

# Anthropology News

ISSN 0098-1605

STACY M LATHROP, Managing Editor  
(slathrop@aaanet.org)

SARAH WALKER, Production Editor  
(swalker@aaanet.org)

*Anthropology News*, the official newspaper of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), is published monthly, except for June, July and August.

The mission of the AAA is to advance anthropology as the science that studies humankind in all its aspects, through archaeological, biological, ethnological and linguistic research; and to foster the use of anthropological knowledge in addressing human problems. *Anthropology News* (AN) advances this mission by providing members with news of association business; discussions of issues of vital importance to the discipline; and information on publications, professional job opportunities, research funding availability, meetings and other items of importance to members. AN promotes the discipline of anthropology and the interests of anthropologists across all subfields.

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Member dues (except for Joint Members) include a subscription to AN. Available by separate subscription for \$111 for institutions and nonmembers. Single copy \$13 for members, \$15.50 for nonmembers.

## Anthropology News

American Anthropological Association  
2200 Wilson Blvd, Suite 600  
Arlington, VA 22201-3357  
Telephone: 703/528-1902  
Fax: 703/528-3546

[www.aaanet.org/press/an/index.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/press/an/index.htm)

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Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices.

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Subscriptions: 703/528-1902, ext 1; [members@aaanet.org](mailto:members@aaanet.org)

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DIALOGUE

## Open Source Experiments

### What They Show About the Analyst's Frustrations in Intelligence Communities

CHRISTOPHER KELTY  
RICE U

GEORGE E MARCUS  
UC IRVINE

**W**hen the question of ethics emerges around the topic of intelligence gathering, security and spying, the first questions anthropologists usually pose are frequently something like the following: Should the CIA fund my research? Should I answer their questions? Should I give them my research? Should I agree to secrecy?

Good questions, no doubt, but are they the right ones? The AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities

professionally comfortable with assisting the worlds of classified and secret knowing, how likely is it that such information will have effect before it is filed?

It was a recent *NYT Magazine* article (December 3, 2006, by Clive Thompson) that raised this question most sharply: "In a world that is awash in information ... the meaning of intelligence is shifting." The article, "Open-Source Spying," reports on recent experiments in the intelligence community with what are known amongst the Internet digerati as Web 2.0 tools: blogs, wikis and "social software" that allow for large numbers of people to quickly post and communicate information in structured ways—the

a diplomatic resolution—this scenario is the model of intelligence to which all spies aspire.

Thus there is little incentive to participate in fancy Web 2.0 experiments that demand of agents that they freely give up secret information to a semi-anonymous, rapidly changing website—to do so is to abandon all hope of advancement. And secret here does not mean secure: the article points out that many spies distrust all electronic technologies, and prefer to keep their secrets in shoeboxes underneath their desks.

#### Order in Sharing and Secrecy

And yet, as the 9/11 Report made clear, the nature of intelligence today is in putting together little bits and pieces of highly disparate and diverse information—bits and pieces that mean nothing in



ON ANTHROPOLOGY AND US SECURITY/INTELLIGENCE

intends to investigate another, perhaps more troubling question that precedes these concerns and changes the nature of the default ethical imperative. To wit: How does research (whether anthropological monograph or secret info from spies) gain traction and become influential within the defense and intelligence agencies of contemporary nations?

#### Research and Influence

Before we assume that our research will help or hurt, should we be wondering how—and more likely—if it will ever see the light of day at all? Even if the information is truly helpful—even if an anthropologist is ethically and

most easily grasped example being "Intellipedia"—a version of the well known Wikipedia for spies, intelligence analysts and defense analysts, and one that exists on a classified network called Intelnet.

The reason for these experiments, the article explains, is the backward "culture" of the intelligence agencies—a culture that sounds remarkably similar to academia. Spies and analysts make their careers on the information they provide, and the reputation they build for having the right secrets at the right time. A spy who comes in from the cold with information about a planned test of biological weapons in Siberia, which leads to an international crisis and

themselves, but when combined start to form a picture. The *NYT* article does a great job of imagining what might have happened before 9/11, were all these tools in place. If intel agencies could share comments, post to each others' blogs, rapidly update a central set of pages on the Intellipedia and obsessively check the "recent changes" page, well then perhaps history would have been different. It's a nice thought experiment.

Of course, the idea raises certain paradoxes: to get such rich information, nearly everyone from the beat cop in Minnesota to the flight school operators in Arizona to James Bond himself, needs to be constantly blogging and updating their tips and infos. In other words, the "Planned Al Qaeda Plots" wiki-page basically needs to be on the Internet—not the Intelnet. But to do so would

#### Commentary Policy

AN Commentaries are designed to explore diverse views of the discipline from an anthropological perspective. Commentaries reflect the views of the authors; their publication does not signify endorsement by AN or the AAA. Authors are expected to verify all factual information included in the text.

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## Open Source

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mean the Al Qaeda plotters themselves need only check their RSS readers daily to know just what Intel knows.

By contrast, keeping the Intelipedia secret reduces its effectiveness—the more secret it is, the less effective it becomes—the limit case being the shoebox underneath the desk. Not only that, but the very problem of terrorism is that we don't know who are terrorists and who are not—so we have no *a priori* way to exclude them except to be completely paranoid. Sharing and secrecy each produce their own kind of order. Or as the article puts it, "social software doesn't work if people aren't social."

Thus there are conflicting demands: on one hand, a world awash with information and an emerging array of clever tools whose function is to manage that flood in a highly public and open manner (blogs, wikis, content management systems, RSS feeds, to say nothing of artificial intelligence projects to automate either the production or the consumption of information). On the other hand is an array of long-standing, sedimented practices and institutions (both academia and government) founded on an ideal of individual, autonomous and highly intelligent analysts who do the work of piecing together a story—whether that be a story of kinship and race, or a story of training camps and weapons-buying.

In the former, information has agency—and the Internet is its body; humans are condemned to "keep up" with it, "navigate" it, "surf" it or otherwise evolve strategies for solving problems and keeping afloat. In the latter, humans have agency, while information is conceived of as a kind of scarce good painstakingly collected like so many pottery sherds and cosmological diagrams.

### Paradoxical Networks

What makes this opposition so interesting is that it is also operative for suspected evildoers—whether they be terrorists or Earth Firsters, social movement activists or hackers, Zapatistas or Hamas—they too are confronted with the

question of what openness gets them, and what secrecy prevents. The Independent Media Centers, as Tish Stringer has shown, are ideologically and technologically devoted to maximum openness even as it puts them at risk of being discovered and targeted, either by right-wing fanatics or by the government. The Zapatistas—with their famous balaclava-wearing Subcomandante Marcos—play both sides: Marcos is a secret, but the network of supports and the flow of information and email about their movement is open and widespread.

Immediately after 9/11, *Wired* magazine published an issue whose cover declared "How to Win: Fighting the Network War" that showcased Rand researchers John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt in terms simultaneously prescient and nostalgic for the recently popped dot-com bubble. It was a kind of perfect connection between the dot-com digerati and the military strategists. But it turns out that not many people outside of *Wired* readers and Deleuze and Guattari fans have heard of these two guys—and certainly few if any of their ideas were implemented in the disastrous wars that followed 9/11.

Similarly, Thomas Barnett writes at length in "The Pentagon's New Map" about how hard it is to get his ideas about re-configuring the strategy of the Pentagon to be heard outside of the lowest echelons. Whatever these ideas are—good or bad—just because they come with a .mil address or out of a PowerPoint presentation delivered to the CIA—it hardly means they are ideas with any traction.

If we needed any further confirmation of this fact, the last five years of executive secrecy and deliberate refusal to accept any outside information should provide it. The structure of power in Washington—within the government bureaucracy—is somehow clearly at odds with the structure of knowledge production that Web 2.0 represents. ■

*Christopher Kelty, Rice University, is the author of the forthcoming "Two Bits: the Cultural Significance of Free Software and the Internet." George E Marcus is a member of the AAA Executive Board, a member of the AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities and Chancellor's Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of California-Irvine.*

## AAA Minority Dissertation Fellowship Program 2007

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invites minority doctoral candidates in anthropology to apply for a **full-year dissertation writing fellowship of \$10,000.**

The AAA *Minority Dissertation Fellowship* is intended to encourage members of ethnic minorities to complete doctoral degrees in anthropology. Dissertation topics in all areas of the discipline are welcome.

African American, Alaskan Native, American Indian or Native American, Asian American, Latino/a, Chicano/a, and Pacific Islander doctoral students who have been admitted to degree candidacy are urged to apply.

For more information contact Kathleen Terry-Sharp, Director of Academic Relations, ksharp@aaanet.org. Application materials and complete instructions are available from the AAA homepage at [www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org).

**Applications MUST be received by February 15, 2007**

Please Note: Incomplete applications will not be considered.

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**Deadline June 1, 2007**

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... Service to the AAA is commonly recognized, as are outstanding applications of anthropological knowledge to improving the human condition.

### AAA/McGraw Hill Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology

... Recognizes teachers who have contributed to and encouraged the study of anthropology.

### Anthropology in Media Award

... Recognizes the successful communication of anthropology to the general public through the media.

### Robert B Textor and Family Prize for Excellence in Anticipatory Anthropology

... Rewards the use of anthropological knowledge and practice to allow the public to make informed choices to improve societies' chances for realizing preferred futures.

### Margaret Mead Award

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... Recognizes recent outstanding achievements that have contributed to the development of anthropology as an applied science and have had important impacts on public policy.

### The David M Schneider Award in Anthropology

... For an original graduate student essay work on kinship, cultural theory, and American culture. The \$1,000 award will be given in recognition of work that treats one or more of these topics in a fresh and innovative fashion.

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