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FROM THE EDITOR

Why the AAA Needs Gold Open Access

Tom Boellstorff
Editor-in-Chief

TURNING POINTS

This, my next-to-last “From the Editor” piece as Editor-in-Chief of *American Anthropologist*, represents one of the strongest statements I will make during my editorship. To minimize misinterpretations to the greatest degree possible, I wish to summarize my argument at the outset:

- (1) Based on my five years of experience as *AA* editor, developments in the world of academic publishing, and what I have learned from valued colleagues, I have come to a turning point in my thinking—one that I feel reflects a broader turning point in scholarly communication. I now believe strongly that the AAA should terminate its current contract with Wiley-Blackwell (hereafter WB) when it expires on December 31, 2017 (although as I note below, that may not mean ending our relationship with WB altogether). Beginning January 1, 2018, AAA journals should be “gold” open access, meaning that all content should be freely accessible online via interoperable, standards-based platforms.
- (2) There are three primary reasons why this transition to gold open access is imperative, reasons that are simultaneously ethical, political, and intellectual. First, there is a fundamental contradiction between the often-repeated goal of making anthropology more public and relevant on the one hand and the lack of open access on the other hand. Second, there is an incompatibility between the broad interest in transnationalizing anthropology and the lack of open access. Third, it is wrong for any academic journal to be based on a model where the unremunerated labor of scholars supports corporate profits. I see no way that the current subscription-based model can be modified so as to adequately address these concerns.
- (3) Despite how busy we all are and despite the bewildering range of issues involved, anthropologists need to take a leadership role in working together to address these challenges of publishing and open access. Although AAA and WB staff have often been at the vanguard of innovative thinking in regard to these prob-

lems, it is both proper and fair that anthropologists be central to the conversation.

- (4) We need to work creatively to make AAA journals gold open access in a sustainable manner that provides sufficient resources for these publications.

I will now expand on these four key points.

GOLD OPEN ACCESS AS THE GOAL

When I became *AA* editor in June 2007, the AAA was finalizing its agreement with WB and thus played no role in this decision (see Kelty et al. 2008).¹ In many ways, working with WB has been a boon. Revenues have been stabilized, but there have been other benefits, including new strategies for marketing. WB has also supported many forms of open access. For instance, all content more than 35 years old is freely available,² although this only benefits journals that have been publishing for at least 35 years and can create the impression that anthropological research is dated (see Boellstorff 2009:3; Golub 2008).

However, as many observers have long noted, true “gold” open access is not a goal under the existing framework between the AAA and WB (see, e.g., Golub 2007; Kamrani 2007). Instead, the current arrangement is a “green” open access model in which authors can circulate a postprint—“a manuscript that has been revised by an author in the wake of peer-review and acceptance by a journal” (Jackson 2011; see Suber 2010). Green open access is less than ideal for many reasons, including the confusion engendered by multiple versions of a article in circulation, as well as the lack of access to articles in the context of an entire journal issue.

As a result, but particularly for the reasons I discuss below, we should work to move all AAA journals to a gold open access model. In doing so we would align ourselves with the growing movement in other disciplines to ensure full open access and challenge the role of corporate publishers in controlling the dissemination of scholarly research (see, e.g., Gray 2012).³ The original five-year contract with WB has been renewed for another five years, until December 31, 2017. Ideally the transition to gold open access could happen earlier, but the current arrangement provides us

with a realistic timeline to prepare for a transition to gold open access on January 1, 2018.

ANTHROPOLOGY'S RELEVANCE

My first concern is that there is a fundamental contradiction between the often-repeated goal of making anthropology more public and relevant on the one hand and the lack of open access on the other hand. I always prefer a model of conversation and collaboration for scholarly engagement—not competition and conflict. Nonetheless, the reality is that anthropology does not exist in a vacuum. We are part of a scholarly ecosystem that includes other disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and beyond, as well as journalists, activists, and other kinds of engaged intellectuals. More and more, the work of these other approaches is freely available online. We risk being increasingly left out of key debates if our work is difficult to access. Simply put, “no one owes scholarly societies anything . . . indeed anthropology doesn't have to exist in our society—and it's clear that most Americans haven't an airy clue what we do or why it might be important” (Kelty et al. 2008:567). This also has consequences for the position of anthropology in the university: the greater circulation of our research can only reinforce the value of our discipline in an era of austerity.⁴

One would have to search far and wide to find any contemporary anthropologist who did not express a strong desire that anthropology be public and relevant. What has become increasingly clear to me is that this goal of relevance and public engagement is incompatible with a subscription-based publishing model.

ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE WORLD

The second concern that leads me to argue for the necessity of gold open access is in regard to the position of U.S. anthropology in the world. As I have noted elsewhere (e.g., Boellstorff 2012a), transnationalizing *AA* has been a priority of my editorship; this builds on the continuing work of a range of anthropologists, including those affiliated with the Committee on World Anthropologies. My efforts in this regard have included transnationalizing *AA*'s editorial board, eliminating a fee for non-AAA members to submit manuscripts, and requiring non-English abstracts.

However, I have come to the conclusion that a subscription-based model for accessing *AA* is incompatible with the goal of transnationalizing the journal. The AAA and WB have been very generous in terms of programs to provide journal access to developing-world universities that cannot otherwise afford subscriptions. However, such a case-by-case approach inevitably leaves out many institutions, does not provide for scholars without an academic affiliation, and often sidelines public, practicing, and applied anthropologists. Although of course there are many anthropologists conducting work in the United States, from the beginnings of the discipline we have learned much from communities beyond those national borders. Anthropologists have

always conducted significant amounts of research around the world, and we owe it to “make our work accessible to the incredible diversity of source communities that anthropologists work with” (Kelty et al. 2008:564).

FINDING A FAIR MODEL

In conjunction with my earlier points, the last of the three principles mentioned above leads me to suspect that the best path forward will involve moving beyond our publishing relationship with WB. (However, it is possible that terminating the current arrangement in 2018 may not entail ending our publishing relationship with WB because WB does publish gold open access journals.⁵) A fundamental issue is that, in my view, it is wrong for any academic journal to be based on a model where the unremunerated labor of scholars supports corporate profits. For instance, under the current system WB pays none of my salary; I am paid by my students and California taxpayers. Their dollars support WB profits, and they pay WB a second time for the same content when my university library pays subscription fees.

Now, although I am opposed to any profit-based model for scholarly publishing, as a thought experiment I would actually prefer a consistently corporate model where WB published AAA journals but editors received, say, \$20,000 a year for their labor, reviewers \$50 for each review they provided, and even authors were paid for their content. In other words, what I find particularly ethically problematic is that WB's current business model is predicated on the unpaid labor of reviewers, authors, and editors, as well as significant cash and in-kind subventions from the universities and other not-for-profit institutions in which editors of AAA journals work.

THE WORST EXCEPT FOR ALL THE OTHERS?

These limitations of the status quo are hardly news, however important it may be to reiterate their importance. Many anthropologists (like other scholars) have long been dissatisfied with the subscription-based model of publishing and have proposed gold open access alternatives. One reason these alternatives have not borne fruit within the AAA publishing portfolio is that it can be difficult to see how they could sustain the journals financially. As I come to the end of my five years as *AA* editor, I can appreciate these concerns. However, we need to forge a path forward.

At issue here is that I do not see as viable a model in which journals run entirely on volunteer labor—relying on graduate students or authors themselves for copy editing, for instance. Copy editing is a craft learned through years of training: it is more than just catching typographical errors; it but helps shape convincing arguments. Thus, at a bare minimum we need a gold open access model that includes support for managing editors (who are usually also responsible for layout and the other vital behind-the-scenes work of journal publishing). For a larger journal like *AA*, there is a need for other basic support staff (like an

editorial assistant, who handles email and other communications with the journal, and also manages the online submissions system). If a journal does book reviews, there needs to be support for a book review office, including postage for mailing books to reviewers. Ideally, editors themselves should be compensated for their crucial labor. All this support is practically necessary and ethically the right thing to do. It will be easier to convince deans and other administrators to support journals in this manner if they know such support is making the journal (and their institution) visible not just to members of a scholarly society but to a broad public who can easily obtain the scholarship in question through open access. Additionally, a proper level of support not predicated on institutional contributions would open the door for anthropologists not at research universities to be editors.

Now, all this might sound fanciful, particularly because my vision is a financing model that accomplishes these goals without requiring that authors pay to have their work published. (Note that there are options for open access other than those predicated on an “author pays” model.) I am eminently familiar with the challenges in identifying and implementing an alternative model to subscription-based financing. However, I also know that anthropologists are a resourceful lot and see a need for an expanded discussion regarding the possibility of viable alternatives. This should take place in the most transparent manner possible; it should not be restricted to committee or other “in-house” discussions but rather engage with the AAA membership and thereby also help educate that membership about the costs and benefits of going to a gold access model in the broadest sense.

There have been many creative attempts to think about how a journal like *Cultural Anthropology* could be properly funded with, for instance, a \$30-per-year increase in section fees (Fortun 2011), and debates over federal support for journals need not cease (Boellstorff 2012b), particularly given federal interest in access to scholarly research. Overall, then, I am keenly aware of the financial challenges involved in any transition to gold open access, but I believe that for the flourishing of our discipline the transition is necessary. It might be useful for the AAA to allow a section to try out an alternative model with an existing publication as a test case ahead of the end of the current contract in 2017.

It will also be important to consider the bitter truth: the likely reality is that the cost of moving all AAA publications to gold open access will entail painful choices. It might curtail the available funding for sections, the budget for AAA programming, and so on. What if we faced a choice of having our AAA meetings every other year (with regional or section meetings in between) as the price of gold open access? What if the sacrifice was that journals were by default “online only,” with a small fee to receive a print version? I am not saying such choices are inevitable but that we should discuss what choices we would be willing to make. Given

that in Section 1 of the AAA’s Statement of Purpose we find a core “purpose of the Association” to be “to further the professional interests of American anthropologists, including the dissemination of anthropological knowledge and its use to solve human problems,” the question is surely worth posing.⁶

BEYOND BARRIERS

In the discussion that follows, I beg the reader to keep in mind this regard in which I hold AAA and WB staff; I honestly do not know how I could have succeeded in my editorship without their support.

I have come to believe that a significant issue regarding discussions of gold open access involves structural barriers to the involvement of anthropologists themselves. Many anthropologists are very busy with research, teaching, service, and activism, making it difficult for them to actively participate in editing a journal. We often find it difficult to keep abreast of changes in the publishing world or even educate ourselves as to how our journals are published. (Some AAA and WB staff have helped educate anthropologists about the various funding models in existence.) Key journal editorial and other committees meet only once a year at the AAA meetings; typically so many topics must be discussed in so short a time that it is hard to strategize in a more sustained manner about the challenges and opportunities we face.

For instance, many aspects of the contract between the AAA and WB are secret even to AAA members. Although WB managers understandably do not want competitors to know details of their arrangements with publishing partners, these confidentiality agreements do make it harder to assess the range of available options in the world of scholarly publishing.⁷

Structural barriers can make it more difficult for anthropologists to communicate with their constituencies within and beyond the AAA. For instance, during the transition from my editorship to the one that follows, issues arose around funding the Book Review Office beginning on July 1, 2012, because in my case that office had been heavily subsidized by my university. One staff response to this problem was that *AA* has apparently not had book review editors at some points in its history and had just published reviews that came in, without seeking new reviews or staying current of reviews. In other words, at least a temporary discontinuation of book reviews was actually floated as an option.

These examples, I emphasize once again, are structural in nature. Although AAA and WB staff have often been at the forefront of thinking about possibilities for gold open access, they cannot be expected to frame these possibilities in terms of the broader concerns about the public place of anthropology, its global engagements, and its status vis-à-vis other disciplines that have moved more swiftly toward open-access models. On November 3, 2011, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (on behalf of the National Science and Technology Council Task Force on Public Access to

Scholarly Publications) asked for feedback from scholarly societies regarding the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010, in which the United States Congress sought to mandate greater public access to research funded partially or wholly by taxpayers. William Davis, the Executive Director of the AAA, provided on January 12, 2012 a response in which he stated:

broad public access to such information currently exists, and no federal government intervention is currently necessary. We know of no research that demonstrates a problem with the existing system for making the content of scholarly journals available to those who might benefit from it.

To my knowledge, no editors of AAA journals (or indeed, any AAA members) were consulted in regard to the drafting of this statement. The only evidence cited was a February 2009 survey of the AAA membership about publishing, but AAA members have access to Anthrosource as a benefit of membership. If we keep a broad perspective in mind regarding the place of anthropology in the world, it is not possible to claim that there is no problem “making the content of scholarly journals available to those who might benefit from it.”

MOVING FORWARD

Within the sphere of his immediate concerns for the flourishing of the AAA, Davis’s statements were correct and in line with AAA policy.⁸ But within the broader universe of anthropology’s place in the social sciences and the world, we find a lack of vision for ensuring that anthropology moves even more to the center of global debates on the vast range of topics to which our research can contribute. But this is our problem—we, the anthropologists. We the anthropologists who are, of course, busy with a thousand other concerns and for whom the topic of publishing may not seem pressing or interesting. But my years of editorial work have impressed on me how important it is that we take on these concerns as our own and not expect the excellent AAA and WB staff, who are as overworked as we are, to forge a sustainable future on our behalf.

This is why the AAA membership and other interested anthropologists not currently members of the AAA should immediately begin laying the groundwork for a transition to gold open access. We can build on the labor of our colleagues who have for years been calling for change and helping us understand the often-bewildering minutiae of the publishing enterprise. I strongly support the call for an interest group within the AAA to push for these changes (Thompson 2012). Such a group should not have an antagonistic relationship to AAA or WB staff: we all share a goal of a flourishing anthropological enterprise, and together we will move forward to a better future. One possible scenario is that gold open access anthropology journals outside the AAA portfolio become increasingly prestigious and dominant, eclipsing *AA* and other journals and forcing those journals to change their

models or be relegated to obscurity. I think this would be a loss for anthropology, and I hope we can work together in a manner that is both realistic regarding the difficulties in finding workable open access models but also recognizes that it can be done (it is in fact already being done), and we have the talent, creativity, and vision to find a sustainable path forward to gold open access.

IN THIS ISSUE

The research articles featured in this issue of *AA* once again reveal the remarkable breadth of anthropological research and the range of conversations to which it can contribute. In “Technically Speaking: On Equipping and Evaluating ‘Unnatural’ Language Learners,” Joshua Reno draws on three strikingly different “experimental moments of ‘unnatural’ language development”—apes in captivity, autistic children, and malicious forms of Internet programming—to explore conceptions of nature, the human, and the speaking subject. Many of these broad questions appear as well in Dafna Shir-Vertesh’s “‘Flexible Personhood’: Loving Animals as Family Members in Israel.” In this article, Shir-Vertesh takes a different approach to questions of nature and the human, examining the contingent love of pets as kin. Tamar El Or’s article, “The Soul of the Biblical Sandal: On Anthropology and Style,” is concerned with another aspect of contemporary culture in Israel—the relationship between material culture, history, and style, as exemplified in the story of the “Biblical sandal.”

Questions of place, materiality, and history are also salient in “Multisited Research on Colonowares and the Paradox of Globalization.” In this article, Charles R. Cobb uses multisited forms of investigation often associated with ethnographic research to examine forms of globalization that long predate the contemporary period—specifically, the European colonial encounter in the New World. Benjamin Arbuckle takes up a related set of themes in his article “Pastoralism, Provisioning, and Power at Bronze Age Achemhöyük, Turkey.” Here, Arbuckle addresses “the nature of the interactions and integration between rural pastoral producers and a centralized state,” providing another set of substantive and theoretical tools for conceptualizing forms of translocal exchange across time.

Such questions of movement, materiality, and place-making show up in a strikingly different context in Jason De Leon’s article “‘Better to Be Hot than Caught’: Excavating the Conflicting Roles of Migrant Material Culture.” De Leon combines ethnographic data and archaeological data collected along routes of migration between Northern Mexico and the United States to examine the emergence of “the routinized techniques and tools associated with the violent process of border crossing.” Legacies of violence are central as well to “‘We Have Been Sensitized’: Excombatants, Marginalization, and Youth in Postwar Sierra Leone.” In this article, Catherine Bolten illuminates the complex relationships between ex-combatants of civil conflict and the civilians

who “question whether youth socialized to violence against elders ever belonged to the social world.” The final research article in this issue, Lalaie Ameeriar’s “The Sanitized Sensorium” addresses related questions of social belonging but in a very different context. By examining ideologies and everyday institutional practices, she demonstrates the contradictions of a multicultural rhetoric that “puts immigrants in an impossible situation in which they must sometimes suitably display their ‘Otherness,’ and at other times efface their cultural difference.”

These excellent research articles, with their conceptual and methodological range, on the one hand, and often-unexpected linkages, on the other hand, demonstrate the best of what anthropology has to offer. This issue includes as well a spectrum of book reviews, public anthropology reviews, and film reviews, as well as an obituary of the eminent anthropologist Fernando Coronil.

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The views expressed here are the editor’s and are not to be taken as a statement of the American Anthropological Association or its Executive Board.

NOTES

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1. It was announced on September 17, 2007: see <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/PressRelease/pressReleaseId-49153.html>.
2. See <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/Free-Access-to-Historical-Anthrosources-Content.cfm>.
3. For examples from other disciplines, see <http://www.elanguage.net/>, <http://digitalhumanitiesnow.org/>
4. See <http://opcit.eprints.org/oacitation-biblio.html>.
5. See <http://blogs.wiley.com/publishingnews/category/openaccess/>.
6. See <http://www.aaanet.org/about/Governance/Statement-of-Purpose.cfm>.
7. For further discussion of this issue, see <http://www.econ.ucsb.edu/~tedb/Journals/BundleContracts.html>.
8. See <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/American-Anthropological-Association-Position-on-Dissemination-of-Research.cfm>.

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