Slow Anthropology in a Fast World

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ABSTRACT

These are exciting times: new electronic platforms, digital innovation, and evolving forms of scholarly and artistic representation. However, it takes a long time to build a good foundation in anthropology. This article is a plea for a slower anthropology in which we recognize and debate the foundational contributions of our disciplinary ancestors. However, it is also an invitation to participate with the new forms of representation in a digitally integrated world. How do you write clear and crisp sentences? How can you evoke space and place? How do you write dialogue? What techniques can you use to craft a personal portrait?

KEY WORDS
Blogs, public anthropology, performance, electronic platforms, art.

ANTROPOLOGÍA RALENTIZADA EN UN MUNDO ACELERADO

RESUMEN

Vivimos tiempos emocionantes: nuevas plataformas electrónicas, innovación digital y formas evolutivas de representación académica y artística. Por otra parte, nuestra disciplina genera conocimiento de una forma muy elaborada. Tenemos mucho que aprender de la paciencia, la persistencia y coraje de los mentores que encontramos en nuestro trabajo de campo. Sus vidas nos muestran la sabiduría de tomar una perspectiva más lenta para vivir en un mundo rápido. Y entonces debemos llegar a nuevas formas de comunicación. En un mundo integrado digitalmente, hay formas de representación que fusionan el poder de las artes y de las ciencias sociales. Este artículo nos plantea interrogantes fundamentales para ello: ¿Cómo podemos llegar a esas formas de representación? ¿Cómo puedes evocar espacio y lugar? ¿Cómo se escribe el diálogo? ¿Qué técnicas puedes usar para elaborar un retrato personal?

PALABRAS CLAVE
Blogs, antropología pública, representación, plataformas digitales, arte.

Early during my fieldwork among Songhay sorcerers in the Republic of Niger, I often tried to accelerate the pace of my education. Like most neophyte anthropologists, I had a limited amount of research time and a rapidly dwindling research budget. Would I be able to generate enough ethnographic data to complete my thesis and earn my doctorate?

My teacher, Adamu Jenitongo, had a very different view about how I should learn about Songhay sorcery. He insisted on teaching me at what seemed — to me, at least — a glacial pace. We routinely held our middle of the night study sessions in his spirit hut, a space that he filled with precious ritual objects: hatchets encased in red leather with bells attached to the hatchet heads; tiny sandals for the *Atakurma*, the elves of the bush; the sorcerer's *lolo* or staff of power, a four-foot iron pole also encased in red leather on to which a score of blood caked rings, larger preceding smaller, had been long ago been pushed into position. In this wondrously evocative setting that begged so many "important" questions, Adamu Jenitongo insisted that we take very small steps onto the path of Songhay sorcery. Typically, we might take up several lines of an incantation — for perhaps 20 minutes. "Well, that's enough for now, he'd say. Come back tomorrow night." "But Baba, I need to know that those lines mean."

He'd laugh. "You're always in such a hurry. It takes time to learn these things. I'm building for you a foundation, Paul, and we need to make sure it's as solid as the ground. It takes a long time to build a good foundation." "But I don't have the time." "Then you must patient. When things are right, your path will open. Always remember this, my son: You can't walk where there is no ground."

This presentation is a plea for a slower anthropology in which we recognize and debate the foundational contributions of our disciplinary ancestors. As a young scholar, I didn't always have a penchant for the slow study of the anthropological classics. Indeed, before that fateful night when Adamu Jenitongo introduced me to the "you can't walk where there is no ground" proverb, I found the study of anthropological classics time-consuming, irrelevant and annoying — something you had to "struggle through" on the path to an intellectual future.

In graduate school, there was no shortage of what seemed dusty and deadly classics to read. When I studied linguistics, the professors insisted that we read Ferdinand de Sassure's *Cours de linguistic générale*, one of the driest most tedious texts imaginable. Having digested that *texte classique*, we moved on to Bloomfield's *Language*, Trubetzkoy's *Principles of Phonology*, and Jacobson's *Selected Writings*. Having consumed the principal texts of structural linguistics, we dove into transformational grammar, making our way through Noam Chomsky's, *Syntactic Structures* and

Aspects of a Theory of Language. When I moved over to social anthropology a new crew of professors proved to be no less enthusiastic about the classics. We read Lewis Henry Morgan and Sir James Frazer. We discussed the fine points Brownislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Raymond Firth's *We, The Tikopia*, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* and Marcel Mauss's, *The Gift*. We explored the tangled bank of Gregory Bateson's iconoclastic thoughts in *Naven* and debated the whys and wherefores of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. We also read Claude Lévi-Strauss's with special emphasis on *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* and *The Savage Mind*. When it came time for me to take a Ph.D. qualifying exam on Africanist anthropology, my committee presented me a list of 80 books to devour, many of them classics from British anthropology, including Meyer Fortes's books on the Tallensi of Ghana, Siegfried Nadel's volume on the Nupe of Nigeria, Mary Douglas's ethnography of the Lele of Congo, Audrey Richards's study of the Bemba in what is today Zimbabwe, not to forget Monica Wilson's venerable work, *Good Company* on the Nyakyusa of Tanzania. Because I had proposed to work in Francophone Africa, my committee insisted that I read many of the classics of French Africanist scholarship — Marcel Griaule's *Masques Dogons, Dieu d'eau (Conversations avec Ogotemmeli)* and *Methode de l'ethnographie*, Leiris's *Afrique fantome*, Germaine Dieterlen's *Essai sur la religion Bambara*, and, of course, Jean Rouch's *La religion et la magie Songhay*.

By the time I arrived in Niger to begin field studies among the Songhay people, I possessed a broad knowledge of the classics in anthropology and linguistics but had no firm idea how such knowledge might help me understand let alone write about the Songhay world. In the field, I collected data on kinship, patterns of economic exchange, elements of social change. I also observed Songhay spirit possession ceremonies and witnessed sorcerous rituals. I recorded Friday mosque sermons and the talk of spirits as they spoke through the bodies of their mediums. Deeply engaged in fieldwork, I rarely thought of all those anthropological classics that I had so diligently consumed.

Then one night in the early morning hours Adamu Jenitongo, annoyed at my impatience said: "You can't walk where there is no ground."

That moment began the slow evolution of my comprehension of things Songhay. Adamu Jenitongo taught me incantations and showed me the plants he used to heal people of both village (physical) and bush (spirit) illnesses. But he refused to explain how the incantations worked or where to find the plants. When I asked about these matters, he said:

> Your path will open. I've given you the foundation of our work. I've pointed you in the right direction. If you're serious, you'll find your way. It will take time, but one day, when you're ready, you'll take what you've learned here and put it to work in your own life. Your mind will ripen with experience, and then and only then will you understand the world.

At the time, I didn't completely understand his message. As the Songhay like to say, the mind ripens — albeit slowly — with age. In my case, years of conducting field research in West Africa and New York City, years of thinking about sorcery and the limits of the possible, years of confronting serious illness have brought to the surface a few central principles about the acquisition and custodianship of Songhay knowledge. These are insights that have gradually emerged from the foundation that Adamu Jenitongo long ago set for me.

— The young mind is nimble, quick and energetic. It is ready to learn fundamentals that construct a foundation of knowledge.
— As we age the mind becomes ready to better understand what we have learned. It is ready to put that knowledge into practice.
— Elders are the masters of their practices, but also the custodians of knowledge.
— The elder's greatest obligation is to preserve and refine that knowledge and then pass it on to practitioners in the next generation, who will preserve and refine the knowledge in their own way.

This wise West African theory of knowledge has been the foundation of my anthropological practice. In hindsight, I am grateful my teachers required me to read, think and write about the anthropological classics. Like all classics, they are imperfect. They mostly emerged from colonial contexts that underscore a sullied past of political, social and racial injustice. Despite these imperfections, these are texts, to paraphrase Lévi-Straus, that are "good to think with." As such, they are texts that remain open to the world. They constitute, at least for me, a foundation from which anthropologists can continue to build a strong disciplinary edifice. Through this process we change our practices and refine our thoughts, all while taking custody of the knowledge we are charged to preserve. Once preserved and refined, we set it as the foundation for the next generation of scholars who, in turn, will, we hope, continue the practice.

I like to say that I sit on the shoulders of my mentors — Jean Rouch and Adamu Jenitongo. Everything I have written is a testament to the foundation they carefully set for me. And yet, my path, which emerges

from their thoughts and practices, is not their path. This foundation — of classical knowledge, classical practices and classical texts — marks a beginning not an end. Rooted in the knowledge that we are part of a venerable tradition, we are not alone as we set out in various directions to find our way in an increasingly complex and troubled world.

Life in the Fast Lane

> If an edifice has no foundation, it crumbles.
> You can't walk, where there is no ground.
> (Stoller, 2017)

In this presentation I attempt to describe how the slow evolution of anthropological practice — slow anthropology — can be employed to better understand the breakneck dynamics of our speedy world in which classic essays, books, photos and films have become the ingredients of fast culture These days all representations can be rapidly downloaded, scanned, reproduced, perused, edited and reconfigured — all to increase human connection. But as the philosopher Mark Taylor has written in a recent essay:

> As I have noted, technologies that were designed to connect us and bring people closer together also create economic divisions. The proliferation of media outlets has led to mass customization, which allows individuals and isolated groups of individuals to receive personalized news feeds that seal them in bubbles with little knowledge of, or concern about, other points of view (Taylor, 2014).

Beyond Taylor's very well taken point, there is another aspect of life in the fast lane: the erosion of empathy. In her magisterial study *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in the Digital Age*, Sherry Turkle suggests that in fast culture, the unanticipated imponderables of face-to-face conversation — of social relationships — create many social challenges. Confronted with the erosion of the perfectly manicured digital life, people increasingly recoil from the creative and sometimes inspiring uncertainties of everyday encounters — the real flesh and bones of the human condition.

> This new mediated life has gotten us into trouble. Face-to-face conversation is the most human — and humanizing — thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It's where we develop the capacity for empathy. It's where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood. And conver-

sation advances self-reflection, the conversations with ourselves that are the cornerstone of early development and continue throughout life.

But these days we find ways around conversation. We hide from each other as we're constantly connected to each other. For on out screens, we are tempted the present ourselves to world as we would like to be. Of course, performance is part of any meeting, anywhere, but online and at our leisure, it is easy to compose, edit, and improve as we revise (Turkle, 2015: 4).

Mediated connection leads to disconnection and to social encounters bereft of emotional exchange, personal development, and inter-personal empathy.

Such disconnection is not limited to living with social media. You could make a similar argument about academic disconnection. Many if not most scholars convey their insights through turgid plain style texts that usually avoid the very empathetic emotions that define our humanity.

There is, of course, much to be said for denotative "objective" description. We can all present lectures and write books and articles in the traditional way and produce works of citations and analytical digressions replete with the specialized language of social science. In truth, some of that kind of writing is necessary in any social science presentation or text. There is academic comfort in the plain style text. It's what our institutions expect.

Experiences in Niger and New York City, however, long ago subverted my desire for representational comfort. Our troubled times require a different strategy — conveying our slowly developed insights into fast media so that our important insights about the human condition reach a larger public and have a greater impact on contemporary social and political life.

Most of us write or film people far removed from middle class life in contemporary society. What is the point of discussing people so remote from us? What can these men and women teach us about living in the world? Like all human beings, Songhay elders who guided me on the anthropological path exhibited flaws and shortcomings. They routinely experienced moral dilemmas. And yet each of one of them embodied an enviable resilience as well as a depth of wisdom that often left me breathless. In a future book, *Slow Anthropology in a Fast World*, I will attempt to recount how these West African mentors shaped my approach to ethnography, writing and being-in-the-world.

For me, the central obligation of ethnography — the key practice in anthropology — is to use narrative to bring to life the remote places and unknown lives of people, like my Songhay mentors, whose life stories shape our anthropological practices. Indeed, their stories of patience, for-

bearance, and courage demonstrate that no matter how different we may be, we are not alone in the world. Indeed, we have much to learn from them, for their lives show us the wisdom of taking a slower approach to living in fast world.

(Amadu Zima's story) How do we do anthropology in a fast world? Ethnography in the Fast Lane

So much has changed since I defended my Ph.D. dissertation more than three decades ago. When I wrote my thesis, most graduate students used IBM electric typewriters to compose their theses. What's more, the end product had to conform to a standard template. Indeed, one of the most feared people at the University of Texas at Austin, where I pursued graduate studies in social anthropology, was the guardian of that template, a woman who worked in the graduate school office. Having laboriously produced a putatively error-free fully edited 330-page document, I presented it to her with great trepidation. She took hold of my dissertation, gave me a steely-eyed stare and vowed to look at all the pages to see if they conformed to the strictly enforced representational criteria. If a sentence was one or two characters too long, she informed me, the page and/or pages would have to be re-typed. If there were glaring misspellings or word omissions, they, too, would have to be corrected — sometimes with a mysterious fluid called whiteout. If whiteout proved to be too messy, as was often the case, then the page or pages, depending on the location of the error, would also have to be retyped. Given the privations of these representational conditions, it's a wonder that scholars and graduate students somehow managed to produce doctoral theses, journal articles and books.

We now live in a digital age in which electronic connectedness is increasingly giving shape and texture to human relationships (Carr, 2011; Castells 2009; Gladwell, 2008; Griffiths, 1998; Keen, 2012; Rettberg, 2014). Scholars have long assumed a direct relationship between technological innovation and social change. The invention of the printing press helped to propel the vulgarization of national languages (English, French, German), a development that eventually challenged Latin as the language of scholarship. The inventions of the telescope and microscope refined scientific method and deepened knowledge of the outer workings of the cosmos and the inner workings of the human body. These innovations contributed to the Copernican Revolution as well as the germ theory of disease. The introduction of the steam engine, telegraph, telephone, auto-

mobile, and airplane, of course, added new dimensions to our social relations and re-shaped our social institutions — the family, the community, the state, the international order. At the conclusion of his highly readable book, *The Digital Turn: How the Internet Transforms our Existence,* Wim Westera (2012: 251) wrote:

> We have to accept that digital media irreversibly change our habitat. They create new extensions of reality, along with new representations, altered identities, and new forms of being. How should we deal with this? Negation is not an option since it requires us to exclude ourselves from the core of society's processes.
>
> Unconcerned adoption is likewise hazardous because of misconceptions, improper expectations, and unclear risks. We may easily lose ourselves in the illusions of the virtual realm.
>
> The only option is to become media literate. We should involve our unique cognitive abilities to remain in control of it, just as we successfully defeated our predators and survived disasters and other adversities. We should all possess true and deep understanding of the risks associated with the media that confront us.

Westera goes on to suggest that…

> Essentially, media literacy is not so much about media. It is about the ways we interact with media and derive meaning from it. The ultimate consequences of the mirror metaphor of media is that the complexity of media reflects of the complexity of our selves. By understanding media, we will get to know ourselves (2012: 253).

In the 21st century, public anthropologists have a wide choice of media to communicate culture. In addition to blogging, the subject of my most recent book (Stoller, 2018) these include narrative ethnography, fiction, ethnographic film/video, performance, poetry and multi-media art installations.

Narrative Ethnography

Although many anthropologists continue to communicate culture through the theoretically foregrounded academic monograph, the anthropological gift to the world continues to be ethnography, the detailed description of a social order. In truth, many of these are anthropological texts attract a limited readership. When an ethnographic text works, however, it can be magical, for it can sensuously connect readers to a place and its people. In these relatively rare ethnographic works the writer crafts a work in

which the textured world of others explodes from pages that feature laboriously crafted dialogue as well as sensuously evoked place and character. These texts, which foreground narrative, are complex and nuanced works that attract readers as well as publishers eager to bring to life books with legs, books that will powerfully communicate culture well into the 21st century (Allen, 2011; Behar, 2007; Jackson, 2004; Narayan, 1989; Stoller, 2002 and 2014; Vitebsky, 2005, among others).

Fiction

Fiction and narrative ethnography share many features. In both fiction and narrative ethnography writers strive to evoke place and space, creating a feel for a location. In both fiction and narrative ethnography, authors attempt to develop a sense of character. What is distinctive about a particular people? Is it the way they walk, a particular facial expression, the way they comport themselves? Is it the way they talk to others? These features contribute to a work's appeal that compels readers to turn the page.

There are, of course, differences between narrative ethnography and fiction. In contrast to ethnography, fiction writers and graphic novelists can configure image, dialogue and narrative to build plot. They can also write inner-dialogue, expressions of a character's silent thoughts and desires. Fiction writers and graphic novelists use these techniques to put the reader in a lock hold of attention that, if well done, is not released until the last page is reached. Fiction writers and graphic novelists who tap into ethnographic knowledge to recount a story are able to communicate culture to a wide audience of readers — a path toward a public anthropology. Scholars have long predicted the end of the novel. Considering the ongoing popularity of fiction and an ever-expanding audience for graphic novels, this genre is very much with us and is likely to be a force for cultural storytelling well into the future (Hamdy and Nye, 2017; Jackson, 1986; Narayan, 1994; Stoller, 1999, 2005 and 2016, among many others).

Ethnographic Film/Video

The late, great Jean Rouch liked to extol the virtues of ethnographic film. During a trip from Niamey, Niger to Accra Ghana, he hung a copy of his book on the Songhay-Zarma migrations to Ghana — part of his doctoral dissertation — from the rear-view mirror of his car. "How many of the subjects of that study would read the book?" he wondered. "Not many,"

he reasoned. But if those same subjects saw his classic work, *Les Maitres Fous* (1955), they would immediate understand the language of film. By way of film, Rouch would often argue, anthropological insights on colonialism, racism, migration, nationalism and the construction of identity could reach a large and varied audience. Rouch paved the way for ethnographic filmmakers to depict social difference that makes a difference in the world of policy and politics. Film, then, has been a strong and important element in the practice of public anthropology (Rouch, 1955; Stoller, 1992).

In the digital age, film/video has become an integral part of social media. Given the small size and reasonable costs of video cameras and the accessibility of high quality editing software, it has never been easier and more cost effective to make film/videos. What's more, contemporary filmmakers can easily upload their trailers and finished works onto Facebook, YouTube and Vimeo, three platforms that enable the wide circulation of filmic material that represent anthropologically important subjects. These new forms of filmic distribution constitute yet another felicitous path toward a more public anthropology.

Performance

Performance is an effective way to present ethnographic research to the public. It is exceeding difficult to write monologue/dialogue, let alone produce a work in which monologue/dialogue is the only vehicle for the development of plot and drama. When performance works, it is a powerful way to convey anthropological insights to the general public. One recent example of an anthropologically contoured play is *The Man Who Almost Killed Himself*, a play directed by Josh Azouz. The play emerged from Andrew Irving's anthropological research on the social lives of HIV/AIDS patients in Uganda and New York City (Irving, 2007 and 2011).

Illness and how we confront morality are serious anthropological subjects. Such existential elements are ripe for transformation into widely appealing dramatic narratives. Such is the case with the play *The Man Who Almost Killed Himself* the main character of which is a Ugandan man who tries to kill himself but never succeeds. Each time the protagonist attempts suicide he is undermined by a 5000-year-old God, who cheerfully finds ways for *The Man Who Almost Kills Himself* to remain among the living.

"*The Man Who Almost Killed Himself*," theater critic Andy Crumins writes, "is a fascinating and funny journey through the cultural and po-

litical recent history of Uganda and Africa — a history that still sends ripples through to the modern day" (Currams, 2014).

The play premiered at the Edinburgh Theatre Festival in August 2014 and was broadcast on BBC Arts and featured at Odeon Cinemas. The play demonstrates how ethnographically nuanced drama can bring anthropological insights on race, diversity, health and illness and religion to large and diverse audiences.

Poetry

Many anthropologists have written inspirational poetry. Great anthropological pioneers like Ruth Benedict published poetry. The tradition continues into the present with exemplary works by Ruth Behar, Dennis Tedlock, Melissa Cahnman-Taylor, Lila Abu-Lughod, Jerome Rothenberg, Dennis Tedlock, Valentine Daniel, Adrie Kusserow, Michael Jackson, Renato Rosaldo and Noni Stone. What is it about poetry that captures the imagination?

On several occasions, I've had the privilege of listening to Renato Rosaldo read his poems. Speaking softly and reading with quiet emotion, Rosaldo's dignified presence gave powerful substance to his words, which created an event in which the connection between the poet, Rosaldo, and the audience became palpable. Consider this short poem and how it speaks powerfully to the sensuous ethnographic realities of the Philippines, the place where he and his late wife Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo conducted fieldwork.

> No Swimmer
> The river turns brown,
> swells, churns, rises, slants.
> No raft rides its surface
> no swimmer dares its current.
> On high ground men and women teeter
> as if on a precipice.
> Persistent rumors,
> *Soldiers at checkpoints torture suspects*
>
> Bodies mutilated bullet-riddled (Rosaldo, 2014: 43).

Consider Rosaldo's commentary about the work of poetry:

The work of poetry, as I practice it, is to bring its subject — whether pain, sorrow, shock, or joy — home to the readers. It is not an ornament; it does not

> make things pretty. Nor does it shy away from agony and distress. Instead it brings things closer, or into focus, or makes them palpable. It slows the action, the course of events, to reveal depth of feeling and to explore its character. It is a place to dwell and savor more than a space for quick assessment (2014: 105).

Poetry, then, is a slow and heart-felt practice that palpably extends anthropological insights to the public.

Multi-Media Art Installations

The advent of the ethnographically inspired multi-media art installation is important new development in the human sciences. Multi-disciplinary collaborative teams are creating works that fuse art and social science through multi-sensorial and multi-disciplinary installations. Such work has contributed profoundly to a more public anthropology in which scholarly insights about the human condition are being communicated powerfully and intelligently to the general public. In a culture of speed and expedience, this kind of public representation is an important development in the social sciences and humanities. The Ethnographic Terminalia (ET) (2009-2015) is a case in point. ET has changed anthropological priorities and deepened our ethnographic sensitivities.

As previously stated, we today stand at a threshold. How will scholars adapt their practices to the expanding digital realities of the 21st century? That which was separate in the past (the arts and humanities, the social and natural sciences) can now be productively and imaginatively integrated. Artistic works can also be linked electronically to textual passages in social media platforms, creating spaces of sensory integration, design creativity and evocative power. In the 21st century can we say that it is sufficient to limit social science practice to protocols of standard observation, data collection, and induction all leading to objective and dispassionate theorization in academic texts? The academic monograph remains an important measure of scholarly evaluation. Even so, in a digitally integrated world, as I have attempted to show in this presentation other forms of representation (blogs, memoir, fiction, poetry, film/video, soundscapes and multi-media installations) that fuse the power of the arts and social sciences are becoming increasingly important.

For seven years ET has playfully explored… "reflexivity and postionality…" asking… "what lies beyond disciplinary territories. No longer content to subordinate the sensorium to theoretical and expository monographs, ET is a curatorial collective motivated by possibilities of new

media, locations, and methods" (Ethnographic Terminalia Collective, 2009). In all the ET installations, the curatorial collective, suggests that… "The terminus is the end, the boundary, and the border. It is also a beginning, its own place, a site of experience and encounter. Ethnographic Terminalia exhibits new forms of anthropology engaged with contemporary art practice" (2009).

To present a glimpse of the power and importance ET's work consider the 2014 installation, *The Bureau of Memories: Archives and Ephemera*, which focused on an important anthropological and historical subject of study: the nature of memory. How do we remember the past? Indeed, for many peoples in the world, history has a powerful tactile dimension. In my review of that exhibit, I wrote: "With its inclusively tactile and multi-sensorial dimensions, the exhibition demonstrates the central importance of a new wave of anthropological expression, an articulation that fuses past and present and here and there. In short, *The Bureau of Memories* invites us to glimpse into the future and provides a much-appreciated tonic for the public dimensions of our discipline" (Stoller, 2015).

Is Public Anthropology Public Enough?

Anthropology has a long history of public engagement. In his aforementioned campaign against the racism and Social Darwinism of early 20th Century America, Franz Boas demonstrated the power of public anthropology. The public dimension of anthropology has also been represented in museum exhibitions, which continue to introduce anthropology to the general public. It is not far-fetched to say museum exhibit halls are the spaces in which millions of people are exposed to anthropological knowledge.

As a discipline, anthropology has therefore had a deep and on-going connection to "the public." Given the depth and breadth of public anthropological engagement, it would seem that anthropological ideas would have attracted a great deal of attention in the public sphere. The discipline did produce the likes of Margaret Mead who in her books, magazine columns and public lectures deftly communicated anthropological ideas to the general public. And yet it seems to me that too much anthropological wisdom remains hidden in in the impenetrable prose of journal articles and academic monographs.

Can we link a venerable scholarly tradition to a world in which swift and ever-changing digital technologies have shaped a culture of speed? No one can deny the many positive features of speedy technology. But speed has many drawbacks. We seem to read less, as the philosopher Mark

Taylor has asserted, and have less time to think and reflect. Perhaps the most important drawbacks of fast culture, as are social alienation and cultural isolation, which begs the question: "Are our ideas and insights produced for only limited consumption?"

Even if an increasing number of scholars have mastered the art of public blogging, who is reading what we write? Many of the websites devoted to contemporary anthropology, (*Anthropology Now*, *Savage Minds*, now *Anthrodendum*, *SAPIENS*, *HAU*, *Living Anthropologically*, *Anthropologyworks*, *Allegra Lab*, and *Somatosphere*) are usually focused on traditional anthropological topics. In a recent issue of SAPIENS, perhaps the anthropology website with the largest Internet coverage, consider what the editors highlighted as the "most popular" contributions: "Confederates in the Amazon," "Paleolithic Ax Debunks Colonial Myth," "Uncovering Ancient Clues to Humanity's First Fires," "Why do We Keep Using the Word 'Caucasian,'?" "Is the term 'People of Color' Acceptable?" Websites like SAPIENS are spreading the anthropological word across the Internet. Indeed, they are an integral part of public anthropology. But is this digitally based public anthropology public enough?

The troubling realities of contemporary fast culture require a fresh approach to scholarly engagement. An increasing number of anthropologists, among other social scientists, want to contribute to public debate about the issues of our times: the persistence of racism, ethnic discrimination, Islamophobia, gender bias and homophobia, the ever-expanding specter of income and social inequality, and the ongoing battle against ignorance which is linked to the denigration of science.

Here's the issue: most scholars, including, of course, most anthropologists, do not write clear and compelling prose. Perhaps the greatest key to developing a truly public anthropology lies less in adopting increasingly sophisticated digital platforms than in training scholars how to write for broader audiences. With doses of constructive guidance, anyone can learn to write well — for the general public.

How do you write clear and crisp sentences? How can you evoke space and place? How do you write dialogue? What techniques can you use to craft a personal portrait? These, of course, are the central ingredients of narrative, which can be used in a variety of genres — including blogs — to communicate culture.

In the education of scholars, public writing courses have not been part of disciplinary curricula. Even so, a number of writing workshops are available to scholars who want to share their ideas with the general public. At many professional conferences, there are workshops on poetry, creative non-fiction, public writing and public blogging. These are usual-

ly of short duration — two to three hour sessions — squeezed into fully programmed three-to-four day gatherings. Frankly, a workshop of two-to-three hours is not long to develop public writing skills. A number of writers have designed more comprehensive workshops. Tapping into my experience as a writer, I developed a four-day public writing workshop, "Weaving the World," which features exercises in transforming academic prose into plain language, evoking place, writing dialogue, and crafting character. We also have blogging sessions. These workshops, which I have run for more than four years, have worked quite well. At the end of three very intense days, most of the participants have been encouraged to write their stories more evocatively. In some cases, participants developed blogs that they posted on public websites. No matter the genre, if you make a sustained effort to write anthropology for the public consumption, as I like to tell workshop participants, the practice will make you a better writer.

To help us to confront the representational challenges of our times, more of these workshops should be developed. Better yet, our institutions, as Alisse Waterston (2017) has suggested, need to valorize public writing by (1) integrating this practice into our graduate curricula and (2) "getting credit" for doing public anthropology. In the end, public anthropology is not yet public enough, but has the potential to become a potent force in future debate.

The Power of the Story

Amid all the discussions about public anthropology and the impact of digital technologies on the future representation of social worlds, there is one central theme that should not be overlooked or underestimated: the profound importance of stories and storytelling. In the 1980s I had the rare privilege of attending film screenings in Jean Rouch's makeshift projection room above his office in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Rouch would routinely gather an eclectic group of people to chime in on a film's strengths and weaknesses. During those sessions, Rouch would invariably ask about the narrative character of the film. Is the story a good one? Does it work? Will the story connect with the audience? If the story doesn't work, can a better one be imagined?

For me, our capacity to imagine, create, anticipate and speculate about the social world emerges from a central source: the story. Does the narrative inspire? Does it make us think new thoughts and feel new feelings? Does it connect with the public and compel people to imagine the future?

Rouch's questions are still important in an expanding world of representation. Can we find stories in sensuously contoured photographs, soundscapes, films, poetry, in multi-media installations or in blogs? Do those stories establish links between the artist-anthropologist and her or his audience?

These are exciting times — new electronic platforms, digital innovation, and evolving forms of scholarly and artistic representation. In the passion of the representational moment, however, it is easy to forget Jean Rouch's central question: Where is the story?

The story is our foundation. Without it, how can we walk on our path? No matter the representational format, no matter the platform, no matter the multi-sensorial sophistication of the representational design, if there is no story, what is there?

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