If Malinowski had been a Blogger

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Isn't Anthropology a Social Science?

Before examining the possibility of Open Access (OA) in anthropology, the question of whether an essay on anthropology belongs in the Humanities special issue of LIBREAS is, quite honestly, itself up for debate. Individual researchers in anthropology, cultural studies and ethnography find themselves - in terms of theory and method - somewhere along a triangular plane between the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. Depending on the university, anthropologists can find themselves in a department affiliated in any of those three disciplines. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote that

> "ethnographies tend to look at least as much like romances as they do like lab reports (but as with [a] mule, not really like either [a horse or a donkey])." (Geertz, 1988)

By this, he means that the research is data-rich and empirically-based and in that way pulls the discipline towards social sciences and natural sciences, but the interpretation of the data can go in many directions, including the literary and poetic. For the sake of this article, I will consider it under the umbrella of the humanities, not least because of the preferred modes of publication, i.e. monographs, in the discipline.

Why a librarian should be writing about anthropology is another question to address, since anthropologists are much better spokespeople for their own field, especially as regards to how they shall and should communicate. As a by-product of my reading on the theories and methods of ethnography for my research on library service design, it struck me that the challenges and opportunities that OA offers for anthropology are very much tied up in questions of ethics in a way that might not be immediately clear to those of us working in the library. Because the audience for this article is librarians and others who hope to design and encourage open access, I write this article to shed light on ways in which we can implement technology that will help anthropologists do their work more efficiently and safely (in terms of data preservation), as well as to offer them exciting new possibilities which are sensitive to their particular ethical concerns. A more thorough examination of the digital scholarship in anthropology is Owen Wiltshire's thesis-in-progress, about which he is blogging at 'Another Anthro Blog' (Wiltshire, 2009) or Chris Kelty's thoughts on the conjunction of open access and anthropology (Golub et al., 2009; Kelty, 2008). Another useful source on open access/open source is a seven-way conversation between anthropologists, which has been published first in the journal Cultural Anthropology and also as a blog, designed to continue the conversation (Kelty et al., 2008).

If Malinowski had been a Blogger

Branislaw Malinowski, a European-born anthropologist, is considered by many to be the father of contemporary anthropological field work. His approach to data collection on the cultures that he studied was participant observation, whereby he took part, for long periods of time, in the lives of the people that he wished to study. This methodological approach has, in many ways, become synonymous with the discipline of anthropology.

After he died suddenly from a heart attack in 1942, a diary was found in his office, which documented his personal experiences during his field research. His wife at the time, Valetta Malinowska, along with a colleague, translated from the Polish and published his diary, entitling it A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term, even though Malinowski himself almost certainly never intended it to be made public. This decision to make public his private writings was and remains for many, a controversial one. The diary describes - in often painful detail - the loneliness of field research, Malinowski's sexual and emotional feelings, unflattering portraits of his social world and peers, harsh remarks

about his study population, and his frequent self-medication for a variety of ailments, many of which seem to be illusory. It could be argued that much of the observation is unuseful as a data source. At the same time, it offers valuable insight into the inner intellectual world of an important ethnographer and paints a fuller picture of that which 'voices' his data and interpretation, which gives readers another tool with which to judge the validity of his research.

A diary or personal field notes can be valuable records of qualitative data. Diary notes can be crucial tools for keeping track of ways of doing things, of the decisions that a researcher makes about what methods were chosen and on what basis, and also how they were implemented, and of outcomes or problems. Logs and diaries also keep track of what happened through time in the field as well as daily developments in theory and managing to-do lists. Ultimately they can also serve as a record of data upon which others can gauge objectivity and work towards reproducibility (in the experimental sense) and openness. (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002; Fetterman, 1998)

> “At least since the 1960s, most sociological ethnographers have advocated including accounts of personal feelings and emotional reactions in core field notes accounts, sometimes only peripherally in descriptions of ones own methodological doings, sometimes as an exclusive core component of the ethnographic project.” (Emerson et al., 2001)

And so let us consider what would have happened if Malinowski were a young field worker today and had chosen to blog his research, or perhaps that Malinowski had been able to use the medium of the blog during his time with the Trobriand Islanders in the early part of the 20th century. Without getting overly embroiled in the question of what anthropology would look like without Malinowski’s influence (ouch, my brain hurts), consider the implications of having had real-time, freely-available access to Malinowski’s journal entries.

On the plus side, had Malinowski blogged his work, it would have definitely given access to his journal, which gives us insight into his published research, without having to rely on the whims of executors or the sadly haphazard state of most manuscript collections, even if they do manage to find their way into a safe archive. It could have also given some of his colleagues and, perhaps more importantly, some of the people who he was studying, the chance to comment on his insights, his plans and his primary analysis (assuming, however, that his study population and colleagues could understand Polish, the language of the journal). An active audience who commented and encouraged him could have perhaps cut down on his loneliness and sense of isolation. Perhaps a reader who was a nurse could have given him better tips on pain management, and gently suggested he hold off injecting so much arsenic.

On the down side, it is a given that he would have written much differently if the medium were public than he did in a book meant to be private and it’s impossible to say whether that would have been a positive or negative. The fact that the insights that we have into his work and his life would have been completely different in a closed medium is enough to cause one to reflect on whether blogging ones diary from the field is always a good idea. Fieldnotes, of which diaries are just one part, are also meant not to be published and the thought that these jottings and scribblings and half-thoughts might someday turn out to be published may put undue strain on the field notes and compromise their quality and their completeness. At the same time, the realization that people are going to be reading field notes may force a researcher to write better ones.

I present Malinowski’s example, of course, in a spirit of fun rather than that of true possibility. But the mental exercise allows us to play with a range of issues that anthropologists confront when considering taking advantage of Web 2.0 tools and OA (Open Access), such as whether it is OK to 'publish' fieldnotes and whether writing them for the public will compromise them; or how to balance privacy with transparency.

Some researchers are indeed already blogging from the field, such as the aforementioned Owen Wiltshire, whose interest is in culture in the digital environment. Another example is Christine Folch, whose research is on 'political culture and national identity at Paraguay’s Triple Frontera' and whose blog 'Defringing Latin America’ mixes photography, video, some analysis and a journal-style descrip-

tion of her work in Paraguay (Folch, 2009). Both Owen Wiltshire and the blog, 'Savage Minds' (Golub et al., 2009) have extensive blogrolls which list upwards of fifty anthropologically oriented blogs, many of which have several authors. So it's safe to say that many anthropologists are taking the opportunity to blog; arguably communicating with a wider public than ever before possible. The technology (free to the reader with an internet connection) lowers the economic and effort barrier involved with toll-access journals and books, but another important aspect of blogging is the accessibility of the language used in writing them, which allows a wider range of people to understand them.

Perhaps the most well-known and widely-read anthropology blog is the collective blog, 'Savage Minds' (Golub et al., 2009). The blog hosts lively and high-level scholarly discussions as well as reporting on news of interest to ethnographers. Its group on Facebook, a social networking site, is nearing 1,000 participants. The Savage Minds writers are a group of about 10 people, whose names tend to recur throughout the anthropology blogosphere. Many of them write other anthropology blogs. This style of blog - hosting debate on issues of scholarly interest, relevant news, links to other scholars and announcements - is popular and has fit seamlessly into the anthropology world. Whether the field notes blog becomes similarly common and useful is not yet certain.

Anthropological Ethics and Open Access

Ethics resurface at every stage of anthropological research, not just during the design phase or when a researcher hands out a release form. It's undesirable, if not impossible, to separate ethics from what is practical or desirable in anthropology. They guide what type of research to plan and what type of data will be gathered, as well as how and what to analyze, and the voice with which one writes. Most importantly for our purposes, they shape how, when and where to communicate the results of the research and offer the most compelling arguments for (and also against) OA in anthropology.

The Code of Ethics for the American Association of Anthropology begins its list of research ethics with the statement

> "Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work. These obligations can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge, and can lead to decisions not to undertake or to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities, such as those owed to sponsors or clients." (American Anthropological Association, 1998)

Part of this obligation to the people studied is to share the research with them. Since the 1970s and 1980s, it's been generally accepted in anthropology that the traditional power dynamic of researcher and research subject results in assessments of the culture studied that are one-dimensional at best and false at worst. There is a recognition that anthropology has colonialist roots that run deep and that researchers must make an effort towards empowering the subject to become a research collaborator rather than a research subject. There is an aim to represent the world of the culture in all its fullness, to use 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), and also to allow the voice of the study population to describe itself.

This obligation to the study population is part of a critical question: namely, to whom does anthropological research belong? Does it belong to the scholar who created it, the person who funds it, the scholarly discipline, or to the culture that is studied? According to the ethical codes, it should belong to the people whose culture is described. The fact that, because of generally-accepted scholarly practice, a large share of that knowledge is locked up in expensive books and difficult-to-find journal articles violates one of the foremost principles of anthropology.

One way to remedy the power imbalance in anthropology is by sharing information in ways that people can read and understand. A researcher may be encouraged to share research findings with a community by sending a copy of a book, a report, or an article but also by making a formal presentation or in casual conversation with members of the community. The perils of 'one-off' information

sessions and easily-lost papers are many. In order to make sure that information is truly shared, it must be there when a reader wants it. People will come to information and understand it when there is a compelling need or the time is otherwise right. Making data OA - providing an enhanced security for archiving, access, metadata, reuse, duplication, citation - grants a higher chance that the data will be available to a reader regardless of when s/he decides to go searching for it. There is, of course, the obvious caveat that those without computer access will have no better chance of accessing digital objects than they will the odd book or journal article, though I argue that chances must be higher if the barriers are lower and there are more opportunities available.

A second extremely important ethical consideration that is true for all scholars, but most importantly for those who use human subjects, is the responsibility for making sure that the research they do will be useful to future science and that you are not wasting the time and effort given to you by the population that you are studying. Allowing for a copyright license that gives full credit to the researcher but that allows for the work to be used easily for teaching and remixing and future scholarship works towards fulfilling that promise.

Open Data

Regardless of how the ethnographic final product is presented, its quality is judged by its believability, or whether the reader finds the data and its interpretation convincing. For this reason, having data without interpretation and context is frequently unuseful and, in many cases, unethical. It can also run the risk of compromising the quality of research. For these reasons, arguments for open data, such as those put forward by Peter Murray-Rust in support of open data for crystallography (and which make sense in that field), are difficult to apply consistently to anthropological data. At the same time, open data in certain situations has the possibility to make anthropological data richer and true to the cultures they represent.

The question of whether one should give access to primary field research data has been long debated in anthropology, archaeology and ethnography. Many researchers have been reluctant to give access to their primary data because it might compromise site integrity, research-subject privacy, and also because primary data taken out of context can be misleading. Sometimes researchers discover knowledge in the field that it is inappropriate to share openly. Paper-based field notes can often be found in library archives but access to them may be controlled. As in the case of Malinowski's diary, the way in which field notes are written could be greatly altered if the researcher knows that they will be published.

Certain types of data (i.e. those which would not result in breaching the ethics described above) would greatly benefit from OA, however. An example of the type of data which may benefit from OA are films made by an ethnographer in the 1920s, for example, which show the daily work routines in a Native American tribe which has since ceased doing that type of work. These films might be just as, if not more useful to researchers in the future than the book which was written based on them depending on the quality of the published work. Though all video and photos are taken from a specific viewpoint and exclude as much as they include, they can offer rich data to future researchers.

Team-based, data-intensive research involving objects require huge databases and can surely benefit from being digitally networked especially where collaborative data tagging or analysis is possible. There are also possibilities for crunching that data using the help of distributed computers, similar to the Seti@Home project, which harnesses the power of the distributed computers of volunteers to analyze automatically radio signals from space. More data doesn't necessary equal more quality in anthropology but where more data is called for and where it can be automatically analyzed or analyzed by many minds rather than a single researcher, this type of distributed data analysis with open data is very promising.

And smaller projects can also benefit from the openness provided by so-called Web 2.0 tools. Data collected on video can be uploaded to YouTube and photographs to Flickr for sharing both with research colleagues around the world and also with the populations studied. Mapping programs could

be used to create personal cartographies, whereby the persons studied can tag places with descriptors or provide information on significance. For an ethnographer studying trade patterns in a community or another looking at school children's routes to school, such maps could be an innovative way of gathering data in a visual, collaborative fashion and turning the research collaborator into research subject. These services are low-barrier, low- or no-cost for those with an internet connection. Kimberly Christen describes the power that these tools have to do anthropology more ethically and to make research more rich:

> "the Free Software movement demonstrated the power of collaboration. ... These may not immediately seem like tools that have altered anthropology. But think about the idea of uploading your photos from a field site, tagging them, mapping them on Google maps and then allowing others —a range of others—to comment on them. It shifts the way that anthropologists process information, manage data, form arguments, and circulate the materials that they have collected in the field. Not only that, most such sites allow users to define which groups can see what - to define the publics with which they engage. Eric Kansa's project for archaeologists, Open Context (www.opencontext.org), is an excellent example" (Kelty et al., 2008)

These web-based services also allow a more data-intensive study because the data are collected by the research subject, rather than the researcher alone.

Because of this complexity regarding how open to be with data, Christen also argues for continuum of openness, rather than a full call to openness (Kelty et al., 2008). She is a co-creator of Mukurtu (mukurtuarchive.org), a digital library with communal tagging features, designed around a cultures way of organizing its heritage. It's not open access, but access is controlled along a continuum from private to public. She describes the continuum as using 'Warumungu cultural protocols to facilitate access to content' (Kelty et al., 2008). By this she means that the amount of access that a user is granted to the content of the digital library is dictated by already-existing cultural norms. Access is controlled by a login and password. This project shows the sensitivity to ethics and cultural diversity that anthropologists must employ when deciding how technology can assist their project.

Green and Gold

Green or gold open access, whereby an author posts a copy of an article to a data-repository or publishes in an open access journal, may also prove problematic in a fractured field where book-length publication is the highest standard of publishing. The final product of ethnographic research could be presented as a report for a school (in the case of applied anthropology) or the interpretation of a culture could be performed as a dance. Most frequently, however, the interpretation is written and presented in a book.

> "Anthropology is primarily a 'book discipline,' meaning that faculty must write books, at least one 'great' book for tenure, and another book to be promoted to full professor, or as one administrator put it: "Anthro is just sort of irreconcilably book fetisized ... This is a book discipline. You can have great articles, you hit a ceiling, potentially very low, if you don't have a book, and the book has to be significant, it has to get reviewed in the right places."" (King et al., 2006)

When designing outlets for green and gold OA, prestige should be emphasized. A book must be published by a good press and it must be well reviewed in the right places in order to be acceptable in anthropology and peer review is crucial for creating quality scholarship (Kelty et al., 2008; King et al., 2006). Thus, whatever digital services are designed to encourage green and gold open access must maintain or perhaps even strengthen the review process. In many ways, anthropology is a conservative, stable discipline. When designing service, it may be good to promote the library's stability for long-term access and legitimacy for conferring status.

An interesting and successful approach to green OA book publishing is Chris Kelty's book Two Bits, which he has turned into a website and a community for discussing his ideas on open source soft-

ware and culture. By creating this hub, he gets immediate feedback, the scholarship is constantly being reused and refined and publicly debated and he argues that he has sold many more copies of the print book than he would have without the site. He points out too that publishing books with a web presence also allows for volunteer translation, which is always a challenge in anthropology. Open access allows for volunteer translations, which if not always a professional quality, still vastly improves a book's reach.

Though the discipline is dominated by book publishing, journals still do play a role in anthropology, and gold OA is an option. The Directory of Open Access Journals lists 53 OA titles in anthropology (incidentally, as Maximilian C. Foote points out on his blog, Open Anthropology, most of these titles are published outside of North America). The journal, Cultural Analysis, based at the University of California, Berkeley, was recognized as the most excellent OA journal by Savage Minds in their awards ceremony of 2008. As things stand, however, the 'best' journals in the field are coming from professional societies, none of which allow open access. In fact, in a blow to open access advocates, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) which is the publisher of 23 important journals, decided in 2007 to switch publishers, moving from University of California Press to Wiley-Blackwell, a private publisher offering on a for-profit basis. The reasons for the move are many, but it is a move decisively away from open access. Steps have been made towards OA, such as an open backfile to articles older than 35 years but the publisher and the society have not yet come to recognize gold OA as an option for their journals.

The move to Wiley has also affected AnthroSource, which was meant to be a creative online space sponsored by the AAA with a discipline-specific digital repository for articles as well as for grey literature and raw data. With the move to Wiley, access to it has become a benefit of membership or subscription-based. Though many researchers protested this move, many have moved on and some, such as Alex Golub have decided that perhaps it's for the best if communication and data-sharing are not under the auspice of the AAA after all (Kelty et al., 2008). Golub runs an anthropology-specific digital repository at the University of Hawai'i (manao.manoa.hawaii.edu). Built on the e-prints platform, it has been in process since 2007 and currently hosts about 100 articles published over the course of the past 200 years.

In the same way that open data can bring anthropologists closer to the ethical obligation of involving the communities they study, Jason Baird Jackson points out that green and gold OA can also be significant in this regard:

> "Indeed, Open Access has special moral relevance for anthropology and related disciplines because we have 'source communities' that we are responsible to;... A gold Open Access journal or a robust repository effort would get much closer to solving the 'obligation to those we study' problem." (Kelty et al., 2008)

Conclusions

Anthropological research is a heterogeneous affair and it may prove difficult to find a universal way to encourage open access in the field. The obligation to the study population is a convincing argument for OA, as is the possibility for a richer, more collaborative work environment between researcher and study population. Openness and transparency are of great concern and the argument against clandestine anthropology (which has been used by governments to subdue populations or wage war) would be another great argument for OA.

When designing repositories for qualitative, anthropological data, there must be ample space for metadata. There must also be the possibility of controlling access. 'Open' might have to be understood to exist along a continuum and the metadata and design may need to be flexible, in order to best reflect cultural norms. Privacy is a serious concern from an ethical standpoint as well as a research-integrity standpoint.

As the anthropologists discuss in interviews conducted at University of California, Berkeley in 2006, speed of publication is not as much of a concern to them, though they appreciated the speed by

which books could be reviewed in an online medium (King et al., 2006). They have, rather, the perception that there is too much information to be weighed carefully and that perhaps too much is published already. Though it's unlikely that any researcher is pleased by the long wait between manuscript submission and publication, making the appeal for open access on the grounds that it allows more work to be published quickly and not squelched by over-zealous peer review will not necessarily be helpful when promoting OA to anthropologists.

When designing and encouraging open access, we should make sure that the services we design fit with the theory, method and practice of our researcher patrons. There will be contradictions in the demands of researchers in different disciplines and perhaps even within disciplines. In order to create services that really work, we must make them flexible and responsive.

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