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Anthropology and Its Contact Zones.

Seth M. Holmes, PhD, MD, *University of California - Berkeley*



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Where is Anthropology Going?

INTRODUCTION

KAS Papers Editorial Board

More than a decade into the new millennium, the practice of anthropology continues to shift alongside the ever-changing worlds around it. The emergence of new technologies, revamped methodologies, and multiple movements in the last decade are just a few of the factors which alter the scope – and focus – of anthropological work. This issue focuses on the past inventions and future innovations of the discipline in the form of theoretical shifts, reframing categories, not-yet histories, and methodological transformations – a look back to what’s been left out and what’s yet to emerge.

As part of our anniversary issue, we asked prominent anthropologists from across the subdisciplines to offer their perspective on the question, “Where is anthropology going?” The contributions are as diverse as their authors, representing reflections on the past, movements within the present, and possibilities for the future of anthropology as a field.

WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Elizabeth Colson

In my experience, anthropology is always going somewhere else. Whoever thinks he or she is working on the cutting edge of the discipline is likely to be viewed by adjacent generations as a maverick experimentalist or a fossilized representative of the past. Unfortunately, ignoring or denigrating the work of predecessors and contemporaries as irrelevant to our own interests means we learn neither from our successes or our failures.

When I was an undergraduate major in anthropology in the 1930s, research in American anthropology was primarily centered on the discovery of what could be known about Native Americans prior to their subjugation by Europeans. This was the rationale for the four field approach which brought together what could be learned about the Native American past through the contributions of archaeology, human biology, linguistics, and cultural studies. But the new fields exciting those calling themselves cultural anthropologists were Personality and Culture (which took us into psychology and particularly Freudian psychology), acculturation (which encouraged us to look at

Elizabeth Colson is Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

change), and community studies of peasant and occasionally urban communities (which encouraged approaches associated with the functional anthropology of Malinowski and the empirical research of both rural sociologists and the urban sociologists of the Chicago School). We were intrigued by British and French anthropologists who studied Tswana, Dogon, Azande, Nuer, Tikopia, and Naga and by sociologists who studied Middletown or Polish peasants in Chicago and by a few American anthropologists (Embee in Japan, Redfield in Mexico, and Warner in Newburyport, Massachusetts), all of whom dealt with people who had a present and future as well as a past, who could be observed as well as questioned about the old times. Participant observation would inform our own work.

By the time I finished writing my dissertation in the 1940s, the forward theoretical thrust seemed to lie in Social Psychology, then experimenting with “social dynamics.” We read Kurt Lewin and J. Moreno who carried out close observation of people in small groups interacting under different conditions, who asked “Why do humans under these conditions behave in such and such a way? What happens if the conditions are changed?” Later this came to be called “Situational Analysis.” We were encouraged to think of ourselves as experimentalists and of our data as the stuff of daily life rather than the long descriptive texts so laboriously recorded by earlier anthropologists. Context was important, but our field of observation or research usually centered on what was happening before our eyes rather than in the larger world that limited or encouraged action.

Soon this approach was proclaimed outmoded in the rapidly changing world of the 1950s and 1960s. Increasingly it was argued that anthropology ought to focus on big questions, on the way even seemingly isolated populations are influenced by the industrial imperial West. This meant that they should study the impingement of markets and a cash economy, the commodification of labor, labor migration, new urban formations, the political encroachment of colonial or otherwise centralizing governments, and the growth of cosmopolitanism as people traveled back and forth to cities and across national boundaries and were increasingly exposed to various media. To do this brought one face to face with the need to examine economic and political power and its contestation. Our new interests encouraged us to look for diversity and conflict where formerly we had looked for uniformity and integration. Political science became an increasingly important ally and Marxism provided many with a useful theoretical framework.

With the end of colonialism in the 1960s and the “blow back” from American involvement in Vietnam, anthropology was proclaimed a tool of the colonial past and became unwelcome in many places where anthropological research was once dominant. The discipline engaged in a mighty questioning both of its mission and its practice. Fieldwork, the earlier hallmark of anthropology, became suspect because it turned people into “others.” Subjectivity became the order of the day. So did symbolic analysis and the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. Both bypassed new restrictions on research including Human Subject Reviews and obtaining official research permits. Grand symbolic themes, embodied in already collected myths, could be analyzed without engaging with people. Art and literary criticism provided theoretical models for both structuralists and their successors of the 1980s who called themselves postmodernists. Now the postmod-

ernists have been superseded as the newest child on the block as anthropologists have discovered new possibilities and linked themselves to appropriate academic disciplines.

Nevertheless, earlier paradigms continue to inform research and teaching of many in the field, giving it a breadth and unpredictability that can be daunting. As our numbers have increased, our interests have diversified, and we have found employment in very different niches, academic and otherwise. We pursue different questions, use different methodologies, and publish in different journals. Anthropological literature has grown beyond the grasp of any single anthropologist. The discipline now and in my lifetime never has been a unified field. It might be better to think of it as a palimpsest, an historical aggregation held together by a focus upon the multifaceted nature of humanity.

Where is anthropology going? In different directions, if the past is any clue to the future. It is still appropriate to ask what do anthropologists have in common that might guide the future. We do not have in common a mission, methodology, body of knowledge or an agreed upon past. Our commonality may lie in an attitude, a willingness to explore and be surprised, to say “that is odd” and pursue that insight wherever it takes one. Former students who have gone into very different fields continue to tell me, “Whatever I do, I continue to think as an anthropologist.” I think this means that their training has left them inclined to search for interconnections across a broad range of human behavior and belief, to look slantwise and see patterns where others see only random activity, and to be prepared to adopt whatever methods are needed in the search for understanding. The oddity of humanity, what it has been and is and is becoming, somehow remains our subject, though we come at this from different angles. As I once wrote, no matter what happens, anthropology will never run out of subject matter because who knows what humans will do next.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS CONTACT ZONES

Seth Holmes

Where is anthropology going? Everywhere. Anthropology is studying “up,” “down,” “sideways,” and every which way. For today’s anthropologist, the field is anywhere and everywhere.

Anthropologists are taking seriously Nader’s (1972) now classic call to perform vertical slices, seen clearly in the growing interest in studies of science (e.g. Hayden 2003, Mol 2002, Rabinow 1996) and of global health and humanitarianism (e.g. Adams et. Al. 2008, Crane 2010, Redfield 2006). Simultaneously, anthropologists show interest in para-ethnography (c.f. Holmes and Marcus 2006), which could be seen as a horizontal slice.

Seth Holmes is Assistant Professor of Health and Social Behavior in the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley.

Acutely aware of its own historical colonial complicities, the discipline has become especially self-reflexive, its multidirectional study turning also inward. Critics of the traditional ethnographic construction of a bounded *ethnos* have called for and experimented with studies of hybridity, circuits, and interrelations between local and global (e.g. Clifford & Marcus 1986). Clifford (1998) suggests a focus on “contact zones,” power-imbued spaces of conflict, coercion, interaction, and mutual constitution (c.f. Pratt 1992). He takes as his focus museums, art exhibitions, hotels, tourist sites.

In the current atmosphere of economic and ideological restructuring of educational institutions, the discipline of anthropology is experiencing new contact zones of its own. Some institutions are threatening to do away with departments of anthropology, moving anthropologists into departments of sociology or broad departments of social sciences. Some universities are requiring anthropologists to bring in more research funding, moving anthropologists into increasing contact with foundations and states. Many universities are seeing growth in interdisciplinary fields of study involving anthropology, for example science and technology studies, disability studies, gender studies, LGBT and queer studies, global health, and population health.

Occupying the worlds of cultural anthropology and the health sciences simultaneously, I often find myself engaged in translation. Public health and medical colleagues ask me some version of the following: “How should we evaluate anthropology articles? What criteria should we employ to determine if they are good or not? How do we know if they are reliable, reproducible, valid?” My general response is, “first, read the ethnography, then, consider to what extent the analysis and theory make sense.” As an anthropologist, this seems straightforward. Scholars in the often positivist and empiricist health sciences, however, are trained to consume academic work in a prescribed form with specific language.

Depending on my audience and immediate context, I find myself writing in different languages. Sometimes translation leads me to new questions, insights, and theories; sometimes to a loss of nuance, complexity, and precision. As an anthropologist, I am cognizant of the importance of language in structuring what is thinkable and askable (c.f. Cohn 1987). How, then, will I navigate the divides and proximities – the contact zones – in my own interdisciplinary context?

I trust anthropologists will continue to offer a critical, theoretical eye – up, down, sideways, and inward – to myriad contemporary questions. At the same time, I hope anthropology will proactively engage its own contact zones, offering its theory and situated fieldwork in challenging and relevant ways to diverse, broad audiences.

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL FUTURES

Michael M.J. Fischer

Where meaning and habitus are woven and renewed – often beyond the conscious control of individuals, and yet in the spaces where institutional social responsibility, political tests of power, and individual ethical struggle take place – there anthropology will follow *emergent forms of social and cultural life*, investigating with available light issues of class differences, culture wars, shifting and contesting epistemes, social warrants, social reform, social justice, mental health, empowerment and subjectivation, democratic checks and balances, regulatory mechanisms, the slow negotiation of international law, access to information, and the formation of new kinds of public spheres.

Relational, plural and aware of its own multiple historicities, anthropology will

Michael M.J. Fischer is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities and Professor of Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology .

explore the silted deltas, fissured uplands, and cultivated-exploited hinterlands of social topologies, ethical plateaus, and surreal and psychodynamic terrains that twist inside out (like Klein bottles and Moebius strips), with memory, language and behavioral fragments sutured, scarred, and recombinatorially experimented with at scales that implicate, block, and redirect one another, revealing natures we never imagined existed.

Anthropos is that *third space* between the divine and the bestial, a self-educating drive that experimentally and fallibly *recombines legacies*, ancestries and loyalties from the past together *with self-legislating futures*, deploying and subjected to passionate engagements (contests, struggles) with the face and demands of the other, and aspirations for *the good life* increasingly defined through (a) *recursive tournaments* in a polis that expands-contracts across striated, contentious, and non-homogeneous social terrains; (b) *experimental aesthetic trials* that attempt to open the third eye of counter-intuitive, counter-factual, possibilities, as well as working through traumatic experiences; and (c) *cosmogenic contemplations reworked by* growing and shifting scientific, technological, and pragmatic *affordances, prostheses, and ways of* understanding, sensing or feeling.

The *anthropological archive will open* to varied temporalities reconfiguring one another, to accelerating access, and to cross-cultural alternative epistemes in ways that in the past were merely utopian fantasy, but now become black and white ninja, forensic, and reprogramming arts, with many shades of grey markets, literatures, and maneuvers in between.

Anthropology will become increasingly *a tool of translation that lays out contesting fields* of interest, power, momentary powerful or weak enunciatory communities structured by double binds of imperatives that conflict and redirect one another. Anthropology's field work modalities and status as *bi-valent field science and cross-cultural humanities* will thereby also become increasingly customized for corporations, governments, academia, policy, arts, therapy and healing. It *will deal in languages, epistemes, re-engineered ontologies, and varieties of social difference* that are constitutive of ramifying social world kinds, forms of life and life forms, a play-dough that refuses reductions to metaphysical tokens such as "life itself" or "Being," but puts them back into play as the interesting parochialisms that made them appear, re-appear, or disappear in cultural power games.

By keeping *supple* its tools of accumulating *positive knowledge, cultural critique, and translation*, anthropology will grow its capacities for revealing political economy, discursive apparatuses, cultural forms and paradigms, socio-cultural psychodynamic patterns, and the enveloping and interaction of new and old media (orality, print, visual, digital), biological-ecological-technological-social interactivity, as these play across various scales of local, national, regional, or transnational circuitries.

WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Zoe Crossland

“The city must never be confused with the words that describe it, and yet between the one and the other there is a connection”

-Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

This quotation from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* heads up the Columbia Center for Archaeology blog, “tracework” (<<http://tracework.blogspot.com/>>). I’ve used it as the starting point for these reflections, as it gestures towards the trends within archaeology that I’d like to discuss in response to the question of “Where is anthropology going?” Our blog is concerned primarily with the material semiotics of New York City, and in this it is embedded in the burgeoning concern with the archaeology of the contemporary past. This shifts the archaeological focus away from the ancient and historic contexts more commonly inhabited by archaeologists, towards a more thorough engagement with the pasts of the 20th and 21st centuries. This builds upon diverse foundations, such as Rathje’s Garbage Project (Rathje 2001; Shanks, et al. 2004), writings on forensic archaeological practice (Schofield, et al. 2002), and archaeological mappings of modernity (Buchli & Lucas 2001; Gonzalez-Ruibal 2006; Lucas 2004) to open up new territories for archaeology that as yet remain comparatively unexplored. Much of the work in the archaeology of the contemporary past is ongoing or experimental in nature and may be followed on blogs (<<http://contemp-ironbridge.blogspot.com/>> and <<http://www.stillintransit.blogspot.com/>>, for example).

Focusing on the relatively recent and remembered past reveals the complexity of the relationships between the material world and our archaeological accounts, not least the doubt that lies at the heart of all archaeological inquiry, and the abductive leaps that we make in inferring from archaeological signs. This encourages consideration of the forms of narrative that we use to tell our archaeological histories (Gero 2007; Joyce 2002; Meskell & Joyce 2003), and of the evidential signs – material or immaterial – through which archaeological histories are composed (Wylie 2002). The recent move towards a more materially engaged semiotics (Nanoglou 2009; Preucel 2006; Preucel & Bauer 2001) allows a more critical interrogation of the affective and material dimensions of interpretation, and the tangible and intangible nature of human worlds (Fowles 2010). In this respect the pragmatic, material and affective dimensions of C.S. Peirce’s semeiotic will be important for archaeologists (Crossland 2009). I anticipate that the next few years will see efforts to integrate questions of materiality, affect, and semiotics, as well as more attention to the archaeology of semiotic processes that operate away and aside from human subjectivity. These might involve the biosemiosis of animal and plant worlds, or the tendencies to habit and mediation that we see in landscapes and materials. This last dimension has some commonalities with the philosophical work growing out of science studies (notably Latour 1999; Latour 1993; 2005) that has been drawn upon by archaeologists (Olsen 2003; Witmore 2006, and papers in *World Archaeology*

Zoe Crossland is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University.

for December 2007 for example), and which will provide another important point of reference in the coming decade. In developing these debates the recently formed North American branch of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (now in its 4th year and held at UC Berkeley in May 2011) has been an important site of debate, and I look forward to seeing the new ideas and case studies that will be brought to it in coming years.

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WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Craig Stanford

As a proud doctoral graduate of the University of California-Berkeley anthropology department and as the long time chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Southern California, there is bittersweet irony in reflecting on the state of academic anthropology in the United States in 2011. I received my doctorate degree in the biological (then physical) program at Berkeley in the late 1980s, under the supervision of the primatologists Katharine Milton and Phyllis Dolhinow. After receiving my degree, I landed a position at USC and currently direct our Jane Goodall Research Center, having spent much of the past 20 years doing field studies of African great apes.

Over the years since leaving Berkeley, the divide between the biological and cultural spheres of many anthropology departments has continued to widen. In some universities this has been only a mild rift; in others an impassable chasm papered over by a stated longing for the four-field approach, but with little effort by any party to actually bridge the gaps. I have always believed that when departments fracture, they do so along the lines of faculty personalities, with some revisionist oral history reframing the split as over academic disagreements. But clearly, in many if not most American anthropology departments, the rifts have grown larger than the links.

In the fall of 2010, the administration at USC invited our four biological anthropology faculty to leave the anthropology department to co-found a new graduate and undergraduate program in human biology. After much negotiation and soul-searching,

Craig Stanford is Professor of Anthropology and Biological Sciences and Co-Director of the Jane Goodall Research Center at the University of Southern California.

we all agreed to the move. As of this month, I find myself retitled a biologist, an anthropologist only by background and early training. Yes, we will retain secondary appointments in anthropology, but for practical purposes anthropology as a multi-field discipline will disappear at USC just as it has elsewhere.

The break seems, in hindsight, to have been completely inevitable. Scholars in the life sciences – which is what modern biological anthropologists are – have little enough in common with scholars in the humanities – which is what modern ethnographers verge on – to make their inclusion in the same faculty a contrivance based on history, not 21st century academic rationality.

ANOTHER POSSIBILITY

Jane I. Guyer

My published paper “On Possibility” (2009) was originally a response to a Berkeley student request to take part in the 2008 AAA panel entitled “How is Anthropology Going?” By a coincidence of my own reading, the invitation provoked me to address not a single horizon in anthropology’s “going,” but a recurrent repositioning of the discipline over time, to look out in changed ways from the idea of human “possibility.” I argued that there had been four approximately twenty-year repositionings in the meaning given to this concept. The first, initiated by Malinowski (1984[1922]:517) as a new expression for diversity across cultures, was extended by Benedict’s (1934:24) “great arc [of] ... the possible” to also comprise diversity within societies. The second was a historical version, envisaging the vistas of modernity, exemplified by Gellner (1965). The third was a micro-critical version, exemplified in Marcus and Fischer’s *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1999[1986]). And the present wave of attention to “the emergent,” “the potential,” is consonant with the perception of new forms of life, new protean organizations, and a social future so un-envisageable as to draw our attention more to affect and orientation than to benchmarks in culture, history or critique.

Like “agency,” or “action,” which covers a range of effectivity from first stirrings to decisive power (Latin *ago*: to do, make, drive), “possibility” derives much of its charisma from the inexplicitness of range that is evidenced in this historical sketch (Latin *posse*: to be able, to influence). The new inflection turns to a “first stirrings” version: to the senses, emotion, ethics, imagination. And I want to insert the will here, as well, which then inserts temporality. Human will was brought into sharper focus for me by another happenstance. As I completed the paper for publication, Claude Lévi-Strauss died. The obituary in *The New York Times* concluded with Lévi-Strauss’s own conclusion to the final volume of *Mythologiques*. But it was a misleading citation. He did not write that the “world’s greatest mystery (was) the possibility of not being, the burden of mortality” (Rothstein 2009). For Lévi-Strauss, the mortality of humans in their individuality, and of humanity as a species, was a certainty. For him, the human factor lay in the quality of courage. In full awareness of non-being, “man has to live and strug-

Jane I. Guyer is Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University.

gle, think, believe and above all, preserve his *courage*” (emphasis added, Lévi-Strauss 1981:694). While I was visiting Berkeley in 2010, the current KAS journal contained an article by Scheper-Hughes on “The Habit of Courage” (2010), referring to professional engagement with the conditions of our times.

However the specific content of “will” may be identified and described, something like “courage” – a configuration of sensibility, imagination, ethical orientation and the capacity for action – emerges as both a topic for study and a commitment for the anthropology of the present. By retaining human “possibility” as a pivotal term and topic, through several revolutionary repositionings, unrealized ancestral points of reference may come into view. Morgan saw in *The American Beaver* a “delicacy of sensibilities” because they, like us, “display courage, fidelity and gratitude” (1868:272). Lambek’s collection on *Ordinary Ethics* (2010) is going in a promising direction, although none of Morgan’s key qualities appears in a paper title or the index. Anthrosource offers only ten recent journal references for “courage”: four are reviews, one is an interview. But intrepid efforts at field research in an unstable world, especially by our new generation of graduate students and junior faculty, are finding new contours of a will-to-be and a will-to-do, by people and anthropologists alike, under the most difficult circumstances. Even if under other-than Homeric terms, the qualities of “courage” and “will” can be recuperated from the past, as another possibility.

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WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Angela Garcia

One of the advantages and challenges of working “at home” is that fieldwork never really ends. The relations forged “in the field” continue to unfold, long after the tape-recorder is turned off, the book published. This quality of ethnographic un-ending feels, at times, like a burden. But it also affords a certain degree of understanding of the horizons of these relations, and of the ethnographic endeavor itself.

As an anthropologist, the practical and ethical demands of working at home has made me keenly aware of the lived temporalities of the condition that I study – glossed here as addiction. The cumulative time spent with individuals, families and communities struggling with drugs has thrown into relief the way addiction forever exceeds instrumental responses (clinical, juridical, linguistic) meant to control it. How, then, to best address this flow of temporal experience?

This is not a new question (see, for example, Guyer 2009). Indeed, to a certain degree, every anthropologist grapples with it, “native” or not, and in changing ways. I have come to orient myself to the temporal reach of experience through the density of relations themselves – that is, through an ethnographic commitment to engage (through fieldwork, friendship and representation) addicted families for as long as I am welcome. This requires “being there,” over the long haul, and often in face of the strong urge to turn away and move on.

In the course of such ongoing ethnographic engagement, one generation becomes two, becomes three. In this deepening of time and life, ever more relations emerge, and with them, the intimate knowledge that one can never know all there is to know. There is something quite powerful about this deceptively simple lesson. Such disorienting knowledge – gained through careful tending of field relations – raises critical questions about any model of human experience, such as addiction, which has become hardened by contemporary explanations of nature (or neurobiology) on the one hand, or politics and history, on the other. It is precisely this lesson that anthropology continues to offer – and through it, the looming horizon of possibility and change, rather than dread and same.

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WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

James Igoe

The future of anthropology seems bleak. A resource crisis in the academy, an essential site of our discipline, is exacerbating a systematic undervaluing of the kinds of thinking and teaching anthropologists do best. For details I recommend Donoghue's *The Last Professors*. Many read his analysis as reason for despair, but I do not. As people who travel across interconnected sites of human experience, anthropologists understand human worlds are always changing. Stability in the academy entails significant maintenance work, not to mention significant privilege. Mosse demonstrates the same for the aid industry in *Cultivating Development*, and I believe this is true of all the realms in which we work.

This has two immediate implications. First, we do not have to accept current realities as unchangeable. Second, the work of maintaining stable institutional realities, which are changing anyway, can be directed to alternatives. Witness Esther Newton's refusal to accept the hyper-competitive culture of academic anthropology and co-founding the Ruth Benedict Collective in the 1970s. She has inspired new generations of queer and feminist anthropologists and opened previously unimagined realms of enquiry and theorization. Inspired by such collaborations, I have worked with others to establish "disobedient knowledge" networks, which challenge presentations of nature as amenable to capitalist penetration and market expansion. We also lend visibility to the negative socio-ecological impacts of interventions informed by such presentations of nature.

Esther Newton writes, "Anthropology, by refuting any one culture's claims to absolute authority, offers permanent critique" (Newton 2000:1). I desire to see this aspect of our work reinvigorated in an anthropology that is at once theoretically rigorous, pragmatically applied, and accessibly public. In addition to being more effective cultural critics, we need to be more effective cultural creators. My thinking here is deeply influenced by Alfred Kroeber's daughter, Ursula Le Guin, whose stories describe worlds where human sex types are literally unstable, the travails and triumphs of anarchy in practice, and the dangers of dreaming worlds without accounting for deep ecological "patterns that connect." I am also influenced by cyberpunk's celebration of the appropriation of technology by everyday people. This is what we are seeing today from Cairo to Madison, and I believe that anthropologist will play an increasingly proactive role in these unfolding realities.

Such work will require careful engagement with Marxian concepts of alienation and fetishization, and especially Debord's concerns about the mediation of human relationships by images. His *Society of the Spectacle* is essential for thinking about the promises and perils of what Anna Tsing calls "world making projects" (Tsing 2005). Debord and the Situationists not only sought to imagine new worlds, however, but also to decondition themselves from received ways of knowing and being. This imperative of finding new ways of being is echoed by Latour in his "Compositionist Manifesto."

James Igoe is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Dartmouth College.

Fortunately, anthropology is uniquely positioned to privilege other ways of being. For compelling accounts of what such transformations might look like, I suggest Katja Neves-Graça's (2005) treatment of conditioned human experiences of nature in her ethnographies of Azorean whalers and Sian Sullivan's (2010) animation of imminent ecologies with Damara people in Namibia.

These are just two examples, and each of us has something to offer. The exciting thing is that reimagining and reinvigorating our discipline can be achieved by reimagining and recreating our interconnected worlds. I can't imagine more crucially important projects.

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WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Todd Ochoa

Anthropology will remain *strange*. The epistemological becoming that has forever defined anthropology roils on. The turn of the 21st century sees the reign of dialectics in anthropology destabilized by epistemologies of the “yes.” Should a half century of dialectical rule pass away we would see a significant block slip from the regime of representation we call “ethnography.” Already, the law of the negative that is carved into nearly every stroke of our writing begins to dissolve. What is more wonderful than to see the solvents passed from hand to hand, splashing on the seminar tables of the discipline’s most committed dialecticians? Abandoned texts turn toward new appropriations as our nature changes – impure animals and imperceptible monstrosity slip onto the page. The consequences are unforeseen as ethnographies of the “yes” start to proliferate.

Sub-disciplinary antagonisms lose their footing as a new spirit of empiricism brings linguistic, socio-cultural, archeological, and laboratory anthropology onto more generic terrain. Generic – hardly utopian. Bighearted curiosity is in order as the prevailing spirit of representational debt (“not too close, not too far, never pure enough”) sees its monopoly on disciplinary affect challenged by the indeterminate play of the experiment. Socio-cultural anthropology disavowed its kinship with the positivist laboratory and invented its own love of the experiment against all odds. Even now this is hardly widespread. But socio-cultural anthropology is living a moment of generosity for having brought anthropology the revitalized, excessive empiricism – a direct consequence of the clamoring “yes.” So much can be built. Already, laboratory practitioners see the gains in exchanging reactive positivism for the affirmative, active experiment, and for the concept of alliance.

Ethnography will overcome itself, again and again. The critique of ethnographic authority, so crucial to the love of the experiment, continues to erode the law of negative representation, each day more unexpectedly. Ethnographies built with “and” and “yes” will generate quirky environments where the arts of evocation might thrive beneath the canopy of towering explanation. Micro-ethnography, ethnographies of intimacy, of the infinitesimal, of imperceptible intensity and the quirky encounter, of the excessive exterior, wait to be written. Writing, which in practice is our greatest resource but in the classroom so difficult to teach, will be undeterred in its struggle to become un-genealogical, to stop signifying, and become unhinged. What will a signifying ethnography look like? Fieldwork overload, texts full of shaggy life, incomplete concepts with too many connection points, more than enough to suggest previously impossible disciplinary relationships. “To repeat the unrepeatable” in a practice that affirms the new by saying “yes” to the experiment and to impure outcomes. Anthropology becomes inconceivable.

WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Eugene Hammel

I thought I would share with all of you some historical perspective of my own. It is a personal account, to be sure, but I am emboldened by the stories of others who have told us theirs. My story is a puzzle from modern perspective, but it has an answer I think is important.

I'm a few months on the wrong side of 80. I've been an anthropologist since my freshman year at Berkeley in 1947. I took about four years off for military service after graduation and finished my graduate work in 1959. All during that time I was exposed to the classical tradition of four-field anthropology. I knew Kroeber well enough to stop and chat about my linguistic fieldwork with the Pomo, although he had retired so that I never had a chance to take a course with him. I was trained in linguistics by Mary Haas, Murray Emenau, John Rowe, and others, and worked with Haas on Burmese phonology and Maya morphology. I was trained in social and cultural anthropology by Robert Lowie, Dave Schneider, Bob Murphy, Tom Fallers, George Foster, David Mandelbaum, and others. I studied physical anthropology and evolution with and worked for Ted McCown as a research assistant and measured the skeletal materials Kroeber had excavated at Aramburu in Peru. My fiancée, Joan, and I measured innumerable skeletal specimens from California, and as a museum preparator all through my college years (under Edward Gifford), I washed and dried them by the hundreds. I spent some summers in archaeological surveys and excavations in California. My interest in the history of kinship systems coupled with the existence of good historical records for Europe led me into historical demography and family history.

It seemed to me that this kaleidoscopic involvement was really all of a piece, intellectually. Is that idea crazy? Yes, it is now. But it wasn't then. It was a natural focus for scholars whose basic interest was in the history of *Homo sapiens* – the physical emergence of the species, the development of cultures, the social structure of human groups and their interactions and especially of the distinctive feature of language. It is a world that we have lost. Without appreciation for the mystery of human similarities and differences, changing across time and space, there is no reason for a commonality of intellectual interest. Without that commonality of interest, or at least without mutual respect for colleagues who are looking at different facets of the same rock, there is no reason for anthropology. Anthropology's abandonment of history has also abandoned the future.

GOING VIRTUALLY EVERYWHERE

Tom Boellstorff

For reasons of brevity, in this short missive I focus on cultural anthropology and ethnographic methods.

Since its beginnings, anthropology has been going somewhere. Classic images of Malinowski and Mead arriving on distant shores encapsulate this simultaneously ontological and methodological trope of movement as not just the basis of knowledge production, but as knowledge itself. In the dominant ethnographic imaginary, by going somewhere, through the very work of departure and arrival, anthropologists produce dialectics of self and Other that constitute their substantive contributions to a better understanding of social worlds.

These movements across space are of course temporal as well, invoking anxieties about future destinations that are by definition unknowable. In the contemporary period, two phenomena seem to magnify these concerns. First is the continuing ascendance of online technologies as constitutive of (not just instrumental to) culture. Second are the concerns about the future of universities in the social order; these political economic threats also call into question the relevance of anthropology itself.

The challenge is to respond to these developments in a manner that avoids the apocalyptic frameworks that can foreclose creative responses. I will simply make three statements that speak to these concerns. First, anthropology can make contributions to understanding how online and mobile technologies are reshaping human sociality. This need not imply that all anthropologists study online and mobile technologies, nor that every research project has these technologies as its primary topic.

Second, relevance can take a range of forms in a range of projects. Anthropologists can write in multiple registers and genres – from a blog for public consumption to a research article intended for a specific scholarly community. In some cases individual anthropologists move effectively between these genres; in other cases, anthropologists prefer some genres over others. A continuing issue will be how to calibrate and value the work of anthropologists whose primary output is in public domains. We anthropologists are more relevant than we sometimes realize, though there remain real issues in terms of ensuring that anthropological work is valued. Key to this struggle is both valuing humanistic anthropological work and also keeping the definition of “science” sufficiently broad so as to include scientific field-based disciplines like anthropology (not to mention cosmology, zoology, and so on) that are not predicated on laboratory experimentation, hypothesis-testing, or generalization.

Third, in the scramble to respond to technological change and social relevance, it is crucial to ask after the value not just of “going” to the right places, but in standing still: in pausing and finding the strength we already have, and also in unasking the questions posed by what I have elsewhere termed “straight time,” the unlinear temporal framework in which talk of coming and going is possible. One alternative is to think in terms of coincidental time, the kind of intersecting cycles of time that make things like

“Friday the 13th” thinkable. We can ask not just “Where is anthropology going,” but “What is anthropology’s coincidence?”

HAVING AN IDEA IN ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY

João Biehl

In the last decade, we have seen a number of proposals for doing anthropology in the contemporary world, given prevailing politics of knowledge production and the division of labor in the academy. Clifford Geertz (2000) spoke of a “world in pieces” in which older notions of the subject who is cultural “all the way down” seemed inadequate. Medical and phenomenological anthropologists have, using varying methodologies, shown how medico-scientific formations, political economy, and social networks are mediated by the body and people’s sense of psychological interiority (see Das 2007; Good, Fischer, Willen & DelVecchio Good 2010). Didier Fassin (2007, 2010) uses anthropology to build a critique of the values, discourses, and exclusions underpinning contemporary “moral economies,” from humanitarianism to HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Paul Rabinow (2008) uses the anthropology of new rationalities in the life sciences to usurp philosophy’s hegemony in concept-work. Anna Tsing, in *Friction* (2004), crafts a voice that is at once anthropological and politically invested in the ways universals are crafted and deployed on the ground. And Paul Farmer (2003, 2008) uses ethnography both to debunk medical and economic orthodoxies in health policy and to mobilize for innovative interventions.

Yet as anthropologists have tackled ever more heterogeneous subjects and deployed our tools towards global political economies, some in the discipline have worried that we find ourselves without a guiding theoretical paradigm to both understand our ethnography and motivate future work (Marcus 2008). “Brilliance is great,” says George Marcus, “but sustaining a sense of, and conditions for, standard work is better – a more pressing challenge” (in Rabinow & Marcus 2008:84). Certainly to carry out our analyses, we need models, types, theories – abstractions of various kinds. But the kinds of paradigms we search for, the ways in which we assemble them, and the authority we ascribe to them also make a great deal of difference. What if we broadened our sense of what counts as critical innovation and left aside, even if for a moment, the need for central discursive engines – the *modus operandi* that shaped much of anthropology in the twentieth century?

I find Gilles Deleuze’s essay “Having an Idea in Cinema” (1998) quite helpful as I try to address some of the major epistemological worries circulating among us today: anxieties about how to combine fieldwork and conceptual work and about the lack of a “driving new idea” in anthropology. In what follows I explore the unique ways in which ethnography might generate alternative figures of thought. Epistemological

João Biehl is Susan Dod Brown Professor of Anthropology and Woodrow Wilson School Faculty Associate, as well as Co-Director of the Program in Global Health and Health Policy at Princeton University.

breakthroughs do not belong only to experts and analysts.

So, what does “having an idea in anthropology” entail?

One does not have an idea in general, Deleuze argues. “Ideas must be treated as potential that are already engaged in this or that mode of expression and inseparable from it” (2008:14). Thus, according to Deleuze, philosophers try (trying is a crucial tentative verb here) to invent concepts, people in cinema invent “blocks of movement/duration” and scientists “invent and create functions” (15).

Thus, given that we work with people and are concerned with knowledge of the human, it would seem to me that our ideas should come out of that engagement.

“No one needs philosophy for reflecting,” Deleuze states (14).

So, do we need philosophy to reflect on our fieldwork?

If our business is not to do what philosophy does – “creating or even inventing concepts” (15) – what is it that we do, create or invent and how do we use philosophy to do what we do?

According to Deleuze, creation comes out of necessity.

What is it that we anthropologists need to do?

What is the complex thing that necessitates our work?

Or, are we the vectors of lost time, a narcissistic self-fulfillment, a whole that could keep the pieces from escaping or hitting us?

Deleuze adds that “Everything has a story” (15). Philosophers tell stories with concepts. Cinema tells stories with blocks of movements/duration. If anthropology also tells stories: with what? What are the materials of our story telling?

I would say that ethnographic details can reveal nuanced fabrics of singularities and the worldliness, rather than exceptionality, of people’s travails; they can make explicit the concreteness of processes and people’s buried anticipations (Biehl 2005).

So, whose stories do we tell? To whom? Is there a pre-defined public? Or, is ours a practice that begs for the emergence of a third, a reader, a community of sorts, a distinct public that is neither the character nor the writer?

What does anthropology’s storytelling with ethnographic materials invent?

Inventing something is a very solitary act – Deleuze does not believe in giving voice; in creating we are thrown back to ourselves. “But it is in the name of my creation that I have something to say to someone” (1998:16).

Consider the following statement: “If all the disciplines communicate together, it is *on the level of that which never emerges for itself*, but which is, as it were, *engaged* in every creative discipline, and this is the constitution of space-times” (16).

What we engage with will never emerge for itself. Our creative work, the necessity we address, the mode of expression we are familiar with – speaks to this real, reducible neither to time nor to space (nor the Unconscious or History, the Social or the Scientific Function). “Deserted ground is the only thing that can be seen, but this deserted ground is heavy with what lies beneath” (16-17).

Like a poet, Deleuze speaks of things that are irreducible to any form of communication, bringing a word of caution to our own ideological and humanitarian impulses to communicate the “true” truth of the human condition. Such impulses issue order-

words and ultimately partake in systems of control.

But is Deleuze saying that we should be mute? Not engage, not represent, not speak?

No, for Deleuze we are not just left to an endless self-reflexive and paralyzing mode of inquiry.

“Our creative work should stand in contrast to the controlled system of order-words that are used in a given society” (18).

Deleuze then goes on to sketch his now famous if quite cursory take on post-disciplinary societies and our supposed future in control societies – he uses the image of highways: driving freely without being at all confined yet still perfectly controlled.

Whether this “model” is true or false is beside the point here. Critical for anthropology today, I believe, is Deleuze’s alertness to the workings of the market and the plasticity of power as well as his acknowledgement of the existence of counter-information – call it ill-formed or incomplete local knowledge that comes with being governed in this or that way. Within it lies the human desire that potentially can turn counter-information into an act of resistance, of making things otherwise.

“Only the act of resistance resists death, whether the act is in the form of a work of art or in the form of a human struggle” (19).

Resisting death in all possible forms: historical oblivion, social abjection, biological life. And the act of resistance has two sides: it is human and it is also the act of art.

Our curiosity can meet what remains to be known as we bring back the everyday travails and stories of characters that might otherwise remain forgotten, with attention to the ways their own struggles and visions of themselves create holes in dominant theories and interventions. Perhaps the creativity of ethnography arises from this effort to give form to people’s own painstaking arts of living and the unexpected potentials they create, and from the descriptive work of giving these observed tensions an equally powerful force in our own accounting.

Simply engaging with the complexity of people’s lives and desires – their constraints, technologies, subjectivities, projects – in multi-layered and ever-shifting social worlds constantly necessitates the rethinking of our conceptual compasses. What would it mean for our research methodologies and ways of writing to consistently embrace this unfinishedness, seeking ways to analyze the general, the structural, and the processual while maintaining an acute awareness of the inevitable incompleteness of our accounts?

The point here is not move our interlocutors in the field up to *our* level in the hierarchy of epistemological authority so to speak – but to dislodge the hierarchy altogether, to argue for an equality of intelligences and to find novel public and scholarly ways to harness the creative conceptual work activated in the field. There is no universal formula for relevance, and ethnographic work should not be valued solely for its immediate instrumentality. The insights anthropologists produce are often, nonetheless, urgent; thus, we must continue to challenge orthodoxies of all kinds and seek original ways to communicate the categories that are significant in human experience – which the powers-that-be dismiss as “anecdotal,” nongeneralizable, and inherently impractical – to the worlds of science, policy, jurisprudence, and care. If this engagement leads

to the subtraction of theories, so much the better, in my view.

Continually adjusting itself to the reality of contemporary lives and worlds, the anthropological venture has the potential of art: to invoke neglected human potentials and to expand the limits of understanding and imagination – a people yet to come. “There is no work of art that does not call on a people who does not yet exist,” writes Deleuze at the end of “Having an Idea in Cinema” (19). The anthropological imagination also includes the active participation of readers. At stake is our capacity to generate a “we,” an engaged audience and political community that has not previously existed – our craft’s potential to become a mobilizing force in this world.

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WHERE IS ANTHROPOLOGY GOING?

Webb Keane

I am a poor prophet and offer no predictions, only aspirations.

When you're in truly interdisciplinary conversations, your interlocutors usually want to know what the anthropologist can do that they can't do better on their own; what makes us worth having at the table. For socio-cultural anthropologists, one conventional answer is "ethnography." But our tic of starting every article by announcing we will "complicate the story" is growing stale, and cautious particularism ultimately narrows our vision. And if our anxieties about relevance let prevailing public opinion determine for us the defining terms of importance, we succumb to a kind of ethnocentrism, and risk over-estimating the uniqueness of our own historical moment. Doing so, we give up on one of anthropology's enduring strengths, a deep capacity for decentering and reframing the apparent priorities of the moment. So then what?

We must restore our self-confidence to think theoretically. This shouldn't stop at quoting translated fragments from European savants. If indeed those are the conversations that draw us, we should enter them able to hold our own. This means developing strong, sharp concepts from our own historical and ethnographic resources – critically reflected on. One result should be a renewed self-consciousness about comparison. This isn't a reactionary call for a return to the colonial or positivist typologies we worked so hard to dismantle. It's an insistence that we become more self-conscious about what, tacitly, *we're already doing*. Like an unstated theory, implicit comparison puts us unwittingly

Webb Keane is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan.

tingly in the thrall of a bad one. By constructing new terms of comparison, we will do better at listening in the field, and learning from one another as well. My guess is this will involve reconstructing ideas such as causality, value, materiality, subject, morality, and objectification (but you can make your own list). At least we should become less comfortable with our familiar assumptions about cultural difference and social construction.

What would follow is a renewed sense of perspective (*not* the sovereign gaze or the view from nowhere). Alongside the local knowledge each of us has mastered has always been some background awareness of an archive extending to vast stretches of historical time and social space. Presentism and futurology are currently popular, and certainly emerging social imaginaries and visions of the human are crucial topics. But they can't wholly define us. Anthropologists are almost alone among disciplines and practices in our habit of challenging the imperial privilege of the Here, the Now, and of Us. We learn not just from intimacy, but also from the distant view (Keane 2003). Ethnography is necessary but not sufficient. We should rest at neither local worlds, say, nor global forces, at neither concrete experience nor abstract structures. Our knowledge derives not from one pole or the other, but from the restless movement between them. Once we're clear about that, we'll be better able to listen to, converse with, and when necessary, talk back to, our interlocutors, academic and otherwise.

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