**Class Note**

**4TH SEMESTER 2020 (M.Sc. Anthropology)**

Course Code: ANT 404B

Course Name: Emerging Areas in Socio-cultural Anthropology

 Topic: CYBERCULTURE (31.8)

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Cyberculture is a dialectical system in which cultural action and cultural structures go online: It involves the permanent mutual production of practices and structures that produce and re-create mind (ideas, values, affects, meaning, taste) and body with the help of networked computer technology that allows to transcend spatial borders and takes place synchronously or asynchronously. Cyberculture develops dynamically; it is a self-organizing system in which cultural practices and structures permanently produce and reproduce each other in self-referential loops. Such a dialectical notion of cyberculture avoids the one-sidedness of subjective and objective approaches.

Cyberculture is not the same as cybersociety. The concept of culture is less broad than the one of society; otherwise there would be no use for one of the two notions. For Fuchus, the information society consists of a number of interconnected, but nonetheless differentiated, subsystems like economy, polity, and culture that have relative autonomy. Conceiving cyberculture as a dialectical system implies that it is not homogenous but in modern society structured by antagonisms and struggles.

The main antagonism of cyberculture is the one between cooperative cyberculture (socialization) and competitive cyberculture (alienation, isolation, fragmentation). The first culture is based on values, ideas, and structures of sharing and building relationships, the second on values, ideas, and structures that erect borders, construct classes, and separate people. Cooperative cyberculture is based on the idea of unity in diversity (Hofkirchner 2004)—a dialectical interconnection of the One and the Many—competitive cyberculture on the ideas of unity without diversity and diversity without unity—a separation of the One and the Many.

The antagonism between cooperative and competitive cyberculture is reflected within the dominant values of two groups of Internet users: the open-source community and the corporate cyberclass. Eric S. Raymond (1998b) characterizes the open-source community as an open, decentralized bazaar that challenges the centralized, cathedrallike software development methods of corporations. He considers code sharing, co-development, acknowledging others ideas, cooperative customs, self-organized production, and voluntarism as important values of the open-source community.

The basic antagonism that characterizes contemporary cyberculture is reproduced in specific forms within the subsystems of late-modern culture. Depending on how ICTs are socially designed and applied, they can have positive and/or negative effects on society. Within cyberculture, they can advance participatory online media and the plurality of political information and communication or one-dimensional online media in the mass-media subsystem; in the scientific subsystem, they can foster a higher publication rate and speed in science (scientific online journals and reviews) or have, due to the increasing publication speed, negative effects on quality standards provided by the peer-review system; in the subsystem of art they can put forward new forms of art (cyberart, electronic art) that involve audience participation or have negative influences on the authenticity of artworks; in education, they can support more cooperative or more individualized and competitive forms of learning; in the moral subsystem, they can foster cultural understanding or fundamentalism; in the health system, they can have positive (mature, aware patients; participatory relationship of doctors and patients; self-organizing communities of patients) and/or negative effects (self-diagnosing, hypochondriac patients) on health and medical awareness; in sports, they can advance and socialize or individualize and limit physical activity and games; and in the system of social relationships, they can be helpful in advancing friendships and love or the sowing of hate (as in the case of right-wing extremists using the World Wide Web). In all cases today, ICTs and information don’t either have solely positive nor solely negative effects but both positive and negative ones at the same time. There are enabling and constraining tendencies of ICTs and information in culture and society at large. People participate in cyberculture when they are confronted with cultural information online, or communicate or cooperate with others online on cultural topics such as scientific insights, art, health, sex, or love. The social systems within which these information and interaction processes

take place can be termed *virtual communities*; these are systems of social activities that allow cultural processes that are mediated by networked computer technologies.

**Reading/Reference:**

*Internet and Society - Social Theory in the Information Age*

Christian Fuchs, 2008