Editorial[1]

Mattia Fumanti, Hannah Knox and Susanne Langer

The papers assembled in this special edition developed out of a panel at the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) Decennial Conference at the University of Manchester in July 2003. Earlier in the same year, the ASA had stepped up its support for post-graduate led activities and this encouraged us to organize a panel at the event. Using the conference's theme of Anthropology and Science as our focus we asked presenters to reflect on the contributions post-graduate researchers can make to the introduction, application and evaluation of new research methods. After all, anthropology as a discipline had considerably expanded and re-orientated itself in recent decades, both geographically and in terms of research interests and we wanted to know how young anthropologists had adapted to these changes. We were curious to find out how they had integrated new methods such as actor-network theory, multi-sited ethnographies, the anthropological study of a technology, or the use of a technology itself as a research tool into their research. We also posed the question of whether post-graduate researchers could make a distinct contribution to the methodology used in anthropology. Further, we wondered if the different working conditions and research interests of today's generation of post-graduates had affected the relationship between student and mentor and altered the transmission of the knowledge and skills that allow the novice to gain professional experience.

Mattia Fumanti entertainingly illustrated this last point in his introduction to the panel by recounting a story about a photograph of Max Gluckman, the founder of the University of Manchester Department of Social Anthropology, which hangs in the departmental common room. At first glance, the picture seems to show only Gluckman himself—a middle-aged 1950s academic, comfortably sitting in an armchair, puffing away contentedly on his pipe. However on closer inspection, one notices a much younger man sitting at his feet with a look of deep concentration on his face, eagerly writing in his notebook. Mattia recalled that on enquiring in the department as to this young man's identity, no-one was able to tell him who he was. However, one member of staff clearly assumed that he was a post-graduate student and after a brief moment of reflection had commented wryly:

> *'Things have changed these days, haven't they? Can you imagine any of you post-graduate students sitting in that position?'*

Yet, have things changed as much as this comment might suggest? While few budding anthropologists these days would want to be quite as reverential towards their superiors as this picture suggests, there still appears to be a remarkable continuity with Gluckman's time in terms of the methodologies that anthropologists use. While

Seligman might have been overstating the point when in 1901 he compared the importance of fieldwork in anthropology to the blood of the martyrs of the early church, judging by the papers collected here, ethnographic fieldwork remains central to anthropology.

All of the contributors to this panel had done their fieldwork in distinctively contemporary field sites, but nevertheless we were struck by just how well anthropological fieldwork—the extended, explorative engagement with other people around a shared focus—had weathered the times. On the basis of the papers published here, we suggest that not only does ethnographic research prove extremely adaptable to new environments, contexts and conditions, but it also serves to make important contributions to current debates and discussion, particular in the field of science and technology.

Tom Wormald's paper is a case in point. He conducted his fieldwork with an umbrella organization for community owned and operated technology centres in Hungary, the Hungarian Telecottage Association (HTA), and was thereby able to observe how technologies come into being as part of specific contexts. Towards the end of his fieldwork a leading HTA member was accused of abusing the Association's website to further his own agenda. Wormald uses the ensuing ruckus in order to disentangle some of the complex assumptions involving technology, society and a particular place—Hungary—that imbued the work of the HTA with a moral quality.

Being present in a place, not only provides invaluable insights, but can also pose certain dilemmas for anthropologists, and also for those they work with, as Hannah Knox discovered. Drawing on her time conducting fieldwork in a web design company Knox recalls her experience of engaging in paid employment as an aspect of her research and questions the ways in which this might challenge our expectations of the value of different kinds of participation and its effects on the kinds of relationships we develop in the field. The paper suggests that rather than provoking an inevitable need for new methodologies, work in contemporary fieldsites forces us to be reflexive about the value of our current methods and the assumptions that they hold about the kinds of knowledge they produce.

Susanne Langer's paper confronts the issue of how to argue a place for anthropological methods and anthropological knowledge in the context of other forms of social and scientific research through an account of her confrontation with an ethics committee from whom she needed approval for ethnographic fieldwork with multiple sclerosis sufferers. Using her own experience as a starting point, Langer explores how anthropological fieldwork might rise to the challenge of the bureaucratized, 'objective' forms of evaluation that anthropological researchers are increasingly facing. Langer sheds light on the implications of the technology of the ethics committee not only for the researcher but also for those it purports to protect. Looking at the ways in which audit embeds practices of accountability, Langer asks how as anthropologists and ethnographers we might find suitable ways of dealing with these demands without simply reproducing all that they embody.

Jenny Advocat brings together the focus on political, medical and information technologies and their relationship to anthropological fieldwork through a consideration of internet-based clinical trials. This paper takes a stance derived from an early stage in the fieldwork process and consequently gives a perspective from the point at which theoretical questions concerning methodology often seem most

pressing for postgraduates. Advocat looks at the ways in which we might define 'the field' in techno-scientific contexts and suggests that one answer might be to draw on actor-network theory's concern with following 'socio-technical networks'. This stance encourages the researcher to focus on the relationship between people and material objects and to focus on practices as a way of identifying points of resistance.

Dealing with a very different kind of resistance, Amites Mukhopadhyay's paper looks at the problem of how to study and theorize environmental protest movements in a way which gets beyond dualistic oppositions between the state as a monolithic and centralized agent of ecological degradation and society as locally situated and inclined towards the natural conservation of resources. By looking at the case of a proposed nuclear power plant in West Bengal, India, Mukhopadhyay asks how anthropological fieldwork can be useful to reveal the complexities and ambiguities of state/society relations both at local and trans-local level. Rather than reproducing an opposition between the state and civil society, Mukhopadhyay looks at environmental movements as examples of what he labels an unfolding 'political society'. In this new realm state and society relations emerge from a perspective that encompasses dimensions of conflict and cooperation between a plethora of different actors.

In addition to raising questions about the kind of methods employed in anthropology, our intention when organizing the panel was also to give young researchers an opportunity to showcase some of their work and reflect on the process of doing anthropology. As such the panel served as a forum to develop a number of professional skills extending beyond those obligatory for reaching any post-graduate's chief goal of completing their thesis. If there is one question the panel served to answer it was that that the relative inexperience of the student is no obstacle to the production of innovative work. Perhaps, given the importance of 'innocence' and serendipity in anthropological research, the 'beginner's mind', which is conscious of not knowing too much, and does not expect answers to all questions, might indeed be a desirable attribute of all anthropologists.