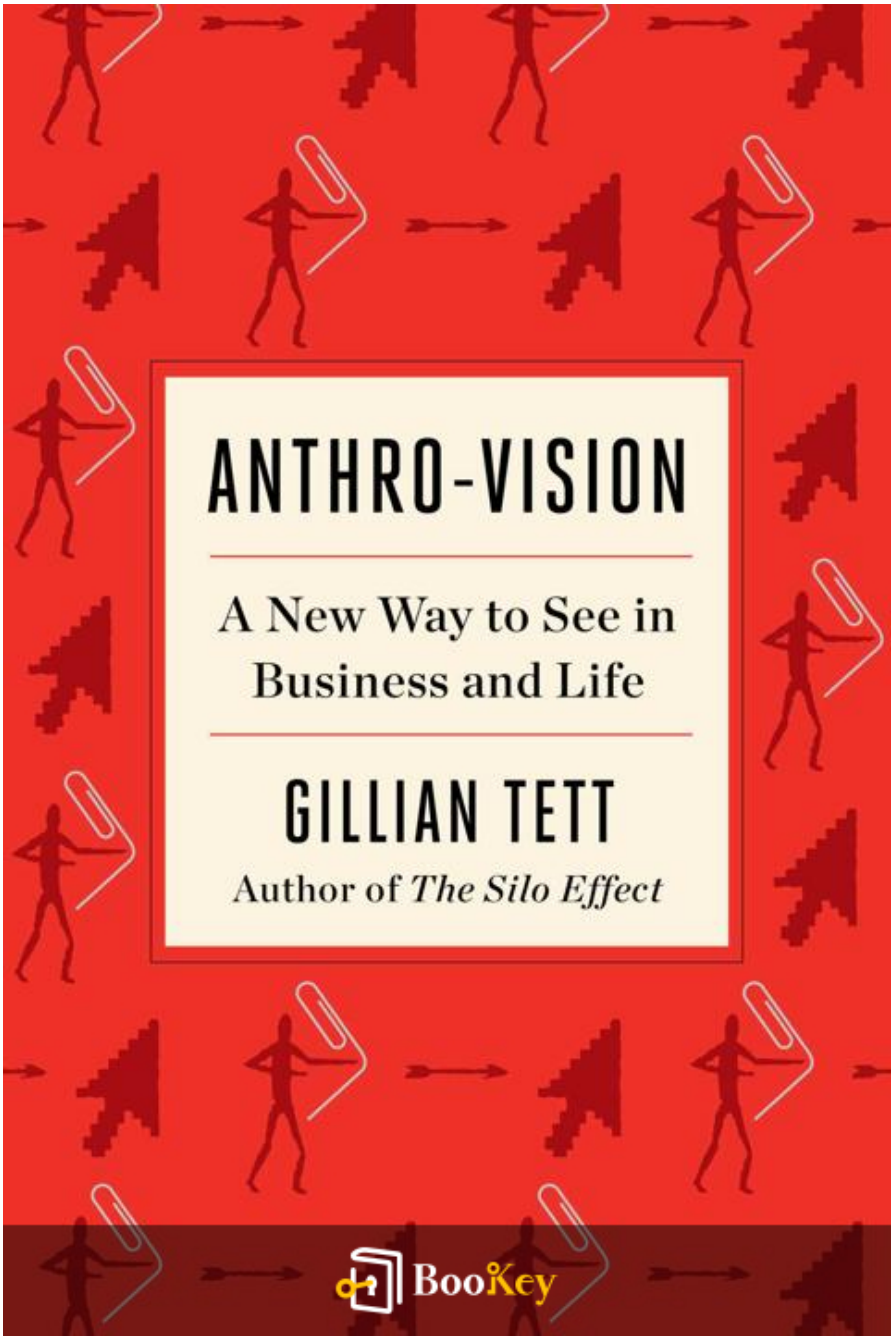
# Anthro-vision PDF (Limited Copy)

## Gillian Tett



# Anthro-vision Summary

Understanding Society Through an Anthropological Lens.

Written by Books1

## About the book

In "Anthro-Vision," Gillian Tett invites readers to explore the transformative power of anthropology in navigating the complexities of our rapidly changing world. Drawing on her extensive experience as a sociocultural anthropologist and journalist, Tett illustrates how understanding human behavior and cultural contexts can unveil hidden insights about economics, technology, and the future of society. Through captivating anecdotes and sharp analyses, she reveals that the key to solving today’s most pressing challenges lies not in traditional data alone, but in the nuanced, often overlooked stories and relationships that define our lives. Engaging and thought-provoking, this book encourages us to adopt an anthropological lens, urging us to see beyond the numbers and understand what truly drives human decisions.

## About the author

Gillian Tett is a distinguished British journalist and author, best known for her insightful analysis of cultural and economic trends in the global landscape. As the U.S. Managing Editor and Columnist for the Financial Times, she has leveraged her anthropological background to explore the intersections of finance, society, and human behavior. Tett holds a PhD in social anthropology from Cambridge University, which she adeptly applies in her writing, making complex topics accessible and engaging to a wider audience. Her contributions to journalism have earned her numerous accolades, including a Weidenfeld Prize for writing on the economy, and she is often regarded as one of the leading voices in understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of modern challenges.

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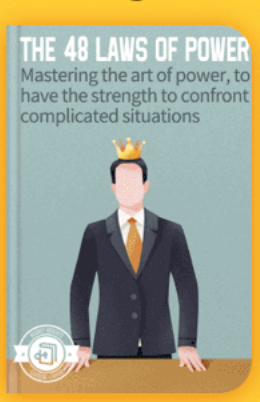



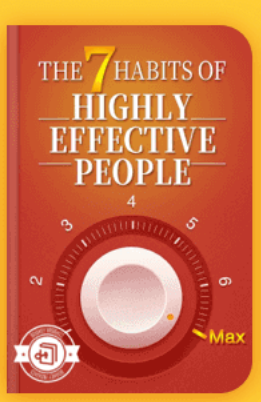



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## Summary Content List

# Chapter 1 Summary: 1. CULTURE SHOCK: (or What Is Anthropology Anyway?)

## Summary of Chapter One: Culture Shock (or What Is Anthropology Anyway?)

The opening chapter introduces the author’s journey into anthropology through vivid descriptions of her initial experiences in a Tajik village, Obi-Safed, in 1990. Set against a backdrop of changing political landscapes, the narrative begins with her arrival in Soviet Tajikistan, where she is guided by Aziza Karimova, a local academic. The chapter juxtaposes the chaotic and rich nuances of village life with the author's academic ambitions, reflecting the overarching theme of cultural immersion that typifies anthropological exploration.

The author is immediately struck by the unfamiliar sights and sounds, such as communal greetings in Tajik, traditional clothing, and unique customs surrounding tea service. Her attempts at language are both humorous and earnest, illustrating the challenges of conducting research in a foreign culture. She aims to investigate marriage practices, hoping to unveil potential cultural conflicts between Islam and Communism, a conflict anticipated from her Western educational background.

The chapter outlines the foundational principles of anthropology, emphasizing the discipline's unique approach to understanding humanity. Instead of a rigid, structured analysis typical of other scientific fields, anthropology promotes open-minded observation and a willingness to embrace the unknown. This reflects the author’s own internal conflict as she grapples with preconceived notions about the cultures she is studying.

Historical context is provided about anthropology’s evolution, tracing its roots from ancient scholars such as Herodotus to the modern emphasis on cultural relativity in the wake of colonialism and imperialism. Pioneers like Franz Boas and BronisBaw Malinowski advocated for and participant observation, shaping a discipline that values the intricate tapestry of cultural practices.

As she settles into village life, the author engages closely with the community, learning about their marriage rituals — symbolic of broader sociopolitical dynamics. The narrative describes candid interactions with villagers, particularly their enthusiastic participation in teaching her their language and customs, indicative of the anthropological method of participant observation.

In a pivotal moment, she discovers that the anticipated clash between Islamic beliefs and Communist ideals does not manifest as expected. Instead, she observes a nuanced coexistence of cultural identities, leading

her to reevaluate her research focus. Villagers navigate their dual cultural landscapes, with public and private spheres embodying distinct values — a reflection of the broader theoretical frameworks she eventually comes to understand.

As the chapter unfolds, the author's assumptions are challenged repeatedly, marking a profound journey of personal and intellectual growth. She learns that cultural identities can be compartmentalized, a realization that reshapes her understanding of the community she studies.

Ultimately, this chapter underscores the journey of an anthropologist embracing culture shock, revealing the complexity of human societies, and advocating for a deeper, empathetic understanding of cultures — principles that are relevant to modern societal and geopolitical dynamics. The author emphasizes that the core of anthropology lies in curiosity, the willingness to listen, and the pursuit of insights that can bridge divides between diverse human experiences.

## Critical Thinking

Key Point: Cultural immersion fosters empathy and understanding.

Critical Interpretation: Imagine stepping into a world so different from your own, where every greeting, every shared meal, and even the unique customs around tea drinking pull you into an experience of rich discovery. This chapter inspires you to embrace the unfamiliar with open arms; it reminds you that, like the author navigating her way through the vibrant tapestry of a Tajik village, you too can foster empathy and understanding in your life. By immersing yourself in diverse cultures, be it through travel, reading, or connecting with people from different backgrounds, you can break down the barriers that often divide us. This journey encourages you to listen with intent, to observe with curiosity, and to engage with the world around you in a way that deepens your appreciation for the nuances of human experience.

# Chapter 2 Summary: 2. CARGO CULTS: (or Why Did Globalization Surprise Intel and Nestlé?)

### Chapter Two: Cargo Cults: Insights from Anthropology in a Globalized World

In a September 2012 conference at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, a gathering of tech enthusiasts and corporate representatives discussed ways in which anthropology could offer insights to the business sector. Among them was Genevieve Bell, an anthropologist and Intel executive, who had transitioned from her academic roots in anthropology to apply her knowledge in the technology world.

Bell's early life in the Australian outback, living among Aboriginal communities, shaped her understanding of diverse cultural perspectives. After completing a PhD in anthropology, she became interested in how cultural differences influenced technology consumption on a global scale, which led her to Intel in 1998. The company faced significant challenges as it expanded into emerging markets, requiring a nuanced understanding of non-Western consumers, especially women, who were largely unfamiliar to the predominantly male engineering team.

Through ethnographic research in countries like India, Malaysia, and China, Bell and her team examined how cultural variances created distinct "webs of

meaning" around technology. They discovered that meanings associated with items such as computers and consumer products differed across cultures and that these perspectives often contradicted the assumptions held by Western businesses.

The narrative of globalization is one of duality: while it often suggests a trend toward homogenization—exemplified by concepts like "Coca-colonization"—it simultaneously fosters distinct cultural expressions. For instance, though Coca-Cola as a product is ubiquitous, it holds varied connotations in different cultures, illustrating the concept of "cargo cults" where local interpretations transform the meaning of foreign goods.

Bell highlighted how companies like Coca-Cola and Gerber had stumbled in international markets due to misinterpretations of local cultures and symbols. For example, Gerber’s baby food jars adorned with smiling babies were poorly received in West Africa, where such labels were expected to depict contents, leading locals to question the nature of the food.

In contrast, cultural differences also offered unique market opportunities. The Kit Kat brand, initially marketed in Japan without success, saw a transformation when the local team capitalized on cultural associations linking the product with exam success during the academic testing season. By rebranding it as a "good luck" charm, Kit Kat became a preferred item among students, showcasing how understanding cultural nuances could lead

to successful sales strategies.

Bell’s ethnography underscored how anthropological insights could bridge gaps between engineers and consumers. For example, Intel engineers initially believed users would appreciate a paperless future only to find that many consumers valued physical documents for emotional reasons. Thus, Bell encouraged her team to think differently about product design, advocating for an approach that prioritized user experience.

As technology advanced, anthropologists at Intel began to shift their attention from analyzing consumer interactions with static products to understanding dynamic relationships with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). Issues of ethics, privacy, and cultural perceptions around AI were key considerations. For instance, the acceptance of facial recognition technology varied profoundly between cultures, with Americans often viewing it with suspicion while many in China accepted it as a normative aspect of daily life.

Bell’s journey from anthropologist to corporate innovator illustrates the increasing recognition of the value of cultural insights in technology companies. As business anthropology gained traction, the discipline faced tensions within academia, where some viewed commercial anthropology as a dilution of their core values. Despite these challenges, the need for anthropological perspectives within business contexts grew stronger.

By 2020, Bell had transitioned to the role of director at an innovation institute in Australia, continuing to promote the importance of understanding diverse viewpoints as vital for technological innovation and ethical considerations. Her journey reflects the essential message: recognizing and respecting different worldviews is crucial for businesses and policymakers navigating an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

# Chapter 3 Summary: 3. CONTAGION: (or Why Can’t Medicine Alone Stop Pandemics?)

### Chapter Three: Contagion (Or Why Can’t Medicine Stop Pandemics?)

In the summer of 2014, a critical meeting was held in the historic Admiralty Building in London, where Paul Richards, an anthropology professor, and Chris Whitty, a prominent medical bureaucrat, discussed the escalating Ebola outbreak that was ravaging West Africa, particularly affecting Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. Despite global efforts to combat the epidemic, including the mobilization of troops and the development of a vaccine, the disease continued to spread, prompting concerns that it could soon reach Western shores. Whitty sought Richards' expertise to understand why conventional medical and data science methods had failed in the context of this crisis.

Richards, whose extensive research included living among the Mende people of Sierra Leone, believed that Western experts had misunderstood critical cultural practices and beliefs surrounding death and disease in the affected regions. He was joined in this discussion by Esther Mokuwa, a local researcher and Richards’ wife, who articulately criticized the Western medical approach that often dismissed local customs as "strange" and imposed solutions without cultural sensitivity. Their argument was further

grounded in the realization that the rituals surrounding death—often essential in local culture—played a significant role in shaping responses to the epidemic.

The origins of Ebola traced back to its namesake river in the Congo, where it first appeared in 1976 with a deadly fever that could lead to significant fatalities. The outbreak that began in late 2013 was amplified by tightly-knit communities across borders and was propelled by both societal beliefs and behaviors, such as the traditional handling of corpses during funerals, elements that were often overlooked by external health organizations.

As the outbreak worsened, anthropologist Susan Erikson observed how Western health responses often relied on templates from past outbreaks without fully integrating local contexts. This lack of cultural adaptation led to ineffective strategies, as exemplified by the failure of quarantines and isolation units to garner community trust. Reports of trepidation and hostility towards health workers became common, illustrating the profound impact of miscommunication and cultural dissonance during the crisis.

By mid-2014, following a surge in Ebola cases, established protocols that enforced separations—such as mandatory burials without contact with relatives—were instituted, yet they failed to resonate within affected communities. Many locals attributed the disease's presence to witchcraft rather than contagion, leading a subset of communities to disregard health

directives, continue traditional rituals, and even engage in violence against medical teams.

In response to the ongoing disaster, a group of American anthropologists convened urgently to address the unprecedented grief and rising panic surrounding the epidemic. It became evident that simply educating communities about the risks was inadequate. The cultural lenses through which the communities interpreted health risks were critical to overcoming the epidemic's challenges.

Emerging from this grim scenario was Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist renowned for integrating cultural nuances into healthcare strategies. He and others emphasized the necessity for empathy alongside medical interventions. This approach was underscored by an awareness that local perceptions of risk and community trust were pivotal in executing public health measures effectively.

Anthropologists soon endeavored to shift the narrative by crafting culturally sensitive solutions. They advocated for modifications to healthcare infrastructures based on local needs, involving village leaders in communication efforts, and adapting ritual practices to align health practices with cultural beliefs.

Over time, the impact of incorporating anthropological insights began to

reshape the response to the outbreak, resulting in the gradual containment of the virus. By the summer of 2015, the epidemic had waned, showcasing a critical lesson learned: effective medical strategies must consider cultural contexts and community engagement to mitigate disease spread.

Looking ahead to the COVID-19 pandemic, Richards and Mokwa found themselves reflecting on previous experiences. The parallels between the Ebola crisis and COVID-19 highlighted how Western responses tended to repeat the same mistakes, often failing to dissect the implications of culture in epidemiology. Even as lessons from Ebola were intended to inform better practices during COVID-19, institutional biases complicated the embrace of this knowledge.

As history indicates, recognizing and integrating cultural understanding remains essential for effective disease management. The chapter emphasizes that whether combating an outbreak in West Africa or grappling with a pandemic in the developed world, community perceptions and cultural norms are key facets that must be respected and understood by any public health initiative to be successful.

# Chapter 4: 4. FINANCIAL CRISIS: (or Why Do Bankers Misread Risks?)

### Chapter Four: Financial Crisis (OR WHY DO BANKERS MISREAD RISKS?)

In this chapter, the author reflects on their experiences as a journalist attending the European Securitization Forum in 2005, a conference showcasing innovations in finance, particularly complex financial instruments like collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) and credit default swaps (CDSs). Surrounded by bankers in a sophisticated environment, the author experiences a sense of cultural disorientation akin to their early anthropological work in Tajikistan, where cultural rituals shaped social identity and understanding. Here, the rituals manifest as financial jargon, theorizing practices, and shared narratives that give these bankers a distinct elite identity, reinforcing their belief in the market's self-correcting capabilities.

The key insight drawn from observing the conference is that the financiers operate within a closed intellectual tribe, one that avoids external scrutiny and rarely considers the human impact of their creations. Instead, they focus on the mathematical and algorithmic intricacies that drive their trade, often neglecting the real-life consequences their financial innovations, designed to enhance liquidity and market efficiency, have on borrowers and the

economy.

The author, desiring to uncover this opaque world for their readers, embarks on a learning journey to translate the intricate financial language into relatable analogies—for instance, comparing CDOs to sausages made of various debts and CDSs to betting on horse races. Through this lens, the author seeks to bring clarity to a field that often seems removed from the human experience, where actual borrowers are invisible in the midst of elaborate financial instruments.

As the narrative progresses, the tone shifts from curiosity to concern, highlighting how the interconnectedness of these financial products can lead to unintended consequences—a foreshadowing of the 2008 financial crisis. The author illustrates a critical disconnect; while the financiers believe that spreading risk across a diverse array of investors mitigates exposure to loss, it instead leads to opacity and a systemic blur between risk and stability.

The author's shift in perspective stems from their background in anthropology, which teaches the importance of critical observation and empathy for the 'other,' contrasting sharply with the insular worldview of financiers. This anthropological approach leads them to question the prevailing creation myth of financial innovation, aligning with criticisms from various academics about the moral disengagement occurring within the banking culture.

Through these observations, the chapter reveals that the financial sector’s inability to question its practices, coupled with journalists' struggles to craft compelling narratives in an industry suffused with jargon and complexity, contributed to a lack of awareness about rising risks. The author suggests




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# Chapter 5 Summary: 5. CORPORATE CONFLICT: (or Why Did General Motors' Meetings Misfire?)

### Chapter Five: Corporate Conflict (or Why Did General Motors' Meetings Misfire?)

In a tense December 1997 meeting in Warren, Michigan, engineers from General Motors (GM) faced a significant challenge in their collaboration on the Delta Two project—a new car expected to revitalize the struggling auto giant. Among them was Bernhard, a chief engineer from Adam Opel in Germany, who expressed frustration over the decision-making process concerning technical specifications like parking brake cable routing. The meeting room was teeming with a blend of American and German engineers, reflecting not just a geographic divide but also cultural differences that complicated their collaboration.

Mary, representing GM's Small Car Group, revealed the findings of their evaluations, favoring the Saturn routing for the new vehicle. However, Bernhard and his team from Opel remained dissenting voices, indicating that the decision lacked consensus—an essential element for engineering decisions in their view. This discord highlighted a deeper issue of "tribalism" within GM, with factions vying for dominance rather than cooperating on the project. Anthropologist Elizabeth Briody, present to observe the dynamics, identified these cultural rifts and how they hindered

productive collaboration.

Briody pinpointed the significance of differing assumptions regarding meetings among the groups: the Opel team preferred short, agenda-driven sessions led by a clear authority figure, while the Small Car Group viewed meetings as collaborative platforms for idea exchange, lacking a fixed agenda. Meanwhile, the Tennessee engineers sought consensus rather than hierarchical decisions, underscoring that the American teams were not a monolithic entity but rather culturally diverse, complicating efforts to work together.

This scenario echoed a historical context within GM, as the company grappled with declining market share against Japanese competitors, leading them to examine management systems and workplace culture. The move from traditional hierarchical structures to more collaborative environments, as promoted by Japanese manufacturing practices, illustrated the ineffectiveness of treating workers merely as cogs in a machine.

Briody, with anthropological insights from her earlier research on communities and workplaces, revealed how informal dynamics—like hoarding parts to avoid production line shutdowns—reflected coping strategies amid a flawed system. The workers' tendency to blame others for problems showcased a pervasive "blame culture" rooted in the pressures of performance metrics that failed to adapt to the evolving quality-focused

environment.

The chapter also draws parallels with earlier management studies, such as those conducted at Western Electric in the 1920s, which uncovered informal social dynamics that mainstream management practices overlooked. These findings led to a reevaluation of how productivity was measured and how worker motivation was understood. Briody noted that despite some progress in changing the culture within GM, significant structural issues persisted, and miscommunication risks were not limited to ethnic divisions but permeated team dynamics within American workers too.

In summing up her observations, Briody highlighted that cultural misunderstandings could frequently exist between teams that were ostensibly from the same ethnic background, yet possessed subcultures that shaped their interactions. As GM sought to address these complexities, Briody's insights illustrated that failures to appreciate these cultural dimensions often obscured the underlying issues hindering success.

Ultimately, as the Delta Two project wound down amid its challenges, Briody was able to convey the importance of understanding cultural differences. While the project was ultimately deemed unfeasible, her findings prompted a recognition that the quality of collaboration—rooted in appreciation for diverse perspectives—was crucial for effective teamwork in the evolving landscape of American automotive manufacturing.

# Chapter 6 Summary: 6. WEIRD WESTERNERS: (or Why Do We Really Buy Dog Food and Daycare?)

### Chapter Six: Weird Westerners (OR WHY DO WE REALLY BUY DOG FOOD AND DAYCARE?)

In the spring of 2015, Meg Kinney, the head of a consultancy called Bad Babysitters, received a significant request from a digital strategist in Los Angeles. Primrose Schools, a successful educational institution in Georgia that had grown to nearly a billion-dollar enterprise since its founding in 1983, required her expertise. Despite impressive metrics, such as 400 nurseries and 11,500 employees, Primrose faced a puzzling problem: low enrollment rates despite high engagement with its online content.

Primrose's strategy relied heavily on data analytics, utilizing a unique “Balanced Learning” program. They predicted consumer behavior via predictive models and Big Data, but Kinney's task was to understand the underlying reasons for parents' hesitance to enroll their children. Her approach, employing ethnographic methods rather than traditional market research, aimed to delve into the cultural aspects influencing consumer choices.

Kinney's insights revealed a generational divide between Primrose’s executives, primarily from Generation X, and the millennial parents they

were serving. The latter had vastly different attitudes towards childcare, driven by their education, financial pressures, and a need for personalized parenting in a digital world. They emphasized values such as character development over mere educational achievements. Moreover, their trust leaned more towards peer recommendations than traditional authority figures like teachers or corporate executives.

The insights gathered prompted a pivotal rebranding for Primrose. Changes included a new tagline focusing on child character over credentials and a more community-focused marketing approach. The initial results displayed promising growth in inquiries and enrollments, emphasizing that cultural understanding complements data analytics in effective marketing strategies.

Adding depth to this narrative is the work of Joseph Henrich, a Harvard professor whose research categorizes Western cultures—often referred to by the acronym WEIRD (Western, Educated, Individualistic, Rich, and Democratic)—and highlights their behavioral peculiarities. Henrich's studies reveal that while WEIRD individuals tend to focus on personal identity and analytical reasoning, many non-Western cultures prioritize community and relational identity. This insight offers a critical lens for comprehending Western consumer culture.

The chapter further explores how companies like Mars, a leader in both confectionary and pet food, began tapping into these cultural insights.

Despite the growing market for pet products—nearly tripling from $17 billion to $53 billion between 1994 and 2011—questions remained about why consumers viewed pet food as necessary. Maryann McCabe, an anthropologist, was commissioned to investigate. Her findings indicated a profound kinship sentiment in American pet ownership; families spoke of pets as part of the family structure. This anthropological perspective prompted Mars to pivot their advertising strategy, shifting focus from pet nutrition to the emotional and relational benefits of pet ownership, ultimately increasing their profitability in pet food sales.

Similarly, McCabe's work across various consumer markets, including food and laundry, uncovered a pattern where consumers often viewed ordinary tasks as ways to foster familial connections—contradicting traditional perceptions of these chores as mundane. This anthropological lens led to significant shifts in marketing strategies that embraced the creativity and community aspects of cooking, as well as the social ties reinforced through laundry rituals.

However, consumer culture around money remained underexplored until researchers from the Danish consultancy ReD Associates highlighted the peculiar relationship Western consumers had with financial products. Their study revealed that people often compartmentalize their financial realities into "fast" and "slow" money, where everyday transactions are approached with ease while savings and investments evoke confusion and anxiety—a

contradiction starkly at odds with traditional economic assumptions about rational and consistent behavior.

Recognizing this complication, Danica, a life insurance company, adopted a fresh approach through user-friendly innovations like a real-time "traffic light" dashboard for monitoring investments. Such initiatives led to enhanced customer engagement and reinforced the significance of anthropological insights in understanding financial behavior amidst complex consumer attitudes.

In summary, Chapter Six illustrates how anthropology and ethnography can shine a light on the intricate, often contradictory values that govern consumer behavior in WEIRD cultures. By marrying these insights with traditional data analysis, companies can navigate the complexity of modern consumer culture more effectively.

# Chapter 7 Summary: 7. “BIGLY”: (or What Did We Miss About Trump and Teenagers?)

### Chapter Seven: “Bigly” (Or What Did We Miss About Trump and Teenagers?)

In January 2014, I attended the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, where the atmosphere was notably upbeat. Five years had passed since the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, and while significant issues—particularly in the realm of "shadow banking"—still existed, the financial system was on a mend. Conversations at Davos were shifting from finance to the burgeoning excitement around technological innovations from companies like Facebook and Google.

Before I left for Davos, Craig Calhoun, the head of the London School of Economics, encouraged me to meet danah boyd, an anthropologist studying the impact of social media and Big Data on teenagers. Boyd’s approach resonated with my past experiences on Wall Street and the emergent conversations surrounding technology, prompting my curiosity. I met her at a dinner where she discussed her ethnographic research on teenagers and their smartphone usage, a topic that piqued my interest as I was soon to have teenage daughters myself.

Boyd illuminated how American teenagers, constrained by over-scheduling

and parental fears, turned to their phones for social interaction. In contrast to previous generations, these teenagers were often confined at home and denied the freedom to explore their neighborhoods or hang out with friends in public spaces. This lack of physical roaming heightened their online activity, allowing them to connect and express themselves in ways that were becoming increasingly necessary yet severely limited in the real world.

Boyd’s research revealed a stark reality: her teenage subjects viewed cell phones not just as devices for communication but as their primary means of social engagement. Parents acknowledged the societal fear surrounding crime and abductions that led to these restrictions, reflecting a pronounced shift in how parents were raising children compared to earlier decades when teenagers roamed free. Boyd drew parallels between this confinement and a broader societal trend that neglected to acknowledge the role of physical spaces in teenagers' lives, as discussions remained fixated on digital platforms.

This formative observation about teenage dependence on technology led me to reflect on my own parenting and the importance of allowing physical exploration. Upon leaving Davos, I promised to promote opportunities for my children to engage with the physical world and remain vigilant about the biases in our cultural conversations about technology.

Fast forward to September 26, 2016. I was at the Financial Times in New

York, watching the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. When Trump used the unconventional term “bigly,” laughter erupted among my colleagues. While I found his language amusing, I reflected on the implications of finding humor in it, especially as an anthropologist. Laughter can signify in-group solidarity, highlighting social divisions and cultural contexts that may escape more educated observers.

This event mirrored what anthropologist Daniel Souleles discovered about Wall Street culture—financiers often employed humor to navigate the contradictions within their elite narrative. Similarly, journalists, including myself, laughed at Trump’s lyrical flubs while ignoring the underlying cultural rift it represented. Elites may have viewed Trump as unfit due to his linguistic missteps, but many of his supporters resonated with him precisely because he expressed himself in ways that diverged from traditional political discourse.

In attempting to understand the divide, I recognized that many educated individuals interpreted Trump through a logical lens largely informed by a WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) worldview, while his supporters embraced a more holistic and performative interpretation. They were drawn to his unconventionality and ritualistic campaign style, which paralleled that of professional wrestling—an arena overlooked by the elite yet rich with socio-cultural significance for many Americans.

Realizing how limited and biased my perspective could be, I became more determined to actively listen to the nuances and unspoken sentiments within different communities. Observations about Trump's supporters brought me to the conclusion that to truly understand the political landscape, one must appreciate the multiple narratives that exist beyond the educated elite's discourse.

The unexamined cultural silences that I began to notice—whether regarding finance or technology—beckoned a more profound exploration of societal structures that shape our lives and perspectives. Engaging with these overlooked elements can reveal much about the ongoing dynamics in politics, technology, and social relationships.

# Chapter 8: 8. CAMBRIDGE ANALYTICA: (or Why Do Economists Struggle in Cyberspace?)

### EIGHT: Cambridge Analytica (OR WHY DO ECONOMISTS STRUGGLE IN CYBERSPACE?)

In the spring of 2016, I encountered Robert Murtfeld from the data science firm Cambridge Analytica at a seminar in New York. Initially unaware of the company's implications for the upcoming election, I was intrigued by their psychological voter profiling methods based on the OCEAN model—assessing Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Misunderstanding the data-driven approach of Cambridge Analytica as unconventional for anthropology, I failed to foresee its monumental impact on the political landscape.

Months later, as Donald Trump clinched the presidency, investigations revealed Cambridge Analytica's role in harvesting data from platforms like Facebook and manipulating voter sentiment. The ensuing scandal highlighted not just ethical violations but also a critical misunderstanding surrounding the word “free.” Contrary to common belief, data was not stolen but exchanged as services, a concept economists often neglect in favor of a monetary framework.

The term "barter," though evoking primitive exchanges, aptly describes how

data service exchanges operate today. Rather than functioning through traditional monetary transactions, contemporary tech giants harness user data in exchange for “free” services, a model that distorts economic accountability and remains largely unseen. Cambridge Analytica’s collaborative roots with anthropological fields further illustrate the necessity of recognizing these exchanges to understand modern economic structures.

Understanding the deeper implications of barter requires examining the etymology of "data," derived from the Latin "dare" meaning "to give," indicating its nature as a “gift.” This insight casts doubt on conventional economic models that prioritize monetary transactions over relational exchanges. The anthropological perspective emphasizes that economics transcends mere market mechanics; it unfolds across various spheres, including kinship and social obligations, thus revealing a more nuanced interplay of exchanges.

In November 2015, Jack Hansom presented to social scientists about using Facebook data to infer voter personalities through OCEAN. His approach echoed Cambridge Analytica’s aim to target the electorate effectively. The company’s origins trace back to Strategic Communications Laboratories Ltd., founded by Nigel Oakes, who recognized the potential of marrying behavioral science with communication strategies. His subsequent work expanded from advising emerging markets to engaging with Western military applications, leveraging behavioral insights to foster peace rather

than conflict.

Oakes's partnership with Alexander Nix marked a pivotal transition toward data analytics. This shift attracted the attention of the politically-engaged Mercer family, who sought to counteract digital strategies used by Obama’s campaigns. They invested significantly in Nix's newly branded firm, Cambridge Analytica, establishing a foundation for using data science in electoral politics.

Using data as a form of barter, Cambridge Analytica acquired access to vast user profiles through applications offering quizzes that required users' consent to share their data. Such practices underpinned their strategies not only to gather data but also to position themselves advantageously in a burgeoning field rife with competition. The company's complex tapestry of business strategies—combining barter for data with financial exchanges—reflected the challenges in assessing value in a new data-driven economy.

By 2016, Cambridge Analytica achieved substantial political influence through its work with the Trump campaign, employing micro-targeted messaging strategies. However, as the election results unfolded, the company’s triumph shifted public scrutiny onto its methods. Investigations uncovered allegations of foreign interference and unethical tactics, culminating in a scandal that questioned the ethical boundaries of data usage

in shaping democratic processes.

Despite the fallout, the scandal underscored a critical moment in the tech landscape. Former employees transitioned to roles that continued to harness data analytics, inadvertently pointing out that while Cambridge Analytica's practices faced backlash, they also catalyzed wider adoption of data-driven strategies across sectors.

At an IMF conference in November 2018, I pointed out the inadequacies of traditional economic metrics like GDP to capture the essence of a digital economy framed by barter. As tech innovations proliferated, understanding the value generated through non-monetary exchanges became urgent, particularly for drawing parallels between consumer welfare and corporate monopolization.

The IMF gathering highlighted ongoing concerns with outdated economic frameworks. Economists grappled with how to account for value in exchanges devoid of money, as many felt current measures were severely underrepresenting actual productivity levels within the digital marketplace.

As discussions moved into how to navigate these new economic realities, I proposed that acknowledging barter's role in modern economies could pave the way for reform. By redefining economic models and regulatory frameworks to account for data as both an asset and a means of exchange,

researchers could better understand and improve consumer relationships with tech giants.

Reforming the terms of data exchanges, making them transparent, and enhancing consumer agency in the digital landscape remain critical. As the narrative around Cambridge Analytica and the following inquiries reflect, constructing a more ethical tech environment necessitates recognizing the nuanced social dynamics at play, especially the pervasive yet overlooked nature of barter in modern valuations. Only by addressing these foundational aspects can we hope to create an equitable framework within our increasingly digital economy.


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# Chapter 9 Summary: 9. WFH: (or Why Do We Need An Office?)

### Chapter Nine: WFH (Or Why Do We Need an Office?)

In the summer of 2020, as the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, Spanish social scientist Daniel Beunza initiated a series of video calls with senior bankers across Europe and America, who were attempting to navigate their finance businesses from home (WFH). Beunza, who had spent over two decades studying bank trading floors, was intrigued by the paradox of the digital age: although technology allowed for much of financial work to shift online, trading rooms had not only remained but expanded in size. This chapter explores the significance of human interaction in the financial industry and its implications for WFH practices.

Beunza postulated that discussions focused on WFH often centered on employee concerns like burnout, team cohesion, and communication, whereas a more profound examination of group dynamics and sense-making is essential. Sense-making, a concept highlighting how individuals gather and interpret information within social groups, is critical for navigation in the complex economies of today. He drew parallels between this and the rituals that form social norms, emphasizing the need to understand the role of human contact and the unique rituals of working together.

The chapter contrasts the technical foundations behind the Internet's creation with the need for human interaction, as illustrated by the Internet Engineering Technical Forum (IETF). A peculiar ritual among the IETF members is the practice of "humming" to gauge consensus on technical decisions, highlighting the importance of egalitarian collaboration. Despite operating in a digital arena, engineers recognized the necessity for interpersonal connection, emphasizing their belief in collective agreements rather than strict hierarchies.

An anecdote from one of the IETF's meetings illustrates this well: during the discussion of a protocol aimed at enhancing cybersecurity, the group used humming to reach consensus rather than traditional voting methods. This informal, yet effective, ritual showcased how nuanced human communication starkly differed from purely digital methods, underscoring the challenges in transmitting this practice to a remote context.

Further insight is drawn from the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), where anthropologists and computer scientists studied how human behaviors and social institutions shape technology use in workplaces. They discovered that the interactions happening in informal settings, such as diners, provided crucial avenues for knowledge sharing and problem-solving, echoing the importance of social dynamics in the financial sphere.

Beunza elaborates on the work of Patricia Ensworth, a consultant who employed these social science principles to improve synergy among diverse teams of IT workers in major investment banks. Ensworth illustrated that issues often stem from a rigid approach to technology that failed to acknowledge the complex, social character of office dynamics, especially when teams were dislocated.

When the pandemic prompted banks to transition to remote work, Beunza sought to understand the resultant impact on performance. Interviews revealed that while certain functions could be executed effectively from home, bankers struggled with the crucial incidental exchanges that typically occurred in-person. This lack of spontaneous interaction, vital for effective sense-making in trading contexts, hindered learning and collaboration, particularly for junior staff and new members.

As financial teams adjusted, it became clear that those working in the office performed better during periods of market volatility, attributed to the continual flow of information and the nuanced understanding that arose from in-person conversations—a key tenet in Beunza's analysis of trading dynamics.

Interestingly, even members of the IETF, who were arguably the most adept at virtual collaboration, expressed dissatisfaction with remote meetings, longing instead for the informal encounters that foster brain-storming and

creativity. This yearning underscored the idea that physical presence plays an irreplaceable role in fostering productive interactions, a reality that the pandemic starkly illuminated.

In conclusion, while the shift to digital work environments has equipped professionals with more robust technological skills, it also exposed the limitations of such setups in facilitating meaningful human interactions. Beunza's findings compel us to rethink the necessity of physical spaces for effective collaboration in finance and beyond. Thus, even in an increasingly digital world, the need for human rituals, sense-making, and spontaneous exchanges remains vital to navigating the complexities of modern work life.

# Chapter 10 Summary: 10. MORAL MONEY: (or What Really Drives Sustainability?)

## Chapter 10: Moral Money (What Really Drives Sustainability?)

The chapter begins in the summer of 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, when the author meets Bernard Looney, CEO of BP, via a virtual connection. Looney had recently taken the reins at BP, a company historically entrenched in fossil fuels, and announced ambitious plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This transition toward renewable energy marked a significant departure from BP's history, aiming to alleviate environmental concerns amid growing global scrutiny led by activists such as Greta Thunberg.

Looney's transformative vision was catalyzed by an encounter at BP's Annual General Meeting (AGM), where he was moved by an articulate environmental protestor. Unlike typical corporate leaders who often dismiss activists, Looney engaged in dialogue with her, seeking to understand her perspective. This uncommon willingness to listen reflected a shift in corporate dynamics, emphasizing the importance of understanding externalities—often ignored factors that impact broader society—as essential for effective management.

Central to the discussion is the changing landscape of investing and

corporate governance, often framed through the lens of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria. Investors began to recognize that ignoring environmental and social issues could pose substantial risks, leading to the emergence of a new form of capitalism focused on stakeholder interests rather than solely shareholder returns. Noam Chomsky's critique of traditional market inefficiencies serves as a backdrop to highlight the evolving business environment, as the consequences of neglecting externalities became too significant to overlook.

The author reflects on personal experiences spanning back to their journalism career at the Financial Times and how skepticism initially colored their view of ESG trends. However, as they delved deeper into corporate sustainability initiatives and engaged with executives, a more nuanced understanding emerged. The chapter outlines how three main sectors—the corporate executive sphere, the financial sector, and the intersecting realms of policymaking and philanthropy—began to synergistically support the sustainability movement, reinforcing one another’s commitment to ESG principles.

Investors, influenced by a combination of ethical considerations and self-preservation, began to adopt ESG as a framework to mitigate risks in volatile and uncertain markets. This transformation can be seen as driven by both genuine desire for positive change and self-interest, creating a complex tapestry of motivations behind the sustainability push. The notable rise in

ESG investments, including a forecast growth in responsible investing, underscores an essential paradigm shift.

Furthermore, the chapter discusses the pivotal role of societal instability, compounded by events like the 2008 financial crisis and recent political upheavals. This heightened uncertainty has prompted business leaders to acknowledge that focusing solely on shareholder value may no longer be viable. Instead, they observe that addressing social issues and environmental accountability is crucial for maintaining legitimacy and investor confidence.

The emergence of initiatives such as Walmart's "Project Gigaton" illustrates how companies are now expected to actively engage in reducing environmental impacts across their supply chains. The narrative surrounding sustainability has expanded beyond corporate environmental responsibilities to include social dimensions, revealing the interconnectedness of these issues.

As the chapter unfolds, it becomes evident that the legacy of traditional capitalist practices must adapt to the rising tide of ESG principles. This evolution reflects broader societal expectations and the shifting definitions of success within the investment community. The author concludes that, moving forward, the patterns established by ESG will require businesses to embrace wider visions and frameworks that account for a complex and interconnected world, fostering a more sustainable future.

Ultimately, the chapter advocates for the importance of listening and understanding diverse perspectives as essential to navigating the challenges posed by climate change and social inequities. The closing assertion that every corporate strategy must now recognize the value of holistic, anthropological insight echoes the demand for a more responsible and engaged approach to capitalism.

| Key Concepts | Details |
|---|---|
| Setting | Summer 2020, during COVID-19 lockdown, virtual meeting with BP's CEO Bernard Looney. |
| Corporate Transformation | Looney's vision for BP focuses on achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, marking a significant shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. |
| Stakeholder Engagement | Looney engages with environmental activists at BP's AGM, showcasing the importance of understanding external perspectives. |
| ESG Criteria | The emergence of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations is reshaping corporate governance and investment practices. |
| Corporate Skepticism | The author reflects on initial skepticism of ESG trends, leading to a deeper understanding of corporate sustainability initiatives. |
| Synergy Among Sectors | Corporate executives, financial sectors, policymakers, and philanthropy are increasingly aligning to support sustainability efforts. |
| Investor Motivations | Investors are driven by both ethical considerations and self-preservation, leading to increased reliance on ESG frameworks. |
| Societal Instability | Events like the 2008 financial crisis have revealed the risks of focusing solely on shareholder value, prompting a shift towards social |

| Key Concepts | Details |
| --- | --- |
| | and environmental accountability. |
| Case Example | Walmart’s "Project Gigaton" demonstrating corporate responsibility in reducing supply chain environmental impacts. |
| Legacy of Capitalism | Traditional capitalist frameworks must evolve to incorporate ESG principles and broader societal expectations. |
| Conclusion | The author advocates for businesses to adopt holistic, anthropological insights and recognize the value of diverse perspectives in addressing climate change and social issues. |

## Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of listening to diverse perspectives for effective change.

Critical Interpretation: Imagine standing in the shoes of a corporate leader, where every decision impacts not just the bottom line but also the world at large. As you engage in meaningful dialogues with individuals who challenge the status quo, like the young environmental activist who caught the attention of BP's CEO, you begin to understand the power of different viewpoints in shaping a more sustainable future. This chapter inspires you to embrace empathy and open communication in your own life, recognizing that true transformation stems from genuinely listening to others, especially those with contrasting experiences or opinions. By fostering these connections, you not only enrich your understanding but also contribute to a collective movement aimed at addressing pressing societal and environmental challenges.

# Chapter 11 Summary: CONCLUSION: AMAZON TO AMAZON: (or What If We All Thought Like Anthropologists?)

In the concluding chapter titled "Amazon to Amazon," the author synthesizes the insights presented throughout the book, drawing from a thought-provoking analysis of the complexities surrounding artificial intelligence, particularly exemplified by the Amazon Echo and its voice assistant, Alexa. Kate Crawford, a professor at New York University, created a detailed chart revealing not only the intricate workings of the AI technology but also the often-overlooked contexts—such as the labor of low-paid "ghost workers," resource extraction, and energy generation—required for the device to function. This highlights the vital need to consider the broader societal and cultural implications of our technological interactions.

The core message emphasizes the importance of shifting our perspective to gain what the author terms "anthro-vision." This entails not just understanding what happens but also exploring the underlying reasons why and how these phenomena are shaped by culture. The book argues that while tools like Big Data and AI provide us with immense information, they fail to cover the cultural nuances and social contexts that shape our world. Thus, anthropology offers a lens that combines qualitative and quantitative insights, fostering a deeper understanding of human experiences.

The author suggests several strategies for cultivating anthro-vision: recognizing our ecological and social environment's influence, appreciating cultural diversity, immersing ourselves in the lives of others, adopting an outsider's viewpoint to gain objectivity, and actively listening to social silences. Examples from etymology, such as the origin of the words "company" and "bank," are utilized to illustrate how language reflects historical social practices that powerfully influence contemporary understanding and interactions within business and finance.

Expanding on what embracing anthro-vision could mean, the author posits that if sectors like economics, corporate management, technology, and media adopted this mindset, they might create positive changes. Economists could acknowledge broader social issues, corporate leaders would invest in diverse cultural perspectives, and tech developers could confront inherent biases in algorithm designs—ultimately leading to a more equitable and responsible framework for technology as it intersects with society.

The narrative weaves in reflections on the evolving landscape of anthropological thought and the increasing acknowledgment of social responsibility among businesses, particularly in response to pressing global issues like climate change and inequality. The author argues that this generational shift, particularly among millennials, supports a drive for sustainability and ethical practices that resonate with deeper human values.

Concluding with a moment of hope, the author asserts that anthro-vision is more crucial than ever in navigating the complexities and risks of today's interconnected world. As challenges like climate change and social polarization threaten to divide us, the need for empathy and recognition of shared humanity becomes paramount. The era of rapid technological change—marked by the rise of AI and a global pandemic—has revealed the necessity for a holistic view of our existence that acknowledges both physical embodiment and cultural constructs. Thus, amidst the chaos, there lies an opportunity for deeper understanding and connection, underscoring the enduring relevance and potential of anthropology in modern society.