ABSTRACT: This essay examines changing practices of public anthropology in terms of their relationship to the political economic processes of global capitalism and neoliberalism as well as changes in the position of anthropology within a hierarchy of knowledge-producing disciplines. Examining my own experiences in different historic regimes, I argue that today’s call for a public or engaged anthropology partially conflates two contradictory processes: the drive to raise the value of disciplinary expertise and stake a claim to authority in the world of policy elites located in the state, media and academy; and the drive to use contemporary theories and methods to offer cogent critiques of the very institutions which are gatekeepers for public knowledge. We often find ourselves examining actors in the same professionalized settings in which we ourselves are situated and within which we seek more authority. I argue that we should continue to work on two tracks simultaneously with serious analysis of their contradictions. While we conform to dominant public questions, producing knowledge in ways that fit mainstream formats of communication, we must also invest significant effort in finding ways to help audiences reframe urgent issues by working to better convey contextualized understandings of how power and politics work through sociocultural processes. As a result, we will become more mindful of the specific structural constraints and cultural processes which work against broadening and reframing popular understandings.

KEYWORDS: knowledge production, neoliberalism, public anthropology, public policy, universities, urban communities

Recently, I helped to select an honouree for a lifetime achievement of ‘actively pursuing the goal of solving human problems using the concepts and tools of social science’ awarded by an anthropological organization. Nominee’s careers varied and we had to grapple with a vast array of knowledge types, modes of dissemination and ways to measure impact, such as scale (national, global), the numbers of people reached and whether the activity was direct and immediate or indirect and gradual. In 2008, the award was given to Orlando Fals Borda, a Colombian social scientist, for his scholarship on violence in Colombia, his development and sustained global dissemination of a practice called PAR (participatory action research) and his recent co-foundation of a political party shortly before his death. These activities had long marked him as an activist social scientist. This experience brought home to me how our ideas and practices of publicizing anthropology have varied over time, always shaped by particular historic moments. This made me reflect on the differences between the ‘public anthropologies’ I have experienced from my initiation into the field until today.
As anthropological work has expanded beyond its original focus on the ‘non-West’ (‘the rest’) to encompass global processes, there has been an increasing call for a more engaged or ‘publicized’ anthropology as reflected in this issue as well as, in the case of the U.S., the University of California Press series and several academic Public Anthropology programmes such as those at American University, and the University of Hawaii. What accounts for this intensification of interest now and how does this effort differ from earlier periods of disciplinary efforts to make our knowledge useful?

This article examines changing practices of public anthropology in terms of their new relationship to the political economic processes of global capitalism and neoliberalism as well as changes in the position of anthropology within a hierarchy of knowledge-producing disciplines. Examining my own experiences, first as an anthropologist in the making in the 1960s and then in a faculty role as a North Americanist urban ethnographer training graduate students after the 1970s, I will examine U.S. anthropology’s politically variable engagement. I argue that today’s call for a public or engaged anthropology partially conflates two seemingly contradictory processes. One is the drive to raise the worth of disciplinary expertise and stake a claim to authority in the world of policy elites in the state, media and academy using their institutional cultures and practices. The other is to communicate theories and methods and through them cogently offer critiques of the very institutions which are gatekeepers for public knowledge in order to reframe public debates.

As our academic work becomes more complex, it focuses not only on the local but on multiple social fields variably embedded within institutional hierarchies. This means that we often find ourselves examining actors in the same professionalized institutional settings in which we ourselves are situated as we seek more authority in them. There are two responses to this paradox. The first is to reframe our questions and produce knowledge in ways that fit mainstream questions and formats of communication. The second is to invest significant effort in finding ways to help multiple audiences to reframe urgent issues by working on new practices to better convey how power and politics work as complex cultural processes. Should we do both? If so, how can we deal with the contradictions?

The COPP (Committee on Public Policy) of the American Anthropology Association (AAA) was created in the 1990s largely to take on the first purpose, to communicate knowledge to a public policy audience. As an early member and chair of the committee, I recall discussions and activities focused on understanding what the media wanted and efforts to get policymakers and journalists to call on anthropologists as automatically as they consulted economists and political scientists. The success of this ‘branding’ of anthropological expertise required us to tailor messages to fit the truncated forms favoured by legislative staff and national advocacy organizations, policy briefs and executive summaries, with numbers and diagrams preferred. Such forms eliminated critical insights about the effects of context, process and contingency. Counting hits on web sites, along with media quotes and sound-bites, became proxies for measuring our impact in spite of our implicit ethnographic sense that we should follow the process through further to explore how information is taken up, reworked and used or rejected.

Reframing critical human issues, those that are globally and nationally urgent in the early twenty-first century, is a more daunting task. Since the 1970s, global and national inequality, instability and violence have grown, become normalized and seen as a ‘naturalized’ part of the human experience often explained through biological imperatives. Ethnographic work has demonstrated how behavioural and medical expertise overwhelmingly locates blame for critical problems in pathologies of the self or of bad ‘cultures’, thereby rendering political-
economic structuring processes and power relations invisible. Anti-poverty policies that induce instability in the name of economic development work against the social capital that sustains poor families and helps reinforce distrust, the very element that ‘civic engagement’ theorists argue is the cause of our most pressing problems. Ideas that directly challenge the dominant paradigms of policy experts, popular journalism and mass audiences are not taken up. Some anthropologists like Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson (2005) have tackled reframing public thinking head on through writing pointedly and accessibly for the public, but this is rare.

As we can see from this issue, many other anthropologists engage by directing knowledge to many smaller, more local and intimate audiences. Some model ways to communicate knowledge respectfully to students and ‘researched populations’ through in-depth, sustained, often face-to-face communication or the use of new electronic and visual media. Recently, several anthropologists have explored communication with their own colleagues in other disciplines with whom they share their professional daily lives (Strathern 2004; Lederman 2006), to explore the boundaries of disciplinary knowledges and ways to cross them.

In the following discussion, I use my early experience with older implicit approaches to the public role of anthropology because these still resonate with the dominant public image and expectations of anthropology and form what our cross-disciplinary colleagues pass on to students in spite of the changed nature of theory, methodology and action. I will then describe the changes I have experienced in my role as an engaged and ‘public’ urban anthropologist in the last two decades.

**Early Academic Training**

I was exposed to two very different ideas about the public role of anthropology as an undergraduate at Barnard College/Columbia University in the 1950s where I encountered two conflicting strands of the Boasian legacy. The first was the ethnography of historically particular ‘cultures’ and the second was Boas’ role as a public intellectual confronting the potential uses and misuses of anthropological knowledge to produce progressive change. At Barnard, my mentors emphasized salvage ethnography as natural history to produce academic knowledge of human variation by focusing on the authentic ‘ethnographic present’. I especially remember one class in which we read and heard about a timeless way of life in an isolated community all semester, only to be shown slides on the last day showing people with modern clothes, homes, appliances and canned food with no mention of the discrepancy between the two representations of culture.2

Recent historical analysis of Boas’ ‘public’ anthropology (Baker 1998, 2008; Pierpont 2004) reveals his role within public debates about concepts of human difference, especially race. Aiming to reframe academic thinking on this critical issue, he was one of the first among his learned colleagues to challenge the hidden pernicious implications of the scientific racism of his fellow anthropologists. His ‘public’ was a relatively small academically educated elite, the academics, professionals and businessmen/philanthropists who controlled the production and public dissemination of knowledge through exclusive learned societies, museums and academic institutions like the American Museum of Natural History.

Across the street from Barnard, in the Columbia General Studies programme, undergraduates flocked to one of Boas’ well-known students, Margaret Mead, who along with Ruth Benedict had carried on the drive to provide useful information for the nation or to educate the public about particular family anxieties. For example, both Mead and Benedict had earlier participated in the dissemination of anthropology directed toward the U.S. war and post-war
effort: Benedict through *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), a profile of Japanese ‘national character’, and Mead through an episode of working as the leader of the National Research Council food habits research for use in preparing to feed city populations who might be evacuated. In my college years, Mead (and Benedict) had expanded their publics by cultivating the post-war growth of U.S. college-educated professionals as a mass audience for their best-selling ethnographies and their regular columns related to childrearing and attitudes about sexuality in *Redbook*, a popular magazine for women. Later, Mead became a leader in exploring the use of documentary film as a form of communicating with the public. Their expansion of a popular audience had indirectly influenced many of us to enter the field.

Looking back to this time and place reveals an anthropology which un-self-consciously engaged in producing knowledge for its own sake, as well as making it useful for the educated elite by providing a comparative view of human nature which was shaped to address middle-class anxieties or to serve the nation in wartime. Obligations to publicize and make their findings useful for those whom they studied who were viewed as located ‘outside’ time and the West were missing, as revealed by the subsequent PBS Nova series *Anthropology on Trial* which was part of the post-1960s critical turn.

**The Modernization/Development Paradigm**

Moving on to Cornell University for doctoral studies, the world shifted. Here I encountered emphasis on the active, direct use of knowledge to produce change directly emerging within a new post-war technocratic optimism for ‘policy science’, which advocated using expert knowledge to engineer solutions to social problems. Policy science took on a mantle of ‘objectivity’ and ‘value neutrality’ through the use of probabilistic models and quasi-experimental research designs. In anthropology, this shift, as well as earlier wartime efforts, led to the self-conscious institutionalization of applied anthropology in the 1940s.

At Cornell, applied anthropology converged with the as yet unacknowledged relationship between the university and the Cold War state (O’Mara 2005). The state, as well as private foundations, supported the training of area studies experts through the National Defense Education Act or Ford Foundation programmes in area studies which supported ‘soft’ social science research both to ‘modernize’ and ‘develop’ the ‘third world’ in order to prevent insurgency, or, in the case of some work funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, to look explicitly for social indicators to predict insurgency (Wolf and Jorgenson 1970; Horowitz 1970). These projects paralleled the more visible ‘hard’ science research for Cold War defence.

In that moment, before the wide spread of post-1960s critical awareness which spotlighted critical theories of power, class, race and gender as well as theories of world systems and dependency, the Cornell-Peru Project, in Vicos Peru, directed by Alan Holmberg (Isbell this issue) used the literature of policy science to justify ‘participant intervention’ (Holmberg 1955) or linked research and ‘development’ in one methodology (Holmberg 1958). Replacing cultural relativity with eight ‘universal’ values or rights derived from Harold Lasswell, a pioneer in policy science, Holmberg and other applied anthropologists who were trying to stake a claim to membership in policy science, clearly accepted the scientific requirements of neutrality, objectivity and experimentalism by accepting its terms while attempting to justify and minimize the difficulties in reconciling ethnography and science.

This approach was markedly different from my undergraduate experiences in which both the impact of political economic transforma-
tion on the ‘researched’ as well as their capacity as consumers of knowledge was ignored in the name of cultural relativity. On the other hand, the project’s paternalistic top-down approach emphasized ‘techniques’ for managing change through which those outside history and modernity needed to be culturally manipulated to be moved minimally ‘inside’ before knowledge could be shared or co-produced in a participatory, collaborative way. In this case, the non-reflexive use of ethnographic knowledge to facilitate the entry and positioning of the project leaders at the top of the hacienda power hierarchy clearly dates the project as coming before the discipline’s widespread concern with power relations, and political critique.

Furthermore, by ignoring the impact of outside political economic structures in which the Vicos hacienda was embedded, the project constructed the community as isolated and living in a functionalist equilibrium. This was depicted in the widely shown film, *So That Men Are Free*, (Van Dyke 1962) made by CBS films which publicized the project and emphasized the triumphal heroic success of anthropology in bringing a group of peasants, described as living the same life they have since the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest, into the modern world. The effects of inattention to theories and actualities of power relations, regional, national and global politics or world systems was brought home when neighbouring hacienda residents, influenced by Vicosinos, began political action against their masters. They were met with violent reprisals by the hacienda owners and the state.

While varying in approach as to how anthropological knowledge should be deployed to bring about change, both of my formative academic settings were steeped in an earlier pre-critical anthropology that did not question or foreground issues of power and politics in knowledge production. Without a self-conscious critique of the ethics and politics of research and representation or a reflexive conceptualization of how to use knowledge for various publics, we did not anticipate the unintended outcomes of anthropology put to use.

**Attending to Power: Critical Anthropology**

The experience of ‘publicizing’, or making knowledge useful to the public, was very different in the first two decades of my work in the academy, roughly 1970 to 1990. It differed both from what had come before 1970 and from my experiences after 1990. In the following two sections, I will discuss these changes and their implications for the possibility of developing audiences or publics located in different positions in the local milieu in which I work.

The effects of several simultaneous and linked global engagements begun earlier: the Cold War, postcolonial movements, and domestic movements focused on race and gender inequality in the U.S., along with the importation of critical theories of power new to U.S. cultural anthropology, transformed views of research populations in the 1970s. Former bearers of self-contained ‘cultures’ became subjects of ‘third-world’ nations. The circulation of Marxist, feminist, anti-racist and postcolonial and post-structural critiques within anthropology and other disciplines signalled a sea change in the field as I began urban research on Philadelphia in the 1970s, soon joined by colleagues and students whose places of training had been infused with the ‘new wave’. While evocations of timeless ‘traditional culture’ still marked discourses of development practice (Edelman and Haugerud 2005, the justifications for incorporating new scales of urban, national and global political economies into our work grew. The practice of contextualizing ethnographic work within scales of structural power moved front and centre in ethnographic practice. The implications for the politics and
ethics of research were subjected to heated debates at contentious American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings, and in critical volumes like *Reinventing Anthropology* (Hymes 1972) throughout the 1970s. Debates centred on the power relations and responsibilities of ethnographers to the people they studied, as well as forcing a recognition of the unacknowledged implications of research in ‘hot spots’ whether they were framed as ‘pure’ and generated by theory or overtly complicit in counterinsurgency research (Wolf and Jorgensen 1970; Horowitz 1970).

Moreover, as Laura Nader (1972) exhorted us to ‘study up’, and urban anthropologists like Anthony Leeds (1994) exhorted ethnographers to place populations within nested power hierarchies and to look at dynamic intersections of structure, culture and agency, these issues became central to the critiques of the ‘culture of poverty’ as well as the early critiques of the use of ‘traditional’ culture to explain the failure of development projects. These debates moved ethnography towards incorporating both theories of power relations as well as ethnographies of encounters between ordinary people and institutions of power (e.g. Susser 1982). Anthropological discourse, before multi-scaled and multi-sited ethnography was seriously addressed, usually deployed a simplified dichotomy between two monoliths: the relatively unexamined ‘powerful’ and the ‘powerless’ – our normative research subjects.

Moreover, with the publication of many strong critiques of the ‘culture of poverty’ (Stack 1974; Leacock 1971; Eames and Goode 1977), many of us, not yet familiar with theories of power and knowledge relationships, were still steeped in a liberal belief that simply producing research and making it available would magically change hearts and minds. Scholars like Stack learned first hand about the political and epistemological barriers which existed as she struggled to publicize her findings, which directly challenged politically privileged presuppositions.

Philadelphia Public Anthropology: 1970 to 1990

As a faculty member at Temple University since the 1970s, my research agenda along with many Temple doctoral students has focused on the structural production of poverty and inequality in the city of Philadelphia and on the political use of raced, nativist and class-marked discourses to (mis)represent and divide the downwardly mobile residents stranded by late capitalism. As critics of the persistence of the ‘culture of poverty’ concept, our work encompassed poor people’s politics: resistance and social movements (Goode and Maskovsky 2001).

As the discipline continuously reframed its theoretical and methodological engagement with broader-scaled political economic structuring processes and the nexus of power and knowledge, our work became more complex as we added new institutional sites, multi-sited designs, and situated the work within emerging paradigms such as urban anthropology, North American anthropology, the anthropology of policy and transnational/global studies.

When our research populations were limited to the ‘powerless’ and our frameworks were less complex, efforts at publicizing knowledge were easier since there was less disagreement over the ‘common sense’ constructions of the problems of deindustrialization between anthropologists and those with whom we worked: colleagues in the academy, university administrations as well as city government and social service agencies.

Philadelphia’s reform project in the 1960s and 1970s was conceived very differently from today. What we now recognize as state-sponsored gentrification, and privatised uneven development (Smith 1996), redevelopment was discussed through national, not global Keynesian/Fordist frameworks. Deindustrialization was reversible if addressed through increasing the tax base and public investment. We counted on local political mobilizations to influence the priorities for such technocratic
‘fixes’ to generate jobs, and regenerate public services (Goode forthcoming).

At Temple University, researchers worked in interdisciplinary collaborations engaged in common cause. Two sets of research groups of faculty members in social sciences and humanities focused on the material, social and ethical effects of plant-closings and produced conferences, media coverage and two books (Raines et al. 1982; Hochner et al. 1988).

Temple at this time was a hospitable setting for this research. This urban university, located in the centre of an increasingly black and poor North Philadelphia, had an original populist mission of social uplift. It had served, inadvertently, as a key space for social movement organizing related to the civil rights and welfare rights movements (Countryman 2006). The administration had stood up to a threatened withdrawal of its new state funding stream, in the early days of its new status as one of three ‘state-related’ universities in Pennsylvania, when it insisted on hosting the national convention of the Black Panther Party in 1970 after the group was denied access to all the traditional convention venues in the city (Wachman 2005). In the 1970s, in response to a community protest against university expansion and low-income housing loss, the university had organized formal negotiations which resulted in halting new demolition and providing concessions related to access to public space, recreational facilities and the creation of a popular education institute.

Moreover, community organizing and social mobilizations were common within all the researched ‘communities’ with whom we worked as they engaged in linked citywide networks of neighbourhood action against downtown development, highway projects and encroaching gentrification (Goode and Schneider 1994; Goode and O’Brien 2006). In the spirit of responsibility to researched populations, anthropology and urban studies students worked alongside community organizers and neighbourhood umbrella organizations, to provide data and research skills to CBOs (community based organizations), to help them stay in front of real-estate housing speculation through mapping, acquiring and rehabilitating abandoned housing and to help create land trusts, write grants for competitive federally funded Community Development Block Grant programmes and to lobby for laws such as the Community Reinvestment Act to prevent banks from refusing to make home loans in poor neighbourhoods.

Within the Philadelphia Changing Relations Project in the late 1980s (Goode and Schneider 1994; Bach 1993; Goode 1998), teams of graduate and undergraduate students looked at the role of local organizations and city agencies in ameliorating or exacerbating tension between new immigrants and established poor white or racialised populations. The project provided insights about the unintended effects of multicultural programming (Goode 2005) and we publicized our findings widely to community residents, leaders of CBOs, front-line social service providers, city agencies and community leaders and residents through conferences, local and city media, lectures, op-ed pieces, and court testimony (Goode and Schneider 1994).

These two decades produced many instances of dissemination through one-time mass media forays into ‘public anthropology’ as well as many sustained collaborations with communities resulting in recommendations to prevent unintended consequences and misunderstandings between communities and service providers.

Globalism, Neoliberalism and Higher Stakes: 1990s to Present

In the last two decades, global inequalities, instability, violence and the U.S. public’s sense of urgency have grown to new levels as contradictions between culturally constructed ideals of peace, equality, social justice, and democracy, increasingly diverge from social practice in frightening ways (Lutz 2001; Gill 2000; Mas-
kovsky 2001; Collins et al. 2008) leading to calls for the primacy of ethical (Scheper Hughes 1990) and activist anthropology (Lyon-Callo 2004).

Simultaneously the theoretical models and methods of anthropology have broadened in scale to incorporate local, national, transnational and global scales simultaneously. By the 1990s, such concepts as globalization, transnationalism and neoliberalism had been theorized and ethnographically demonstrated sufficiently to complicate the simple black-and-white dichotomy between the powerful and powerless. The simple dichotomy was replaced with a desire to demonstrate ethnographically how power works through relationships between and within contested institutions and everyday life and to document the processes through which individual political subjectivity shapes and is shaped by discourse.

These paradigm shifts were linked to what was happening ‘on the ground’, in other words the material and discursive shifts shaping and being shaped by the rollback of the Keynesian/Fordist regime and the rollout of neoliberal and global discourse and practice (Harvey 2005). The critiques of neoliberalism foregrounded the displacement of Keynesian justifications of public investment and social welfare (by neoliberal privatisation), the withdrawal of state provisioning, and market solutions alongside discourses of personal responsibility, and the triumphant celebration of individuals who had successfully adopted neoliberal personas by making ‘good’ choices alongside escalating the blame and punishment for those who made ‘bad’ choices (Kingfisher 2002). There were many politically demobilizing effects produced by the new public/private relationships as well (Goode and Maskovsky 2001), leading to calls for an ‘activist’ engaged anthropology.

At the same time, anthropologists joined others (e.g. O’Connor 2001) in finding new ways to look at the politics of knowledge production and the effects of intentional technocratic ‘policy science’ and ‘social engineering’ on sociopolitical relations. The critical work of James Ferguson (1994) on development policy in Lesotho demonstrated that what was really important was not the explanation of why development fails but the ethnographic analysis of the productive nature of policy in practice. Looking at what programmes actually created as ‘side effects’ or instrument effects was a key to understanding how power and politics generated action and structure in situations of change. What happened could not be understood within the framework of the technoscientific apparatus of ‘development’ but had everything to do with existing political relations and political practice that is made invisible in the neutral professional discourse and practice of policy. Shore and Wright (1998) called for an anthropology of policy that uncovered the diagnosis problems in the off-the-mark blame discourses inherent in cultural constructions of policy targets, while Fisher (1997) through a review of ethnographic evidence about the workings of NGO advocacy groups raised questions about whether they were uniformly ‘doing good’ and about the variable links between NGOs and power structures.

As Temple students and colleagues mutually began to work within these frameworks which incorporated ways of addressing the operation of power through discourse, governmentality, ‘expertise’ and the coercive effects of ‘audit culture’ (Strathern 2000), our focus shifted from the ‘grass roots’ to social locations in the junctures where power-laden, multi-scalar institutions encounter city residents. Ethnographies like those of Gregory (1998) and Checker (2005) model linkages between historical process and encounters between differently located agents deploying varying discourses and political subjectivities.

New research developed by anthropology faculty members, postdoctoral and pre-doctoral students began to examine how neoliberalism, working through multiple local public/private economic development programmes and educational privatisation projects, sponsored by
state, market and civil society institutions, affected the civic engagement and politics of the poor (e.g. Hyatt 2001; Hyatt and Peebles 2003; Goode 2005, 2006; Maskovsky 2000, 2001, 2006; Goode and O’Brien 2006; Hardy 2006; Roaf 2007; Suess 2008).

These new frameworks were productive sources of new insights, but had the paradoxical effect of implicating and alienating our closest colleagues who, in spite of presumed similarity in social location, were following different intellectual pathways. Critical findings were more likely to be ignored, misunderstood or actively rejected not because of the old complaints about anthropology’s complicity with power elites but because we raised questions about more privileged sectors. Our colleagues would see themselves as implicated in the unintended effects of policy and this challenged the value of their expertise and their sense of themselves as well-intentioned problem solvers. That these actors and organizations were also experiencing loss of respect and caught in increasingly bureaucratized structures of constraint and accountability did not help. New paradigms created ‘noise’ and communicative distance between us and the more literal straightforward analysis of those with whom we had collaborated in city agencies, the academy, the media and local organizations. It was easier to reject the new frameworks as mystifying and anthropologists as arrogant and self-aggrandizing.

I observed the same actors who I have collaborated with for decades shifting their alliances as their organizations, whether local community, city government or academically based, restructured and took on neoliberal governance practices. Some local organizations were incorporated into new public/private power structures while others tried to mobilize political opposition. In the process, strong friendships and alliances were destroyed (Goode and O’Brien 2006). Similar political fault lines and epistemological disconnections grew in the university between faculty and administrators around the discursive and coercive effects of expertise and bureaucracy. Disagreements occurred within departments, and between Liberal Arts disciplines and professional or practitioner fields. At the same time, work speed-up left few opportunities to deal in-depth with these conflicts.

Unlike Boas who was offering a critique based on specialized knowledge and data acknowledged as ‘anthropological’ to demonstrate a distinction between race, culture and language or Holmberg who was contributing the normalized ethnographic knowledge of the ‘indigenous’ to a ‘science of policy’ as well as the interdisciplinary projects in neighbourhoods combining expected anthropological knowledge about ‘exotics at home’ with other disciplinary knowledge, new paradigms went against the grain for many publics. Expert colleagues, whose basic epistemologies were being challenged, along with the public-at-large could openly disagree with what seemed to be over-analysed and often mistaken interpretations of their own interpreted experience. Contemplating possibilities for bridging the gap in cultural constructions between long-term colleagues in academic and community circles was disconcerting.

Distance widened even more as the city and university were caught up in rescaling projects to become ‘global’. Neoliberal practices were widely deployed by the city and university throughout the 1990s as the public school system was ‘privatised’ and new forms of management and governmentality emphasized technologies of self-management, created exaggerated ritual celebrations of success and turned knowledge into technical skills (Urciouli 2006) while at the same time consolidating the level of the bureaucratic and ritual apparatus of ‘audit’ culture (Strathern 2000). These trends sacralise the truth-value and precision of metrics and mapping, and fail to distinguish between actualities that are better captured through contingent, contextualized and qualitative forms of analysis. In terms of those with
clout in the ‘information economy’ there was a cost-benefit deficit as well as a political disadvantage linked to complex critical analysis.

This was especially true at a public urban university like Temple in which the rapidly growing number and size of vocational and professional schools and faculties now dominate (Goode 2008). Subject to centralized accrediting agencies and marketing credentials of expertise, certainty trumps critique, now seen at best, as a nostalgic emblem of the Golden Age of the professoriate and at worst as the target of the movement against academic freedom.

As state funding shrank, Temple became more enrolment driven and pushed to upscale its student body and its physical plant. It also became enmeshed in property development as part of the city’s campaign to rescale itself as a ‘global’ city. The city and university worked in tandem to attract capital investment to the city and neighbourhood (ibid.). This once again changed the relationship between the university and its surrounding residential communities.

In this effort, university collaborations with the city and surrounding neighbourhoods were expanded and consolidated for new capital investment. ‘Civilizing missions’ through mechanisms like: ‘partnerships’ engaged in collaborations to beautify and landscape the environment, a School District contract to operate local schools, and the creation of medical and social extension services via clinics that also trained professional students. Most of all, a variety of incentives were given to develop community-based learning through recruiting student volunteers as interns and service learners. Some of these efforts were intellectual efforts at critical pedagogy such as the class which produced *The Death and Rebirth of North Philadelphia* (Hyatt and Peebles 2003) or the *In and Out* programme created by Lori Pompa. Others were part of the university’s neoliberal project of development. Often both interests wrestled for dominance in these endeavours.

The ‘ears to the ground’ ethnographic perspective on what was happening increasingly diverged from those of former colleagues and friends who had major stakes in programmes that became co-opted by the university. They often experienced the same everyday happenings, but interpreted them differently through lenses shaped by their professional training and position. Our views were silenced more by a lack of time or discursive space in which to examine mutually the diverging assumptions and frameworks about these projects. While anthropologists have recently begun to explore new ways to discuss difference with those in other knowledge-producing disciplines, the elite university contexts they describe are protected by specific institutional resource investments (Strathern 2004) or by the privileged elite working conditions of universities whose ‘brand’ is premised on space for ‘Ivory Tower’ contemplation (Lederman 2006). The working conditions and frequent resource emergencies in publicly funded urban universities in the U.S. often work against this. Such increasing obstacles to reaching across disciplinary boundaries leads many anthropologists to turn inward and to talk, publish and read in smaller networks amongst those who share their paradigms.

**Conclusion**

Before the Second World War, U.S. anthropology’s public was an elite audience seeking authoritative knowledge, within which Boas, as an outsider, struggled to become authoritative. His students were authorities to the state and nation at war and then spoke to a new mass middle-class audience through mass media. Some anthropologists who sought to enter a new technocratic policy elite in ‘development’ and ‘modernization’ and with varying degrees of self-awareness, were drawn into Cold War research.

Following the critical reaction of the 1970s, engendered by the as yet under-theorized forces of ‘globalization’ and ‘neoliberalism’, analysis shifted to political economic, post-colonial,
feminist and post-structural critiques, placing power at the centre of analysis. This disciplinary crisis pushed anthropologists to address power issues reflexively, to work more closely with research populations as the first audience for their understandings, and to question their role vis-à-vis dominant political and economic structures. Moreover, the last decades of the twentieth century saw anthropologists working on problems in networks and institutions socially located outside the nation state, and framed their work and its dissemination in terms of multiple levels of scale and multiple socio-spatial sites.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. academy the very global neoliberal conditions which produced the critique also fortified the pre-existing strong preference for certainty, predictability and simplicity (e.g. rational choice models) of the positivist and metrically oriented segments of social sciences consumed by political and corporate elites. Ethnography provided evidence that demonstrated how and why politically inflected cultural constructions shape the explanations of ‘social problems’ held by institutional actors and individual citizens, and the corresponding policy fixes they imply. These presuppositions undermine important insights about power and politics ultimately undermining attempts to challenge portrayals of inequality, instability and militarisation as ‘natural’, ‘normal’ human conditions to be valued as ‘opportunities’ for reinvention and spiritual ennoblement. Just as the unintended political effects of this kind of knowledge production as well as the ways it could be appropriated by specific political projects has been increasingly laid bare and challenged by interpretative historic and ethnographic analysis, the value of theorised anthropological analysis has been diminished especially in universities with vocational market-oriented missions.

I now turn back to the paradoxical issue of whether and how we can and should continue to ‘publicize’ anthropology’s analytic usefulness through simplified formats and techniques that overlook context and contingency in order to raise our standing as experts without undermining the attempt to create new insights and processual ways of thinking about problems in an increasingly perilous world. The latter understandings require denser, less portable formats and an emphasis on contingency and process. This requires more effort at tracing the ethical contradictions and instrumental effects of speaking to the media about particular issues while at the same time searching for the rare social settings in which we can do the reframing work with variable potential audiences.

There are several reasons for doing both kinds of work. First, it is important to brand public anthropology and raise the profile and the authority of the discipline in a world in which information comes in ‘bits’ and attention spans have been shaped by sound bites and a preference for de-contextualized magic numbers. This can work while we still maintain a critical edge and avoid the ‘evil twin’ evoked by Ferguson (2005).3 In the U.S. academic public anthropology efforts teach us about communicating to the policy and media worlds through their preferred formats and protocols for communicating. At the same time, the national AAA campaign to publicize anthropological insights on race is using current knowledge for a blockbuster public exhibit placed in valued cultural spaces thereby paralleling Boas’ public anthropology. This works to provide the museum-going public with critical information to challenge racism. This informs as well as legitimises the authority of the discipline on a crucial public issue while also demonstrating that we no longer specialize in representing the exotic other (Di Leonardo 1998).

Yet, at the same time, we must also be impelled to reframe other public political debates, and political action in terms of politically and structurally inflected paradigms. The simultaneous attempt to cater to existing media channels while we pay attention to encouraging
complex perspectives from many social locations will directly expose pernicious ethical and conceptual contradictions between the two, and help identify and transcend specific epistemological, structural and political obstacles to audience acceptance. Complex reframing calls for smaller, more intimate social spaces with differential strategies to focus on specific kinds of epistemological obstacles: simplistic master narratives, scientific certainty, correlations interpreted as understandings of cause and effect and other forms of ‘truth’ which extend the reach of neoliberal ‘common sense’.

This is the place which calls for recommendations of strategies and examples of successes in communicating across the intellectual boundaries we confront. Yet as specialists who privilege a focus on contingencies and context, our work makes processual case specificities the heart of the matter, precluding simple prescriptions. Some life-threatening health and environmental issues can be addressed by public programmes, such as Maida’s contributions to public health, where changing behaviour can have spectacular results without structural change (Maida, Part 1 this issue).

But our witnessing, documenting and analysing the fall out of contemporary human-made structural processes yields a sense of urgency. We must continue to render transparent the invisible political processes which underlie the production of contemporary inequality. The trick is to use our common social practice of identifying potential allies in various sites along the broad spectrum of socio-spatial and network scales and take the time necessary to communicate complexity. Especially important publics today are our closest neighbours in the academy itself.

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Studies: The Ethnography of Politics, Policy and Impoverished People in the United States (with Jeff Maskovsky).

Notes

1. The Bronislaw Malinowski award of the Society for Applied Anthropology
2. Ironically, several of my friends and I had been late converts to anthropology because it promised a more comprehensive ‘history’ of human life, but found ourselves studying ‘timelessness’.
3. Ferguson argues there is a fundamental and irreconcilable contradiction between knowledge produced by those who critique the assumptions of development institutions and that produced by those who work within them

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PBS video (1970), ‘Anthropology on Trial’ NOVA series, Margaret Mead episode.


