Introduction

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Recommended Citation
DOI: 10.56702/MPMC7908/saspro4001.1
Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/southernanthro_proceedings/vol40/iss1/2

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Introduction

Robert Shanafelt

Consider this. If the topics of papers published in anthropology in a given year were jumbled up, smeared together as in an inkblot, like the Rorschach blots of psychological fame, what would we see? Would there emerge in our perception a rather natural-seeming vision of four or five fields? What would the patterns we observe reveal about the nature of our interests? About the field in which we are a part?

Rorschach images are open to interpretation, but that does not mean they lack regularity in response. There are ways of seeing the images that are statistically ordinary and others that are unusual. There is both cultural and individual variation in this patterning. Of course, in anthropology as elsewhere, the way we see things is also only partly constituted by the forms that are given to us. How we see anthropology also reflects historical trajectories of teaching, research work, publications, academic fashions, and our individual dispositions. As self-reflective anthropologists, we might think that we are very sophisticated in understanding this, but it still could be that there are implicit ways we have been taught to see the patterns that lead us to overlook certain other forms that appear obvious to others who have been taught differently.

An inkblot metaphor for our academic discipline is probably too amorphous and vague to capture the nuances of our field and to be
of pedagogical use. The more popularly used metaphors are often geographic and geometric. The textbooks commonplace is that of anthropology as a subject with fields, areas, and subdivisions—as if we are describing a plane geometry of farmlands and housing units. Anthropologists also talk regularly of foundations and layers. It is not uncommon for those who support a combined biological/cultural approach, for example, to speak of culture as being built upon a biological foundation.

Perhaps most insightful and sophisticated are metaphors suggesting movement and transformation. Here there may be pathways, crossroads, and links. (In the next section I’ll get to the bridges.) The image of a ship exploring an intellectual sea is also an interesting one. Discussing their work in a newly conceived “sociocultural psychology,” Rosa and Valsiner (2007, 692) write, for example, that “A research field is indeed similar to a ship. It sails somewhere—sometimes only the direction may be known, but not the route, nor the harbor of arrival.” Yet even with this you cannot avoid the geographical tropes. Even a sea of “open systems—biological, psychological, social, and epistemological—is always wrought with unexpected expansions into new areas of challenges” (ibid.).

Clearly, though, ship and sea metaphors need not always be so nice and positive. The weather and the waves are not always calm. In recent years, our anthropological ship has been facing some rough weather; we’ve been going through our own sea changes, although whether they represent tidal waves or dangers from oily seas depends on your perspective. For those who have feared the worst, talk has turned to breakages and threats to existence. Back in the mid-1990s, for example, noted British anthropologist Robin Fox argued that anthropology was becoming so fragmented that it was nearly in a “death grip” (Fox 1997, 196). Speaking more specifically about ethnography, the widely-cited ethnographer Bruce Kapferer argued
more recently that “the postmodern movement in anthropology accentuated a rupture between the anthropology of the past and a reinvented anthropology more relevant to the times” such that there was the proverbial risk of “throwing the baby out with the bathwater” (Kapferer 2007, 189). At the extreme, critics from cultural anthropology have called four-field anthropology a “myth,” “a noble lie,” and have suggested it was just “sentimental.” Most vociferous are the views of many of those who contributed to the volume by Daniel Segle and Sylvia Junko Yanagisako (2005). They find little value in biological perspectives and archaeology, seeing four-field unity not as a positive thing but as something that needs to be rejected. Indeed, such perspectives reflect literal divides, manifested publicly by the division of some prominent departments. Most notably, anthropology divided into cultural and biological wings at Duke (1988) and, a decade later, at Stanford. And there have been rumblings of a similar division at Harvard, with the actions for division this time apparently coming most from those with more biological interests (Shenk 2006). Still, this level of divisiveness may represent more of the statistical anomalies of the anthropological Rorschach than of the major trends. Stanford, for example, was reunited as a department in 2007. In addition to whatever epistemological reasons there may be for this, there are practical, generally budgetary, rationales for our continued unity as well. And, even division is not necessarily the “end of anthropology as we know it” as the split of a department does not necessarily mean a complete loss of four-field perspectives (Balée 2009). Nonetheless, the seriousness of the divide in anthropology should not be underestimated. More recently, for example, the executive board of the American Anthropological Association caused controversy by eliminating any reference to science from the association’s mission statement (Berrett 2010).
As a matter of research, it has long been recognized that very few anthropologists are actually involved in study that combines the subfields (Balée 2009; Stocking 1988). Indeed, analysis by Rob Borofsky (2002) suggests that anthropologists rarely churn their research waters with material from other seas; his survey of 100 years of research published in the flagship journal *American Anthropologist* shows that fewer than 10 percent represented collaboration across the subfields. Apparently, even for those who maintain holism as an ideal, Boas and Kroeber have been rather more like mythic figures to be looked up to than model scholars to be emulated.

Still, I would argue that even if most of us do not have the time, the skills, or the inclination to work collaboratively across the fields, this does not invalidate the goal. Myth, in the sense of Malinowski, is an ideal and a charter for behavior. It does not have to be followed literally to be useful. And, as with ritual enactment, mythic enthusiasm may wax and wane. Indeed, things at the present historical moment do not look as divisive and lacking in unifying perspectives as they did in the 1990s. Perhaps we have weathered the most severe storms of our epistemological crisis and we are now facing calmer weather; and we are not just traveling to and from different ports. There are a number of trends in anthropological thought that are signs of this. In the next paragraph, I outline and reference at least eight types of studies that are being formulated by new understandings of nature-culture interactions.

First, the dichotomies between mind and brain, or mental and material, that have pervaded the discipline seem less certain in an era of functional MRIs and brain machine interfaces that allow thoughts to move robots (Blakeslee 2008). Second, the more wide-ranging but related contrasts formerly made between nature and nurture are less compelling when we take into consideration the potential impacts of nutrition, stress, and other environmental factors on gene expression
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and the possible long-term impacts of what is more broadly being termed epigenetics (Jablonka and Lamb 2006). Third, older notions of sociobiology that appeared to be over-reliant on reductionist representations of genes as selfish and models of all living things as individual maximizers have been modified by new empirical evidence demonstrating complexities such as epigenetic influences and evolution by symbiosis and modifications of the homeotic genes of embryological development. This rethinking extends also to the assumptions of neoclassical economics and the new field of behavioral economics, which itself has been demolishing the myth of the rationally calculating individual. Fourth, there are new developments in primatology, ranging from how chimpanzees and orangutans express significant cultural variability (Wrangham et al. 1996; van Schaik 2004; Langergraber et al. 2010) to how monkeys work more cooperatively and appear to be more content when receiving equitable rewards (Van Wolkenten 2007). Fifth, there are studies that indicate that evolved cognitive proclivities shape and limit forms of religious expression (Boyer 2002; Atran 2002; Barber, Wayland, and Barber 2004). Sixth, there is new emphasis on how we learn. For example, we seem to have evolved proclivities to imitate in terms of frequency and prestige that may create and foster apparent cultural maladaptations (Richerson and Boyd 2005). Also key here is the discovery of mirror neurons, specific neural networks first discovered in monkeys that unconsciously track the familiar behaviors of others. Seventh, instead of representing science as pure reductionism, there are more nuanced visions of nonlinear science and complexity (Deacon 2012; Delanda 2006; Mosko and Damon 2005; Kohring and Wynne-Jones 2007). Last, there is increasing study of how sociocultural and psychobiological processes interact to produce symbolic capacities and language. In one form, this concerns the perspective of embodied semantics, particularly, but not exclusively, about how
language works by means of analogies that come from physical and bodily experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Thibault 2006; Deacon 1998; Bickerton 2009). In another, archaeological, form it is about how a “symbolic mind” developed in prehistory from emergent processes of engagement with material artifacts (Renfrew 2008) and their metaphorical relations (Gamble 2007).

In a brief piece written for the Bulletin of the General Anthropology Division of the American Anthropological Association, Walter Goldschmidt suggests an image of anthropology that nicely captures a sense of the unity in complexity. This is the image of the bluebird and the nature of its coloration. Indeed, he suggests that anthropologists should adopt bluebirds as a kind of totem. He reasons as follows:

There is no pigment in the bluebird’s wing. Put a feather in a mortar and break it down and there is no blue stain but just a pile of grayish crumbs. The color, the very essence of what makes the bluebird so attractive, is made by the structure of the molecules on the feathers. The surface is made of crystals that reflect only blue light. It provides the perfect metaphor for what gives anthropology its brilliance. Our unique quality lies in the four-fold structure of our discipline; our brilliance is that when we speak, we reflect knowledge from the classic and troublesome four fields of our discipline. (2006, 1)

Here we have the description of a combination of factors that are similar to the ones that initially intrigued me about the inkblot image. There is a given structure, but it is seen differently from different perspectives. What is particularly intriguing about the bluebird image is the way it incorporates physical structure and a process of perception and interpretation. This gets us away from what Richardson and Hanebrink, in this volume, describe as the metaphors of
geological layers and strata often used to represent the relationship between biology and culture. While culture must certainly depend on a biological foundation, in practice it is so intermeshed with this biological foundation that it appears more as the lustrous color of a feathered wing than as the sheen of a well-built house.

BUILDING BRIDGES: THE PAPERS

This volume consists of a set of 10 papers all but one of which was presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society (SAS) in Savannah, Georgia, in February of 2010. SAS was formed in the late 1960s primarily by cultural anthropologists based in the US South who wanted a regional organization that would be inclusive of the four-field approach, one that would be open to the participation of students and faculty alike. In 2010, the theme of the annual meeting was “Ports, Hubs and Bridges: Key Links in Anthropological Theory and Practice.” The idea here was that in anthropology there are bridges and links worthy of discussion in a variety of ways. Important interconnections are to be found not only within the discipline, among the various types of anthropologies, but also between the anthropological professional and those others anthropologists teach, rely on for information, or otherwise focus on in their research.

It must be stated at the outset that the results of SAS’s call to “talk bridge building” did not lead to a sudden change in the character of our meeting—as in the past, most of the papers were ethnographic or based on ethnographic accounts. Nonetheless, the theme did foster more across-the-subfields interaction than usual, and there were some interesting and unanticipated results of thinking of anthropology in terms of the metaphor of the bridge and the link. Following up on this, the papers in this volume elaborate upon bridges that can
and have been built in theory, pedagogy, and practice, and in a variety of cultural contexts. They have been organized here into three groups. Part I consists of papers that emphasize theory and conceptual issues; part II is for papers about teaching and practice; and, part III is for papers with an ethnography focus.

Theory and Concepts

The three papers in this section represent quite different perspectives on the theme of anthropological interconnections, but they are also all about showing the interconnections between frameworks often divided. The first essay was solicited by the editor specifically for this volume because of the long commitment the first author, the late Miles Richardson, had to anthropological holism and because of his distinguished efforts to forge links between academics, students, and the general public. His death on November 14, 2011, was a great loss to the Southern Anthropological Society and to anthropology and humanism more generally. The paper “Traversing the Great Divide: The Embodiment of Discourse between You and Me,” which Richardson developed with his former student Julia Hanebrink, is characteristic of Richardson’s style in that it combines logical insight and zest for all things anthropological and philosophical with poetic flair and good humor. Its key point is that we are simultaneously biological and cultural beings and that the divides we may feel as individuals mask a deeper interconnection between the psychological and the social. There is much food for thought here even in this brief essay; the interested reader may delve more deeply into these issues by perusing Richardson’s (2006) Being-in-Christ and Putting Death in Its Place: An Anthropologist’s Account of Christian Performance in Spanish America and the American South, which, despite its title,
contains much about biological anthropology and an evolutionary perspective.

In “Culture as Information: Not a Shaky Link but a Stable Connection,” I briefly discuss what I believe to be a neglected conceptualization of culture, that of culture-as-information. This perspective has an advantage in that links and flows across borders are as anticipated as boundary-making barriers. In particular, I stress several bridge-building features of this view of culture. These include that information processes pervade life, and perhaps even physical processes, and that an information perspective can foster a less anthropocentric and more naturalistic approach to the discipline without being essentialist. Provided that one sees these processes as emergent and synergistic rather than reductionist, one need not rely on the static geological metaphors that Richardson and Hanebrink critique.

In his article “Human Scales,” Thomas Brasdefer considers another major issue, that of the role of scale in the social sciences, and takes up venerable questions about the relationship between maps and territories and how to link or network the scales of small, medium, and large, and all in between. Quite rightly, he argues that a proper understanding of how scaling works is necessary if we want to retain the possibility of valid generalization without ignoring the investigation of the details of the unique. Brasdefer provides a history of debates about scale in human geography, ethnography, and sociolinguistics and concludes with a brief case study relating these issues to policies concerning Native American languages. While his interests are primarily historical and ethnographic, a sense of scale that takes into consideration the local while still taking into account the global is clearly a concern for many other types of analysis.
Teaching and Practice

Teaching and engaging the broader community in anthropological perspectives have probably never been more important than they are today. Taking this into account, in this volume there are four papers that concern teaching and practice. The first is an in-depth assessment of college student interpretations of religion and evolution. The next two concern particular methods for teaching and practice, with the second being primarily archaeological but also highly interdisciplinary and the third being focused on teaching students about the contemporary situation of a particular place in Africa. The fourth paper concerns the production and dissemination of ethnographically informed film geared toward fostering positive social change.

In “I Didn’t Evolve From No Monkey: Religious Narratives About Human Evolution in the US Southeast,” H. Lyn White Miles and Christopher Marinello describe some of their findings from a 12-year-long investigation into student attitudes about evolution and religious cosmology at the University of Tennessee. They report here analysis of the responses to one particular survey item made by a subsample of 846 students, with 759 narrative explanations (from a total sample of 4,662 students). In this item, students chose among statements that gave them five perspectives about evolution and religion on a “creationism-naturalistic evolution” continuum and then were asked to provide a written justification of their response. In line with other studies, Miles and Marinello find substantial resistance to change of deeply held, historically ingrained, worldviews; and, indeed, fewer incoming students now accept the scientific facts of evolution than did a mere decade or two ago. Newer to this study is the focus on how attitudes toward evolution reflect students’ intellectual development and senses of certainty. Among the findings are that “nearly two thirds of students gave flat one-sided statements or
acknowledged the other side of the issue but made no attempt to relate their choices to their identity, major, or understanding of science or religion.” While a majority accepted the facts of evolution, many were comfortable rejecting prehistory and other ancient history with the justification that scientific evidence could be a complete fabrication. We may also note here that such a disconnect between evidence and belief is probably not unrelated to the large gap found between scientific knowledge in other areas and what is generally believed in popular culture, such as beliefs about the realities of the global environment and climate (Elrich 2002, 5-6; Elrich 2010). More recently, a “backfire effect” has also been reported whereby exposure to facts that contradict one’s worldview may have the ironic effect of actually strengthening that worldview (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). In discussing this research, Miles and Marinello also provide details on how they use their results to more effectively teach about evolution in the classroom.

Because of its complex nature, the next paper, “Enculturating Student Anthropologists Through Fieldwork in Fiji,” is given more space than others in the volume. Written by a team that includes professors and students, this paper is really a set of papers within a paper. The first section describes the nature of a rather extraordinary model of interdisciplinary collaboration in pedagogy and research. Based in part on the project called MATRIX, “Making Archaeology Teaching Relevant in the XXI Century,” the project involved University of Alabama at Birmingham students and professors working together to develop a field school to investigate the prehistory and ethnoarchaeology of marine resource use on four islands of the Lau group in Fiji. In the first year of the project, both undergraduates and graduates did research in archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, ethnography, and history relating to garbology, toponomy, foodways, traditional knowledge systems, and environmental/ecological change;
and their initial findings are given in separate sections here. All this demonstrates that the project is not only a great model for interdisciplinary teaching and research but for the practical application of that knowledge as well.

In the next paper, “Making Africa Accessible: Bringing Guinea-Bissau into the University Classroom,” Brandon D. Lundy focuses attention on how he works in the classroom to overcome misperceptions about Africa and on the techniques he employs to engage students in the kind of understanding that comes from rich ethno- graphic experience. The paper thereby represents a good example of how anthropological reflexivity—learning about yourself in the process of learning about another—can be put to use in motivating students to feel a sense of connection to others, particularly others who are too often ignored in the popular media or portrayed in terms of negative or distancing stereotypes.

With the paper “Causes Mini-Film Festival: Anthropology for Public Consumption” by Matthew Richard and Andrea Zvikas, the focus of the papers shifts to public education and issue advocacy. It describes the development of a mini-film festival that had been created in recent years by Matthew Richard and his students at Valdosta State University. In this paper, the authors show how the festival brings together the skills of fine-grained ethnographic observation with fine-grained filmmaking. The films screened are self-written and produced and no more than 90 seconds in length, and they have the goal of focusing on a particular social problem or issue of concern to a local community. On the one hand, as Richard puts it, making such films gives students the “opportunity to apply their developing understanding of social forces in order to bring about transformation in our society.” On the other hand, the very success of the Causes festival indicates that others outside the student base
are also getting involved in the use of film to stimulate awareness of issues and thereby to foster positive change.

**Ethnographic Emphasis**

Part III has papers that are location-specific ethnographies. They reflect some of the diversity of ethnographic approaches that one can find today in anthropology but also show linkages between different research areas, worldviews, and particular theoretical concerns. The first paper is set among Pentecostals in Guatemala, the second among the human visitors to a Florida zoo, and the third among students in Japan. In terms of topics, one is about understanding the meaning and form of Christian religious practice today, one is about adult and children’s perceptions of apes, and one is about the nuances of a linguistic concept in Japan.

C. Mathews Samson’s paper, “Searching for the Spirit: Researching Spirit-Filled Religion in Guatemala,” is the work of a seasoned ethnographer who has devoted years of his life to the study of a sociocultural phenomenon that is both local and transnational. As in other parts of Latin America and the world, Guatemala has seen a rapid growth in Protestant denominations that are often known under such labels as Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Renewal in the Holy Spirit. Taking his cue from the work of Bruce Lincoln, who sees religion and religious institutions as more nuanced and flexible than they are often given credit for, Samson finds that members of the “Full Gospel Church of God,” among whom he has worked in Guatemala, cannot be characterized simply as inward-looking and otherworldly. Rather, they are involved in particular forms of networking and bridge building in their own way. And here “the ethnographic stance is one in which the ethnographic lens becomes a bridge
between one culture and another, sometimes serving as a bridge for cross-cultural, and even intercultural understanding.”

In the paper with the most peculiar title here, “Ooo Ooo, Aah Aah,” I offer a brief analysis of the types of things children and adults say while watching bonobos and other primates at the zoo. I suggest that the conversations people have with each other about the apes and the observational statements people make about ape behavior and appearance reflect both unconscious, mostly accurate, identifications with the animals and projections onto them of commonly understood human behaviors and attributes. In this, there are two major patterns, which I label “Mirrored Behavioral Analogies” and “Misconceived Interpretive Schemas.” The paper also hypothesizes a biological basis for a projection (or, more precisely, mapping) of human body and behavioral schemas to bonobo body and behavioral schemas.

Undergraduate students often have opportunities to do locally based fieldwork only, with their ethnographic observations taking place near their homes or schools. But students come from diverse backgrounds and have differing travel opportunities. Lauren Levine’s paper here is based on her experiences as an exchange student during a nine-month period in Nagoya, Japan. It focuses on trying to understand what linguistic anthropologist Michael Agar has termed a “rich point,” a cross-cultural difference that is not easy to frame in the familiar terms of one’s native tongue. Given the bridge-building theme, “The Kegare Concept” is a particularly rich concept to attempt to link or translate. Do the Japanese understandings of kegare equate to Western senses of “pollution,” “cleanliness,” and “propriety”? Is the concept employed in same way among students today as it was in traditional Japan? Or, is it better to understand kegare in terms of the meta-analysis of human concepts of pollution put forth by Mary Douglas and others? As is typical with other conceptually
rich points, the answer given here is not “Yes or No” but “yes and no.”
To begin to unravel what kegare is all about one needs to think in
terms of various domains. Kegare is peculiarly Japanese, but it is also
linked to universal ways of thinking. It is reflective of tradition, but
it is also reflective of our changing times. Interestingly enough for a
volume about links, study of kegare (and thinking back to the find-
ings of Douglas) reminds us that combing categories previously kept
distinct often makes many people feel uncomfortable.

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