

SYDEL SILVERMAN'S UNIFIED ANTHROPOLOGY

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Every year, when teaching the history of cultural anthropology, I tell my students that American anthropology is traditionally divided into four subfields: cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology and linguistic anthropology. And, of course, when discussing the American historical particularist tradition in my course Theories and Methods in Anthropology, Franz Boas invariably emerges as a scholar who worked across all four fields. Does this mean that we can meaningfully speak of the unity of anthropology? Or is such unity merely an illusion produced by a powerful disciplinary narrative, masking what are in fact irreconcilable differences among the four subfields? Was the fragmentation of anthropology merely a consequence of the publication and misinterpretation of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962)? Or do the seemingly endless debates among the subfields reflect a more fundamental tension arising from the incompatible epistemological commitments of the natural sciences and the humanities?

In 1999, in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, Sydel Silverman (1933–2019) attempted to foster dialogue among scholars representing the four subfields of anthropology. This meeting, titled *Anthropology at the End of the Century*, brought together leading anthropologists to reflect on the state of the discipline at the turn of the millennium. Silverman, who served as President of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research from 1987 to 1999, regarded the symposium as the culmination of a broader effort to reassess anthropology's past and future. The conference addressed both the development of twentieth-century anthropology and the challenges facing the discipline in the twenty-first century. One of Silverman's central ambitions was to strengthen the idea of anthropology as an integrated discipline. Why did she consider this goal so important? And to what extent does this vision remain relevant today?

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