

Editorial

Super-Diversity And Systems Thinking: Selected Moments From A Conversation With Steven Vertovec.

Stefen Verdove, Sylbie Genost.

Faculté des Arts, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, QC H3C 3P8, Canada.

In the fall of 2023, we reached out to Steven Vertovec and invited him to take part in this special issue on systematic methodologies when used by academics, especially anthropologists, in the context of their work on migration challenges in the era of super-diversity. We truly appreciate him willing to answer our questions on this matter, which seems to be quite important. Bob W. White moderated the interview, which was conducted via Zoom on January 17, 2024. The transcript, which was obtained with the help of Maude Arsenault, was edited by Sylvie Genest, who created a version that was appropriate for publication. Professor Vertovec accepted the version published here after it was proofread and adjusted. The final writing takes the shape of a series of subjects on which Professor Vertovec expresses his thoughts, liberally drawing from his prior research, extensive experience, and unprompted kindness.

My academic background in religious studies early in my career had a significant impact on my methodology. I was engrossed in Geertz's work on cultural models of reality, which are found to be highly systematic, especially when it comes to interpreting cultural systems and how people see and project these models onto the outside world [1]. As a religious scholar, I was interested in examining the connections between myth, ritual, values, and daily activities in order to comprehend how these components contribute to religious systems. However, the attention switched to the study of variety in urban settings. Contextualization therefore became essential to my research. Context works as a system that is constantly modified by the interactions among its constituent pieces. My academic mentors from my time at Oxford, especially James Clyde Mitchell, helped me gain a

deeper comprehension of systemic thinking. The situational analysis of Mitchell and Gluckman, which entails examining several levels of context around events, had a significant influence on my work, particularly with regard to approach. A key principle of the Manchester School was "situational selection," which Gluckman presented. In my opinion, this captures systemic thinking in an engaging way, allowing one to move between many levels of analysis [2].

The concept of the social ordering of difference is one way that systems thinking directly influences my work. I have prepared an article about this, drawing some inspiration from Mitchell's views [3]. These events or actual actions (encounters), the circumstances or meanings that actors assign to activities (pre-presentation), and the environment or structural context in which these things occur (configurations) are the three main components that I refer to. These are the three components of the Mitchell-Gluckman triangle, *Forme*. In that piece, I discuss Mitchell and its connection to situational analysis. Additionally, Mitchell was a pioneer in the field of social network theory. He tackled it both scientifically and figuratively. Originally a mathematician, he developed several quantitative methods for social network research, but he was also able to discuss social networks in a more traditional ethnographic setting [4]. I co-edited "The Urban Context," a festschrift for Mitchell. Clyde even added to it later [5]. I also include a few of Barnt's works in this conversation. It is clear that Barth made significant contributions to the field of social organization, particularly in his work on ethnic groups and boundaries [6].

Obviously, the concept of system is of primary importance. As an anthropologist, social systems are my main area of interest.

***Corresponding Author:** Sylbie Genost, Faculté des Arts, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, QC H3C 3P8, Canada.

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Tome, a system is centered on a number of interdependent relationships. Every element of a system, whether it be an individual, a function, or an organization, maintains reciprocal relationships with the other elements of the system. The entire system is impacted when one component is impacted. Changes in one have both quantitative and qualitative repercussions on the others. The openness of any system to its surroundings is another aspect of systems thinking that I believe is crucial for social anthropology. Gluckman's book "Closed Systems and Open Minds" is one example of this [7]. Thema It would be naïve and destructive for a social anthropologist to limit her field of research in an attempt to isolate it from the larger context of what is being examined, or to focus solely on one part of reality while neglecting other areas explored by other disciplines. To put it another way, anthropologists would be better off keeping an open mind and not considering the systems they study to be closed. Therefore, I always keep this recommendation in mind when conducting my research projects. For instance, I led a multidisciplinary team from 2011 to 2016 to complete a research examining diversity in public areas in Singapore, Johannesburg, and New York. [8]. Moving outside of closed-system techniques, we investigated the laws of spatial interaction that arise from differentiation. Our study was conducted on a fairly large scale. However, you could accomplish the same thing on a smaller scale, as in a classroom, for instance. Indeed, it is a crucial methodological challenge to link various scales. I address this in my work on super-diversity[9] by recognizing that immigration patterns, legal statuses, and economic engagement are shaped by national policy. This occurs on a larger, non-local scale. However, these policies' consequences are seen locally through traits like gender, nationality, ethnicity, and legal status. Thus, there is a continuous oscillation between these scales.

Another important concept from Gregory Bateson's systems thinking that diversity anthropologists have not always acknowledged as pertinent to their work is this one. However, it is an idea that has broad resonance in our profession, and I wholeheartedly concur with Professor White and other academics who have contributed to this Special Issue on this issue. I may use Elijah Anderson's book "The Cosmopolitan Canopy" to illustrate this point. In it, Anderson discusses how, despite seemingly harmonious times, visible minorities are constantly reminded of their differences [10].

This, in my opinion, is a wonderful illustration of the double bind that many migrants face: being pushed to "be like us" and then being told to "be different." They find themselves in a vicious circle where they are unable to stop asking themselves, "What exactly do you expect from me?" They are continuously reminded of their otherness in these trying circumstances. In addition to language, there are other subliminal indicators that convey to migrants that they may

be accepted but do not belong.

I can also think of another example that relates to the way we normally discuss immigration. There is a discourse that discusses diversification as disruptive, yet there is also research that indicates that increased diversification might help social interactions. In her article "Being open, but sometimes closed," Susanne Wessendorf explains this [11]. People consequently frequently find themselves caught between their own experiences and the discourses they are exposed to. Opinion polls also reflect this. While some may argue that variety is excellent at the local level, there is concern about excessive immigration at the federal level [12].

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