

Sense and Sensibility: Modern Anthropology in a Posthuman World  
or  
Listening Well to the Globalization of Discontent  
by  
Dave Crawford  
for  
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First, I'd like to thank you all for coming this afternoon, or thank you for staying if you are amongst the hardcore anthro-geeks who have been here for much of the past two days. It warms my sour old heart to know there are young people out there who get off on the idea of doing anthropology. I think you're crazy, but crazy in a way that is inspiring.

Thanks in particular to the organizers—the geeks amongst the geeks, the most wacko of the crazies-- who have put this conference together. Organizing anthropologists is like teaching worms to sing; while ultimately futile, it can be entertaining if your sense of a good time is warped enough. You are all beautifully warped and we have all benefited from your efforts. And finally, thanks for having me back again this year to talk. I was out here for the first of these California Undergraduate Anthropologist events and I am both stupefied and thrilled that you have not only declined to seek a restraining order against me, but instead have asked me to talk again.

You know not what you have done; I am a dangerous man with a microphone. And in this forum I am especially dangerous as my assignment is to send you off with a bang. Your organizers are quite concerned that this be a positive bang, however, and if you know me at all then you also know that this is a terrible misalignment of assignments. I am not a positive person. On an existential level, and a political and economic and environmental one, I am quite sure we are all doomed. At one point I even started a religious order called the "Church of Despair" with a political wing which was the "The People for Doom"). Can you imagine? We were only trying to match the tax exempt status of the Christian Coalition, but it should tell you something that my contribution to religious politics was an organization that did not agitate for the death penalty, but instead advocated for death itself. Our rituals involved cheese puffs and used motor oil, but I can't go into that. The only other person to ever join my religion is now dead, which, again, colors my sense of where we're all heading.

Anyway, I've mellowed since those days and will try to make today's talk slightly more rosy, but it won't be easy. As near as I can tell our democracy is convulsing from a crack-like addiction to corporate money, our environment is degraded to the point we'll soon be counting laboratory rats as wildlife and golf courses as protected open space, our universities—which at one point were at least *said* to be concerned with the training of sensible citizens—are now openly declared giant job training factories where CEOs and government apparatchiks tell us what to teach. Our main goal is now to sharpen your spikes so you don't slide into the social class below. Yes, clearly the whole planet is doomed, not just you and me. So it is probably apparent why you were more than a little nuts to elect me as the one to send you off with hearts full of fire and minds lusting for an incandescent anthropological future that smells like vanilla candles and looks like ripe fruit, free beer, and naked Gap models. But I will try.

My plan is to begin with a few words about political economy and what we might call the political economy of knowledge production. I know Geoff Mann did some of this yesterday, and more sagely than I shall, but it's necessary to give my view of it so you'll see why I'm so worked up. That done, I want to move to your conference theme of "modernity" and talk some about a parallel sort of *nouveau lumpencategory*, "globalization," a word I despise, but one that I think you need to learn to cope with since it seems everyone now believes that everything is not just global, but globalized. This obviously includes anthropology.

My argument will be that the main product of our social order is discontent. That is, to start with, I believe that the most notable emission of our late capitalist economic system is widespread ennui. I am not alone in noticing this, of course. Durkheim, Tonnies, Weber, Marx, the band Sublime –just about everyone who has ever thought about "modern" life has come to the conclusion that it comes down not only to the numb production of vast oceans of crap, but also weird idea that this crap can salve the pale misery induced by the production of the crap in the first place. I should warn you that by this point in my talk many of you will have used your Chinese-made Bic pens to puncture your American carotid arteries and will be quietly bleeding yourselves to death in your seats. Others will have tried self-suffocation with those free bags grocery warehouses use for incarcerating vegetables. I want to urge you to resist suicide, however good your reasons may be, because the upbeat part of the talk comes at the end. To end my talk I will give you the secret to a fruitful and meaningful life. (You see, I am not completely out of the religion business!) I can't give these insights away to soon, however, I first have to scare you, depress you, humor you, and send around a collection plate, but I will give you a hint: the secret to life involves anthropology. Yes, the fate of the world hinges upon your creaky old, colonialist discipline, with its delaminating four fields, and total intellectual paralysis before its most fundamental concepts, like culture. But here also lies our secret....

#### First: Political Economy and the Political Economy of Knowledge Production

I am a recalcitrant materialist, which is to say that I can't stop myself from beginning with political economy. I know, there are lots of other ways to slice a cake, but for me it makes sense to begin with how the cake gets made in the first place.

The Oxford English Dictionary (online) says of political economy that it was, "originally the art or practical science of managing the resources of a nation so as to increase its material prosperity; [but] in more recent use, [has become] the theoretical science dealing with the laws that regulate the production and distribution of wealth." The whole "laws" part of this definition is suspicious, as I have not noticed much in social life that follows laws very assiduously, but "managing resources" to "increase material prosperity" does not sound completely insane. It's especially sensible if you think of when the OED's "originally" might have been: say, Scotland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. I don't know heaps about this place and time, but according to what I've read, the notion of "political economy" evolved in this moment of spectacular intellectual florescence in a fairly miserable place. This was time when big-brained Scots swarmed madly about one of the poorest countries in Europe, got drunk in the morning, and argued, lectured and wrote all the time about ideas that would come to make the

modern world. These are the people whom I consider my ancestors, the people who, long before Hunter Thompson, made it clear that if you leave all the thinking to boring, sober people you end up with boring, sober ideas and a boring sober society. This, I'm afraid, is what we are facing now. We are a world trapped in a twelve-step program and life is one long bad meeting. I wanted to begin this talk by saying, hello, my name is Dave, and I am addicted to not being bored. I have a feeling this may be a crime.

But this old Scotland place was different from my world, and not just in terms of its per capita alcohol consumption or the cultural accommodation of the concept of a "breakfast claret" that led to it. Aside from the abundant booze, this seems to have been a world of lack, at least compared to the one we know, a world freighted with fears of crop failure and flood, disease and disability, when each single shoe had to be hand built from scratch and every fiber of every pair of socks was carefully assembled by some human's hands toiling in a lightless and unheated garret. White folks had not, at this point, outsourced so much of their misery to tropical places. In such a world, a world where the poor lived cheek by jowl with the rich and where even the rich didn't have clean toilets, refrigerators, vaccines, or easy access to Trader Joes, the problem of increasing overall wealth—the overall quantity of stuff in society—was of obvious concern. Not only was there no Wal-Mart, there were no antibiotics, no iPods, no Cancun spring break. All too often life was all too short and I suppose it was hard to imagine what you even *could* want beyond a warm house, short winters, reasonable amounts of leisure, food unpopulated with microfauna, and of course, a decent beer for your midmorning break. But there was a lack even of these modest desirables and the person we most associate with articulating a way to overcome this lack and increase the wealth of nations was, of course, Adam Smith.

Now, Adam Smith is not much read by anthropologists. He's the bad guy, the one rapidly lionized in economics, and while I can understand the sentiment behind this, it is still unfortunate. Sure, Smith was grouchy at dinner parties, he talked infrequently, but once started he wouldn't shut up; he was not one of the better partier-philosophers in my view, and, worse but not necessarily unrelated, he became the high priest of what we now call capitalism, that is, the economic system that is presently engulfing the entire planet. Because anthropologists often work with societies devastated by this whole capitalism thing, it is no surprise that Adam Smith pisses us off. But this is sort of blaming the messenger. I would suggest that grouchy A.S. was not nearly so unaware of the complexities of the issues he raised as are many of his acolytes today. Smith was concerned, for instance, with what he called the "bad effects of commerce" and the terrible costs involved in the hyper-specialization of labor. While on balance Smith believed that the benefits of unbridled commerce outweighed the costs, he does not sound like the delusional architects of contemporary IMF policies. It is these present-day gnomes who yatter breezily about the destruction of people's lives—real lives of real human beings-- as structural readjustment "medicine" to be taken for the benefit of "the economy," whatever that is. In fact, in my view the IMF / World Bank seem to promote policies eerily analogous to early Stalinist plans for a glorious future just beyond the immediate destruction—the sadly, terribly unfortunate but *necessary* destruction—which, as always, means necessary for somebody besides the people living in Washington, D.C or Moscow. Granted, the IMF / WB people invert some aspects of the Stalinist model, but the logic of violent, blind and baseless optimism is the same. By contrast, Adam

Smith writes that “In all commercial countries the division of labor is infinite, and everyone’s thoughts are employed about one particular thing.... The minds of [such] men are contracted, and rendered incapable of elevation. Education is despised, or at least neglected, and heroic spirit is utterly extinguished” (quoted in Herman 2001:220).

Utterly extinguished! Now, what does this sound like to you? As near as I can tell this Smith guy was right on –and not just about the “Causes of the Wealth of Nations,” but the consequences. Smith isn’t arguing here that capitalism by itself will produce a free and satisfied liberal populace, only that it will produce lots of stuff and will, on balance, be better than the miserable time he was writing in. Some of the by-products of all this stuff-production were easy enough to see even in the 1700s, but we are now being devoured by locust storms of “contracted minds” and our only protection lies in a notably unheroic culture. The leaders of powerful nations are not only venal thugs and religious fanatics “incapable of elevation,” but are often incapable of sensible communication! Education remains the holy saving grace of you undergrads scrambling to avoid life as a Denny’s hostess, but education has also, ironically, become the scapegoat for all that even might go wrong with the Capito-Stalinist future, at least according to the vicious apologists of this New World Order. Scholars, who, let’s face it, have almost no effect on anything, are nonetheless castigated by oxycontin-addicted talk show hosts for distracting you desperate undergrad masses from your singular pursuit of profit. And a few of us –who really ought to be exterminated, slowly, as enemies of freedom— a few even to ask you to question where this whole pursuit of profit thing is taking us. I’ll get to that later.

For now I’ll just say that in terms of political economy, it is no surprise that thoughtful Dead White Men –the very same Dead White Men we Lefties skewer for launching this fever we live in—these men were not ignobly concerned with how to generate more prosperity, how to unleash human ingenuity stultified by centuries of brutal labor under mulish hereditary landlords. It was not, at the time, very clear how to solve this. As his father was a customs inspector and young A.S. grew up watching smugglers outwit his dad, this Smith Jr. (and others) struck upon the idea that greed –in this case, the desire for profit—this greed might act as a brake upon the other passions, like laziness, sloth, or even lust, and it might in fact be the key to a unleashing not just a mania of productivity but actual social benefits like autonomy of action and even democracy. Smith argued that since rich people would always want more than they could physically ingest, their mad accumulation would spill over and make everyone the richer. This is to say, as Sandy Robertson argues,<sup>1</sup> that the limitations of the body were, at one time, key to a theory of general good coming from capitalist organization.

According to this view, the upshot of everyone pursuing what we have come to call “self interest” will be an “invisible hand” that will kindly and blindly organize the world. It is the economic counterpart of “natural selection” in evolution and is thus not exactly a God kind of hand, but a force something like gravity that would keep everyone stuck together and rolling forward in this dizzy hunger for *more*. This is where the idea of “laws” of political economy comes from. As such, Smith combines a theory of human nature with a theory of economic growth to produce a result that has, I think, become the central metaphor at the core of our civilization, and now, maybe, our planet. To the old story of marching out of Eden into the corrupt world and then on to heaven we now

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<sup>1</sup> See “Greed” by A.F. Robertson.

march out of school, into the corrupt world and on to material prosperity. We still all seem to believe we are *going* somewhere and that the whole world is on a track, more or less the same track, and the real issue is who is getting on the bus how and when and how far they're going to ride. This is what people mean when they talk about "tradition" and "modernity," it's what they mean when they ask how "developed" a society is.

True, you anthropologists are certainly thinking, this notion of humanity as a monomaniacal *homo want-more-icus* seems a bit thin, and the idea that some "invisible hand" is gently coddling us into a coherent society seems a teensy bit naïve, especially given our ringside seat to the capitalist-driven destruction of everything from American Indians to the ozone layer. Even oxymoronic "compassionate conservatives" can't show how an invisible hand covers anyone's naked ass who has failed to profit, who has been too lazy, too stupid, too old, or too unlucky to drag herself or himself on to the bus of progress, or who has inadvertently got off at the wrong stop. Many of our domestic most-impooverished are, in any case, children. And in fact the most recent extraterritorial experiment meant to demonstrate that a "free market," corporate-dictated free for all would spontaneously generate a free society was in Iraq, and I think we can see how that's going. The "invisible hand" seems to depend upon an iron fist (as noted, and celebrated, by Thomas Friedman).<sup>2</sup>

But back to Scotland, where the point is that however mangled the message became later, it was not necessarily the fault of Adam Smith and his brilliant, dipsomaniac interlocutors. Smith was, I think, essentially right that something like self-directed effort rewarded by something like a meritocracy made much more sense than feudalism and crass nationalist and sub-nationalist atavism, at least in terms of *generating* wealth. There was not much discussion about how to distribute the wealth once it was made. That was a matter for a later generation.

And later generations had much to say about this. Liberal economic theories made some sort of sense in soggy old Scotland of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but we all know what happened as the English got hold of these ideas and turned London in the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the world's greatest economic powerhouse *and* a cesspit of misery and human debasement probably unequaled just about anywhere at any time. It was in this context we meet Karl Marx, his rich friend Frederick Engels, and the development of the strain of moral outrage we have inherited today as "critical theory."

Marx too had a theory of human nature—if I need to remind you why anthropologists should be interested in this—and Marx too grafted his idea of who humans are as a species to a theory of political economy. It is not the case that Marx was simply opposed to what the Liberals had to say. He understood very well the productive power unleashed by capitalism. I don't think he ever denied that as a system for generating the things of this world, nothing has been or maybe even could be better. The essential Marxian critique as I read it is simply that generating stuff is not necessarily the only point of an economy. In this sense, a central human product of capitalism (what Marx called "alienation") has come to operate as its fuel, and thus what we call capitalist relations form a positive feedback loop not unlike a nuclear chain reaction. The release of energy has been as awesome. The more our fellow thinking human beings are driven to do stupid, mindless jobs over which they have no control, the more "alienated" they become. The more alienated they become, the more they look for ways of building

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<sup>2</sup> See Friedman in Tariq Ali's "Clash of the Fundamentalisms," p. 286-287.

selves they can love, selves that seem lovable, and the obvious social mechanism for doing this is to consume. Voila! The peril of overproduction is solved by spontaneous over consumption. This is why Michel de Certeau talks about consumption as a form of production: it is a production of self, of social identity and even a form of sociality itself. This seems apparent enough and so I can't quite agree when Mary Douglas says that we don't know why people want goods. Why? Well, I can build or at least communicate a whole new me if I can drink the same beer as beautiful people, use the same hemorrhoid cream as rich guys in golf carts, stiffen my erections with the same pills as tough football coaches, and drive a car that makes me downright sexually irresistible to 18 year-old women with pneumatic breasts the size of small dogs. This seems a reasonable substitute for a meaningful life.

Thus, in my view, the genius of capitalism is that it feeds on its own despair. In fact it relies on despair as its engine even as it produces despair at a permanently accelerating rate. Satisfied, happy people with a reasonable hope for their children's future do not choose to sit in factories, they do not choose to package chickens for a living or scoop out fish guts or pick strawberries. All of these necessary jobs are done by people who *have* to do them, who don't have any other good options. Many of the most vital jobs in our world—like caring for children, for instance-- are done by people who experience lack much like 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, people who even today cannot really revel in the taste of ripe mango daiquiris on Santa Barbara beaches. To give but one example, I pay something like \$2,000 a month for daycare but when one worker's father died, her colleagues had to take up a collection to get the couple hundred bucks she needed for a flight to the funeral. Can you imagine being a couple days' worth of work away from eviction? Can you imagine begging your coworkers so that you can attend your own father's funeral? I know that's hard to believe, but you all feel this terror somewhere in your bowels because these poor drones have the future you are trying to avoid. They also, I'm going to suggest, have the future you need to understand. The predatory genius of capitalism is that it digests the weakest members of our social order, and at the same time recruits the weakest members of alternative social orders, drawing them into the great maw that is contemporary global capital expansion. I am not suggesting that "out there" somewhere are anthropological utopias of happy natives terrified that a McDonalds will open in the rainforest. Rather, what I find in my research, and what I think you'll find in yours, is that the wretched walk into the great machine we have built to eat them. My question for you is why they do so?

And what does this have to do with intellectual production? Everything! The system you are hoping to work in is not separate from the larger political economy, it is not, as some have it, an "ivory tower." God, those were the good old days! Give me back my tower! We are now the ivory basement and with the collapse of any real Left above ground, thinkers bewildered by the blind acceptance observable everywhere at ground level, those of us dizzy from the weak, smog covered sun, we have all gone to live in prairie dog cities. Don't get me wrong: I'm happy underground. I like having a job very, very much and (in case my dean is listening) I really like the particular job that I have. However, this does not mean that don't understand that the main point of my job—and the reason my students pay \$35,000 a year to attend my school—is to ensure that the children of the people winning today's economic game continue to win in the next generation. Essentially, all I can really do is make them feel guilty for winning and

sometimes give the odd boost to the upwardly mobile, the rare child of a servant attempting to secure a slot in the Big House. I don't suppose mine is any great public service.

But, for your purposes, saving the world is secondary. The pressing issue, for you agitated seniors in particular, is how to stay sane in an insane world, that is, how can you can even *get* a job like mine, let alone complain about it, which is to say how to get a job where you have some control over your labor, where you get to think creatively, at least occasionally, and where you can imagine your days and seasons and indefinite future something like however you want. That's what we're going to discuss in a minute.

But first, my bit on "modernity" and globalization, just so I don't forget. You specifically used the term "modern" in the title of your conference, which I have to say tickles me to death because while I was in graduate school, which was not *that* long ago, "modernity" was kind of bad word. At that time we were arguing about the term "postmodern," a notion that had a very anti-modern feel to it. What I mean is that we thought we had confirmed that "modernity" was the problem and we were trying to figure out what to do about it. In other words, it was cold, mean, modern scientific logic that brought us to the precipice of nuclear annihilation and stamped the mystery out of nature, modernity and the pursuit of "progress" that had stripped our forests down to the subsoil and rendered our air nearly as solid as our earth, it was modernity's teleological notion of itself as the end of history, of history itself as a kind of divine fulfillment of destiny, that had served to justify the genocide of the Americas and enslavement everywhere else. We were sure that this modernity thing was a way of thinking that confused qualitative goodness with simple profusion, and it was not simply the fault of cowardly white conservatives. Modernity was the sin of both liberals and the self-proclaimed Marxists – everybody Left and Right was peddling progress like car salesmen loaded on methadrine, with opinion diverging only where we were meant to be going.

And here you guys tell me you're interested in "modern" anthropology! I love your insolence. Screw the old farts! It's like the children of all the hippies who became punks or, worse, Republicans. It's some sort of natural law –the political economy of youthful obnoxiousness. It's very healthy and I'm very impressed.

But what to think? I suppose that I'll take you at your word, and quote Evelyn Fox Keller –one old fart on your side-- who writes, "I remain an unreconstructed modernist. I retain the hope and even belief that at least some forms of confusion can actually be cleared up" (NY Times 4/12/05 p.F2). Indeed! The idea of hope makes me queasy, but perhaps you and Evelyn are right. Perhaps it's time we can admit that while we've learned a lot about our theoretical limitations, about the thicket of reflexivity we're writing from, and how much fun it is to dwell on the fact that there is no obvious end to questioning questions and deconstructing deconstructions. But, it seems, we do have to end. It seems you (young people) are telling us (old people): get a life. It's time to move on.

OK, but I'm moving backwards one more time before moving on, backwards to examine "modernity's" big brother "globalization."

Globalization is a modern idea, but not a very new one. It is a word you should fear, since it has no precise meaning, but is instead a kind of amalgam of processes: fluid labor markets, more fluid capital, the retreat of the state in economic realms, ideological

individualism, cultural commoditization, technological transformation, especially in terms of transport and communications—everyone has her favorite cocktail of dynamics, favorite causative modalities, her own argument about which parts matter and which don't. For my part, the interesting bit in all this is what David Harvey and others have called the “compression” of space and time. This is the idea that fluid capital along with technologies like airplanes and email collapse the distances between places and shrink the time between events to next to nothing, creating an accelerated, black hole of a world that is (to some) gloriously liberating and (to others) a kind of maddening spin cycle for the soul. But this is nothing new. Let me read a long and I think eloquent passage on the topic.

"The [business class] cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish [our] epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the [business class] over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The [business class] has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. [What we might now call “outsourced.”] They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creation of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature."

For those of you who don't recognize it, that was the “Communist Manifesto” and was written something like a century and a half ago. It is notably modernist as social theory, at least insofar as it posits a direction for things and doesn't seem traumatized by

the idea of causation, and it seems pretty clear about how and why the nexus of processes we now call globalization were, if not inevitable, then pretty damned likely to work out pretty much as they have.

My question now is whether this “globalization” thing can be salvaged, or resurrected the way you and Evelyn Fox Keller want to resurrect the very modern idea of working towards some specified good? I don’t suppose I can stand here and advocate a world communist revolution –that would be a bit too modern-- but I am willing to call for an anthropological revolution, and while I’m frightened of vanguards generally, you seem like a nice enough group of young people to civilize the world. God knows the world can use it. So here’s my plan.

### Sense and Sensibility: On the Future of Anthropology

OK: whether you’re a digger of holes (you archeologists), a fondler of the dead (you bio types), or, like me, a confused otherlover determined to show that conversations with regular people can produce at least as much wisdom as time spent in libraries: all of us, our time is now. If you recognize that the world is a shitbox on fire, if you can see that your own participation in it will inevitably cost you the greater part of your waking hours and thus the bulk of your one and only and desperately precious life, and, incidentally, probably your soul, then you have to take stock of the situation. First, you cannot avoid the madness. It’s everywhere, including inside your head. No matter how principled, you too will want to buy an iPod (if you have not done so already; I have), you will hate your body because you cannot avoid seeing Brad Pitt and that godawfully cheerful woman he used to be married to, you will long for cars that can go three times the legal speed limit and shoes that cost more than the annual budget of Samoa. You will envy your friends who major in accounting and pay off their school loans in one year. This is as it should be. You cannot avoid it. Embrace the doom, but do not succumb, do not lose your sense of humor.

You, my friends, are the anthropologists and your secret is that you are having more fun. This is our preeminent principle, our nuclear option, our impregnable fortress: we must not let anybody have more fun, and we must do this by ensuring that nobody works on problems that are any bigger, any more interesting, any more urgent or, of course, more fun. If we are having more fun, we are invulnerable. We can never be wholly swallowed up by the pursuit of awful *moreness* (unless it’s more fun!) because we will always be reading books we want to read, talking about things we want to talk about, and answering questions we think are worth answering. If we refuse to cede the terms of our reality, if we remain ferociously interdependent and resolutely civil, if we produce a social space where our values rule, then the Pentagon and Microsnuff can take over the rest of the world and we will still be around to write about it, and write about it critically.

How shall we write, what sorts of questions are worth answering? How about, what makes people happy? How do we make a society worth living in? We in anthropology we have a treasure trove of evidence, a god’s gallery of ways of thinking, feeling, acting and being in the world and so we know that there are alternatives to what Roger Lancaster has called our “deranged culture of lawn care.” We are the antidote to pat assertions about “family values,” to assumptions that greed is a (useful) human universal, about the need to give government over to wicked trolls simply because they

want power more than the rest of us. We need not be crazy primitivists to make the case that other people in other times and places have many, many good ideas. A quick example: I can tell you that I have no desire at all to spend my life growing barley by hand, like the people in the High Atlas with whom I lived with during my dissertation research. But you know what? They have a tenacious devotion to community that brings tears to my eyes. They have a confidence that comes from caring for people and being cared for by them, a knowledge that they are welcome in the world, a knowledge that I strive to instill in my own children but am not sure I can manage. My mountain dwelling friends have much more immediate things to fear than I do. They are desperately poor, and thus stalked by disease and occasionally malnutrition. They are subjected to backbreaking labor and corrupt bureaucrats, rockslides and flash floods. But they do not fear. They do not fear as much as I do, and they do not fear nearly as much as my undergraduates. Sure, poor farmers want more than what they have, things like sturdy shoes and electric lights, so they “lack” in ways we don’t. But they are saved from life on a razor’s edge of homeland security fear mongering and note making rent, late insurance premiums and overdraft notices. My mountain friends have houses they build themselves, from the mud they live on, and these thick-walled beauties cost almost no money and are warm in the winter and cool in the summer. People such as these know where they come from, they don’t live amongst a forest of appliances they don’t understand, eat food they can’t identify, watch their children marry people they don’t know. They have ways of making communal decisions that they did not—I need repeat this—did not learn from the Greeks. Thus my beloved Berber speaking friends have taught me much, from how to love to how to dwell in a space I understand to how to organize a very small polity with a minimum of force and ill will. It is now my charge to teach other people, and to teach something about this wisdom under threat, the wisdom of people around the world today and stretching back in time that you, my future colleagues, must also seek to comprehend and explain to the rest of us. You will gain more than you can imagine from this process. Producing your own knowledge, publishing it, sending it out in the world like a child or a leaf in the wind—this will bring you rewards that make the best book you ever read feel like back of a Cheerios box and the most fabulous object in the universe seem a simple plastic bauble. As KRS One says, “be a producer!” Production, in our case, is the crafting of ideas, the building of theories, arranging words into papers, assembling and analyzing data, making sense of this world: this is our spiritual Viagra.

How? Sense and sensibility, my young friends. You cannot rely on your minds alone. Your poor dry minds have been severed from your wet material selves, locked away from what Marx called your “species being” or what you would call human nature. You need to recover this by using anthropology, you need to recover what it means to be human through the process of *doing* anthropology. You will learn it outside of yourself and inside, in the sensual interface between yourself and the Others who make you yourself. You will have to go through a sociological epiphany, come to learn that you are not the individual you have been sold, and that your ideas are everyone’s ideas. You can then share them because you have come to learn that they were never really yours in the first place. Anthropology is thus the practical epistemology of consciousness, a way of knowing yourselves through others. To pursue it you will need “sense,” bodily

sensations, but also “sensitivity” or what the OED calls “emotional consciousness.” Your raw disembodied brain won’t do.

I am more sorry than you know that the world has become, or is rapidly becoming, posthuman, and that so many of our sisters and brothers are slaves to the blind production and reproduction of *moreness*, that they have become more determinedly visual at the expense of other senses, and too frightened to engage our deeply human capacity for empathy, engagement, tenderness, for touching one another. I’m not John Lennon, so I won’t say “love is all you need,” but you certainly aren’t getting far on simple computing power. Your bodies are what distinguish you from rocks and machines, and your bodies are home to your manifold beautiful minds, minds that I hope you will turn to the very greatest of questions. So head out of here, young friends. Listen to bones—your own and our ancestors. Read the dirt, in your own yard and across the world. And listen very, very carefully so you may tell us all who we are. The best anthropologists are always the best listeners, and I thank you for listening today.