



Distinguished Lecture

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

A Partial View of Contemporary Anthropology

ABSTRACT This address considers ethnographically a range of sites and practices central to sustaining the intellectual, pedagogical, professional, and public life of anthropology and related disciplines: research funding, human subjects review, scholarly publishing, program and personnel assessment, and intellectual property among them. The talk points to current practices of knowledge production and circulation in the United States and to the increasingly complex intersections among scholarly knowledge, managerialist language and practice, and private capital, intellectual and otherwise. It is meant to encourage serious ethnographic examination of the contexts within which anthropologists work, consideration of the potential consequences of these contemporary changes, and creative thought about the kinds of collegial and collective action that might be pursued to help sustain what we find to be of real value in the discipline and in our professional practice. [Keywords: knowledge production, funding, publications]

WRITING IN 1938, Joseph Mitchell, later to become renowned as a *New Yorker* essayist, noted, “I believe the most interesting human beings, so far as talk is concerned, are anthropologists, farmers, prostitutes, psychiatrists, and an occasional bartender” (2001[1938]:10–11). This particular bit of anthropological talk, my last as an officer of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), represents a moment in an ongoing and often very intense conversation with many colleagues. In it are reflected some issues that were often center stage and others that, remarkably, have rarely entered the discussion. The past four years have been for me, first as president-elect and then as president, full of talk explicitly about the field, its present configurations and conflicts, and its possible futures, with the internal politics of the discipline often highlighted. At the same time, there has been a remarkable silence about many dimensions of the broader professional, institutional, and governmental contexts within which we work and that often set the conditions under which we pursue anthropology. Further, in my view, profound transformations are underway in these contexts.

In this address I will be briefly considering a range of sites and practices central to sustaining the intellectual, pedagogical, professional, and public life of our and many other disciplines: research funding, human subjects review, schol-

arly publishing, program and personnel assessment, and intellectual property among them. This discussion is informed in part by my own perspective as participant in many of these sites and practices, in part by my own ethnographic project on research funding (Brenneis 1988, 1994, 1999), and in part by ongoing conversations with many colleagues within and beyond the field. It is intended as something of a provocation, a challenge to engage ethnographically with these institutional contexts within which we work, to consider the potential consequences of several apparent current trends, and to think creatively about the kinds of collegial and collective action that might help us sustain that which we find of real value in our discipline and our own professional practice.

This address presents a decidedly partial account of our field in the sense that I am not at all impartial about the possible future courses that anthropology and the social sciences might take. While I deeply resist the rhetoric of crisis, I have become convinced that dramatic change is occurring both within the academy and in those areas beyond the academy with which we as social scientists are most frequently engaged. Some possible futures catalyze real concern; others, ones toward which I am considerably more partial, offer somewhat more hope. My talk is, in the largest sense, about current practices of academic knowledge

production and circulation in the United States and about the increasingly complex intersections among scholarly knowledge, managerialist language and practice, and private capital. At its core is my concern that our work is becoming increasingly privatized and that access to, and potential uses of, social science knowledge will become ever more restricted and undemocratic.

I am at times surprised that many anthropologists who are extraordinarily subtle and sophisticated in their analyses of field situations are considerably less analytical about the institutional webs that we daily inhabit here at home. In part this is because these webs are often determinedly routine. I'd suggest that there is a critical need to study those mundane, "not very exciting" (to quote a colleague), yet highly important sites—bureaucratic, corporate, and institutional—that are often bracketed in our research: for example, the practices of funding panels at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and other agencies and foundations. These sites are crucial parts of the institutional framework within which much contemporary anthropology takes place, and we often, I am convinced, forget or ignore the frame as we focus on the picture it surrounds.

This address presents a partial view in several other senses. Even when one is near the assumed center of a discipline, it is impossible to grasp the entirety of a large and complex intellectual scene. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of U.S. anthropology is its profoundly pluralistic and decentralized nature. Being president of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) is in some ways like being mayor of Gertrude Stein's Oakland: There is a lot of fascinating activity going on, but it is not—nor should it be—a locus of power or an intellectually defining position for the field as a whole. Central to our field's possibilities, in fact, are pluralism and the complex—and at times quite contentious—conversations it both requires and makes possible. The vitality of anthropology is enormous, and the range of our interlocutors extends in multiple directions. It is in fact, I think, the case that concerns about the integration of the field derive in part from the great success of our cross-disciplinary engagements, from the new and quite various audiences we address to the forms, genres, and styles of argument through which we speak to and with them. We are somewhat difficult to "brand," being so mercurial and heterogeneous. This does not necessarily make for easy translation within the field itself, but it does make for a lively, responsive, and imaginative intellectual world among practitioners and academics alike. One way, in fact, of thinking about the field is as a classic Galisonian trading zone (Galison 1997), with the crucial and defining—if ill-defined—boundary object (Star and Griesemer 1989) of "culture" at the core of the action.

We also live in a remarkably pluralistic world institutionally. U.S. anthropology is taught at a range of private and public (but no directly national) institutions, and practicing anthropologists work for a plethora of private, public, nongovernmental, and other institutions. Lots of

federal, state, and other institutions figure into the mix, but it is indeed a very heterogeneous system. The funding sources, universities, regulatory agencies, and other infrastructural institutions with which we work are diverse and scattered. This is in marked contrast to France, for example, where, especially in regard to higher education and research, there is *a* state. In addition, academic anthropology, in both its research and teaching guises, is an almost wholly state-supported enterprise. Models of governance and governmentality that might be appropriate and productive for analyzing more or less monolithic institutional systems are problematic when applied to the U.S. scene without a strong sense of ethnographic subtlety and specificity.

Voluntary associations figure significantly within this U.S. institutional pluralism. As a particularly salient voluntary association in our field, the AAA plays an important role vis-à-vis, among other things, the production and circulation of anthropological knowledge and relations with federal and other regulatory agencies—activities central to our professional lives but which often go unnoticed by AAA members. Further, the AAA is itself much more, on its good days, a federation than a single entity. The AAA is as internally pluralistic institutionally as it is intellectually.

I will be reporting ethnographically on a range of sites—some within anthropology, some within a university framework, some associated more broadly with the social sciences—sites central to knowledge production and circulation in the United States. What is going on in these various sites, and in the institutions and institutional practices that define them, is quite consequential for the current course of scholarship and science in our field. It is also, in my view, clearly in a state of real transition, one that resonates with quite large-scale transformations in U.S. society and beyond.

A third sense in which this is a partial account is that I will not be attending to some of the more immediately recognizable challenges facing us: for example, the transformed relationships we have with past and present subjects of our inquiry, or their recognition (or misrecognition) of commodity aspects of what we learn from them. Nor will I be discussing the very real and quite obvious political threats to our and related fields, as well as academic freedom more broadly. These are crucial issues, but they have received—and are receiving—a great deal of thoughtful attention.

Finally, this account is partial in that it is concerned primarily with academic anthropology within the United States. However, any sense of our singularity and isolation in respect to some of the issues I discuss below, especially in relation to assessment and audit practices, is illusory. The rise of academic program audit during the 1980s in the United Kingdom—and its subsequent refinement and spread within the Commonwealth and the European Union, for example—have provided a model available to U.S. administrators as well. While our anthropologies, unsurprisingly, vary in both past

histories and present characters, we are far from alone in the structural quandaries that we face, although there are also some specifically U.S. dimensions to our situation, most markedly the organizational pluralism noted above and the noncentralized nature of U.S. higher education.

ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE LEAST LIKELY PLACES

I want to organize my remarks by noting three classical dimensions of any ethnographic project: (1) a focus on practice in situ, (2) a concern for language and translation, and (3) a serious engagement with questions of value. In the remainder of this address I will be drawing on, as noted above, both formal research at NSF and less formal reflective participation in a wide range of events and institutions. Throughout this work I have been concerned with *practice*—that is, a focus on the detailed particulars of situated social action over time in quite specific sites. My own understanding of social practice at NSF and other sites proceeded in part by a strategy of juxtaposition. In this strategy, very different events, institutions, and cases or social dramas in the Manchester sense (Epstein 1967; Gluckman 1967; Turner 1957) are compared with each other. Through such a strategy, a necessary refinement of how institutional practice is contextualized—and, indeed, of how institutional contexts are always being made through social practice—might be possible. Such juxtaposition also often illuminates common underlying themes and practices. In my current research—concerned as it is with practices as disparate as department reviews, academic publishing, and human subjects policy—the juxtapositions noted below represent my cumulative sense of the relationships among local practice at a range of sites in which I was, and in some cases continue to be, a participant. This is intended as a provocation to keep our own eyes and ears open. It is also somewhat reminiscent of old-style structural-functionalism: It is not surprising to see similar underlying themes emerging in a wide range of practices and institutions, but these patterns may be far from functional for those of us who are embrangled in them.

A second ethnographic dimension of this work has been my concern with the role of language in such institutional practice. In part this has to do with questions of translation, of how key terms and phrases move and circulate across various domains and of how their meanings and prescriptive implications are transformed and negotiated in the new settings. It also has to do with the nature and consequences of talk within various institutional settings; how we talk with each other in such settings is in many ways as significant as the meanings we may try to convey.

A final ethnographic aspect of this project is that it has a great deal to do, in multiple senses, with questions of value and especially with how what is valuable—and how it takes on value—is worked out on the ground. Why do particular kinds of scholarly and scientific knowledge matter? How do they “count” and to what ends? These are crucial questions

that have been at the heart of much classic anthropological inquiry.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF PRACTICE

My research at NSF initially occasioned something of a headlong dive into the black box of bureaucracy, an investigation that has required, to transform the literary maxim, a certain interim suspension of belief. That is, I have had to suspend those relatively easy assumptions we often make about how bureaucratic organizations operate in order to work toward a more textured and empirically convincing understanding of what actually happens. Given the nature of scholarly and scientific bureaucracies, for example, I found that I was not so much “studying up,” to use Laura Nader’s (1972) phrase, as “studying across.” We ourselves are often, in situated moments at least, implicated actors in those same institutions we critique, and understanding how our recruitment, socialization, and practice are effected or, more properly, negotiated can provide particularly revelatory data for such institutional analysis. The very duality of our own roles and practices, in fact, may well help make such institutional engagements opaque to us even as we take part in them.

This initial research focused on the nature of talk during discussions of funding decisions over three years on an interdisciplinary social sciences research funding panel at NSF. How did panel members read, respond to, and discuss the fate of specific proposals? In the context of an institution such as NSF—which, when viewed from the outside, seems highly hierarchical and clearly powerful—perhaps most surprising were the tentative nature of our discussions and, frequently, the ambiguity of our final decisions (Brenneis 1999). Ambiguous as the discussions might have been, however, others clearly acted on them. The starting point for my work in this area was about fifteen years ago. At that time I realized that, if one were interested in tracking the intellectual course of anthropology or any other scholarly enterprise over time, a consideration of published texts and the debates they engendered, however revelatory, could only provide a partial account. When viewed with an eye to what gets defined, funded, and, ultimately, published as academic knowledge, there is, at least in the United States, a necessarily prior written genre: the research grant proposal. Before one can, to use James Clifford and George Marcus’s (1986) phrase, “write culture,” one must first write money. Further, at least in the United States, one must write money for an audience of one’s peers. *Peer review* is the process of evaluating not only research grant proposals but also journal submissions, book manuscripts, and such, and it is central to scholarly life in the United States—almost omnipresent and always very salient. At the same time the recurrent and routine interactional practices through which peer review is accomplished—and through which quite consequential outcomes are shaped—remain largely unnoticed, even to the many of us who are routinely engaged in it. By definition it implies having one’s work—or proposed

work—evaluated by one’s peers. What I realized over the course of my language-focused ethnography of panel practice was that it also means that those doing the evaluating are also, in the context of their discussions, negotiating being peers. In the series of papers noted above, I have explored how a shared concern for ongoing sociality shapes panel meetings and directly influences the recommendations that constitute their outcomes. For example, one panel with which I was involved had been organized to help fund highly innovative work concerning transsovereignty legal issues, and it supported a great deal of very interesting and valuable research; however, many of the most innovative proposals were tabled and not reconsidered. I have argued (Brenneis 1999) that, in this context, the value placed on panel civility served as a limiting factor, dampening our enthusiasm for making strong and potentially controversial cases.

Four general findings have emerged from this project. The first is that the notion of “peership” necessarily defines those who are not peers as well as those who are; it both includes and, often implicitly, excludes. Second, peer review involves reviewing *with*, as well as *of*, peers—or with those whom one would like to consider one peers. Jointly constructing peership around the panel table is central and often helps shape the outcomes of panel discussions. Third, panel evaluative practice and discussions are often structured with an underlying model of interrater reliability in mind—assuming that there is a phenomenon, in this instance scientific quality, present to be mapped with increasing accuracy. This assumed model is quite explicit at the National Institutes of Health (Durso 1996; Hebert 2002) but seems to inform practice in other agencies as well. Finally, disciplining and self-regulation come to play central roles in shaping panelist behavior. How we participate as assessors can be affected by, for example, changes in the choices afforded us by evaluation forms (Brenneis n.d.) or through the ongoing provision of information so we can monitor and normalize our behavior (Brenneis 1994).

Even as several scholars (Mallard et al. n.d.), myself included, have been exploring how such panels work and how they shape what comes to be taken as social scientific knowledge, the role of such federal agencies or their private philanthropic counterparts in funding research appears to be diminishing. Especially when considered across the whole gamut of scientific and scholarly disciplines, an increasing proportion of funding comes from corporate sources. And, perhaps most consequentially, such privately funded research often leads to proprietary rather than public knowledge. To some extent this reflects the general defunding of government-sponsored *basic* research. More markedly, perhaps, it represents the increasing potential commercial value of much research done in the academy, if not generally within anthropology.

In moving beyond funding issues, and keeping the increasing privatization of much research in mind, I want here to very carefully introduce the notion of the “biomedical model” that will recur in the remainder of the talk. I am

using this term fairly loosely to suggest a way of thinking about scientific research that generalizes from current practice in one general area—that is, biomedical science—to research across the full range of scientific and social scientific study. I am not talking in any way about epistemological or substantive issues. Rather, I am speaking about recurrent *institutional* dimensions of funding, research, publication, circulation, and application, and I’m suggesting the proxy role that biomedical work has come to assume for science across the board. I’m also not arguing that this is a bad model: My concern has much more to do with its increasing extension in a one-size-fits-all model to the broader range of scientific and scholarly activity and to the determination of relative value. Not all science within this model is big science, but most of it much bigger—and more expensive—than anything we do in anthropology. Further, not all biomedical science produces proprietary knowledge. Considerable capital is, however, often necessary, and it frequently comes from sources other than the government or foundations. Not all kinds of rigorous and productive inquiry, however, need such large budgets. One supersize doesn’t fit all, nor is funding on such a scale, or from such funders, necessarily possible. While such capital demands might seem to be a limiting factor, they may in fact make a range of important things possible.

One crucial sphere other than funding in which the extension of the biomedical model is particularly marked has to do with Institutional Review Boards (or IRBs). Until the Clinton administration, federal human subjects review was tied directly to federal funding of the research being proposed; review was required if research was to be federally funded. Now, however, most kinds of research involving humans, even if unfunded, must be reviewed by institutional panels if the home institution receives any federal funding.

Due in large part to the rise of biomedical research, especially that which is driven by pharmaceutical and medical appliance corporations, public and governmental concern for the protection of human subjects has increased dramatically over the past decade. Responding to this concern—and to the remarkable absence of a common set of practices or principles that applied across the range of agencies supporting scientific research—the Clinton administration proposed a set of universal requirements for any research involving human subjects, whether federally funded or not. The proposed regulations are still under discussion and debate in 2004. For those of us engaged in qualitative and ethnographic research, many of the proposed regulations, generalized as they were from drug test protocols, were at best irrelevant and at worst impossible to meet. For example, one suggested requirement entailed that all questions to be asked first be cleared with a review panel. A plenary session at the 2003 AAA Annual Meeting spoke directly to the current situation of anthropological research with an eye to these emerging standards.

What is directly relevant here, however, is that meeting the procedural and monitoring requirements likely to be

adopted will be expensive, requiring considerably more administrative staff, infrastructure, and expertise than is currently the case. Adherence to the proposed rules would, I think, make demands that many smaller institutions would find it difficult to fund. Given the somewhat loose standards regarding conflict of interest, compliance would, in fact, be easiest for large corporations that have the capital to fund the ethical review of research that directly serves their financial interests. Public institutions in particular might well be priced out of the human research market to some extent.

Scholarly publishing is a further area in which I have had considerable recent experience. The AAA is one of a dwindling number of scholarly associations that control their own journals—that is, we hold copyright and licensing rights. With the advent of digital media, there is markedly increased, generally quite age-graded, interest in receiving our publications on-line rather than on paper. And some unseen but very real consequences of digitalization are emerging. I published a piece recently in *Human Development*, a journal published by the private Swiss publisher, Karger. To my surprise, I had to pay a fee to have my article included in the electronic version of the journal, although not to have the piece published in the paper version. The digitalized version is linked and, therefore, somewhat more likely to be read than the paper version but, crucially, much more likely to be cited. My sense is that the citation rates of various anthropology journals, sometimes taken as an unproblematic index of journal quality, may be directly related to their availability on-line and as links, whether in digitalized journals or through such archives as JSTOR.

The start-up costs for digitalization are considerable, beyond any but the largest and most financially robust scholarly group, especially in the current economic situation. It is clear from discussions within anthropology and with colleagues in other disciplines that there is an increased drive by private and university publishers to take over the journals owned by scholarly associations. Private presses in particular use pricing policies that provide subsidized subscriptions for association members of those societies while charging extraordinarily high rates for library subscriptions. In the case of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA), for example, members receive the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology (AJPA)* as a benefit of membership and annual membership dues are only \$130; a library subscription, however, is close to \$2,000. While there has long been a difference between members' costs for journals and library rates, conversations with research librarians have made it clear that the increases have accelerated dramatically over the past 15 years. In the sciences the differential is even greater, and publishers' requirement that subscribers buy bundles of journals rather than individual publications makes for even higher prices. For journals published by the AAA, library costs are considerably less than, for example, *AJPA*.

Fewer and fewer libraries can afford privately published journals, especially when bundled rather than separate, and less well-funded schools—including community colleges

and many of the four-year colleges—are, again, priced out of the market. In December 2003, for example, I received a letter from the chair of the University of California (UC) Academic Senate and from all the UC-campus librarians arguing that even the larger institutions are finding they cannot afford scholarly journals. The case that prompted their letter was that of Elsevier, a major publisher of scientific, medical, and forensic journals. After a year of negotiations between the UC system and Elsevier over a dramatic rise in subscription costs led nowhere, the faculty senate at UC Santa Cruz voted unanimously to boycott Elsevier, by not submitting manuscripts and refusing to serve as editors or on editorial boards. Subsequently, the medical faculty at UC San Francisco took a vote to boycott the *Cell* family of journals published by Elsevier. Other university library systems followed suit. Elsevier has subsequently returned to negotiations with the system, although apparently they are more likely to budge on the bundling issue rather than cost per se.

A relevant question here is, of course, if the UC system can't afford journals at these prices, and if Elsevier is clearly not shooting for corporate suicide, who *can* afford them? An answer may well lie in the private sector, where some journals, at least, no matter how expensive, can more easily just be treated as part of the cost of doing profitable business, a cost passed on to customers.

In the case of AAA, the Mellon Foundation has given a generous grant to help make possible what is certain to be a necessary transition to digitalization through "AnthroSource," a collaborative arrangement wherein the AAA maintains ownership and copyright while the University of California (UC) Press manages print and electronic preparation, distribution, and other publishing functions. Most scholarly associations, however, are not so fortunate. If our associations have a mandate to disseminate scholarly and scientific knowledge widely, the privatization of publishing poses real threats. While the Habermasian notion of a "public sphere" (1989) can be critiqued and challenged on many grounds, it also seems clear that ensuring public access to the knowledge we produce is a defining dimension of what associations such as the AAA should be about.

Here again another aspect of the biomedical science model plays a role. A recent bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives as a response to the pricing practices characteristic of many private publishers. The language of the bill argues that the results of any research funded by the U.S. government should be available without cost to the public. The framers of the legislation are pursuing, I think, an admirable goal, as are the scientists, ethicists, and administrators working on human subjects reform. Their plan for how to fund the inescapable review, editorial, production, and distribution costs is that anyone submitting a manuscript for review should pay \$5,000 up front to meet those costs, arguing that this increased burden may be met by building it into one's grant proposal. While it has been standard for research proposals in many of the sciences to build publication costs into the budget, this clearly

envision a very different kind of grant—and a very different scale of grant—than those with which we are familiar.

At the nongovernmental level, the *Public Library of Science Biology* has been launched in an on-line searchable version with paper copies available to subscribers. Access to the electronic version will be open to the public and free. To fund this, contributors are asked to pay \$1,500 per article. Even at this relatively low cost, anthropologists might have some difficulty building the anticipated publication fees into their grants.

There is a crucial role for scholarly associations in legislative advocacy regarding such issues. In October 2003, for example, oral history research was formally exempted from the human subjects policies currently under review. The AAA and the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) are in the midst of an effort to reshape the draft policies not to exempt social sciences but to better reflect characteristic social science methodologies. COSSA has also been working against the proposed “free” publication congressional legislation in its present form.

NEW TRANSLATIONS

I turn now to the second ethnographic theme noted above—that of translation. I’ve found it increasingly helpful to think about the contemporary academic world as, in Peter Galison’s (1997) phrase, something of a “trading zone”: a site in which, in this case, actors from quite different spheres can interact without fully shared understandings of what key terms might mean and where particular instances of cross-domain borrowing—some free-wheeling and some quite purposive—can occur. A number of us, including a number of British and Commonwealth anthropologists deeply concerned about the post-Thatcherite transformation of British universities initiated in the 1980s, have been tracking the increasing intrusion of managerialist language into the academic world. Marilyn Strathern (2000), Cris Shore and Susan Wright (1999, 2000), and others, for example, have documented the rise of “audit” and related notions in the evaluation of academic quality. While audit per se is less visible in the United States, many federal research funding agencies have now established “stakeholder” groups to consult on policy and practice. Central among such terms borrowed from elsewhere but increasingly consequential in academia is *accountability*, a notion that an international panel of scholars addressed in a presidential session at the 2003 Annual Meeting, “Keeping the Bureaucratic Peace: Audit Culture and the Politics of Accountability, New Managerialism, and Neoliberal Governance.”¹ It is critical to note that, as is often the case with key terms, *accountability* is polysemic and has multiple histories. In this instance, it does not refer to moral responsibility or being “called to account” on ethical grounds. Accountability here derives from the language of management and conveys a complex sense of measurement, transparency, and evaluation.

In all of these exemplary cases, the language of management itself had first borrowed from the much more limited language of accountancy and has itself, in turn, been interpolated anew into a very different range of institutions focused on knowledge production (see Power 1994, 1997). One of the benefits such borrowings are taken as affording is that they are assumed to be transparent—that is, that we all know what they mean and that they provide a framework not just for evaluation and institutionalized reciprocity but also for the kind of comparative consideration taken as necessary for such assessment to work. It is critical to point out that this is not just a matter of lexical seepage. These ways of naming salient issues, and, thereby, of pursuing them, have very real consequences. The drive toward standardizing the meaning of undergraduate degrees with the European Union (or, in the German case, of offering undergraduate degrees at all) seems one example of a kind of coercive commensurability attendant on the increasing bureaucratization of higher education. Practices of external regulation and internal control have long been with us in the academy, but a major transformation seems to be underway, especially driven by increasing sense of needing to speak recurrently to public, external audiences. Audit has increasingly become the idiom through which such address takes place.

The development of metrics of some sort is almost inevitable for a variety of reasons. Of course, the critical question is “Of what sort?” Far better that they reflect situationally specific and relevant variables than, again, one-size-fits-all models. The number of research dollars brought in, for example, or average time to graduate degree, make much more sense in most natural sciences than in anthropology. Here scholarly associations such as the AAA and its sections can actually help departments articulate field-specific measures and practices in crucial ways. That the AAA adopted language proposed by the Society for Visual Anthropology concerning the scholarly value of film, video, and sound documents for personnel review has already proved important in several individual cases, but it is only a first step.

We can also help resist translation as appropriate. As Stefan Collini has suggested, it is critical recurrently and effectively to make the argument that “intellectual activity can, for the most part, be judged but not measured” (2003:6). Beyond this, however, we can work against the development of general audit procedures that encourage the generation of too much information of a particular, decontextualized type, as they make “transferable skills an objective . . . reduc[ing] what makes a skill work, its embeddedness” (Strathern 1997:14). No field has wrangled with questions of the contextualized nature of social and cultural practice to better effect than anthropology. Drawing on such disciplinary intellectual resources, we should be particularly well suited for suggesting principled ways in which to help our institutional interlocutors recognize embedded skills, accomplishments, and situationally rather than globally measurable qualities.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF VALUE

A third ethnographic dimension has to do with questions of value. Here I want briefly to draw on a very useful argument made by Corynne McSherry, a lawyer and sociologist who has written extensively on intellectual property (IP). In examining a number of cases concerning IP issues, primarily in genetic research, McSherry (2001) depicts the current state of unease at research universities on questions of the ownership of academic knowledge. In exploring this discomfort, McSherry argues that universities have traditionally been involved in a complex system of ongoing exchange. However disputed, competitive, coercive, and vehement local exchange practices might be in academia—and in this they are directly reminiscent of the kinds of exchange practices we have traditionally studied in anthropology—ideas, methods, and inventions circulate within particular scholarly circuits, their value deriving in large part from such circulation. One of the principal internal roles of universities and scholarly associations alike has further been one of redistribution, a source both of intermittent conflict and of strength across a range of approaches and specialties.

With the development of a “knowledge economy,” however, the products of some kinds of scholarly and scientific work—but decidedly not all—provide strong candidates for commoditization. The academic world is, in McSherry’s view, on the cusp between exchange and commodity, with the financially promising nature of much academic knowledge driving the transition. And, for me, a crucial question is how we—in this instance “we” as anthropologists—can claim value, and in and through what languages? In what terms can we “matter” or, indeed, be seen as comparable at all to other fields that appear to have more patent roles to play?

As an example of the emerging centrality of the economic role of universities and knowledge production, consider this brief quote from *The Future of Higher Education*, a recent white paper on the future of higher education in Great Britain:

We see a higher education sector which meets the needs of the economy in terms of trained people, research and technology transfer. At the same time it needs to enable all suitably qualified individuals to develop their potential both intellectually and personally, and to provide the necessary storehouse of expertise in science and technology, and the arts and humanities which defines our civilization and culture. [Collini 2003:1]

Similarly, Bonnie Urciuoli provides a subtle and insightful account of the penetration of managerial and corporate terminology into the heart of liberal arts college—recruiting materials, which now stress such outcomes as “excellence, leadership, skills, and diversity” (Urciuoli 2003:385). Collini and Urciuoli chart suggestively how the goal of selling themselves to funders, parents, and potential students—a long-term concern of university and college administrators—has been reshaped vis-à-vis the language of management over the past 10–15 years.

In thinking about how value is assigned within higher education, a brief consideration of differences between the sciences and humanities—a divergence within which anthropology and other social sciences often occupy an uncomfortable middle ground—might be helpful. In my time on the UC-systemwide Graduate Affairs Committee, I was surprised that perhaps 75 percent of our agenda involved routine requests to permit the splitting and recombination of various natural and physical science departments. Committee members, many of whom were scientists, saw nothing amiss in the fields changing shape with an eye to how emergent research problems might better be explored. Emergent knowledge required new methods and new intellectual configurations. On the other hand, there was considerable angst, on that committee and more generally, concerning departments in humanities and social sciences splitting and reforming. In 2001, for example, the UC Santa Cruz Biology Department split without any marked campus response. Meanwhile, I am recurrently asked my views, as a non-Stanford anthropologist living in Palo Alto, about the split of the Stanford Department of Anthropology into two new departments, years after the event. This is not to argue that departmental fission is a good idea or that such splits should not catalyze concern. It is, rather, to suggest that these modal contrasting opinions tell us something about widely shared views of what makes our different disciplines worthwhile. Science is often viewed as always being reshaped, the better to pursue emergent paths to new knowledge, while the humanities’ value appears to reside in their being container-like, charged with carrying the contents of particular historical and “civilizational” worth and depending for their importance on the integrity of the vessel itself. It is not new knowledge that is taken as giving these fields their importance. It is, instead, their capacity for conveying old knowledge and ideas—and the relationship of a discipline’s contexts vis-à-vis that of other such vessels. In the minds of many, anthropology seems to be taken much more as such a vessel than as a range of ways, both scientific and scholarly, of pursuing and creating new knowledge. At the same time, many of us in the field value it because it involves both elements.

In her examination of the exchange to commodity transformation, McSherry has provided a powerfully helpful notion, but the boundary line is considerably more ragged—and perhaps has been in place for longer—than she suggests. Within U.S. anthropology, as a quick example, an increasing number of our graduates and Ph.D.s have found work as practicing anthropologists—that is, they work directly for firms doing applied research, leading in many, but far from all, cases to private, proprietary knowledge. And, again, I need to be very careful here: This is not an ethical critique in any way but is rather provided as ethnographic observation that should help illuminate the issue. That they are producing proprietary knowledge has shaped not only the professional trajectories of the individuals involved; it has also shaped, for example, debates about anthropological ethics and responsibilities, as

in the reformulation of the AAA ethics policy in the early 1990s.

Similarly, many, but far from all, physical anthropologists, especially those involved with genetic and genomic research, have long been producing commercially valuable work. This is not a simple dichotomy between scientific and less scientific anthropology: For example, since the 1930s, Americanist archaeology has been crucially focused on producing and widely circulating public knowledge. At the same time, such a focus has, according to my archaeology colleagues, often been in contrast to more academic parts of the subfield, in which theoretical contributions are more highly prized. The nature of the knowledge produced, and how it finds its way to users, constitutes a critical underlying feature of how our field has become internally differentiated somewhat distant from the usual debates about science versus humanities and other expressly intellectual disagreements.

Beyond anthropology, however, it is clear that some disciplines afford far greater possibilities for commoditization than others. Perhaps this is, again, the result of living in Silicon Valley, where—to return briefly to the contents and vessel imagery—those of us in the social sciences and humanities are at times referred to as “content providers.” My sense is that different kinds of academic work gain value in quite different arenas and quite different ways. Cultural capital is central in what many of us produce. And here I am convinced this is not merely a reflex of the kinds of non-commercial knowledge I participate in producing. It seems that there is much of value in producing public rather than private knowledge and of working to make it as broadly available as possible. This is not solely a matter of commercial potential. The electrical engineering programs at both UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz, for example, strongly support the development of open access software, arguing that more and better knowledge gets built over time through many parties drawing on a widely shared intellectual base.

If there is merit in something resembling a public sphere—a broadly accessible arena for engagement, argument, and intellectual imagination—keeping our scholarship open and available seems critical. Similarly, while the notion of “civil society” poses many of the same political complexities as does the “public sphere,” it does provide a useful heuristic for the social life of scholarship. With all their limitations—and with all the necessary and significant caveats such models engender—contemplating a world in which we cannot conduct much of the kind of research that has been central to the field—and in which the results of such scholarly and scientific work as we will produce are available and useful only to an increasingly limited range of institutionally wealthy audiences—makes the sustaining of more public discourse, for me, all the more necessary.

CONCLUSIONS—OR BEGINNINGS

I am still quite sanguine. I’ve never had any doubt about the vitality, imagination, and consequentiality of the work that

anthropologists do, across a range of professional settings. I think there is considerable intellectual legitimacy to our continued existence—but that’s another argument. I want to close with three related points.

First, I think it will require a fair amount of good anthropology on our part to understand, wrangle with, and think through appropriate ways of engaging with the complex, if tedious and daunting, institutional worlds within which we live and work. We need to pay attention—in the ways that anthropologists can and do better than most anyone—to these local and far-reaching mundane practices. We very much need to rethink our shared and disparate positions and possibilities—and not to overtheorize or to fall back on perceived differences to efface and destroy the possibility for recognizing and building on shared underlying goals and concerns.

Second, we need to understand that the stakes are both real and large scale. For those of us fortunate enough to have full-time professional positions, it is clear that the kinds of transformations suggested above can dramatically affect the circumstances under which we live our professional lives and may well reshape whether or not we can do our work to our own sense of satisfaction, as well as the degree of pleasure that we can take in doing it. For the increasing numbers of us in part-time positions, in community colleges and underfunded small schools, we can anticipate increasing difficulty in finding access, whether for ourselves or our students, to critical resources in the field. The potential for increasing stratification—for the accelerated parsing out of different levels and types of institutions—is striking. Those of us who are committed to the democratic potential and necessity of both teaching and research in the social sciences need to resist such an acceleration with all the insight, knowledge, and well-directed energy we can muster.

Finally, given the challenging possibilities I’ve just noted, we should draw on our more broadly informed understanding of our current situation to figure out where and with whom the real fights are or should be. And it is critical that our actions be collective—but collective in a particularly anthropological, that is, highly heterogeneous, mode. Central to both the subject and practice of our field is its productive recognition and exploration of both human and analytical heterogeneity; pluralism is central to our strength. Scholarly associations—such as our sections, the AAA itself, and foundations and other concerned institutions such as NSF, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the School of American Research—should increasingly provide both the arenas and the support to speak with passion and a particular sort of intelligence deeply embedded in the specifics of anthropology’s history, practice, and possibilities. Departments can organize collegial discussions around such issues, and, perhaps, publications such as *Anthropology News* can publish reports from a range of different groups. We need to work to understand what we can only and must do jointly, and what demands the pluralistic strengths of sectional or more specialized communities. Certainly, as a

quick example, only the AAA can mount a project of the scale of AnthroSource—our portal to digitalized publications, databases, and potential collegial networks—and sustain it as a resource available to increasingly larger and more democratic audiences. Only the vitality, range, and intellectual intimacy and stimulation that sections and their publications afford can make it worthwhile as an enterprise. And, perhaps most significantly, we should work actively with colleagues and associations beyond the United States: While each regional and national system has its own histories and particular contemporary realities, we face many of the same challenges and can learn, contribute to, and benefit immeasurably from each other.

I want to return briefly to Mitchell, who prized the diversity of the human voices of, and through which, we speak. So too should we. We should also make it possible for the widest range of interlocutors, audiences, and colleagues to participate in these conversations. Such diverse voices—and the pluralistic social and institutional worlds in which they arise—are our strength, our subject matter, and, quite often, our delight.

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NOTES

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1. Papers from this session are now available through the *Anthropology in Action* website: www.angelfire.com/rpg/anthropologyinaction/.

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