



Acceptance and Rejection

Every month, as part of my work as Editor-in-Chief of *American Anthropologist*, I send letters of acceptance to authors who have submitted manuscripts to the journal. It is a joy to be able to validate the importance of significant research and to help ensure such work is made available to a wide audience.

Unfortunately, every month I must also send a greater number of rejection letters. I truly hate doing this; it is the most difficult and unpleasant aspect of my duties as Editor-in-Chief. However, it must be done—because of limitations of space but also because not all manuscripts are ready for publication in *American Anthropologist*, and I am ultimately charged with making this call.

When I reject a manuscript, I put as much time and energy into my decision letter as I do for those manuscripts accepted for publication. I try to provide ideas for future revision and sincerely hope that every author will find a suitable venue for their manuscript. As I have stated in earlier editorials and as should be clear from perusing the contents of this or any issue of *American Anthropologist*, what guides my decisions with regard to acceptance and rejection is not a particular school of thought, tone of voice, or methodological toolkit: *American Anthropologist* works to present the best of all the varied conversations that exist under the rubric of “anthropology.” The goal of this journal is not to adjudicate between these conversations but, rather, to place them in further dialogue with each other, without forcing that dialogue to take place on the terms of any one approach or perspective.

When making these difficult decisions about acceptance and rejection, I bring to the table two personal experiences that help me understand the dynamics involved.

First, I once had a manuscript rejected from *American Anthropologist*. Like any rejection this was disappointing, but in retrospect I realize that the manuscript had serious flaws, making it unready for publication. With the help of the comments I received from the Editor-in-Chief at the

time and also from the anonymous reviewers, I was able to revise the manuscript such that it was, within a year’s time, accepted for publication at another top-tier journal (Boellstorff 2004).

Second, I once had a manuscript accepted for publication in *American Anthropologist* (Boellstorff 2005). However, the manuscript was only accepted after multiple rounds of revision. I confess that, at the time, I grumbled privately at the labor those revisions entailed. However, I am eternally thankful that it was the final—not the original—version of that manuscript that saw the light of day. From the revision process there emerged a much more theoretically compelling argument, and it was one far more effectively integrated with the ethnographic materials.

From these experiences, I have learned to understand rejection as simply one step along the route to publication and, more generally, as part of the scholarly process. The dynamic of acceptance and rejection is part of any journal’s work, and with regard to *American Anthropologist* I hope to make both sides of the equation as productive as possible.

In making these decisions about acceptance and rejection, I rely heavily on the work of anonymous reviewers. As this is the final issue of *American Anthropologist* for 2008, it is an appropriate time for me to thank these reviewers for the crucial work they perform. To ensure the greatest possible anonymity for these reviewers, I will not mention them by name, but each and every reviewer has played a pivotal role in this journal’s success. Prior to becoming Editor-in-Chief of *American Anthropologist*, I had reviewed manuscripts for a range of journals and presses. However, it is only now, when I am able to see a large number of reviews (not only those I have written, or those that review one of my own manuscripts), that I can truly appreciate the incredible contribution that AA reviewers provide.

I am always prepared to redact reviews if I encounter inappropriate or ad hominem comments. It is striking that

I have not had to engage in such redaction a single time since becoming Editor-in-Chief. I have found reviewers for *American Anthropologist* to be consistently respectful, diligent, and engaged. A substantial percentage of reviewers provide pages on pages of insightful comments. Even when they disagree with a manuscript's argument or do not recommend accepting it, reviewers offer helpful advice that is relevant to the subfield and approach in question.

This consistently high quality of responses reflects the stellar work of the AA Editorial Board in suggesting insightful reviewers that are well-matched to the manuscripts under review. This effectiveness of reviews also reflects the robust health of our discipline, pulling the rug out from any claim that ours is a fractured discipline in which ideological battles have displaced careful empirical and theoretical work. Instead, what we find is a range of thriving communities of scholarly inquiry.

I would like to personally thank each and every reviewer of AA manuscripts for their service to the journal this year. To all readers of this journal I have a message: if you have not reviewed a manuscript for *American Anthropologist* in the past (and even if you have done so), it may happen that in the next year you will receive a request to review a manuscript. Should such an e-mail make its way to your inbox, I strongly encourage you to agree to review for this journal. I personally do an initial review of each manuscript myself, so should we take the time to request a review from you, you may rest assured that I have deemed the manuscript in question to be at least potentially appropriate for *American Anthropologist*. It may very well represent a cutting-edge piece of research that could stimulate your own thinking. By agreeing to review, you help participate in the growth and success of *American Anthropologist* itself.

In this issue of *American Anthropologist*, you will find research articles that represent a range of compelling anthropological work, all further improved by the process of review and revision discussed above. In their article "The Evolutionary Forms of the Religious Life," Stephen K. Sanderson and Wesley W. Roberts employ a quantitative, cross-cultural analysis to make compelling claims about relationships between forms of religious practice and institutionalization, on the one hand, and a range of social factors (like subsistence economy and population size), on the other hand. Readers will discover fascinating resonances between this article and Philip Kohl's article "Shared Social Fields," which draws on the archaeological record to argue for a creative, macrohistorical interpretation of human prehistory. More distant but nonetheless fascinating "resonances" to Sanderson and Roberts's interest in religion can be seen in Deborah Kapchan's "The Promise of Sonic Translation." In this article, Kapchan employs her fieldwork in Morocco to examine how international music festivals shape what she calls "transnational communities of affect" through deployments of sentiment and the sacred. In "Statemaking, Knowledge, and Ignorance," Andrew S. Mathews explores how forms of knowledge can be pro-

duced through entanglements of "state" and "indigenous" discourse, with special attention to the paradoxical roles of silence and concealment in this knowledge production. I invite the reader to discover implicit linkages between Mathews's argument and the arguments of Kapchan and Kohl, among others.

In addition to the research articles mentioned above, this issue of *American Anthropologist* features an "In Focus" section entitled "Culture in the Spaces of No Culture." In their introductory essay to this section, Ilana Gershon and Janelle S. Taylor consider, in their words, "the consequences that follow when people in a variety of institutions—courts, armies, and legislatures—find culture good for understanding others (this issue)." What happens when the "culture concept"—which has been dismissed by anthropologists as predicated on boundary making and insensitive to power but is, at the same time, surprisingly resilient and even crucial to cutting-edge theorization—shows up in places "outside" anthropology and "outside" the locations anthropologists often identify as cultural?

These themes are carried through the three research articles making up this "In Focus". In "Being Explicit about Culture," Ilana Gershon explores debates in the New Zealand parliament as to "whether the indigenous Māori are a cultural group or a racial group (this issue)." Among other goals of this article, Gershon works to examine how notions of culture and race are deployed in an ostensibly "noncultural" context. Melissa Demian's "Fictions of Intention in the 'Cultural Defense'" joins the work done by a group of anthropologists and other scholars interested in the conceptions of "culture" deployed in courts under the rubric of the "cultural defense." Demian, however, distinguishes her contribution by noting that rather than critiquing the notion of "culture" used in the cultural defense "from a position of anthropological authority (or worse, ownership), my object is to ask what sort of evidence culture is that it can be marshaled as a legal argument (this issue)." This "In Focus" section is rounded out by Keith Brown's "All They Understand Is Force," in which Brown explores military uses of the culture concept in relation to the current conflict in Iraq. Brown's analysis is predicated on disrupting a homogenous view of military discourse, working instead to elucidate "an internal, critical theoretical disagreement between a model of culture as a static, or slow-moving, property of a constructed 'other,' embraced by mainstream thought in the U.S. Army, and a competing sense of cultural process as dynamic, interactive, and emergent, emphasized by Special Forces and the Marine Corps (this issue)."

As in the two issues of *American Anthropologist* prior to this one, this issue also features four messages from editors of other AAA journals. In addition to a number of single book reviews, the "Book Reviews" section of this issue includes a special "Author-Meets-Readers" forum focusing on Sally Engle Merry's *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (2006). The issue

also includes reports and reviews under the banner of visual anthropology, three obituaries, and two commentaries that build scholarly conversations with regard to recently published articles and reviews. Taken as a whole, all of the contributions to this issue of *American Anthropologist* offer compelling and finely honed analyses that will, I hope, be of interest to you, whatever your own theoretical and research foci.

REFERENCES CITED

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