Annual Report from AES to the AAA, 2002-2003

Submitted by Fred Myers

1. Accomplishments during the year:

**Membership:** Our membership numbers seemed to have fallen slightly in the period Sept. 02-Sept. 03, from 2580 members to 2461. During the same period, AE subscribers dropped from 1,029 to 967. While not enormous, the shift may represent a trajectory related to evaluations of the worth of the journal, alternative kinds of access (electronic), and views of AES. We are certainly not building new membership at this time. This leads the Board members to consider how we might continue, as a scholarly organization, to offer services of distinctive benefit to anthropologists and others.

**Spring Meetings:** The 2003 AES meetings, chaired by Councillors John Borneman and Katie Stewart were held in Providence, R.I. April 24-26, in conjunction with the Society for the Anthropology of Religion. Titled "What Is The Ethnographic Project?" the 2003 AES meetings invited participants to focus on the challenges of "new" and "old" ethnographic practices. We are interested in critically engaging with what anthropologists are doing, rather than in meta-commentaries on what anthropology is about. Some of the major goals of this meeting were 1) to re-examine what is understood by "ethnographic encounters", 2) to query how understandings of culture and ethnography are put into practice, 3) to have these various ethnographic practices speak to each other, to consider continuities between what we've thought of as "old" and "new" practices, 4) to begin to track the generative effects of transforming practices on what we teach and write and do in different settings, and 5) to ask what kind of knowledge we produce and why it matters.

The participation was encouraging, and the combination with the Society for the Anthropology of Religion very productive. For the AES component, there were 32 organized sessions with 142 individual papers, 3 plenary sessions, 2 roundtables and the Presidential Address. The plenary sections were particularly successful, drawing good attendance and lively participation of panel and audience. These plenaries were intended to allow for different modes of presentation and participation. They included "What is the ethnographic project?" (John Borneman, Katie Stewart, Cathy Lutz, Emily Martin, Fred Myers, and Sally Falk Moore), "Fieldwork without Archives: Historical Methods in Anthropology" (Maria Pia Di Bella, Talal Asad, Allen Feldman, David Kertzer, Tom Csordas), and an American Ethnologist "Town Meeting: Has the American Ethnologist Stopped Leading?" (Virginia Dominguez, Faye Ginsburg, Nina Glick Schiller, Michael Chibnik). The Presidential Lecture, by AES President Fred Myers, was entitled "Some Properties of Art and Culture: Ontologies of the Image and Economies of Exchange."

**Publications:**
Under the editorship of Virginia Dominguez, the American Ethnologist has taken a new tack, developing a new, larger format (to an 8.5x11 page size), and moving ordinary book reviews to the web. In addition, she has sought to develop more variety in form and content in the journal. We have done so in response to a decline in subscriptions and to announce some change in the field's relationship to non-anthropologists. Virginia undertook some reorganization of the
journal, in hopes of building up the readership beyond current levels and of engaging some readers outside the discipline of anthropology itself. These changes reflect both changes in the discipline of anthropology but also our concern to keep the journal on sound financial footing. The journal is an important source of revenue, one of our major member benefits, and also of cost. We have begun printing Review Essays while posting single Book Reviews to the new AE Book Reviews Online Site. The Table of Contents of each print issue continues to list single Book Reviews. This will save pages for other kinds of articles, reduce the cost of preparing book reviews for publication, and increase the access and speed of getting reviews into the public.

A major issue to be faced by academic publishing and especially of scholarly journals is electronic publication. This is being addressed at the level of the American Anthropological Association's, publishers and owners of the journal, in the plan articulated as AnthroSource.

AAA Meeting Activities:

Mayfair Yang programmed this year's AES Sessions at the AAA Meetings, in Chicago. They included 5 invited sessions with the following titles:
- "Environment/Globalization/Sovereignty"
- "Critiquing The Modern State IV: East Asia"
- "Anthropology And The Middle East: The Politics Of Knowledge During A Time Of Crisis"
- "Secularism And Modernity" (Co-Sponsor: Society For Anthropology Of Religion)
- "Political Ecology And The Politics Of Place" (Double Session)

On Friday evening, November 21, 2003, the Executive Board of AES met. We also held our Annual Business Meeting, on Saturday noon, November 22, at which we presented our book prizes.

Book Prizes: In the past year, AES awarded two book prizes at the 2003 AAA meetings. Teresa Caldeira was the head of the committee for The Sharon Stephens First Book Prize. The 2003 Prize was awarded jointly to Kim Fortun, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, for Advocacy After Bhopal - Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders (University of Chicago Press) and to Adriana Petryna, New School University, for Life Exposed - Biological Citizens after Chernobyl (Princeton University Press). The committee awarded an Honorable Mention to Hugh Raffles, University of California at Santa Cruz, for In Amazonia - A Natural History (Princeton University Press).

Julia Paley (University of Michigan) headed the committee to decide the 2003 Senior Book Prize. The prize went to Mary Weismantel, Northwestern University, for Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes (University of Chicago Press).

The Elsie Clews Parsons Award for best graduate student essay went to Gavin Hamiton Whitelaw, of Yale University, for "Fermenting Flows: Japanese Buyers, Canadian Farmers, and the Moral Economy of the Non-Transgenic Soybean." Honorable Mention was awarded to Helena Hansen, of Yale University, for "Isle Evangelista: A Story of Church and State, Puerto Rico's Faith Based Initiatives in Drug Treatment." John Borneman of Princeton University and Ralph Litzinger of Duke University served as the committee for this award.
Cultural Anthropology Magazine: An initiative that grew out of interest by the AES Board in 1998-1999 was to develop a contemporary issues/public affairs magazine. It is no longer an AES enterprise, but a sample issue of what is now called Culture Matters: A Journal of Culture in Contemporary Life, exists on the web, with four full-length illustrated articles (Susan Harding, Emily Martin, Richard Lee and Ida Susser, and Fran Mascia-Lees) and two shorter pieces (by John Borneman and Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi and by Tom Strong). It can be found at http://www.nyu.edu/fas/ihpk/CultureMatters/index2.htm. A second issue is being planned, with potential contributions from Lila Abu-Lughod, Sandy Morgen, Lorna Rhodes, and others. It is still hoped that this journal will find a publisher.

2. Future plans and activities:

Internal reorganization: Although AES operations remain financially sound, we are still concerned with the problem of maintaining our basic operations and balancing our budget. Nonetheless, we have decided to continue with yearly spring meetings, regarding these as an important contribution to members. With adequate publicity, good thematic choice, cooperation with other sections and advance planning, we anticipate that the meetings can be maintained within our budget. The principal threat to these activities rests with the potential effects of the new AAA electronic Anthropology Portal. Many members of the Board, along with officers of other sections of AAA have expressed concern that the new plans for publication, AnthroSource, may reduce the revenues from our journal, American Ethnologist, on which most of our activities rely. We are concerned that any decline in revenue will threaten the support we have been able to provide for the editorial office of AE and also some of our other activities.

The biggest concerns voiced involved the enormous change in the degree of financial centralization at AAA that is being developed to handle AnthroSource and the difficulty in knowing which revenue allocation and cost allocation principles are best for AAA as a whole and for the AES. We expect that the AE will do fine, perhaps even thrive, by having the University of California Press as its production partner and by having all issues, past and present, become available electronically by 2004. There are, however, sizeable worries about the financial implications of these huge changes for the AES. Technically the AES has not had legal standing since the mid-1980s but if all AAA members and many others have access to the AE without becoming members of the AES in the near future, there may be little reason to join the AES. And without members--and already without legal standing--will there still be an AES in 10-15 years? Insofar as AES is the largest section of AAA that represents the interests and concerns of sociocultural anthropology, this is the reason for our concern. Despite considerable discussion of the potential effects, we understand the publication plans will take place and we hope that fine-tuning the revenue sharing will allow us to provide our members with an organization in which our shared intellectual and professional interests can be engaged.

AES Website: The AES website has functioned acceptably, in a minimalist way. It continues to be partially hosted at AAA. We are hoping to take more advantage of the website as a way of communicating with members. As a first step, we had decided to begin putting sample syllabi on the website, as a means of disseminating information about pedagogy and content for teaching. Leo Hsu, our student representative and web manager, has done a fine job of taking care of the site and clarifying what our usage should be.
After discussions at the Spring Meetings, the Board decided to invite Aaron Fox (Columbia University) to join us as an ex officio member to help develop the AES website in ways that would develop the structure of our scholarly organization in a more horizontal fashion, allowing for the circulation of knowledge outside of personal networks, departments and direct lines of transmission within programs. We also hope this will allow for much more interaction with and from graduate and even undergraduate students. The idea partly would be to enlist labor/help from volunteers who might curate particular projects. We hope to purchase a recognizable domain name to make it easy for people to find their way to the sites. Aaron has agreed to serve as "Webmaster" for the site.

There have been a number of ideas that might be developed largely through "curation" of already existing materials rather than costly direct development. The goal is to gather knowledge and make it accessible on our site. These have included

(1) the posting of syllabi.
(2) current topics -- curating materials (through web links or articles gathered) from popular press and other sources on a topic regarded as worthy of interest.
(3) interactive events - perhaps related to current topics - in which we might have well-known specialists or experts give a period of time in which they will respond to online queries, questions. This would be advertised in the newsletter and website.
(4) student electronic publications, a curation of links to a sample/set of undergraduate and graduate student electronic projects. These would again have to be sampled and curated. A committee or set of volunteers could do this. The curation would give some legitimacy to this. Also this would build student interest in the site and connection to other issues.
(5) the website could link to selected current publications, chosen for their importance or representativeness, their prominence in the book reviews or whatever. This would allow for more media associated with those publications to be available. Expectably, the authors will have websites themselves which would be linked - where could find associated material, and resources for teaching and research supplemented. This would draw often on work already done by others and could elicit this kind of voluntary work while also leading to it as a form of knowledge production. It could be linked to the book reviews on line and also to syllabi.
(6) the growing number of Indigenous web projects offer another form of knowledge and audience that could be drawn into the website. These would project the voices of indigenous people and their perspectives to a broader audience and make them available to anthropologists (and others) in a more concentrated place. Since anthropology has a special relationship to this audience, it would be a productive possibility.

**Spring Meetings 2004:** This Spring's AES Meetings have been planned by Councillor Gertrude Fraser. They are to take place in Atlanta, Georgia, April 22-25, with the theme of "Crisis." We have invited participants to consider the relevance of crisis for ethnology. The substance of the theme is articulated in the paragraph that has been circulated to invite participation:

"In the U.S. people are currently expressing a heightened sense of crisis. The anxiety is sometimes reflected in the view that irrational external forces have turned against ordered political, economic, cultural and moral landscapes. What are the multiple readings of crisis and its outcomes in the many settings, societies, sites, media and genres through and in which Anthropologists write, teach, engage in fieldwork, take stances in public discourses and represent
the worlds of the anthropologized subjects, identities, routines, rites and orders which come under our investigatory frameworks? What does an ethnological framework offer in the way of conceptualizations, definitions, descriptions and analyses of crisis and its experiences, expressions and manifestations?"


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