PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Review Essay

Blogging Anthropology: Savage Minds, Zero Anthropology, and AAA Blogs

ABSTRACT In this review essay, the academic merits of three anthropological blogs ("Savage Minds," "Zero Anthropology" [formerly "Open Anthropology"], and the official blog of the American Anthropological Association) are considered. The review examines differences between group-blog projects (such "Savage Minds"), single-voiced blogs (such as "Zero Anthropology"), and official blogs representing central anthropological institutions (the AAA's blog) and identifies roles and strengths of each of these blog forms.

Keywords: anthropological blogs, public anthropology, academic blogs

The ease of use and rapid spread of Internet-based blogs makes them an important venue for academic discourse in all disciplines, and anthropological blogs occupy an increasingly important space for fostering cutting-edge anthropological debates. In an hour or two, an average computer user can use free hosting sites and simple software to set up one's own weblog (blog for short), allowing near instantaneous web publishing of one's writing, the writing of others, and comments received from any other web-linked computer user on earth. Hundreds of blogs now host anthropological conversations on a near endless variety of topics that engage anthropologists and nonanthropologists alike. Some blogs, like Savage Minds (http://savageminds.org/), are jointly produced by collectives of anthropologists; others are hosted by long-established organizations like the American Anthropological Association (AAA; http://blog.aaanet.org/); while still others, like Zero Anthropology (http://zeroanthropology.net), are largely the efforts of a single anthropologist engaging with readers.

Academic blogs inhabit intellectual spaces somewhere between unpunctuated-verb-absent-run-on-paragraphs and footnoted meticulous final drafts of thoughtful, publishable papers. Although the medium of blogs often evokes writing voices that list toward the Burrowsesque, and the anonymity of responses is a sort of attractive nuisance that seems to invite graffiti responses, anthropological blogging has the proven potential to host high-quality anthropological discourse and to expand the reach of the discipline.

Although blogging does not compete with peer-reviewed scholarship, it is becoming anthropologists' new electronic polis. The fundamental value of seminars and salons has always been their opportunity to move beyond conventional limits by tentatively exploring new ideas in ways drawing on the freedom provided by the provisionality of the setting; the best blogs draw on these same dynamics, although in the fleeting permanence of this medium, even the most flippant of comments remain whirring on archived hard drives and virtually preserve that which would have otherwise long ago ceased to be remembered.

Writing quickly without editors—as many bloggers tend to do—brings grammatical risks and increases incidents of logical fallacies, but the opportunities to explore ideas and arguments, share knowledge, and develop writing voices in a public arena without the controls of consensus and the gatekeeping of traditional publishing outlets make blogging an effective testing ground for anthropologists at all stages in their academic careers. Given the free and interactive nature of the medium, blogging also presents opportunities to engage nonanthropologists by directly sharing findings and analyses with the public, making it an important venue for expanding anthropology's audience and for those interested particularly in public anthropology. Blogs present vital opportunities to allow publicly engaged anthropologists to break through the often-narrow analysis of traditional corporate-media outlets—if anthropologists can write in clear and nonjargon-filled prose about topics (e.g., war, race, inequality, health care reform) of general interest to the public.

The best academic blogs are multivoiced, drawing either on multiple writers or on the multiple voices of the feedback they generate. Blogs have become vital resources for scholars, although they obviously require different forms of discrimination than are needed in reading academic journals. Although blogs' dialogic form presents opportunities to engage in exploratory exchanges with colleagues, the nature

of the web's pseudoanonymity often lowers the bar of academic civility and can bring on all sorts of pseudonymed shenanigans from sock puppets, flamers, and trolls. However, the best blogs roll through such structured outcomes spawned by the flexibility of identities on the web, while the weaker become increasingly restrictive and risk poisoning their fruit by eliminating anonymous posts.

Like any other writing project, the time required for effective blogging can be enormous and with some of the high scholarship shown in detailed and thoughtful postings and exchanges by scholars at blog sites like Savage Minds, Zero Anthropology (formerly Open Anthropology), or Culture Matters, there are reasons to wonder about the unrewarded disciplinary usefulness of establishing and maintaining such valuable public commons. The political economy of academia is not structured to reward individuals building things for a common good outside of the peer-review process. It has long been true that many of the most useful academic resource tools (annotated bibliographies, reference books, and the like) are undervalued or unrecognized by formal academic assessments. For now at least, academic blogs seem to be an electronic extension of this troubling phenomenon.

"Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology—A Group Blog" (http://savageminds.org/) began in 2005 and has become the central online site of the North American anthropological community. Savage Minds's value is found in the quality of the posts by the site's central contributors, a cadre of bright, engaged, young anthropology professors and graduate students writing on topics ranging from anthropological (post)theory and disciplinary history to syllabi and teaching techniques, individual research, and media coverage of anthropological issues. Savage Minds's central bloggers include Alex Golub (who writes under the blogger name "Rex"), Chris Kelty (ckelty), Kerim Friedman (Kerim), Dustin Wax (Oneman), and a variety of invited anthropologist guest bloggers drawn from the ranks of academia.

Savage Minds is worth reading every few weeks because of the devotion of Golub, Kelty, Friedman, and others to produce thoughtful posts, but it also provides an electronic equivalent of a Hyde Park speakers' corner, where anyone can reflectively weigh-in or simply shoot one's mouth off in reactionary fashion. Like the proverbial university cafeteria debate, this volatile mix is the heart of a good academic blog.

One example of the value of Savage Minds is found in its detailed analysis of the controversy surrounding the $10 million defamation lawsuit facing Jared Diamond and the *New Yorker* magazine's parent company after Diamond published an article claiming that a member of the Handa clan had been involved in a revenge killing. On Savage Minds, Golub and a variety of other invited New Guinea specialists posted their analysis of these events, joined by an invited guest blog on relevant ethical issues by Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and reader comments ranging from wisecracks to thoughtful informed analysis (see http://savageminds.org/category/people/jared-diamond/).

While Savage Minds models the potential of blogging as a collective enterprise led by dedicated and knowledgeable scholars willing to suffer the slings and arrows of transient readers, since 2007, Zero Anthropology (http://zeroanthropology.net/) has showcased the potential of a single strongly voiced anthropologist-blogger—a voice so strong that at times it evokes vitriolic responses from readers. Maximilian Forte, an associate professor of anthropology at Concordia University, with field research in the Caribbean and wide-ranging political interests, writes a prolific blog (often posting several thousands of words a week) that typically focuses on the military uses of anthropology and issues of academic freedom and U.S. foreign policy. Forte uses the web's full potential, adding links to his Twitter and to multimedia content on his own "Zero Anthropology TV" page, on which he collects and critiques an impressive variety of video content on things anthropological (http://vodpod.com/maxforte/openanthropology). Forte sometimes blends his critique with dark humor, and most of his work blends anthropological and political critiques. His posts range from satirical analysis of the U.S. military's Human Terrain Team program (e.g., Forte 2009) to an impressive code of ethics "from the bottom up" designed to protect studied populations from meddling anthropologists (Forte 2008).

The AAA has been slow to adopt an active online blog presence, adding a limited blog presence in the last few years. It has recently moved from hosting member comments on one-off pressing issues (e.g., the Human Terrain Team program) to maintaining rotating blogs (http://blog.aaanet.org/) on issues of interest (e.g., laptop searches at U.S. borders and IRB considerations for online research) with comments from members and nonmembers alike. The AAA blog is maintained by association staff and now provides an important venue for members to learn about and respond to association policy and especially AAA task forces, committees, reports, and other documents. As a space representing a professional organization, the AAA blog tends to be more news and policy oriented, but it is beginning to explore its potential to host exchanges on the central issues of the discipline. If the association wishes its blog to take on a more central role in hosting anthropological discourse, it can draw on the successful examples found at Savage Minds, although I suspect the pressures to reduce friction between different factions in the association will likely lead the AAA to leave the hosting of cutting-edge debates to others like Savage Minds or Zero Anthropology.

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Reviews

Anthropologist as Prognosticator: Gillian Tett and the Credit Derivatives Market

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Cultural Anthropologist and Brand Strategist Shook Kelley

Gillian Tett, financial reporter for the London-based *Financial Times* and Ph.D. in cultural anthropology, not only predicted the current financial meltdown but also claims to have relied on her anthropological training to do so.

Although Tett never explicitly proclaimed a specific date or timeline for the impending disaster, she did spell out the potential for disaster in a series of daily and weekly articles from 2005 to 2007. What made her call for concern an act of critical insight was that, in an era of optimism and prosperity, the unwritten rule in the culture of high finance seemed to be that no one should utter any word of bubbles, recessions, or impending storms. At elite gatherings, such as Davos, Switzerland, in 2007, financial mandarins chided Tett for needlessly stirring fear in the markets. Yet, in an ironic way, this criticism itself revealed just how important and influential Tett's critical voice had become, eventually helping raise debates concerning whether the growth of the credit-derivatives market was good, because it spread risk throughout the system, or potentially catastrophic, as Tett predicted.

Beginning in 2005, Tett began reporting on the emergence of this credit-derivative market and its specialized instruments, such as collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), which are bundles of fixed-income debts, and credit default swaps (CDSs), which are agreements to insure a loan in case of default. Subtly moving beyond straightforward reporting of these financial trends, whose details were considered obscure and tedious at the time, Tett's articles articulated their implications. In her most compelling articles, Tett began to raise important "what if?" questions concerning the potential repercussions of these risky instruments, which she recognized as increasingly central to the global financial system. As far back as April of 2005, when many inexperienced investors began to put their money into these often-misunderstood markets, Tett asked, "Do investors really understand what they're buying?" In particular, Tett questioned whether investors, blinded by massive profits, really understood the "correlation risk" created by these new instruments. Tett recognized that because loan defaults rarely occur as isolated events, a few defaults might launch

"a chain reaction," presumably leading to the entire system's meltdown. And it was precisely this fear of a chain reaction that would later catapult the credit-derivatives market into a spectacular collapse in 2008.

Of course, this impressive achievement bodes well for our discipline. But it also raises the following question: What bearing does her anthropological training have on her critical analysis of the credit markets? In an interview with the British newspaper the *Guardian,* Tett claims that "[as an anthropologist] you're trained to look at how societies or cultures operate holistically, so you look at how all the bits move together. And most people in the City [London's "Wall Street"] don't do that" (Barton 2008). The second benefit came from interpreting human behavior in cultural context, or as Tett states: "bankers like to imagine that money and the profit motive is as universal as gravity. . . . And it's not. What they do in finance is all about culture and interaction" (Barton 2008).

But although Tett employs classic frameworks of cultural anthropology, her series of articles do not seem to engage with or benefit from more contemporary anthropological currents. One example, from the emerging subfield of the anthropology of finance, is Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles's (2005) call for ethnographers not to perpetuate "the mystique of finance" that has increasingly divided Wall Street from its real-world implications. At times, Tett problematically leverages her anthropological background to describe financial "tribes," employing a degree of exoticism in her descriptions. Much in the way classic ethnography shaped its object of study as a separate cultural world, Tett's writing often separates these "tribes" from their real-world implications. It's revealing that Tett has likened her financial journalism to her Ph.D. fieldwork experience, stating, "I thought . . . this is just like being in Tajikistan. All I have to do is learn a new language. This is a bunch of people who have dressed up this activity with a whole bunch of rituals and cultural patterns, and if I can learn Tajik, I can jolly well learn how the FX market works!" (Barton 2008). And with that goal of deciphering a unique culture in mind, Tett importantly elucidates a part of the financial world for her readers.

While Tett successfully gets us inside the "tribe" of bankers, her story is not completely satisfying. Part of the

problem may have to do with the way newspapers and their journalists are divided and organized by subject matter. By concentrating almost solely on the credit-derivatives market and the world of high finance, Tett never follows the story into the subprime housing industry and the culture of excessive lending in the everyday world of personal finances. Later, in her book-length treatment of the story (2009), Tett corrects this, but she still never provides a more "on the ground" ethnographic account that might help readers understand the complex social relationship between the overleveraged credit frenzy among middle-class U.S. citizens and the overleveraged credit party on Wall Street. There is never a full sense of how the everyday culture of these financial tribes ends up impacting bigger economic issues for regular people around the world.

Tett's work highlights the issue of timeliness for an anthropology of contemporary social forms. Although anthropologists have published work on financial derivatives in academic literature (e.g., Maurer 2002; LiPuma and Lee 2004), Tett managed to capture in real time the development of a credit-derivatives market that barely made an impact on the system initially but a mere five years later nearly caused complete collapse. Yet, because of the timeliness of such events, both journalists and ethnographers typically make trade-offs in their work. Whereas journalists may press their analysis for the sake of a deadline and have a more limited purview, they are well able to capture the spirit of a moment. The ethnographer works on a longer schedule that generally prevents immediate reporting but that can

provide penetrating cultural insights about a larger scope of behaviors and social forms. Although we might debate which form is preferable, Tett shows that journalists with an anthropological sensibility have the ability to provide far-reaching, insightful, and critical analyses of contemporary social currents.

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Human Rights on the Border

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The border between the United States and Mexico too often symbolizes illicit flows, dangerous deals, and military-style operations. For millions who live and work near the border, the threat presented by increasing militarization of the border region is not symbolic: it is the stuff of everyday life. The policy recommendations outlined by the U.S.–Mexico Border and Immigration Task Force in *Accountability, Community Security, and Infrastructure on the U.S.–Mexico Border* (2009) and its 2008 predecessor, *Effective Border Policy: Security, Responsibility, and Human Rights at the U.S.–Mexico Border,* address the concerns of border residents in relation to border policing. Prepared in anticipation of impending immigration-reform legislation, the documents are intended for legislators who draft U.S. immigration policy. They also may be of interest to anthropologists who are concerned with human rights issues associated with globalization and labor migration.

The policy papers were authored by the U.S.–Mexico Border and Immigration Task Force (http://www.bordertaskforce.org), a coalition comprising over 50 individuals and organizations, including local law-enforcement officers, local government officials, community advocates, business and labor interests, and academics such as anthropologists Josiah Heyman and Guillermina G. Núñez. The primary concerns of the task force are to enhance the protection of civil and human rights for all people along the border—regardless of race, ethnicity, or citizenship status—and to make border communities safer and stronger. Their recommendations broadly support reduced militarization of the border region and enhanced oversight of border enforcement agencies and activities.

Many of the specific recommendations proposed in the documents address rights violations associated with increasing militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border over the last two decades. These include racial profiling, inconsistent practices at checkpoints and ports of entry, avoidable deaths of crossing migrants, and human and civil rights abuses by

immigration officials. To redress these problems, the documents outline over 70 specific recommendations that focus on three core areas: (1) improving accountability and oversight of border and immigration enforcement; (2) enhancing community security and preventing border violence; and (3) investing in infrastructure and ports of entry. Overall, the documents emphasize the need for comprehensive, inclusive immigration and border policies, instead of military-style "operations" and border walls.

Although the enforcement-oriented trend in U.S. immigration policy—which has powerful advocates in business, government, and popular media—is not likely to be reversed in the near future, the recommendations advanced in these documents could help bring broader consensus toward upcoming immigration reform. A perspective that prioritizes the rights and security of all border residents offers an important counterbalance to prevailing militaristic approaches. But this human rights emphasis is largely geared toward practical, short-term "fixes," rather than complex, long-term solutions. For example, recommendations in the first core area, accountability and oversight, are concerned with training and oversight of law-enforcement agencies, including streamlining the complaint process and establishing an independent monitoring agency. Such measures may have short-term success in reducing instances of abuse by law-enforcement officials, but they do not address unequal power relations that render immigrants and Latinos vulnerable to such abuses in the first place.

From an anthropological standpoint, this is where the documents are weakest. A dearth of historical and political-economic analysis means that recommendations advance direct responses to local problems and are less concerned with the long-term implications of accelerated labor migration within global capitalism. Still, what the papers lack in theoretical sophistication, they gain in short-term pragmatism. The documents ground the relationships among transmigrant workers, national residents, and neoliberal policy—

which anthropological scholarship typically considers in the abstract—in everyday interactions and matter-of-fact language. For this reason alone, the papers should provide ample food for thought for anthropologists of globalization and transmigration.

In addition, these documents provide a model for how anthropologists can be engaged actors—and not just observers—in their ethnographic fields. Heyman, Núñez, and their colleagues contributed teaching, research, and writing skills to developing the documents. Heyman, for example, was instrumental in synthesizing relevant research and composing drafts of the documents. These practical contributions have helped produce a well-researched, clearly written, and effectively argued set of papers. Yet, as Heyman and colleagues (2009) emphasize, their intent was to go beyond contributing research to the policy process and to take an active role in crafting policy itself. As researchers and border residents who have deep ties to the immigrant community, their engagement with immigration policy demonstrates a commitment to a holistic, collaborative approach to anthropological praxis.

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Archaeology and the Problem of the Public

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In recent years, many archaeologists have come to recognize that their discipline does not serve one simple and uniform public but, rather, multiple publics with varying interests, perspectives, and needs. Complicating the idea of "the public," however, has challenged heritage managers to find ways to actively and equitably serve diverse communities while responsibly protecting and preserving archaeological resources. The three reports reviewed here—which were produced in the NPS Technical Briefs Series—address key questions about how and why different publics can be involved in archaeology.

Theresa S. Moyer's "Archaeological Collections and the Public" (2006) explores how archaeological collections can benefit public audiences and, in turn, how public use benefits the collections. Archaeologists have habitually prized excavation and acquisition over the study of extant collections. The traditional career route in the field has long involved the discovery and exploration of sites, too often leaving museum collections untouched and underappreciated. Yet Moyer emphasizes the immense financial investment and scholarly commitment we make in the long-term care of objects. Museum collections, she writes, are not the end point of excavations but, rather, a vital part of the ongoing work to study and care for the material past. For collections to accumulate value, they require dynamic use and intellectual

engagement. In short, Moyer argues that the field must become ever more committed to working with the objects that already pack museums and collection facilities, supporting new research and enabling new kinds of public access. Five case studies are examined. Although not all the programs discussed are especially inspired, some indeed are—such as those at the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository in Kodiak, Alaska, which directly serves the local community through a range of collections-based programming. Moyer does not address more problematic areas of collections—for example, sacred objects or human remains—and in this sense the report does not critically examine the range of complex issues involved in caring for collections. But the report is a compelling argument, indeed, that museum objects will sit idle and forgotten on shelves unless collection managers proactively create opportunities for their study and use.

In "Developing and Implementing Archaeological Site Stewardship Programs" (2007), Sophia Kelly explains how the threats of looting and vandalism to historic places can be mitigated by the work of volunteer monitors. Many land managers are responsible for protecting thousands of sites spread across vast landscapes, and often they do so with limited financial and human resources. Site stewardship programs serve multiple purposes, including facilitating communication between private land owners and government officials, tracking and documenting damage as it occurs, educating the public, and providing a rare opportunity for ordinary citizens to become active stewards of crucial heritage resources. Kelly's report, aside from laying out the benefits of these programs, provides straightforward and sage advice to land managers on how to launch a new site-stewardship program. From leadership to budgets, volunteer management, and Native American involvement, Kelly covers an impressive range of issues that mean the difference between a program's failure and its success.

Although Moyer's and Kelly's technical briefs are basically practical how-to guides, in "Archaeology and Civic Engagement" (2008), Barbara J. Little and Nathaniel Amdur-Clark evaluate the theoretical potential of archaeology to strengthen community ties and promote democratic dialogues. Since the 1960s, U.S. federal heritage laws have obliged government agents to actively consult with different kinds of publics, including American Indian tribes, local neighborhood associations, and national advocacy groups. However, Little and Amdur-Clark emphasize that although consultations are fleeting, civic engagement is lasting: in this mode, archaeology's ability to tell hidden stories fosters a sense of community belonging and common history. At the heart of this manifesto is the idea of "social capital," which can be "thought of as connections of trust, reciprocity, shared values, and networks among individuals" (Little and Amdur-Clark 2008). Little and Amdur-Clark argue that archaeology should be used to accumulate social capital for the well-being of individual communities as much as of entire nations, generating archaeology projects that give a sense of corporate heritage and identity. Real civic engagement, the authors posit, is not merely a by-product of research but "requires deliberate intentional effort" (Little and Amdur-Clark 2008). In particular, these projects should move beyond celebrating a national past "to understand the journey of liberty and justice, together with the economic, social, religious, and other forces that barred or opened the ways for our ancestors, and the distances yet to be covered" (Little and Amdur-Clark 2008). To illustrate what these principles mean in practice, the authors present six case studies. Although rather disparate—ranging from the Harvard Yard Archaeology Project, which looks at the American Indian experience at the storied university, to the Cypress Freeway Replacement Project, which used the concept of environmental justice to include the historical voices of African Americans—these examples vividly illustrate how archaeology can be employed to craft "deliberative dialogues" that broaden people's view of others and themselves.

The NPS Technical Briefs Series provides timely and concise reports on topics important to applied archaeology. They are not policy papers per se; rather, they offer limited studies on focused though diverse technical issues, from site stabilization to promoting preservation and implementing federal laws. One general criticism is that the reports do not fully take advantage of their online format, offering little in the way of hyperlinks or color figures. Also, given that they are free and on the web, the NPS could more actively promote the series for wider distribution. (A web-based search confirms the briefs have a very short online reach.) It is perhaps ironic that these papers about public archaeology have yet to reach a wide public audience. Hopefully, this will change because these are important papers that can provide help and insights for all anthropologists working for the physical preservation of places as well as those seeking to foster the kinds of public participation that ultimately gives heritage sites and objects their meanings.

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Sidewalk Radio: Anthropology as Resource to Promote Health, Labor Rights, and Visual Media (http://www. sidewalkradio. net)

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In a clip from the ethnographic film *Thangata* (2002), visual anthropologist and creator of the website Sidewalk Radio Marty Otañez draws viewers into a terrifying event that disrupts many of anthropology's standard boundaries. The scene is a demonstration by Malawian trade unionists against the negative socioecological impacts of economic policy in their country. Suddenly, soldiers arrive and fire tear gas at the demonstrators, and the viewer is caught up in the frightening disorientation of the moment as Otañez, his camera still on, flees along with the demonstrators.

Although this moment is reminiscent of Clifford Geertz's flight from the Balinese police in "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (1973), it is not about the transformation of an outsider to an insider. Otañez's films, which are featured throughout his website, insist that there are no insiders and outsiders. We are all connected in a world economy in which a tobacco-producing household in Malawi is paid less than 0.01 percent of the value of the 100,000 packs of cigarettes that it produces every year.

These kinds of connections form the premise of Sidewalk Radio, which breaks down barriers between theoretical and applied anthropology by presenting theory and transformative action as critically interlinked. So too, Otañez emphasizes that the ethnographer is a socially positioned actor in the world that she or he documents.

Otañez, the main producer of Sidewalk Radio, completed his Ph.D. at the University of California, Irvine, where he worked with Victoria Bernal and James Ferguson. Before his Ph.D., he studied and worked in labor organizing before completing an M.A. in pubic health at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. He produced *Thangata* without prior filmmaking experience, with the goal of making his dissertation research on the global tobacco industry accessible to a wider audience. *Thangata* was shown in high school classrooms of Orange County Public Schools the year of its release.

The chronology of films presented on Sidewalk Radio reveals a progressive refinement of Otañez's filmmaking skills, although none reproduces the ethnographic immediacy of *Thangata.* That said, the later films reveal greater collaboration and broadening networks of influence. Most notable are six short films created from the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, produced in collaboration with tobacco-documents researcher Ann Landman and artists Ashlee and Holly Temple. The films engage in artistic *detournement* (Debord 1995:145–146) in which elements of dominant media are used to destabilize the normalcy of that media.

One of these videos features promotional films from Phillip Morris's aborted "Marlboro Train Campaign," while another features satirical scrapbooks with quotes from tobacco-industry executives. A third film created by scientist–activist Wara Alderete focuses on the tobacco industry in her home country of Argentina. Produced in collaboration with the Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health, a fourth film in this series centers on the health implications of free-trade agreements.

The films' chronologies are also significant in terms of content: the first reveals the hegemony and spectacle of big tobacco with a montage of industry propaganda. Ensuing videos use data, images, and a diversity of voices to deconstruct this hegemony. As part of that project, the videos demonstrate the structural connections between debt servitude in Malawi and tobacco-related health issues in the United States. They also document the negative environmental impacts of pesticides and herbicides used in tobacco cultivation, the links between tobacco processing and tropical deforestation, the declining value of Malawi's tobacco exports relative to the profits of transnational companies, and the negative effects of tobacco on local food production.

At the same time, Otañez could improve the structure and interface of Sidewalk Radio because the site neither highlights the importance of its own content nor spells out its broader theoretical implications. A quick glance also reveals that the site has not been updated since 2007. Yet, in evaluating projects like Sidewalk Radio, it is necessary to bear in mind the structural barriers to this kind of engaged public anthropology. Such projects are frequently undertaken on top of existing professional responsibilities by ethnographers who have taught themselves to produce videos, make websites, and to engage with a wide diversity of audiences. Consequently, they are also undertaken with minimal financial resources and are afforded little merit at tenure-review time.

Such barriers threaten to thwart the promise of multimedia websites as a critical tool for anthropology as a discipline. Anthropologists stand to gain a great deal—including greater social relevance and increased attractiveness to future generations of scholars—by giving greater institutional support to works like Sidewalk Radio and integrating them into our discipline. Sidewalk Radio, for instance, reveals complex interconnections that would require many pages of scholarly writing and that would not be accessible to a broad diversity of nonspecialist audiences. Moreover, Otañez has maintained methodological and bibliographic rigor by including a video on methodology, explanatory texts, and document links. The site is thus a valuable resource for theory building, education, policy making, and advocacy. Indeed, content from the site is used in workshops by the Johns Hopkins Institute

for Global Tobacco Control, and Otañez's work was recently featured by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Hill 2009). Otañez has indicated that he plans to update the site soon, including a feature on the power of digital storytelling for influencing public-health interventions.

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Classic ethnography was an account. Postmodern ethnography is a narrative. Digital ethnography is *hypermedia* (defined in, appropriately enough, Wikipedia as "graphics, audio, video, plain text, and hyperlinks intertwine[d] to create a generally non-linear medium of information" [Wikipedia n.d.]). A project created by Kansas State University professor Michael Wesch, *Digital Ethnography* uses hypermedia in a short video format to analyze the way that digital forms of organizing data are changing the character of social relationships, information access, and identity. Already the winner of several awards for this work, Wesch and his students have turned digital ethnography into a YouTube site (http://www.youtube.com/digitalethnography), a web portal (http://mediatedcultures.net), and other interactive features.

Wesch started experimenting with digital formats in the late 1990s, but his digital-ethnography project really took off in 2007, with the posting on YouTube of "The Machine Is Us/ing Us" (2007c) which explores how xml script led to the "democratization" of information creation by enabling data to be exported free of formatting constraints. Wesch explained in a lecture at the Library of Congress in June of 2008 that after the video was reviewed on filter site digg (http://www.digg.com), it went viral, surpassing ten million views. Subsequently, he posted several more videos and launched a collective project with his students to study YouTube. Wesch's project represents a transformational advance not only in ethnographic forms but also in the ways that ethnography can be taught and used to engage students coming of age in a post-text world.

In two of the ethnographies, "Information R/evolution" (2007b) and "The Machine Is Us/ing Us" (2007c), Wesch explores the changed character of information storage, retrieval, and creation. Both videos are fast paced and set to a variety of background music (credited at the end of each video). Here, Wesch contends that the web has changed "information" in fundamental ways, principally by divorcing "form" (or formatting) from content.

"Information R/evolution" begins with video of a file cabinet (the music is piano and violins) to show how information used to be stored and retrieved; then it moves (shifting to electronic music) to show how the web is changing, especially with "linking" and "tagging" devices that eliminate any fixed form of ordering information.

"The Machine Is Us/ing Us" explains that, with no code to learn, any person can create and organize information and, thus, "teach the machine." In turn, the machine uses people to create links between different information streams and between its users. For example, as soon as the viewer selects Wesch's videos, she or he is linked to music sites, similarly themed videos, websites, and posted comments or critiques. Hence, hypermedia ethnography—an investigation of cultural processes that is interactive and nonlinear. Although the videos are only four to five minutes long, the links can lead to a deeper exploration of the theme.

In a third video, "A Vision of Students Today" (2007a), Wesch collaborated with 200 students in his class to survey how student learning and academic engagement has been changed by new technologies (among them, cell phones, Internet access, and texting).

Can these short video ethnographies compare in depth and explanatory power with 300- to 500-page published books? They do not contain the "thick description" of the best ethnographies, but the videos are clearly informed by theoretical insights exploring the interrelated aspects of communication structures and changing social relationships as mediated by technology. Left unanswered are questions about what we cannot see: for example, who controls the filters that determine which bits of information become widely accessed and which remain obscure? Some of this "deep structure" can be found on the mediated cultures website

and in the lectures Wesch has also posted on YouTube. Ethnographies posted by Wesch's students also expand on the themes of the first three digital ethnographies.

Although Wesch acknowledges that the "information revolution" has a dark side, he mostly focuses on the "critical optimism" (as he states in his blog [Wesch n.d.], citing Yochai Benkler and Henry Jenkins) that it is generating as millions of people are taking control of the format to create connections across cyberspace that can spill into physical space (e.g., the use of texting that in Spain resulted in the overthrow of the government after the Madrid bombings of 2005 or the twittering that fuelled the protests and global support for supporters of the opposition parties in Iran's 2009 election). For public audiences and anthropologists alike, Wesch's work represents a compelling portal into a global shift in a fundamental component of culture.

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