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Review article:

European Social Anthropology in 2018: an Increasingly Recursive Public

In 2018, social anthropology finds itself increasingly concerned with its technical, legal, and political conditions of possibility. The long-term effects of austerity, financialization, and the technological transformation of media on teaching, research, and publishing have led to intense struggles over the labor and property regimes underpinning the discipline. In responding to these challenges, anthropologists seem to be re-conceptualizing their own personhood and labor through the diverse conceptualizations of their interlocutors. However, it is also important to remember what makes social anthropology and its unique professional challenges but a small facet of a larger human condition. By way of conclusion, I offer kinship (the public's constitutive other) as one potential means of grappling with the limitations of social anthropology's own publicity.

This review marks the third iteration of an emerging annual practice of taking stock of the state of European social anthropology. Whereas previous reviews have focused on how the discipline is boldly venturing out to solve the world's problems through political engagement (Coates 2017) on pressing issues like inequality (Koch 2018), I would like to focus on a certain sort of turning inward that has also become apparent in recent years. Indeed, the very practice of amassing these annual reviews is itself symptomatic of this increasing reflexivity—including an appreciation for social anthropology's status as a *public*, which is to say its status as a

community that is brought into being through the circulation of texts (Habermas 1962; Warner 2002).

On its own, of course, greater reflexivity is by no means new—nor is it opposed to a salutary deepening of the discipline's political engagement and powers of critique. It is the increasingly self-conscious mediation of this reflexivity by publics that carries with it both opportunities and challenges that now deserve serious attention. Most importantly, publics by their nature exclude from view much of the work that goes into their ongoing materialization—most notoriously the work of women, working class people, and other stigmatised social types[1]. It is inherent to most social scientific models of publics that they covertly feed, parasitically, on a 'private sphere'—a 'domain' of 'kinship'—both materially and ideologically. This drawing on the 'private' and seeking to make it 'public' itself often becomes a stylised genre of performance: an ongoing meta-commentary on the male appropriation of female resources (Bear et al. 2015; McKinnon and Cannell 2013; Ortner 1972; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). As Andrew Shryock has put it, publics always assume a designated 'off-stage': 'gaps and screens' that are 'often a site of social intimacy' (2004: 3) and constitute some of the most important action within the social field. The linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal has identified a common pattern of what she calls 'fractal recursion and erasure' (2005: 23) in which speakers consistently smuggle references to the 'private' into 'public' discourse—only to erase that discourse's material-semiotic dependence on the private (like when the house's *salon* is treated as 'public' despite literally—spatially—being in the 'private sphere' of the home) (Gal 2005: 27). Since publics are representations that are also inherently self-distorting, deciphering their effects

[1] Anthropology may also introduce its own unique inequalities as well.

becomes more important for social anthropologists the more those publics pervade sociality—yet all the more difficult.

In the following review, I rely on Christopher Kelty's (2005) concept of 'recursive publics' to analyze how contemporary European social anthropology has grown increasingly concerned with its technical, legal, and political conditions of possibility. Kelty developed the concept of recursive publics while working with South Asian tech workers to draw attention to an emerging tendency in such fields towards a self-conscious embrace of forms of sociality predicated on common membership in a public. So, whereas theorists like Jurgen Habermas and Michael Warner might write about—and even address themselves to—those who might not be particularly aware of their membership in something called 'a public', Kelty's interlocutors (known as 'geeks') obsessed over the conditions of their own association and transformed social action into the technical pursuit of new forms of interactional infrastructure.

Increasingly, however, the concerns of Kelty's geeks suffuse our contemporary world more generally with the proliferation of online platforms for the facilitation of sociality—though their reach and scope may well be overblown. Here, the recent move in anthropology to critique the closed model of academic publishing and to embrace forms of 'open source' publishing developed in the computing sciences is notable. With the recent—and very *public*—implosion of the journal *Hau*, this recursivity of social anthropology's publics seems to only accelerate, with discussion overflowing the boundaries of the traditional journal form and creating new emergent communities on twitter (in the form of #hautalk), as well as an emerging European Social Anthropology blogosphere led by sites like Allegra Labs, the Focaal Blog and the Network for Ethnographic Theory. Even as a sense of crisis abounds in these new forums, they simultaneously reify social anthropology's publics, networking participants together in new,

more intimate ways—all while also offering a trenchant critique of the status quo in research and publishing and forcing us to question the assumption that the journal article is the basic, knowledge-bearing unit within the discipline.

In this regard, it is quite fitting that my first difficulty in writing this review was simply obtaining access to two of the journals I have been asked to review here—since my university's library objected to paying Berghahn Journals over 1000 pounds per year to have access to the most recent year of their content[2]. This sort of practical bureaucratic wrangling rips us away from more abstract theoretical debates and helps to place the political economy of academic knowledge production in sharp relief. Anthropologists tend to be employed by universities that increasingly see aspects of their educational mission (like libraries) as burdensome distractions from their true raison d'etre as engines of financialization. They object to the way that anthropologists give their research away to for-profit corporations so that their libraries can buy it back from them. Yet the hostility to the journal-article form runs deeper than mere accounting: in a world where academics are increasingly governed by managerial models centered around ideas of targeting, project management, and risk management (Pels et al. 2018), the nebulous concept of 'impact' is perhaps even more corrosive to the tradition of the peer-reviewed journal article. These systems for measuring and rewarding anthropological knowledge production increasingly compete with incentive structures that instead valorise workshops with 'stakeholders' [disproportionately policy-makers], websites, media appearances and—most concerningly—advocacy for policies later implemented by government or industry. Anthropologists seem to be increasingly called upon to act as entrepreneurial brokers between

[2] I would like to thank the editors of *Social Analysis* and *Focaal* for helping me access their journals and to the powers that be at my university for eventually agreeing to subscribe.

‘communities’ and various power-centers within society, commodifying various forms of knowledge and expertise for diverse audiences.

Against this backdrop, it would be unsurprising to see anthropologists struggling to take stock of the bewildering changes that are clearly afoot and, indeed, this seems to be the case. In this year’s journal outputs, I see a remarkable—but still completely understandable—amount of explicit reflection on precisely these challenges. In the first part of this review, I identify this as a turn to meta-anthropology (the anthropology of anthropology) with an intensive concern for the dynamics surrounding the public dissemination of anthropological knowledge amidst increasingly entrepreneurial models of scholarship. While I take this to be the most solid and obvious evidence for my thesis about the current state of the discipline, I would argue that the trend goes much deeper. I then focus on how recent work on personhood (especially notions of networked, non-individual personhood) and labour also seeks to resist the reduction of the anthropologist to the role of entrepreneur within what Dominic Boyer has called ‘artisanal knowledge-making economies’ (2003: 270). I conclude by taking stock of how social anthropology’s own transformation through the broader institutional and technological mechanisms I identify here actually makes it uniquely sensitive to these trends (certainly a good thing), but I also suggest that other aspects of the human condition could easily be occluded in the process. As a corrective, I point to work on kinship as especially well-placed to help social anthropology struggle against the limitations of its own publicity while remaining sensitive to a human condition that cannot be bounded by paywalls or the strictures of the neoliberal university.

The Rise of Meta-Anthropology

Clearly, there is nothing new about self-reflexivity in anthropology and there is little need to rehearse the long and storied history of various 'turns' that have sought to make anthropology more self-aware. What distinguishes recent work, however, is how it tends to posit an empirically discernible breakdown in a whole series of traditional boundaries between academic knowledge production on the one hand and knowledge practices unfolding in both 'the field' and the wider political economies in which academia has always been embedded on the other. At a time when anthropologists are increasingly evaluated in terms of 'impact' metrics (Andersen 2018; Stein 2018) and project management ontologies that demand certain classes of *deliverables*, they increasingly encounter similarly responsibilised broker-entrepreneurs in their various fieldsites (Marauda 2018). Yet the convergence of anthropologists and their objects of study is not just the result of downward social mobility for anthropologists coinciding with a long-overdue broadening of the anthropological gaze to include what Laura Nader (1972) once called 'studying up' (Gilbert 2018; Gilbert and Sklair 2018; Glucksberg 2018; Salverda and Skovgaard-Smith 2018; Sklair 2018). This convergence of observer and observed is further implicated in a complex and highly ambiguous mix of political, economic, and technical changes that have transformed many of the descendants of anthropology's traditional interlocutors into highly networked, media-savvy *auteurs* in their own right. Anthropologists are responding to this emerging reality in diverse ways, but some of the most important common threads seem to be an explicit focus on the relationship between anthropology and its publics and attempts to creatively rethink the nature of nature of collaboration.

One key way in which this breakdown in the traditional boundaries between anthropologists and the wider white-collar workforce manifests itself is in the spread of 'audit culture' (Strathern 2000; Shore and Write 2018), a topic explored by Stein (2018). Drawing on

50 interviews with practicing academic anthropologists, Stein argues that the UK's Research Excellency Framework constitutes a metric of 'impact' that 'cannot fully grasp the nature or effect of anthropology, insofar as the latter [anthropology] is a critical science that contributes to the constant renewal of audit's own politico- epistemic foundations' (2018: 10). While Stein's anthropological interlocutors support the general goals of maximizing the impact of their work, they point to a range of flaws in the audit's methodology: the devaluation of teaching; an inability to appreciate the sometimes-slow beginnings of important ideas (like gender), and inherent biases in what will be deemed worthwhile.

Andersson likewise worries about 'The Price of Impact' (2018) in his unapologetically 'autoethnographic' account of his attempts to avoid 'capture' by 'policy agendas' feeding on the hysteria surrounding the issue of migration points to the peculiarly perverse incentives created by the 'impact agenda.' Far from sparking 'innovation,' Andersson suggests that its rigid conflation of 'impact' and 'public policy' may merely foster '"solutions" [that] capture media and policy attention, based on their creative rebranding of old medicine in new bottles, and their alignment with Western governments' political priorities' (2018: 235). This is consonant with Stein's suggestion that the supposed indifference of academics to the social 'impact' of their work might be primarily a rhetorical device in the struggles of policymakers to define the role of academic knowledge production within society.

If the concept of impact often makes anthropologists uncomfortable, they do seem to pursue it with alacrity—even when they avoid the word. In a somber special issue on climate change entitled 'Economies of Growth or Ecologies of Survival?', Eriksen and Schober offer a fascinating look into how anthropologists might help broker between the divergent 'scales' necessary to connect local communities with 'global environmental actors that take the high

moral ground but disregard people's concerns over livelihoods' (2018: 419). The global forces of environmental degradation repeatedly arouse local opposition, but institutionalised environmentalism seems to sail right past their concerns—at times literally (Eriksen 2018). Farmers may resist the futures that conservation policies imagine for them (Norbye 2018). Locals may see pollutants as a welcome sign of prosperity (Jovanović 2018). Supposedly progressive measures like Corporate Social Responsibility may serve as an excellent tool of divide and rule (Knudsen 2018). Yet, in what the authors clearly see as a model of anthropological engagement, they offer one case from Australia where the slow work of weaving together local knowledge with the state of the art in environmental impact assessment allows a local indigenous group to defeat those threatening their lands on their own terms (Wergin 2018).

The use of ethnography (with all its positivist, empiricist and of course colonial baggage) in ironic juxtaposition with contemporary forms of knowledge production like environmental impact studies (or, as we will see, studies of new media) has become a pervasive means of generating critical tensions and new angles of analysis within contemporary anthropological work. In fact, it strikes me that this is precisely what Vokes and Pypes (2018) are getting at with their focus 'repetition and recursion' in their special issue in *Ethnos* entitled 'Chronotopes of Media in Sub-Saharan Africa'. Like the antique radios and televisions that adorn many homes across the continent (Pype 2018), ethnography can create through creative juxtapositions certain dynamics which fight against the time-space compression so often associated with media. Recursivity can create a sort of nostalgic 'thickening' (to borrow from Bakhtin) or even, if we accept Vokes and Pype's argument, a *humanization* of time. Here, repetition and time-space decompression become values and ends in their own rights, resisting the very marketing logics driving the proliferation of these technologies (Brisset-Foucault 2018; Gilbert 2018; Vokes

2018). In an afterword, Gunner identifies this as ‘a new episteme’ (2018: 292) that can now be part of a ‘search for new dimensions of “mobile ecology” where we begin to understand the meshwork of dynamic interaction through which persons and things are brought unexpectedly into meaningful relations with each other’ (2018: 295).

Similarly, in a special issue entitled ‘Reason and Passion’, Day, Carsten and Stafford take on the question of anthropology and its publics to explore the link between ethnography and other, related media for ‘the materialization of experience,’ like police files (Wesser 2018), houses (Carsten 2018; Day 2018), biography (Beatty 2018), anxious text messages (Sedgwick 2018) and even magic (Weston 2018). Again and again, the proliferation of work focusing on the materiality of the mediation of social relations seems to stem in part from the changing grounds of ethnographic engagement and certain convergences of observer and observed. Struggling with the ethical implications of the entanglements that ethnographers develop in the course of their work, Day, Carsten and Stafford argue that, ‘stories enroll participants – not least, professional anthropologists – in new moral and political trajectories’ (2018: 14). It is not necessarily an appreciation for the importance of stories that is decisive here, but rather it seems to be linked to a new politics of representation in a world of replicating and refracting cultural images that, in some respects, appears to be shrinking.

As roles within the ethnographic encounter are renegotiated, a concern for better theorizing collaboration (Hastrup 2018; Korsley and Stravianel 2018) becomes pervasive—for good reason. Anthropologists continue to hold a lot of power in many of their interactions and they have a responsibility to be mindful. Rabasa and Cuelenaere (2018), for instance, take on the dynamics that often accompany relationships with so-called ‘research assistants’—who often do far more of the data collection and analysis in anthropology than is generally acknowledged.

Rabasa and Cuelenaere ask whether this can even constitute a sort of 'ethnosuicide' as 'collaborators' are pressured to conform to the epistemological and ontological priors of their employers. Durham (2018) shows how anthropologists must be mindful of their power to distort the social field even when they avoid direct employer-employee relations, focusing on a rumor that the government was targeting tradipractitioners who claimed to cure AIDS with death. As she notes, the rumor itself plays into all manner of stereotypes, but she argues that this can be no excuse for ignoring how such rumors drove an otherwise circumspect and rightfully suspicious group of 'collaborators' into her waiting arms—on deeply unequal terms. Similarly, Olwig (2018) writes about the difficulties of collaborating with those commonly subject to negative stereotypes, focusing on narratives of adventure among migrants that resist both the conservative framing of criminality and a liberal framing of abjection. In each case, it is the increasingly porous boundaries between anthropological publics and wider publics and a concern for the potentially transactional (even exploitative) dimensions of collaboration that seem to cause much more longstanding dynamics to suddenly demand greater scrutiny.

In some ways the dilemmas driving the turn to meta-anthropology represent an expansion of anthropology's public and hence arguably represent immense vitality: what anthropologists do is becoming more relevant and more widely followed. Yet a public should ideally serve a function beyond its own self-aggrandizement, ideally some sort of public good. Here, there are clear reasons for concern to the degree that collaboration cannot be an end in itself—nor can recursivity be an end in itself. Often times, anthropologists may need to make a conscious decision to avoid collaboration—especially as they become increasingly 'entangled' (Leenders 2018) with various 'elites.' Anthropology has been here before, of course, back in the days when anthropologists were more open about collaborating with the military-industrial complex (Kao

2018). Yet in many other (less dramatic) cases, collaboration may still raise troubling issues. Patico (2018), for instance, suggests that a 'critical empathy' may be a necessary distancing device when anthropological commitments cannot be commensurated with particular forms of domination that anthropologists seek to understand. Perhaps the most difficult questions around collaboration arise with those who seem to be on the cusp of allyship. In the frankly titled special issue, 'Desire for the Political,' Dzenovska and De Genova (2018) seek to explore what positive collaborations looks like when unjust social structures are ostensibly failing to produce their own gravediggers. Disabused of any sense of inexorable forward progress, one cannot simply borrow freely from—or critique—one's milieu. It is to the more discerning work of fashioning usable liberatory concepts that I now turn.

The Rise of Networked Personhood

One proposition that anthropologists seem to be uniting around is an almost gleeful rejection of the freely choosing, self-reflexive individual. The notion of individual Christian (or later bourgeois) subjects with rich interior mental lives shaped by everything from the confessional to prayer, novel-reading, journaling, double-entry book-keeping, and psychoanalysis seems increasingly implausible amidst a widespread valorization of the networked *dividual*. Here I admit I am resurrecting and crudely generalising a term that McKim Marriott (1976) coined to emphasise the porousness of the Hindu subject amidst repeated exchanges of food and bodily fluids in opposition to the modern, Western *individual* (but see also Faubion 2018: 173 in Reed and Bialecki's special issue on character for an invocation of the concept). My aim, however, is to index a shift from a mode in which the concept of the *dividual*, especially when later taken up by Strathern and others and transposed to other contexts, can—quite rightly—be accused of essentialising differences between Westerners and various 'others'

(Mines 1994: 4-10; Sahlins 2013: 24-29) to a mode in which the concept can testify to anthropologists' increasingly strenuous efforts to divorce themselves from individualistic accounts of others *and* themselves. This rejection of the individual is not complete, of course, and some continue to theorise an 'ethics of freedom' (Laidlaw 2013). Yet just as often ethics seems to be invoked simply to dismiss pretensions to individual agency and change the subject, often to develop frameworks focused on emotion and affect. In other cases, affect and emotion seem to index the impossibility of freedom. Much of this work, however, seems to play with questions around the dissolution of the traditional boundaries of the self amidst a proliferation of new media and political-economic models of supposedly responsibilised entrepreneurship.

To be sure, contemporary work continues to grapple with the questions that have driven interest in ethics in recent years, documenting how people create spaces for freedom and self-fashioning through practices of self-reflection, reasoning, and moral judgment. Nielsen (2018) uses the concept of the 'moral laboratory' to better understand ADHD diagnosis. Huang's (2018) study shows how mobile phones-enabled 'wrong number' relationships are helping women employed in microcredit schemes renegotiate *purdah*. Tuckett (2018) shows how some immigrants in Italy find ways to engage in 'ethical brokerage' that not only carve out jobs for them within the Italian immigration bureaucracy, but also provide an avenue for fashioning the self. High (2018) shows how a Buddhist reflective practice of 'breaking the mind' helps monks come to terms with their participation in a gold rush despite Mahayana Buddhism's disapproval of mining. McManus (2018) shows how Turkey's diasporic football fandom can likewise create a space for playful self-reflection, perhaps (he claims) even inoculating participants against essentialist nationalism. Similarly, Makavicky (2018) argues that villagers in the Polish highlands narrate informal economic activities in a way that elaborates a 'poetics of self.'

Mayblin and Malara's special section on discipline and lenience in *Social Analysis* takes this further by suggesting that the contemporary focus in the anthropology of religion in 'discipline' is too restrictive to capture the ethical complexities of religious lives. Whether they are talking about witchcraft (Santo 2018), African Pentecostal megachurches (Reinhardt 2018) or Ethiopian Orthodox Christian fasting (Malara 2018), ethics is portrayed as being as much about dissolving the self within a wider environment as it is about molding a coherent and consistent self.

By far the most extensive engagement with the anthropology of ethics in 2018 was Reed and Bialecki's two-part special issue in this journal on character, which seeks to take the concept of character beyond its often deeply individualistic Christian undertones to understand how the concept could be made more flexible so as to inhere in all manner of collectivities. Contributors are concerned to account for how Christians—especially modern, protestant Christians—have historically conceived of character within the context of its conceptualization of individual moral culpability (Bialecki 2018; Pedersen 2018). Yet contributors also seek to both catalogue the shortcomings of such conceptualizations (Faubion 2018; Strathern 2018) as well as to document how the notion of character in Western society overflows these boundaries in a myriad of ways. The concept of character, far from being limited to purposive individual ethical self-fashioning, can also inhere in buildings and neighborhoods (Yarrow: 2018); idiosyncratic urban 'personalities' (Wardie 2018), the techniques of method acting (Tinius: 2018)[3] and even evolutionary theory (Candea 2018). With its deliberate de-centering of the freely choosing and reflecting human subject as the unit of analysis, this move seems symptomatic of a broader anthropological disinvestment from earlier approaches to ethics in favor of a return to a more constrained conceptualization of human action.

[3] Keisalo's (2018) work on stand-up comedy makes a similar point.

One particularly intriguing symptom that I detect of this wider backlash against the reflective individual subject is the current interest in emotion and affect—especially when it seems to be the end point of an investigation that began with questions of ethics. Here, Huang's (2018) work on wrong-number relations is particularly intriguing for its portrayal of how new technologies open up space for new forms of emotional attachment. Also notable is Rapport's (2018) critique of discussions of love that privilege the 'I' at the expense of what he terms love's status as 'public virtue.' Tran's (2018) more ethnographic study of anxieties around romantic love among Vietnam's new middle class reveals how self-reflection leads not to ethical self-fashioning but rather to the dissolution of the self. Intriguingly, in all of these pieces, 'love' becomes key to how social actors try to reconcile notions of freedom and constraint. In a slightly different vein, Jakimow (2018) explores how attempts on the part of local NGO partners to 'do good' can lead to lasting 'affective injuries' that go far beyond anything that volunteers anticipated.

In other cases, however, affect seems less like a critique of the ethical turn than a token of the impossibility of ethics due to prevailing conditions of true unfreedom. Garza's 'Becoming Illegal' (2018) offers a particularly harrowing account of the affective weight of unfreedom, revealing how the undocumented reckon with a legal status they have little control over. Telle (2018) writes about the rise of blasphemy trials and a new form of 'affective politics' and 'lawfare' in Indonesia that have become a new way to sort out ethical disagreements through the resort to state regulation and, at times, mob justice. Humphrey's (2018) ethnography of the use of facial expressions like smiles along the Russian-Chinese border meticulously excavates layer after layer of mutual recognition and its avoidance, revealing how 'affective registers' help to regulate the flow of people and goods across the frontier. Kearney's (2018) long-term interest in

‘cultural wounding’ leads her to write about how Australian aborigines attempt to confront the history of their forced displacement through a sort of distance. alienation and fear. Such affective entanglements with the land simultaneously invert popular Australian stereotypes about the authentic ‘native’ while in fact representing a truer and more understandable set of emotional investments. In a similar vein, Schubert describes what might at first seem like an ethical or moral notion of a corrosive ‘culture of immediatism’ in post-war Angola. Yet he argues that this notion is better understood through an investigation of ‘the affects of contemporary, neo-authoritarian statecraft’ (Schubert 2018: 2), which can reveal how the idea of a ‘culture of immediatism’ actually helps leave isolated individuals vulnerable to the regime’s inducements to quiet complicity since it offers no substantive alternative basis for solidarity and collective action.

This trend in thinking about affect completely beyond ethics and morality also emerges in Ladwig and Roque’s special issue in *Social Analysis*, ‘Mimetic Governmentality. Colonialism, and the State.’ Contributors are especially concerned to understand ‘the relationships between the state and forms of imagination and affect’ (Ladwig and Roque 2018: 15), especially when colonial rulers and resistance movements make adjustments in material culture with an aim to generating specific affective responses in others. This comes out most clearly in Ladwig’s ‘Imitations of Buddhist Statecraft’ (2018), which explores the French strategy of restoring Buddhist temples as a form of colonial pacification. However, the affective dimensions of mimesis are also central to Bastos’s work on Portuguese hut hospitals, which were likewise designed to use mimicry to coax the ‘native’ into colonial structures of control. Yet all was not so simple for colonial administrators. While Tappe (2018) demonstrates how some administrators borrowed freely from indigenous repertoires to enhance their control, Roque

(2018) relates a case from the colonial archives in which participation in local head-hunting practices led to a crisis of sorts in the colonial sense of self, threatening the colonists' deeply held notions of moral superiority. Taken as a whole, the focus on mimesis and affect in statecraft highlights how social action is preconditioned by its conditions of reception.

One way in which the critique of more individualistic notions of personhood can take on more analytic bite is through a focus on the re-distributional nature of all human societies via concepts of moral economy and even infrastructure. In a fascinating special issue, Alexander, Bruun and Koch examine the 'Moral Economies of the Home' (2018). Drawing on case-studies of Danish cooperatives (Bruun 2018), Brazil's 'landless' (Flynn 2018), British neighbor disputes (Koch 2018), Kazakh housing protests (Alexander 2018), Serbian apartment blocks (Johnson 2018), and rumors about the safety of housing in China (Bruckermann 2018), contributors examine how people around the world articulate communities and collectivities through housing. Susser (2018) argues in an afterword that the increasing financialization of housing is driving political organizing on the right and the left that emphasizes intense emotional connections to place-anchored collectivities. In a somewhat different way, certain work on infrastructure seems to doing something similar, focusing on how the confluence of morality, affect, and materiality fashions human subjects not as freely choosing individuals but rather as collaborators in redistributive projects that house, feed, clothe and transport the young, the old, and those otherwise unable to work—but often at the cost of savage inequalities. Here, I am thinking of a lively dialogue between Venkatesan, Bear, Harvey, Lazar, Rival and Simone on infrastructure (2018)—as well as Haine's (2018) work on the 'affective power of infrastructure.' In a very different way, Daele's work on food's status as a 'holographic condensation of life' in Sri

Lankan ritual seems to develop similar lines of thought about persons and their relations to collectivities in the contemporary world.

The shift towards affect in much of this scholarship seems eminently reasonable to the degree that it speaks to apparently widespread anxieties about the coherence of the self amidst significant social, technical and political upheaval. Yet one must be wary of investing too much in a vague critique of the liberal/Christian/modern individualist subject. As Rodd (2018) notes in a study of how white, Australian neo-shamanic Ayahuasca-drinkers process their experiences, the 'expansive, non-relational self' ('it's all you') becomes a metaphor for transcendence that, ironically, reproduces the very modern narcissism and disenchantment that it seeks to overcome (2018: 325). To avoid methodological solipsism, it seems essential to pay attention to how persons are actually made. First and foremost, understanding how people are made seems to imply attending to the *labor* that goes into making humans. It also seems to imply recognizing the degree to which much of this work is *care*—a term of art in feminist kinship studies used to theorise how much of the unacknowledged yet absolutely essential burdens of reproducing society has been disproportionately borne by women in recent human history. Unsurprisingly, these seem to be major theoretical trends shaping contemporary anthropology and it is to them that I now turn.

The Turn to Labor

The concept of labor has come to rapid prominence in recent years and, while some of this is driven by the left-wing and Marxist currents that have shaped anthropology for decades, it is notable how much of the work on labor seems to come from other perspectives—and the degree to which a number of scholars advancing explicitly Marxian analyses seem to be cautioning against an unqualified embrace of the concept of labor (Robbins 2018; Weiss 2018).

So while one might expect to see labor playing an important role in a special issue on 'Marxism Resurgent' (Neveling and Steur 2018), it is notable to see the more staid *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (formerly known as *Man*) hosting a special issue entitled 'Dislocating labour: anthropological reconfigurations' (Harvey and Krohn- Hansen 2018). Whether this represents a radicalization of the anthropological profession and its publics or a domestication of the concept of labor is more complex and beyond the scope of this review. However, it is striking to note how the concept of labor is being used to describe things that did not use to be considered labor at a time when forms of human action that might be called labor are increasingly being theorised through concepts like 'brokerage' (Jensen 2018; Koster and van Leynseele 2018) and 'commoning' (Bodirsky 2018). However, I would suggest that this reformulation of economic concepts is tied up with the reformulation of the anthropological profession and its publics that I have already begun to sketch out.

The most notable dynamic of the increasing anthropological focus on labor is the tendency to use labor as an analytic concept precisely *because of* the dissonance it creates with what is being described. This emerges most clearly, perhaps, in Rajkovic's concept of 'mock-labour,' which he uses to develop 'an anthropology of the demoralised' focusing on low-level state employees who seem, in a sense, to be doing anything *but* working (2018). Kravel-Tovi also uses this same sort of dissonance between the vernacular sense of labour and his ethnographic object in his fascinating study of the exacting disciplines that apprentices seeking Israeli state-recognised conversion to Judaism undergo. Here, Kravel-Tovi uses the concept of labor in keeping with what has been called a 'Corporeal turn' in Jewish studies (2018: 963) to challenge how readers think about both labor and faith. Brown's ethnography of 'women's work' and 'transactional sex' (2018) makes a similar, if more familiar, analytic move building a

long history of socialist-feminist thinking on issues of care, gendered oppression, and compulsory heterosexuality.

Harvey and Krohn- Hansen's 'Dislocating Labour' (2018) is the most programmatic of these contributions, drawing on a tradition in feminist thinking that has historically expanded the concept of labour to draw out new solidarities in relation to capital. In that spirit, contributors to the special issue try to offer the most expansive possible sampling of relationships between labour and capital, seeking to avoid limiting the concept to wage labour (Cant 2018; Martin 2018; Narotzky 2018; Yanagisako 2018). Here, they make a deliberate decision to focus both on the now much-discussed precariat (Grill 2018; Harvey 2018; Schober 2018), but also the persistence of the state and far more stable labor relations among certain privileged groups (Campbell 2018; Hoëm 2018; Krohn- Hansen 2018). These authors all seem to be promoting the idea that, as Harvey and Krohn-Hansen frame it, even anthropologists who 'might not necessarily see themselves as working primarily on economic relations' can still use labour as 'a means of extending thought as we attempt to find ways to respond to the challenges of our contemporary world' (2018: 28). Indeed: it is hard to deny that labor remains a pervasive reality for most humans—whether or not it is in their best interests. Mikuš (2018) reminds us of this through his ethnography of welfare and disability in neoliberalizing Serbia, analyzing how pushing the disabled into wage labour is often treated as a policy end in itself.

Nonetheless, others drawing from the Marxian tradition, seem more reticent to embrace and expand the concept of labour. For instance, contributors to 'Marxism Resurgent' seem keen to place more emphasis on how their understanding of labour is grounded in a particular kind of materialism (Howard 2018; Murawski 2018; Neveling and Steur 2018). When labour is more directly at stake, the emphasis is still on forces like accumulation through dispossession (Morell

2018) and the limits of subaltern ‘autonomous political initiative’ (Ciavolella 2018). Others are even more openly critical, like Robbins, who proposes that the classical focus on the division between labor and capital needs to be replaced by a redoubled focus on creditor-debtor relations (2018: 103). In a similar vein, Weiss tries to recover insights from the work of Meillassoux on social reproduction among Neolithic farmers to argue that the immiseration that seems to accompany financialization need not create a proletariat of workers—indeed it may create ‘surplus populations’ of ‘investors’ with no choice but to ‘invest’ in their ‘households.’ As Weiss observes, ‘the boundary between workers and capitalists is increasingly porous’ (2018: 113). Indeed, a range of recent scholarship, especially research exploring brokerage (Chalhi, Koster and Vermeulen 2018; James 2018; Lindquist 2018; van Leynseele 2018) points to a generalised retreat of straightforward *labor* relations as a means of organizing social life (see also Mattioli 2018). For instance, Dolan and Rajak (2018) identify renewed interest in global development circles in promoting ‘entrepreneurship’ among the underemployed at the ‘bottom of the pyramid’—which only seems like a short step from another phenomenon on the rise: pyramid schemes (Schiffauer 2018; 2018).

If anthropology’s newfound interest in labor sometimes seems to carry with hint of exoticization and even salvage ethnography, then it is nonetheless worth considering how labor may remain (despite all of the other changes afoot) one of the most powerful ways that humans articulate property relations. Labor figures prominently in both Cooper’s (2018) work on Nicaraguan peasant notions of entitlement and Bodirsky’s work on commoning (2018). From this perspective, the concept of labor is better understood as a token within a certain system of claimsmaking—one that might be heavily biased, yet still often preferable to the more capricious arrangements associated with more predatory modes of accumulation. From this perspective, one

has to wonder whether the theorizations of labor that are emerging are prepared to detach themselves from the assumptions inherent in their articulation within a certain professional setting. Here, I am particularly struck by Engeler's (2018) study of a recent student uprising in Burkina Faso. Driven by their frustrated ambitions to use their education to become full 'afropolitans,' they turned to an earlier era's social contract and ideological-symbolic trappings, with an earlier imagery of socialist and nationalist struggle inspiring new dreams of social mobility—even as hashtags and social media replace the formal structures of the old student union and party cadres. Nonetheless, such actors may lose more than they bargained when they trade 'international connections, migratory experiences, and good job prospects' for 'the power of sheer numbers as they mobilise *en masse* within a mainly local context but equipped with global tools' (2018: 87). Whether these technologies can confer the freedoms their marketing has promised remains another matter.

Kinship and the Struggle against the Limits of Publicity

There are many ways that anthropologists are struggling against the limits of publicity and I want to be clear that I am not so grandiose as to think that this review is anything but a microcosm of the wider current I am trying to describe. Yet I want to end by pointing to anthropological studies in kinship as one particularly intriguing way that anthropologists are embracing the challenges of becoming an increasingly recursive public. To be sure, there are other ways to try to escape the iron cage of contemporary entrepreneurial knowledge-production's regimes of publicity that involve an exploration of alternative ontologies or 'other worlds' (Hage 2018; Hazorika 2018; Rosengren 2018; Stolz 2018; but see Erazo and Jarrett 2018). Yet it is inherent in the nature of publics that they will produce a vital yet largely under-appreciated 'off-stage' zone populated by those unacknowledged toilers who are so essential to

any public's materialization. As such, one need never go far to disrupt commonsense shaped by over-exposure to publics. At the same time, however, the subtle sense of going *behind the scenes* increasingly itself becomes something of a social art. Like an 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault 1978: 17-35), all of the essential work that goes into creating publics that is too boring, obscene, nonsensical, scatological, sexual, and sacrilegious is re-introduced through careful practices of encapsulation, buffering and masking. Anthropology, of course, has long been a part of this process, taking humanity's reproductive, affective, and connective concerns and presenting them in public in an acceptable manner. In this sense, kinship has long been one of the key ways that anthropology has struggled against publicity, asking important questions about how humans are made and struggling even harder to answer those questions unwaveringly.

Indeed, the relationship between public and private itself continues to be a rich source of grist for the ethnographic mill. Those working on kinship today have no patience for the notion that it can be treated as its own domain distinct from the 'public sphere.' For instance, Jacobsen (2018) uses a French moral panic over veiled nannies as a window into how certain biopolitical fixations drive laïcité's 'secular suspicion' ever deeper into the recesses of family life. Pina Cabral (2018) writes of how austerity has left a generation that came of age in the 2000s unable to reconcile its familial obligations with the demands of living in a consumer society. Cohen (2018) shows how Guinean transnational migrants use magic and religion to set limits to kinship—and kinship obligation. Meher et al. (2018), in a study of the 'transcendental ethics of care,' shows how lower-caste care workers in India use the concept of *seva* to re-frame their engagement with the most intimate aspects of their charges' bodily functions. Conceptualizing their engagement with human waste as a form of religious devotion figures care workers as not merely polluted in a way that makes them fundamentally 'other' but as beings capable of

appropriating Brahmanical ethical practices to become 'less than kin but more than servant' (Meher et al 2018: 757). At the same time, such an analysis cannot help but trace out how care-workers' increasing ability to convincingly articulate this account is itself tied up with the wider breakdown of the patriarchal family and more familiar home-based modes of elder care that have, in turn led to the renegotiation of caste-inflected labor in light of new imaginings of the proper relationship between 'public' and 'private.'

One can take the analysis of how kinship becomes a matter of public concern further into the analysis of wider-ranging biopolitical regimes. For instance, Gamelltoft (2018) seeks to understand what 'belonging' means to women who are pressured into abortions as a consequence of biopolitical calculations of the Vietnamese state designed to optimise the country's population. In 'Raising Dead Sons,' Carter (2018) explores how mothers in New Orleans use familial idioms to organise against regimes of racial terror. Lazar (2018), analyzes how Argentinian labor unions actively work to constitute themselves not just as work units but also as kin units. Cooper (2018), drawing on fieldwork with those orphaned by AIDS in western Kenya, shows how reconnecting with natal kin becomes a way to reassert moral personhood amidst massive social dislocation. Alternately, Wilson (2018) shows how the public presentation of bridewealth both creates relationships between affines but also cuts off the recipient from her natal family. Edwards (2018) studies practices of 'family treeing' among British amateur genealogists and discovers forms of care that respond to deindustrialization and its threat to working-class dignity. Mariner (2018) studies 'American Adoption's Penetrating Gaze,' analyzing how the manipulation of the gaze can make adoptive kinship possible or foreclose that possibility.

As the foregoing examples make clear, kinship is hard to contain and overflows the boundaries imposed on it by the public sphere. Mezzenzana, for instance, examines how Runa women's personhood is gendered, requiring women to exteriorise their knowledge in particular ways in practices have often been interpreted by anthropologists as 'making kinship'—without appreciating their full transcendental possibilities. Making kinship in such a manner should clearly be understood as a fully cosmological and even ontological project with far-reaching implications. Here again, anthropologists and their interlocutors are increasingly networked and transnational, their lives defined by the circulation of information and knowledges. Yet these developments, arguably remain embedded in foundations that can be screened off as 'off-stage' but never truly disposed of.

Conclusion

If the social science of the industrial era was defined by mechanistic metaphors, then it is no wonder that the social science idiom *par excellance* of the information era is the network. This is completely understandable and even necessary so long as anthropologists remain mindful of where they are getting their vocabulary—and where they are trying to force a spurious correspondence. There is no need to embrace more organic metaphors as some sort of atavistic corrective—much less to abandon the study of how these broader political and economic transformations are impacting notions of labor, personhood and, indeed, anthropology. Yet despite all of the ways in which social anthropology's professional condition must inevitably mirror wider social trends, anthropologists need to reach beyond that immediate context, not necessarily through the classic ethnographic trick of geographical displacement but rather by thinking seriously about the ways in which social anthropology is constrained by its status as a public and looking for ways to subtly subvert that status. I have suggested that engaging with the

idea of kinship could aid in that—because kinship is always integral to publics and usually *hidden in plain sight*.

Most anthropologists today would agree that 'kinship' as a transcultural 'domain' or 'subsystem' of 'society' is, in David Schneider's felicitous phrase 'made up' (1984). In fact, the same goes for the other classic 'domains' of inquiry in social anthropology: politics, economy and religion. While these remain pervasive *topics* of *interest* in 2018, one would be hard pressed to find today's anthropologists consciously limiting themselves to one *a priori* 'subsystem' of a pre-given 'society.' The preference seems to be instead for taking on the challenge of exploring forms of practice that are both generative of but also subject to systemic constraints, seeking to better understand how people relate to one another and foster new forms of human life. European social anthropology seems more than up to the task and the authors reviewed here all seem to succeed in doing this in their own ways—most with far more creativity and verve than this review (which is little more than an attempt at faithful iteration) can hope to muster.

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