

Laboratory for the Anthropology of the Contemporary  
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## Steps toward an anthropological laboratory.

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The challenge is to invent new forms of inquiry, writing, and ethics for an anthropology of the contemporary. <sup>1</sup> The problem is: how to rethink and remake the conditions of contemporary knowledge production, dissemination, and critique, in the interpretive sciences? The direction forward does not include yet another attempt to have anthropology imitate a natural science model anymore than it implies a foreclosure of anthropology finding a form as a distinctive knowledge practice. <sup>2</sup> Mimicry has proved to be neither prophetic of the course of disciplinary change nor empirically fruitful. It has, however, been fertile in bringing forth and fueling polemics. <sup>3</sup> The twentieth century has taught us that polemics and prophecy do not lead to an exit from epistemological or ethical immaturity.

### **Orientation.**

What would an anthropological laboratory look like that was not attempting to imitate a positivist model but that still sought to develop systematic knowledge? Here it is useful to broaden the vision of the ways in which scientific knowledge production may work. Practitioners of the philosophy and social studies of science and technology have demonstrated the fertility of concentrating on: (a) specific **concepts, technologies, and experimentation**, rather than a general theory of ‘scientific method’ (Bachelard, Canguilhem, Hacking); (b) historical and material conditions of knowledge production rather than universal truths (Kosellek, Shapin); (c) the diversity of scientific practice and results rather than their unity (Foucault, Galison).

Progress toward achieving this goal entails changing the norms and forms of current practices, habits, and affects. Above all, it entails recursive experimentation and learning of a collaborative sort. In its initial stages, “experimentation” simply means trying out different configurations of

inquiry and critique. “Recursive” means punctual assessment and re-configuration. “Collaboration” means inventing new forms of work that redistribute individual and collective contributions.

A hallmark of early modernist experimentation in the twentieth century was the effort to go beyond the figure of the artist as genius or lone creator, and to find ways of working that combined both an artisanal and industrial manner. Whether in the Bauhaus or in Soviet workshops of the 1920s multiple experiments were undertaken to create a new work environment. Although they were defeated politically by the right and the left, they have left a legacy and an archive of techniques, forms, and results.

While current conditions and problems have altered in significant ways, there are important things to learn from previous experiments. Although there are evident (and not so evident) epistemological and pragmatic differences between disciplines (past, present, and future), there is a reservoir of prior practices that might be helpful -- given the appropriate re-working -- in confronting the problem of what methods, technologies, and forms, are most appropriate to the current situation? It is fertile to inquire (using both genealogical and archaeological methods) into spaces (including the arts) of collaborative and critical practice. A necessary, if not sufficient, step in that direction is to invent practices of knowledge production, dissemination, and critique, that resolutely refuse the symbolic capital driven individualism so prevalent in an academic world permeated with its own form of consumer capitalism. Further, if such work is to remain distinct from the therapeutic, it must be rigorous, engaged, de-personalized, and integrate innovative forms of co-labor.

More recent experiments are not lacking. For example, during the 1990s, right wing think tanks in the United States created effective forms of goal-driven, policy work. They provided alternative sites outside the academy and the government -- but linked to both -- at a time when leftist critical impulses were channeled in quite other directions. They produced effective re-formulations in many areas ranging from economics to political theory to law. They did this with an infrastructure built from massive financial support and powerful political alliances. Adequate counter-thinking, while not absent, has been less successful intellectually and politically. Resources are not absent but have not been well-used. In any case, the role of a laboratory is fundamentally different from a think tank or policy shop. The latter are by definition conventional in that their role is to respond to agendas set by others. They seek answers rather than questions. Their

function is to produce deliverables on specific items rather than to problematize givens and existing agendas.

Given that the social sciences and humanities disciplines in the U.S. university system are essentially those of the nineteenth century, and there is little motivation from within the disciplines to abolish themselves, we are not optimistic that new work can be exclusively based in the university. The university (or restricted parts of it) remains a source of employment, of resources such as libraries, and of pedagogy. In that light, we imagine new hybrid organizations, adjacent to and in many parasitic on, the university. Full-scale reform within the university currently seems both hopeless and probably dangerous given the dominant political trends and the ever-increasing demand for knowledge to be made instrumental and therapeutic.

## **I: Genealogical Lines.**

As the present configuration of knowledge is undergoing re-configuration, and there is as yet no body of sustained scholarly work on the period under consideration, one available activity is to begin to sketch genealogical lines back in time. This technique is a well-tested component of the “history of the present.” By definition there are a multitude of such lines and the ones presented here are presented to encourage others to provide more and to open the challenge towards more historical scholarship.

### **a. (One) History of the (anthropological) Present..**

As high school students at New York City’s Stuyvesant High School (1958-61), we were taught without much fanfare or pretension that we were entering into an encounter with a long and wonderful tradition of mathematics and mathematicians. We were expected to participate and contribute. A favorite line of one math teacher was “Boys, one day, one of you will discover the proof to Fermat’s theorem.” At that time, the challenge of reconstituting Fermat’s lost proof had lingered for three centuries. It seemed perfectly common sense that a group of almost entirely Jewish boys both belonged to a long standing community of thinkers and that there was a problem from the past that was very much contemporary in the present. There was no overt doubt concerning the reality and importance of such work, On East 15<sup>th</sup> street between First and Second Avenues in Manhattan, Fermat’s theorem had a simple ontological status, it was a thing of the world. Even if one felt, as I did, “not me,” it was exhilarating to think that someday someone else would provide a proof. And I would take pleasure in such an achievement. And I did when a proof was finally provided although by that point in time what counted as a proof was incomprehensible except to a very restricted group. Forty years later, Stuyvesant is no longer an enclave of Jewish boys, it has a vibrant, multi-gendered, and highly diverse student body. It continues to be a public institution.

As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago (1961-65), a similar, but much broader and more comprehensive, sense of an intellectual and ethical community stretching over time and space was a given. Its significance was constantly stressed and it was embodied in a curriculum. Legitimate authority existed. There was no question that some people knew more than others. There was no question that one was being invited to participate in that community but only on condition of a strenuous formation that included work on the self. Authority was embedded in individual human beings but at least for an undergraduate those human

beings – Richard McKeon, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Paul Tillich, among others – were part of a group that included Aristotle, John Dewey, and Spinoza among others (Galileo, Newton, Maxwell, Hobbes, etc.). Fermat was inexplicably ignored.

Two images will have to suffice in lieu of an adequate discussion of such a situation. In both, philosophy was taken to be an engaged practice in the world, with long and deep connections to problems in the past, with the highest political and ethical stakes, in sum, an undertaking of the highest civilizational importance in which the impersonal quest for knowledge and the good life were intertwined.

- Richard McKeon in his foundational 3 quarter course “Ideas and Methods,” (of the physical sciences, social sciences, humanities) asked questions by proceeding in alphabetical order down the class list. McKeon was hard, cold, and not especially personable. <sup>4</sup> The procedure was a much commented on source of anguish, even dread. It aimed at producing a distinctive form of depersonalization. On one frigid Chicago morning, a student on the class list was asked “Mr. M. why does Spinoza start the Tractatus with the following distinction. Mr. M. replied, “well, I think,” at which point McKeon interrupted him by saying “I did not ask you what you think but why Spinoza started that section of the Tractatus as he did?” For me, this was a moment of liberation. It was the purest example – not just the one story but the whole experience – of what Michel Foucault two decades later would refer to as the goal of philosophy: “*Se déprendre de soi.*” To go beyond the self through knowing. But McKeon never seemed to put himself in question and this produced an affect of fear augmented by the repeated claims by McKeon that his philosophic approach was pragmatic and subject to revision.
- Hannah Arendt taught a ten week seminar on the Preface to Hegel’s Phenomenology. If memory serves me right there about ten young men in attendance. Arendt did most of the talking. She combined a very seductive almost Greta Garbo style of great passion and engagement. She smoked during the seminar. While elucidating one passage, she lit a second cigarette and continued talking about Hegel with a cigarette in each hand, wafting smoke upwards. No one said a word. We were transported by Hegel. And Arendt. But the performative

dimension was so strong, her persona so singular, that it was hard to see how one could participate in a common project.

- Thinking, we were taught had both virtuous and corrupted forms. For example, the rise of the neo-cons and what relation their program has to Leo Strauss needs to be scrutinized. The same applies to such icons as Alan Bloom. Read Ravelstein.

In graduate school at the University of Chicago's department of anthropology (1966-70), there were two year long required core courses followed by a comprehensive exam. The exams were marked anonymously. There was an explicit project of the faculty building a comprehensive – and highly qualitative and symbol-oriented -- social science. Such a science was to be composed of multiple parts (the influence of Talcott Parsons and his tables was unequivocal) requiring the elaboration of disparate domains of knowledge while demanding and accepting a range of temperaments. The approach was not based on a theory (middle-range theory was not too far from a conceptual inventory) or an overt political agenda (although social welfare liberal ideology clearly dominated) or an explicit philosophy of history (Marxism was the reigning opponent but Marx was taught). Although much of its hopefulness for the social sciences and the world now seems dated, there is much to admire in the aspiration. And to criticize. Like McKeon and Arendt, the anthropologists were sure that what they were doing was relevant to the world of politics, economics, and society. For McKeon, the pragmatist principle that thought was a practical activity, a natural response to perplexity, breakdown, and a drive to coherence and repair, was a given. For Arendt, thinking was perhaps the last remaining shred of politics, in the Greek sense of the world, remaining in the modern world. Of course, all of these positions and claims can and should be contested. Otherwise one would let philosophy become a doctrine, or an idol in Bacon's sense, rather than a practice coping with breakdown and problems.

A core set of the anthropologists founded (along with other social scientists), the Committee on New Nations. Clifford Geertz, Lloyd Fallers, and others. Its agenda was both intellectual and broadly policy-oriented. It can be seen as one of numerous Third Way attempts that marked the twentieth century. Key members of the Committee had been part of the Ford Foundation funded initiative in the 1950s to send an inter-disciplinary group of social scientists to Indonesia both to study human relations there in a comprehensive fashion as well as to train

Indonesian social scientists and policy makers. The youthful team produced a series of monographs, perhaps most notably, The Religion of Java, The Social History of an Indonesian Town, Peddlers and Princes, Agricultural Involution. The uprisings of nationalists and the subsequent massacres of those identified as Communists effectively ended the moral hopes of that project. Although no apparent lessons were ever drawn by the American academics most involved in the hopes (not the massacres). They moved on.

Effectively the American political and military involvement in Vietnam brought this effort to an end (even if the Committee lingered on). In the name of anti-Communism, Geertz supported the war. Most the students opposed the war as imperialism and an adventure of destructive futility. The leading anti-war faculty member was David Schneider. I shared his politics but did not share his understanding of culture. Basically no one, and this applied much more broadly to the American political debates, was interested in or knew much about the Vietnamese. The exceptions were some C.I.A. analysts, and a small number of historians of China and South East Asia.

In 1967, Geertz invited me to join his project in Morocco. He had carried out preliminary research there with his wife Hildred, and they had identified a town, Sefrou, at the edge of the Middle Atlas Mountains, that fulfilled the criteria they had set out to enable them to carry forward a comparative study of Islam, social life, and modernity, in Indonesia and Morocco. They had already invited another graduate student, Lawrence Rosen, to work in Sefrou especially on law. Geertz explained that they were attempting to bring a loosely coordinated project together and wondered if I would be interested in working in the rural areas. Among other things, the interest of anthropology moving beyond the “my island, my tribe, my people” mode into a more contemporary updated Weberian social science – conceptual development, comparative, cumulative knowledge generation, identification of significant phenomenon, etc. -- was exciting to me. Geertz explained that each of us would conduct our own individual projects and were free to publish whatever we wanted to. He hoped, however, that we would try to coordinate things. He felt strongly that there was enough material to be covered such that a score of anthropologists could comfortably work in the same geographical area without competing over scarce resources. He argued that such overlap would enrich everyone’s project and provide some convergence of categories and problems. He was thinking of possibly setting up an

archive of field notes so that future researchers – and the Moroccans themselves – would have access to the material that did not find its way into publications. Furthermore, there were students from the University of Michigan and from Columbia University working in other regions of Morocco; Ernst Gellner was studying the Berbers. This richness would certainly not be without conflict and competition but it offered many pluses. Geertz emphasized that the project was an experiment and would be loosely coordinated.

The project was actualized to a degree. I did go to Morocco and work in a rural area. A series of monographs were published. A joint book (not including any contribution of mine) saw the light of day. No archive was set up. Little communication or brain-storming took place. Geertz left the University of Chicago and moved to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He had had, he said, enough of unruly students. The opportunities at Princeton for building one form or another of a collaborative social science were vast. Geertz seized none of them. He hired a cook at the Institute. I leave to others the historical and psychological explanations to explain this missed opportunity (including the fact that the utter freedom and resources at Princeton have yielded a ‘graveyard’ effect on other scholars).

Geertz’ loss of interest in this project as well as his refusal to engage in debate during the 1970s and 1980s remain a loss that has no scientific justification to it. Geertz simply followed the individualistic route, his stylistic skills carried him more and more into the “I am unique and do what I do—and so brilliantly” mode. But most of all, his refusal to engage in dialogue and debate during the 1980s with the those excited by the arrival of a new wave of European theory as well as a re-thinking of anthropology effectively brought any claims he may have previously made to be doing science or philosophy to an end. Style and brand-name recognition remained.

The idea of a joint project remains vitally important. The loose coordination of diverse projects seems the right place to start. Proceeding on the basis of a shared background of a broad intellectual tradition but not a specific doctrine seems right. As does the concern for method as a question that extends beyond the focus on ethnography that the term currently denotes in anthropology. The idea of an archive for future scholars as well as those whose hospitality had been extended remains a good one.



The institutional pre-conditions for a collective, rigorous, cumulative, undertaking were present at both the University of Chicago and at the Institute for Advanced Study. The politics of the Vietnam War and its multitude of consequences effectively eclipsed the Chicago project and the vagaries of Geertz's character the other.

Other members of the Institute that year, 1972-73, did have visions of a collaborative enterprise – conflicting and contrastive ones. Robert Bellah eloquently spoke of a “moral social science” and Pierre Bourdieu of a rigorous sociology as a science in its own right as well as a powerful weapon to undermine the nefarious domination of symbolic capital. Bellah and Bourdieu violently disagreed. Geertz watched. Both Bellah and Bourdieu wrote prefaces to my Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco, a book Geertz admonished me not to publish as it would ruin my career.

In 1976-77, I joined a National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar for College Teachers (not professors as it was designed for those of us teaching at institutions without graduate schools.) led by Robert Bellah at Berkeley.<sup>5</sup> The title of the seminar was “Social Science as Moral Inquiry.”<sup>6</sup> It was composed of young scholars from around the country. I became good friends with William Sullivan and we produced a reader on Interpretive Social Science and a conference volume on Social Science as Moral Inquiry. The main encounter, however, for me was with Hubert Dreyfus. NEH rules explicitly restricted the participation of other faculty members but as Dreyfus and Bellah were fellow Harvard graduates and Berkeley colleagues, Bellah graciously allowed Dreyfus to attend. Dreyfus brought my education in European philosophy into the twentieth century (Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty). As recounted elsewhere, Dreyfus and I started collaborating two years later when I was appointed in the Department of Anthropology at Berkeley. Dreyfus and John Searle were teaching a seminar on Derrida, Foucault, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. I attended and thought that what they were saying about Foucault being a structuralist was too simple. Dreyfus was eager to clarify the issue and we started working together. As it happened, Foucault was coming to the Bay Area to lecture at Stanford in the fall of 1979. We approached him for clarification; a complex and wonderful set of exchanges ensued. By the early 1980s Foucault proposed a collaborative research project between Berkeley and the *College de France* on governmentality in the counter-reformation and the 1920s. Foucault died in 1984.

## II. The recent past and near future.

Whereas the History of the Present calls for genealogical and archaeological labor, the Anthropology of the Present is oriented toward the recent past and near future. It works through a recursive triad of steps -- orientation, inquiry, and diagnosis. Here the task at hand is to begin to elaborate the orientation phase.

### Orientation.

The 1986 book Writing Culture, set forth a compelling, if heterogeneous, challenge to ethnographic authority. Whereas the challenge has been taken up in diverse ways, two decades later the experimental moment has yielded neither an alternative program (or programs) nor a distinctive form of expression or authoritative practice.

- One substitute candidate for ethnographic authority has been a turn to history, including the history of the present and governmentality studies. (Dirks, Stoller, Comaroff, etc.)
- Another form of authority has been forged in direct interventions like those of Paul Farmer or Nancy Scheper-Hughes.

Another symbolic form -- perhaps the dominant one in elite departments -- has been a rather curious turn to individual authority based on style, performance, and an academic politics of reception. This turn has frequently, if not exclusively, taken the form of a use of Theory (as understood in the Anglo-phone world during the 1980s and 1990s) as the source of authority.<sup>7</sup> This turn to performance is unfortunate on multiple registers.

1. Epistemological: Work in the philosophy and social studies of science have rightly long ago rejected theory as the diacritic of scientific practice and replaced it with conceptual work and experimentation.
2. Aesthetic: The human and social sciences have not attended to producing an aesthetics able to provide critical self-reflection on performance. In the art world, the importance of the “conceptual” and the “critical” has held center stage in the last two decades of criticism.<sup>8</sup>
3. Political: In the qualitative human sciences, there is a situation in which, to be charitable, there is a return to variants of the Romantics valorization of genius. Or, to be less charitable --

but more sociologically accurate -- to an unreflective form of fashion, branding, and a star system, based on elite networks, publication contacts, funding initiatives that are not followed up, mutual vanity and contempt, and their concomitant affects. It is hard to see how these practices contain the possibility of a critique of consumer capitalism when they seem to embody themselves so many of its central features.

Given the political climate, how long can this genre be sustained? And what will happen once it implodes or is destroyed? Sociologically speaking, anyone who thinks this situation will continue indefinitely is deluded. Ethically and epistemologically speaking we can see no reason why it should. Therefore, the pressing question: is what should come next?

### **Avant-garde Hero.**

The main stream of experimentation during the 1980s and 1990s in American anthropology has followed in the wake of Writing Culture. Although there is no single program or unified school, there has been a large number of attempts at the modification of the older academic forms of writing. These “morpho-clastic” moves have tended to be carried out as ends-in-themselves. They have been aligned in poorly thought through ways with the hope of more or less radical, political, aesthetic, or ethical transformation. That horizon has rarely included scientific advance as an explicit goal.

This experimentation with form has been carried out in diverse media (writing, video, photography, and virtual sites). It seems fair to say that there have been no common norms agreed upon as to what new forms of expression should look like. And that there has been no common understanding or explicit set of criteria for how to evaluate such experimentation. On the one hand, initially an open state of affairs was to be expected as it would indeed be incoherent to legislate from the start what the new norms and forms should or could be. On the other hand, one result that has become apparent over time is: as there is no authority structure that could legitimate innovation or sanction abuse, nor any expressed desire to have one. Consequently, one main result has been that the imperatives of fashion and the market dominate. The change in publishing practices is both an expression and a driver of this novelty driven style.<sup>9</sup>

Much (but not all) of the cutting-edge efforts have been carried out in the spirit of avant-gardism. This twentieth century current had frequently been allied with radical political movements and utopian programs. At the

moment that larger numbers of anthropologists have come to embrace this mode, however, recent theorization in the arts has questioned whether there can be an longer be an avant-garde. (Jameson, Andersen, Danto, etc.) Thus, following Fredric Jameson, one might qualify this form of after-the-fact avant-gardism as post-modernist, as a “nostalgia for the present.”

Twenty years into an experimental moment, it is appropriate to assess what has been achieved. George Marcus (and colleagues) is carrying out an energetic set of reflections and analyses of what the “experimental moment” has produced in terms of ethnography, and, pedagogy: and what should happen next.

### **Collaboration.**

It is quite remarkable that the contemporary self-understanding of anthropology includes few examples of collective work.<sup>10</sup> Of course, throughout the twentieth century many experiments in collective projects have been undertaken, including above all a long-standing tradition of collaboration with those whose culture the anthropologist was attempting to understand. It is not surprising that individual research, writing, and knowledge production has received support -- and instilled a habitus that has been wary of challenges to its form -- in a discipline that has based its authority on participant observation, existential immersion, in more or less isolated sites. The narratives of quest, “anthropologist as hero,” and the like, continue to carry symbolic weight even if aspects of previous claims to scientific authority now appears archaic.

- As Lassiter has recently documented, and sought to normalize through methodological suggestions, collaborative relations between anthropologists and informants have been the cornerstone to fieldwork. Some preliminary exploration of the dynamics of these no doubt highly diverse relationships (with a description of the range of exploitation, domination, and subjectification), has been done but more cases and analytic reflection would help to clarify what stages (rappport, complicity, adjacency, etc.) the field has passed through, and what current transformations are taking place.

Today, much of this history is either forgotten or discredited. There are any number of possible reasons for the historical amnesia. One possibility, that must be taken seriously, is that directly collaborative work in qualitative and interpretive inquiries is neither desirable nor plausible. Such a position has been sustained tacitly in anthropology, a discipline that has a long history of (rugged and romantic) individualism, an individualism that has its virtues. Those virtues, however, need to be made more explicit and

strengthened while their limitations acknowledged. Critique consists in such evaluation and redirection.

- James Faubion points out (pers. Comm.) that there have been numerous collaborations between husbands and wives in anthropology. From Bateson and Mead (and others) through Clifford and Hildred Geertz, etc. One of the characteristics of these collaborations is that the men of anthropology have perhaps been more open to working with women (frequently their spouses or partners). This insight raises the question about whether one of the main impediments to collaborative knowledge production in anthropology has not been the combination of “anthropologist as hero” and male gender roles.
- We need a better appreciation of how collaborative efforts have functioned within various feminist and gay/lesbian/transgender collectives. It would be especially valuable to know more about the invention of new and better forms of collaboration in research.

How can changing gender roles contribute to the de-heroization of anthropological knowledge production? What forms could collaborative practices take that would reduce domination, exploitation, and exclusion while increasing individual and collective capacities? <sup>11</sup>

Given that an increasing number of anthropologists are working in (multi)sites peopled by Giddens’ self-reflective moderns, the backgrounded issue of collaboration deserves, and is beginning to receive more attention. Again, presumably there is a great deal of variation present that needs to be better understood. Surely, different training methods are required to successfully confront such situations. And, as we argue below, new forms of collaboration and coordination among and between anthropologists (and other knowledge workers) is unquestionably going to be required to adequately address the scope, complexity, and temporality of contemporary objects and problems. Among other issues is that of the status of interdisciplinarity (Strathern) as both a context of anthropological work and as an object of second-order observation.

Regardless of the contributions of fieldwork as a practice of inquiry, it seems entirely plausible that the rugged individualism of the field worker and her data could nonetheless have been combined with different norms and forms for what counts as a fact, an argument, evidence, a scientific advance, a refutation, a refinement. Especially in the United States, the poles of ethnographic authority and an abstract methodological formalism have rarely been brought into successful relationship. And none has succeeded in becoming normative. Now that both poles have been under sustained

challenge for decades, can there be any doubt that the time for experimentation and invention has arrived?

The mode of the anthropology of the contemporary is “secessionist.”<sup>12</sup> It seeks neither to reject the past per se nor to automatically valorize it. Consequently it is neither reactionary nor avant-gardist. It is neither modernist nor counter-modern. Rather past efforts are available for scrutiny, re-use, or remediation, on condition that they be used reflectively in the light of changed conditions. Thinkers (and others) from the past can be made our contemporaries with the appropriate thought and mediations. If one does not proceed from a philosophy of history, or believe in the totalizing determination of culture, conceptual work in the past, can be made pertinent today. This claim points to the curious and largely unexamined fact that Max Weber or Karl Marx has been refuted and rebutted for a century but certain aspects of their work remain deeply insightful and orienting.<sup>13</sup>

The anthropology of the contemporary includes an explicit relationship to elements of tradition(s). Tradition, Rabinow wrote in Symbolic Domination, is alive when it provides a ‘moving image of the past’ and hence is constantly changing. For knowledge workers it is a reservoir of concepts, reflections on research trajectories, and the like. Hence we differ strongly from reactionaries like Alan Bloom who fetishize a canon and despise the present. Counter-modernism is reactionary, and in that sense has a strong tendency to nihilism and resentment in its proclamation of “values.”

### **Comparison.**

Both French and British anthropology in the twentieth century while preserving a form of ethnographic authority have followed a more collective mode of knowledge production that has been (to a degree that needs more evaluation) more consistent and cumulative. The long tradition of kinship studies, or those of *mentalités*, has been more critically recursive, to use George Canguilhem’s term. However, neither the British nor the French have succeeded in producing a practice of collective work per se that is pertinent to the contemporary. For example, in France Claude Levi-Strauss’ *Laboratoire d’anthropologie sociale* has a half-century of impressive accomplishments to its credit but they have been built on a very hierarchical and charismatic model. The *Laboratoire* has not found a way of renewing itself; either in terms of its social organization or, more seriously, in face of the challenges of understanding the twenty-first century world. The practice of knowledge gathering and knowledge production as well as the

mode of analysis remains largely what it was decades ago. An axiom of what defines a science is that it changes its methods, its objects, and its ethos. A method that has proved productive for one type of object must be re-examined, and almost certainly modified, as the object of inquiry changes. The world of La Pensée sauvage most certainly has waned, but other life worlds have replaced it.

An adequate discussion of the sociological dynamics of knowledge production in France and the U.K. would include the organization of thesis topics, genres of publication, funding, examination systems, and career patterns.<sup>14</sup> The advent of audit culture (Strathern) has produced more explicit standards and criterion; whether it has produced a vibrant and rich anthropological research environment remains subject to debate. In any case, in the United States, there is nothing directly comparable to its centralization of credit, resources, and evaluation. This claim does not mean that regularized and policed patterns of sanction and reward are not normative in the U.S., quite the contrary, only that they have not been made explicit and subject to criticism. One of the central aims of the reforms in the U.K., after all, was to reduce the dominance of traditional tacit symbolic dominance. Such a reform would be long over due and most welcome in the U.S. The critiques of the humanities, so far, however, have been carried out largely as ideologically-driven, denunciatory parodies of “post-modernism,” “multi-culturalism,” “deconstruction,” and the like. There most certainly have been excesses and dead-ends just as there have been in every other discipline and trend. A time of stock-taking is with us, regardless of what the right wing culture industry is doing.

### **Problematizations.**

The object (and objects) of an anthropology of the contemporary are set within a broad Problematization. The concept is from Michel Foucault. A problematization has the following characteristics.

- “It seemed to me that there was a specific element that distinguished the history of thought: something one might call [ ] **problematizations**.<sup>15</sup>
- In effect, in order for a domain of action to enter into the field of thought, it is necessary that a certain number of factors have made it uncertain, have made it lose its familiarity, or have produced around it a certain number of difficulties.”
- “Thought is an original response, or at least a specific

response, one that may well be multiple, at times contradictory within its different aspects, in so far as it is responding to multiple difficulties or incitations that have gone into making a situation or context appear as a possible question.” “To the same set [ensemble] of difficulties several responses can be given. And most times, diverse responses are proposed. That which one needs to understand, is that which makes these diverse responses simultaneously possible.”

- “This elaboration of a given situation into a question, this transformation of a set of difficulties and troubles into problems to which diverse solutions are proposed as responses is the point of problématisation, the specific work of thought.”<sup>16</sup>
- “Problematization does not mean representation of a pre-existent object nor the creation through discourse of an object that did not exist. It is the ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.”<sup>17</sup>
- “The study of modes of problematizations (that which is neither an anthropological constant nor a chronological variant) is therefore the way to study general questions through approaching them as historically singular.”<sup>18</sup>

Taken broadly there have been three historically singular moments in American anthropology. As configurations change -- become problematized -- the older figure does not simply disappear from the scene but takes on a different place in a space of problematization and must be thought anew. How to do this depends to a significant degree on the decisions made about the appropriate analytic categories and tools to “think” the new emergent problematization. By definition, these can only be contingent and contestable. They can only be tested in use on specific problems. A multiplication of such problem-oriented inquiries could or should cast light on the larger shape of the emergent configuration. And consequently of those that preceded it.

The following are *topoi*, starting points for inquiry.



### **A. Meaning and Order. Anthropos as *l'Homme*.**

- The ethnographic present and its associated attention to culture, society, and personality. There are many ways of describing this figure but a combination of Lévi-Strauss' "world on the wane" and the Boasians valorization of cultural difference can stand in for the story. What one sought to understand, to underline the value of, and at times even to guide the appropriate form of government was a distinctively human character. Whether the symbolic forms of the neo-Kantians, the spirit of the people in the neo-Hegelians, the free individual of the Marxists and utilitarians, -- anthropology studied the figure of anthropos as the Man.

### **B. Domination and Subjectivation. Anthropos as Humanity.**

- The revolt against this understanding, whether in Writing Culture with its attacks of ethnographic authority or Pierre Bourdieu in his program of the unmasking of all forms of symbolic domination amounts to the valid insight that power relations understood as exploitative and dominative were essential components of the history of Man. Hence the task became to catalogue, reveal the techniques and methods deployed, and to denounce in the name of justice, truth, and a better future to come. In the United States, after Writing Culture, there arose a great attention to the historicity of the forms taken to have existed in the ethnographic present. Those forms, it was held, were largely shaped by colonialism and capitalism and could be understood within the analytics of exploitation and domination. Much invaluable insight has been achieved by shifting the problem space in this manner. Equally in the United States (French and British anthropology have been much less influenced in these directions, and this time against the grain of Writing Culture, analytic passion has turned toward the third of Foucault's triad of power relations, subjectivation. Under the influence of feminism, gay and queer movements, as well as post-colonial studies (and their myriad interconnections) attention has turned massively to forms and modes of subjectivation. When one add's the emphasis on human rights one can perhaps conclude that this corpus has devoted itself to understanding Anthropos as Humanity in its suffering, victimage, exclusion, and trauma. That this work

has added to the accuracy and richness of the understanding of the twentieth century is undeniable. That it lacks significant analytic and methodological treatises should be considered as a hypothesis.

- In the social and cultural sciences, especially in the United Kingdom and its institutions of audit culture, we can see the results of a standardization of genre. The centralization of funding, of evaluation of individuals and institutions, and the demand for measurable utilitarian results would seem to have severe deficits but possible important beneficial effects. They should be approached as a large scale experiment that tells us important things about what knowledge in these fields look like once they are brought under a single regime of governmentality.

### **C. The Emergent: Vital systems?**

- We are working within an emergent problem space whose contours are neither clear nor stable. That there continue to be issues of meaning and order, exploitation and domination, Mankind and humanitarianism, is self-evident. However, other things are taking shape that will certainly re-configure and re-mediate these previous problem spaces and the analytic programs that have addressed them. Orienting to these now large, multi-dimension, and highly fluid objects in an analytic mode appropriate to their complexity and volatility is now the challenge of anthropological knowledge understood as the logos of the contemporary figure of anthropos. This figure has not been named.
- New modes of knowledge production are called forth by this problem space and the objects in it. Initial attempts to characterize it such as Nowotny et.al.'s Mode Two are salutary first steps. Much more analytic specificity is required and can only be achieved through coordinated, multi-disciplined, multi-sited projects. Contemplation without empirical constraint and Theorizing (Latour) without inquiry appear to us as retrograde.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Stephen Collier, Andrew Lakoff, Roger Brent, and to Tobias Rees, Meg Stalcup, Carlo Caduff, Nicolas Langlitz, Tarek el-Haik. The term “interpretive analytics” was coined by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow . It is explained in their book, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Geertz and Bourdieu both make this claim.

<sup>3</sup> On polemics: Michel Foucault, “Problems, Polemics, etc.” Also Richard McKeon....

<sup>4</sup> For a less flattering view of McKeon as teacher, see Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.

<sup>5</sup> I was teaching at an experimental branch of the City University of New York, Richmond College. Although CUNY did have a graduate center that drew from the branches of the university, my applications to teach a course there was consistently rejected. I was too “Chicago” and pluralism was not on the agenda of these Columbia and Michigan loyalists.

<sup>6</sup> Check.

<sup>7</sup> For a French view, see French Theory, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Osborne, Conceptual Art.

<sup>9</sup> Lindsay Waters on publishing.

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Lemov documents several of the most significant attempts at coordinated research in her book.

<sup>11</sup> We especially want to explore contemporary collaborations between anthropologists and those with whom they work. As many of us work among self-reflective knowledge producers, this issue of collaboration, exchange, dialogue, and critique, is increasingly pertinent not only as an ethical issue but as a scientific one as well (Marcus, Holmes, Kelty, Faubion, etc.)

<sup>12</sup> See Anthropos Today, pp. .

<sup>13</sup> Reflections on “founders of discursivity.”

<sup>14</sup> On the British exam system and its limitations, see Talal Asad in Writing Culture.

<sup>15</sup> La pensée, c’est la liberté par rapport à ce qu’on fait, le mouvement par lequel on s’en détache, on le constitue comme objet et on le réfléchit comme problème.» (599)

<sup>16</sup> En fait, pour qu’un domaine d’action, pour qu’un comportement entre dans le champ de la pensée, il faut qu’un certain nombre de facteurs l’aient rendu incertain, lui aient fait perdre sa familiarité, ou ait suscité autour de lui un certain nombre des difficultés; elle est une réponse originale ou spécifique souvent multiforme, parfois même contradictoire dans ses différents aspects, à ces difficultés qui sont définies pour elle par une situation ou un contexte et qui valent comme une question possible. À un même ensemble de difficultés plusieurs réponses peuvent être données. Et la plus part du temps, des réponses diverses sont effectivement proposés. Or, ce qu’il faut comprendre, c’est ce qui les rend simultanément possible; c’est le point où s’enracine leur simultanéité. [[la problématisation] élabore à leur propose les conditions dans lesquelles des réponses possible peuvent être données; elle définit les éléments qui constitueront ce à quoi les différentes solutions s’efforcent de répondre. Cette élaboration d’une donnée en question, cette transformation d’un ensemble d’embarras et de difficultés en problèmes auxquels les diverses solutions chercheront à apporter une réponse, c’est cela qui constitue le point de problématisation et le travail spécifique de la pensée. (598)

<sup>17</sup> Problématisation ne veut pas dire représentation d’un objet préexistant, ni non plus création par le discours d’un objet qui n’existe pas. C’est l’ensemble des pratiques discursives ou non discursives qui fait entrer quelque chose dans le jeu du vrai et du faux et le constitue comme objet pour le pensé (que ce soit sous la forme de la réflexion morale, de la connaissance scientifique, de l’analyse politique etc.) (670)

<sup>18</sup> “L’étude des (modes de) problématisation (c’est-à-dire ce qui n’est ni constante anthropologique ni variation chronologique) est donc la façon d’analyser, dans leur forme historique singulière, des questions à portée générale.” (577)