

PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

From the Incoming Public Anthropology Review Editors

Enduring Whims and Public Anthropology

David Griffith, Shao-hua Liu, Michael Paolisso, and Angela Stuesse, *Public Anthropology Review Editors*

"You might come here Sunday on a whim."—Richard Hugo, *Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg*

Anthropology shares with poetry a range of styles that reach from stunning commentary on themes of the times to esoteric, obscure, and barely accessible reflections on itself. Long before a wing of anthropology turned introspective, poetry stumbled through a phase of talking more about what poetry was than addressing with moving verse a deeply human capacity for appreciating, assessing, portraying, and understanding one's surroundings and relationships. It was primarily less self-indulgent poets like Elizabeth Bishop and James Wright who were able to develop the staple literary themes of illness, abuse, dysfunctional relationships, and coming of age by enhancing them with imagery from social justice, structural violence, historical knowledge, collective memory, and other subjects familiar to anthropologists.

Amid this self-indulgent phase, Richard Hugo told his students about an essay he had published comparing his work as a professor poet to his work at Seattle's Boeing plant as a service writer, translating mechanics' needs for engineers. Like Alan Dugan and Philip Levine, Hugo spent time outside of academics, working in a factory, before his poetry earned him enough recognition to attract the attention of the University of Montana's English department. Among the issues Hugo raised in his essay were the supposed disconnectedness and isolation of the ivory tower and the supposed cutthroat world of business at a company like Boeing. Neither of these stereotypes struck a chord with his experience. He found Boeing a pleasant enough place to work, where thoughtful coworkers purchased dozens of copies of the literary magazine in which his essay appeared, and in the academic community he joined were some people just punching their departments' time clocks, inching to and from office and class, others working with Missoula to do something about the awful bald mountain peering down on the town, and still others wondering, with lovely verse, what happened to a city you might visit on a whim.

Public anthropology occupies different points, with different weight, along just these sorts of continua—from the isolated to the engaged anthropologist, from the penetrating expressions of the academy to the impenetrable interior of-

ices of defense contractors, from the university to the town. At times, anthropologists writing for the public often seek to maintain a fiction of writing outside of the academy, engaging in a kind of journalism designed to detach itself from the theoretical or disciplinary conversations that cannot help but influence what we write. When Alabama's lawmakers passed their 2011 anti-immigration law, making it illegal for anyone, in any way, to assist an undocumented immigrant, they assumed that they could sever the multiple network ties connecting neighborhoods to schools and work sites, or the temporary connections that made accomplices of clerks at Wal-Mart to recent arrivals buying inexpensive shoes, or the relationships that coursed through the state's economy so densely that even purchasing a piece of fruit picked by an immigrant could be construed as a crime. Ripping apart the social fabric to such an extent was and is, of course, impossible.

In soliciting items for this section on public anthropology, we are not asking that anthropologists attempt to cut ties to the academy, crossing some fictional institutional border without their disciplinary documents. Nor do we conflate public anthropology with the collaboration with nonacademics typical of engaged, practicing, or applied anthropology, however much the four may overlap. We would like to hear about how anthropologists have translated their theoretical work in ways that engage themes of the times and themes that transcend the times, writing about issues as seemingly mundane yet profound as foods and beverages or as disquieting and tragic as human trafficking with the clarity that the public usually expects.

Public anthropology is not a field of anthropology but a form of anthropological expression, a mechanism for connecting people like those working at Boeing, at city hall, or at Wal-Mart to work that, typically, is most often read by other anthropologists. It moves beyond the proliferation of terms (*applied, activist, feminist, engaged, critical medical, community archaeology*) to lift up the best of each, dealing with social problems and issues of interest to a broader public or to our nonacademic collaborators yet still relevant to academic discourse and debate. As such, we would like to continue the tradition of the editorial team from which we inherit this section, considering all of those forms of communication that are not typically reviewed elsewhere

in the journal: “blogs, websites, online videos, other forms of new media, policy papers, expert reports, other forms of ‘gray literature,’ treaties, public testimony, journalism, op-eds, public educational materials, participatory research, conferences, art, theater, multimedia presentations, and much more” (Checker et al. 2010:5–6).

By saying this, we do not mean to confine ourselves to reviews. We found the recent forum on happiness, organized by the associate editor for public anthropology, particularly refreshing (Johnston et al. 2012). And much public anthropology happens in small, subtle, but important actions during meetings, in conversations, in memos or letters-to-the-editor of local newspapers, or in moments of networking in which we communicate something about anthropology and its application to a public issue; for reasons we might never have been able to predict, such communications can have an impact. This public anthropological work often sails below the radar of more established and recognized work, in and out of public anthropology, that appears in reports, publications, talks, and other formal venues. How do we recognize, value, and share this very informal and constant public anthropology?

One method of recognition lies in the realization that the public we hope to reach is global; although the journal is limited by language, our long tradition of anthropological work outside of the United States—much of it, now, spearheaded by non-U.S. anthropologists—positions us to engage issues and debates that may be unlikely to rise to public consciousness in the West. The spread of social media certainly facilitates this, as does our desire to use this section as a forum for telling one another how to reach many audiences with many voices through diverse formats yet uttered, always, with clarity. If we were to solicit work, for example, about foods or beverages, we would be much more likely to consider for review and publication, say, William Roseberry’s (1996) work on coffee than, say, Dafna Hirsch’s (2011) on hummus, at least in light of the following passages:

As I visit the gourmet shop, it might be a bit disconcerting to know that I have been so clearly targeted as a member of a class and generation, that burlap bags or minibarrels, the styles and flavors of coffee, the offer of a “gourmet of the day,” have been designed to appeal to me and others in my market niche. But such are the circumstances surrounding my freedom of choice. [Roseberry 1996:771]

A group’s preference for certain foods is related not only to income and gendered division of labor but also to embodied dispositions

and habitus. In this sense, the Israeli manner of eating hummus (referred to in Hebrew as “wiping,” distinct from Palestinian “dipping”), the entire bodily hexis involved in its consumption, and also its amenability to being shared, eaten from a common plate, manifest the main qualities that Israelis like to associate with “Israeliness”: informality to the point of rudeness but also sociability. [Hirsch 2011:619]

We cannot, of course, nor would we want to, dictate content. We have always believed anthropologists to be particularly adept at making creative connections where few would consider connections could exist, a character trait they share with poets. In a recent essay, Kelly Grey Carlisle (2012:35) spoke of perceiving DNA’s double helix in the chains of roses and vines in Westminster Abbey above the tombs of Newton and Darwin, drawing a connection between the “symbol of Mary, Christ’s humanity” and the evolutionary bond that connects all things human. Just so anthropologists can find connections by thinking, for example, of accumulation by dispossession as illness, AIDS as abuse, guestworker programs as dysfunctional relationships, coming of age in Samoa, or turtles in the discipline’s collective memory. Whether you write about human rights or rites of passage, about harbor seals or Navy seals, about oysters or pearls, we are open to you teaching us, open to you speaking to us as if we were—but of course we are—members of the public.

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Review Essay

Protest Anthropology in a Moment of Global Unrest

Jeff Maskovsky

Queens College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

ABSTRACT In this review essay, I explore today’s protest anthropology, the high-stakes domain of professional and politi-

cal practice in which anthropologists are not just aligned with protest movements, revolts, and uprisings but are also full-fledged participants in them. Focusing on examples from the Occupy Movement, I discuss the promises and perils of taking a protest stance. I argue that, despite the risks, protest