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Anthropology must embrace journalism. Public pedagogy is discipline's challenge.

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ANTHROPOLOGY MUST EMBRACE JOURNALISM

PUBLIC PEDAGOGY IS DISCIPLINE'S CHALLENGE

Abstract

Both professional anthropology and professional journalism are in free fall. «End» is a keyword in both realms with the relentless corporate assault on investigative journalism and the deep concern for anthropology's relevance in a privatized neoliberal world. Academic anthropology continues to worry about its future while imploring its members to get more urgently involved in public life and yet professional socialization in academic anthropology dramatically inhibits public journalistic action. The article posits that anthropologists must, in spite of this, become media makers and journalists themselves. This call is situated within four overarching movements which theorize important issues surrounding this border crossing praxis: the veteran field of applied anthropology, the sub-discipline of media anthropology, the emerging initiative of public (or engaged) anthropology, and the burgeoning field of public pedagogy. All explore, to different degrees, various problems and possibilities for doing journalism while offering important resources for critical practice.

Keywords: Media anthropology · Applied anthropology · Professional socialization · Public anthropology · Critical pedagogy

Brian McKenna

Is there a career danger for an anthropologist in wanting to be a relevant, publicly engaged writer? Maybe. Consider, why is it that one of anthropology's most talented writers, Kurt Vonnegut, felt that he had to drop out of anthropology graduate program (University of Chicago), just inches from the dissertation finish line, to become a novelist? And why did another University of Chicago student, David Moberg, who actually attained his PhD in anthropology, leave academia to become a journalist, the senior editor of *In These Times*?

Typically the anthropology profession – both academic and applied – looks skeptically at journalism. A common refrain among academic anthropologists is the following: «I never talk to journalists, they always get me wrong. I just can't trust them». Whenever I hear this, my mind churns, though, and I think: «Then why don't you become the journalist and write it yourself?» Applied anthropologists are more inclined to write an occasional journalistic piece, but this type of work is not viewed as a central focus of applied work (Ervin 2005). Again, why not become the seasoned journalist?

In this article I identify several social constraints and professional contradictions that have served to cloister much of professional anthropology in an academic tomb. I discuss the growing *public pedagogy* movement (Sandlin et al. 2009) which has arisen to reclaim democracy (and inspire academics) in this Late Capitalist Age of the Great Meltdown. The current «terror of neoliberalism» (Giroux 2004) is a form of public pedagogy from above, characterized by immense concentrations of unaccountable wealth, the increasing privatization of the public sphere, relentless attacks on the social state and – in a context where a critical and engaged citizenry is viewed as a threat – increasing corporate control of the media, schooling and higher education.

This domination has resulted in a deformed public culture and woeful citizen ignorance. The form and content of anthropology itself is degraded by its encasement in what many are calling the corporate knowledge factory (Aronowitz 2000). At the same time increasing numbers of anthropologists are doing journalism and other forms of public communication as a feature of applied practice directed against this hegemony. The burgeoning subfield of media anthropology (Allen 1994; Bird 2009) and the evolving public anthropology movement (Eriksen 2006; Hale 2008) both ask crucial questions and model new forms of critical practice as they continue to develop. Both still need to critically engage with one another and with the broader public pedagogy movement now sweeping through the academy, especially with regard to education (Sandlin et al. 2009). A central theoretician of this new wave is Thomas Eriksen who argues in his seminal work *Engaging Anthropology* (Eriksen 2006) that «anthropologists need to lose their fear of plunging into the vexed issues modern societies present» (Eriksen 2006). Driven by a «fierce urgency of now» these scholar/citizen/journalists are helping to fill the void left by a corpo-

rate controlled media that has largely eviscerated investigative journalism (Cockburn and St. Clair 2006; McChesney 2008). I am a participant in these movements and discuss my journalistic efforts below. This scholarly article, in fact, began life as a journalistic article (McKenna 2009a).

HERMETICALLY SEALED CLASSROOM, DUSTY JOURNALS

Too many academic anthropologists are marooned in the rearguard retreats of university classrooms, their pearls of wisdom echoing wistfully off of hermetically sealed walls. Paradoxically, just outside of campus bounds, local TV and radio programs – which can potentially educate millions – are staffed by their freshly minted (and inexperienced) former students! These are campus graduates of journalism, broadcast communications, speech, and / or theater programs who, in their new roles, are groomed in the practical arts of elocution and head-bobbing for the TV cameras. According to the Federal Communications Commission, these are supposed to be democratic public airwaves. But in practice, under corporate hegemony, these spaces are mostly off limits to PhDs, social scientists and even investigative journalists, i.e. to thinkers and social critics. Anthropologists must fight for access to these spaces. Meanwhile they must circulate their voices in a multitude of public fora in local newspapers, the alternative press, the Internet, public television and public radio.

When I went to graduate school, in anthropology, in the early 1980s at Temple University, the emphasis was on Marxist anthropology and social transformation. My mentor, Peter Rigby (1985), was fond of saying, in an ironic way, «Men make revolutions. Anthropologists are men. Therefore anthropologists make revolutions». Rigby was a brilliant Cambridge-educated Africanist who studied and advocated for the Maasai. On his curriculum were Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, Stanley Diamond, Kathleen Gough, Laura Nader, Bernard Mugabane, Eric Wolf, Louis Althusser, Maurice Godelier, Maurice Bloch, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Samir Amin.

Following Rigby's precepts, we understood, came with risks. In 1983, my anthropology student friend Richard Cross, 33, a freelance photojournalist, was killed on the Honduran border (along with Los Angeles Times correspondent Dial Torgerson) while covering the US-supported Contra War against the Sandinistas. Back then I was part of a movement that led or participated in antiwar demonstrations (El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, first Iraq War etc.), raised money for medical relief in Nicaragua and was part of the effort to establish a school for social change on Philadelphia's South Side (where popular courses were Spanish for Activists, Capital One, journalism and health policy, which I taught). In tune with the urgency that I was absorbing from the anthropology seminar room I became a reporter / broadcaster for The Central America Report on Temple University's jazz radio station WRTI, bringing news that was censored or suppressed by corporate controlled newspapers. I later began writing for alternative newspapers including the New York Guardian, the Philadelphia City Paper and the University City Review. Immersed in practice, I learned about Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Bowles and Gintes' *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) and Henry Giroux's *Theory and Resistance in Education* (1983), books that had enormous influence on me as I diagnosed the culture, resource and power dimensions of my own educational life. None of these books were ever mentioned in my anthropology or social science classes. I wrote a Master's essay in anthropology titled, *Education for What?* (McKenna 1986) and went on to do what I considered to be good applied anthropology.

A theoretically important point is that most of my activist colleagues and I eventually «dropped out» (Bourdieu might have referred to an incompatible mix of cultural capital) of the PhD programs (history, anthropology, communications, sociology, African American Studies) with which we were involved to conduct this timely work. I'll return to this point later.

Leaving graduate school with an MA in 1986 I worked in a number of health non-profits and eventually found a job as the development consultant on *FRESH AIR* with Terry Gross in Philadelphia in 1991. The arts and politics broadcast now reaches 4,5 million listeners daily and is found in Europe on the World Radio Network. Ms. Gross and her colleagues have featured the work of numerous anthropologists such as David Kertzer, Peter Goldsmith, Sam Charters (musical anthropologist) and medical anthropologists Paul Farmer and Terry Graedon. Seeking a stronger credential with which to ply my journalism and communications work, I decided to return for my PhD in anthropology at Michigan State University. When I left I told Ms. Gross and her staff, «You help do the work of a great many anthropologists, getting the message out about their work. Keep it up». The broadcast could conceivably profile an anthropologist every week to great effect, but does not.

Today it is clearer than ever that we cannot depend on what Anthony Giddens called the double hermeneutic (interpreters of our interpretations) line of gatekeepers (people like Gross) for our public media education. Anthropologists have no choice, then. They must become media

makers and journalists themselves. This will be tough in a field, anthropology, that does not provide systematic education on «how to become a public intellectual» in its curricula, pedagogy, modes of evaluation or reward structure.

CRACKING CHAUCER

What makes a good journalist? In a telling *Slate Magazine* article, *Can Journalism School Be Saved?*, editor Jack Shafer said that «I'd rather hire somebody who wrote a brilliant senior thesis on Chaucer than a J-school M.A. who's mastered the art of computer-assisted reporting. If you can crack Chaucer, you've got a chance at decoding city hall» (Zenger 2002).

Anthropologists can crack Chaucer and much more. Anthropologists can debate Foucault, survive in foreign lands with little more than the skin of our teeth and write insightful interpretations of the global / local intersections of capital. Anthropologists would make great journalists, albeit if they learned to write more quickly, urgently, succinctly and in a public voice.

Unfortunately, anthropologists rarely write urgently about the local culture for the general public. It's even rarer for them to do this in their own hometowns where they live. But journalists – particularly investigative muckraking journalists – do. And at a time when corporate media has fired too many investigative journalists, anthropologists need to pick up the slack. Both professional anthropology and professional journalism are in free fall. «End» is a keyword in both realms, as in *End Times: The Death of the Fourth Estate* (2006), by top investigative journalists Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair. The two recently published a AAA series *Pulse of the Planet* to good effect.

BUT THAT'S NOT ANTHROPOLOGY!

Anthropologist James Lett is a former broadcaster and present-day anthropologist. In 1986 he wrote about his dual life commenting that he found it «remarkable that [the] similarities [between the two professions] are not more widely appreciated. As an anthropologist, I have been trained to observe, record, describe, and if possible, to explain human behavior, and that is the essence of what I do every day as a journalist» (Lett 1986).

I interviewed an anthropologist / journalist for this article who asked to remain anonymous. Now an assistant professor, she confided that she kept her graduate student journalism quiet because of how it was talked down. «When someone mentioned Deborah Tannen [a popular linguistic anthropologist] professors' eyes would roll». She said that since anthropology and journalism have so much in common anthropologists struggle «to define their discipline as unique». «They want to distance the profession from journalism […] you know, how anthropology is always struggling to legitimate itself».

Anthropologist Thomas McGuire exemplifies this type of border patrol work in defense of anthropology in a recent article called, «Shell games on the water bottoms of Louisiana: investigative journalism and anthropological inquiry» (2008). In it he discusses the work of two investigative journalists working for the New Orleans Times-Picayne daily newspaper who exposed political corruption involving oysterbeds. He argues that investigative journalists, despite seeking to uncover the truth like anthropologists, fail to be anthropologists because they frame a story «like a picture is framed to separate it from the background to focus attention». They do not tell us enough about why things happened from a broader perspective, he says. He also submits that investigative journalism is not anthropology because it is limited «by what their readers will bear», and by a «moral imperative that cuts them short» (McGuire 2008: 119).

Excuse me? McGuire has evidently never read anything by Mike Davis, Upton Sinclair or Jeffrey St. Clair whose *Been Brown so Long it Looked like Green to Me* (2004) perceptively analyzes capitalist corruption in Louisiana. I myself have learned more about how the media operates from non-anthropologists like Upton Sinclair (see his *The Brass Check*, 2003) and McChesney than from any anthropologist. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that the two reporters were able to impact public policy to a far greater degree than McGuire who, as evidenced from his piece, does not do journalism.

Several anthropologists argue that journalism has little or no sophisticated social theory. That's true for mainstream journalists but not for many of the investigative journalists I know. Moreover a significant amount of anthropology fails to adequately theorize its own imperial context of privilege. According to Laura Nader, «it is often the case that the critical potential of a discipline is obliterated as soon as the disciplines gets institutionalized and transformed into an industry» (Mattei and Nader 2008: 100). Nader argues that the thrust of American anthropology has supplied the ideological support for imperialism and colonialism, studying down not up, studying away and not in their own backyards. The context of most academic

anthropology is the university, and the best critiques of the university have not come from anthropologists but educators, sociologists and historians.

CAPTIVE INTELLECTUALS

To better understand McGuire one must read Russell Jacoby. In his *The Last Intellectuals, American Culture in the Age of Academe* (1987) Jacoby talks about how the growing academic culture of the 1950s absorbed a great many of our great public writers (such as Tarbell, Stone and Steffens) turning them into academics who lost their public voice. «For many younger intellectuals the dissertation was the cultural event and contest of their lives […] the dissertation became part of them. The rhetoric, the style, the idiom, the sense of the ‹discipline› and one's place in it: these branded their intellectual souls. The prolonged, often humiliating effort to write a thesis, to be judged by ones doctoral advisor and a committee of experts gives rise to a network of dense relations and deference that clung to their lives and future careers […] earlier intellectuals were almost completely spared this rite» (Jacoby 1987: 18).

Twenty-three years later Jacoby's analysis still rings true. Anthropology programs remain too aligned with an academic culture that creates socialization experiences that have little to do with engaging the public directly.

As Giroux describes the process, «Engaging in intellectual practices that offer the possibility of alliances and new forms of solidarity among cultural workers such as artists, writers, journalists, academics, and others who engage in forms of public pedagogy grounded in a democratic project represents a small, but important, step in addressing the massive and unprecedented reach of global capitalism. […] Such a pedagogical task suggests that educators and cultural theorists define intellectual practice as [a commitment] that enables them to speak with conviction, enter the public sphere in order to address important social problems, and demonstrate alternative models for what it means to bridge the gap between higher education and the broader society» (Giroux 2004: 70f.).

Few citizens know about the powerful ethnographic studies that quietly sit in libraries, on dissertation shelves, or in journals like *American Ethnologist or Human Organization*. Professional ethnography rarely sees print in the local *Metro Times* or *City Paper*. Why not write for both audiences, though, academic and popular?

Anthropology had an auspicious start with a number of well known public figures such as Boas, Mead and Ashley Montague. What happened?

A THREATENING SCIENCE

«When practiced properly», David Price reminds us, «anthropology is a threatening science» (Price 2004: 29). According to Price, that's part of why the national security state has heavily monitored anthropologists and has historically taken severe actions against activist anthropologists. In a magnificent work of scholarship, Price, an anthropologist, drew upon more than 30'000 pages of FBI and government memoranda released under the Freedom of Information Act which described dozens of activist anthropologists who were prosecuted during the Red Scares of the 1940s and 1950s (Price 2004). Significantly, Price shows that it was not Communist Party membership or Marxist beliefs that attracted the most scrutiny but high levels of public action, particularly around racial justice. That is, it was those who got involved on the streets, in public forums and in public writings that caused alarm. He argues, «McCarthyism took a large chunk out of American anthropology – a chunk so deep it continues to affect and limit the scope and approach of anthropology today» (ibid.: 33).

Price argues that anthropology might have produced legions of activist anthropologists were it not for the encroachments of the US government. It's not hard to imagine that many would have become muckraking journalists.

Why is anthropology such a threat? A chief mission of anthropology is to overcome narrow-minded ethnocentrism, the idea that one's culture is superior, i.e. that it's the best of all possible worlds. In the United States that means it's about confronting nationalism and social amnesia, both of which are endemic in the populace. This most basic professional assumption, then, when applied publically, can frighten the powerful. The discipline also celebrates holism and castigates overspecialization. Anthropology is about making connections, revealing hidden assumptions, teaching about alternative cultures, uncovering origins (of humans, the state, one's landscape, oneself) and resisting oppression. It's about illustrating the «weapons of the weak» and legitimating for students the anthropological knowledge that «to exist you must resist». It documents subaltern resistance within a given culture in order to advance social transformations. At base, anthropology is about reclaiming democracy (see McKenna 2008b). That's why it is a threat.

THE MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY MOVEMENT: THEORIZING THE TRANSITION

The sub-discipline of «media anthropology» (Allen 1994; Rothebuhler and Coman 2005) has been slow to adopt the above perspective with regard to journalism. In 1987, two of its early proponents, Grindal and Rhodes (1987), wrote an important article comparing and contrasting anthropology and journalism. They drew attention to scores of similarities (e.g. intruding on others lives, going to the «field», establishing rapport, skillful interviewing) and differences (e.g. journalists work to tight deadlines, are more fragmentary, focus on limited questions). Significantly, they underscored that anthropologists can learn how to «affect a voice that renders the human story both compelling and true» from journalists (ibid.: 13). However they largely reproduced a dualistic view of the two professions, with anthropologists relegated to writing for «posterity» while journalists write for the «community».

In 2005 anthropologist Elizabeth Bird reproduced this notion in arguing that «journalists, at times, have a responsibility to the public that anthropologists can justifiably avoid» (Bird 2005: 306). This view is today vigorously challenged by «public pedagogues» (Sandlin et al. 2009) and public anthropologists (Eriksen 2006; Hale 2008), who argue that avoiding the public is unjustified. Despite her viewpoint, Bird is an articulate interpreter of the relationship between the two traditions, pointing out that over the past quarter century there has been a significant «blurring» of social science and journalism. That owes, in part, to the fact that «descriptive and interpretive approaches have always been at the core» of cultural anthropology. Bird positively references «the long debate within anthropology about whether ethnography is a science, an art or perhaps a little of both» (Bird 2005: 301).

Still, Bird does not argue that anthropology must embrace and learn from (investigative) journalism. For Bird it's the other way around as evidenced in her article *The Journalist as Ethnographer: How anthropology can enrich journalistic practice* (Bird 2005, which is an update of a 1987 article). Similarly Cramer and McDevitt, in *Ethnographic Journalism* (2004), call for journalists to follow anthropologists and infuse their work with more detail, in-depth analysis, reflexiveness and a standpoint epistemology, like anthropologists.

Why not the other way around? Why can't anthropologists be more like journalists? What can they learn from journalists, especially investigative journalists? In 1994 anthropologist Susan Allen addressed the issue directly in *Media Anthropology: Informing Global Citizens* (1994), commenting that, «When I thought seriously about the ways in which anthropological perspectives would improve journalism […] to reach a critical mass of global citizens, I was, in the vernacular of the day, blown away that no one was training people with both skill sets» (Allen 2005: 285). A decade later Allen reflected on the lessons learned in a 2005 article, «Activist media anthropology» (Allen 2005), remaining committed to her vision. Allen concludes that today activist anthropologists need to «reframe media anthropology as part of a larger social change movement» (Allen 2005: 287). An activist media anthropology subverts the dualistic thinking of professional cultures. It needs to overcome «us versus them», and «win or lose» thinking. In this view the enforced professional dualism between anthropology and journalism is no longer credible. «Interconnectedness» is the key, she asserts.

Still, while anthropologists can choose to perform as journalists in a simplistic who-what-when-where manner, such an engagement does not adequately utilize the armamentarium available in the anthropological toolbox (Eriksen 2006). Less, it ignores the great insights and techniques developed by investigative journalists over the past century (Steffens 2005). As one enters the public journalistic domain it becomes more evident how these two traditional enterprises are both inextricably linked but yet very different. With practice one can both study and impact how the two approaches are co-evolving, even in this neoliberal age.

Building on Allen's insights is anthropologist Jennifer Hasty who makes a critical observation. Hasty points out that «the burgeoning field of media anthropology has oddly neglected journalism, focusing instead on film, television, radio and photography» (Hasty 2009: 132). Hasty suspects something is amiss. She proceeds to argue that the neglect «has deeper roots traceable to the very heart of our discipline, the critically interrogated seat of anthropological desire» (ibid.). Journalism, she says, appears dirtier than anthropology in its ethics, instrumentality and politics. Anthropologists assume that their profession is more ethically and politically pure. Not so, however, says Hasty. «Anthropologists are just as immersed in the dubious obscurities of power and interests as journalists are, *perhaps even more so*» (Hasty 2009: 133, my emphasis). She posits that «the forms of sociality and writing in journalistic fieldwork expose and accentuate contradictions in professional norms and practices common to all anthropological research» (Hasty 2009: 133). In other words, a critically exhaustive examination of the two fields causes too much anthropological dissonance and is therefore systematically avoided.

Hasty's views are authoritative since she simultaneously conducted fieldwork as an anthropologist and a journalist in Ghana in the 1990s. In fact she worked for a large number of politically opposing journalistic institutions and also interviewed journalists and editors from all shades of the political spectrum. Her conclusion that anthropologists and journalists are both complicit with power needs to be thoroughly considered by all anthropologists who desire to act as journalists.

Curiously, Hasty does not refer to the work of Price, above, which would bulwark her case. Nor does she reflect on how her particular fieldwork approach can be replicated and theorized as a new methodological approach in social science practice. I now take up this issue.

JOURNALISM IS MUCH MORE THAN SHARING KNOWLEDGE

In a timely and important edited work, *Engaging Contradictions* (2008), anthropologist Charles Hale makes clear that social activism and journalism (a form of social action) are very important ways of *doing social science*. Hale notes that, «Activism is not just a matter of publicity or reaching broader publics with a message from social science. It is a way of doing social science [emphasis mine], often in collaboration with non-social scientists. [... It] is part of the process of forming, testing, and improving knowledge» (Hale 2008: xvii).

Hale's theorization builds on work from a host of theorists including anthropologists Roger Sanjek (1990), Ugo Mattei and Laura Nader (2008) and Charles Hale (2008) to educators / public pedagogues Paulo Freire (1970), Peter McLaren (1994, 2009) and Henry Giroux (2004, 2009). It is linked fundamentally to the Freirian ideas of critical dialogue and the gnosiological cycle. This approach requires that educators, as transformative intellectuals, appropriate the references and referential contexts of informants and then amplify the «dangerous words» or «generative themes» back to them for further dialogue and reflection as part of a gnosiological cycle of research and practice that helps lead to the creation of a democratic public sphere. Importantly this also leads to *a creation and re-creation of the self* – against authoritarianism (Freire 1970; Sanjek 1990).

In this manner social scientists and educators work to overcome their ideological socialization by reversing the learning process with subjects while assisting people in the rediscovery of the historical and cultural roots of their lived worlds.

This is also what good journalism does. And good journalism is investigative. It is, as Alex Cockburn said in a personal interview (2008), «as radical as reality itself». As the motto goes, good journalism is intended to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

As public pedagogues will tell you, the terms «journalism» and «anthropology» are reifications, moving targets of socially constructed meaning. All concepts leave remainders of meaning, as Adorno made clear in his magisterial *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 1997). Both terms intersect in the act of border crossing, translating phenomena of reality and meaning from one social sphere to another. Both are «walking fieldnotes», cultural brokers of dangerous memories.

WHERE WAS ANTHROPOLOGY?

Freire's notion of the gnosiological cycle is powerful. As an anthropologist / journalist I have written several articles inspired by the cultural frustrations of everyday life on topics such as car culture, traffic, and the weather. Recently I wrote an article for the Society for Applied Anthropology's Newsletter titled «Traffic ethnography on Michigan's Highway 96: it's all the rage» (2008d). In my review of the literature I searched for anthropological analyses of the culture-resource-power dimensions of traffic culture. I was surprised at what I discovered.

In a bookstore I came upon a bright yellow book titled, *Traffic, Why We Drive the Way We Do (and what it says about us)* (2008). The book is an incredible combination of traffic science, psychology and, yes, anthropology. Written by a man named Tom Vanderbilt, it describes the recent work of American «traffic archaeologist» Eric Poehler who went to Pompeii to study the wear patterns on curbstones at corners and the stepping stones established for pedestrians to cross the «rutways». He was able to discern that traffic drove on the right side of the street and primarily used a system of one way streets for their chariots. Vanderbilt gives a penetrating analysis of how traffic dehumanizes and he credibly speculates on questions of culture and personality pointing out that nations which are the least corrupt – Finland, Norway, New Zealand and Singapore – are also the safest places in the world to drive. Finland fines you according to your income so that Internet entrepreneur Jaakko Rytsola received a $71'400 fine for going 43 miles per hour in a 25 miles per hour zone. A few weeks later I was reading about a traffic book featured in the *Anthropology and Behavior* section of the August

2008 edition of Smithsonian Magazine titled *The Truth About Traffic*. It was Vanderbilt's book! And he is not an anthropologist but a journalist.

Why aren't credentialed anthropologists writing these kinds of books? Why do we cede popular «anthropological» writing to Jared Diamond (*Guns, Germs and Steel*, 1997) and Charles Mann (1491). True, both of those books would have greatly have benefited from an anthropologist as a co-author, if only to help prevent errors of analysis and interpretation. But the point is that they are writing captivating work for the educated lay reader and are having a great impact on the culture. Yes, there are many critical omissions in Vanderbilt's text. This is true of most texts, though, and I still regard Vanderbilt as a popular anthropologist who has made my job much easier. I am actively mining his ideas (which I shall attribute) for my own research. It is clear that no anthropologist can go forward in traffic work until they plough through Vanderbilt.

YOU CAN WRITE FROM TWO DIRECTIONS, ACADEMIC FIRST OR ACADEMIC SECOND

In my applied anthropology I am integrating the practice of academic writing and journalistic writing from two alternate directions, as the need fits. First, you can write a short journalistic article and then, after publication, turn it into a more expansive academic work (as I did for this article before you and for a recent article on Dow Chemical that I did first as a journalist and later as an academic in the journal *Anthropology in Action* [McKenna 2009a]). Or you can perform the strategy the opposite way. First I write an academic article and then, after publication, quickly convert it into journalism. One year ago I did this to great effect. After my academic article «Melanoma whitewash: millions at risk of injury or death because of sunscreen deceptions» was published in the Singer and Baer book, *Killer Commodities: Public Health and the Corporate Production of Harm* (2008a), I waited for the most opportune moment to translate the work for the media. I was given a gift when the most well known melanoma victim, John McCain, ran as the Republican nominee for President. Writing for the Internet newsletter *CounterPunch* I called the piece, «McCain's melanoma cover-up» (2008c). McCain became the newsworthy «hook» or the lead of the story. The story was, in essence, my ethnographic research. The journalistic piece garnered tremendous attention. I received more than a hundred emails from around the world. Even today, over a year later, if you type «McCain» and «melanoma» into the Google search engine there are about 1'150'000 hits. My article is the seventh most popular one.

GRAMSCI'S WAR OF POSITION. MILITARY VS. JOURNALISTIC ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Instead of journalist anthropology, the profession is being inundated with calls for business anthropology and military anthropology. Recently I was asked by Tim Wallace, the editor of the Society for Applied Anthropology Newsletter, to engage Human Terrain System anthropologists who had called for dialogue with military critics. Today anthropologists are busy at work for the CIA and the Pentagon. The CIA recently funded an effort – the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program – to train up to 150 analysts in anthropology. Each analyst receives a $25'000 a year stipend, tuition support, loan paybacks and other benefits with the proviso that they work for an intelligence agency for 1½ times the period covered by the financial support. These are secret scholar-spies circulating in our anthropology departments. They cannot reveal their funding source. Then there are the Cultural Operations Research Human Terrain Teams in which the military actively recruits anthropologists to provide counterinsurgency data for its occupying armies. As private contractors anthropologists can make up to $300'000 a year for their services.

My article was titled «A good military education is hard to find: if I taught anthropology at the US Army War College, I'd ask: What would Smedley Butler do?» (McKenna 2008f). Here's an excerpt: «I agree with the idea that ‹to wage war, become an anthropologist›. The trouble is that it turns out that we are on different sides of the war. ‹Human Terrain› anthropologists are with imperialism. I'm with Gramsci. […] Gramsci's enemies were capitalists and fascists. Who are the enemies of the U.S. Army War College? According to Porter it's ‹Marxist revolutionaries, Palestinian nationalists, and Hezbollah net-warriors› (Porter 2007: 57). That wide net would include Gramsci. In short, the CIA / Human Terrain military anthropologists have aligned themselves with a national security state apparatus in wars of position and maneuver against critical anthropologists and indigenous peoples. Let's be clear about what CIA anthropologists and the Human Terrain anthropologists are NOT doing: ‹studying up› at power. This leaves the troops vulnerable. Enlistees need informed consent before signing on the dotted line. Soldiers need actionable intelligence so they can decide whether the cause is right» (2008f: 13f.).

The article was later published in *CounterPunch* and there it was evidently read by the War College faculty who apparently considered inviting me to speak at the campus (based on emails to me from faculty and Internet chatter). Public anthropology can learn much from Gramsci, since the

practice takes seriously the idea that anthropology is in a «war of position» with the dominant hegemony. Journalism, which Gramsci practiced, is an important form of counterhegemonic engagement. Gramsci needs to be highlighted in the anthropology curriculum, as he was in the 1980s.

THE BACKLASH AGAINST PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Anthropologist Barbara Johnston has written about the work of being an anthropological activist, especially in relation to doing environmental justice work. But she warns about associated risks. Environmental justice work «requires confronting, challenging and changing power structures». When someone is involved in this work, says Johnston, «backlash is inevitable». «When environmental justice work involves advocacy and action – confrontational politics – a number of professional bridges are burned». Cause-oriented anthropology suggests people who make trouble. Troublemakers are celebrated in this discipline when their cause succeeds and justice prevails. But often «justice' is elusive, success is hard to gauge, and action results in unforeseen adverse consequences» (Johnston 2001: 8).

This likely happened to me in 2001. After a story I wrote about Michigan State University's wetland pollution (McKenna 2001), then President Peter McPherson (a close friend of then Vice President Dick Cheney) phoned my superior, an anthropologist. I was then teaching a course, as an adjunct, called *Global Diversity and Interdependence*. The superior informed me that McPherson had phoned him/her asking about my background. The superior said that he was probably upset because of my environmental journalism and asked me to stop writing about MSU. I chose not to. Later I lost my adjunct position without explanation. This may or may not have been because of my journalism, of course.

DISCIPLINED MINDS

We live in dangerous times. Oil wars, environmental battles and shameless corruption mark our age. The injuries of class have rarely been more pronounced. In the US, tens of millions suffer bankruptcies, foreclosures, illness and death amidst the greatest upward shift in wealth to the owning class in recorded history. Culture theorist Henry Giroux is blunt, «Given the seriousness of the current attack on higher education by an alliance of diverse right-wing forces it is difficult to understand why liberals, progressives and left-oriented educators have been relatively silent in the face of the assault» (Giroux 2007: 185). One reason is because «academics are increasingly being pressured to become either servants of corporate power or disengaged specialists. There is an emerging idea that social criticism really has no place in a university. Academics are increasingly caught in an ideological crossfire regarding the civic and political responsibilities they should assume as engaged culture critics» (Giroux 2010: personal communication).

Anthropologists have historically stepped back from this critical engagement. Johnston's recent edited work *Half-Lives & Half-Truths, Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War* (2007) details the ethnographic (and often advocacy) work of fourteen anthropologists researching the consequences of the first nuclear age, from the Marshall Islands to the former Soviet Union. As Laura Nader notes, «over the past fifty-plus years, relatively few American anthropologists or the American Anthropology Association have voiced opposition to this [Marshall Islands] destruction» (Nader 2007: 304). Nader critiques the scores of anthropologists who worked in the Pacific, people like Margaret Mead, but who never spoke up about the nuclear testing. Why? «Many got their Ph.D.s in lands they thought the US would permanently administer. Others had worked in intelligence for the national security state. Still others were supported by federal grants to conduct salvage ethnography» (Nader 2007: 303).

It's also a form of orientalism in which the dominant culture is not viewed as «the other». For an excellent elaboration of the forces working on academics and salaried professionals, anthropologists need to turn to Jeff Schmidt's *Disciplined Minds, A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-battering System that Shapes their Lives* (2000). Schmidt describes the socialization process in universities as a process of fostering political and intellectual subordination. The process «ultimately produces obedient thinkers – highly educated employees who do their assigned work without questioning its goals. Professional education is a battle for the very identity of the individual». The experience can be brutal. Schmidt argues that graduate schools attempt to break individuals into politically subordinate roles to prepare them for employment, undermining independent thinking. That's one of the reasons, he argues, that there is a high attrition rate from the country's graduate schools (over 50%).

Schmidt notes that there is an enormous gap between the opinions of professionals and their professional opinions. The engineer, for example, who believes that corruption is common among politicians will freely offer that opinion, but the political scientist fears saying any such thing. Schmidt provides a great deal of support for this

assertion, beginning with the point that Gallup Polls during the Vietnam War consistently showed that those with higher levels of formal education were those most likely to support the government's position about the war. He argues that while there are plenty of liberal professors on campus they are generally «very conservative on work issues», especially issues like democratizing the workplace which might question their professional authority. Schmidt says salaried professionals tend to be «liberal on distant social issues, issues over which they have no authority at work and no influence outside of work».

In my work on *Dow Chemical* I've discovered this to be overall true. For many professors at Michigan universities, *Dow Chemical* is not a distant social issue. *Dow* is a big benefactor, well known with its name visible throughout the campus. During these difficult times in higher education funding, university administrators actively court *Dow*. The end effect is that *Dow* becomes a workplace issue for many academics. To cross *Dow* under these circumstances is to risk cultivating the animosity of your superiors in the hierarchy.

ACADEMIC CULTURE TRIVIALIZES ACTIVIST WORK

In an interview Johnston is not optimistic about academic culture's abilities to prepare students for the perils of non-academic applied work. In an interview she said that the «ever-expanding continuum of engagement», that is currently underway in anthropology will likely result in more censorship and backlash against applied anthropologists (in McKenna 2008e).

Johnston points out that academic culture «trivializes the importance of this work», while, at the same time, the engaged anthropologist struggles to find disciplinary support in dealing with backlash, which can range from papers that cannot be published (and thus cannot advance careers) to disinformation campaigns, character assaults, threats, even murder. She cites the execution of a Colombian anthropologist in 1999, killed after studying displaced persons from a proposed energy development. He was shot by three masked gunmen at a faculty meeting. But the more common forms of retribution and retaliation come in the form of lost jobs, lost careers and lost health. «While anthropology is a powerful social persona (in Hollywood, public consciousness, legally mandated reviews, etc.) in terms of numbers, it is a very minor discipline. The American Anthropological Association has only about 11'000 member s compared to the American Economic Association with 21'000, or the American Psychological Association with over 150'000. This means that when it comes to power (who gets the most research grants, who gets to serve as the dominant social science voice in the corridors of power, etc.), anthropology is a very minor afterthought» (in: McKenna 2008e: 18). And yet there is much room for resistance, she adds. «We have an unusual power because as a social personality anthropology/ists have captured the public imagination. There is a cachet to the title, to the opinions emanating from ‹An Anthropologist.› So backlash is not only a matter of an unprepared, unforeseen, poorly played hand, but also a matter of threat, and how best to silence that threat. Anthropology is a very loud mosquito buzzing around the head at night. There is a lot of power there» (ibid.).

A BURGEONING MOVEMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOURNALISTS?

It is interesting that the push for anthropology and journalism often comes from students. That is true for the California State University-Fullerton where students organized a «Society of Anthropology in Journalism» recently. That's also true at the University of Arizona where Hecky Villanueva told me, «A number of us here at the University of Arizona have long debated the relationship between anthropology and popular writing». They insist that anthropologists must write in accessible styles for diverse audiences. In their 2007 paper *Lessons from New New Journalism* (Burke 2007), Villanueva and four student colleagues reviewed «the work of five popular nonfiction writers to determine the extent to which their approachable writing styles are compatible with anthropological rigor and nuance».

It is noteworthy that many anthropologist/journalists are not well known by their potential colleagues across the discipline. These are, however, important models of anthropologist/journalists who need to be contacted and engaged. For example, Barbara Nimri Aziz is host, executive producer and anthropologist for WBAI radio-Pacifica. Cambridge-educated Gillian Tett, PhD, is a journalist for Britain's Financial Times. And Maria Vesperi, a former reporter, is a cultural anthropologist who specializes in the analysis of contemporary social issues and the communication of anthropological ideas to the public. She recently co-edited, with Alisse Waterston, *Anthropology Off the Shelf: Anthropologists on Writing* (2009).

In Europe it seems to be easier for anthropologists to gain access to the dominant media. As Jeremy MacClancy, Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University in the UK, said in an interview, «If anthropologists

have something to contribute directly to journalism, then the doors open for those who know how to write. Personally, my colleagues (e.g. Professor Joy Hendry, a Japanologist, and Simon Underdown, a Paleobioanthropologist in my department) and I have found it relatively easy to get on national BBC radio programs and sometimes into the national press, but only when we are able to illuminate clearly a current affair. In France, Marc Abélès used to write frequently for the French quality press. In Spain, anthropologists, like many intellectuals there, can have a significant presence, e.g. Joseba Zulaika in the Basque Country, even though he is based in the Centre for Basque Studies, Nevada» (in McKenna 2009c: 27).

MacClancy mentions obstacles: «Many anthropologists, especially younger ones, do not know how open the UK national press and media are to approach by anthropologists». Then there are «pressures to publish and other increasing demands on our time; a very understandable fear of being made into ‹Dr Rent-a-quote›; little (albeit increasing) recognition for public anthropology by Heads of Faculty; and lack of successful models to emulate» (ibid.).

MacClancy's view, while important, does not delve into the nuances of doing journalism as discussed in this article. Anthropologists need to become the insurgent border crossers themselves. In this light all anthropologists need to reclaim the work of one of the masters of social science, Robert Lynd. In 1939, Lynd, author of the groundbreaking Middletown studies (the first full bore ethnography of a US city), wrote a book that is less well known, but just as important. *Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture* (Lynd 1939) is as relevant today as the moment he penned it. In it he wrote that, «[T]he role of the social sciences is to be troublesome, to disconcert the habitual arrangements by which we manage to live along, and to demonstrate the possibility of change in more adequate directions […] like that of a skilled surgeon, [social scientists need to] get us into immediate trouble in order to prevent our present troubles from becoming even more dangerous. In a culture in which power is normally held by the few and used offensively and defensively to bolster their instant advantage within the status quo, the role of such a constructive troublemaker is scarcely inviting» (ibid.: 181f.). In the context of 1939 Lynd conceived of a social scientist as a kind of muckraking journalist studying up and writing up about power and corruption, despite the attendant risks.

Anthropologists need to rethink «public pedagogy» and «journalism» along these lines. On a practical level, academic anthropologists need to bridge with communications departments and create courses and programs in *Anthropology & Journalism* to help create the critical public intellectuals of the 21st century. Such programs will not only attract journalism majors to anthropology but will help equip students with skills to popularize critical knowledge. Anthropologists also need to thoroughly study the historic contours of the mass media in order to grasp the cultural logic of the media system. Essential books are *Manufacturing Consent* (Chomsky and Herman 1980), *Inventing Reality* by Michael Parenti (1992) and *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (McChesney 1999). Following Susan Allen, if anthropologists value democracy they must work with a broader social movement and organize politically to take back the media to reclaim the public sphere. One radical academic journalist, Bob McChesney, has established a well received public radio program called *Media Matters* on Illinois Public media. Anthropologists can learn from him. At the very least anthropologists should approach the communications departments in their universities and petition for airtime or programs in collaboration with other critical academics. These are but small reforms in a larger effort that is needed to revolutionize education and public practice in the social sciences and anthropology.

The glaring paradox of professional anthropology graduate programs is the following. The profession claims that they want more public anthropologists but the prolonged ritual initiation into the guild (of nine years or more on average) greatly discourages public intellectual work like journalism! It revolves around the impulse of urgency. During this seemingly endless rite of passage, a sense of urgency is largely «cooled out». Those graduate students who want to write urgently for the public are forced to keep that inclination repressed for up to a decade. Those who cannot suffer this humiliation often leave for activist work outside of the PhD environment. In this manner the profession selects for professional scholars not citizen scholars. In fact, it is sometimes the case that when academics speak out as civically engaged journalists they can suffer reprisals. In an ideal world, universities, as democratic public spheres, would protect scholars who engage in public pedagogy, not subdue them.

Public anthropologist Nancy Scheper Hughes whose own journalistic writings and / or collaboration with journalists have, especially over the Organs Watch Project, proven effective says, «Those who want to be public anthropologists – just do it! But don't expect to be rewarded for it. Instead, consider it a precious right and a privilege» (Scheper-Hughes 2009: 1).

That is no longer acceptable. The culture of anthropology needs to create an army of public pedagogues and muckraking journalists and reward them for so being.

Indeed, as Rylko-Bauer and Singer (2006: 188) argue, the historical successes of «pragmatic engagement» must be reclaimed for the 21st century. «For applied anthropologists, the commitment to action is a given; the challenge lies in continuing to find ways of acting more effectively and ethically while linking the specificity of local problem solving to larger sociopolitical contexts». At the very least, why can't academic anthropologists write for both audiences, academic and lay? Why not turn each and every academic article into a form of public writing as well? The hard work of research and writing the «first draft» has already been done. Moreover, why not be professionally rewarded for doing this public pedagogy work? In order to prevent the «end/s of anthropology» one must confront these issues head on. Anthropologists need to reflexively study the cultural contexts of their own life worlds. Educational theorists Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) have a name for this: critical ethnography. Anthropologists need to seriously evaluate how capital over-determines their profession and analyze how domination distorts subjectivities and colonizes the rhythms of everyday life. And they need to act as border crossers into the larger culture. After all, the larger culture is acting on them.

One thing is certain. We need a new wave of writers and journalists, unafraid to do the most radical thing imaginable: simply describe reality. Their ranks will largely come from freethinkers, dissenting academics and bored mainstream journalists who rediscover what got them interested in anthropology in the first place: telling the truth.

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