Consuming Anthropology

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> … rather as existing 'cultures' get in the way of development, existing disciplines get in the way of interdisciplinarity.
> > Marilyn Strathern 2006:196

As a development project within the imaginaries of the 'knowledge economy', making useful knowledge seems to imply less interdisciplinarity than antidisciplinarity. Or to put it another way, the incorporation of academic disciplines into economic activity is assumed to require their appropriate transformation. Through a history traceable at least to the labour 'unrest' of the 1930s, American anthropologists along with others in the then emerging behavioural and social sciences have worked to legitimise themselves as relevant to industry (Eddy and Partridge 1987). My focus in this paper is on a recent chapter in this history, the incorporation of anthropology, as both figure and practice, within industrial research and development in the United States beginning in the 1970s.[1] More specifically, I examine the frames within which anthropology is imagined as valuable to contemporary industry, particularly in the area that I know best, the design of information and communications technologies. How is anthropology positioned both within these frames, and in relation to what Callon (1998a) has identified as their constitutive outsides or overflows? My strategy for addressing these questions is to think about the embedding of anthropological research within corporate enterprise in relation to the turn to markets as a research object in the social sciences (Callon 1998b; du Gay and Pryke 2002; Barry and Slater 2005; Mackenzie 2006; Thrift 2006).[2] Thinking these developments together helps me to articulate the imaginary within which anthropology in corporate settings has emerged, and to explore some of that imaginary's consequences for the forms of research and scholarship that are possible. A further disciplinary encounter in my story is that of anthropology (operating as icon for the

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[1] For a timely collection of writings on the types and extent of anthropological engagement in industry see Cefkin 2009.

[2] I use the term 'embedding' here deliberately, despite the problems of its connotation of the corporation as some kind of containing entity, for its comparison to the situation of the 'embedded' reporter in the military. The controversy over embedded journalism turns, on one hand, on the argument that embedding provides unprecedented access to the daily activities and perspectives of military personnel and, on the other, the question of whether and how the capacities of the journalist to raise critical questions are compromised. It is important to note in this analogy that the embedded reporter is not typically employed by the military: commentators generally treat military employment as something that must categorically affect the reporter's position, transforming her from an investigative journalist into a public relations representative. Without assuming that the latter is the fate of the anthropologist in industrial research, I come back to the further complications of her position in the discussion that follows. I take to heart as well the call to conceive of the market, or capitalism, not as a unity or as given in advance of its specific enactments (a form that we might refer to as the Market, or Capitalism), but as fractured and multiple: so I assume throughout that the performance of 'the corporation' as a singularity is itself a part of the everyday labours of its affiliated actors (Gibson-Graham 1996:187; Sunder Rajan 2006: 7).

social sciences) with the cognitive and computing sciences, the dominant disciplines within the sites of industrial research with which I am most familiar.

Contemporary theorising regarding relations of production and consumption emphasises the contingent, appropriative processes by which commodities simultaneously inflect the lives of their purchasers and are remade within the particular practices of their use (see for example Appadurai 1988; Slater 1997; Miller 1998a, 1998b; Cronin 2000, 2003; Lury 1996, 2004). This paper considers the implications of conceiving anthropology itself as an object of consumption within worlds of commercial research and development. Incorporated into this matrix over the past several decades, anthropological methods and imaginaries have been reconfigured at the same time that they have informed the discourses and material practices of their users. Drawing from twenty years as a researcher at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), an organisation identified as a centre of innovation and founding site for interdisciplinary research and development in computing, I take a performative approach to the question of disciplinarity, asking when and how anthropology is enacted as a distinctive discipline with a particular value for industry. I close with a reflection on the messy contingencies of this interdisciplinary commerce, and their implications for more radical forms of inventive collaboration.[3]

Culture and the making of markets

Writing against the tradition of classical economics, particularly in its separation of 'the economy' from 'society' or 'culture', recent scholarship has developed the argument that economic and cultural activities are inseparably interrelated. This is so insofar as identifications of products, markets, competitors, and the like fundamentally presuppose the mobilisation of cultural knowledge; that is, the persuasive assertion of qualities of sameness and difference between relevant objects (Slater 2002: 60). Taking as his cases in point advertising, design, and marketing, Slater observes that 'the very notion of a market requires qualitative understandings of the place and meaning of objects/commodities in ways of life' (ibid: 61):

> The supposedly "economic" issues of "what market are we in?" and "who are our competitors?" are simply not economic in the conventional sense. Producers cannot know what market they are in without extensive cultural calculation; and they cannot understand the cultural form of their product and its use outside of a context of market competition. Moreover, the crucial question is not in fact "what market are we in?" but rather "what are the various interrelated definitions of product and competition that we can dream up, and how do we assess and choose between them as commercial strategies?" The answer to that question takes the form, eventually, of the identification of what we gloss as "the market" (ibid.: 63).

Figured as the expert on culture, it follows that the anthropologist would have an obvious currency in the making of markets. Indeed, in the service of making a space for workplace ethnography during the 1980s, my colleagues and I at PARC framed our arguments in terms of the relatively greater value of ethnographically-based attention to practice over the kinds of decontextualised opinions and fragmented expressions of preference elicited through market research. And while Slater is critical of the failure of mainstream literatures to acknowledge the place of advertising as integral to business, we could also understand the

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[3] For a related argument developed through detailed ethnographic engagement with a high profile site of the musical 'avant garde', founded in the same year as Xerox PARC, see Born 1995.

value of activities related to 'culture' as located precisely in their promise to go beyond the reach of business as usual. The anthropologist promises to (re)contextualise objects as entangled in meaningful social and material practice through ethnographic fieldwork, however much the results of those investigations must be translated back into commercially relevant terms in order to be useful for other actors like designers, product managers, marketers and the like. Whatever might be lost in translation (and the loss of contingency is a requirement for translational efficacy), fieldwork's capture of the elusively cultural should afford insights and opportunities not available through any other means.

At the same time, du Gay and Pryke (2002) question the premise of the 'increasing culturalisation' of economies and organisations. As signs of the turn, Lash and Urry (1994) cite three developments: 1) the rise of what have come to be referred to as the 'culture industries'; 2) the argument that increasingly consumer goods and services across a range of sectors can be conceived of as 'cultural' in the sense that they are deliberately and instrumentally inscribed with particular meanings and associations in a conscious attempt to generate desire for them amongst end-users, as even banal products are 'aestheticised' and inserted into narratives about 'lifestyle' and 'experience'; and 3) the turn to 'organisational culture' within business and management discourses. While du Gay and Pryke are critical of the epochal and often hyperbolic characterisation of these developments, they acknowledge the evidence for growing management interests in 'culture' as a means of improving organisational performance, and an associated concern with managing 'organisational culture' (2002: 1). The cultural turn, they observe, is tied to the premise that it is management's task to unleash workers' creativity and enterprise in order to compete within the new, knowledge-based economy (see also Salaman 1997; Marcus 1998; Thrift 2006). Culture is ambiguously the basis for *explaining* how people think, feel and act, and the means for *engineering* desired forms of behavioural change:

> managers are encouraged to view the most effective or "excellent" organizations as those with the "right" culture – that ensemble of norms and techniques of conduct that enables the self-actualizing capacities of individuals to become aligned with the goals and objectives of the organization for which they work (du Gay and Pryke 2002:1).

I will suggest that it was in part these developments of the 1990s that worked to close down the space for difference that allowed a critical anthropology within Xerox PARC. For the moment, however, the point is simply that in thinking about the place of anthropology within these emerging market frames, we need to attend to the ways in which, just as 'accounting tools ... do not simply aid the measurement of economic activity, they shape the reality they measure' (du Gay and Pryke 2002: 12-13), so corporate anthropology is implicated not only in the introduction of new methods for 'knowing' but also in producing the realities of what we now identify as commercially relevant objects. To say that anthropology is implicated is not to posit any singular accountability, nor any simple causal relationship between industrial anthropology and the turn to culture as a central trope in product design and marketing. The latter would overly simplify the disciplinary influences of anthropology among related fields within the social and behavioural sciences during this period, as well as the diffuse and contingent modes of circulation through which market imaginaries and their strategic enactments are constituted. It would, in other words, over-attribute both power and responsibility to the figure of a discipline. At the same time, we can trace some paths through which the figure of anthropology, and its identifying premises and practices, have conjoined with and helped to realise the market's 'cultural turn.'

Anthropology at Xerox PARC

Anthropological engagement at Xerox PARC began during the research center's first decade, in the summer of 1976 on the initiative of Jeff Rulifson, a computer scientist and research manager of what was then the Office Research Group.[4] Rulifson was deeply dissatisfied with the office modeling on offer from consulting firms hired to advise the corporation on technology strategy. Searching for alternatives, he was inspired by his readings of Levi Strauss, from whom he took the lesson that 'we are our tools'. He turned to his academic networks in the San Francisco Bay Area in an effort to identify an anthropologist who might be interested in research on office work in the context of new technology development. Knocking on doors at the University of California at Berkeley he met Eleanor Wynn, then a graduate student in linguistic anthropology, who signed on for a summer contract. The following summer, Rulifson sponsored a second round of studies, once again arranged through UC Berkeley. This time a team of three graduate students were placed in Xerox branch sales offices for six weeks, with the assignment to examine the informal procedures and social relations comprising the work of customer service (Browner and Chibnik 1979). In their account of the project in the journal *Central Issues in Anthropology*, Browner and Chibnik distinguish two aspects as unique at the time with respect to anthropological research: 1) adapting anthropological methods for use in a business setting and 2) conducting research for a profit-making corporation. They report that the first proved relatively easy, the second more problematic. Observing that the 1970s was a time of decreasing opportunities in the academic job market for anthropology, they cite other publications by anthropologists engaged in non-academic research at the time (in government, non-profits, and private consultancies), which reported a number of difficulties including political pressures, conflicting responsibilities to subjects and sponsors, and the need to present findings 'of practical value' within short time frames. In the context of corporate-sponsored research, they observe, practical value translates as relevance to profitability.

The research group to which they reported (pseudonymed 'the Center for Office Studies')[5] was engaged in developing information systems designed to transform administrative work, and organisational communications more broadly, from paper to digital media. The field site for the study (the site of ongoing observations of office 'paper flow' by computer scientists in the research group as well) was a corporate branch office devoted to sales and customer service, also slated as the test site for the introduction of a prototype information system the following summer.[6] The justification for the anthropological initiative was framed with reference to problems that had arisen with the introduction of earlier computer-based office equipment (specifically word processors), and corporate concerns that these problems might repeat themselves. In a presentation to the anthropologists, Jeff Rulifson explained that he believed that these problems were due less to technical shortcomings of the equipment than to a flawed model of the work, focused only on the individual user's relations to the machine rather than the broader social relations of the office. 'The effect of installing new machines', he speculated, 'may be that they interfere with

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[4] Before coming to PARC, Rulifson had worked with Douglas Englebart on the 'Augment' project at the Stanford Research Institute, a source for many of the imaginaries and technologies that comprise the 'office of the future'. The founding of PARC in 1970 was itself symptomatic of Xerox's early concerns with its place in that future. The following account draws from an interview conducted by the author with Jeff Rulifson on 19 February 2003, as part of a project funded by the ESRC Science and Society Programme Award/Grant Reference: L144250006.

[5] While Browner and Chibnik felt it appropriate to adopt a pseudonym at the time of their writing, they have agreed that, with the consent of Jeff Rulifson, the group might be identified here.

[6] The prototype configured PARC's Alto minicomputer into an administrative workstation running 'Officetalk', software created using the Smalltalk programming language also under development at PARC.

– or at least change – the way people work together' (Browner and Chibnik 1979: 64). Rulifson pointed out that while we know that 'work' goes on in offices, little is known about how it actually gets done; for example, the 'informal procedures' used to carry out tasks, the social relations necessary to carrying out procedures, or the effects that changes in routines might have on getting the work done. Social anthropologists seemed potentially able to provide information on these issues that would be relevant to the design of office information systems.[7] Moreover, as the champion of the project, Rulifson saw his engagement of anthropology as putting Xerox PARC on the cutting edge of social science research: Browner and Chibnik report that he announced to others regarding his employment of anthropologists that 'The best [our chief competitor] has done is an industrial psychologist!' (ibid.: 70) His main concern was to show that 'this crazy project', of placing anthropologists in the branch offices, could actually be done.

The research report produced from the project emphasises the necessity of autonomous decision making to the conduct of clerical work, and the importance of interpersonal relations (for example, between customer service and sales representatives) for organisational effectiveness. The administration of the project proceeded less smoothly than the fieldwork, however, particularly with respect to project definition and direction (Browner and Chibnik 1979: 68). Negotiating access to the branch offices was difficult, given general skepticism on the part of branch management regarding what contributions anthropologists could make to questions of corporate interest. The productivity pressures on branch managers made them wary of the potential disruption, or at least distraction, that researchers might bring and, more specifically, of the possibility that researchers might report activities not sufficiently conforming to official procedures. In part as a consequence of this, access for the researchers was negotiated with upper level managers, who then 'advised the branch managers of the desirability of cooperating' with research (ibid.: 69). While the branch managers could, in principle, decline they found it difficult to do so insofar as the suggestion came from those above them in the corporate hierarchy. Closer to home, computer scientists within the research group demonstrated some anxiety about the entanglement of their own procedural studies and those of the anthropologists. More generally, Browner and Chibnik report that the anthropologists faced unanticipated objections to their research from all sides (ibid.: 70).

With this origin story as background, I fast forward to the 1990s. The Office of the Future (at least in its paperless imagining) is a thing of the past, while digital systems comprise an unremarkable, albeit continually changing, medium of administrative work. Fifteen years after the dissolution of the 'Center for Office Studies' (in 1980), The Systems Science Laboratory is now the Knowledge and Practices Laboratory and the Work Practice & Technology (WPT) research area, established in 1989, is in place.[8] Gradually achieving sufficient credibility to constitute a small research group comprising four anthropologists and two computer scientists (over a decade after the 'first contact' described by Browner and Chibnik), we mobilised arguments about the value of ethnographically-informed co-design of prototype technologies to industrial research and development.[9] Creating and iteratively refining these arguments was an integral aspect of our work. Along with concrete

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[7] Much of this perspective was likely due to Rulifon's engagement with Eleanor Wynn, whose contract the previous summer resulted in subsequent support for her dissertation on the importance of informal office conversation in the communication of business-relevant information. See Wynn 1979.

[8] Following a summer position in 1978 as a research assistant to Eleanor Wynn, I became a summer intern in the Office Research Group in 1979 and subsequently completed my own dissertation at PARC (Suchman 2007[1987]).

[9] Founding members of the group along with myself were Jeanette Blomberg, Brigitte Jordan, David Levy, Julian Orr, and Randall Trigg.

demonstrations of an associated research practice, these arguments opened a space for a range of collaborations – critical engagement with cognitive and computer scientists around questions of intelligence, knowledge, reasoning, and related constructs; collaboration with system designers aimed at respecifying central issues for them including the human-machine interface, usability and design expertise; extensive studies of work settings oriented to articulating technologies as sociomaterial practice; engagement with an emerging international network of computer scientists and system designers committed to more participatory forms of system development with relevant workers/users; activism within relevant computer research networks to raise awareness of those alternatives; [10] and iterative enactment of an ethnographically informed, participatory design practice within the context of the research center and the wider corporation.[11]

These efforts took advantage of the ways in which our position at Xerox PARC – in its identification as a center for basic research and its members as academically recognised 'scientists' – afforded us 'margins of manoeuvre' to sustain affiliations that overflowed the conventional market frame (Barry and Slater 2002: 303). In particular, we drew the model for our own practice from colleagues in Denmark, Norway and Sweden; academic computer scientists collaborating with Scandinavian trade unions to develop union-sponsored demonstration systems informed by values of quality of working life and workplace democracy. In our representations of the value of participatory design to the corporation, however, political values were minimised in favour of potentially superior design outcomes, producing information systems better suited to working practices. While this strategy, and the extended history of collaborative experimentation and engagement through which it was realised over two decades was unquestionably fruitful, it also raises a number of questions that have yet, in my reading, to be fully or clearly articulated in recent writings on interdisciplinarity. It is to those questions that I turn in the remainder of this paper.

Sponsorship and accountabilities

In an interview published in 2002, Michel Callon reflects on the question of 'how social scientists can link themselves to social actors' (Barry and Slater 2002: 302). More specifically, Callon is concerned to articulate a conception of markets that 'overflow the frames' of conventional economic discourses, both theoretically and practically. The reference case for Callon is activists engaged in working for recognition of, and resources for, 'orphan' diseases like muscular dystrophy, for which mass production medical and pharmaceutical research and development is not profitable. Callon urges social scientists to engage in collaborative partnerships with such groups:

> On the one hand, actors are interested in this form of co-operation because they can enhance their capacity to describe and analyse their own experience and, on the other hand, social scientists are also interested in co-operating because they can mobilise actors as colleagues who are as competent as academics or scientists (ibid: 302).

In response to this, Andrew Barry, Callon's interlocutor, asks the crucial question: 'which actors do you cooperate with, and with which do you not cooperate?'

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[10] In 1988, as Program Chair for the second conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW), and in 1990 (as part of a working group of the educational non-profit Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility) the first Participatory Design Conference (PDC), I found opportunities to help bring these ideas to academic computer scientists in the U.S. See Schuler and Namioka 1993.

[11] For a partial overview see Suchman *et al* 1999.

One of the problems that Barry's question raises is that of sponsorship and associated accountabilities. Many writings on the virtues of social scientists' engagement with other 'social actors' (a category that I return to in a moment) assume either that researchers will be based in an academic institution, or that where researchers are based is not a critical question. I would like to suggest that this is perhaps *the* critical question. Without in any way diminishing the extraordinary creativity and commitment with which anthropologists working in industry have managed to open a space not only for constructive, but even for critical and oppositional work within 'the engine rooms of technological production' (Wajcman 1991: 164), I focus here on the contradictions that frame that work and that are deeply woven into the everyday experience of doing it. Unless we explicate those contradictions, we are obscuring the conditions within which interdisciplinarity has emerged as a 'good' in contemporary discourses, and the realities of what it means to enact it, particularly in the constitution of markets.

I want to return, then, to Callon's urging that 'social scientists link themselves to social actors' to look more closely at the differences that are made in this statement along with its call to connection. Most obviously, there is the implication that the social scientist is somehow not, herself, a 'social actor' at least in the sense that Callon has in mind. Presumably the latter are actors whose primary identifications and commitments are to something other than social science – to lobbying for recognition and resources for a disease that overflows the frame of the Market, for example. The former, in turn, are actors whose identifications and commitments are to an ongoing engagement with the concerns of the academy, or at least of the historical disciplines from which they draw inspiration and to which they want their work to contribute. It is here in part, I would argue, that questions of sponsorship matter. That is to say, these distinctions become more complicated, slippery and problematic when the 'social scientist' is incorporated economically into an organisation committed to operating in the Market, at the same time that she is committed to expanding and redrawing that frame. An example might help to make this clear.

Overflowing the Market

It is 1995, and the corporation has undergone a massive rebranding initiative aimed at establishing itself as The Document Company, imagining the document now as an object that moves seamlessly between paper and digital media facilitated by networks of 'multi-function' devices able to copy, print, scan and fax as needed. Four of us are embarked on a project that is the latest in a series, aimed at enacting an interdisciplinary design practice that mobilises ethnographically informed studies of work to create prototype document systems, designed cooperatively with their prospective users. These 'case-based prototypes' comprise the medium through which already existing work practices and materials can be reconfigured into systems incorporating both 'off the shelf' and emerging technologies, to create technologies that make sense and are useful (for multiple audiences), while also acting as demonstrations of new technological possibilities for the integration of paper and digital documents (Blomberg *et al* 1996; Trigg *et al* 1999; Suchman *et al* 2002).

Like the technology prototype that is its object, the project itself is designed to do multiple kinds of work. One aim is that this project should expand the boundaries of our last; more specifically, that we should go beyond a demonstration prototype (albeit one installed temporarily in the workplace of our collaborators; see Blomberg *et al* 1996), to a prototype that is fully usable and integrated into the wider infrastructure of our user/collaborators' workplace. A second is that we extend our growing understanding of document work practices, specifically in relation to what we are calling 'working document collections'; that is, corpora of documents that exist between the archive and the desktop (the filing cabinet

being the canonical example). With high value now placed on strong endorsements from the corporation's product divisions, we have designed the project as well to engage with the currently most politically salient of those, through our choice of workplace (a large State agency, considered an important market segment) and the positioning of the prototype (as part of a wider configuration that would incorporate the latest product line of multi-function machines).

While the project that unfolds is a complex and fascinating one, I focus here on the particular kinds of exchange relationships involved. Figured as a prominent customer, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) had long been a site for significant installations of company products. This formed the initial basis for its currency as a prospective site of our research engagement, a possibility that we pursued through the Sales Manager dedicated to the Caltrans account. This contact, along with the cultural capital afforded by our status as researchers at Xerox PARC, secured us a meeting with senior Caltrans management in District 4, the nearest Agency headquarters located in Oakland, California. While our identification with Xerox, and more specifically with PARC, was what made us legible to Caltrans management, that identification framed as well the challenge for our first meeting. In contrast to the familiar relationship of technology vendor and customer, we placed a proposal for a different kind of relationship onto the table. Most notably, this would be a relationship in which no money would change hands, but rather (only) an exchange of time and labour. As salaried PARC researchers, we would require no payment from Caltrans, and would offer whatever expertise we could bring to bear for free. In exchange, we asked for an opportunity to work closely with a civil engineering team within the department over an extended timeframe (our subsequent engagement continued for two years), to identify some aspect of their document-related work that might benefit from translation between paper and digital media, and to collaborate with them to develop a demonstration system. The latter would not, we emphasised, be a working system in the sense of a purchasable product. But it would be developed sufficiently to be put into real use, *in situ*. What we hoped Caltrans engineers and management would gain by the end of the project was, first, a deeper understanding of their 'requirements' for a document system that would be genuinely useful and usable within the context of an engineering team's daily work. And second, that they would gain a realistic appreciation for the state of the technological art, including relevant technologies already available, those currently in research and development, and others often promised but likely never to be realised. Taken together, we suggested, these would place the organisation in a stronger position from which to think about their technology strategy, and to assess the claims of future technology vendors who came along. In place of familiar relations of paid services or products for sale, in other words, we set up a kind of barter, exchanging labours for labours. Our exchange eventually included as well a small suite of gifted technologies (a scanner and dedicated personal computer plus requisite software), necessary for the prototype that emerged: procuring those technologies from Xerox without charges to Caltrans was among the more substantial of the practical challenges and achievements of our own labours on the project.

The form of our 'interdisciplinarity' by the time of this project was a collaboration within which studying the working practices of a team of civil engineers and designing a prototype system for managing their project documents were intertwined research objects. As researchers we all engaged in work practice studies and in design sessions, albeit that the technical work of writing code fell predominately to Randall Trigg, a gifted computer scientist. His work now was less to invent technologies *de novo*, than to engage in extensive forms of configuration work that drew upon software packages designed as generic toolkits for customised systems, or that at least made available application programmers interfaces (APIs) that enabled him to do the necessary customisation and integration work. The

prototype that resulted was a mix of commercially available and bespoke components, with the latter combining customisations required to make a system that made sense for the work at hand, and other research technologies (for example, for document image analysis) of interest to colleagues back at PARC (see Trigg *et al*, 1999).

While conscientiously aligned with the evident commercial interests and prevailing practices of the corporation, in sum, the project that unfolded overflowed that frame as well. As a consequence, we found ourselves positioned at the interstices of received categories for economic exchange, both in our relation to the site of our collaborative prototyping effort (some within Xerox management believing that Caltrans should be paying us), and in the technologies created (under what precedent could the hardware be donated? Should and could the software developed in the context of the prototype be patented and licensed as Intellectual Property? If so, what was the status of the prototype system installed at Caltrans?) Our successful negotiation of these questions was a prerequisite for, and an integral aspect of, the creation of a space (albeit a temporary and experimental one) for a different kind of market within the Market frame – a form of exchange that didn't fit (Gibson-Graham 1996: ix), but that was necessary for the kind of project to which we were committed.

Mediated imaginaries

> The worldly authority of modern ethnography … may long outlive its credibility within the discipline.
> Rosemary Coombe 1998: 35

With these fragments of a history of specific anthropological encounters in mind, I turn back to the question of anthropology's value as a consumable within U.S. industry. Recent contributors to the cultural economy discussion argue for the importance of documenting the performative naturalisation of economic objects, as a basis for their contestation (Slater 2002). In Slater's analysis, product definition, positioning, branding, and marketing are all constitutive activities in the stabilisation of commercial actors and organisations as well as their objects. How does this apply to 'anthropology' itself?

On February 24, 1991 an article appeared in the business pages of the *New York Times*, in the 'Managing' section, titled 'Coping with Cultural Polyglots.' The article, by reporter Claudia Deutsch, told of a small (but by implication increasing) number of anthropologists employed by major corporations. Twenty years after its first sighting, the commercial market for anthropology is still news. An article in *Business Week* published in 2006, with the title 'The Science of Desire,' drew the following account of anthropology's popularity: 'closely observing people where they live and work, say executives, allows companies to zero in on their customers' unarticulated desires … This makes anthropology far more valuable.' The *New York Times* translates this added value as a matter of the difference between behavioural sciences of the individual versus the group, asserting that '[u]ntil recently, anthropologists – people trained to analyze group behavior – were spurned by corporations, which preferred to stress individuality and entrepreneurship' (Deutsch 1991). Along with the somewhat peculiar disciplinary characterization and history on offer here, the proposition that anthropologists were actively spurned by the corporate world, rather than simply being invisible to it, is tied to the suggestion that anthropology's embrace is indicative of some new-found interest in the social, even some newly emergent sociality, in corporate affairs.

We have here, then, a resonance with the social sciences' own observation, discussed above, of the turn to a 'cultural economy.' As signaled by their common resort to colonialist cliché, it is the promise of access to territories beyond the boundaries of the familiar that most

obviously dominates these media reports of anthropology's value. Anthropology is taken by business as emblematic of the capacity of the social sciences, specifically new methods of observation, to aid in the expansion and deeper penetration of cultures of capitalism (Thrift 2006). Even more than the social it is the cultural that enters the picture, as the residual category left over after the psychologists and industrial sociologists are done with their work, the mysteries of which it is now the anthropologists' job to make accessible. The *Times* article explains that 'most anthropologists study exotic cultures in faraway places,' and accounts for the interest in anthropologists on the part of management as a desire of those who want to expand their operations overseas to understand other cultures, while 'at home, the same companies want help dealing with work forces that are increasingly polyglots of cultures and behaviors' (Deutsch 1991). Globalization, in sum, brings the exotic other into one's line of sight wherever it falls, whether far away or close to home, and the anthropologist is the logical choice to aid in the process of learning to deal with these new multicultural challenges.

While the promise of her unique expertise may provide the rationale for the anthropologists' employ, however, the fascination of that employment for the media lies in the unlikely juxtaposition of anthropologist as *investigator* of exotic other, with anthropologist *as* exotic other in the mundane, familiar halls of the corporate workplace (di Leonardo 1998). The interest in corporate anthropology involves the anthropologist herself in an identity marked as exotic other, in other words, within the context of familiar commercial and technological worlds: an other brought home to live inside and become part of the enterprise. My colleagues and I experienced this quite directly as we found ourselves, even after many years, being hailed by some of our computer science colleagues at PARC, if we happened to walk down the hall together, with the (only semi-ironic) warning, 'Here come the anthropologists!' (We ultimately took this thinly veiled reference to the Jets to heart, donning satin gang jackets with our group name emblazoned on them.) As we have seen this warning – half promise, half portent – is reflected clearly in the texts of the media reports as well as in their titles.

With this said, I want to suggest that the anthropologist's interest for the media derives not only from her promise of special access to the user/consumer, or even from her own unlikely appearance in the halls of corporate office buildings, but perhaps most importantly from the ways in which her traditional associations transform her objects of study from banal to exotic through her interests in them. That is to say, the anthropological gaze, insofar as it is defined by its traditional attention to the other, vicariously renders exotic those on whom it is turned. Factory floors, corporate offices and 'middle class' homes, assumed to be so transparently familiar as to not warrant anthropological attention, are turned into sites as foreign as the colonies once were by the mere fact of the anthropologist's presence: in her making of the familiar strange, the presence of the anthropologist in the 'tribal office' transforms what goes on there – the banal and ordinary activities of the working day – into something mysterious and correspondingly interesting. The anthropologist, in short, renders 'us', the reader addressed by these media stories, as exotic Other.

The appearance of these accounts in the 1990s makes clear that, however specific in their details, our peculiar histories were also part of some general trends, shifts in rhetorics and practices of multinational corporate enterprise at the close of the twentieth century.[12] Naomi Klein suggests one way of understanding these shifts and their relevance to our experience when she proposes that:

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[12] See Reardon's discussion (2005: 91-2) of the enrollment of anthropologists in the Human Genome Diversity Project around this same time.

The astronomical growth in the wealth and cultural influence of multinational corporations over the last fifteen years can arguably be traced back to a single, seemingly innocuous idea developed by management theorists in the mid-1980s: that successful corporations must primarily produce brands, not products (2000: 3).

It is this basic premise as well, Klein argues, that underwrites the rapid rise of the 'virtual' corporation, aimed at outsourcing production to various export processing zones around the globe, then attaching an image to the resulting assemblage of parts. Unlike their industrial ancestors, the in-house work of these companies is not manufacturing, but marketing. As Klein puts it, '[s]ince many of today's best known manufacturers no longer produce products and advertise them, but rather buy products and 'brand' them, these companies are forever on the prowl for creative new ways to build and strengthen their brand images' (ibid.: 4-5). A crucial element of brand building in an age of mass production and competitive marketing is the manufacture of difference, based less in products than in the packaging of products and their association with recognizable images. Starting in the 1940s, brand evolved from a mascot or catchphrase on a label, to the identity of the corporation itself. By 1998, a UN Report found that the growth in spending on global advertising outpaced the growth of the world economy by one-third (cited in Klein 2000: 9).

It is here as well, in the early 1990s, that we find the rise of 'lifestyle' marketing, increasingly abstract 'high-concept' advertising, and the first initiatives in the design of shopping 'experiences'. The search for 'brand essence,' Klein proposes, moved companies progressively away from individual products and their attributes 'toward a psychological/ anthropological examination of what brands mean to culture and to people's lives' (2000: 7). As Celia Lury sums these developments, the market exchange is now a matter 'not merely of ... calculation, but also of affect, intensivity, and the reintroduction of qualities' (2004: 7). And the performativity of the brand, Lury observes, depends on the compulsory inclusion of consumers as information sources, insofar as 'information about consumers is used as a basis for multiplying the qualities or attributes of the product and managing relations between these multi-dimensional variables in time' (ibid.: 9). The brand under the sign of relationship marketing works to entangle the consumer in an exchange that extends beyond any specific object, or any given transaction.

It is surely no coincidence, then, that it is around this same time that the media begin to proclaim the discovery by industry of the discipline of anthropology. The reinvention of the consumer as a social/cultural – rather than strictly rational – actor in contemporary economic and marketing imaginaries is both a condition of possibility, and the central charge, for the anthropologist figured as the medium through which the consumer can be known within, or translated into, sites of production. As at least a minor player in these developments, anthropology had a role both as brand (offering human interest and public relations caché to corporate employers via the media), and as social science (promising new and appropriable insights into worker and customer 'culture' and 'experience'). The anthropologist as brand performs a kind of interface, at once connecting producer and consumer, and through her mediatory role helping to limit and make manageable their interaction. The anthropologist's relations to the making of brands is a reflexive one, insofar as her own brand efficacy operates through the promise of its contributions to this same process. Through its performativity the brand becomes a figure, an assemblage that operates in these ways through repetition, and through accretions of agency over time and within specific cultural imaginaries. While announced each time as an innovation, media sightings of the anthropologist in industry work as well to fix the anthropologist's position as envoy of a discipline that, in Lury's words, if not a matter of certainty is at least an object of possibility. As a disciplinary identification that carries its own caché, the identity of anthropologist in

turn doubles back to work as a novel contributor to what Lury identifies as the 'processes in which information about competitors and the consumer is fed back into production,' making the brand itself dynamic (2004: 3).

Typically applied to an association of images and things, an interweaving of signs and commodity objects, I am suggesting that we consider the brand as taking persons, or more accurately disciplines, as its object. So what does this mean for those of us concerned about these appropriative translations of anthropology, but at the same time not wishing to be drawn into exercises of purification or the policing of disciplinary boundaries? Our work as anthropologists sits uncomfortably inside the close-knit interweaving of consumer experience understood as something prior, discovered through anthropological investigation and then addressed by design and marketing, and consumer experience understood as constituted *through* activities of design and marketing, in their contributions to the creation of desire and the crafting of cultural imaginaries. I do not believe that we can resolve this tension. But, as in our subject positions as employees or as consumers, our problem as anthropologists is to find the spaces that allow us to refigure the projects of those who purchase our services and from whom we buy, rather than merely to be incorporated passively within them.

Translations

> Knowledge grows through multiple layers of collaboration – as both empathy and betrayal.
> Tsing 2005:155

I turn in closing to the tricky borderlands that differentiate two modes of collaboration across difference. The first assumes the existence of *a priori* truths, and the project of interdisciplinarity as an instrument for their discovery. The second, based on Verran's construct of working disparate knowledges together (1998; 2002), assumes the irremediable multiplicity of the real, and reconciliation as too often the product of power-differentiated translations of one party's knowledges into the terms of another's. Rather than reconciliation, then, working knowledges together aims at possibilities for partial, practical connections (see also Strathern 1991). Translation has little tolerance for the persistence of differences that challenge the foundations of claims to universal knowledge; partial connection takes the negotiation of difference as an ongoing foundation for getting on together. Translation insists that politics should be suspended from the space of collaboration (and therefore must repress them), partial connection operates on careful attention to the politics of difference.

In the introduction to his book *Biocapital* (2006), Kaushik Sunder Rajan describes his discomfort at the lack of a legible story to tell about his dissertation project to the scientists in the laboratory that he was studying, until he met Mark Boguski, a scientist at the National Center for Biotechnology Information, who provided him with one. Comparing Kaushik to anthropologist Paul Rabinow, he exclaimed 'I think someone needs to write a contemporary history of genomics, and I think you should do it' (ibid.:1). Kaushik goes on to describe the access that this provided him to the field of genomics (and by implication at least partial relief from his discomfort). But what are the implications of this recognition, the associated story of Kaushik's project, and the expectations that it signals for what the anthropologist might do in researching this, or any other field of technoscience? What, in particular, might Boguski have imagined, and what would become of the differences between that and the stories that Kaushik himself, in his relations with anthropology and science studies, might go on to tell? Yes, recognition eases our discomfort at being illegible. But it also carries its own discomforts, insofar as the identification that it offers us limits our possibilities for difference.

In the case of Xerox PARC, and of collaborations between computer and social scientists more broadly during the 1980s and 1990s, two modes of interdisciplinarity were in tension, one general and programmatic, the other specific and practical. By the mid 1990s, programmatic debates over the relation of computer and social sciences held at major research conferences in the previous decade had largely been replaced by reports on practical experiments in working together computational, engineering and anthropological knowledges with those of practitioners in a range of sites, to explore inventive configurations of relevant information technologies. Within Xerox PARC, the tropes of 'knowledge' and 'practice' were now conjoined in our laboratory's very name. On the face of it, then, it would seem that arguments reiterated over the preceding fifteen years had been fully embraced.

My experience, in contrast, was that the space of interdisciplinarity in some significant respects closed down as the trope of 'practice' was embraced. As the latter became the general rubric for knowledge making different – and in particular contested – readings of what research and scholarship on practice might entail were more threatening to what now should be an emerging consensus. Nigel Thrift (2006) helps to contextualise this experience for me, in his analysis of what he names recent 'tendencies' in contemporary capitalism. The first, seemingly far removed from the enterprises of the Silicon Valley (apart from the endless need of high technology for more materials – aluminum, coltan, and so forth), comprises further intensification of resource extraction, involving 'force, dispossession and enclosure as part of a search for mass commodities like oil, gas, gems and timber using all the usual suspects: guns, barbed wire and the law' (ibid.:280). The second tendency he articulates as:

> an obsession with knowledge and creativity and especially an obsession with fostering tacit knowledge and aptitudes through devices like the community of practice … [along with] a desire to rework consumption so as to draw consumers much more fully into the process, leaching out their knowledge of commodities and adding it back into the system as an added performative edge through an "experience economy"… This stream of thought and practice has now blossomed into a set of fully fledged models of "co-creation" which are changing corporate perceptions of what constitutes "production," "consumption," "commodity," "the market" and indeed "innovation"' (ibid.: 282).

This second tendency, clearly much closer to home, includes as well projects of social engineering designed to accelerate creative collaboration including, of course, across disciplines.

It is within this nexus of designs and desires, during a time when profitable returns on investment among established technology manufacturers grew ever more difficult to achieve, that our work and the wider brand of corporate anthropology was formed. At the same time, our identification as anthropologists relied on continuing engagement with developments in the academic discipline of anthropology, where increasingly incisive critiques of contemporary capitalism, including the 'tendencies' that Thrift identifies, were under construction. So as the programme within the laboratory was in the process of developing its own orthodoxies – including the embrace of the social sciences – the space in which to question received assumptions regarding the politics of corporate anthropology seemed to diminish. Where before we had been enrolled in what was clearly an 'agonistic' form of interdisciplinarity (Barry *et al* 2008), we were now asked to contribute to an apparently cohesive undertaking. While the former could be negotiated based on partial connections, the latter demanded modes of loyalty that seemed to make our own differences increasingly indigestible.

Perhaps most obviously absent from discourses of the research laboratory was any critical discussion of the political economies to which our work was increasingly

accountable. As the corporation's performance on Wall Street (a topic of little or no interest to researchers when I arrived at PARC in the late 1970s) became a constant preoccupation (stock prices and business analyses being discussed at every lab meeting), there remained deafening silence regarding any critical analysis of developments in the world economy and financial markets. To engage in such critique was treated as anachronistically naïve at best, 'biting that hand that feeds you' at worst. Yet in a more optimistic imagining of corporate anthropology, George Marcus writes, in his Introduction to the collection *Corporate Futures* (1998:2) :

> … in terms of their own highly specific idioms and purposes, the social actors who become, in conversation with us, our specific subjects of research may even provide more nuanced, deeper, and richer conceptualizations of contemporary change than the remade, distanced, and authoritative exposition typical of the social-scientist expert, cultural critic, or journalist-commentator.

My own critical reading of the position of the corporate anthropologist leads me to ask just what is at stake in this contrast of the actor-subject and ethnographer-analyst, including the privileging of the former. What if we were to abandon the ordering (even as an inversion), and ask instead what each brings to the project of theorizing contemporary developments in science, technology, industry, capitalism or whatever? Unquestionably the actor deeply embedded in the sites of interest brings distinctive ways of knowing those sites, born of extended participation in and lived experience of relevant doings. But is it necessarily the case, as Marcus' formulation at least implies, that the social scientist or cultural critic's account is any more 'remade,' 'distanced,' or 'authoritative' than the organization member's? Certainly not inherently. I would argue that all accounts are equally 'remade', albeit with reference to different relevancies. Moreover, there are many forms of distance and authority evident within organizational actors' accounts of themselves, albeit different ones from that of the social scientist.

The differences between accounts made by organization members and those of anthropologists is less about closeness *versus* distance, in other words, than about different frames of reference and audiences. It is even possible that social scientists and cultural critics have at least potentially additional resources to draw on, beyond those available to organization members, in contextualizing, theorizing, and conceptualizing what it is that's going on. So what could it mean, rather than to order the accounts of organization members and ethnographers, to work them together – and against – each other: to treat the resonances and tensions as productive? In their discussion of the performative effects of categorisation (specifically of constructions of Capitalism as a singularity, whether by enthusiasts or anti-capitalist critics), feminist economists J. K. Gibson-Graham observe that 'If there is no singular figure, there can be no singular other ... Theorizing capitalism itself as different from itself - as having, in other words, no essential or coherent identity - multiplies (infinitely) the possibilities of alterity' (1996: 15). We might apply the same observation to the disciplines. Like other identity categories, the disciplines are overdetermined; that is, 'continually and differentially constituted rather than … pre-existing their contexts or … having an invariant core' (ibid.: 16). Like corporations and markets, disciplines are enacted and multiple. And practices – including economically relevant practices – invariably overflow the frames of any single account; they 'enact complex interferences between orders or discourses' (Law 2002: 22). Multiplying the possibilities requires articulating the frames, and the overflows, that comprise markets, disciplines and the micropolitics of economies of knowledge, including close attention to their differential constitutions of value, or of the 'good'.

It is in this respect that I would argue that, however subject to creeping neoliberalism and corporatisation, the academy as an institution still affords frames of reference and accountability importantly different to those of industry. Most concretely, in the latter there are few bases for protesting growing corporatisation, demands for profitable entrepreneurship and the like: those are, rather, the primary social responsibility of corporate citizenship. Historical commitments of the academy – to education, understanding the human condition, the public good – can, commensurately, be invoked as grounds for resistance. These are differences in charter, I would argue, that make a difference in the forms of action that they at least potentially legitimise and underwrite. More substantively, commerce and politics get both entangled and obscured in contemporary calls for 'user' relevance in all things: we need to distinguish between calls for value in the sense of utility, and a recognition of values as inextricable from the conduct of research. There is a difference that matters between normative research enlisted in the service of agendas – public or private – in which the frame is not itself open to question, and research that affiliates with efforts to question the frames within which politics, markets, or any other entities are disciplined. The history of anthropological research conducted under industry sponsorship makes evident the possibilities for generative interference that come with anthropology's promise of reframing, as well as the tricky politics and frictions of its incorporation.

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