

'Anthropologists Are Talking'

About Anthropology After Globalisation

This is the second feature of 'Anthropologists Are Talking'.¹ The aim of the series is to provide an alternative to the standard, single-author article that academic journals generally publish in order to give space to a more dialogic kind of reflection. When they do not write, anthropologists arguably spend much of their professional time (though perhaps not as much as they might like) engaged in informal academic conversations, corridor talk, and debates with colleagues at seminars and conferences. 'Anthropologists Are Talking' seeks to emulate these kinds of informal conversations in the conviction that they often turn out to be formative for the ideas that later become the basis of our publications. The series is intended to explore these informal kinds of inspiration and knowledge production that otherwise rarely make it into academic journals. The series does so by bringing together a group of anthropologists and inviting them to talk candidly and spontaneously about a contemporary issue of common concern to them.

This conversation took place in May 2006 at Hindsgavl in Denmark in connection with the conference 'Reinventing the Whole in a Global World' organised by the Danish Research School of Anthropology and Ethnography. The conversation was recorded, moderated and edited by Nils Bubandt. The topic 'Anthropology After Globalisation' was chosen to spotlight the ambivalent changes that the relationship between the global and the anthropological is currently undergoing. On the one hand, the topic invites the participants to take stock of the concept of 'globalisation' and evaluate the state-of-the-art of anthropological analyses of the global situation. What are, to put it differently, the strengths and weaknesses, the platitudes and profundities of current anthropological thinking about the global? On the other hand, the topic attempts to focus attention on the global forces that are reshaping anthropology as a subject and an institution in fundamental ways at the very same time that the discipline is trying to get a methodological, analytical, and theoretical handle on these forces. The topic invites

the participants to discuss the dilemmas and challenges of this predicament. The participants in the following debate are:

ERIC HIRSCH is Reader in Social Anthropology at Brunel University. He has a long-standing interest in the ethnography and history of Melanesia where his research has focused on issues of historicity, landscape, power and property relations. He recently co-edited (with Marilyn Strathern) *Transactions and Creations: Property Debates and the Stimulus of Melanesia* (2004). He has also conducted research in the Greater London area on new forms of technologies and domestic relations. A publication from this research entitled *Inside Organizations: Anthropologists at Work* (co-edited with David Gellner) appeared in 2001.

BRUCE KAPFERER is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Bergen. His current research focuses on ritual, in particular ritual and healing among Sinhalese Buddhists, and on the dynamics of ancient and modern state forms with particular reference to contemporary global processes. He is concurrently conducting comparative research in India, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Australia looking at nationalism, violence, and shifts in bureaucratic and corporate structures. Bruce Kapferer's publication list is extensive, but among his most well-known writings are *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (1988, 1998) and *The Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and Power* (1997). He recently published the edited volume *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery* (2003).

EMILY MARTIN is Professor of Anthropology at New York University. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Social Science Research Council and as President of the American Ethnological Society. Her research interests centre on the pharmaceutical industry and trace global discourses about the body through a diverse range of fields, including medicine, biology, and public media with a particular focus on issues of gender and race. Emily Martin has previously taught cultural anthropology at the University of California, Irvine, as well as at Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, and Princeton University. She is the author of *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (1987); *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in America from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (1994); and *Bipolar Expeditions* (forthcoming).

ANNA TSING is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Kalimantan in Indonesia focussing on natural resource issues, state violence, and global imaginaries. She has recently embarked on a collaborative research project on global scientific and commercial networks involving matsutake mushrooms. Anna Tsing is the author of *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connections* (2005) and *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (1993). Her co-edited collections include *Nature in the Global South* (2003) and *Shock and Awe: War on Words* (2004).

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NILS The debate about globalisation has been going on for twenty years now, taking up ever more space in academic journals. I would like to start off by asking you whether you think some aspects of these debates and the consequences they have had are still relevant today or have they outlived their sell-by date?

ANNA I think that the best thing you can say about the debates about globalisation is that they were an attempt to address issues in public culture beyond the academy. It is probably unnecessary to rehearse all the things that were their weaknesses. But it seems to me that one of the interesting things now, at least from the perspective of a US-American, is that when you look back on the globalisation debates of the 1990s they look like something that had very much to do with the Clinton era in American politics where people thought that some kind of economic integration through peaceful methods was going to be possible. Political changes in the world since then and the new importance of American military interventions have really refocused some of these same debates on questions of military intervention, religion, regional difference, and these kinds of issues in a way that have to do with public debates of the current period.

The other thing I want to mark in response to your question is that some of the most exciting stuff that goes on in anthropology today has emerged from the discussion of what people sometimes call 'other globalisations': the incredible excitement of work on the history of the Indian Ocean over the last 500 years; the ties between Europe and Haiti in the Haitian revolution; the re-examination of Pan-Asianness in the Japanese Empire – these 'other' moments of

regional and global integration have become really exciting sites for interdisciplinary discussion including anthropology.

Let me give one example. At a 'slow seminar' in my department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, we have for some time explored the concept of culture in what we call 'the long 1950s'. The insight that got this started was that we wanted to look for a broader set of intellectual genealogies than those that grew out of accepted European and North American canons. The 1950s were an extremely boring era in the Euro-American canon but were an incredibly exciting era of decolonisation with a lot of emerging ideas about culture, in particular if you look at the global south. If you look at the ideas, flows and interchanges that came out of the Bandung conference in Indonesia, the Algerian war or the Cuban revolution, you would have a very interesting set of genealogies about culture, which have influenced what has happened in the academy since, but which are not always identified as the intellectual genealogies that inform the figures that we know best today.

ERIC I think you are making a very important point. What we now call 'globalisation' is a process that has had different epochs spanning hundreds of years. This co-exists with the explicit notion (and myth) of globalisation used to gloss the contemporary moment. My thinking about these issues has been influenced by your article 'Inside the Economy of Appearances' (Tsing 2000). In this article you discuss the importance of analysing different scales when considering how 'the global' is imaginatively 'conjured'. My interest in your article was also related to the significance of epochs I have just mentioned. A place like Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been greatly affected by the reality and rhetoric – but also the myth – of structural adjustment. Several decades ago development and the formation of a nation-state would have held a similar power. These global projects, in turn, have powerful local consequences, one of which is the emergence of myths encapsulating parallel epochal ideas. It is these connections or 'contingent articulations', as I think you call them, that are of much interest for anthropology. So, what has been useful about the debate about globalisation is that it has made us more aware of how we might work these myths of globalisation into our ethnographies as well.

NILS One thing that has changed, I think, in the last twenty years at least is that the concept of globalisation itself has become a political buzzword that is bandied around the scene by people well outside the academic arena. There seems to me to be a widespread academic resentment against the concept for that very reason. The concept of globalisation has from this angle become a political form of clap-trap that has lost much of the critical value that it may have had in the 1980s. Today it is disseminated by people like Thomas Friedman who are pushing the term as part of a neoliberal vision of what the world looks like. A similar kind of vision is espoused by politicians like Tony Blair and George Bush, but the term has also worked itself into smaller national discourses. Globalisation is thus also strongly pushed in Scandinavia as a new way, really, of talking about the nation. How do you see this relation between shifts in global politics and shifts in the changing position of the concept of 'globalisation' as a critical term in academia?

ANNA That may have happened quite a long time ago. My sense – and I would like to hear other people's histories on this – is that there was a moment when concerns about the global, and I do not know whether it was called 'globalisation' then, were being voiced by the emergent NGO movements. At that moment, people thought that this turn to the events of the global scale was somehow a progressive thing. My guess is that people like Appadurai were jumping out of that moment. But very quickly in the 1990s it became corporate hype. It became clear that it was big companies who were really 'globalising' and who could not wait to talk about their 'global reach', and this gave rise to the anti-globalisation movements out on the streets. Anthropology was sort of slow to respond to that, and by the end of the 1990s it was pretty hard to hold onto the notion of the global that was just then coming out of that progressive empowerment kind of story and people had already gotten this sense that the term 'globalisation' was being controlled by PR companies.

EMILY Just the other day I heard a colleague say: 'Globalisation is dead!' Although I know the concept has come under all these kinds of criticism, this really took me aback. One reason is that, as my students and colleagues and I have continued to try to work on institutions

like corporations, banks, public health organisations, and NGOs, these entities all see themselves as players in some sense in something they call 'the global'.

ANNA Right!

EMILY So globalisation is hardly dead; it is very much alive in these contexts. In this situation, it becomes an ethnographic task to find out what they mean by that: what do people intend when they use the concept of 'the global', what kinds of practices are related to it, and what imperatives bear on these notions and practices. The pharmaceutical companies I study cannot be 'national' entities and survive as they see it; they have to be 'global'. They have to 'upgrade in a global sphere' because they operate in a highly competitive situation, and this leads them into these incredibly fascinating endeavours. It is for me very interesting ethnographically to study what follows from these endeavours where the abstractions go up. It is for me exciting to study ethnographically for instance how something that was conceived of as a medicine for an ailment becomes a body system seen as a central nervous system with a whole array of remedies for it that spreads on a global scale. This is amazingly interesting for me: to work out ways to understand what these kinds of transformations mean, how they are accomplished, and what kinds of relationships pertain between what people do and what they say under these conditions.

ANNA It is interesting to me which of the catch phrases associated with the early period of 'globalisation-talk' that have lasted. Here at this conference, for instance, I have heard several expressions from this period, expressions like 'time-space compression' and 'the weakening of the nation-state'. I am saying this ironically, because I am not sure that these little 'formulas' are really the most useful to understand the phenomena that Emily is talking about, which seem to be about a series of particular commitments to global action by all these different kinds of organisations and institutions.

BRUCE I would like to talk about this in relation to recent anthropological theory, if I may. It seems me that a critical moment was reached with the publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986). This

book recognised that there was an anthropology which somehow was limited and which had denied a whole critical range of human phenomena. This anthropology furthermore was tied to a limited set of methodologies, and was profoundly unaware of its own complicity in various kinds of humanly destructive processes. The book produced this awareness by bringing together a number of different positions in itself. So if you look at the people who contributed to it, at least one or maybe two would not have been counted as anthropologists as the subject was normally defined at the time. The contributors had varied backgrounds and experience but from these very different perspectives, they raised a similar set of questions about the limitation of anthropology, its frameworks and its relative irrelevance to a globalizing and postcolonial world. A major aim was to pull anthropology away from being bogged down in increasing irrelevance and an apparent commitment to various kinds of essentialism associated with its colonialist beginnings. So *Writing Culture* is actually the critical turning point that recognises the importance of larger global realities which had somehow been of reduced importance to anthropological knowledge. It then went on to suggest a whole range of new methodological perspectives and styles of writing freed from objectivist pseudoscience as well as to popularise concepts like 'studying up' rather than 'studying down'. It seems to me that within anthropology, *Writing Culture*, as everyone says, is the critical moment.

We come to this interview, I would hazard, at a point in which we are now 'post-*Writing Culture*'. What has happened is that the kind of perspectives in *Writing Culture* have in their turn, as I think Anna mentioned earlier, come to be seen to be somehow complicit in something which people are now more sharply aware of after 9/11 than at any other time. So now we are experiencing the repopularisation of certain types of critiques of states and imperialism, and of the relationship of certain forms of anthropological analyses to these formations, although I do not think it is fully realised in the subject as yet. My own political position on this would be that anthropology by and large – even though it has changed often for the better – is still extremely complicit in a whole series of things. I think it was Emily who yesterday talked about 'the uncanny' as that which is left out, but then is realised. I think we are in an 'uncanny moment' right now.

EMILY Aha.

BRUCE Paradoxically, anthropology may have lost some of the critical potential that it did in fact have in earlier times, despite its rationalism and colonialist leanings. When I think about Margaret Mead for instance...and this is a strange thing to say.

EMILY Not at all...

BRUCE We will excise that later...but no matter what you might otherwise think of Margaret Mead and her work, she was wonderfully critical of certain forms of thought and practice, and she wanted to bring other forms of thought into a critical relation with her own world. This was a general dimension of anthropology at that particular time regardless of people's political persuasions. It is this dimension that is being lost. What has happened in anthropology as a result of the discipline's reshaping by contemporary globalising and imperialist circumstances, I would hazard again, is its 'metropolitanisation' – a paradoxical and maybe even a tragic trend. I am for instance interested in a word like 'cosmopolitanism' that is also coming into the field – we had an ASA conference on this just the other day. In a sense we have metropolitanised anthropology. Once again the discipline insists on the dominant voice even when it appears to be arguing against this. Some might argue that this is consistent with the particular imperialising moment within which anthropology is currently set and in which the centre of the discipline is undoubtedly the US. 'As things have changed', as Marshall Sahlins would say, 'things have remained the same'.

ANNA What do you mean by 'metropolitanisation'?

EMILY Yeah, what do you mean?

BRUCE Well, there has been a very heavy attack on conceptions of difference; yet difference is not necessarily a basis for establishing hierarchies of power in anthropology. It may be, however, something we are interested in without diminishing whoever is posited as 'different'. I would suggest that this strong movement against notions of difference

is connected to a very powerful individualisation of anthropological thought. This style of thought is concerned with personal narratives for example, the reduction of the subject to individual strategy, in fact a movement against the notion of 'structure'. Anthropology is more than ever reflecting opinions established at dominant centres and the debates that are often highly internal to them. These opinions and debates are being intoned and applied without there being a careful exploration of their applicability, and this lack of reflexivity may in fact be ideologically ingrained in them. One finds this in the way concepts like diversity, hybridity and the individual are being used for instance...

EMILY In what way is this metropolitan, then?

BRUCE It is metropolitan, because there has been – and this is the globalisation dimension – a kind of universalisation of the vision of the world from the metropole. Take the current concerns to analytically move beyond the felt constraints and limitations of structure and the fashionable stress on the individual. I find in these trends more than a hint of the political universe of George Bush with its assertion of freedom, the freedom of the individual. If you move it into general political speak...when you talk about Thomas Friedman, you might just as well talk about George Bush...there is a notion that everybody wants freedom and everybody is an individual who naturally desires freedom. We do not ask what 'freedom' is and what the 'individual' is.

ANNA When you brought up anthropology, it made me think of a different kind of relationship between anthropology and globalisation, and I say this to see if you will comment on it. We have seen the florescence in the last few years of a recognition of other anthropologies. Where it used to be that people talked about British, French, and American anthropologies, we now have Shinji Yamashita's volume on Asian anthropologies (Yamashita, Bosco, & Eades 2004), and we have got a new volume out on world anthropologies (Ribeiro & Escobar 2006). There has, in other words, been an appreciation of multiple histories of anthropology in recent years. How does this fit with your idea of 'metropolitanisation'?

BRUCE It fits with my idea of 'cosmopolitanism'. Cosmopolitanism is connected to what I would call 'metropolitanisation' in that different metropolitan centres are now asserting themselves. In Saskia Sassen's sense, the world is no longer bounded in national territories but is structured in networks between various metropolitan centres around the world. Each metropolitan centre has its own vision of its importance within this larger global network. So I would say that the phenomenon you are talking about is a form of 'metropolitanisation' and 'cosmopolitanism' that fits with the new 'globalised anthropology'.

ANNA I see.

BRUCE I would be equally critical of the conventional distinction between French, British, American, and now German anthropology that has been re-launched in a recent book (Barth, Gingrich, Parkin, & Silverman 2005). It sets up the very kinds of boundaries and territories that many people would be very suspicious of, and misses the theoretical and analytical interchanges and forms of co-existence in so much anthropology. There is no stable thing you can comfortably call 'American anthropology' or 'British anthropology'. As I was trying to say yesterday, there are lots of divisions. How could you have 'British anthropology' when people were fighting fiercely about how to do it? Reo Fortune is a classic example within Melanesian anthropology. He was disagreeing with all kinds of theoretical edifices that they were trying to build in Oxford at the time.

To return to your question, Anna, I am saying that one feature of globalisation – and here I return to Thomas Friedman despite my general critique of his perspective (Friedman 2005) – is a flattening out of the world in particular ways. So even though people have recognised different anthropologies there is a kind of flattening of anthropology.

ERIC I would like to connect the point Bruce is making to the historical question. On the way up here he and I were talking about new religious movements that have emerged all over the world, such as Pentecostalism, which is now powerfully present in various parts of PNG. When I was back in PNG several years ago, I was struck by how different the Catholic mission was compared with the situation several

decades ago: now there are fewer personnel, dilapidated buildings and so on. This is very unlike the situation of contemporary Pentecostalism in PNG. In a previous historical period the globalisation of the Catholic missionary endeavour was substantial throughout the Pacific, even though they did not use the concept 'globalisation'. But that has now altered. So it would appear that what we call globalisation works itself out in very different ways depending on the kind of entity and time considered.

EMILY This might change the subject but when we were invited to talk about anthropology and globalisation, my first thought was that a central part of my work has been to understand the processes of reductionism that occur when things begin to stretch across the whole globe – not to use the word 'globalisation'. You have written about this compellingly, Bruce. But understanding these processes of reduction in various domains seems to be where anthropology has the most ability – if we figure out how to do it right – to answer back, to 'bite back'. In the area where I have been working, the central issue has been the reduction of complexity. Capitalism thrives on difference; it must have difference. I do not want to personify 'capitalism' here, but it requires differences of a certain kind. There is thus a common assumption about the existence of some 'universal stuff' with small – measurable, calculable, and decipherable – differences. But the 'mass' or the 'base' has to be shared, otherwise you cannot translate, and you have to be able to translate very quickly for capitalist production to work. A good illustration of this is the idea of the 'human body'. There is now a conception in pharmaceutical corporations that clinical trials on new drugs can be conducted anywhere in the world. While this would appear to suggest a benevolent idea about common humanity in which race and other differences no longer matter, the logic behind this kind of thinking is generated by something entirely different. It is generated by the fact that pharmaceutical companies need to be able to shift the sites of these clinical trials around, just like corporations need to be able to shift production sites around the globe, to places where labour is cheaper or where government control is less strict.

ANNA Is this not exactly a 'non-flattening' of the world that you are talking about here?

EMILY I would say that companies want to take advantage of every small variable difference, but the assumption is somehow that they can do that and still have the same scientific result. This carries a mixed burden, because everybody is equal in a certain sense but only equal if measured in this sense. This completely elides the fact that people often agree to do clinical trials because they have no other sources of income. So their bodies are not really the same at all, and they are not making the same sorts of calculations. So I would just point to these global forms of reductionism that come with the incursion of socio-biological ways of thinking, with evolutionary psychology, with new forms of social Darwinism...

BRUCE Even economism.

EMILY Yes, and economism.

BRUCE Some of this is a kind of anti-globalisation. People like David Harvey and Giovanni Arrighi have in a sense a flattened view of the universe.

EMILY I would disagree with you about David Harvey. He started out that way, but he has had a lot of contact with anthropologists, and he has moved a lot in his recent work.

BRUCE I agree. I am perhaps being too critical.

ANNA The thing I was going to raise is that it is really time for another methodological round of discussion. How can we, for instance, think about new forms of collaboration across languages and across ethnographic scenes of various sorts? I am thinking here of forms of collaboration that follow neither the Big Science model, where some person is in charge and orders everybody else around, nor the conventional scattered peer-group model. The first model entails too much collaboration in the sense of following a top-down conception, while the second is 'not enough'. These problems, it seems to me, are exactly the challenges to how we could move forward into new kinds of ethnographic projects that also tackle global questions.

BRUCE This raises a problem for me, actually. It is something I cannot answer, but is a problem I would like to have discussed, because I am confused. The problem is this: what constitutes 'an anthropological problem'? Is it dictated by the moment; that is, what has happened today or yesterday? Or is there a broader sense of a 'problem' that to some extent transcends the moment? By this I mean that we find out something about human beings through a variety of forms of contexts that is not limited to the moment itself, even though that moment may be critical for asking a particular kind of anthropological question. So what constitutes an anthropological question?

Now what worries me is that one truth about globalisation is that it has entailed the 'de-regulation of anthropology'. Maybe this is a good thing, but as anthropology is moving into other disciplines there is nothing distinctive about anthropology, apart from the fact – so anthropologists like to say – that they do ethnography. But everyone is doing ethnography. And so the whole status of 'the ethnographic' is at issue, as is what constitutes an anthropological problem. The earlier kinds of anthropology did have sets of problems that they were concerned to investigate and solve as well as a particular method that was related to that. But we seem to have lost a sense of what is 'issue' and what is 'problem'. That is what I am confused about. There are masses of problems 'out there'. But what makes them particularly open to an anthropological investigation? And is an anthropological investigation simply collecting 'material' as a lot of people do? The very fact that David Harvey has crossed into anthropology at NYU...

EMILY No, at CUNY.

BRUCE ...at CUNY is an indication that the nature of the anthropological problem has left the discipline. And that is an aspect of globalisation. This is a problem because it relates to how courses are organised, how we define a department of anthropology in the university. All problems that were not a problem 50 years ago but which are problematic at the moment.

EMILY I think that we are not able to answer that in the abstract. Do you agree?

BRUCE Hmm.

EMILY But sitting around a table as a department or part of a department, can people not agree on, say, whether a student proposal is truly anthropological? We have these discussions constantly.

BRUCE I know.

EMILY A student presents a proposal for a PhD project, and we hassle with them, because we do not think it is anthropological enough. So we struggle back and forth, they adjust it and in the end we might end up approving it.

ERIC But what does it take to ...?

EMILY I do not think we ever articulate what it takes. The sense is that we know one when we see one. Even though we are different in our interests, we have some shared sense of what it takes.

BRUCE I have a feeling that we are going Kantian on this one. Anthropology has been shaken loose from its narrow disciplinary basis, that is, anthropological questions are now being asked by a vast number of disciplines.

ANNA This is not necessarily about fieldwork, Bruce, but about how you create theoretical frameworks that come up with some kind of empirical data and 'mixing it up' in the way to which most anthropologists continue to be committed.

I would not have considered it, except you raise this challenge. When I talk to my students about the kinds of ways that they are copying students from other disciplines, it seems to be one of the distinctive requirements that we think about theory and our empirical material together. We do not separate them out as two layers.

EMILY Sociologists do that, right?

ANNA Right.

EMILY We do not want to make them the model, though.

ANNA I like the vulnerability to contingency which is another way of stating that the theory has to have something to do with the material that you apply it to.

EMILY Or written material.

ANNA Right. It does not have to be ethnographic necessarily. I recently taught Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* to a class (Asad 2003). Asad here makes a passionate attack on the tendency to fetishise fieldwork and wants to argue that anthropology has a long tradition that is not tied to fieldwork alone.

ERIC Bruce's question made me think of a recent project I was doing with Marilyn Strathern and other Melanesianist colleagues about property rights, with particular reference to the Pacific. Intellectual property is now a global phenomenon. States sign up to intellectual property agreements under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation and the World Intellectual Property Organisation. This includes states such as PNG. What motivated us, however, were classic anthropological issues like exchange, personhood, and property. In fact, a couple of project members explicitly engaged with Bruce's 'old' book *Transaction and Meaning* (Kapferer 1976). On the one hand we were doing this new thing and being part of 'the moment', as Bruce put it. But on the other hand we were re-engaging with classical debates that have been with the discipline since it became 'modern'. It is these sorts of connections for me that are important for doing anthropology. Is that what you are getting at?

BRUCE The basis of my confusion is this. A colleague of mine who was based in an anthropology department but happened to be trained as a geographer said to me: 'You anthropologists are strange. You have a set of deities that you worship'.

EMILY Yeuw!

BRUCE 'and you define yourselves as anthropologists by continually reinventing the significance of these people either positively or negatively. In geography we do not have a canon. We have a kind of thing we are interested in'. So David Harvey would perhaps say that he was interested in the dynamics of space. But it is still 'geography' they are interested in, just like physics is about 'physics'. They are continually trying to break away from their ruling paradigms to find something new, which means the entire received paradigm has to be abandoned without the discipline being questioned.

ANNA But what you are getting at is a general problem in the humanities. In fact most of the humanities, philosophy, and literary studies, for instance, are much more 'canon-stuck' than anthropology is.

BRUCE Really... yes, you got me there.

NILS To what extent do you see the disciplinary predicament you are talking about as a reflection of the new forms of cross-disciplinary cooperation that changes out there in the world have forced us to deal with? And to what extent is it a reflection of anthropology 'having gone global'? Are those disciplinary concerns in other words motivated by the world changing or by the discipline changing, or by both?

BRUCE I think anthropology has been 'hollowed out' and the discipline is basically left with the notion of fieldwork without the sense of theoretical specificity that it used to have. It is not necessarily a bad thing. The hollowing out has occurred as the discipline, as part of a globalising process, has been absorbed into a variety of other disciplines, while anthropology itself has absorbed other disciplines – the Harvey-syndrome if I can call it that.

EMILY Oh.

BRUCE In many ways this has been a success story: you find anthropologists going all over the scene. As a function of what we would call globalisation or 'cosmopolitanisation', the breaking-up of boundaries and the overhaul of what used to be the distinctive canon, the subject of

anthropology has substantially been opened up but leaving just one remaining disciplinary strand: personal fieldwork. As a particular kind of institutional structure, anthropology, I think, is under threat.

EMILY I have a similar but also partly different take on this. I think it might be quite different in different national contexts, but also different from the East Coast to the West Coast, maybe different in private and public universities. We are in a private university in New York City undergoing a quite fierce competition – it is a friendly competition I have to say because we like each other, but a competition nonetheless. All the small disciplines – ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, metropolitan studies, Hispanic studies, Asian and American studies, and I am probably forgetting some – have joined together in one department. They struggled and fought over their name, but guess what they came up with? ‘Social and Cultural Analysis’. This has started a competition over the use of the term ‘culture’ in this name, and there is a lot of talk that anthropology like globalisation is dead. What we in anthropology have as our defining feature is not fieldwork, however. Because they do fieldwork, too, although I would not say it is...

BRUCE Proper?

EMILY Thank you. That was exactly the word I was looking for. So what we are left with is not so much fieldwork, but rather the fact that we are a four-field department. The challenge in this, of course, is that it is a legacy of the original conjuncture of studying non-human primates who were considered slightly less than human on one scale and ‘the primitive’ who were slightly less than civilised on another scale. So we have this legacy of a dark kind of thinking. This is not a heritage we would choose to carry, but it is nevertheless one that we now are trying to make new sense of. I recently picked up this new book *Unwrapping the Sacred Bundle* (Segal & Yanagisako 2005). It is really interesting in this regard, because it offers a provocative look at the American conception of the four fields. The challenge for us is to figure out whether we keep some disciplinary justification for the four fields and at the same time combat the rather watered down version of culture in cultural and ethnic studies. One vital justification is that

you cannot do science studies without the four fields. You cannot, for instance, do an anthropological study of genetics without involving biologists in some way. In terms of collaboration and tackling some of the important issues of our time, the four fields may actually be an important...

ANNA But the people you collaborate with might not be those in your department?

EMILY Well, in my case actually they are. But you are right, it does not necessarily have to go that way. What it comes down to, I think, is how to study the place of biology in the modern world. Biology is a hugely difficult presence for anthropology to contend with, because it will take over and – apparently at least – reduce everything to its common denominator.

ANNA What I am hearing you suggesting is that there may be a new justification at NYU for the four-field approach.

EMILY That is the type of justification we are working towards.

ANNA That is really interesting!

ERIC Your discussion highlights very much that there are some very important historical differences between national anthropologies.

EMILY Yes, absolutely!

ERIC In Britain there are only two departments that have any biological anthropology: UCL and Oxford.

BRUCE And Durham.

ERIC ...and Durham.

EMILY So only three.

ERIC Yes, three or maybe four. The big challenge to anthropology in Britain

comes instead from cultural studies...that anthropology in Britain is being eclipsed by cultural studies.

BRUCE Absolutely!

ERIC If you go into any bookshop, anthropology is virtually incorporated in cultural studies. The historical legacy of the discipline works itself out differently in the two places.

EMILY Quite differently!

NILS I would like to go back to Bruce's point about fieldwork being the one thing to which anthropology clings. In a recent issue of *Ethnos* George Marcus wrote a piece called 'Where Have All the Tales of Fieldwork Gone' (Marcus 2006). In that piece he observes a certain reticence surrounding the telling of fieldwork experiences in the new kind of globally aware ethnographies. It is a reticence for which he speculates there perhaps are good reasons. One possible reason is related to the predicament of doing multi-sited fieldwork. Doing multi-sited fieldwork entails multiple competences that many fieldworkers may have difficulty honouring. If fieldwork is the 'last stand of anthropology', has this stand not also been shaken by recent methodological attempts to refashion it in order to study global contexts ethnographically? Even as we say that other disciplines can never do fieldwork properly, can we ourselves cling to fieldwork in quite the same way when studying the global situation?

BRUCE I have in mind Sidney Mintz's beautiful critique of George Marcus and multi-sited fieldwork (Mintz 2000). It is a critique of the sense that there was somehow a jump from single-sited to multi-sited fieldwork and of the image of the 'moving anthropologist' versus the 'static anthropologist'. It is a very interesting critique, because it comes back to a point I raised earlier and that is the nature of the anthropological problem. What Mintz charges George Marcus and others for is that you cannot make an edict which is universal and which should move from one kind of fieldwork to another. It surely is dependent on the issue and the problem that is being explored.

EMILY Aha.

BRUCE The method is relative to that. It should not be a universal declaration. That was Mintz's point and I think it was a good one.

EMILY But surely he is not saying 'just stay put'?

BRUCE No, he is saying that you would need to look at the structural aspects of global relations and that if you are looking at a moving population it would be silly to stay in one spot. In order to explore that you would have to move, too. So the fieldwork approach is determined by the problem, not by the universalisation of method regardless of problem. So anthropology is contingent in that sense, which is not the sense of 'contingent' that has come into use which means more or less 'accidental'. It is a different type of contingency: contingent on the problem. What defines anthropology, then, is the particular way a problem is established. This is why, I suppose, you are able to debate about student projects in your department, Emily?

EMILY Right.

BRUCE The way the project is stated and the appropriateness of the methodology that is applied. I have a feeling that one legacy of the globalisation of anthropology has been the spread of generalised edicts which are really relative to the kind of problem that they...

ANNA You mean the 'multi-sitedness'?

BRUCE 'Multi-sitedness' and even 'diversity'. All these things are surely empirical problem-centred phenomena. They are not necessarily...

EMILY Not always relevant.

BRUCE They are not always relevant...

ERIC What about uni-lineal descent groups, then?

BRUCE Well, actually, it is one of the things that appals me. It is interesting

because it may be an effect of globalisation, and in a sense George Marcus is correct here. Globalisation has changed the nature of the kind of worlds that traditional anthropology went to look at. Massive urbanisation for example has broken up kinship groups and this has rendered kinship less important than it was 50 years ago.

EMILY I think kinship is more important...

ERIC Kinship has really re-emerged as a central...

BRUCE I agree that it is more important, but I feel that there has been a shift in the kinds of problems we ask as a consequence of this. And those problems have in a sense become general across a range of disciplines and not necessarily problems that distinguish an anthropological perspective, but I am just confused.

NILS Barring kinship are there any other avenues or themes that you think have been left unexplored by global ethnography? If you were to mention a field, topic, or approach that is sorely lacking in current anthropological dealings with the global world what would that be?

ANNA Only in the sense that there was this rush of programmatic announcements followed by a smaller number studies of diasporas, media forums, and corporate networks, so the actual ethnography of the global is still largely lacking. That is the reason I am saying we still need to work at the methods, because if we are not counting programmatic statements we still have a very small corpus of ethnographic work. I think the question on how to do work on some of these new topics is still being worked out. Science studies is a perfect example to me. Science studies in the 1990s was plagued by being a kind of 'white studies'. I think there are some really important efforts to extend it, but one has to deal with that legacy over and over again. The legacy, for instance, that it was associated with metropolitan areas. The work to try to stretch science studies out to other parts of the world and involving different kinds of people is still very new.

ERIC There is this very interesting piece by Warwick Anderson (Anderson 2000) about *kuru* disease in Papua New Guinea. He documents how

Carleton Gajdusek, who won the Nobel Prize in 1976 for his work on *kuru*, came to 'possess' *kuru* through complex exchange networks established between the locals affected by the disease and scientists on various continents, exchanges involving body parts and fluids. What Anderson accomplishes in that article is exactly what you are talking about.

ANNA Right, right.

EMILY As a footnote to that, I would just say that access is a really large problem. In addition to the issue of what methods we should use and teach to our students, there is a gigantic problem that people do not want to be studied. This is the old Laura Nader thing, but it bears on us more powerfully when we have had some access to sites of power and we realise how much can be learned there, and we try to get into other sites and they are intransigent. I want to mention one such area and that is advertising.

BRUCE That is hard to get into, is it?

EMILY It is next to impossible.

BRUCE Corporations surely are more...

EMILY The advertising industry is such a large institution in terms of its impact. They do not want to be studied and they know what effect bad images can have, so they are very reluctant.

BRUCE Can I raise an issue that I think is related? As I romanticise an earlier anthropology, the ethnography was systematically analysed. The ethnography did not stand as data in relationship to a theoretical or conceptual understanding. There was a thorough integration of thought about the issue and the ethnography. There was a bit of a separation in the beginning of the discipline but later it began to get quite analytical so it was a continual analysis of material. That is at least my characterisation of anthropology up until the 1980s.

ERIC Until *Writing Culture*?

BRUCE Maybe up until *Writing Culture*. Yes, perhaps that will sound better for what I have to say.

ERIC Okay.

BRUCE Looking at monographs coming out in England mainly, but in the States, too, I feel there has been a shift towards topic rather than analysis. And ethnographies have become much more data...

EMILY Topics?

BRUCE Data and topical data rather than stuff that is subjected to a careful analytic investigation. I really feel there has been a shift in this direction and – if I am right – I am wondering if this has something to do with globalisation in a bigger sense. What we call globalisation has caused massive shifts in the structure of universities and the institutions upon which certain kinds of research depend. Some of the things we have been discussing and the threats to anthropology may stem not so much from a shift in attitude and internal critique, which I think is very healthy, but from globalisation as an institutional shift that has changed the very circumstances in which anthropology can continue its practice. Is there such a shift to topic from careful analysis? I mean there are lots of ‘sexy’ topics to study that students immediately go for, but the level of our understanding of the social nature of human beings or human existential consciousness is not necessarily extended any more. What we have got is another kind of topic that we have covered, which may or may not sell in the bookshop, but it has not expanded anthropology as a kind of systematic production, not just of knowledge but of analytic knowledge, a real understanding of things. I think earlier forms of anthropology did do this. There is a reason why we still read *The Nuer*.

EMILY Yes, I agree.

BRUCE It is not because it is simply an old book but because it stands as a particular model for an analytical presentation of ethnographic work. This is very different from some of the ethnographic work that is being done now. I am just trying to suggest that globalisation is more

than an ideology that may have influenced shifts in the structures of the discipline. It is really connected to what David Harvey has beautifully analysed...

EMILY Oh, now we are getting there.

BRUCE ...has beautifully analysed, namely the neoliberal restructuring, which has fundamentally affected the conditions of anthropological work.

EMILY Right, I agree. Journalism also has to be mentioned in terms of its ability to capture widespread, even global, media circulation. I know from my own very small experience that this is the goal to find a topic that will capture the imagination. Anthropologists are caught in a bind here because if we do that, Bruce is right that we lose our analytic.

NILS In that sense would media be another area to study?

EMILY NYU has a big media studies, an anthropology of the media behind the scenes. But much more could still be done.

ANNA I have an observation before we finish. It is interesting to me that we did not actually talk a lot about globalisation in this conversation and I do not know if that is good or bad.

ERIC In a sense it is a good thing. In your article that I mentioned earlier, Anna, you yourself show how globalisation is an imaginary that people have to conjure up all the time. We got into at least some of the details of this conjuring, anthropological and otherwise. Perhaps the less said about 'globalisation' as such in this process, the better?

Note

1. The inaugural 'Anthropologists Are Talking', a conversation about the new right in Europe, was published in *Ethnos* 68:4.

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