

[The following paper is a slightly revised version of the Keynote Address given to the Australian Anthropological Society Meetings in Canberra, October 2002. The version presented to the Society was illustrated and referred to some on-line sites, indicated here in the text in the usual way. If you read the paper on-line you can go directly to the sites referred to.]

## BEYOND ANTHROPOLOGY, TOWARDS ACTUALITY

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The AAS meetings of 2001 heard a plenary address from Jeremy Beckett, in which he took up the idea of the *longue durée* in the trajectory of anthropology. Looking backwards as he so entertainingly did has a certain fascination especially for those of us who have a similarly long perspective on our discipline, who knew personally those who now are famous forbears: Professor Elkin sitting in his study, long retired but still editing *Oceania*, summoning me to his office to make corrections to a manuscript which he felt did not acknowledge sufficiently the importance of his own work.

<http://www.usyd.edu.au/arms/archives/elkin/biog.htm>

Or T.G.H. Strehlow, to whom I am indebted for first telling me of women's ritual in Central Australia during long morning-teas in his Adelaide office in the early 1960s, his blue eyes gazing into a time that was utterly past and yet part of his everyday present.<sup>i</sup>

(<http://www.strehlow.com.au/cdsca/strehlow/centre.htm>)

Turning around and looking back is revealing, but we should recognize that looking forward is imperative, and we cannot avoid the question: "where is anthropology going" in the twenty first century.

I do not believe anthropology can conceivably exist, at least in the sense of being reproduced, outside the University. It certainly can be practiced outside the University, and in some countries, notably the US, it is practiced very widely. However only in the University environment is it possible for students to learn the discipline and progress in it, for the necessary research base to be maintained, for the conditions to exist so that a continuing freshness and vitality can be assured. It is true that in the nineteenth century groups of interested gentlemen could join together in the premises of the Royal Society, and read learned papers which interested them on a wide variety of topics.

<http://www-gap.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Societies/Rshistory/>

This kind of amateur activity could keep anthropology alive again, one supposes, but not for long.

In these times of intense competition for dwindling resources in Universities, the domination of “market forces” and neo-liberalism, the spread of late global capitalism, and the instability of the emerging world system, it is clear that certain choices will determine which knowledge bases or systems will survive and thrive. There is no guarantee that an area of study and knowledge which was considered significant and influential at one time will automatically be so considered later. Phrenology is a good example. Once a lively “science”, phrenology disappeared because what it proposed was incorrect and hence irrelevant. The belief that you could determine individual criminal tendencies from the shape of the head was a widely shared delusion.

<http://pages.britishlibrary.net/phrenology/>

The past two decades have seen a number of challenges to anthropology at the institutional level, and the loss of a significant number of staff positions as academics retire and are not replaced. The primary reasons for this are simple: the student demand for the area of study is not high enough to justify the number of positions, given competitive conditions. The question will be asked: do Universities NEED Anthropology departments? Why? Some Universities fund their Arts/Social Sciences areas much more generously than others, and as a result some Departments remain strong, while others enter into a steady decline as they find themselves unable to increase student numbers or even to deal with those they have, with traditional approaches and techniques. The proposed rationalization of University offerings likely to result from the current Nelson Inquiry may mean that only certain Universities will offer certain programs. “Language of lesser demand”, for example, will be offered at only one or two Universities. Other underperforming and low-demand areas will be closed, and resources will be used to support stronger ones. Students who want to study subjects of lesser demand will have to physically move to the Universities where they are offered, or possibly study on-line or in other “flexible” modes. The programs will be developed by the Departments where the strength is already established.

In terms of current continuing positions in Australia the following seems to be approximately the case:

### Anthropologists employed in Australian Universities

University	Department/School	Anthropologists *
Sydney	Anthropology	10
UNSW	Sociology/Anthropology	5
Macquarie	Anthropology	8
UNE	Research, Education	2
ANU Faculty	Anthrop and Archaeol	10
RSPacS + Others	(Gender, CAPRA,CCR)	10+5
Wollongong	Sociology?	2
Charles Sturt	?	1
Ballarat	?	1
Melbourne	Anth, Geog and Env	6
Monash	Pol and Soc Inquiry	4
Newcastle	Social Sciences	6
Adelaide	Anthropology	10
UQ'ld	Anthrop and Archaeol	4
LaTrobe	Anthrop and Sociol	6
UWA	Anthropology	14
NTU	Various	2-3
JCU	Anthrop, Arch and Soc	7
Griffith	Environ. Studs	2
Other	Various	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>113</b>

- Identifiable anthropologists include those specifically named as anthropologists in staff lists on Web pages, some of whom are in non-anthropology departments but are known to be anthropologists. In some cases individuals cannot be clearly identified. Some Webpage lists are out of date. Apologies for any inaccuracies, this should be regarded as an approximate guide only. AAS will be carrying out a more accurate survey in the near future.

This gives a total of around 113 identifiable anthropologists working in Australian academic environments. Of these, slightly more than 50% appear to be members of AAS, ranging from 12.5% in one department to 70% in another. However, there are many more members of AAS, totaling around 293. Ordinary Members (of whom there are 93) include many postgraduate students. There are 137 Fellows, 101 of whom are associated with Universities including a considerable number of Overseas Fellows. There are 16 retired anthropologists, two with Honorary retired status, around 4 apparently

employed in hospital or health services, some who work in Aboriginal organizations, and a considerable number who work as consultants, generally in Australia in land claim, native title and allied contexts. Notably, only two members are specifically identified as “consultants” even though many do undertake consultancy work either on a full-time basis or from time to time. The “consultancy” activities however are invisible on the membership database.<sup>ii</sup>

In the early days of Australian anthropology there were few academic positions and few researchers (although what giants they were!). The expansion of the 1960s allowed a significant growth, but since then one would have to say the story has been one of stasis or decline. This has also been a decline in respect and reputation, for reasons I will address later. I would like briefly now to contrast the situation of two “sibling” disciplines.

I will begin with Psychology. Psychology and Anthropology were, until about the 1960s, considered to be similar or comparable disciplines. Psychology dealt with the individual, anthropology with the socio-cultural, but their fields were seen as complementary. However since that time their paths have diverged dramatically. Anthropology has struggled to retain a hold in the University, whereas Psychology has flourished. It has a secure presence in every University, and because of accreditation by its own professional association, there are incontrovertible reasons for maintaining certain core areas of study. Entry standards are generally high and there is no sign of lessening demand. A four year qualification in Psychology is a vocational degree and psychologists are employed throughout the social, educational and welfare system as well as in business, human resource management, administration and allied fields. Currently 13,000 individuals are members of the Australian Psychological Society.

What is it that psychologists do which distinguishes their contribution in such a way as to make their discipline virtually immune from criticism, and the basis of a firm expectation of employment for their graduates? Most of us will recall thinking that psychology had something to do with “the mind”, with understanding “what makes people tick”. This is generally still true, but academic psychology has moved away from humanistic concerns and has become dominated by experimental methods and “scientific” concepts of human behaviour, relying on an empiricist concept of “proof” (“rats and stats”). As a result Psychology departments are increasingly being relocated to Science Faculties rather than Arts Faculties, and gain the benefit of some differential funding which renders their continuation even more certain. There is an inherently “scientific” mind-set established in Psychology which makes the research practices of anthropology seem bizarre and perhaps laughable. Other Humanities research fields, such as English Literature, do not seem to be laughable in the same way, but Anthropology proposes itself as a discipline concerned with human life yet has no apparent method, cannot demonstrate the “truth” of its assertions, apparently cannot demonstrate its “data” to anybody else and has low or no replicability. These accusations are not necessarily correct, but there has been no venue or context in which discussions about the nature of anthropological knowledge can be pursued. Anthropology sits somewhere between the humanities and the social sciences, unsure of its own epistemological bases and seemingly unwilling to discuss the matter. This issue will become increasingly significant as demands increase for the provision of data-sets as a prerequisite for funding and as a means of assessing the quality of research

publication increase in the next decade. It is imperative that anthropologists in Australia begin to address this issue, alongside the implications of the increasingly rigid Ethics Clearance requirements for the conduct of research as anthropologists understand it. Simply throwing up one's hands and saying it is all ridiculous will not be a satisfactory response.

Psychology's claim to being a "science" has largely arisen from its repudiation of "the social". Social psychology is almost dead, and even more grim has been the fate of psychoanalytic thought which remains in some clinical therapeutic contexts but has been relegated to the dustbin of conventional psychology. If psychoanalytic thought exists anywhere now it is in departments of cultural studies, film theory or literature. What we must recognize is that psychology remains profoundly influential, not only in the academy but, through its pervasive teachings, in society generally, in business and management, and in popular understandings purveyed through the media.

By the 1990s, psychology's hot new area was cognitive neuroscience. This indeed concerns "the human mind", but it is a kind of mind which is understood as the outcome of biochemical and molecular processes. Q: What makes people think certain things? A: the presence of certain chemicals and structures in the brain. What humans consciously suppose about themselves, their motivations and the structure of the world can be seen as a form of delusion.

<http://www.cogneurosociety/ovs/>

<http://www.cnbc.cmu.edu/Other> Train

Let us briefly consider delusion. The term "delusion" generally refers to the idea that someone is "wrong" about something, an opinion or an idea – the condition of holding a belief which others consider to be unwarranted. But how do we come to believe certain things, and who decides if they are right or wrong? Anthropologists will readily reply: "human beings learn to believe certain things because their culture teaches them that such and such is the case". However for cognitive neuroscience, this cannot be a satisfactory answer, since "believing" is a process which takes place within the brain of the individual. Cultural processes may support beliefs, but cannot be used to account for them. "Belief" is now the subject of millions of dollars of international research investment. At the Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science (MACCS), for example, a key investigation is the Belief Formation Project.

<http://www.maccs.mq.edu.au/>

This project aims to "develop a general model of the cognitive system which people use to generate, evaluate, and then accept or reject beliefs". The key to the study is the investigation of delusions, for example, the Capgras Delusion. People suffering this delusion suppose that a close relative, usually a spouse, has been replaced by an exact double. This impostor seems exactly the same as the original person, but the sufferer "knows" this to be wrong. Some see themselves as their own double, and believe someone else has "snatched" their body. Other delusions include the Cotard delusion – the belief that you are dead; the Fregoli delusion: the belief you are continually being followed by a group of people who you cannot recognize because they are in disguise;

and the Mirrored- Self Delusion, the belief that your own reflection in a mirror is actually a person who is following you around.

These “extremes” of delusory belief appear from experimental evidence to be associated with the existence of microscopic lesions in the right brain. But what about other beliefs? How can we understand what people believe, especially other people? If “tribal” people state that thunder is the voice of God the anthropologist is quite happy to report it as part of their religious system. If the anthropologist’s brother states the same thing he is likely to be sent to a psychiatrist. Why? Because belief can be right in one context but wrong in another. Yet this answer cannot satisfy cognitive science and certainly won’t impress its funding bodies. Cognitive science claims to be able to give some kind of material answer to these questions. It explores the minuscule, wholly invisible (in normal subjective terms) and unknowable processes which occur as thought itself takes place and discourse flows from thought. Immense sums of money are being spent on this research in the belief that it is possible to know precisely how memories are formed, how “ideas” are developed, how languages works at the cellular level, what makes people feel certain things, and how humans think. It seems to be completely accepted in the scientific community that the human being is no more than the sum of these microcellular biochemical reactions and interactions; that our conscious human subjectivities are something like masks or dreams created to permit our animal existence, which however bears no direct or mimetic relation to the “actual” processes underlying our supposed “selves” and our actions. In other words, the human subject may act on the understanding that he or she is motivated by a certain kind of desire; but this is a delusion, inasmuch as desire itself is a relation between biochemical neurotransmissions of which the human being can never become fully conscious. In providing this admittedly cursory and fragmentary account of a very significant research field I am not meaning to demean it (as some listeners seemed to think at the spoken presentation). Instead, I am trying to point out the way in which whole swathes of taken-for-granted assumptions which guided the development of anthropology in the 1970s are today, to those in apparently adjacent fields evidently limited, misguided or even absurd. Perhaps they might seem equally absurd to anthropologists, although there has been little sign of this to date. Instead, the major response has been to refuse to even think about it, or engage with such questions at all. The “siblingship” anthropology once shared with psychology seems to have been utterly sundered and their respective ideas about “human being” are talking entirely past each other.

Let me turn to a different “sibling” discipline. History, like psychology, is booming. The *Literary Review* (London) in May 2002 carried a lead article by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, who said:

For historians, this is the best and worst of times. Our numbers have boomed over the last forty years and the subjects we tackle multiplied to match. The output of rubbish, of course, has grown proportionately; but the good scholarship... has exploded. Two generations of social and cultural revolution have liberated us to penetrate parts of society our predecessors did not reach: the jetsam of history, the excluded classes and cultures. There are no more ‘people without history’, no minorities marginalized into invisibility. Other disciplines have broadened and sharpened historians’ vision; anthropology, because the past

is a foreign culture... sociology, because although models mislead they also stimulate; linguistics and genetics, which have revealed new ways of finding out what happened in ill-documented reaches of the past; psychology, because historical events... happen first of all in the mind. Postmodernism ... nudged historians into the study of the strange, the ambivalent, the liminal and subliminal, the latent, the implicit, the reflexive and the dreamed.

As never before, historical writing does what Nobel prizewinners in literature are supposed to do: it “illuminates the human condition”. (p. 1, May 2002).

Illuminating the human condition will not translate readily into a job or a vocation, or very seldom, but it spreads a certain kind of world view, a certain understanding of contemporary social and cultural dilemmas. This perspective is very different to that of the cognitive neuroscientist, but it does not undermine or compete with it. The support for historical research has never been stronger: ARC grants are regularly given to historians, students clamour to study history including Ancient History, and World History is developing rapidly, and has in great measure taken over the perspective on the development of human societies which once was part of the normal anthropology curriculum, but was repudiated some time in the 70s-80s because it looked like “evolutionism” to talk about major forms of human life-ways in a sequential way. As a result, students who want to understand why some peoples on earth never took up farming will have to go to History (or perhaps archaeology) to find the outlines of an answer.

Where history was willing to embrace the interdisciplinary visions and possibilities arising from the decomposition of the traditional “knowledge systems”, anthropology to a significant degree ignored them, on the grounds that whatever this form of knowledge was, it was “not anthropology”.

Thus where psychology entrenched itself by embedding its graduates into vocational outcomes, history laid claim to the broad vision of human societies on a world scale, as providing a humanistic knowledge appropriate to all educated people. Anthropology has resisted both possibilities. In terms of vocational outcomes anthropology in Australia and Britain has tended to deny or downplay the legitimacy of an anthropology in the service of “the real”. To advocate anthropology as a “useful” activity is viewed in some circles as tainted, something lower down the scale of human worth than the scholar sitting in his study. In part this is because “the real world” has not turned out to be as anthropologists thought it should be. The domination of late global capitalism and the demise of “traditional societies”, the defeat of socialism, the loss of authentic “Otherness”, has created a situation of mourning and melancholia, a nostalgia which has penetrated the discipline in many ways. Many long for the “olden days”, when fieldwork was an encounter with life-ways untouched by the “modern world”; when Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune could spend months and years on end in remote New Guinea jungles going from “tribe” to “tribe” with a model of human behaviour to test in the “laboratory” of the primitive world. Then, meeting Gregory Bateson, the three of them embarked on an intensified search for knowledge about human nature itself, to be found at its simplest among the untouched tribal people. In all the criticism of Margaret Mead, it is often forgotten that she was working always with a large vision of the nature of human society and human culture in mind. In other words, there were questions about the world behind

her work, and if she failed to answer these questions it may be because they were wrongly framed, or the anthropological approach she took could not succeed in answering them, but it was not wrong to be asking them.

<http://www.mead2001.org/>

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mead/field-sepik.html>

Let me come now to that bastard sibling, “Cultural Studies”. There is no doubt that there has been a remarkable turn to something called “Culture” everywhere in the humanities. We should remind ourselves that Culture was the preserve of Anthropology in earlier days. Nobody would have gone to a geographer or an expert in English literature to ask about Culture. Today, Culture (or a version of it) belongs to everyone. Recently I heard from an English Literature Professor who was working on the culture and history of sugar in the maintenance of colonialism; someone in History who was doing a cultural study of a Hindu pilgrimage; and there are numerous other examples of people doing projects which seem quite obviously to me to be “anthropology”. However the emergence of Cultural Studies somewhere in the interstices between literature and sociology, using a kind of Anthropology Lite as the major though unacknowledged method, has been the most extraordinarily successful “discipline-creation” of recent times. Cultural Studies has reworked elements originating from an anthropological sensibility begin to “make sense” in many different disciplines and contexts. But Cultural Studies also claimed an ideological purity. This territorial expansion was certainly a sudden grab, like something out of the Old West, and was combined with a systematic attack on anthropology as the handmaiden of colonialism and a tool of Mr White Man, so that Cultural Studies could claim that although it looked like anthropology, and smelled like anthropology, it definitely was NOT anthropology which was inherently racist and Orientalist (or Aboriginalist). The fact that the anthropology to which they were referring was usually that of the 1920s rather than the 1970s and 1980s was conveniently overlooked. But anthropologists have to take some of the responsibility here.

Firstly, anthropology resolutely refused to take up the opportunity of applying its own techniques and analyses to the contemporary world, to the world in which we lived and worked, to the cultural practices which made sense of contemporary lives, wherever they were. Anthropology evinced little or no interest in the study or analysis of our own contemporary cultural forms – to radio, video, contemporary music, cinema for example, or to the contemporary equivalent of the myth-saturated rituals of tribal societies -to football or political rallies - or to work environments which were saturated with their own cultural forms, such as the police force or the army or any major corporation or business organization. In short, anthropology paid little or no attention to the actual world in which anthropologists lived and practiced. There was nothing to stop anthropology doing this. Nobody else was doing it – certainly not sociology which had a certain claim to the arena of “contemporary society”, but went about it in an utterly un-cultural way. When Cultural Studies emerged, it did so precisely on this terrain and claimed it in its entirety – and the rest of the world as well.

And it is true that far too many anthropologists continue to draw a distinction between “the West” and “the rest”, to continue to believe that the “tribal” or peasant or hunter’s world is the proper terrain for their work, and that this terrain should be, as far as

possible, evacuated of any contact with the contemporary world. This position becomes more and more difficult to sustain today, and there is clear evidence of a series of moves in US anthropology in particular to reclaim the kind of scope and activity which would recognize the role of anthropology as the study of culture and human experience based on an empirical, as well as textual, encounter.<sup>iii</sup>

I have also seen recent attempts to develop Cultural Studies for Areas. Noting the extreme ethnocentric bias of most conventional Western Cultural Studies, it has been proposed that there should be a Thai Cultural Studies, a Latino Cultural Studies, a Greek Cultural Studies: and you can see where this would lead. Yet clearly the ethnocentrism embedded in a Cultural Studies which has failed to understand the very fact of cultural difference – even while fetishising *différance* à la Derrida – is a fundamental weakness when compared with the close encounters required by anthropology: the linguistic encounter (perhaps fragmentary, and sketchy, but much more than nothing at all), the bodily experience, the necessary transformations in subjectivity to accommodate “difference” as well as “sameness” – yes, it is the issue of alterity and identity again.

And who, after all, is “Derrida”?

<http://www.derridathemovie.com/>

I do not propose to resolve this issue of difference here, obviously, but it lies at the heart of anthropology’s dilemma in terms of how to “explain” itself to the world, and the very peculiarity of its methods and approaches require revisiting many of these familiar problems which, precisely because they are so difficult, and because they involve philosophical and other issues, have been for so long ignored.

In summary, what seems to have happened is that the traditional disciplinary boundaries partially dissolved during the postmodern turn of the later twentieth century, but not sufficiently as to render them irrelevant or able to be abandoned. When I recently suggested that my Faculty might like to consider, in the spirit of scholarly discussion, what would happen if we gave up the formal recognition of disciplines altogether, and grouped ourselves in terms of principal teaching and research interests, this provoked considerable interest but in the end, puzzlement. It seemed impossible to imagine how the humanities and social sciences could continue if there were not disciplinary processes by which to define what scholars are doing, even though so many scholars in different disciplines seem to be doing very much the same thing – offering courses in postmodern theory, or postcolonialism, or cinema and film studies, or gender and sexuality studies, for example.

The noun “discipline” comes from the Latin, *discipulus*, pupil, and was first found with this meaning around the year 900 in Alfred’s translation of the Venerable Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. *Disciplinea* in Latin is the instruction given to a disciple, and from that, chastisement. It entered English with this meaning around 1300. Discipline, then, is something transmitted from master to pupil, the latter, failing to learn correctly, being subject to punishment. However, in its original Latin etymology, the term appears to have derived from *dis-* apart and *capere-* to take hold of. The real meaning of the term is not to learn from a teacher with the threat of punishment for not getting it right, but rather, to grasp intellectually and analyse thoroughly.

In a microcosm of the larger problem of intersecting knowledge-fields, anthropology's sub-areas now have virtually nothing to say to each other, even though they ostensibly arose from a common base. Anything which might seem like an "evolutionary" question is rejected, anything implying a biological focus on humanity as a species is disregarded, and the "discipline" has developed into an ever more enclosed and self-reproducing world, largely ruled by solipsism. This is exactly the kind of world which its own founding fathers were concerned to study: an enclosed, limited world with its own life-ways and culture, everything being related to everything else within, yet to nothing beyond. Anthropology, in spite of intellectual changes and fashions, has largely continued to depend on single-person fieldwork, studying "Others", small scale communities in less-developed societies, with participant observation as the primary method. Anthropology has proved extraordinarily resistant to change.

Even new technologies have, in a sense, merely allowed anthropology to intensify its traditional practices, like New Guinea Highlands cultivation of the sweet potato. The example of the Los Loros CD-Rom is interesting. Chris Tennant is the author of the EthnoWeb authoring tool, now known as Hyperbuilder. A PhD in Anthropology and Law from Harvard, he developed this authoring tool while working in the jungles of Guatemala on a solar-powered laptop. The tool itself is remarkable and seems to have tremendous potential in many contexts in anthropology. The ethnography, based on two years fieldwork, is available on a single CD-Rom disk and provides the most complete information imaginable about a single small community. The material includes the complete life stories of many people, several thousand images, a great deal of recorded sound and a wide variety of documents from the community. There are more than 5 hours of audio and 1000 images, 25,000 individual files, including a document for every person in the community, a list of every place the Lorenos have ever lived, a clickable block by block map of every house in the Loros townsite, and the complete text of the author's field journal, among other things. (See [www.hyperbuilder.com/loros/](http://www.hyperbuilder.com/loros/)) This would seem to be the perfect example of the data-set.

And yet, why do we, does anybody, want this level of detail? Is the complete documentation of a group of people, something which our new technology permits us to do as never before, a worthwhile undertaking in its own right? What is the significance of this kind of data? The written ethnography tells the story of the people of Los Loros, as they experienced migration, displacement, war and terror in the midst of their ordinary lives. But what use can somebody else make of the totality of the data? What is the nature of this ethnographic gaze?

Recently two whales were disporting themselves in the balmy early spring waters of Sydney Harbour. Quickly dubbed Cheryl and Gareth, the whales came closer and closer into the Harbour, spending a day rolling and smoodging right at the edge of the Opera House. A radio program was aired, purporting to give the sound-track of Cheryl and Gareth's conversation. The two whales, seeing the vast number of humans who ran to the harbourside and remained transfixed there with cameras and binoculars, staring in rapture, wondered aloud to each other what they were.

“What do you think they are, Gareth?” asked Cheryl.

“I’m not exactly sure, Cheryl” he replied. “But I think they must be some kind of land prawns”.

“Or very large krill?” she suggested.

“Yes, possibly, very large krill”.

<http://www.abc.net.au/sydney/stories/s636657.htm>

This whale’s eye perspective opens up the kind of dialogue which we need to have with ourselves concerning what we, as a species, really are. We are at a point now where the explosion of knowledge-systems is guiding research and innovation as never before, and changing how citizens everywhere think about the world and their role in it. Big questions are back on the agenda. What is a human being? Is humanity itself a cancer on the planet? How did we get here, as biological beings? What can we understand about ourselves? What is there to fear from us, and what to be grateful for? What kind of relationships should we have with fellow beings who share this horizon of existence? Are there deterministic processes at work in our understandings and behaviour which are beyond the possibility of consciousness? Shouldn’t somebody be leading the discussion about whether or not humanity should try to transcend itself, by prolonging human life via biotech developments, perhaps to reach immortality? Or are Third World cities the evolutionary proving ground of the human of the future? What should we believe, and why?

Belief (and beliefs) is not a topic of interest only to psychologists. Recently philosopher Gianni Vattimo published a slim volume, entitled *Belief*, in which he develops the argument for a “philosophy of actuality that offers an analysis of the sense of existence in the technologically oriented postmodern society” (Introduction, p. 4, 7, Vattimo 1999). Vattimo reexamines Christianity as a source of ethics and the possibility of charity, claiming it to be quite consistent with the nihilism which has produced the end of metaphysics. (<http://giannivattimo.it/>)

In 2001 Slavoj Zizek also published a book called *On Belief*, in which he argues that at the very moment of the triumph of technology and capitalism, the hegemonic ideology has become that of New Age “Asiatic” thought, especially Buddhism, which he claims perfectly fits the fetishistic mode of ideology in this era. (<http://lacan.com/frameziz.htm>)

The philosophical implications for the subject of the contemporary world order – explored so subtly in these writers – demand a different kind of engagement with the contemporary “real”, an engagement which anthropology should be able to respond to. This will no longer position the anthropologist as a detached and pure observer, in disguise and slumming it (and enjoying the experience), but a co-inhabitant with other beings, both similar and different, who cannot be posed as “others” to an “us” but as co-existent beings encountering each other, perhaps fleetingly, perhaps for a life-long relationship, out of a particular time and in a particular place.

Yet anthropology cannot only be about that interaction. There is also a need to comprehend the broader material, political and historical processes which have been in play throughout human existence and which produce the moment in which the experiencing, and the writing, take place. Above all, anthropology should demystify itself

and its practices. The fieldwork experience is central: the monograph or PhD thesis depends on that experience, but all too often disguises the essentially random, fractal ways in which “knowledge” arises, the fleeting encounter, the conversation in the temple, the experience of illness, learning to dance. People quite rightly want to know: where is your data? What is your methodology? To answer this would be to develop an entire philosophical account of the way knowledge arises in human cultural experience, as well as the possibility of making mistakes in the learning, and perhaps even the undoing of the mistakes. This might well be one task anthropology could engage in. But it would require an openness to other modes of thought: not only the ontologies of pre-modern worlds, but those of our own, of our sciences, managements, politics and economies, with a broad vision of the trajectory of the human experience and a vision of a *longue durée* in which the present world is merely a fleeting moment between a long human past and an indeterminate human future, all of which are implicated in one another.

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<sup>i</sup> I worked as a research assistant to Strehlow over two summers while I was an undergraduate at Sydney University. I was employed to translate Missouri Synod newspaper reports from High German to English, a task which proved beyond me. Kindly, Mr Strehlow put me to work cataloguing Aboriginal materials. In spite of his unpopularity in academia and beyond I very much admired his writings which I regarded as exemplary, and still do so. I am glad his reputation is being reconsidered today.

<sup>ii</sup> My thanks to David Martin who made available to me the current AAS database in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. Using AskSam, I carried out some quick interrogations of the data. Unfortunately there is not enough information on the database to be accurate regarding certain categories of members; hopefully the AAS will encourage members to provide some additional information which will make the development of an on-going profile for the Society much simpler.

<sup>iii</sup> This is not the place for a lengthy discussion on the relation between textuality and the empirical world. I certainly do not see them as opposed, or consider that “the real world” is a place which is not also at the same time textual: but the insistence that a thorough analysis of “culture” (of anybody’s life-world, one might better express it) can emerge solely from a scholarly engagement with textuality seems problematic, to say the least. On the other hand, this is precisely what the historians, armed now with concepts such as “culture” and a probing technical understanding of “sources” and their use, have been able to achieve.