

During the past half a century or so, both life and anthropology (and related themes and disciplines) have taken sharp turns. In her perceptive review of the state of anthropological theory, “Anthropology since the Sixties,” Ortner (1984) nicely captured the decline of the three schools dominant in the 1950s (structural functionalism, cultural and psychological anthropology, evolutionary anthropology), the new frameworks that emerged during the 1960s (symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology, structuralism), how each of them drew upon and differed from their predecessors, and how they collectively, in turn, generated new theoretical avenues during the 1970s (in particular, several kinds of Marxism). Reflecting on the landscape ahead, she anticipated a new emergent “key symbol of theoretical orientation” (Ortner 1984: 127) – namely, practice or praxis, partly through the influence of Bourdieu (1978). Ortner was right, but only up to a point.

13.1 Styles and context

Any convincing account of the development of anthropological theory since the eighties is bound to give substantial weight to the shift from structure to agency and to the various ways in which practice theory has been developed and used during the subsequent decades. Ortner’s claim, on the other hand, about the fuzziness of community boundaries, the quiet and peaceful coexistence of “small coteries,” and the absence of “stirring arguments” in the early 1980s failed to foresee the rough and divided road ahead:

The field appears to be a thing of shreds and patches, of individuals and small coteries pursuing disjunctive investigations and talking mainly to themselves. We do not even hear stirring arguments any more . . . We no longer call each other names. We are no longer sure of how the sides are to be drawn up, and of where we would place ourselves if we could identify the sides. (Ortner 1984: 126)

The same year that Ortner’s article was published, a group of scholars gathered in Santa Fe for a ground-breaking theoretical discussion that later materialized in *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Signaling the birth of a

long-standing and heated debate on the postmodern that would split the community into rather clearly demarcated camps, *Writing Culture* illustrated the difficulties of anticipating theoretical currents that set the stage for years to come.

During the 1930s, years before the concept of scientific paradigms gained currency, Fleck (1979: 142) pointed to the idea of changing “thought styles.” If thought styles name the world, generating perceptions that “stick,” there has to be a collaborative and receptive audience; namers and context, so to speak, coproduce those styles. What, then, have been the main forces channeling anthropological interests, shifts in perception, and persistent theoretical scrutiny? Several radical changes in intellectual culture and geopolitics have helped to shape anthropological theory. One of the key changes involved was that of the postmodern turn that would inform the discussion and framing of many key issues, including ethnographic authority, the constitution of ethnographic facts, the proper manner of writing ethnographies, and, last but not least, the decline of grand narrative.

The prime example of grand narrative in anthropology and the humanities is structuralism, which also inspired theorizing in several other fields, including linguistics (Roman Jakobson, Noam Chomsky), the psychology of cognitive development (Jean Piaget), and biology (François Jacob). Aided by mathematical language and precision, the discovery of previously hidden structures and units (phonemes, mythemes, genes) was assumed to explain just about anything. Anthropology, then, had a powerful theory that many other disciplines could emulate and adapt for their own purposes. In recent decades, however, partly due to postmodern critique of totalizing theories, structuralism has increasingly been under attack. Structuralist perspectives, however, remain strong in some fields, in particular the gene talk of molecular biology and biomedicine, but even here the semiotic systems presupposed have increasingly been subsumed by the biosocial turn – invaded by relations and context, by challenges posed by, for instance, epigenetics and developmental systems theory (Krimsky and Gruber 2013).

To some extent, postmodernism underlined an anthropological Mid-Atlantic Rift by the turn of the century, with its tectonic friction and divisions. It was not, in fact, a uniform thought style with the same perceptions and effects in different academic contexts on either side of that rift. Godelier (2009: 2, 19) warns that the collective work of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze, known in the United States as “French theory,” was “a purely American invention, since France recognizes no such unified body of thought,” adding that one should not put “Americans on trial,” and “that . . . conflating all those who have rallied to or are accused of having cheered ‘Postmodernism’” would not make sense. There were, indeed, important North American strands, including that of the interpretive anthropology of Geertz.

Postmodernism, no doubt, had a useful impact in that it sensitized the anthropological community and related fields to the role of the ethnographic scribe, highlighting the need to situate accounts and, more importantly, to continue to experiment with methods and representations. Significantly, the modernist notion of ecological anthropology that was popular in the 1970s and the 1980s, which tended to separate human discourse from the systems observed, seems to have been replaced by the more open-ended label of “environmental anthropology,” emphasizing situated accounts, the perspective of dwelling, and the unity of humans and that which surrounds them (Ingold 2000).

In the long run, on the other hand, the appeal of radical postmodernism began to fade. After all, it was argued, some kind of grand narrative might be unavoidable, even essential, for responsible scholarship, given the pressing global problems faced by humans and life itself. Would environmental anthropology, for instance, be of any use if it only deconstructed discourses on climate change, and would it be socially and environmentally responsible to abandon any attempt to establish the conditions of the biosphere and to inquire into the implications for anthropological subjects? And has postmodernism, which by now has been around for almost a century, not had a grand narrative of its own, an ironic and cheerful nihilism?

At more or less the same time that postmodernism was gaining force, globalization and neoliberal politics settled in, paving the way for the new economy of Late Capitalism, an economy characterized by, among other things, venture capitalists, fluctuating markets, Internet technology, and digital trading (Fisher and Downey 2006). These events generated theoretical interest in a series of new and renewed themes, such as cultural flows, spatial formations, property rights, and the nature of the political economy. For some analysts, virtualism represented a new political economy that conflated the domains of economy, society, and the community of economists modeling the market: “Perceiving a virtual reality becomes virtualism when people take this virtual reality to be not just a parsimonious description of what is really happening, but prescriptive of what the world ought to be: when, that is, they seek to make the world conform to their virtual vision” (Carrier 1998: 2). Not only did these developments echo both the postmodern condition and K. Polanyi’s early work on “fictitious commodities,” they also seem pertinent for theoretical understanding of more recent dramatic changes in both the world economy – global financial crises, marketing bubbles, and collapses of banks and national economies – and the political economy of life itself.

For several scholars, a return to Marxian theory – suppressed and marginalized during the heydays of postmodernism, neoliberalism, and the Cold War – provides an important avenue for understanding power, inequalities, biopolitics, and the human condition more broadly in Late Capitalism.

Patterson (2009: 159–160) suggests, for instance, that Marx would be relevant for a number of modern themes, including the historicity of human beings, capitalism, and transformations on an increasingly global scale. Keeping in mind Polanyi's early work on the fictitious and Carrier's notion of the virtual, it is rather saddening to see that anthropologists, with notable exceptions (for example, Tett 2009), failed to detect and disentangle the recent financial bubbles until the collapses they implied had eventually occurred. In the wake of the recent crises, it seems, virtualism needs to be dissected and exposed and placed firmly on the agenda, highlighting the importance of theorizing the transformations of capitalist economies and their implications for culture and society, locally and globally, and all kinds of anthropologies of life.

13.2 Disciplining thoughts

The classification of academic fields and disciplines is often seen as somehow natural or predetermined, as a final state of affairs bound to be revealed eventually through the processes of history. In C.P. Snow's classic formulation, the gap between the "two cultures" – between the natural sciences, on the one hand, and, on the other, the arts, humanities, and social sciences – was self-evident (Snow 2001). Increasingly during the past few years, however, academics have seen this binary construction as masking a much more complex field. Academic fields and disciplines are relatively recent and unstable phenomena established and modified in particular historical contexts. The conditions for academic practice continue to change, and, as a result, so do disciplines and their division of labor. At the same time, new fields emerge in response to new developments. A blurring of genres seems inevitable; the future academe may be multicultural and transdisciplinary. During the twentieth century, spectacular developments in genetics and related fields, including the so-called new genetics, not only elevated molecular biology and the life sciences to the status of Big Science but made biology arguably more important than physics. Where does this leave anthropology, a field traditionally divided along the biological–social axis? Will the new genetics and associated theoretical and technological developments signify a reshuffling of the anthropologies taught and practiced in the twenty-first century? Will they lead to an even more hybrid and lively assembly of "anthropological" paradigms and practices?

Recent research in the fields of anthropology, cultural theory, sociology, as well as history and philosophy of science, has readjusted the notion of knowledge as something that is already there and only needs to be retrieved, towards the notion of knowledge as something that is produced through social practice. Not only has the modernist project, with its notions of truth and grand narrative, increasingly been challenged, the academic landscape of fields and

disciplines in itself is tense and unstable. The changes now taking place may be just as spectacular as the changes represented by the Renaissance and Enlightenment. If disciplines, subdisciplines, and fields of inquiry arise, develop, and disappear, much like natural species in evolutionary theory, how should one represent this process? How is it disciplined (in the dual sense of controlling and fragmentation), what validates the candidacy of a discipline or a field, and what would be the languages and metaphors most appropriate for the theoretical understanding of current and future developments? In the past, spatial metaphors were commonly used to talk about disciplinary fragmentation: borders, zones, areas, fields, provinces, pastures, and territories. Recently, new hybrid zones of intellectual discourse *bordering on* different fields of science have appeared at a growing rate. Indeed, transdisciplinarity has its advantages, as much creative work develops at the interfaces of established fields of scholarship. At the same time, some transdisciplinary issues and perspectives that used to represent a specific voice or platform in several fields, notably race and gender, often seem to have been co-opted, mixing with and reshaping the fields in question. This is evident in anthropology, where many feminist perspectives formerly at the critical margin have moved to the core.

Clearly, Snow's idea of the two cultures seems increasingly archaic, given the current conflation of all kinds of domains and the destabilization of the dualisms of the past. Keeping in mind the conflation of the domains of the natural and the social and the radical culturing of life with the new genetics, the demarcation of sociocultural anthropology, on the one hand, and, on the other, biological and physical anthropology seems misguided (*contra* Segal and Yanagisako 2005). It seems likely that anthropology will be redefined, in terms of both its internal divisions and its relations to other disciplines. While there is often strong resistance in academies and universities to erasing disciplinary boundaries, quite possibly the current "blurring of genres" will make academe *post-disciplinary*.

Not only have there been several roads out of the writing culture of Santa Fe, also in recent decades anthropological theory has been informed by several other nodes in the emergent network of events and ideas. Some turned out to be dead ends, others have recycled earlier themes, much like the theoretical schools charted by Ortner (1984), while still others have opened up new ethnographic and theoretical vistas for the future. Anthropologists will continue to debate, hopefully without calling each other names, what counts as dead-end and what represents a new and promising vista. Given, however, both the refashioned human condition in the contemporary world and the contested understandings of some of the core orientations and key concepts of anthropology, anthropology and related disciplines need to do extensive homework on theory, concepts, methods, and disciplinary formation and collaboration. Significantly, as we have seen, a biosocial turn is characterizing academic agendas to an unprecedented degree, across both the social and the life sciences.

Method, of course, is informed by social context and social theory. Whatever its advantages, the classic, single-site model of ethnography demands important qualifications. At least two major methodological trends have taken place in recent decades. The first is that of multi-sited fieldwork emphasizing cultural and material flows, spatial connections, and different scales of observation, moving near and far, from the center to the margin and back. Multi-sited fieldwork is at least partly a byproduct of globalization and changing conditions of fieldwork in the postcolonial era. Secondly, collaborative methods have been gaining ground. Ethnographers often speak of collaboration in relation to the entire research process, from research design to publication.

This involves expanding the community of modelers, blurring the boundary between the observer and the observed in the coproduction of knowledge. One example is Gudeman and Rivera's (1995: 245) emphasis on the making of ethnography "*with a people*": "Doing ethnography is joint work, teamwork, not a discovery, and not an interpretation of a preexistent, fixed culture." For Lassiter (2005: 72), the radical move to collaboration has much to do with the shifting context of fieldwork and the growth of multi-sited ethnography: "In sum, the 'new ethnography' potentially moves collaboration from the taken-for-granted background of ethnography to its foreground." No doubt, collaborative work is also informed by the growing impact of practice theory and postcolonial studies, granting agency to the people formerly identified as passive informants. An associated and still relatively underdeveloped methodological development is that of studying up, rather than down or sideways, in science studies of laboratories and high-tech teams. Interestingly, in such contexts the tone of humility characteristic of collaborative ethnography is often submerged, if not entirely lost.

Neither multi-sited ethnography nor collaboration is entirely new. While many of the early ethnographers tended to stick to a single site throughout a field period, seeking to develop a broad perspective, some of them repeatedly moved from one site to another. Likewise, collaborative approaches draw upon earlier experimenting with dialogue and consultancy in feminist scholarship and critical ethnography. No doubt, experimenting with multi-sited approaches and collaborative forms of publication and dialogue will continue, but these trends are no longer seen as experimental; rather, they represent emergent norms that young scholars tend to see as appropriate to the conditions of ethnographic work in the contemporary world.

13.3 The house and the body

The discipline of anthropology is part of the ongoing negotiation of the boundaries between the social and the biological, given its conventional fragmenting of *Anthropos*. Keeping in mind that the notions of "biology"

and “the body” have been radically socialized, at the same time as the notions of “social theory” and “society” have been thoroughly embodied and materialized, it seems pertinent to rethink *Anthropos* and the discipline of anthropology. Attempting to make sense of the political economy of modern biotechnology, including the fragmenting of body parts and the labor processes involved, a series of scholars (for example, Lock and Nguyen 2010) have revisited the writings of Marx and Foucault. Quite possibly, the growing awareness of the conflation of the natural and the social through studies of the post-human and contemporary biopolitics will be one of the key forces shaping anthropological theory, and much of academe, in the decades to come.

The house, the body, and the environment are intimately connected; the house serves like an extra skin mediating between persons and the context within which they are embedded. Ethnographic evidence shows that houses are often thought of as bodies (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 2). Housekeeping, then, is frequently a matter of both constituting bodies and environments. In the South American model, the flow of vital energy connects the house and human bodies. Just as the energy of life – *vis vita* – drives the household, it sustains the body, in fact all living things. As one peasant put it, “[i]n working you are using the strength of food . . . When you eat, you replace this strength . . . This goes on and on in the body. People suffer when they do not have enough force to work. They are using up their health” (Gudeman 2012: 60). Given a housekeeping model of the Anthropocene, this “vital” connection between person and planet, organism and environment, needs to be restored.

Charles Darwin may provide a lead. In a well-known passage in *The Origin of Species*, he presented the notion of entanglement somewhat at odds with his main thesis:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth . . . There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers. (Darwin 2008: 210–211)

Human entanglement is characterized by the complex biosocial relations within which we are embedded. Food, of course, provides one of the key avenues. As Probyn (2013: 289) suggests, “[a]cross a number of scales, eating ties us into global-local geo-political webs: the ecological landscape of food-human and non-humans.”

Nutritional environments (the kind and quantity of food) – early environments, in particular – condition the possibility for gene expression, potentially affecting our health and well-being. Such “epigenetic” regulation seems to be prevalent in the human genome. Niewöhner (2011: 281) suggests that social and cultural anthropologists may benefit from the challenge of what he calls

“environmental epigenetics,” to “rethink the role of materiality for the patterning of social practice.” According to the field of nutritional epigenetics, food transforms the organism’s being, leaving an imprint on the body (Landecker and Panofsky 2013). A similar idea seems captured in the South American house model; physical (phenotypic) resemblance despite different (genetic) ancestry is accounted for by “sharing the strength of the earth” (Gudeman 2012: 65). In light of the profound changes that have taken place in the understanding of bodies and their “environments,” to what extent do they present new problems of governance during the Anthropocene?

Along with some other body issues, genomic and microbiotic material seems to invite new property dimensions and considerations – new kinds of housekeeping. With the new genetics, environmental epigenetics, the development of biomedicine, and the expanding production of biocapital, the very notion of the “biological world” has been destabilized as “nature” is increasingly subject to artificial, human, and social refashioning (Rose 2005). Moreover, the possibility of zooming in on the micro-world of cellular material inevitably destabilizes common notions of the biological. This in turn demands a rethinking of the governance of biological commons and raises important questions about the relevance and applicability of new institutional frameworks.

13.4 Environmental politics and theory

Discussions on how to address what now counts as “environmental” concerns have a long history, especially in political theory. William Lloyd wrote his tract “On the Checks to Population” in 1833, exploring the problem of overstocked pastures in the commons of old England with a conceptual framework that later inspired much work on commons (Lloyd 1977). Until the 1980s, however, the commons had not been addressed in the context of consistent comparative and empirical work juxtaposing speculation and theory, on the one hand, and actual regimes, on the other. At that point, several fields of scholarship – in particular, anthropology, ecology, economics, and political science (see, for instance, McCay and Acheson 1987) – collectively established a new interdisciplinary domain focusing on the cultures, practices, and institutions associated with the governance of commons.

For early political economists – Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, and some others – labor activities were, by definition, directed at the extrasomatic, external world. Thanks to their labor activities, however, humans are now able to reproduce their own bodies, as part of the “inorganic body” of nature, turning themselves into a “resource.” Not only have the capacities of the body been fragmented and turned into instruments for production, redefining both human labor and human bodies, the sites of labor and

production have increasingly been separated with the growth of the World Wide Web, network society, and virtual migration. “Paradoxically,” Aneesh (2006: 2) notes, “the new space of transnational labor has reversed its relationship with the worker’s body. Rather than move the body across enormous distances, new mechanisms allow it to stay put while moving vast quantities of data at the speed of light.” This, too, invites commons issues and concerns. Governing the “house,” as a result, has become vastly more complex than classical theory suggests.

Without doubt, the new interdisciplinary effort to address questions related to governance was partly informed by the growing environmental problems of late modernity, including those posed by rapidly expanding human populations, ever more efficient technologies of extraction and exploitation, and the near collapse of entire ecosystems and animal populations, especially fish. More than any other single recent work, Ostrom’s book *Governing the Commons* (1990) carved the new interdisciplinary domain of the commons. In the process, our world of concern was expanded. “Think galactically, act locally!” is not just a Star Trek thing on the Internet, there are serious concerns with the commons of both the globe and celestial bodies (with rubbish in outer space and cultural heritage on the moon).

In recent years, political and environmental theory has been zooming *out*, emphasizing the interconnected world of Gaia and the detrimental “anthropocenic” signatures of humans on the global front. These concerns, however, are rarely connected and compared to those pertaining to the organismic and cellular level (Palsson and Prainsack 2011). A comparison of some recent works helps to illustrate the point. In her book *Reframing Rights: Bioconstitutionalism in the Genetic Age*, Jasanoff (2011: 3) usefully discusses the problems of entitlements in the context of life itself, pointing out that “periods of significant change in the life sciences and technologies should be seen as constitutional or, more precisely, *bioconstitutional* in their consequences. Revolutions in our understanding of what life is burrow so deep into the foundations of our social and political structures that they necessitate, in effect, a rethinking of law at a constitutional level.” Interestingly, however, despite her emphasis on the bioconstitutional, Jasanoff’s book makes no reference to E. Ostrom or her followers. Nor do Ostrom’s books on the commons pay any notable attention to the level of organisms, cells, and genes. Her book *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice* (Hess and Ostrom 2006) only extends the commons perspective to the domain of information and the Internet. Her earlier book *Understanding Institutional Diversity*, which lists a number of cases and contexts for exploring the “building blocks” (Ostrom 2005: 9) of institutions, similarly makes no connection to the context of genomics and biomes. Given the growing recognition of human–environmental entanglements in the Anthropocene, including the

development of epigenetics and microbiomics, it seems time to consistently link the levels of nano and giga.

The metaphor of the wind may be instructive to capture the problems of managing the flow of vital energy through bodies and biomes. As Evans and Reid (2014: chap. 4) suggest, “atmosphere” penetrates and profoundly influences our bodies. While the wind is best described as movement and force, not as chemical substance, it can be regarded as “fugitive” resource interacting with landscape to produce, among other things, bodily sensation and energy. Lifshitz-Goldberg (2010) suggests the wind is an example of semi-commons where private and common property overlap and interact. Not only do wind farms necessarily draw upon the features of the terrestrial landscapes of public plains and cities, also they produce a so-called “Shadow Effect”; once the wind has encountered a mill or a turbine its strength and energy content is reduced, and, as a result, other users in its path will be somehow affected. Similar concerns need to be raised and discussed for the context of the “winds” and “shadow effects” of epigenetics. Our porous bodies, then, and their internal and external networks and relations are becoming center-stage.

As long as one exclusively focused on the internal relations of cells and bodies, the issue of genomic governance seemed to resist the gaze and reasoning of political theory traditionally focused on the external biological world. Now, however, it seems we are back in a rather familiar terrain; microbiomes and epigenetic processes, after all, invite standard questions about distributive issues, rights to meaningful participation, social justice, and intergenerational fairness. One driving force behind the growing governance discourse of the late twentieth century was the advancement in many contexts of corporations, the “new economy,” the free-market, virtualism, and neoliberal movements and governments. These were epidemic developments, no less straddling than migrating fishing stocks, ignoring conventional disciplinary boundaries and academic territories. Alternative governance models are needed for dealing with the global environmental crisis and the embedded body. In order to govern bodies and genomes it is necessary to both manage access to certain parts of our environmental commons (clean air and water, in particular) and to *avoid*, minimize, or adjust the impact of some others (toxic substances, radiation, and microbiomes, for example). These issues are already central concerns.

13.5 Key questions

Given the preceding discussion, the social sciences and the humanities need to play an important role in transdisciplinary research on the theoretical and political frameworks invited by the Anthropocene, posing new research questions and raising new issues that require new ways of thinking and acting. Among the key questions and issues that need to be addressed are the following:

1. *House models*. Gudeman (2012: 72–73) observes that his South American ethnography on the house model “throws sparks in multiple directions,” demonstrating a “current of vitality” that blurs the division between human society and the environment. Emphasizing the need to seek ways of imagining a better world for humans, non-humans, and the rest of nature, Cronon (1996: 85–86) suggests we pay attention to the “middle ground”: “The middle ground is where we actually live. It is where we – all of us, in our different places and ways – make our homes.” It now seems pertinent to explore house models – to systematically examine their similarities and difference and their limits and potential for the context of the Anthropocene – through both the ethnographic and archival records. This would be a worthwhile and major anthropological and historical task. Attending to ethnographies and “other” voices and models is a precondition for aligning a variety of actors and agencies at various levels of governance under conditions of complexity and uncertainty.
2. *Solidarity and responsibility*. Given both our relatively new role as geological agents and our awareness of it, it is now *our* primary responsibility to observe, to reflect, and to act. Some recent works on the world of biomedicine and its resources provide a significant step forward on how to proceed. Thus, Prainsack and Buyx (2012) outline the history of the concept of solidarity and related terms, their growing salience in political theory and public discourse, and their usefulness in the context of concerns with biobanks, pandemics, and lifestyle-related diseases. The notion and framework of solidarity necessarily invite key questions about participation and authority. Members of the global anthropogenic household are not an undifferentiated “we” – formed by “the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes,” to paraphrase Marx’s description, in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* of 1852, of the “great mass” of the French nation. There are important differences among “us,” including those of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and history. Such differences imply that one cannot assume a single self-aware agent addressing the Anthropocene:

The fact that the crisis of climate change will be routed through all our “anthropological differences” can only mean that, however anthropogenic the current global warming may be in its origins, there is no corresponding “humanity” that in its oneness can act as a political agent. (Chakrabarty 2012: 14)

For Chakrabarty, contemporary environmental politics is caught in the tension between the universalizing discourse on the species-being of humans and their collective responsibilities, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, postcolonial politics emphasizing difference and particularity. Resolving or amending such tension remains one of the central tasks on the Anthropogenic agenda.

In addition to our differences, our ambitions at times to act collectively for the benefit of sustainable life are thwarted or blocked by what Benson and Kirsch (2010) call the “politics of resignation” – the manufacture of apathy, cynical distance, the hijacking of critique, and the erosion of public trust. While their analysis is based on the powerful role of capitalist corporations in particular empirical contexts (those of tobacco and mining), it has broad relevance for environmental discourse, the problems of apathy expressed in the American vernacularism of “whatever,” an implicit assumption of having no political choices and accepting status quo. Under what conditions, Benson and Kirsch (2010: 460) ask, can the politics of resignation become the basis of transformative politics?

3. *Knowing and being*. Finally, a larger issue remains the broader understanding of “what happens when the human starts to be written into the geological record” (Szerszynski 2012: 168). In geological terms, humans have become a geophysical force, aware, at the same time, of both their role and responsibility. Presumably, this is the rationale behind the expected decision of the International Commission on Stratigraphy to add the category of the “Anthropocene” to the previous list of geological epochs. What does the presumed dual role of subject and object imply? Chakrabarty observes that “we now . . . have a mode of existence in which we – collectively and as a geophysical force and in ways we cannot experience ourselves – are ‘indifferent’ or ‘neutral’ . . . to questions of intrahuman justice. We have *run up against our own limits as it were*.” “Call the mode of being a ‘species’ or something else,” he goes on, “but it has no ontology, it is beyond biology, and it acts as a limit to what we also are in the ontological mode” (Chakrabarty 2012: 14; emphasis added).

Perhaps the predicament of the geologists need not puzzle anthropologists studying the nano-scale of the Anthropocene, the implications of the new genetics, biomics, epigenetics, and similar developments for both *Anthropos* and the study of humans. Have we also run up against *our own* limits? After all, in studying ourselves and the ways in which we refashion bodies and relations we lose an element of objectivity. In a sense, this is anthropocentric anthropology *completely* at home. Any account of human life, however, whatever the scale or context (genomes, cells, bodies, households, the planet), is necessarily situated. The neutral gaze from afar, outside the system observed, is an impossibility, a figment of the modernist imagination. As we have seen, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain any kind of distinction between observers and the observed, nature and nurture, organism and environment, nano and giga. An integration of the biological and the social along the lines of the biosocial turn should facilitate a broad notion of biopolitics, abandoning narrow conceptualizations of life itself, agency, and responsibility.

Human activities increasingly refashion the structures of bodies and genomes, human and non-human, even life itself; and organisms and species increasingly seem conflated and fuzzy – in Darwin’s words “entangled.” The environment is literally *embodied* in humans through social practices and, moreover, humans themselves partly *consist of* microbial ecosystems. Given the intimate relations of porous bodies and molecular environments, how should human–environmental relations be conceptualized and refashioned? An important issue now is to capture Darwin’s insight and to see where it would lead. To what extent would it be meaningful and useful to extend the notion of Anthropocenic impact to include the human body and “life itself”? Might we benefit from applying the same theoretical and political frameworks to the nano-world of bodies, cells, biomes, and genes and the giga-worlds of the globe? What would be “good” governance in such contexts? How is it possible to align public and private interests? What would count as “private,” given our entanglements?

As we have seen, life has become center stage for anthropology and related disciplines. As it travels through epistemic space, it has adapted to and co-evolved with scientific perceptions and practices at several fronts. Some of the important historical developments relate to the Cold War, the arrival of modern genetics and bioinformatics, the quest for outer space, the growth of inter-species sensibilities, and the awareness of anthropocenic change. Yet the disciplinary tensions in anthropology along the nature/society divide are as strong as ever. Strangely enough for the study of a single species, life itself and life as such seem to belong to separate intellectual galaxies.

To explain the rapid upsurge in anthropological interest in the body in the 1980s, Martin (1992) drew upon Lévi-Strauss’s argument about the fascination with the disappearing primitive; just as the category of the primitive seemed to fade away or prepare for departure, as a result of radical shifts in geopolitics, it seemed to demand anthropological scrutiny and attention. Similarly, Martin (1992: 121) suggested, the recent interest in the body signified its disappearance, “a dramatic transition in body percept and practice . . . the end of one kind of body and the beginning of another.” Could it be that we have also seen the end of one kind of life and the beginning of another? Anthropology, in any case, along with several related fields, seems teaming with life, at least in the sense that the idea of “life” has become the center of attention for many anthropologists.

For me, in closing, the notion of “anthropologies of life” primarily refers to comparative explorations of the *making* of life, however fuzzy and unstable life may be and at whatever scale (from minute genomes to the planetary Gaia), through human thinking and practices, in collaboration with a host of other species and entities. Drawing attention to the *activity* of life rather than its essence, emphasizing the verb “to live,” may help to illuminate.

When suggesting that “to live is to radiate; it is to organize the milieu from and around a center of reference,” Canguilhem (2008: 113–114) insisted that the study of “the living” should not treat individuality as an object but as an “attribute.” The radiating center (functional humans, capable of metabolism, being healthy, and staying alive) is the embedded organism, a node in a meshwork of biosocial relations.