

DEMANDS

ON THE LOGIC OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL INQUIRY

OF THE DAY

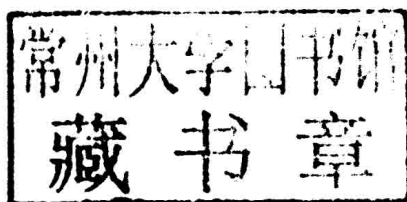
PAUL RABINOW and
ANTHONY STAVRIANAKIS



**Demands of the Day:
On the Logic of Anthropological Inquiry**

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Preface

This book is about the unfolding of one particular anthropological inquiry and the logical standards and forms that guided it. Although the experiment is a particular one, we are convinced that narrating its jagged unfolding highlights what should be a more general process of scientific experimentation in the human sciences in the twenty-first century. How general, and precisely what that generality consists in, will only become clearer as others undertake similar experiments. Our hope and intention is that this case does provide conceptual and narrative standards and forms that further inquiry might well take up.

These experiments might be called, following Niklas Luhmann, *second-order participant-observation*. It also might be understood, echoing John Dewey, as the invention and testing of a *changing* set of standards and forms developed in the course of further inquiry. In sum, our project has been experiential, conceptual, narrational, veridictional, and, at its core, ethical. One could argue that over the course of its modern history as a discipline, anthropology has (or should have) ascribed to the significance of these variables, combined together in diverse fashions.

The research as described in this book derives from five years of fieldwork (2006–2011) in a series of linked sites, as well as two (partially overlapping) years (2009–2011) of experimentation with forms of participant-observation

different from fieldwork. As the reader will see later, although Rabinow was the principal investigator in the larger of the linked sites, Stavrianakis had engaged in his initial graduate years with researchers in that site. His primary research and thesis work, however, were located elsewhere as part of a large project centered at the Arizona State University in which Stavrianakis's core inquiry was based in Basel, although set in a larger context. That context was a comparative one, specifically in its relation to Rabinow's Berkeley-centered project and, perhaps more importantly, conceptually within ongoing reflection and work on the anthropology of the contemporary.

In that light, there was nothing untoward when Rabinow and Stavrianakis decided to write an article together (June 2011) on the conceptual and comparative dimensions of their overlapping projects. Once under way it became clear to Rabinow that what they were writing could well require a short book. With some trepidation, he proposed this book project to Stavrianakis with the sincere proviso that of course if Stavrianakis wanted to finish his doctoral thesis first, that would be fine. Stavrianakis responded that there were good scientific reasons to undertake this project first and he had no doubt that it would enrich his thesis.

We set to work collaboratively to meet what we later called, following Max Weber, the demands of the day. In this case, this phrase meant that the process of bringing a complex experiment and experience to a close required more reflection as to exactly how to do that. We both knew that although the bulk of the traditional participant-observation had been completed, in order for this experiment to contribute fulsomely to an anthropology of science, further analysis and narration were demanded. Without much ado, we set out to explore this terrain jointly.

Our capacity to set off into this domain was predicated on years of shared work with other researchers—above all Gaymon Bennett—nested experiences, and a slowly developing critique about the biosciences, the human sciences, and the place of knowledge and care in the university in the twenty-first century.¹ In each of our participant-observation experiments, the question and the problem of how ethical practice and human and bioscientific knowledge practices could best be brought into an integral and mutually enriching relationship took center stage. This book is organized largely around our experiments and experiences in this uncertain domain, whose exploration we call the anthropology of the contemporary. Said another way, this whole project could be said to turn on the problem of ethics, truth, and subjectivity. How it turned out is for the reader to discern.

Acknowledgments

Among the demands of the day some are arduous and some spring into presence accompanied by the joys of grateful acknowledgment for recognition more than amply earned and deserved. Among the latter is the simple naming of that core group of friends with whom we have engaged over the course of this work and its associated labor. As friendship is diverse, and as we eschew the lengthy and embarrassing rhetoric of confessional American discursive gratitude, we simply and straightforwardly acknowledge the *stultitia*-countering and *soteria*-encouraging relations we have been graced with from Gaymon Bennett, Limor Darash, James Faubion, Erik Fisher, Stan Herman, Colin Koopman, Marilyn Seid-Rabinow, and Laurence Tessier.

Demands of the Day

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Introduction

The problem reduced to its lowest terms is whether inquiry can develop in its own ongoing course the logical standards and forms to which further inquiry shall submit.

John Dewey¹

During 2007–2011 we were engaged as participant-observers in two innovative enterprises in the contemporary sciences: one for synthetic biology, which included a program for a collaborative component dedicated to ethics and social ramifications; and one dedicated to the “real time assessment” of nanotechnology and its social consequences. Both were funded by the U.S. Congress, via the National Science Foundation (NSF), as improvements on previous efforts to bring “Big Science” into alignment with twenty-first-century ethical concerns. Both were conceived in the wake of the massive project to sequence the human genome and its associated ELSI (ethical, legal, social implications) component, “the biggest ethics project in human history,” which was cast as “downstream and external” to the science.²

Briefly stated, the critical limitation of ELSI was that the authority of the ethics and social science researchers was circumscribed by their position outside of the biological research.³ ELSI research was advisory and was limited to pointing out issues. These limitations produced several responses as to how social science researchers might bet-

ter design upstream and midstream involvement with natural science and engineering research. "Upstream" means deliberation prior to the commencement of projects, and "midstream" refers to the effort to introduce questions during ongoing research. The projects we designed and participated in were responses to this challenge. Hence, these were not traditional fieldwork projects; rather, in the literal sense of the term they were experiments in participant-observation. At the outset of the experiments no one really knew with any precision what the standards and forms of such participant-observation should be, and therein lay the challenge of the experiment.

The domain of bioengineering with which we were engaging was oriented to producing foundational technologies for the purpose of making biology easier to engineer. Rabinow was invited to participate in the Synthetic Biology Engineering Research Center (SynBERC), a consortium of biologists and engineers from UC Berkeley, UC San Francisco, Harvard, MIT, and eventually Stanford. This center was the first such center for synthetic biology in the United States. The NSF mandated that the center include a research component dedicated to the ethics, politics, and security aspects of this domain of bioengineering. For four years (2006–2010) Rabinow headed this research thrust. He asked a then Ph.D. student in the Graduate Theological Union, Gaymon Bennett, to join him in designing and executing anthropological and ethical research within the center. The project was in place a few months before Anthony Stavrianakis joined the Department of Anthropology at Berkeley. Shortly after arriving, in search of a project and funds, he was invited to participate in "Human Practices," as the undertaking was being called.

Bennett had been a staff researcher for the Geron Corporation on their ethics advisory board in the late 1990s. Geron was one of the companies funding much of the early research in embryonic stem cells. The company brought together ethicists and biologists to meet a year before they derived the cells, to think in advance about what some of the repercussions might be. As with the ELSI "social consequences" research in the Human Genome Project, the downside to the arrangement for the ethicists with regards to the scientific activity was that their capacity was purely advisory.⁴ Having experienced the limits of the institutionalized role of the bioethicist, Bennett sought out intellectual resources in theology to think through these limitations. In theology, one of the limitations was that reasoned discourses about the divine, in academic venues, was removed from an engagement with present situations in which one might want to think. Bennett sought out Rabinow with the

aim of thinking through the relation of biology, ethics, and real world problems.⁵

Shortly after beginning the project, Rabinow was contacted by a group at Arizona State University (ASU) focused on nanotechnology and its social consequences. The ASU Center for Nanotechnology in Society (CNS) was also funded by the NSF to deal with the social consequences of emerging technologies, especially nanotechnology. The group's activities are most closely related to what in Europe is known as Mode 2 Science and Society.⁶ CNS coordinates many projects over six interconnected research arms.⁷ Stavrianakis was invited to participate in one of CNS's projects, the Socio-Technical Integration Research (STIR) project and to cast it as a comparison with Human Practices.

The organizational structure of the STIR project was a network of social, cultural, and political scientists and philosophers using a core methodology in twenty sites across a number of different emerging sciences and technologies. This network seemed noteworthy since it offered an interesting comparison of the ways in which social scientists can interact with one another in such efforts to integrate social and ethical questions into laboratory research, as well as the opportunity to reflect on how such a project can be implemented within emerging scientific spaces. We have written about the details of these projects elsewhere.⁸

What is at stake in *Demands of the Day* is a conceptualization and analysis of collaboration during fieldwork in these sets of experiments, within SynBERC and STIR. Our interconnected *projects* and experiences were oriented to and to a significant extent designed as an investigation into *problems*: what are the ways of forming a practice of inquiry into the ethics of biology and emerging technologies? In what way can participant-observation be made ethical and anthropological?

A starting point for our project in Human Practices was how to give form to a relation between those researchers developing a designed approach to making engineering use of cells and DNAs and ourselves, the human scientists, who were reflecting on the relationship between what is being made and the kind of ethical reflection appropriate to such knowing and making. Exploring this relation required recognition that the Human Practices project was part of traditions of thought including anthropology, ethics, philosophy, and theology. We posed the question of how these traditions, along with developments in the biosciences, were being reassembled into a common problem in the present, which we designated with the name Human Practices.

As a term, Human Practices has multiple referents: organizationally,

it referred to a division of SynBERC (Thrust 4 Human Practices), which included researchers from Berkeley and from MIT.⁹ It should be noted that the researchers from MIT expressed little interest in what the endeavor to think beyond ELSI signified. In addition to its organizational referent, the term Human Practices referred to what we were doing in *our* venue of thought and experience.

Demands of the Day is not an ethnographic monograph nor a historical chronicle of people, places, and events; rather, it describes our attempts to conceptualize and narrate the diverse forms that were apposite to different stages of our experiments and experience. Readers interested in the details of SynBERC and STIR, and their human scientific engagements and disengagements, can consult a by now substantial scholarly literature as well as one that is awkwardly, if astutely, referred to as vulgarization.¹⁰ In this book our narration is retrospective. In this sense it has faint echoes of Hegel's owl flapping its wings in flight, as it does as well in its attempt to understand the conceptual dynamics of the unfolding of the process of inquiry. Of course, like the young Dewey and so many others, we reject the telic and triumphant narrative of freedom in Hegel, and their traces are nowhere to be found here. Rather, we offer our analysis as a modest contribution to an understanding of the demands of our day.

The Demands of the Day

We shall set to work and meet the "demands of the day," in human relations as well as in our vocation. This, however, is plain and simple, if each finds and obeys the daemon who holds the fibers of his very life.

Max Weber¹¹

Rabinow and Bennett proceeded in SynBERC with an informed awareness that reconfiguring the relations between and among the life sciences and the human sciences would require a range of conceptual, pragmatic, and diagnostic activity.¹² Such an interface of the human and biosciences aimed at transforming ethical and scientific blockages and breakdowns into more determined and concrete problems such that a range of possible solutions might be made available.

Collaboration between anthropologists and bioscientists would require each side to take seriously the relations that their own activity has to the larger complex environment in which it is situated. Our primary orientation was to give form to problems so that they could be worked on jointly. Given our mandates in SynBERC and STIR, to collaborate with the bioscientists and engineers on the challenges of contemporary

science and ethics, the question was how, and not whether, the biosciences could be obliged to engage this challenge.

As Rabinow and Bennett wrote previously of the rationale for our engagement, the goal was

to design new practices that bring the biosciences and the human sciences into a mutually collaborative and enriching relationship, a relationship designed to facilitate a remediation of the currently existing relations between knowledge and care in terms of mutual flourishing.¹³

We were experimenting with bioscientists as well as other human scientists to determine the forms and standards appropriate to the question, How is it that one does or does not flourish as a researcher, as a citizen, and as a human being?

These experiments had their own contours and were driven in part by a particular set of field experiences, preconditions, opportunities, and, to coin a term to which we will return in the conclusion, “supportive but harsh task-masters” that is, our *daemons*. We take the term “daemon” from Max Weber, although it has a long, long genealogy behind it from at least the Platonic Socrates forward. We also take Weber’s associated term “the demands of the day” as a partner and couple to this seemingly puzzling daemon.

This book is oriented to the demand to take flourishing seriously. As explained in previous writings, flourishing is the term often chosen to translate the ancient Greek term *eudaemonia* (literally, the good daemon). The term flourishing, or a well-lived life, involves more than success in achieving projects, technical optimization, or undirected maximization of capacities.¹⁴ The daemon who binds us to this demand is one with whom we searched, and search again, for a form and mode of such a flourishing practice, when such forms and modes adequate to this demand prove lacking.

Progressively Directed Inquiry

We initially understood this project as an attempt at Deweyan reconstruction. Dewey writes of reconstruction,

Reconstruction can be nothing less than the work of developing, of forming, of producing (in the literal sense of that word) the intellectual instrumentalities which will progressively direct

inquiry into the deeply and inclusively human—that is to say moral—facts of the present scene and situation.¹⁵

What is pertinent in Dewey's formulation is that science and ethics are interfaced and assembled in accordance with the demands of "progressively directed inquiry." Such a demand is directed at the possibility of the invention and implementation of intellectual instrumentalities that facilitate thinking and life. Following Michel Foucault, we use the term "equipment" as a rough equivalent to Dewey's intellectual instrumentalities.¹⁶ Equipment, defined abstractly, is a set of truth claims, affects, and ethical orientations designed and combined into a practice. Our challenge was to design a mode of collaboration that contributes to flourishing, our own and others, and to produce the equipment needed to carry out such an undertaking.

As we will narrate in the course of this book, our attempt to define problems, with respect to which we could develop collaborative responses, was consistently blocked. The motion we will follow is one away from a blocked "present scene and situation" characterized by cooperation but not collaboration. Cooperation consists in demarcated labor with regular exchange; cooperation does not entail common definitions of the situation or shared techniques of remediation, which are fundamental to collaboration.

Once blockages in SynBERC and STIR were apparent, which stymied moving from cooperative to collaborative relations, we decided that we should continue our experiment in the spirit of anthropological science, carefully monitoring results and determinations that followed from our research. We also decided that flourishing could not be abandoned as a metric of science as a vocation if we were to attempt to meet the demands of the day and the call of our daemon.¹⁷

For a long time, we entertained the hope that the kind of remediative labor we had been undertaking, with SynBERC and STIR, at least opened up the possibility that one type or another of Deweyan reconstruction was imaginable. Only slowly, and in a stumbling and at times disheartening manner, did we come to acknowledge that reconstruction was not a path we were going to follow and give form to; the situation we were participating in was not at present open to such an intervention. We also came to realize that we needed to rethink and renovate Dewey's conception of "the moral" and "the deeply human." These conclusions left us searching for alternatives.

Exit: Ausgang

Demands of the Day started, in a formal fashion, after we began systematic efforts to think through our exit from "the field." As we proceeded, reflecting on how best to exit from a blocked and discordant situation, we came to recognize that our inquiry had a logic to it, which we thought it ought to be guided by, if it and the logic were eventually to cohere and synergize one with the other. Both the activity of anthropological inquiry and the logic of coherence could be characterized as recursive. By this we mean the research had its starts and stops, moments of perplexity and clarification. At least in one sense, anthropology is experimental and in another sense it is experiential. The interplay of the two can be, or should be, recursive, that is to say, mutually corrective and reinforcing.

We came to realize existentially that contemporary anthropology did not begin or end either with fieldwork or with anything resembling traditional ethnography. Rather, anthropology included the preparatory phase before the field, as well as the sometimes abrupt and complex motion of exiting or leaving. Such exiting was not only a process of leaving the field site (as this is more than a simple spatial location), but rather this leaving itself was, or at least could be, an aspect of participant-observation. Strangely enough, the immediate postfieldwork participant-observation, as well as that involved in "writing up," have been glossed over and largely ignored in the disciplinary literature.

We came to conceptualize our experiment as consisting of multiple forms of participant-observation, ones appropriate to different phases of anthropology. In that light, we provide a series of framings for reflecting on these phases, as well as the resultant production of knowledge, for both our subjects and objects. These framings were forged for their capacity to give form to the incessant mutual involvement of subjects and objects, as well as the milieus in which these living beings find themselves.

These framings are theatrical, curatorial, and cinematographic. The theatrical frames the affective dimension of our participation. The curatorial frame enabled us to gather our observations in such a way that we could observe the observations we had made as participants in the situation. The cinematographic framing enabled us to track lines in the wider milieu in which we had been operating.

In each phase (fieldwork, leaving, and the phases that opened up after leaving), our experience and experiments were framed in such a way that we could narratively move away from the experience of discor-

dance and toward, minimally, a more determinate narrative rendering of the situation in which we had been involved. This required coupling our observation of the multiplicities of the process of "leaving the field" and entering further phases of anthropological research, with the requirement for a multiplicity of narrative modes. The production of such multiple narrative modes was oriented to opening up further paths to explore. The motion from field to text, the practices through which one can give a form to an experience such that it might produce movement toward that which one would like to know, as well as the form of life one is trying to cultivate, somewhat strangely has as yet been only cursorily explored within the anthropological literature.¹⁸

Present, Actual, Contemporary

We understand the demands of the day in the frame of *problematization*, briefly sketched and unfortunately underdeveloped, by Michel Foucault. The problem space, within which our inquiry was initially located and then proceeded, was that of the internal and external indeterminations and discordancies of *bios* (life) and *anthropos* (the human thing), as well as the competing and interfering sciences—*logoi*—that accompany them. "Indeterminations" and "discordancies" are terms we take from Dewey; we have found Dewey's claim that they are the site and object of thinking to be fruitful.¹⁹

We asked ourselves, In what way does our undertaking differ from what we understand to be Michel Foucault's project of a *history of the present*?²⁰ Our project operated from the outset from the premise that there is a distinction between the history of the present and the *anthropology of the contemporary*. Consequently, it is important to sketch the contours that separate them. One version of the history of the present is that it is a strategy to render the understanding of objects, apparatuses, and knowledge, taken to be stable, as contingent. Our fieldwork and our other engagement with participant-observation was located and conceptualized around organizations for the production of new forms of knowledge, which were understood at the time to be emergent. Hence, to render the emergent contingent would be tautological; to render it inevitable would be foolish. Furthermore, Foucault's genealogical approach, whatever its other vagaries, consistently and rigorously maintained at least a century's distance from the historical present it was seeking to render contingent. The reason for Foucault's studied and targeted distancing lies in his commitment to politics understood as a

concern of citizens acting as citizens; his commitment was not one consistent with thinkers providing solutions for others or even guidelines for action in any direct sense.

When Foucault deployed his genealogical narratives it was usually in order to make a problem visible. However, it is more accurate to say that Foucault sought to render a solution visible and articulable thus making it possible to see and understand that it had been only one of other possible solutions, long since obscured.

A different and discontinuous, yet linked, version of the history of the present can be found in the last three years of Foucault's lectures at the *Collège de France*. During this period of time (the early 1980s), Foucault was concerned not with rendering the present contingent, but rather with exploring the conceptual repertoire that might help in opening the present to a process of exploration whose most general object he called problematization. Although these lectures continue to adhere to his genealogical constraints of keeping historical distance from the present, that distance is much greater and operates within a quite different set of historical conditions and constraints. Nonetheless, Foucault's explorations in what he nicely called "the work site [*chantier*] of history" can be understood as a *history of problematizations*.²¹ These explorations can be seen as an effort to proceed in an affirmative sense that would enable or motivate the critical thinker to undertake the hard labor of identifying and recasting the problematic relations of truth and subjectivity. In this version, Foucault's central target was not to demonstrate the contingency or obsolescence of solutions to long obscured problems but rather to recover an extended series of transformations of the core problems of thinking in its troubled and frequently disorderly relationships with politics, science, and ethics.

We took as one of our diagnostic starting points (elaborated and explored in different ways by social scientists, journalists, historians, and anthropologists) that macroforces were contributing to a reproblematicization of the relations of truth and subjectivity, as well as those of science (inclusive of the human and physical sciences) and ethics. This orientation did not lead us down the path of genealogy as it did for Michel Foucault. Although we drew inspiration and obviously have learned a great deal from Foucault, we have become clearer about why and how an anthropological approach differs from that of Foucault's history of the present. Our participant-observation and our conceptual efforts demonstrated not so much either the contingency or the necessity of the lack of engagement we encountered with the bioscientists and