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Chapter 6

The Anthropologist as Storyteller

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OF MELTED WATCHES AND MONOPOLIES

At the workshop in Stockholm where I presented an earlier version of this chapter, I found inspiration for my talk in an unexpected place. The day before the workshop, fellow panelist Paul Stoller and I toured the Stockholm Museum of Modern Art. Anticipating a pleasant diversion before the hothouse of our conference, we were amazed to see our prior images of surrealist artist Salvador Dali expand dramatically beyond what we had known of his *oeuvre*. The iconic melted watches and lobster phone of my memory were quickly replaced by all manner of other objects. We saw women's fashions and magazine covers that Dali had designed; we learned that he made commercials and films, wrote parodic newspapers, designed an exhibit for a world expo, and was even a contestant on a U.S. game show; he also used his own body as a canvas in cultivating his famous moustache. Dali's restless imagination impeded him from settling into a single genre; his playful engagement with all these genres surely contributed to his genius.

We anthropologists might learn from Dali's creative spirit. In the academy, until recently we largely left unchallenged the hold that the scholarly article and monograph have long held on our discipline. Of course, when led by creatively thinking editors, scholarly journals can themselves become sites for scholarly innovation (Dominguez 2010). Even so, the academic journal and its book-length counterpart have inherent limitations that even innovative editors acknowledge (Dominguez 2010). Yet notwithstanding the occasional adventurous scholar who tries writing in other genres from time

to time, in effect the combined dominance of the scholarly journal and monograph have long constituted a veritable monopoly. Over a century ago in the United States, the famous Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 effectively restricted the reach of monopolies in business¹—but we have not passed our own Antitrust Act in the academy. Still, anthropologists have begun to challenge de facto the notion that the scholarly journal article and book-length monograph embody the only legitimate means to share knowledge. In exploring this point, let me begin with a brief autobiography.

In high school, I fancied myself a poet. Writing poetry allowed me to sort through all manner of adolescent angst. A national magazine even published one of my poems, “Worry Stone,” that put a name on my teenage anxieties. My best friend also loved to write, and together we founded a literary magazine, *The Purple Dragan*, that (literally) cranked out issues for a good two years, thanks to an office mimeograph machine that my friend’s businessman-father allowed us to use.² A few years later, speaking to my love of writing, the college I chose to attend boasted the nation’s strongest undergraduate curriculum in creative writing, and most academic classes substituted semester- or year-long research and writing projects for tests. The unusual curriculum attracted teachers who encouraged creative approaches to scholarly material.³ The most enthusiastic scribbled comments I recall receiving from a professor accompanied a Chinese art history class paper I wrote that opened with a dream I’d had about the paper topic—Neolithic-era Chinese bronze vessels—and the meanings my dream had suggested for the designs on the ancient goblets and bowls.

So I found myself in some shock in graduate school, when faculty feedback on my papers looked drastically different. Far from penning anything as creative as a dream-based interpretation of Karl Marx or a poem about Max Weber, my uses of the first person in my class papers remained restricted to such scholarly phrases as “In this paper, I will argue that . . .” or “I find this argument problematic insofar as . . .” Even so, on the first paper I wrote for a History of Theory seminar, all such phrases received angry-looking red strikethroughs, accompanied by suggested revisions such as “It will be argued that” or “This argument is problematic insofar as . . .” In case I missed the logic to the red-penned marks, my professor noted that any use of the first person was inappropriate in academic writing. Period. I remember staying after class to discuss our divergent writing strategies. My instructor remained adamant about this line-in-the-sand-I-could-not-cross. Faced with a clear choice—write in the first person, or remain in graduate school—I retrained myself to hide behind passive constructions and went on to produce hundreds of pages of scholarly writing suitable for obtaining a doctorate as a social scientist.

Further sidelining the human foundations of ethnographic research, my late-1970s doctoral program offered no course in how to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, beyond a technical (albeit helpful) course in field linguistics. My classmates and I heard snippets of more realistic scenarios of what to expect in the field from some of our professors, who peppered their office hours, and sometimes their class lectures, with stories from their fieldwork experiences. Victor Turner and his wife Edie warned me about snakes hiding in thatched roofs in rural central Africa, Roy Wagner injected Melanesian Pidgin into his lectures, and Chris Crocker counteracted his French structuralist persona by joyfully recounting (and sometimes demonstrating) dancing in Bororo villages from his fieldwork in Brazil. Senior graduate students regaled us at parties with their own field adventures and disasters: a West Africanist scared us with his claim that he'd spent months learning how to say Hello (thanks to very complicated greeting patterns), while eating nothing but rice for a year and deploying CIA-style tactics to penetrate closely guarded cultural secrets; a North Africanist alarmed us with his confession that the spoken Arabic he encountered in the streets of Morocco had little relationship to the standard Arabic he'd spent years studying in the United States and Egypt; by contrast, a Central Asianist loved recounting the pleasure he took in playing the traditional horse-racing game of *buzkhashi* in Afghan villages (cf. Azoy 2012). But none of these adventures—or the light they might shed either on the societies these scholars studied or on the fieldwork process itself—made their way into the work we read by our professors, or even our older peers. Our takeaway lesson: write theory, and save the dramatic, scary, or charming stories for parties and the occasional classroom lecture.

While building up my tenure dossier, I made this lesson my mantra and kept to the straight and narrow, producing two scholarly books and enough journal articles to satisfy my tenure committee (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988; Gottlieb 1992). I even turned down an offer from a trade press in New York to publish one of those books, after the chair of my tenure committee warned me to run, not walk, away from that tempting offer. (The lack of the talismanic peer review in the acquisition process would have doomed such a book as *Dead on Arrival* to my tenure committee.) Still, while writing up my field materials in the language of science for peer-reviewed scholarly journals, memories of my (always intense and often tumultuous) fieldwork tugged at me, beckoning me to revisit the Beng in a more humanistic register than that which I had used in writing about them thus far.

It was not just the poet in me who was dissatisfied with my writing decisions, but also the political activist. I had chosen anthropology as a career that encourages us to boldly rethink social institutions and explore novel

solutions, with the goal of increasing equality and decreasing exploitation, from social to ecological. In the rain forests of West Africa, I had found lessons that I thought my fellow citizens in Euro-America might find inspirational. Commitment to community ... ingenuity in the face of material deprivation ... attention to mind-body connections ... respect for elders ... devotion to the memory of ancestors ... energy to recycle everything until it becomes undeniably unusable ... assertion that human activity has a notable impact on seemingly unconnected natural processes ... constant awareness of the spiritual side of human life ... insistence on treating infants and toddlers as full persons—these were among the many ethical principles and lifestyle commitments I admired in Beng villages. But if I couldn't induce even friends and relatives to read my academic writing about these life lessons, how could I hope to reach a broader audience beyond the small group of scholars already interested in the issues I explored in my professional works?

And so, while publishing the books and articles that had the greatest chances of earning me tenure, I secretly began a different sort of writing. During the fifteen months of my first research stay in Côte d'Ivoire, my fiction writer-husband Philip Graham had frequently suggested—often in the middle of our latest efforts to cope with the challenges of making human connections in such a different cultural world—that we write a book together about our experiences. Later, back in the United States, in spare moments we each jotted down notes about incidents that remained seared in our memories, and Philip patiently reschooled me in aspects of writing narrative that my graduate training had squelched. Mentally revisiting the Beng, I started writing my heart back into the lessons I had to impart—this time, via stories. Slowly, we fashioned a text of alternating first-person-singular narratives in short, successive sections, so that each of our stories followed the other's while allowing us to explore our individual experiences and reflections. One day I timidly mentioned this co-authored parallel output to a senior colleague—who immediately urged me to divulge nothing of this endeavor to any other colleagues until I had received tenure. And so I concealed the fact that Philip's literary agent had sold our co-authored memoir, now titled *Parallel Worlds*, to a major New York trade publisher, and I received tenure solely on the basis of my scholarly *oeuvre*.

A few years later, that “trade book” proved troublesome when a committee discounted it in evaluating my bid for promotion, precisely because it lacked references and footnotes. The fact that the book had by then won the Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing may have further doomed it from helping my promotion case—for the members of this committee, clear writing for a broad audience apparently served as a mark against a text.

Only when I demonstrated that the book had been widely taught in graduate-level courses were my colleagues on this interdisciplinary committee convinced that our memoir had scholarly merit; the fact that it had also been taught, in its first two years in print, in over sixty undergraduate-level courses was deemed at best irrelevant, and at worst a further sign of negligible scholarly value.

What is it that makes the academy so nervous about becoming “popular” in the wide arena beyond the immediate charmed circle of fellow scholars?

FROM RETREAT TO REVIVAL

In high school, the urge to “be popular” overcame many of us as otherwise reasonable teenagers. Motivated by the dream of joining whatever friendship circle with which we craved to be associated, we might have studied the walking and speech styles of our most popular classmates, drunk more beer than we liked, pretended interest in the weekend football games, taken after-school and weekend jobs to earn money for the latest fashion trend. At an earlier stage, even we academics yearned to be popular.

But something happened on the way to the academy. Perhaps moved by a range of fears—oversimplification, overgeneralization, distortion, misquotation, vulgarization—many of our colleagues have learned to disdain popularity beyond the invisible but nonetheless real walls of the academy. And sometimes they have good reason to be wary. As Wendy James has pointed out, in writing for a broad audience, authors often “produce Punch and Judy versions of some of the classic texts” (1996: 91). If we don’t “dumb down” our texts ourselves, others may do it for us—in the process, wantonly misinterpreting in appalling ways. For example, Dominique Casajus (1996) has documented how the work of Louis Dumont was misappropriated by some ultra-right forces in France as endorsing hierarchy and condemning egalitarianism—an interpretation Dumont roundly rejected. Given the possibility of such troubling misinterpretations, anthropologists may follow the “once burned, twice shy” principle.

Yet scholars in other fields are often less nervous. Philippe Descola (1996) has pointed out that both physicists and historians often seem far less wary than do anthropologists when it comes to spreading understanding of their discipline. Joy Hendry (1996) has further speculated that it may (ironically) be because anthropologists classically paid attention to demographically small, rural, seemingly “exotic” societies that we remain afraid of being mocked as antiquarian—and, thus, have retreated from the public gaze.

It is a twofold retreat. Not only do many among us never even consider writing for a nonspecialized audience; we may even resist the attempt by journalists and other writers to popularize our findings for us, and we often condemn their attempts, once made. Perhaps we are nervous to have the tables turned on us: in effect, to be used as informants. Howard Morphy (1996) suggested that this reaction occurred with Bruce Chatwin's popular book about Australian Aboriginal religion, *Songlines*, which received an icy reception from most of the informed anthropological community—in Morphy's view, unjustifiably.

We may be at least partly responsible, then, for the fact that our opinions don't matter much to journalists when they seek "experts" to comment on all manner of issues confronting modern society.⁴ If we are consulted at all, it is usually the archaeologist who fields questions about an early hominid find; very occasionally, an Africanist cultural anthropologist may be questioned (when the political scientists have run out) about the latest crisis in a seemingly "other" country such as Rwanda or Somalia. Rarely are properly anthropological issues that lie at the power-heart of the modern world the occasion for anthropologists to be tapped for comments in the mass media. The "Arab Spring" uprisings, the housing crisis that has produced downward class mobility in some 750,000 formerly middle-class homeowners in the United States, the Occupy movement, the epidemic of eating disorders among teenage girls and young women—all these contemporary issues and many more speak to anthropological expertise, yet (at least in the United States) the scholars quoted in the major newspapers and interviewed on the major television news shows on such issues are rarely, if ever, anthropologists.

While we often shy away from such publicity in mass media contexts, I suggest that even scholars yearn for a certain level of popularity—in our own community. Who among us does not at least occasionally sneak furtive peaks at citation indexes and the bibliographies of colleagues' books and articles, to count up references to their own work? And what is this effort if not a primitive, post-secondary-school rite rooted in a yearning to join that ever-elusive in-crowd? Were we not trying to find a place in the "restricted code" of fellow scholars (Bernstein 1964), we would publish our work anonymously or pseudonymously (Campbell 1996). The problem enters when we lose control of the limited circle of admirers.

Still, all this is starting to change. Since the time that my promotion committee questioned the value of a book intended for a broad audience back in 1997, the discipline of anthropology (along with some others) has begun reassessing its priorities to expand its audience. It may remain impossible to earn tenure at research-oriented campuses on the basis of popular

rather than scholarly writing, but writing for a broad readership increasingly garners value even in elite institutions. If it won't win a junior colleague tenure, work aimed at the mythical "general reader" is now frequently valued at least as complementary to scholarly texts. In my own department, far from being concealed by nervous junior colleagues, professional blogs, photography exhibits, dance performances, theatrical productions, and DVDs have all weighed in on the positive column in assessing tenure and promotion cases in recent years.

No longer are most of us content to write ethnographies that are, as Jeremy MacClancy wrote of an earlier generation of scholarship, "boring, and ... virtually unreadable" (1996: 237). No longer is it a badge of honor for many of us when a friend or relative expresses excitement on hearing about our research, only to confess (or at least try to hide) boredom after dipping into any of our actual (scholarly) publications. Fewer among us are content to write scholarly texts that turn off ordinary readers despite the fascination of our topics.

Moreover, fewer academic publishers are willing to publish such works. Anthropology editors at four of the major university-based presses in the United States have told me that their "bottom line" print runs have increased significantly in recent years. In past days, a scholarly author could count a book a success if it sold 500 copies. Nowadays, that number is up to 1,500 or even 2,000, by the major academic publishers' reckoning. To sell more books, these editors now advise authors: "More stories, less theory." For our *homo narrans* species, good writing sells, and that means, in one way or another, good stories.⁵

And many among the generation of new scholars-in-the-making are listening to the editors. Indeed, more graduate students I know from my own and other programs increasingly express a desire for either a nonacademic career, or a career that combines academic research with nonacademic projects. In both cases, their goal is to use their expertise to make a difference in arenas beyond the classroom. For many, key to success in achieving this aim is honing the ability to write for readers beyond fellow scholars.

In fact, the last dissertation-writing workshop I led for advanced doctoral students in cultural anthropology renewed my hope for reviving and expanding interest in the discipline. I had become familiar with the projects and writing styles of that group of students before they left to conduct their year or more of fieldwork in either partly or wholly non-English-speaking spaces of Africa, Latin America, and Europe. From doctoral seminars they had taken with me, I had previously found the English writing style mastered by most of this group of scholars-in-the-making rather turgid. Substituting excess syllables, nested dependent clauses, theory-laden jargon of

the moment, and passive constructions for clarity, these young authors had mastered the required fussiness of scholarly writing early in graduate school and seemed confidently headed toward careers in which they would labor to replicate the wordy pretensions of academic-ese that we often feel obliged to read and pretend to love.⁶

But in working through early drafts of these students' dissertations-in-progress, I discovered that every one of the young scholars in my seminar had somehow become remarkably engaging writers of English since returning from their various fieldsites. In our seminar, they found themselves easily writing in the first person (some for the first time), telling stories from their fieldwork, and using dialogue, scene setting, and other classic narrative techniques to engage a reader in their scholarly themes—writing strategies that none of these student-writers would have dared consider before they departed for their far-flung fieldwork locales.

It is true that I had encouraged these recently-back-from-the-field students to approach the challenge of completing a dissertation by writing from the heart (Aronie 1998). As I had designed the workshop, the long-ago words of a graduate school professor had still resonated with me, over a quarter century later. After returning from fifteen months of living in the rain forest of West Africa to conduct my own doctoral research, I had hoped that the respected East Africanist, Ed Winter, might offer me helpful recommendations for how to write my dissertation.

"Alma, I just have one bit of advice," he'd offered. "Don't look at your fieldnotes."

"What?" Surely I'd misunderstood.

"Just write what you remember. Don't look at your notes. You'll remember the good stuff. The important stuff. You can always check your notes later, make sure you got the details right."

"Hmmm," I replied, and the senior scholar returned to whatever he had been doing.

Fat chance I'll take that ridiculous advice, I thought, and proceeded to write a dissertation steeped in the details of my thousands of pages of field notes.

It took me nine years to de-dissertation-ize my thesis enough to publish it as a book (Gottlieb 1992). But by then, I had also begun writing a book of a very different sort—that fieldwork memoir co-authored with my writer-husband that took as a starting point the emotional intensity that characterized our stays with the Beng people of Côte d'Ivoire (Gottlieb and Graham 1994). Over the years, that fieldwork memoir (*Parallel Worlds*) has sold thousands more copies, and has been taught in hundreds more classrooms, than has my revised dissertation (*Under the Kapok Tree*)—and for good reason. Composed dutifully while continually consulting my copious

field notes, my rewritten dissertation spoke to disciplinary issues but elided emotional ones.

Yet psychologists tell us that we humans live our lives at least as much in our feelings as we do in our thoughts.⁷ For example, when neuroscientist Antonio Damasio studied people who could no longer feel emotions due to brain injuries, he discovered that these individuals had difficulty making decisions about matters ranging from what to eat to where to live, despite being able to articulate rationally the advantages and disadvantages of their options (Damasio 2010).⁸ A recent theory of politics posits that a combination of emotion and reason accounts for the political stances we all take as citizens (Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen 2000). A growing number of cultural anthropologists now suggest that the same reality characterizes the methodological heart of our discipline—our fieldwork.⁹ That is, we bring our emotional biographies with us to the field, where they meet up with myriad emotional biographies of those in the communities we are studying. However else we might portray it, the anthropological field encounter can also be described as an emotional cauldron. Increasingly, anthropologists are acknowledging that it does not make intellectual sense to divorce affective considerations from our analyses when they are a key component of the experiences that formed the bedrock of our understanding. Accordingly, anthropologists are concluding that narrative and other writing genres may offer more accurate means to convey the full range of the human experience than do the conventional scholarly journal article and monograph. Echoing the wisdom of this growing interdisciplinary body of research, the best ethnographies, I suggest, engage our hearts and minds in equal doses. In urging me to adopt a dissertation-writing strategy that relied (however unconsciously) on this insight, my late teacher Ed Winter may have had it right.

Keeping his long-ago advice in mind when I designed the first in-class assignment to my dissertation-writing seminar, then, I exhorted my students to jot down notes about the most striking event either that had happened to them, or that they had witnessed or heard about, during their fieldwork. Maybe it was an ethical dilemma (theirs or someone else's)—or a trauma—or a challenge—or even just a conversation. Why did it affect them so strongly? What were their reactions at the time, and how did they perceive the situation now, months later? What did/might it teach them—and others—about the society they had studied? Would they include a discussion of this event or conversation in their dissertations? Why—or why not?

As I listed these writing prompts, I worried that this intellectual crowd would balk at what might have sounded like a Mickey-Mouse assignment devoid of the high theory they had worked hard to master in our demanding doctoral program. To further encourage them, I pointed out that if we ever

develop Alzheimer's, it will be such old, haunting memories that remain—that they stick in our minds for a reason.

“Later, you can analyze the reasons for the durability of a particular memory,” I assured them. “Later, you can support the big picture with relevant statistics and other details; later, you can add *caveats* and exceptions in footnotes and references galore. For now, just pick the memory that most stands out when you think back about your fieldwork, and write about it. If you write your passion, it will come out with excitement and energy.”

I need not have bothered with my words of encouragement. Well before I had reached the end of my prepared short speech, some of the heads before me were already face down, intent on their pages filling with ink; the others were staring at some distant, invisible memories they were wrestling to narrate. A half-hour later, the students all emerged from writing frenzies with prose that told intercultural stories of connection and betrayal.

One of the seminar participants read aloud a disconcerting but gripping scene of an entire community that had run in fear as soon as she had stepped out of the bus in front of the rural village she'd hoped to call home for the next year. In a more cheering narrative, another young scholar recounted how, in the course of conducting “native ethnography” in her hometown in South America, a wary market trader long reluctant to grant an interview had nevertheless shown up unexpectedly at a funeral to express her condolences when the fieldworker's own aunt died. A third student recounted her momentous decision to marry a resident of her fieldsite in the midst of conducting her research, and the ways this new relationship shaped her project. These potential dissertation snippets engaged the human side to fieldwork at the same time that they spoke eloquently—and movingly—to important themes redolent in the students' respective fieldsites; they also embodied broader theoretical issues important to the discipline. So different from the more stilted prose that these young scholars had mastered before they had left the country, these first stabs at dissertation writing were all the more impressive given that several of the students in question were not native English speakers.

Over the years, I have noticed a few such before-and-after writing conversions in returned-from-the-field doctoral students; but I had always chalked the transformations up to idiosyncratic developments in the lives of those young professionals. Now, seeing this group of advanced doctoral students collectively charting parallel intellectual transformations, I wondered what might account for this unexpected development that suddenly appeared systematic, even predictable.

Perhaps doing ethnography changes our “writing brain.” For one thing, in many research projects, cultural anthropologists either think continually

in a second language, or they commute between two (or more) languages while doing fieldwork. After a good year or more of engaging in such a demanding linguistic dance, something may happen in the brain to provide a new perspective on the structure and possibilities of English (or whatever language in which the anthropologist writes). Feeling more comfortable with a personal approach to writing may be one effect.¹⁰ If this hypothesis were ever demonstrated, we would do well to attend to the pedagogical implications, as teachers and mentors, to help returned-from-the-field students tap into such a newfound relationship to writing. Yet previous generations of mentors routinely endeavored to squelch such impulses in their students. Rather than encouraging early dissertation writers to think through the issues they found most challenging in the field and write about the process of confronting them, the previous inclination of many faculty was to direct students to elide such reflexive discussions and (as I experienced in graduate school) instead aim for a definitive analysis, bypassing any personal odysseys of intellectual discovery along the way.

A related factor that may contribute to the phenomenon I observed in my ABD students concerns the intellectual frameworks that inspire our writing. For a year or more, fieldworking students live far from the graduate school immersion in scholarly literature and conversations that characterized their previous three to five years in a doctoral program. Returning to the academy, many students may feel newly comfortable in pursuing a different relationship to the written word. Again, such an impulse was not regularly promoted in previous generations of anthropological instructors. Yet if it informs the returning-from-fieldwork brain, perhaps our graduate programs should take these changes into account and invite—or even train—students to write their theses differently from the usual model. Incorporating critical personal reflections and the politics of their field experiences into the heart of their analysis, rather than relegating such discussions to a preface or even a mere footnote, might produce dissertations that would at once engage more readers, humanize distant Others, and add transparency to what might otherwise remain opaque field methods.

A third factor that might explain the writing changes I saw in my ABD students concerns more emotional considerations. In some cases, a traumatic incident in the field may have so shaken new fieldworkers that they felt compelled to write about it in some deeply personal way. The usual distanced academic prose just won't capture enough of such events to satisfy either author or reader. In my case, I recall the first professional talk I gave (to the New York Women's Anthropology Conference), after I returned from fifteen months of doctoral research in Côte d'Ivoire: I detailed a public rape I witnessed in "my village," and my anguish at how to react at the time. Although

the incident haunted me, I found no way to include any responsible discussion of it in my dissertation. It remained imprisoned as a troubling memory until, a decade later, I discovered the memoirist's style, which allowed me to explore honestly my reactions to the traumatic moment (Gottlieb and Graham 1994: 151ff.). The fact that witnessing or (in other fieldworkers' cases, experiencing) sexual violence has produced riveting narratives by female anthropologists evoking their experiences to explore powerful theoretical issues suggests that emotionally engulfing events can be turned into compelling platforms from which to think frankly about the workings and bodily effects of power inequities in ways that more conventional scholarly accounts cannot accomplish (di Leonardo 1997; Winkler 1991, 2002). Other returned fieldworkers may not experience such a single dramatic moment but nevertheless may have felt every aspect of newness so deeply, and attended so deeply to these feelings, that the cumulative result compels them to work through their emotions on the printed page. In either case, encouraging students to pay attention to the emotional core of their fieldwork involvement is likely to produce rich texts that leave an impact, and much to contemplate, well beyond the last page.

I take the writing transformations I observed in my last group of dissertation-writing students as emblematic of important changes occurring in our discipline. The group of young authors I shepherded through their final stage of training may have felt inclined to try new modes of writing because of the liminal moment they straddled, for all the reasons sketched above. Still, unlike those of earlier generations, these advanced doctoral students did not resist such transformations but, rather, embraced them, and they still seem inclined to incorporate their new writing voices in what they are writing for publication. In short, during my first years in the profession, the clamor for alternative writing formats, while increasingly loud, remained marginal, with few among us feeling courageous enough to venture beyond the strict contours of the scholarly article or book. Today, the new generation of scholars seems inclined to write from the heart as much as from the mind.

WRITING AN ENGAGED ANTHROPOLOGY

I see both reasons for and signs of transformation well beyond my dissertation-writing seminar. In recent years, the discipline's flagship professional association in the United States, the American Anthropological Association (AAA), has strongly encouraged anthropologists to share our expertise with a broad public and increase our relevance, and has created a host of new initiatives to offer realistic means for achieving this new goal.¹¹ At the heart

of all these exciting programs to considerably enlarge the audience for anthropology lies a mandate for creating texts to engage readers beyond doctorate-bearing scholars. No matter how compelling our topic, an article of overstuffed and jargon-laden prose further weighed down by endless caveats and footnotes will surely constrict our readership to a small group of professional colleagues. By contrast, an accessible text will easily draw new readers to our research and our insights. And who better than anthropologists to provide the comparative framework linking the global and the local, to humanize both near and distant Others, to explain seemingly inexplicable behavior ... in short, to propose creative ways to address the extraordinary challenges of the twenty-first century?

The mandate to communicate our knowledge to a broad public becomes more realistic if we provide training for scholars in the writing skills that can convey the content of our research in an inviting manner. Thankfully, more and more scholars now teach such writing skills. Workshops on writing ethnographic fiction, poetry, and other “alternative” genres that the Society for Humanistic Anthropology sponsors at the annual American Anthropological Association conference are increasingly oversubscribed, as was an intensive, week-long workshop in ethnographic writing held for some years every summer at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon.

Each time I have (co-)taught such workshops (often with Philip Graham), I have been amazed to see the passion—even desperation—that enrollees brought with them. In initial discussions about why participants had joined the workshop, we typically hear stories from anthropologists who describe themselves as refugees from an intellectual space that some said felt like a textual prison. I recall one senior colleague—a department chair—describing in a shaky voice the ethnographic novel she had been working on for a decade but had not yet had the courage to show anyone, until she brought it, with much trepidation, to our workshop. The most junior member of that workshop—a young woman who had just graduated with a B.A. in cultural anthropology and was taking a couple of years off before applying to graduate school—listened to this senior colleague’s story with alarm. She wanted to continue writing in a variety of styles (I recall a moving fictionalized ethnographic account of a fishing community she knew well) and suddenly worried that graduate school might silence her writing voice. Still, some graduate programs are less conventional than others; new emphases in public anthropology now characterize increasing numbers of graduate programs.¹² Increasingly easy access to well-written op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, magazine articles, radio pieces, satires, and so on provides further tools that encourage us to experiment with writing that can draw readers to our work beyond the small circle of colleagues who already share our scholarly interests.

THE CLASSROOM WRIT LARGE

Efforts to engage a broader public in anthropology can include the classroom. In my own life as a teacher, and inspired by growing interest, I introduced a seminar on Ethnographic Writing into my department's curriculum some years ago. In the workshop, we take as our starting point Geertz's observation—so obvious yet, until he made the case, mostly overlooked—that scholars are also authors (1988). From that basic assumption, we focus on the ways in which scholars-as-authors may take unexpected license to cross the seemingly unbroachable frontiers that divide writing genres. Exploring a selection of anthropological texts that experiment with writing ethnography to expand the readership of the discipline, students discover a range of writing genres practiced by early anthropologists from Edward Sapir (a poet-linguist) and Zora Neale Hurston (an anthropologist-folklorist-novelist) to contemporary scholars pushing the bounds of academic writing. Complementing our reading of experimental texts by respected scholars, students try their hand at ethnographic styles of their choosing by writing a set of interpretive texts in three different genres about a society they select for their focus. Over the years, I have seen undergraduate students decide to major in anthropology after discovering the world of writing options available to them; other students—declared anthropology majors who had already decided to abandon the discipline after they graduated—have found themselves reinvigorated about the potential of their major and have applied to graduate schools in anthropology when they realized the field offers more writing options than they had assumed.

Beyond these excited undergraduate students, every year several graduate students confess that although they would like to take this course, they are reluctant because they fear it would not help them with their qualifying exams or, further down the line, that “alternative” writing styles will not help earn them tenure. Still, each time the course appears on the schedule, a couple of intrepid graduate students in cultural anthropology enroll. Our local experience echoes a national trend: courses on ethnographic writing such as this are sprouting up in top-rated anthropology programs across the United States and even internationally.¹³ As colleagues increasingly create similar courses, our programs will increasingly train students to take the craft of writing seriously.

Skeptics might wonder about the merit of such courses. Yet, as I have suggested, ethnographic writing workshops often (re)excite students about the writing process, and about anthropology. Beyond this welcome emotional effect, the texts I have seen students produce are sometimes little short of spectacular. For example, a play featuring Roma people in Russia written

by an undergraduate student at once thoughtfully highlighted and problematized ethnic stereotypes and “othering” discourses about this historically marginalized group by embedding serious issues in a moving drama (Parada 2008). Another memorable piece (this one by a doctoral student) creatively considered the challenges of globalizing forces in the lives of East African refugees in the United States, and of anthropologists who might wish to study their situation, by creating a narrative embedded in an online, interactive Google map (Balakian 2011). When students share such innovative pieces in class with one another, their classmates often marvel at their colleagues’ ingenuity and find themselves inspired to produce creative pieces for their next assignments. In such courses, students learn that if they hold ambitions to write for readers beyond colleagues with doctorates in their subfields, the possibilities of alternative genres await.

* * *

The example of Salvador Dali beckons. Beyond award-worthy journal articles and monographs, anthropologists are staking out new territory by dipping into other genres, in a dual quest to reinvigorate traditional readerships and find new ones. Some anthropologists venture beyond even these genres to create their own. Back in the 1960s, not content with the conventional genres, the ever-maverick Gregory Bateson went so far as to invent a charming genre of writing that he called “metalogues,” in which he wrote partly fictionalized conversations about the most arcane of topics—conversations that he supposedly held with his partly imagined daughter (whose real-life model grew up to become anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson) (G. Bateson 1972). While few anthropologists have followed Bateson’s lead in crafting such a creative format, plenty try their hands at writing ethnographically informed poetry and short stories. In fact, the Society for Humanistic Anthropology now offers annual awards in these two genres, with winning pieces published in its peer-reviewed journal, *Anthropology and Humanism*.¹⁴ Beyond these conventional literary genres for adults, the world of writing offers a plethora of genres that we normally exclude from our scholarly purview, though we may engage them daily outside our academic lives. Dieting books—advice columns—repair manuals—greeting cards—package warning labels—shopping lists—bookstore receipts ... the kinds of texts that literate people now encounter daily abound. As participants in what we might term a veritable riot of literacy, we scholars are intimately acquainted with a dazzling array of texts of every shape, size, and sort. Limiting ourselves to a single genre—the scholarly article (or its book-length equivalent)—dramatically reduces our options for how we can convey our knowledge, and to whom.¹⁵

Acknowledging the small but growing corpus of alternative writings, I invite you, as reader, to find your own jig to dance with genre. Perhaps even the shyest among us might be encouraged to disseminate our knowledge and our analytic acumen more broadly if we classify the world beyond the academy as the classroom writ large. With that model, a much larger cohort of students awaits.

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NOTES

1. The United States law has its analogue in most other modern nations; for some overviews and discussions, see Hylton and Deng (2007), C. James (2001), and Joelson (2006).
2. Unlike me, this friend, Miriam Sagan, became a professional poet (see, e.g., Sagan 2004, 2007, 2008).

3. Perhaps not coincidentally, another contributor to this volume, Kirin Narayan, also attended this very small but distinctive college as an undergraduate student.
4. This journalistic invisibility is especially relevant in the United States; it is less so in several other nations in which public anthropology boasts a more robust and valued profile; on Latin America, see Chelekis (2015), Ribeiro (2012), Uquillas and Larreamendy (2006); on Europe, see Afonso (2006), Barth, cited in Borofsky (2001), Eriksen (2006, n.d.), Hastrup et al. (2011), Howell (2010), Rogers (2001); on India, see Mahapatra (2006).
5. The notion that storytelling is central to our survival and nature has been proposed by thoughtful observers of the human condition in diverse times and places. For a selection of such work, see, for example, Coles (1989), Eckstein and Throgmorton (2003), Fisher (1985, 1987), Gabriel (2000), Gottschall (2012), Niles (1999), Sandercock (2003), and Scolari (2009).
6. For some provocative critiques of the insults to the language wrought by scholarly writing in English and pleas for more reader-friendly writing, see, for example, Germano (2013), Leonard (2014), Limerick (1993), Nida (1992), Ruben (2012), and of course the Bible of all English style guides, Strunk and White (2011); for a playful parody of academic writing, see University of Chicago (n.d.).
7. For a small sampling of this growing literature, see, for example, LeDoux (1998), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Solomon (2003).
8. For additional research on the role of emotion in decision making, see Isen (1993), Markic (2009), and Sanfey, Rilling, Aronson, Nystrom, and Cohen (2003).
9. For some examples, see Ahmed (2004), Boellstorff and Lindquist (2005), Dickson-Swift et al. (2007), Dutton (2007), Hovland (2007), Hubbard et al. (2001), Hunt (1989), Irwin (2007), Kleinman and Copp (1993), Kulick and Willson (1995), Monchamp (2007), Mossière (2007), Pertierra (2007), Rosaldo (1984), and Shrestha (2007); also cf. Wulff (2007).
10. Research by psychologists on the “bilingual brain” now demonstrates other distinctive cognitive profiles that suggest that this hypothesis bears pursuing (e.g., Bialystok et al. 2004; Craik et al. 2010; Koussaie and Phillips 2010).
11. Although based in the United States, the AAA increasingly (and intentionally) attracts members from around the world, in an effort to internationalize the organization that was vigorously promoted by Virginia Dominguez during her term as president (2009–11). A Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology now also addresses “the increasing number of anthropologists in and outside the academy doing practicing, applied and public interest work” (American Anthropological Association 2015a), and a Committee on Public Policy encourages anthropologists to participate in public policy debates (American Anthropological Association 2015b). Furthermore, in the organization’s flagship journal (*American Anthropologist*), a new section of Public Anthropology Reviews further supports this increasing commitment to engage public issues by printing reviews of “anthropological work principally aimed at

- non-academic audiences, including websites, blogs, white papers, journalistic articles, briefing reports, online videos, and multimedia presentations” (American Anthropological Association 2010).
12. At the time of this writing, the list includes the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Oregon, Wayne State University, and the University of South Florida, among others. To increase the likelihood that members of the faculty in such programs receive tenure, the AAA has developed guidelines for tenure and promotion committees to use in judging efforts beyond scholarly writing (American Anthropological Association 2011).
 13. Such courses are now taught at the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, and the University of Wisconsin, among other premier doctoral departments. In Belgium, a short course in ethnographic writing that Philip Graham and I co-taught at the Catholic University of Leuven in 2002 attracted an excited cohort of international graduate students. The demand for such courses appears to be spreading across Europe.
 14. In recent years, cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has won the widely respected American Book Award for his poetry (Rosaldo 2007). Other anthropologists have written up their ethnography in the form of plays (e.g., Allen and Garner 1997; Saldaña 2005), memoirs (e.g., Behar 1993; Briggs 1970; Campbell 2001; Cesara 1982; Dumont 1978; Orlove 2002; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Tedlock 1992), literary novels (e.g., Narayan 1994; Stoller 1999), mysteries (Berger 1997; Nanda and Young 2009; Price and Price 1995), biographies (Crapanzano 1980; Shostak 1981), and “factional ethnography” (Sillitoe and Sillitoe 2009).
 15. In recent years, a few experimental works by anthropologists and other social scientists have begun to draw creatively from other genres to convey ethnographic information in lively formats. Examples include a graphic exposition of the discipline (Galman 2007), an imagined Socratic dialogue among European and African historical figures (Nzegwu 2006), an extended photo essay (Behar 2007), a political cookbook (Fair 2008), imagined childcare guides *à la* Dr. Spock (DeLoache and Gottlieb 2000, Gottlieb and DeLoache 2016), and an ethnographic “flip book,” children’s book–style (Taylor 1998).

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