WHO ARE WE? WHERE DO WE COME FROM? WHERE ARE WE GOING?
MALINOWSKI, MEAD, AND THE PRESENT STATE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

by Erika Bourguignon

This brief excerpt from the conclusion of Dr. Erika Bourguignon's Distinguished Lecture, prepared for the Sixty-third Annual Meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society, is offered with the expectation that it will create an interest in the full paper, to be printed in Central Issues in Anthropology.

As anthropology has taken its place among the social sciences and the humanities, it has given a great deal to our neighboring disciplines and is taking a great deal back. People in education nowadays speak easily of "doing ethnography in the schools," and students of American business discuss the "culture of the office" and the "ritual of business interactions." Historians do what amounts to ethnographies of past periods, and praise the methods and insights of anthropologists. For example, the historian Robert Darnton speaks of his pursuit of how people in 18th century France thought as an approach that "treats our civilization in the same ways as anthropologists study alien cultures. It is history in the ethnographic grain" (Darnton 1984:3). For this genre of history, developed in France under the title l'histoire des mentalités, the past becomes another country.

On the other hand, anthropologists have turned to literature to learn about textual analysis, to treat cultural data as texts; where structuralism came to anthropology from linguistics and went to literary criticism, we have received in return deconstruction and discourse analysis. Even psychoanalysis, which had such an important impact on anthropology earlier in the century has returned by way of literary criticism, and in a much more strictly Freudian form than that of the 1930s and '40s.

It is helpful to see anthropology both in historic perspective—a rather non-functionalist view, I am afraid—and also as part of a larger field. There we see that our own current confusion, our lack of a reigning paradigm, is, in fact, shared by the other social and behavioral science, as is the profusion of adjectival specialties and the splintering into diverse orientations. One result of this is a bureaucratic reaction—an interesting phenomenon in itself: a concern by university administrations for central, mainstream orientations, publication in mainstream journals and support from mainstream funding sources. One result is that anthropology in contrast to the heyday of culture and personality research is now only marginally relevant to psychology, where it is often relegated,
when it is acknowledged at all, to being a source of information about other societies—often under the heading of cross-cultural psychology. The concept of culture, where it has been used, has been largely emptied of its meaning—any of its anthropological meanings.

Looking back at Malinowski and Mead, it is clear that we have learned from them, from their failures as well as their successes—failures and successes as judged both by their generation of readers and ours. Where they were seen as successful then, they are often now seen as having failed—this at least in part, because we have learned from them and have phrased the problems differently—whether we know it or not.

As to what is anthropology for? The answer, inescapably, seems to be, then and now: for its producers and its consumers, be it as literature or as applied science addressing practical ends. And this is precisely why Third World societies are now so often interested in producing their own anthropologists and their own anthropology.

As to whether we shall again find another reigning paradigm the answer will not lie in any independent history of anthropology, but in the larger context in which we exist, the influences and constraints brought to bear, and the opportunities offered and seized. American anthropology in large measure reflects both American society as a whole, and the particular institutional framework within which it operates, as well as the international contexts in which our research is carried on. The history of anthropology, as Hallowell (1965) said, is an anthropological problem. And this applies not only to the past but also to the present and future. We shall need to return to the questions raised here again and again. May we do so for a long time to come.

ANTHRO CLUB SEeks NEW LEADERSHIP

With the spring graduation of Tracy Bownard, who has led the undergraduate Anthropology Club for the past two years, the organization is looking for new leadership. Tracy hopes that the person who takes the job of president will have Lisa to work closely with. She hopes the new president will have the chance to develop strong participation in new activities, and she visual...