Anthropological Theory

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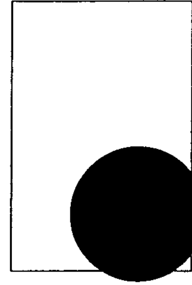

Anthropology in the middle

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Abstract

During the last decade and a half, anthropologists have increasingly given up grand theoretical debates to pursue mid-level articulations that effectively cross many of the discipline's received divides and oppositions. In the process, a middle ground of increasing connections cross-cuts and cross-fertilizes academic theory and applied practice, regional and local scales of analysis, world areas, general structures and specific events, ethnography and history, and objectivism vis-à-vis reflexive or experimental genres of representation and analysis. Amid continuing challenges of anthropological method and representation, these post-paradigmatic articulations have opened sociocultural anthropology to important new ranges of perspective, topical fields, and critical interventions.

Key Words

anthropological theory • applied anthropology • history of anthropology • meso-anthropology • practice anthropology • practice theory

During the last decade, anthropology has taken a curious turn. The debates of the 1980s and early 1990s – concerning experimental ethnography and reflexivity, science and pseudo-science, objectivity versus evocation and the subject-position of the author – have lost their energy and their sense of either accomplishment or struggle. Anthropologists now weave together approaches and perspectives from a toolbox of possibilities not just across topics, but across epistemic divides. In the process, what seemed like momentous polarizations, threats, and fragmentations have slid back. This is not because the issues were considered unimportant or because some have won at the expense of others. Rather, anthropologists have moved like *bricoleurs* to combine pieces of different perspectives – positivist and post-positivist, historical and genealogical, symbolic and political economic, theoretical and applied – in relation to particular projects and topics.

Viewed historically, this is not surprising. Debates that are hot and heavy in the moment rarely get resolved in the long run. Instead, their polarizations get less interesting over time. This pattern informs many of anthropology's past contentions. Instances include Victorian evolutionism versus Boasian diffusionism; Malinowski's functionalism

versus Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism versus Levi-Strauss' structuralism; cultural materialism *à la* Marvin Harris versus symbolic anthropology *à la* Clifford Geertz; Marshall Sahlins' cultural objectivism versus Gananath Obeyesekere's post-colonial critique; Bourdieuian practices versus Foucauldian genealogies; and James Clifford's generalized critique of writing culture versus Ruth Behar and others' insistence on gendered and subaltern authorships of difference. The flow of academic time doesn't resolve theoretical oppositions so much as incorporate them as variants upon larger themes that were widely shared at the time.

As debates grind down with age, however, they are easily reinvented in new guises even as – or more often because – they are forgotten. Amid great differences, to speak telescopically, resonances emerge among perspectives that emphasize the relative, subjective, and defamiliarizing moment of cultural anthropology – from Boas to Zora Neale Hurston to Geertz to George Marcus, Johannes Fabian, Lila Abu-Lughod or Marilyn Strathern. In an historical perspective, post-positivism was simply relativism raised to a higher and more reflexive power. So, too, there is rough analogy between master narratives of objectivity and universality – from Lewis Henry Morgan to Leslie White to Eric Wolf, to James Scott, or, in French terms, from Emile Durkheim to Claude Lévi-Strauss to Pierre Bourdieu. Or, in terms of totalizing critique and iconoclasm, from Marx to Meillassoux to Hardt and Negri, or even Bruno Latour or Giorgio Agamben. The differences within and between these longstanding strands of anthropology – the subjectivizing and diversifying, on one hand, the objectivizing and universalizing, on the other – are certainly too great and interconnected (if not dialectic) to reify their separation. But certain threads of continuity and opposition have continued in anthropology for much of the past century.

During the past decade and a half, however, many of these contrasts and the perception of their essential differences, have been crumbling. This change dovetails with broad and creative new combinations across many received divides in sociocultural anthropology, including those between theory versus application, objectivity versus subjectivity, structure versus event, ethnography versus history, local versus global (aka micro versus macro), and between cultural areas or world regions. Accordingly, the reification and contestation of named 'isms' and their progeny – materialism, Marxism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and even those that cultivate a distinctive subject position of politics or authorship, such as feminism or multiculturalism – are no longer as subject to explicit theorization or paradigmatic contestation as they were 10 or 15 years ago, notwithstanding their enduring threads, lineaments, and academic politics. Theoretical disputes between paradigms or subject positions are no longer as prominent as they were. At its best, the result is neither fuzzy, blurred genres nor a new master narrative nor even competing master paradigms but the braiding together of different approaches or perspectives like strands of a rope configured specially for a new topic, issue, or critical intervention. In Thomas Kuhn's terms (1996), cultural anthropology no longer battles between paradigms so much as it augurs to be post-paradigmatic.

Attempting to sketch these developments against prior trends lapses easily from illustration to iconization to essentialism. Necessarily brief, the present account may be viewed as a broad abstract or even an editorial rather than a substantive rendering with detailed examples or strings of citations. Though ranges of representative authors are mentioned, I continually court the perception (as already shown) of generic

name-dropping, on the one hand, or unintended omission, on the other. In attempting an account that is short as well as broad, my references are only telegraphic (full citations for authors mentioned without reference are available on-line).[1]

Other caveats also apply. My characterizations apply largely to Anglo-American anthropology and especially to American cultural anthropology during the last dozen or so years; the many and increasing contributions of world anthropology from other nations and world areas are beyond my scope (see Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006). In this sense, the present view is of and about what some may take, quite critically, to be a presumptive or unmarked central position in anthropology's field of academic capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1988). Indeed, many non-American anthropologies are ahead of the curve; they throw into relief and underscore trends found more belatedly and partially at the putative center. As discussed in due course, these include a deep mandate to mediate scholarship with practice, to negotiate politics of national and 'indigenous' representation with public intellectualism and public scholarship, and to articulate diverse research topics and employment strategies over time. Finally and relatedly, my account privileges the hope and the promise of trends that are not so much 'new' as young in the sense of being germinal but not yet fully credentialed. This includes important trends among junior scholars and in primary research that takes years to emerge as published articles and books.

Reciprocally, my renditions move lightly or neglectfully over commitments of tenured and senior scholars who maintain strongly embraced allegiance to core paradigms bequeathed during previous decades during graduate training. Though much of the most important recent work in American sociocultural anthropology, including by senior scholars, questions this tendency, past paradigms continue to exert political impact in many anthropology departments, including as standards of assessment or evaluation against which junior colleagues are held. Depending on what side of the fence one is on, this may appear to be a plodding adherence to paradigms of the dying past or, alternatively, as 'anthropology lite' – the top-40 anthropology of newfangled genuflection before non-anthropologists such as Giorgio Agamben (last year) or the Nazi scholar Carl Schmitt (this year).[2] My own point, however, is a somewhat different one: that the contention is less between opposing paradigms than between the diminishing notion that paradigms do and should exist in cultural anthropology and the increasing sense not even that they don't and shouldn't, but that their diffuse presence doesn't really matter.

NEW COMBINATIONS

A narrative of anthropology's present vis-à-vis its past is at pains to avoid a mastered story of 'development' – a history *à la* Eric Wolf (1964; cf. 1982), rather than a genealogy *à la* Michel Foucault (1984). But the polarization between such views – between anthropology as an accumulation of knowledge or as a construction of sedimented representations – is itself increasingly refused by contemporary anthropologists. At least in American cultural anthropology, there is a greater tendency to pragmatically engage and combine different moments of objectivist history and critical genealogy or political advocacy for one or another topical or analytic purpose. A near-random selection of journal articles from seven recent issues of flagship journals *American Ethnologist* (*AE*) and *American Anthropologist* (*AA*) illustrates this point:

AE, August 2005, Maia Green and Simeon Mesaki, 'The Birth of the "Salon"' – how antiwitch specialists in southern Tanzania adopt specifically modernizing practices, including in quasi-Habermasian 'everything salons' that combat witchcraft and related impediments to modern success by regimes of personal hygiene, shaving, and purification therapy.

AA, September 2005, Carol Greenhouse, 'Hegemony and Hidden Transcripts' – how James Scott's notion of hidden transcripts (1990, cf. 1985, 1998) can be turned upside down to understand the operation of hegemony from above by exposing the hidden discursive purposes and histories of official doctrine – such as the Military Order of President Bush that authorized military tribunals for noncitizen 'detainees' accused of broadly defined terrorist acts.

AE, November 2005, David Berliner, 'An "Impossible" Transmission' – how young people's memories of pre-Islamic rituals that have officially disappeared in Guinea-Conakry operate not primarily through personal recollection but through intergenerational transmission.

AA, December 2005, Paige West, 'Translation, Value, and Space' – how the politics of translation and value transmutation inform not only environmentalist misrecognition and generification of Gimi forest beliefs and practices in Papua New Guinea, but categories of political ecology in anthropology.

AE, February 2006, Miriam Ticktin, 'Where Ethics and Politics Meet' – how compassionate humanitarianism in France for sick undocumented immigrants is transformed into biopolitical governance and limited notions of what it means to be human.

AA, March 2006, Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism' – how intermediaries such as community leaders, NGO participants, and social movement activists in East Asia 'map the middle' as translators who both mediate and can be subverted by transnational and national discourses.

AE, May 2006, Jennifer Hubbert, '(Re)collecting Mao' – how compulsive Chinese collection of badges and material paraphernalia associated with Mao sheds new light on the anthropology of fetishism by revealing the conflicts of meaning between different historical eras and rendering problematic a distinction between public and private fetishes.

In all these cases, topics, analytic frameworks, and epistemological perspectives are cross-mapped in creative new ways. Habermas and salons are recast in the context of East African anti-witch movements; hidden transcripts emerge in the service of Bush Administration hegemony rather than as resistance from below; West African religious memories are based not on personal experience but on intergenerational transmission under conditions of repression; both environmentalism and political ecology engage politics of translation that subvert the views of rainforest peoples; humanitarianism for

sick migrants in France creates biopolitical discipline; NGO intermediaries are squeezed or subverted by competing interests of superordinate powers and local constituents; Chinese collectors of Mao paraphernalia recast anthropological understandings of fetishes and of conflicts of meaning across history.

In each of these instances, things are not what they first seem – topically, analytically, epistemologically, or theoretically. As these and countless other examples illustrate, the dominant cutting edges of American sociocultural anthropology engage new topics through mosaics of part-theoretical assertion, part-subjective evocation, part-ethnographic and historical exposition, and part-activist voicing. The field is decreasingly concerned with developing or contesting new master narratives.[3] Take a range of names commonly mentioned on the senior circuit of American cultural anthropology, say, Lila Abu-Lughod, Jean and John Comaroff, Veena Das, James Ferguson, Michael Herzfeld, Catherine Lutz, Arthur Kleinman, Aihwa Ong, Sherry Ortner, Marshall Sahlins, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Ann Stoler, Anna Tsing, or Katherine Verdery. This list is illustrative only and is hardly exclusive or exhaustive. Even so, very few of the aforementioned persons are associated with a 'named approach' much less an 'ism' with a programmatic slate of terms or procedures. Prominent instead are critical new combinations between theorizing, historicizing, subjectivizing, objectivizing and ethnographizing. Articulations weave features of cultural and political economy to the project at hand rather than pursuing general theories or paradigms. In the process, both ancestry and legacy are downplayed; strands of stated influence are diffuse at both higher theoretical levels and lower ethnographic or methodological ones.

Increasingly, anthropological work pursues mid-level connections by linking individual facets of large-scale theories, topics, and methods to particular but not entirely local objects of study. In the process, erstwhile contentions between objective assertion and critical re-representation are broken down into smaller and more easily digestible chunks – less grandiose or Olympian, on the one hand, less impressionistic or deconstructive, on the other. Implicit here is that sociocultural anthropology is continuingly and importantly theoretical while not enunciating or contending alternative versions of 'Theory'. Reciprocally (and particularly in the United States), the field takes increasingly critical stances on social issues and institutional policies while shying from programmatic assertions of essential or universal critique. In both theoretical and interventionist terms, the dominant trend in sociocultural anthropology is to make creative and critical combinations through partial but suggestive connections.

CONCEPTS IN USE

Shifts in anthropology influence how our key terms are used. As the field becomes post-paradigmatic, key concepts tend to be relativized, pluralized, and then reduced in status to an adjective – an entity that modifies something else rather than standing as a concept in its own right. Relatedly, declarations of theory are replaced not just by theoretical modifications but by theoretical modifiers. The most well known case is probably the concept of 'culture' itself. From its Tylorian use as a capital singular ('Culture' as synonym for 'Civilization'), culture in American anthropology became resolutely plural during the 20th century – from the early work of Franz Boas to Clifford Geertz's 1973 emphasis on 'the interpretation of cultures'. Stocking (1968: ch. 9) suggests that pluralizing the culture concept was a watershed development in the modern history of anthropology.

Even in the plural, however, cultures were things that could in principle be isolated, analyzed, and ultimately compared – Balinese culture, Navajo culture, American culture, and so on. During the last quarter century, this concept of culture has been further softened and is now more comfortably expressed as an adjective. Questions that so exercised an earlier generation of anthropologists – what was 'a culture', how it could be defined, how coherent or disjunctive it was, how one culture intersected another – seem now anachronistic. But American anthropologists are still quite comfortable with culture as a modifier that denotes the symbolic or subjective dimension of life: 'cultural this', 'cultural that', 'cultural anthropology'. To say that something is 'cultural' still carries theoretical meaning for many, but this meaning is diffuse and not definitive; it depends on the thing that is modified.[4] In the process, 'culture' has become loosely evocative and theoretically fuzzy even as it is deeply sedimented in anthropological sensibility.

A similar trajectory attends other key terms, and with increasing speed toward the present. Mid-century anthropologists seriously debated the meaning, definitions, and boundaries of 'Structure'. Since pluralized to 'structures', what constitutes the essence and contours of one or another structure – social, political, or cultural – is no longer important for most anthropologists. But it remains quite permissible to describe a circumstance or a process as 'structural' and in the process to evoke a diffuse theoretical penumbra rather than a distinct theory much less an explicit theoretical source. The same applies to the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' – transmuted to 'hegemonies' and thence to depictions of what is 'hegemonic' – the Bourdieuian notion of 'practice' – proliferating in 'practices' that are diverse if not into things that are 'practical', and Anthony Giddens' and Sherry Ortner's notions of 'agency', which were increasingly pluralized into identifiable 'agents' and then into motives or forces taken as 'agentive'. 'Modernity' has seen a particularly elaborate declination – a broad series of analyses and critiques concerning both the term and its contentious alter, post-modernity. During the last 15 years, however, these debates have simmered first into the terminology of plural modernities – alternative modernities, vernacular modernities, other's modernities, and so on – and thence to increasing use of the term as a simple adjective – modern this, modern that (see Knauft, 2002a). What starts as theoretically identifiable and essentially singular becomes plural, theoretically fuzzy, and then a simple modifier of other things. No longer indexing a specific theory, the key term evokes a fuzzy theoretical 'wake' that is increasingly broad and thin.

The same has been arguably happening to anthropological 'theory' itself. First 'Theory', then 'theories', now 'theoretical'. Increasingly, theory in anthropology emerges not in itself but as a modifer of specific topics and issues to which theoretical articulations are applied, explored, and expressed. The increasing speed of these declensions reflects the decreasing half-life of our theoretical assertions – and their market relevance. For junior scholars in particular, this raises both opportunities and problems: a potential for creative new terms of argument and the pressure to be at the cutting edge of new or newfangled trends that pass by – including their chances for good publication – with increasing speed. In the mix, however, theoretical work has become more integral and intrinsic in anthropological analysis. The last three decades of writing have seen more connection and less separation between anthropological 'description', 'analysis' and 'theory'; these are melded more now than they were in the past. Gone in

all but hard-core social science journals is the yawning divide and experiential remove between 'data' and 'discussion' – as also between ethnography and history or between documentation and assertion. Accordingly, it becomes increasingly difficult and awkward to talk about 'theory' in anthropology apart from specific applications and interventions.

This shift has important gendered, racial, and ethnic dimensions. As suggested by Catherine Lutz (1995), Theory as a master narrative was typically associated with men and with masculine genres of experience-distant representation. Analogously on the basis of race or ethnicity, much less nationality or religion, writing by those who did not adopt canonical styles and subject positions was typically considered un-theoretical and thus second-classed in anthropology, notwithstanding profound insights and implications (see Behar and Gordon, 1995).

In moving from a Holy Grail of grand Theory to a softer theoreticism – more integrally related to ethnographic, historical, and personal representations – anthropologists cultivate stronger and more active appreciation for diverse authorships at the same time that they depolarize oppositions based on subject position or identity politics that were prominent during the 1980s and 1990s. Likewise, the enduring anthropological commitment to critically understand and theorize inequality, disempowerment, and subalternity (see Knauft, 1996) is both more integral to the discipline and less explicitly flagged as a theoretical enterprise. To say that representation and theorization now articulate increasingly in the middle is hence not a lament for Theory – not a wish for canons of the past or new ones in the present. It is rather to underscore how interrelated theoretical thinking, critical intervention, ethnographic and historical depiction, and subject positioning have become in sociocultural anthropology. This combination increases the risk of theoretical unselfconsciousness and bricolage but it opens a wide middle ground for fresh combinations, explorations, and authorship.

PRACTICAL OPTIONS

If the center of gravity in cultural anthropology is now most comfortable combining rather than separating moments that are, at turns, theoretical, objectivist, subjective, or reflexive, it occupies an increasingly middle ground as well between academic pursuit and practical intervention. Michael Herzfeld (2001: x, cf. 1997) refers to this as the 'militant middle ground', through which

> the modesty of a discipline concerned with practice rather than with grand theory may ultimately have a more lasting effect in the world. This is a view of anthropology as a model for critical engagement with the world, rather than a distanced and magisterial explanation of the world. (2001: x)

This tug and pull between academics and activism or advocacy is, of course, nothing new to anthropology, and, in many formulations, calls for practical engagement can be stronger in principle than in actual practice. And yet, stated emphasis by paragons of the field is important not only in signaling a value, but in encouraging practical engagements, including by younger scholars. This increasing professional impetus to have anthropology impact upon public policy is reflected, among many other initiatives, in the AAA's Public Policy Committee's strategic plans for an AAA Center for Human

Studies and Public Policy (see aaanet.org, 1996–2006) and in Robert Borofsky's public anthropology website, data base, and book series (Borofsky, 2006).

Historically speaking, anthropologists have sometimes interacted dubiously with informants or held myopic or reactionary views concerning alternative ways of life – from eugenics or abuse of human rights to the prospects of darkness in El Dorado (Borofsky, 2005). And anthropology's purview until the last 40 years was still largely restricted to ostensibly indigenous populations. But activist strains in anthropology have been undeniably strong. From the 1840s to the 1860s, British anthropological organizations vied between the more activist legacy of the slavery abolitionists and the Aboriginal Protection Society, and the natural scientific, evolutionary, and sometimes eugenicist strains of comparative ethnography and ethnology. Though British natural historians and evolutionary 'scientists' ultimately held institutional and academic sway, a sense of value and sympathy, if not empathy, for non-western ways of life – and practical advocacy on their behalf – was common among professional anthropologists from the start. Including issues of race and racism, land rights, colonial policy, ethnocentrism, and many other issues, against-the-tide work on behalf of non-western peoples by Morgan, Boas, Rivers, Malinowski, Mead, Benedict, Herskovitz, Gluckman, and many others presents a larger pattern that is clear and has continued.

During the 1960s and 1970s, of course, anthropological activism articulated broadly with opposition to the Vietnam war and in support of feminism and civil rights. Less charitable counter-currents have also been evident, including some in which the rights or interests of local people were disregarded or trampled upon by anthropologists. The professional side of anthropology has sometimes kept its head in the exotic sand while contemporary issues begged for attention. But it is worth re-remembering that activist engagement on behalf of local peoples has been strong in anthropology's history.

What seems to be new – increasingly since the 1960s and 1970s – is that critical activism is not just what anthropologists are personally prone to, but legitimately cultivate in their capacity as professional anthropologists, including in academic publishing. On the one hand, many professional anthropologists – half or more of all new MAs and PhDs – now enter non-university employment and work for government, private, or non-profit organizations or work as freelance practitioners (Nolan, 2003). This 'practice option' connects anthropology integrally with key social problems and exerts concrete impact on people's lives.[5]

It remains true that the divide between academic and activist or applied or public anthropology is continually rebuilt within the discipline – 'applied' taken to mean unscholarly or untheoretical, 'activist' taken as unobjective or unscientific, 'public' taken to mean all of these. Reciprocally, anthropologists employed outside the academy can be both cut off from influence on the discipline and lose their own sensibilities as anthropologists. But the mandate to connect academic to practical concerns continues to emerge more strongly in fact as well as in ideology within anthropology. Though the 'applied' track and the 'university' track often still appear as mutually exclusive, increasing numbers of anthropologists combine these strands. This has been true for some time among environmental and medical anthropologists – as it was earlier for anthropologists working under the auspices of colonial regimes – but these connections have become more common and more relevant to anthropology within the academy itself. Of the seven recent *AE* and *AA* journal articles mentioned earlier, three reflect critically on

applied concerns or implications – concerning national health intervention policies, transnational human rights, and environmentalist intervention. More generally, it has become increasingly permissible for 'mainstream' anthropologists to combine theoretical and ethnographic concerns with practical ones in their scholarship, publication and teaching.

Among countless other examples is Jeremy MacClancy's edited volume *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines* (2002). The book's contributors include a range of well known cultural anthropologists – including Philippe Bourgois, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Jane Schneider, Margaret Lock, E. Valentine Daniel, William Beeman, and Faye Ginsburg – who provide critical summaries of anthropology in relation to issues such as US apartheid, body and organ stealing, refugees, human rights, children's rights, hunger in Africa, international aid, tourism, mass media, religious fundamentalism, the anthropology of science, and cultural survival. As foci of scholarly interest and significant professional publication, most of these issues were not prominent in the anthropology of 30 years ago – and many of them articulate directly with applied or activist engagements. This said, they extend upon concerns that anthropologists were increasingly concerned with during the 1960s and 1970s, including gender and sex, race, poverty, ethnocentrism, environmental degradation, health and disease, warfare, ethnicity, and world markets (each of which is also attended to in MacClancy's volume).

One reason anthropology occupies an increasingly middle ground between academics and activism or application is that the 'academic' side of critical reflection and careful scholarship provides an important counterbalance to the vacillating agendas, shifting funding priorities, and interventionist myopias associated with many well-meaning attempts to improve or 'develop' people's lives. As fully exposed in critiques of development theories, government interventions and NGOs, the drawback of a fuller applied option in anthropology is that the practitioner is employed or contracted by an NGO, governmental agency, or private foundation and largely dependent on its institutional agendas, ideologies, and structures of power.[6] It is practically a truism that development schemes either reproduce existing inequalities or have unintended consequences that produce new if not larger inequities. One recent example on the international front is the increasing shift from intervention programs based on 'needs' to those based on 'rights'. The attempt to encourage human rights has easily led to discipline and control rather than to personal empowerment or collective development. Structurally similar ideologies have been used to 'enlighten', 'civilize', 'develop' or 'liberate' colonial or postcolonial peoples – including in US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years.

Academic employment is itself not immune to similar ideologies and politics. Relative to NGOs, private employment, or government service, the academy imposes different types of constraint – concerning research, teaching, and university service. Often (through not always), these provide a lengthened time frame for critical examination and publication; a measure of quasi-independence to do one's own work; and the hope of being professionally rewarded on a continuing basis for one's efforts. The latter, however, is typically dependent on a tenure-track job, and these become scarcer as the percentage of students taught by temporary instructors and graduate assistants increases.

Reciprocally, without careful ethnographic scholarship and critical theorization, the engaged attempt to be 'exotic no more' risks its own neo-exoticism, including in parts of MacClancy's own volume. Activism in the well-meaning present can edge eerily close

to the mandates of Victorian anthropology and its close twin, missionization: to bear witness and to lift up unusual others who are judged along western standards to be backward or unfortunate. Most people in the world do deplore sickness, suffering, and premature death. But how even these conditions are defined, interpreted, managed, legitimated, or perpetuated remains orthogonal to simplistic western sensibilities of sympathy, outrage, or intervention. The same difficulty applies to assumptions or activism based on simple western or even simplistic anthropological assumptions about power.

In all, the current trend is for anthropologists to engage an increasingly middle ground between academics and full-scale advocacy or activism. Viewed positively, the respective trade-offs between these alternatives can provide an important check and balance on their respective excesses – ivory tower detachment, on the one hand, handmaiden service to the organizations and ideologies of others, on the other.

To clarify anthropologists' emerging role in this relationship, it can be helpful to distinguish three aspects of practice. One of these is 'practice' as an aspect of 'practice theory'. Practice in this sense is associated most closely with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1977) and, in American anthropology, Sherry Ortner (e.g. 1984, in press). The issues that surround practice theory are important to anthropology into the 21st century, including the unequal results of structured practice as these play out concretely in time and place (e.g. Ortner, 2001, 2003; Sahlins, 2004).

On the other hand is practice as intervention outside the academy that cultivates major positive impact on people's lives. Examples here include health care intervention, human rights or environmental activism, influence on national, international, or NGO policies or procedures, or direct service as an NGO program advisor, consultant, or director. But despite significant exceptions among medical anthropologists – including medical practitioner Paul Farmer (1992, 1994, 1998, 2003), Jim Young Kim, Director of the World Health Organization Department of HIV/AIDS (see Kim et. al., 2000), and the cultural epidemiology of James Trostle (2005) – intervention by anthropologists outside the academy seldom achieves major positive impact. By training and intellectual inclination, most anthropologists are more successful as critical researchers, analysts, and teachers than as practical interveners – and they tend to be skeptical of unintended impacts from large-scale interventions, however well-intentioned. This said, it is important not to underweight the role anthropologists play in the very practical activity of student training and academic politics – in addition to their potential role as public intellectuals. As neo-conservatives and others clearly recognize, the university remains an important if not key site of political engagement and pedagogic practice.

Perhaps the greatest practical potential for anthropologists lies in combining selective aspects of both these options – academic practice, on the one hand, and engagement outside the academy, on the other. Anthropology as practical engagement critically includes field research on human problems – how they develop and operate, and how they are reproduced, ameliorated, or intensified in sociocultural, economic, and political terms. Anthropological *praxis* as the engaged labor of research is not limited to armchair analysis or critique; it begs hands-on experience and research that increasingly informs not just teaching and publication but advisory activities or contract employment outside the university concerning medical, political, environmental, and other kinds of

problems.[7] Combining university work with engagements outside the academy connects anthropology increasingly to practical concerns and vice-versa. These connections increase the potential of anthropologists to act as public intellectuals, which are sorely needed by the field. Earlier figures, such as Margaret Mead, have had few heirs.[8]

From a practical middle ground, anthropologists find themselves shifting increasingly from 'topics of study' to 'problems of inquiry'. This trend engages and connects the practical and academic sides of 'having a problem'. On one side is 'problem' in the social scientific sense: the systematic exposition of an empirical conundrum so that information gathered with respect to it can increase new knowledge and understanding. On the other side is 'problem' in a practical and applied sense: the critical investigation of a human harm, crisis, or condition – sometimes as defined by a client – that begs investigation and amelioration. In contemporary anthropology, the middle ground between academic and human problems has the capacity to bring theory and practice directly together. In this respect, anthropology has increasing potential to become both more effectively theoretical and more effectively applied – and, in the process, to become more integrated. As discussed later in this article, however, this potential requires greater attention to methods and to analytic articulations – how new combinations can yield greater insight and not simply bricolage or a mix-and-match of blurred genres.

SCALING SPACE AND PLACE

In spatial scope, anthropology now tends to relinquish both sweeping global views and particularistic local ones in favor of mid-level connections between them. During the 1980s and 1990s, village-based or community studies that held culture to be shared, even if not locally homogeneous, were questioned and broadened through the breathtaking scope of global anthropology. Earlier perspectives on large-scale political economy (e.g. Wolf, 1982) were complemented not only by new political economic analyses (e.g. per David Harvey, Jonathan Friedman, Neil Smith, and Saskia Sassen) but by multi-sited ethnography, modernity-at-large, flexible citizenships and cosmopolitanisms, and far-flung landscapes of traveling commodities, images, and identifications (e.g. the work of Arjun Appadurai, Jean and John Comaroff, George Marcus, Daniel Miller, Aiwha Ong, and many others). Since the downturn of the global economy at the end of the 1990s and particularly since 11 September 2001, however, optimistic views of global economic and cultural articulation, including perspectives on cosmopolitanism and the globalization of culture, have been increasingly critiqued or left aside. Though international connections are arguably more salient now than ever, globalism now seems as inadequate as the localism it supplanted. It is hence no surprise that cultural anthropologists often gravitate to mid-range articulations that draw upon selected international or global influences and connect them across space and place to regional, national, or local conditions. In the process, the unseen hand beyond the horizon is increasingly linked to the experience on the street. As Anna Tsing (2004: 1, emphasis omitted) puts it, 'Global connections are everywhere. So how does one study the global? . . . [A]spirations to fulfill universal dreams and schemes . . . can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters' (cf. Knauft, 2002b).

As part of this general trend, cultural anthropologists have become much more interested in institutions, organizations, and movements that mediate between the

international and the regional or local. The anthropological study of nations and national-level phenomena is near the top of this list. Prominent anthropologists concerned with national-level and associated regional developments include John Borneman, Partha Chatterjee, Fernando Coronil, Donald Donham, Judith Farquar, Robert Foster, Richard Handler, Thomas Blom Hansen, Robert Hefner, Michael Herzfeld, Claudio Lomnitz, Bill Maurer, Diane Nelson, Michael Peletz, Charles Piot, Elizabeth Povinelli, Lisa Rofel, Peter van der Veer, and Katherine Verdery, among many others. Concern with national-level organizations or influences is complemented (including among some of the authors just mentioned) by burgeoning attention to national and local incarnations of world religions – including fundamentalist or evangelical Christianity as well as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and a special concern with Islam since 9/11. These trends are paralleled by deepening interest in dispersed ethnicities and diasporas, including migrant diasporas in the US and what Benedict Anderson (1998) terms long-distance nationalisms.

The growing anthropological concern with national and international political, religious, and cultural identifications is thrown into relief by the fact that, as late as the 1970s, these issues were uncommon on anthropology's map. Contemporary work seldom rests exclusively either at a local level or at a rarefied one of global images and institutions. Rather, these are linked and brought together through specific topical and ethical concerns that bear variously on politics; translocal organization; economics, exchange, expropriation, or environmentalism; religion, belief, or spirituality; aesthetics or performance; mass media or small media; gender and/or sexuality; health, disease, or medical intervention; human rights, ethics, or morality; and many other significant issues.

Illustrative here is the proliferating anthropology of development and globalization (see Edelman and Haugerud, 2005). Generic critiques of international or global processes are giving way to research and analysis concerning specific agencies, companies, and NGOs (NGO-graphy), along with studies of medical organizations, educational institutions, trade and business groups, environmental organizations, and governmental programs and policies (e.g. Mosse, 2006; Terry, 2002; Tsing, 2004; West, 2006). Amid international, national, and local dynamics, anthropologists are increasingly in the middle – studying and writing about the complex relationship between local and external influences, including how people solicit and embrace external influences while also resisting or opposing them.

As part of this awareness, the anthropological study of phenomena that are bigger than a community and smaller than the world – nation-states, religions, ethnic or diasporic groups, NGOs, government institutions, regional mass media, public cultures, and so on – has greatly increased. These interests have been facilitated by new ways of accessing and analyzing sources, types, and levels of experience and information – at least as much if not more than they have been spurred by explicit theories of nationality, religion, ethnicity, NGOs, public culture, or mass media per se. The edge of new research on supra-local but regional or otherwise infra-global developments is theoretically informed but not pegged to a general or even a specific theory about one or another discrete topic.

RE-PLACING ANTHROPOLOGY: OLD WORLD AREAS, NEW GEOGRAPHIES

As part of these mid-range tendencies, area studies – the scholarly study of one or another world area – are increasingly linked together rather than atomized. What constitutes a culture area or world region is increasingly problematic, and world area concepts are invoked cautiously, like theories, as if they had quotation marks around them. Beyond the emphasis during the 1990s on border crossings, liminal spaces, resistances, and the envelope of the unthought and the unsaid, cultural anthropologists are now increasingly concerned with concrete configurations of identity and influence across places and locations, especially as these recast received notions of world area, region, nation, ethnicity, culture, or local status group. If the post-Second World War era saw the academic globe partitioned into world regions for academic study – Latin America, the Mid-East, sub-Saharan Africa, South, Southeast, and Eastern Asia, and so on – it has since become a truism not only that oceans, coastlines, and so-called border zones are regions of import but that long-distance connections and identifications reflect far-flung networks of cultural, religious, economic, political, and demographic influence. Notwithstanding the high standards and sometimes the conservatism of regional specialists, inward-looking regionalism is increasingly transformed by interconnections that are both diffuse and concrete, neither global nor local. Attention to these alternately reflects and generates further interest in organizations, institutions and movements or affiliations that link people across places and spaces.

Amid this process, the pinning of anthropological concepts or theories to specific world regions, as critiqued by Appadurai (1986), has declined. Christianity is Papua New Guinean, Islam is British, Lebanese are Brazilian, and cosmopolitanism is Zambian. This has long been the case, but anthropological awareness, research, and writing about these conditions has come to the fore. This does not mean the anthropological rejection of concrete 'places' in favor of diffuse or ethereal 'spaces'. Rather, place-based identifications and influences are regrounded and refigured by analyzing specific networks of identity and geography. Of particular importance is how power, profit, and opportunity or marginality are differentially distributed across places and cartographies of influence or expropriation (e.g. Ferguson, 2005, 2006; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a). Against fears of the 1980s and early 1990s, ethnography is not being replaced, rather, it is being 're-placed' – repositioned across new contours of research site and new configurations of geographic study (see Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Marcus, 1998).

These trends both inform and reflect the changing role of world area knowledge in the training of graduate students and the development of careers. Some 40, 30, or even 25 years ago, detailed ethnographic knowledge of a specific world area, including a deep range of classic anthropological literature, was not just important but axiomatic to professional training, research, and publication. The long ethnographic monograph, and articles related to it, were viewed primarily and in some cases exclusively through the lens of world area specialization.

Today, peer-reviewed articles and the monograph remain pivotal for tenure, but there are decreasing publication outlets for studies justified primarily on the basis of rich ethnography and world area concentration. A growing number of university presses no longer review manuscripts written primarily for scholars of a specific world area. Apart from 'hot' areas, such as the Islamic world and the Middle East, China, and war-torn

areas of Africa, pressure increases for ethnography to be brief, telegraphic, and configured through topical and analytic lenses that transcend world areas and regions. Even first-book manuscripts and articles may be read by a topical reviewer who has not conducted primary research in the world area in question. This causes special problems for junior scholars, who risk being critiqued by generalist reviewers, on the one hand, and aficionados of world area concentration, on the other. In academic hiring, it often matters less whether the candidate can represent a broad ethnographic region than whether the research evokes themes and linkages beyond a local area. A broadening interest in 'topics that travel' has long been important for mid-career and senior anthropologists. But this broader focus is now important and often pivotal for junior scholars as well.

This trend informs graduate training. Cross-training at early career stages is increasingly common not only between anthropological topics and fields but between anthropology, other disciplines, and non-academic projects. Public health, medicine, law, environmental studies, social work, and NGOs or government organizations form an increasing part of career engagement for anthropologists before, during, or after graduate training. Given the time and the importance of these commitments, comprehensive reading of classic and recent world area ethnographies form a smaller relative percentage of young scholars' concentration. Junior anthropologists are often sandwiched between the recognized importance of place-based scholarship and the need, desire, and demand for broader topics, training, and experience.

In concert with this process, anthropology's fresh articulations cross political economy, history, cultural studies, public culture, medical anthropology, development and environmental studies, and many other new topical fields and subfields, often with a significant advocacy dimension. The risk is superficial connection, thin ethnography, and floating theory. But the best of these articulations are theoretically and analytically trenchant even though they are seldom 'about theory' per se.

Though not often noted within the discipline itself, these linkages can help counteract the universalization of world areas under the homogenizing umbrella of international or global studies. Often underwritten by disciplinary impetus from political science, economics, and positivist sociology, international and global studies tend to reduce cultural diversity to the costs and benefits of rational choice, the inevitability of globalization, or the geopolitics of nations and leaders. Within these purviews, concern with cultural and linguistic variation is easily seen as untheoretical – a particularist distraction – and not deserving of scholarly attention or support. More broadly, the so-called internationalization of the university can be a mandate for muting cultural perspectives that run against the grain of neo-liberal globalization or American neo-imperialism. Against this trend, it remains important for anthropological work to move critically across areas and topics without being sweepingly universalist on the one hand, or narrowly particularist, on the other.

MINDING TIME

If mid-level articulations are currently prominent in anthropologists' geographies of place, space, and region, they are also increasingly evident in treatments of history, time, and temporality. History has been important to anthropology since its inception, but from the 1960s through the early 1980s, as Sherry Ortner (1984) noted, history was increasingly recognized by cultural anthropologists to be important to ethnographic

analysis. Exactly how historical and ethnological perspectives were to be combined, much less theorized, however, has remained an open and sometimes contentious question.[9] Neither the *longue durée* of large-scale political economy nor the minutiae of the historical archive have been especially well suited to anthropology's twin commitment to the lived richness of others' experience and broader frameworks of critical and analytic purchase (Knauft, 1996).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, attempts were made to bring history and anthropology together by melding cultural and political economic understandings. This trend has intensified in the wake of so-called postmodern contentions and confusions; anthropologists increasingly connect historical specifics, political economic analysis, and insights from lived experience. The results are not overarching views of a modern world (pace Eric Wolf, Immanuel Wallerstein, David Harvey, or Giovanni Arrighi) nor the details of microhistory (per LeRoy Ladurie, Carlo Ginzsberg, or Pierre Nora), but intermediate articulations through temporal frames longer than a few years but shorter than several centuries – typically between a quarter-century and a century and a half. Focus is frequently supra-local, national, or regional in scope without being fully continental or hemispheric, much less global. Indicative here is work by Partha Chatterjee, Jean and John Comaroff, Nicholas Dirks, Arif Dirlik, Donald Donham, Claudio Lomnitz, Mahmood Mamdani, David Nugent, Sherry Ortner, Gyanendra Pandey, Marshall Sahlins, Ann Stoler, Rosalind Shaw, and Nicholas Thomas, among many others. These perspectives problematize the construction of history in selective, critical, and surgical ways without being either a-cultural or post-modern. In the process, greater ethnological and theoretical purchase is gained on historical features of nations and national histories; religions; ethnic affiliations; violence and conflict; racial, gendered, and sexual relations; and diverse aspects of colonial and post-colonial imperialism or domination. These developments link obviously with the articulation of local and broader developments across national or regional space.

Supple connections between historical and present circumstances are increasingly forged with little reliance on grand determinism, on the one hand, or presumptions of contingency and chaos, on the other. Flexible treatments of time and temporality also influence work that relies primarily on participant-observation. Recent ethnographies tend to have greater and more penetrating treatments of historical influences and of temporality than they did in the past, and these treatments are often woven integrally with ethnographic and analytic arguments. Beyond increase of historical coverage, then, recent developments in anthropology move increasingly from a 'fixed lens' use of time – in which either a close-up or a wide-angle perspective is taken – to a zoom lens view in which the scale of temporal and geographic engagement enlarges or narrows in different parts of the presentation. Though such shifts depend on the skill of the author and are not always effective, they do provide new fresh perspective and scope to anthropological analyses. In the process, they can avoid the excesses of grand theory while finessing the need for detailed treatment of issues that cross time and space.

TOPICS AND FIELDS

In configuring new ranges of geography and time, and in crossing research with practice, anthropologists have in recent years addressed a host of new topics and institutional fields. During the last two decades, mid-range institutional and organizational concerns

have gone from the margins to the center of the discipline. Some of these have been alluded to earlier in this article – the anthropology of development, NGOs, educational institutions, public health programs and policies, government and governance, commodity chains and businesses, environmental impacts, food, suffering, world religions in vernacular expression, diasporic and other long-distance identities, and transnational political economies. Many other foci could be mentioned, few if any of which have a grand theory of explanation, a privileged site of world area concentration, a canonical body of academic literature, or even a systematic or distinguishing method of study. Yet these fields and foci of intermediate study form an increasingly central and vibrant part of anthropology and an increasingly important part of its likely future.

Notably, research in many of these budding areas benefits from training across fields, disciplines, schools, or even vocations that were previously considered marginal or orthogonal to the academic career – public health, law, medicine, government, NGOs, and business, among others. Most of these applied fields, it may be noted, seldom develop or use theory in the scholarly sense of the term – anthropologists who engage these fields generally must supply their own theoretical perspective. On the other hand, new topical arenas often require the anthropologist to write for and receive feedback or evaluation from multiple audiences and constituencies – not just academic scholars or peer reviewers but organizations, institutions, and individuals associated with both the places of study and the forces that engage them: the agents and associations of educational, medical, legal, environmental, governmental, or international intervention and change, plus national scholars in the country of research and a literate audience of local people who are themselves the subject of research, advocacy, or intervention. This broadens the career of many junior scholars while also making it more demanding.

CRITICAL SUMMATIONS

Broadly viewed, an important connection has developed in recent years between anthropologists' occupation of middle grounds that articulate rather than polarize several of the discipline's received oppositions, the creative combination of temporal and geographic scales, and increasing engagement with concrete human problems as foci of research. Received tensions are increasingly mediated between theory versus practice, generalization versus particularism, explanation versus evocation, culture versus political economy, history versus contemporary trends, and canonical versus subaltern voices. In practice, articulations across such divides provide anthropologists with a rough and ready, if loose, sense of commonality that helps mitigate the splintering of the field's subdisciplines despite their engagement with expanding concerns and social problems (cf. Segal and Yanagisako, 2005).

Though anthropology has often risked being spread so thin as to disappear (it is easy to forget how few anthropologists were studying across so many world areas in earlier decades), the field draws increasing energy, even if not by design, from application of anthropological sensibilities to practical venues outside the academy and to other disciplines within it. Within the university, departments of anthropology typically remain smaller than social science departments of political science, economics, history, or psychology, but they retain a significant place at the academic table and, at least in the US, are seldom at risk of being closed or forcibly merged with other fields (notwithstanding sociology-anthropology programs at smaller institutions). Though

invariably fuzzy and defined in part through segmentary opposition to competing fields, cultural anthropologists on the whole continue to have a roughly distinctive identity based on appreciation of alternative cultures and histories and a proclivity both within and outside the discipline for critically questioning received assumptions about action and belief. It remains important, however, to succinctly promote the field's distinctive contributions – including to deans and administrators, who may have little awareness in this regard. On the other hand, anthropology departments have been relatively good – rarely good enough, but better than many other disciplines – at cultivating, legitimating, and promoting scholarship by women, persons of color, and those with minority, subaltern, alternative sexual, and/or non-western backgrounds and orientations.[10]

It has been common for eminent senior anthropologists to lament the decline of anthropology, if not the disappearance of its classic topics of study. Such admonitions are not new; they have been part of anthropology's cycle of generational turnover – and subsequent rejuvenation – for over a century. During this time, the field has continued to grow and to develop. Against this past, the increasing range of anthropology's engagements has become increasingly central to the academic as well as non-academic careers of anthropologists. Though genres have blurred, they no longer threaten to indulge as much in either reflexive involution or uncritical objectivism as they did 15 years ago. Types and genres of analysis get articulated less through omnibus theorization or scattered impressionism than through concrete connections between different levels of analysis, types of information, and subject positions.

Lest this view seem utopian, significant challenges can be mentioned. These include continuing problems of method, of application and public scholarship, and of self-congratulatory critique. Though the methods of sociocultural anthropology – interviews, participant observation, censuses or genealogies, and consultation of historical records – have become fairly standard over the last half-century, the articulation of these in specific types of research has largely remained a function of untrained and independent invention by individual anthropologists. Though this prompts creativity and innovation, it also courts mix-and-match bricolage while giving junior scholars and others few guideposts for methodologically configuring new topics, context, and issues.

In prosaic terms, it would help if anthropological writing were simpler and more direct. Much discourse by anthropologists, especially in books and monographs, is heavy with in-house terminology and overwritten evocations – long on innuendo but short on exposition. Clear and concise statements of purpose, implication, and relevance would create more rather than less space for ethnographic illustration through examples that are creative, carefully chosen, and powerfully rendered. Structural and presentational clarity throws anthropological insights into bolder relief and fosters greater rigor as analysis is organized and orchestrated.

The challenges of clear presentation link to the importance of application and public scholarship. Despite increasing practical relevance of research topics and personal commitments, sociocultural anthropology typically has little impact on policy makers, full-time practitioners, or activists – despite anthropologists' increasing contact with, reliance upon, and potential influence on them. Though anthropological critique remains appropriately at the heart of the field – its sharpest cutting edge – self-designated import of critiques that proceed largely by implication or serpentine erudition limits the communication and practical relevance of anthropology, including some of its most

potentially influential research. Though lyrical and creative writing has been something of a Holy Grail in cultural anthropology, most anthropologists, truth be told, are not particularly strong, much less, gifted, as writers. The cultivation of writing as a careful and rigorous part of the anthropological métier, including for wider audiences, would also aid in student training and peer review.

In complementary fashion, at the other end of the representational spectrum, sociocultural anthropologists still tend to resist if not debunk collection and analysis of numerical data, be these from census or demographic sources, questionnaires, archives, or observational record-keeping – all of which can document, among other things, economic, political, or religious trends and histories, patterns of inequality or disempowerment, and disparities in health and disease, social organization, or political configuration. Anthropological innovations in cultural, textual, historical, and political analysis are seldom complemented or buttressed by empirical analysis of systematically collected sets of data. The larger relevance of our specific findings is hence often unclear – evocative but uncertain. An anthropology of mid-level articulations, critical interventions, and creative interpretations does not need to shortchange its efficacy or its punch by neglecting countable information, the categories and parameters of which can be as creative as other forms of representation and analysis. Rather than dominating the analysis, simple numerical summaries, percentages, and tabulations can provide important complementary strands that open new questions while increasing the force and justification of qualitative representation and analysis. This can increase the relevance of anthropological work for multiple audiences, including other social scientists, policy makers, and a wider educated public.

Grappling with the twin challenges of powerful writing and empirical rigor can give anthropological insights more impact on other disciplines and outside the academy. This resonates with the benefit that anthropologists have gained from transdisciplinary perspectives during the 1990s, including post-colonial studies and cultural studies. Drawing on these precedents, the breaking down of further disciplinary walls is increasingly called for, including with respect to sociology, political science and international relations, public health, law, and medicine – not by succumbing to the epistemologies of these fields, but by critically engaging and trumping or transcending them with anthropological documentation and insight.

Amid such engagements, sociocultural anthropology remains largely distinctive in terms of methods, including ethnographic fieldwork based on participant-observation as a primary dimension of research. Face-to-face combination of research with human engagement – regardless of how this experience is additionally supplemented or contextualized – continues to contrast anthropology broadly and importantly with fields that rely more exclusively on archives, literature, questionnaires, large-scale data-sets, or experimental protocols of social interaction. The ethnographic encounter provides anthropology with its key potential for empirical and analytic insight – a foundation upon which other levels and genres of analysis can be articulated without undermining the field's distinct contribution. As method, ethnographic fieldwork continues to exert centripetal force in anthropology even as the field expands aggressively across new topics of research, analysis, and theoretical articulation. Looking back, the worries of the 1980s and 1990s that ethnographic inquiry would disintegrate, be transformed into something different, or become impossible have all proven unfounded.

MESO-ANTHROPOLOGY?

In several ways, sociocultural anthropology is now betwixt and between – between theory and practice, general and particular, global and local, historical sweep and present fixation, academic understanding and activism or advocacy. This has also been true for the last century. But for much of that century, the tropes and terms of anthropological success, if not privilege, traveled under signs of grand theoreticism, on the one hand, or brilliant particularism, on the other. Under either guise, practical engagement or activism outside the academy has seldom been as germane to the anthropological profession – including in self-representation, status, or academic publication – as it is today. Reciprocally, there is less concern or anxiety in contemporary anthropology that its research does not generate either high theory or exhaustive ethnographic detail.

In some ways, then, contemporary anthropology, especially in its Anglo-American guises, is post-paradigmatic. In contrast to hard science disciplines such as physics, anthropology among other social sciences has long been multi-paradigmatic, that is, characterized by simultaneous competing paradigms rather than the replacement and dethronement of one dominant paradigm by another (cf. Kuhn, 1996). Since the 1960s, however, sociocultural anthropology, especially in the US, has shifted away even from distinct competing paradigms to greater and more critically self-conscious combinations of interpretation, representation, and assertion (cf. Geertz, 1980). In this regard, the growth of symbolic anthropology and Marxism during the 1960s both reflected and galvanized the critical humanization of anthropology, making the field increasingly the most humanistic and the most critically engaged of the American social sciences. Without the status of competing named paradigms and contestations, the strengths of anthropology's mid-level articulations are now pursued more vigorously and strongly than ever. In many ways, this is an anthropology born of post-neoliberal pragmatism and progressivism, especially in the US and to some extent in Britain. The scope of this trend for anthropology in other world areas is both important and, importantly, beyond the scope of the present discussion.

American sociocultural anthropology is not 'in the middle' in the sense of being suspended in tension or pendulum swing between opposed alternatives. The force field of previous poles has itself diminished. Anthropology does not anticipate either new master narratives or new anti-theoreticism; these terms of antinomy have faded. While the present characterization flags and underscores the strength and significance of anthropology's mid-range articulations, it takes a generic and generalizing view that is itself orthogonal to current developments. In this sense, the attribution of an 'anthropology in the middle', much less a 'meso-anthropology', can be self-deconstructing; as a concept, its half-life may be short.

If our present moment is constitutive of the future of anthropology – as I think it is and should be – we may consider how anthropology can better and more creatively lever and explore issues that resist or complicate poles of received opposition. Anthropology in the middle need not be a 'middling' anthropology that collapses toward a rude mean. It can improve upon the more confident but also more myopic assertions, categories, and polarizations of our disciplinary past. Whatever the exact shape of future developments, it seems a good sign that the implements in anthropology's toolbox – theoretical, methodological, topical, and practical – are getting richer, more diverse, and more

vibrantly woven together. As mentioned, the terms of these articulations need further specification – methodologically, empirically and in clear writing. But if our goal is not to privilege certain tools on prior grounds but to use them productively to document, theorize, critique, and intervene in the world, then anthropology is well poised for a future both inside and outside its disciplinary frame. The mandate is not for stasis or mediation between less-than-attractive extremes, but for anthropology's emergent condition to bring new strands of difference together in rigorous, critical, and significant ways.

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Notes

1 Given space constraints, representative references for each of the many authors mentioned without citation in this article can be found at the following website: http://www.anthropology.emory.edu/FACULTY/ANTBK/theoreticalcurrents/references.html A 60-page list of relevant references through 1995 can be found in Knauft (1996).
2 For example Agamben (1998); Schmitt (1996, 2006).
3 Though beyond the scope of the present article to discuss, similar trends have been occurring in disciplines such as sociology and history, especially in the US.
4 On a larger disciplinary scale, the 'cultural' of 'cultural anthropology' is often perceived to be different from the 'cultural' of 'cultural studies'. At issue in this referential shift is the degree to which cultural anthropology is connected and integral to the critical cross-disciplinary humanities or, alternatively, if anthropology's core concept of culture has being changed or 'hijacked' by other fields.
5 Though they shade into each other, useful distinctions can be made between 'applied', 'activist', and 'public' anthropology. Activist anthropology includes support for non-western or subaltern peoples through reports, presentations, teaching, broad-audience publications, or on-the-ground political or organizational work that supports disempowered peoples and their causes. Applied anthropology includes work by anthropologists who use their skills and efforts to answer questions posed by non-academic clients, including those who pay or employ anthropologists. For both better and worse, applied anthropologists are to some extent beholden to their clients. Public anthropology includes the promotion and dissemination of anthropologically derived understanding, findings, critical analyses, and opinions in a wider public sphere, especially for non-academic public audiences, including through popular writing, editorials and mass media publications or appearances. These three definitions are not exclusive; each shades into the other. On the other hand, connections between applied, activist and public anthropology are often personal and do not imply each another. Applied anthropologists may be barred or discouraged from releasing their findings or their opinions for either academic or public audiences. Activist anthropologists may work forcefully on behalf of local people without being paid and without publicizing or publishing their efforts. Public

anthropologists may reach a larger public audience without being employed outside the academy or being engaged in organic activism.

6 This was noted almost 40 years ago by George Foster (1969).

7 In contemporary parlance (per priority Google-derived web definition), *praxis* is

> a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society, and become critically conscious human beings. Praxis comprises a cycle of action–reflection–action which is central to liberatory education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to coercion), intentionality (as opposed to reaction), creativity (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

8 Compare the University of California Press book series 'Public Anthropology' (edited by Robert Borofsky).

9 Debates concerning history in relation to culture have pitted a number of anthropological luminaries against one another – Gananath Obeyesekere versus Marshall Sahlins, Donald Donham versus Jean and John Comaroff, and Michael Taussig versus Eric Wolf and Sydney Mintz, among others.

10 The percentage of Anthropology PhDs who were women increased from 32 percent in 1972 to 57 percent in 1997, with an unchanged percentage in 2004–5. The percentage of women is slightly higher if only sociocultural anthropology is considered. However, women constituted just 36 percent of tenure track positions in anthropology in 1996, and women continue to hold significantly fewer full professorships than men (AAA PhD survey website; AAA Guide 2005–6, pp. 629–30).

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