

# UC Irvine

## UC Irvine Previously Published Works

### Title

review

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1d99v4th>

### Journal

American Anthropologist, 111(2)

### ISSN

0022-1953

### Author

Baldocchi, Dennis

### Publication Date

2020-07-20

### DOI

10.5194/gmd-2020-139-rc1

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



## Review

“Review” is the fundamental process by which *American Anthropologist* or any academic journal operates, yet too often review remains misunderstood and unappreciated. The principle of peer review is absolutely central to anthropology (and all scholarly disciplines), but in this age of instant commentary, when we are accustomed to hitting “like it” or “hate it” buttons on a webpage, it seems worthwhile to revisit what “review” truly implies.

One of the many things for which I have gained new appreciation since becoming Editor-in-Chief in June 2007 is that review is unequivocally the blood pumping through the veins of any “peer-reviewed” journal, certainly including *American Anthropologist*. In fact, it would probably be more accurate to refer to my position as “Reviewer-in-Chief.” Review is sometimes denigrated as a form of gatekeeping that reproduces existing hierarchies and networks. Certainly the risk of improper gatekeeping exists, and journals like *American Anthropologist* work to minimize this risk through double-blind review. This means that authors do not know the names of the persons reviewing their manuscript, and reviewers do not know the name of the author or authors of the manuscript they review. (Against claims that double-blind review is ineffective because “you can still figure out who the author or reviewer is,” nearly all authors and reviewers who attempt to make such determinations in their correspondence with me guess incorrectly.) Besides double-blind review, another way journals work to minimize improper gatekeeping is by having an editor who can access all reviews and who (in collaboration with an editorial board) works to select appropriate reviewers in the first place.

To extend the metaphor, however, not all gatekeeping is bad. Gates are useful because when connected to fences, they both define domains and permit movement between these domains. It is this possibility for movement that differentiates review and commentary. In the online cultures that play a growing role in our social worlds and

increasingly shape physical-world cultures as well, “commentary” is a highly salient way of engaging with the practices, texts, and creations of others. On Amazon.com or eBay or Netflix, we give someone or something five stars, or perhaps three or one; we add a statement at the end of a blog post; we respond to friends’ new sets of photos on their Facebook pages. Commentary is useful because it remarks on a state of affairs, but review, and particularly peer review, defines communities of scholarly inquiry by determining what research will be seen as exemplifying that community. In this regard, it is striking that, in my experience as Editor-in-Chief, the most negative reviews come from persons who are “gatekeepers” from within a research community—owing in part to my efforts, in conjunction with the AA Editorial Board, to identify appropriate reviewers. It is rarely the case that, say, a manuscript written from an evolutionary perspective is assessed negatively by a scholar who typically works from an interpretive perspective or vice versa: “gatekeeping” typically comes from within a scholarly community, which is of course appropriate, because it is precisely those scholars who are best able to make such assessments.

“Review” is more than gatekeeping narrowly defined: it pushes scholarly conversations forward. I continue to be thankful for the amazing work of AA manuscript reviewers, who provide authors with detailed, helpful, and generous comments to guide revision. In addition, a central mandate of *American Anthropologist* is to review work published or produced elsewhere. This includes book reviews and reviews of films and museum exhibits; we have also appointed three Public Anthropology Review Editors—Melissa Checker, David Vine, and Alaka Wali—who have begun coordinating reviews for various kinds of public anthropological work (a welcome “From the Section Editors” will appear in a future issue). These forms of review do not help determine acceptance or rejection, but they do serve to broaden and deepen scholarly conversations in

anthropology and beyond. Thus, the behind-the-scenes work of double-blind peer review and the publicly visible work of reviewing books, films, and other forms of anthropological production jointly shape conversations that advance existing domains of anthropological inquiry and build cross-cutting linkages among these domains. This is why I see review as absolutely central to our scholarly endeavors.

### REVIEW AND YOU

Given my passionate advocacy of review, I may be forgiven for encouraging you, the reader, to consider reviewing for *American Anthropologist*. This includes not just reviewing manuscripts but reviewing the books, films, and other forms of anthropological work mentioned above. In particular, it is often challenging to build a suitable “pool” of persons interested in possibly reviewing a book for *American Anthropologist*. Should you be interested in doing so, please e-mail the AA Book Review Editorial Office at rajoyce@berkeley.edu with your name, institutional affiliation, and areas of expertise and interest. *American Anthropologist* does not typically consider unsolicited book reviews and usually cannot assign a particular book ahead of time to a potential reviewer; what is most useful to us is to have your name and interests on file, so that we could approach you when we receive a book that might be a good fit.

### THE YEAR IN REVIEW

In light of my discussion of review, I am pleased to announce that with this issue of *American Anthropologist* we introduce a new feature, “The Year in Review.” Almost a year ago, each of the associate editors of *American Anthropologist* worked to identify a scholar who could write a short article reviewing what happened in a particular subfield of anthropology (and also in public anthropology) in 2008. In my instructions to these authors, I explained that this notion of a “Year in Review” piece has never been tried before (it is the brainchild of Justin Richland, who first proposed it at the November 2007 AA Editorial Board meeting; Richland is one of the AA Book Review Editors and the author of one of this year’s “Year in Review” pieces). Most reviews of multiple books and articles that appear in journals like *Annual Review of Anthropology* are organized around a theme. These kinds of reviews are crucial for developing topical fields of anthropological inquiry, and I myself have done such reviews (e.g., Boellstorff 2007). In contrast, the idea behind “The Year in Review” is to craft articles that are bounded by a calendar year. I emphasized to the authors that because this was a new experiment they had near-total latitude to shape their articles as they wished. There was just one limitation: because of the finite number of pages in any issue of *American Anthropologist* and my duty to publish as much original research as I can, I set a strict word limit. This helpfully eliminated any pretense (or pressure) for the authors to present a comprehensive overview of everything

that took place in a particular subfield in 2008. The goal was thus not an encyclopedic compendium but, rather, an analysis of some key themes and debates—and I think you will agree that all five authors have succeeded wonderfully in this regard.

### IN THIS ISSUE

In addition to the various reviews that appear in this issue of *American Anthropologist* (as well as more “From the Editor” pieces from other AAA journals), this issue features an “In Focus” section, “Valuing Culture through Markets and Money,” in which two authors explore new intersections of culture and economy, a subject of interest to anthropology since its beginnings. In her article, “Disciplining Investment Bankers, Disciplining the Economy: Wall Street’s Institutional Culture of Crisis and the Downsizing of Corporate America,” Karen Ho draws on ethnographic research in Wall Street investment banks to explore a “culture of crisis.” This cultural logic is of long standing and is based on research going back to the mid-1990s, but Ho’s analysis should be of particular interest given the current economic morass that now affects the entire globe and that can be traced in part to Wall Street itself. Jessica Cattelino’s article, “Fungibility: Florida Seminole Casino Dividends and the Fiscal Politics of Indigeneity,” extends this discussion of culture and economy by examining how notions of “cultural authenticity” and “political legitimization” shape American Indian identity in the era of “casino capitalism.”

The four additional research articles in this issue speak to a range of current anthropological debates, and all in various ways extend aspects of the conversations opened up by Cattelino and Ho. Timothy de Waal Malefyt’s article, “Understanding the Rise of Consumer Ethnography: Branding Technomethodologies in the New Economy,” connects most straightforwardly to these conversations, as it examines the rise of ethnography in consumer research—including how ethnographers in these contexts not only study brands but “brand” themselves as they seek marketing contracts. In “New Immigrant Youth Interpreting in White Public Space,” Jennifer Reynolds and Marjorie Orellana investigate how the phenomenon of “child interpreters” reveals ways in which language is racialized under contemporary neoliberal forms of governance, the same forms of governance shaping intersections of money and culture. Emily Schultz’s article, “Resolving the Anti-Anti-Evolutionism Dilemma,” works to move anthropological debates over evolution beyond some of the familiar “nature–nurture” frameworks that typically retrench misunderstandings rather than move conversations forward. The sixth research article in this issue of *American Anthropologist*, “Spread of a Terrestrial Tradition in an Arboreal Primate,” by Fernanda P. Tabacow, Sérgio L. Mendes, and Karen B. Strier, is quite distinct from the others. I could, I am sure, find a way to link this fascinating discussion of “tradition” to discussions of “tradition” in other subfields of anthropology—who knows, perhaps even to contemporary

neoliberal forms of governance! However, such rhetorical moves are unnecessary; the goal of *American Anthropologist* is not to force conversations among the various communities of practice in anthropology but, rather, to review and present the best research in as many such communities of practice as possible. In so doing, *American Anthropologist* facilitates conversations among different schools of thought and methodological paradigms as well as fostering further

debate and productivity within these conversations. This is the kind of work that I see as the ultimate goal of this journal, and more generally of review itself.

#### REFERENCE CITED

- Boellstorff, Tom  
2007 Queer Studies in the House of Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36:1–19.