

## **Mind the Gaps! Politics, Power and a Space for Anthropology**

**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to think through two kinds of ‘gaps’ that researchers need to deal with. It is argued that what is at stake is much more than a mere conceptual or theoretical issue but one that has implications in the world. The first gap exists between the policies devised by national or supranational authorities and the ‘local level’. How to account for both sides of the ‘gap’ that exists between the policies and the people? I will argue here that it is less helpful to rely on concepts such as ‘the political’ or ‘the state’, but more fruitful to make power a central concern of the analysis. Reaching across pragmatic, methodological and epistemological issues, I would like to take seriously the question whether a “dwelling perspective”, [can] be combined with the recognition that human lives are lived collectively within fields of power’ (Ingold 2005a: 501). The other ‘gap’, pointed out at least since the advent of universities in Europe or, perhaps, even since Antiquity, is the one which exists between the academy and the wider world, and which, I would like to suggest, has similar structures of becoming as the first one. The corollary question that is treated in this article is both normative and practical, and regards the use of anthropology in the contemporary world, asking why anthropologists have not been, as could be expected, commentators on pressing social, both local and global issues. I then pose the question whether, and how, anthropology can speak outside of academia, and in how far the structure of academia acts as an impediment with regards to this aim. The paper first offers to deconstruct the assumptions embedded in certain conceptualisations of the state by proposing alternative ways of including the state more usefully in anthropological analysis and ethnography than has been done so far. This is then opened up by a discussion of general interest of what anthropology could be for, concluding, with Gledhill, that ‘we can be active and more engaged participants in the messy intersecting fields of power that we study’ (2004: 38).

**Key words:** power, state, policy, engaged anthropology, public anthropology, pragmatism

The agreement... of men is by covenant..., which is artificial; and therefore it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required (besides covenant) to make their agreement constant and lasting; which is a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the common benefit.

(Hobbes 1999b [1651]: 58)

For me, the whole point of the project [The History of Sexuality] lies in a re-elaboration of a theory of power... Between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible for it to function.

(Foucault 1980: 187-8)

Thank goodness, then, for the anthropologists. Let them listen to the laundry lyrics, let them meticulously chart those mind-boggling kinship patterns and the distribution of zinc roofs. They can afford to be open to the sort of populist values imported by socialists and feminists. None of them has to shoulder the heavy responsibility of finding economical explanations for the workings of the entire international system. To study the powerful is not autocratic. It is simply reasonable. Really?

(Cynthia Enloe in Smith *et al* 1996: 188)

### Two Questions and Two Gaps

This piece is the result of my thinking through the implications of one of my central field research<sup>1</sup> concerns: local communities and livelihoods being reshaped as a result of the impacts upon them of translocal institutions such as the European Union, 'non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) of varied shapes and forms, and international corporations. In the face of these ever more prominent changes of the political economy of the early twenty-first century, and in studying the relationships between people and institutions, the question arises of how to best analyse the social phenomena of 'politics' and 'the state' anthropologically. In my fieldwork, it has already become apparent that gap number one, which exists between the policies devised by national authorities and EU legislators and the local level, is huge. How to account for both sides of the 'gap' that exists between the policies and the people? I will argue here that it is less helpful to rely on concepts such as 'the political' or 'the state', but more fruitful to make power a central concern. Reaching across pragmatic, methodological and epistemological issues, I would like to take seriously the question whether a "dwelling perspective", [can] be combined

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<sup>1</sup> My doctoral field research is taking place between October 2006 and December 2007 in rural Romania, focusing on the emergent relationships of smallholder farmers with the European Union, and the impacts this change in their political economy has upon their livelihoods. A further aspect of the research concerns food politics.

with the recognition that human lives are lived collectively within fields of power' (Ingold 2005a: 501). The other 'gap', pointed out at least since the advent of universities in Europe or, perhaps, even since Antiquity, is the one which exists between the academy and the wider world, and which, I would like to suggest, has similar structures of becoming as the first one. The corollary question that is treated in this article is both normative and practical, and regards the use of anthropology in the contemporary world, asking why anthropologists have not been, as could be expected, commentators on pressing social, both local and global issues. I then pose the question whether, and how, anthropology can speak outside of academia, and in how far the structure of academia acts as an impediment with regards to this aim.

This paper first offers to deconstruct the assumptions embedded in certain conceptualisations of the state by proposing alternative ways of including the state more usefully in anthropological analysis and ethnography than has been done so far. This is then opened up by a discussion of general interest of what anthropology could be for, concluding, with Gledhill, that 'we can be active and more engaged participants in the messy intersecting fields of power that we study' (2004: 38).

## The State: Representing, Reifying or the Making of Authority

Nugent reports that anthropological approaches to the state have

undergone a veritable revolution since the 1970s. Max Weber's once normative model of the state as a centralised entity that taxes, conscripts, and monopolises violence within a given territory – and further, his conception of rational bureaucratic states as 'cages of reason' that stand above society, employing a vast bureaucracy to implement decisions in a neutral, disinterested manner – has been called into question from multiple quarters. (2004: 198)

The important point here, and the one from which I would like to dive off, is that the state, as portrayed in the classical political and sociological literature, is to a large extent a reification and a thingification of processes at work in government.<sup>2</sup> I will come back to this important point. Taussig (1992) holds, in a compelling argument involving Durkheim and totemism, that the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Abélès (2005), Balandier (1967), Bourdieu (1998), Ferguson & Gupta (2002), Nugent & Vincent (2004), Rose & Miller (1992), Scott (1985, 1995, 1998), Smith *et al.* (1996), Trouillot (2001) with the caveat that I cannot do justice to all these authors in my necessarily partial argument, and also that there is an abundant earlier literature on the state which I ignore.

process he refers to as ‘state fetishism’ makes the mark of the sacred (in Durkheim’s argument on totemism) not only sanctifying but more sacred than the object it represents (1992: 123).<sup>3</sup> According to Taussig, the ‘crucial [aspect] in this predominance of the signifier over the signified is a... materialisation by inscription (1992: 125). In this process of what I would like to call *trans-lation* (literally the ‘carrying across’ of meaning into a different realm), ‘the representation acquires not just the power of the represented, but power *over* it, as well’ (Taussig 1992: 128, emphasis added).

In the case of the state, the practices of representation render it more tangible than it ‘really is’. However, we must not confuse the representations with the practices, as the representation or the idea may be crystalline, whereas the fact is fluid (Brand 1994). Aretxaga (2003: 400) points to the *fiction* of the state, but quotes Geertz who held that conceptualising the state as fiction does not necessarily mean to impute it falsity, but a certain *genre* of representation. That technologies of representation such as writing have contributed to and coincided with the spread of nationalism and the naturalisation of the state has been extensively documented by Benedict Anderson (1983). Similarly, Rose and Miller (1992: 183) draw attention to Bruno Latour’s ‘inscription devices’ to characterise the material conditions which enable thought to work upon an object. In this way, reality is made stable, mobile, comparable, and combinable, and thus inscription is a kind of action at a distance (1992: 185, 187).<sup>4</sup> Thus, if I may extrapolate from these statements, the state has been constructed in Western history and thought in a particular way, through particular techniques. This results in lingering unquestioned assumptions on which we often base our analysis.

### Dichotomies of Power, Power of Dichotomies

The upshot of these techniques working on the world is that the ‘shifting alliances between diverse authorities’ (Rose and Miller 1992: 174), through which political power is exercised today, get classified into polarised categories. Because we think the world in terms of the categories of our environmental context, we sometimes mistake the polarisation with the complex reality, or we use it as a shorthand. This idea is important as it reveals the persistent dichoto-

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<sup>3</sup> While I appreciate the points Taussig makes, I regret that he abuses at points of an obscuring, heavy, colloquial style that is complicit with a lot of literature usually classified as postmodern, and that intends to shock rather than to convince dispassionately – to a point that the argument loses out to excessive flourishes, unnecessary appoggiaturas and half-baked afterthoughts. I prefer simplicity of style. Taussig also distorts Abrams’s (2005) argument.

<sup>4</sup> See also Latour (1993).

mies that continue to influence our thinking about all things political. Asymmetrical dichotomies such as state: (civil) society (as well as state/society/culture: nature), ideal: material, reason: passion, persuasion: coercion, mind: body, where the first term is traditionally valued above the second, 'do... not adequately characterise the diverse ways in which rule is exercised in... liberal democracies' (Rose and Miller 1992: 174), and may mask, legitimate, naturalise, and reproduce, through misrecognition, hierarchies and inequalities (e.g. Bourdieu 1991). Walker (1997: 179) draws attention to the fact that we have inherited not Machiavelli's sense of the sheer difficulty and contingency of state formation, but Hobbes's sense that there can be no solution to the difficulties and contingencies of modern life without the eternal presence of the sovereign state.<sup>5</sup> Leviathan, as the category and empirical, juridical entity, continues to be the metaphor with which we think the 'common power' (Hobbes 1999a: 14) of the state, despite its conceptual and epistemological inadequacy in understanding the contemporary world. Lewellen (2002) recognises that states "leak", and may never have been the reified and essentialised entities that they have been represented as.<sup>6</sup> All this to say that the most common representations of the state approximate a model that is ideal rather than real, and thus, firstly, perpetuate dichotomous thinking, and secondly, do not give an appropriate basis for analysis of the processes at work between the complex relations of power existing between people.

Mitchell (1991) turns popular assumptions on their head in his article on metaphors of power. He holds that dichotomies opposing mind and body within the person also create an outside world, opposed to the person, that can be divided into two realms, the ideal and the material.<sup>7</sup> Instead of starting from the assumption that the state somehow diffuses power from a centre, and

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<sup>5</sup> I believe this point does not lose its validity in the face of state breakups and wars. My point concerns how we *think with* the state, and I acknowledge explicitly that the reality ain't necessarily so.

<sup>6</sup> Talk of the putative 'demise' of the state is often used as an argument 'for' explaining processes of globalization in specialised literature. However, in anthropological literature, I found that there is near consensus that this is an inappropriate way of putting things that confuses more than it elucidates. Lewellen (2002: 207) notes that in these sorts of arguments, it is never quite clear what aspects of the state are supposed to be withering away, and that these arguments essentialise the state in unhelpful ways. Furthermore, while Aretxaga (2003: 398) concedes that the state has lost many of the ordering functions that produced the effect of a unitary force, but that this should be considered as part of the new type of governmentality we are moving towards. See also Axtmann (2002) and contributors to Held & McGrew (2002) for serious engagement with the question of the state in an increasingly 'globalizing' world.

<sup>7</sup> This is very remindful of Ingold's (2000) account of the construction of the nature: culture divide.

that the state is the ideal hovering over and controlling the material, and the person, he holds that the transformation of modes of power involves a process he calls 'enframing' (borrowing a Heideggerian term). This is an innovative reversal of the first view on power. By enframing, he means

a variety of modern practices that seem to resolve the world's shifting complexity into two simple and distinct dimensions. Such practices... give rise to the effect of a purely material world, opposed to and given order by what now appears as a free-standing, non-material realm of meaning... [Furthermore,] with their distance from local influence, their regularity, and their repetitive uniformity, practices of this sort create... the effect of something... that seems to exist outside the practical world as a programme governing particular practices. (Mitchell 1991: 566, 571)

Going beyond the polarisations of Western discourse, Mitchell shows, by way of a close reading of Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), how the dichotomies are maintained, and why common metaphors of power reproducing dichotomous thinking remain so pervasive, even in anthropological analysis that purports to work beyond or against such universalising categories.

### Michel Foucault: Power creating Subjects

Mitchell's analytical approach has a heavy Foucaultian tinge, despite no explicit referencing; indeed, Foucault's work on governmentality and power has today come to be widely accepted in anthropological quarters, to the point where anthropologists use Foucault's ideas as common currency, often without acknowledging the origins of their thinking. However, I would like to briefly reiterate some of the main contributions Foucault has made to the study of the state and power. I believe they are epitomised in the following (characteristically ambivalent) passage:<sup>8</sup>

The state, no more probably today than at any other time in its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality,... maybe... the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicised abstraction, whose

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<sup>8</sup> I take on board anthropological criticisms directed at Foucault for the eurocentrism and insufficient attention to context inherent in his work. Gledhill (2000: 152) rightly argues that when Foucault is unable to illustrate a point with French material, he cheerfully substitutes an example from England or another country. I also acknowledge certain weaknesses in applications of his work to analyses of micro-power, that are ultimately more top-down than they would like to be and thus threaten the force of Foucault's argument that there is no outside of power, and no way to escape.

importance is a lot more limited than many of us think. Maybe what is really important for our modernity... is not so much the *etatisation* of society, as the 'governmentalisation' of the state. (Foucault 1991a: 102)

In this quote, the reader may find resonances with part of the arguments laid out heretofore. Indeed, poststructuralism's main thrust consisted in going beyond the dichotomies of the variously laid out previous structuralisms, by creating analytical space for history and power, by questioning the existence of timeless, unchanging and underlying universal structures proposed by structuralism's proponents, and by creating considerable room for debate, both in terms of what 'culture' is and how anthropologists should approach it.<sup>9</sup> Instead of creating systems of abstractions that are meant to neutrally describe the 'real thing' and impose categories of meaning onto shifting processes of reality (Kenrick 2002) – in this case, the state – and that in some cases have become more real than the real thing, if you will, we should attempt to capture the ways in which the state is practised, and this means paying close attention to power relationships. The theoretical move is thus from seeing the state as a category to focusing on the processes that create power, subjects and representations. The practical move is to deal with the messy realities of fieldwork, and stick with it, come rain or shine.

More concretely, Foucault (1980, 1991a, 1991b) has also reversed the way in which how we ought to conceptualise power. Turning away from the monolithic, unilineal, and unidirectional power that is supposed to emanate from the central state, he conceptualises it as 'regimes of truth' or 'disciplinary power' that diffuse the social body right down to the smallest capillary, and construct human subjects who act and think in a certain way.<sup>10</sup> Murdock (2003: 511) rightly notes that it is important to recognise that power is not unidimensional or singly 'located' and emphasises the need for *processes* as anthropological foci. Mukhopadhyay (2005) provides a compelling ethno-

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, there is a lot of space for debate in this sentence. I take this as my momentary interpretation of poststructuralism for the purpose of the argument, and acknowledge that it is quite a sweeping statement. I need to also express my due respect to structuralism's main proponents and I admit that the structuralism I am putting as the rhetorically useful 'strawman' here, does not quite exist in this caricatural manner.

<sup>10</sup> This goes beyond Marxist conceptualisations regarding the creation of 'false consciousness' as, in Foucault's case, this cannot be pierced even by supposedly clever philosophers. This is a contentious issue which deserves and requires a paper of its own. There may exist a certain autonomy of the subjects from the state apparatus, but they are situated within entangled power relationships at all times. My point here concerns the transcendence of the dichotomies, not the excessive agency that seems to be given to power in some of Foucault's writings, especially his earlier ones. I note that it is an important point, but I also think that this point of criticism is partly a misrepresentation and a misunderstanding of Foucault's intentions.

graphic example focused on the engagement in an anti-nuclear campaign by a voluntarist agency in India, and writes against polarised discourse which characterises environmental movements as the 'people's spontaneous emancipation from a destructive and monolithic state', and in the course documents negotiations that render problematic treating the state or people as some kind of unified and monolithic unit (2005: 1). In terms of how power works, Rose and Miller (1992: 183), who acknowledge explicit intellectual debts to Foucault, argue that power is a complex assemblage of diverse forces, not a 'matter of 'implementation' of ideal schemes in the real, nor of the extension of control from the seat of power into the minutiae of existence.' (*ibid.*)<sup>11</sup> In the history of the Western state, they argue, with Foucault, that

the constitutional and legal codification and delimitation of the powers of political authorities did not so much 'free' a private realm from arbitrary inferences by power, as constitute certain realms, such as those of market transactions, the family and the business undertaking, as 'non-political', defining their forms and limits. (*ibid.*)

Thus, power in this sense creates governmentality and subjectivity, and goes against the grain of popular assumptions of the state as an ontological entity independent from or opposed to society.

Foucault, especially in his later life, identified the processes that make up government (of oneself and of others) within the modern era as a vital power in the shaping of persons. He characterised governmentality as follows:

The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge, political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security. (Foucault 1991: 102)

What are the lessons to take from this Copernican (Foucaultian) revolution then? Turning away from traditional conceptualisations of the state as a static category acting on an already pre-constituted world, and taking on board the idea that effects of power create subjectivities in shifting social environments, can help us to more adequately portray the complex relationships (and gaps) between people and the state in practice, as well as question business-as-usual representations and simplifying views of policy makers.<sup>12</sup> Governmentality is

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<sup>11</sup> Conceptualising the state as an assemblage of diverse forces comes close to how Bourdieu (1998, 1999) conceptualises fields of power in his later work.

<sup>12</sup> See Svasek (2006) and Phillips (2006) for contributions that go against these kinds of views.

well suited for ethnographic analysis as it is not a theory in the conventional sense of the term, one that would seek to subsume data to a single explanatory framework (Wolfe 2000: 211). It is

a term that stands for a set of assumptions about the conditions under which human beings live their lives... [These assumptions include] the claims that we not only construct our own histories, but also make the means by which we understand ourselves. Knowledge is the constituting medium of everyday life, and it is the peculiar legacy of the modern era to make possible the creation of a kind of knowing about knowledge, to make possible the rigorous examination of the unreflected and profound ways of knowing that act upon the world. (*ibid.*)

Thus, studies of governmentality can make a critical contribution to the understanding of everyday questions such as, 'How do one's informants come to talk the way they do?', 'How have they come to make sense of the world in this particular way?', 'What are the genealogies of the forms of knowledge that organise their lives?' (Wolfe 2000: 212). I therefore advocate approaching the state as

phenomenological reality... produced through discourses and practices of power,... through the discourses of public culture, rituals of mourning and celebration, and encounters with bureaucracies, monuments [and] organisation of space. The state has to be considered as the effect of a new kind of governmentality; it appears as an open field with multiple boundaries and no institutional or geographical fixity. (Aretxaga 2003: 398).

For the reasons laid out above, I believe this to be a timely way to bring the state back in and help to address Ingold's question of whether a perspective prioritising the lives of ordinary people from their perspective can be combined with the recognition that human lives are lived collectively in fields of power. This perspective is able to account for the 'messy realities' Gledhill describes here:

I argue that retreat to the study to compose analyses that 'speak truth to power' is quite ineffectual in a world in which forces we wish to denounce have themselves become skilled players of multiculturalist politics. For all its difficulties, more active engagement in the messy realities of concrete situations is the only way forward. That entails the rejection of some of the intellectual trends that have dominated the discipline in the past two decades and the kind of re-evaluation of our professional role that has to date been sidestepped in efforts to contain ethical and political controversy. (Gledhill 2004 : 2)

For the remainder of the article, I would like to analyse this 'professional role' that Gledhill mentions within the context of a larger discussion about a 'space for anthropology', as announced.

## The Other Gap or: Anthropology and the Ivory Tower

I would like to draw attention to the curious fact that anthropology, for all its focus on powerless people, social ills and cultural resilience and local victories, its calls for cultural translation and mediation, and its identification with 'the people', is not effectively constituting a *presence* in the general public, but remains largely confined, judging by its end products, to highly specialised journals with a limited readership. I would like to suggest that anthropology has a problem with its public image: unlike in History, Archaeology, or Popular Science, there are few non-academic audiences attracted to it, and few, if any, bestsellers. Except for some Scandinavian countries (Eriksen 2006), anthropologists are, as a rule, not asked for their opinions on public matters of any kind. Neither do non-anthropologists read anthropology as it is being written, and, furthermore, the discipline's aims and objectives are usually far from clear to them.<sup>13</sup> While conceding that there is vitality in anthropology's 'voracious appetite for self-questioning' (1999: 1), Pottier argues that anthropology's problem lies not within the realm of representation, but is a problem of relevance. I think that the two are intimately linked. Leaving aside the ethical questions of 'engaged anthropology',<sup>14</sup> it is one matter to write for a specialist audience, and quite another to write for policy-makers, civil servants, people running NGOs or the general public. It is one thing to write a sound academic analysis, and quite another to write clearly, accessibly and so Mrs Harrison from upstairs can enjoy it and learn from it. Not only is 'engaged anthropology' difficult, so too is good writing practice, and the achievement of a truly 'public anthropology', which, I hasten to add, I like to imagine as essentially pluralistic.

First, the structure of the academic field itself presents some impediments to these goals. Given the low prestige that publications outside of academia represent (despite the broader spectrum and larger amounts of readers involved),

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<sup>13</sup> my family is sometimes still wondering what on earth it is that I am doing with my life...

<sup>14</sup> See d'Andrade (1995), Schepher-Hughes (1995) for a discussion on the moral issues related to so-called 'engaged anthropology', and its presumed opposite(s). I would like to argue, *pace* the aforementioned authors that the debate should not be opposing subjectivity to objectivity. This is an unhelpful way of thinking about the issue. Instead of thinking that one is entirely native or entirely foreign and forever oscillating between those two poles, one should be aware that a person is always both an insider and an outsider to different and varying degrees in every kind of social context. The question then becomes one of 'objectivation' (Bourdieu 2003), and one should be aware that one is always able to distance oneself *somewhat*, though it remains impossible to entirely step outside of one's own perceptions, history, limitations, in the manner prescribed by the 'objectivist' paradigm.

and given the pressures weighing on academics to publish (or perish) in peer-reviewed journals has been intensifying, furthermore, taking into account further obligations such as general bureaucracy and teaching, it appears difficult to expect anthropologists to publish op-eds, or produce and edit their own publications, on top, and for very little (monetary or prestige) compensation. We tend to forget that anthropology is structuring and producing its subjects as a discipline and as a *profession*, and as such, Billig may be right in pointing out that we

deny those elements in ourselves that we might share with the powerful. The paradox is that social scientists will really take a risk of becoming professionally threatened when they study the operations of power close to home in their own departments, universities, and disciplinary institutions – and when power is attributed not just to powerful "others" but also to the professional self. That will be uncomfortable because it will threaten the desire of academics, especially the powerfully successful, to appear as the powerless good guys. (2006: 945)

However, while we do not need to lose ourselves in meta-discussions on issues that are very context-dependent, and while this is also a reason why general moral claims are nigh impossible to make, we should not remain inactive or paralysed because of these difficulties, but keep doing fieldwork, with all its ensuing ambiguities, contradictions and messiness. Rather than having to decide whether we want to remain suspended in postmodern angst *or* being a 'pure' activist, we should use our skills and practices to combine the best of both worlds. Wikan makes this point very eloquently, encapsulating in this statement, I would like to argue, a life-long experience with anthropology and a very specific point of origin (Scandinavia):

I have sought intimacy during fieldwork to be in a position to interpret as sensitively as possible what people actually seek and are up to. I know that I have felt commitment to discovering, knowing, and if possible furthering *their* compelling concerns. I come from a society that is still deeply marked by an ideology of social welfare, and I have experienced fieldwork as an extension of my life in society. My authority as a writer of anthropological texts depends on the extent to which this has been successful. Thus I have conceived of my fieldwork also in terms of "duty" and of making a contribution to social justice. "Going public" is not just a preference but an obligation. Is it fortuitous that I am calling for an experience-near anthropology and a public anthropology at a time "when anthropology is beleaguered by new disciplines like cultural studies, and is searching for new directions, new theories, and new objectives"? No. I believe that anthropology is losing ground and that a reengagement with the real world is urgent if we are not to become voyeurs. Do I make a moral claim on the world? And is there a disguised will to power in the kind of anthropology I advocate? I don't think so. But there is clearly a will to *act on the world, to make a difference* in terms of social equality and social justice. (2006: 948)

A second, somewhat related, impediment is that it is difficult to find a genre that appeals to the public and that does not constitute the end of one's credibility within academia. Should anthropology's endproducts try to conform to the wooden language of certain corporate and business contexts that draw Manichean portraits of 'cultural difference', if they are to speak to non-academics? Can or should 'serious' anthropological research be pressed into marketable, yet often simplistic types of *vignettes* that are screened in the space of a three-minute TV report, or even an infotainment type documentary? The discussion around the BBC series *Tribe* (see Caplan 2006, Fish & Evershed 2006, Hughes-Freeland 2006, Singer 2006) seems to suggest that it is difficult. Major points emerging from it concern the question on disciplinary identity politics and academic prejudice or snobbery. I agree that human lives should be researched with more attention to more complexity, context, and with more empathy than can be achieved through mainstream, consumer-oriented journalistic techniques which may lead to sensationalist and distorted representations of people's knowledge and lives. However, do we really believe that people cannot deal with complexity? I believe we have not yet thought enough about (and acted upon potential conclusions) how we can produce texts, exhibitions or performances that can speak to people beyond the academy, and, as is obvious from my argument, I believe this could be beneficial and productive. Appadurai puts it this way:

To take up this sort of study involves, for the social sciences, a serious commitment to the study of globalization from below, its institutions, its horizons, and its vocabularies. For those more concerned with the work of culture, it means stepping back from those obsessions and abstractions that constitute our own professional practice to seriously consider the problems of the global everyday. In this exercise, the many existing forms of Marxist critique are a valuable starting point, but *they* too must be willing to suspend their inner certainty about understanding world histories in advance. In all these instances, academics from the privileged institutions of the West (and the North) must be prepared to reconsider, in the manner I have pointed to, their conventions about world knowledge and about the protocols of inquiry ("research") that they too often take for granted. (2000: 20)

Thirdly, Kulick (2006) raises important questions, of which I would like to emphasise one in particular. Why do people choose the topics they do? A friend's encounter with an academic (from Politics and International Relations) and his claim that after solving a "problem" by writing an article about it, does not care how many people read his article is, perhaps, a metonymy for the issue at hand. This kind of attitude does not make for useful scholarship, as one would need to triangulate what one's own interests are with what one perceives to be and what is generally perceived to be useful. Is it down to being a matter

of one's own conscience? I would like to think it is not. One's epistemological perspectives influence, possibly even determine how one's world is perceived, acted upon and conceptualised, and given that there is no position of neutrality, one needs to be careful about ensuing political positionings. I follow Saitta (2006: 2) in the belief that universities should be 'unpopular, adversarial and even subversive institutions', especially in the current politico-economic climate.<sup>15</sup> Hence, I understand my approach to be 'critical', which I take to mean a perspective of generalised scepticism regarding modes of knowledge production and dissemination by powerful agents and institutions. I do not use the term in a purely negative sense of critique, since, whatever else anthropology does, its bottom line will have to be respect towards the people anthropologists work with. I would like to follow Robert W. Cox, who defines the critical project as an inquiry which does not implicitly accept the status quo, but which 'stand[s] apart from the prevailing order of the world and ask[s] how that... order came about' (Cox & Sinclair 1996: 88, Cox 1981, see also Bourdieu 1998).

### Is an engaged or public anthropology possible after and with Foucault?

The issue of 'standing apart from the world to some extent' becomes more problematic if Foucault is involved. If power is all encompassing, and it is impossible to step out of it even to the smallest extent, how can one possibly hope for enlightened (and enlightening) analysis? Arguably, this is Foucault at his most 'postmodern'. Nelson expresses this in the following way: 'The problem with Foucault is you don't see the stakes, you don't get a sense of what is being fought for. He's a conspiracy theorist without conspirators' (2005: 217), and reports that she is torn 'between a Foucauldian hope that while power is as dangerous as a bomb it may also swerve course' (*ibid.*). Her fundamental question here is whether one can be Foucauldian *and* an activist? I believe that the issue she gets at is vital, but that, here too, it is not desirable, or indeed possible, to make a choice. Gledhill has the following to say on the matter:

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<sup>15</sup> I do acknowledge that this political climate has different forms in the US and in Europe, and that Saitta's argument is mainly based on the US (at the time of writing a Republican- aka Neoconservative-governed) context, while my interests lie more in the directions toward which Europe is moving – arguably following an economic path that is modelled on the Anglo-American model. I am referring to issues such as the contours of EU governance, high and rising unemployment, declining wages, the legitimacy crisis of the state, and the extension of corporate power, for instance. I acknowledge, however, that there are big differences as to the degree to which left-wing activity is tolerated and perceived comparing the US to the UK or continental Europe.

That also means not settling for deconstruction or "speaking truth to power" alone (which is not to deny that both strategies have their uses and appropriate contexts). We may not be able to see the future clearly but we learn enough about the past and the present to make more than gestures of solidarity. Anthropology can make valuable contributions to the selfreflective development of the actors in the political situations that we study. They may as often as not fail to agree with our ideas about how and on which fronts to move forward, but if intellectuals have any usefulness at all, it must be in terms of trying to help to expand local visions. (2004: 37)

In this endeavour, it is important to resist simplifying views which dichotomise the world, but also to leave some space for innovation and oft-complex types of "struggle" that are happening among the people we live and work with.<sup>16</sup> Before moving on to the conclusion, I leave the final word of argument to Gledhill:

What it is to say is that discussion of political possibilities at a particular moment has to start from an understanding of structural power in both its socio-economic and "governmentality" dimensions, with a focus on the complex dynamics of hegemonic processes... as a means of understanding "struggle" that does not start from the premise that there is some completely uncoloni[s]ed autonomous domain of "resistant" consciousness yet also recogni[s]es the scope for subalterns to produce and reproduce their own ideas. (*ibid.*)

### Some Conclusions

Bridging the two gaps I have been describing (the first one between institutions and people, the second one between the academy and the wider world) to the greatest realistically possible extent is not an easy task, and I am certainly not the first person to focus on these gaps and propose ways of closing them. However, I would like to draw attention to the fact that anthropologists have not thought enough about, first, what the benefits and interest is in disseminating their work to wider audiences, and, second, how to go about putting this into practice so that it is both accessible and available to people. As anthropologists, I think we should be wary of the usual response from academics, claiming that people are not interested anyway, and throwing in the towel before having exhausted all possibilities, and taken on board ideas from other disciplines and domains of education, e.g. adult education. Gledhill affirms that '[m]aintaining a grounded optimism of the spirit requires a realis-

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<sup>16</sup> I acknowledge that this paper would have benefitted from a closer reading of Gramsci's (2005) ideas that are very compatible with the view Gledhill defends here.

tic appraisal of situations and possibilities, orientated to supporting the efforts of movements themselves to recognize contradictions and seek ways of transcending them' (2004: 31). With all the focus on practice of recent times in methodological and theoretical questions, it is about time that we encourage practical outcomes of anthropological endeavours, and work, as Nelson (2005) terms it, *milieu*, in the midst of action, not through schemes of abstracted thinking. We can use our individual skills to put this vision into practice, through a plurality of methods: writing for non-academic journals, putting up exhibitions, speaking on the radio, participate in community work, and so forth. I believe that anthropology's research insights are important and interesting enough to 'survive' a careful 'vulgarisation', which I take to mean here the process of rendering familiar or popular without destroying the revelations and findings therein. People read, people watch intelligent TV, people are curious, people visit museums and public events, and people are interested in the world around them, and on this I think one can build a more democratic, public anthropology, which has intimate connections with people's concerns and produces knowledge that remains connected.

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### Kejti Fojks

#### PAZI RUPA! POLITIKA, MOĆ I PROSTOR ZA ANTROPOLOGIJU

Ovaj članak predstavlja pokušaj da se povežu dve vrste "praznog prostora" sa kojima se suočavaju naučnici. Reč je ne samo o običnom konceptijskom ili teorijskom problemu, već o jednom koji ima jasne praktične posledice. Prva "rupa" postoji između politika nacionalnih ili nadnacionalnih vlasti i lokalnog nivoa. Kako se baviti obema stranama prostora koji razdvaja politiku i ljude? Tvrdim da nam oslanjanje na koncepte kao što su "politika" ili "država" ne može biti od velike pomoći, već da je najkorisnije analizu koncentrisati oko pojma moći. Povezujući pragmatička, metodološka i epistemološka pitanja, želela bih da dovedem u pitanje mogućnost kombinovanja "'prebivajuće perspektive' sa prepoznavanjem činjenice da ljudi zajedno nastanjuju polja moći" (Ingold 2005a: 501). Drugi prazan prostor, o kom se raspravlja makar od osnivanja univerziteta u Evropi, ako ne i od antičkih vremena, je onaj između akademskih struktura i šire zajednice, a koji, kako tvrdim, nastaje slično prvom. Stoga, drugo pitanje koje ću postaviti u ovom tekstu istovremeno je normativno i praktično, i tiče se upotrebe antropologije u savremenom svetu, odnosno odsustva očekivanog doprinosa antropologa komentaranju urgentnih društvenih problema, lokalnih kao i globalnih. Zatim razmatram da li, i kako, antropologija može da "govori" van akademske zajednice, i u kom stepenu sama struktura ove zajednice to onemogućava. Prvi deo ovog teksta, dakle, bavi se dekonstruisanjem nekih od osnovnih pretpostavki prisutnih u određenim konceptualizacijama države, predlažući alternativne načine na koje država može biti uključena u antropološke analize i etnografiju na način korisniji nego što je do sada bio slučaj. Drugi deo otvara pitanje od opšteg interesa o mogućnostima upotrebe antropologije, zaključujući, sa Gledhilom (Gledhill), "da možemo biti aktivniji i posvećeniji učesnici u haotičnim poljima moći koje proučavamo" (2004: 38).