
THE EVENT OF OTHERNESS: AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES T. SIEGEL

Joshua Barker and Vicente Rafael

About the Interview, by Joshua Barker

The following interview took place in Aceh, Indonesia, in 2007, against the backdrop of a short period of collaborative fieldwork conducted by James Siegel, Arief Djati, and myself. Aceh was the site of Siegel's doctoral research in the early 1960s, and he has returned there on several occasions in the years since. For this visit, we rented a car and drove from town to town along the coast, from the southwest corner of the province up to Banda Aceh and back down the east coast. Prior to leaving on this trip, I sent out an email request to some of Siegel's former students and colleagues for questions I could put to him in an interview. I received questions from a number of people, including Benedict Anderson, Rosalind Morris, John Pemberton, Pietro Pucci, Vicente Rafael, Danilyn Rutherford, and Andrew Willford. Upon our meeting in Indonesia, Siegel agreed to participate in the interview on the condition that I give him all the questions in advance so that he could decide how best to answer them, and in what order. He also indicated that he intended to record his own answers to the questions, without me being present. The interview as it transpired was thus an odd one. Each day for a period of about ten days, late at night or early in the morning, Siegel would record a reply to one or more of the questions posed by his interlocutors. I would then listen to the recording on my own, and we would discuss it together during the long hours of travel between towns. Sometimes Siegel would choose to record some further thoughts that addressed questions that emerged from that discussion.

In important respects, the form the interview took was consistent with the broader epistemological stance Siegel adopts in relation to cultural anthropology.¹ We are all familiar with the critiques surrounding the manner in which ethnographic writing “orientalizes” or “others” the people it studies. The assertion of cultural difference, which was once thought to provide the basis for a critique of ethnocentrism, is said to reify and naturalize differences. Siegel is a bit unusual among American anthropologists in his continuing insistence that the problem of otherness and difference ought to remain the foundation of cultural anthropological work. In a certain respect, one could say that he drew very different conclusions from Anthropology’s self-reflexive moment in the 1970s and 1980s than those drawn by many others. Rather than reflexively problematizing his own culture’s tendency to “other” the object of inquiry, Siegel focused primarily on how the peoples he studies deal with the problem of otherness. In *Solo in the New Order*, for example, Siegel wrote about how urban Javanese use others, including the figure of the foreigner, to construct social hierarchies. Indeed, virtually all of his work since *Solo in the New Order* has focused on this question of how people deal with both proximate otherness, which can usually be symbolized and named, and more profound otherness that can only be symbolized, or whose effects can only be seen, in displaced form.²

This concern with otherness is also evident in his method of interviewing others. He gets people to start talking, and he allows their thoughts to direct the course of the conversation, much as a psychoanalyst would, and he listens for the appearance of various kinds of otherness in what they say. Otherness is not here understood in terms of an ethnic group, or any kind of social group necessarily; on our trip, we were looking at events that people would be trying to make sense of, but which might not be easy to assimilate, such as the tsunami, events in the civil war, or the killings of 1965–66. In Meulaboh, when we asked people about the tsunami and who had died, people repeatedly said that those who had been killed were not killed by the wave, they were killed by the garbage (carried by the wave). Rather than treat this kind of statement as insignificant, Siegel would then continue with a line of questioning that sought to find out what the garbage was, where it had come from, and, hence, what it stood for. Thus, he would seek to learn how people were making sense of the tsunami as an event in which death was not the result of an act of nature or an act of God, let’s say, but an act of garbage. His focus was on any kind of occurrence that challenged people’s capacity to symbolize it, and the traces and often disruptive effect this has on their symbolic world. In this sense, his interview method was not just “open-ended,” it was also “open-middled,” since it involved a kind of deep listening and response that allowed for meanings that had not been consciously intended by the speakers involved to leave an impression on the conversation.

¹ Elements of what follows are drawn from a more comprehensive essay on the epistemology of ethnographic interviews. See Joshua Barker, “The Ethnographic Interview in an Age of Globalization,” in *The Sage Handbook of Social Anthropology*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Fardon, Olivia Harris, Trevor H. J. Marchand, Mark Nuttall, Cris Shore, Veronica Strang, and Richard A. Wilson (London: Sage Publications, forthcoming).

² See, for example, James T. Siegel, *Solo in the New Order: Language and Hierarchy in an Indonesian City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); and James T. Siegel, *Naming the Witch* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

This same openness to the unexpected was the basis for the interview with Siegel, but the forms this openness took were shaped by the very different conditions of mediation under which that interview took place. The interview with Siegel occurred in both a place and a non-place, to use Marc Augé's terminology. The place was Aceh, which consisted of a set of very particular locales linked together by our automobile travel through them and by our conception of that part of Sumatra island as being our "field site." The speed of automobile travel meant that we could maintain a conversation spanning several towns, creating a place that was much bigger than the kind of field site that I have normally been familiar with. This was helpful because it meant that the interview with Siegel was the kind that takes place *in situ*; in a place where the interviewee is "in their native habitat," so to speak. The conversation was, thus, regularly being interrupted by unexpected elements of the setting, which furnished concrete examples for discussion and provoked new lines of questioning and analysis. Small observations Siegel would make during our day, such as the fact that all the houses on the beach were built to face away from the ocean and toward the road, suggesting that people were separating themselves off from a "view," would appear the following morning in his recorded answers to interview questions. It was not merely that Siegel was being a *bricoleur*, although there was an element of that. It was also that the place and the people in the vicinity entered into the conversation, provoking questions, interrupting chains of thought, and sometimes even drowning out the interview. These surprises and interruptions were not always evident in the recording, in part because Siegel had taken control of the tape machine. However, some traces of them do remain, and we have retained them in the transcript: the noises of waves crashing in the background, people coming to Siegel's hotel door and starting up conversations with him while the recorder is still on, and so forth.

In a different way, the interview was also occurring in the non-place, or cyberspace, of global connections and electronic traffic. The questions themselves were solicited and received via email from people around the world—Thailand, the USA, Italy, Singapore, and Canada—and arrived bearing few traces of their locale. The lack of co-presence between the interviewers and the interviewee meant that the locality of the interview was to some degree undermined and contaminated by this cyberspace. While cyberspace, of course, had a certain materiality—in this context, a cell phone and laptop with only spotty connectivity—it nonetheless weakened the sense of "immersion" in the locale, since it collapsed the distance between home and "the field."

Siegel commented that, as he was speaking into the machine, he could conjure up the people whose questions he was answering. These presences might have been elided had I voiced all their questions in a more direct, face-to-face, manner. While we are accustomed to thinking about how the ethnographer represents, and to some degree consolidates, the multiple voices of ethnographic informants, we do not often think about all the other researchers who are occluded by the idea of the lone ethnographer. The mediation of the digital recorder served to flatten out these multiple others into a single spatial and temporal frame, whether they were across the world or in the room next door, and thereby allowed Siegel to achieve a form of transference that made a place for multiple others.

We often assume that new technologies speed things up, but the real effect of the Internet, the digital recorder, and the automobile in this case was to slow things down, such that the interview unfolded in a temporality that was precisely not that of contemporaneity and “real time.” Rather, the interview was asynchronous: structured with built-in intervals and pauses, not only between questions and answers, but also between the moment a question was posed and when it was heard, and between the moment an answer was given and when it was heard. The intervals in this densely mediated interview mean that the time and space left open for unexpected otherness, and for new thoughts and rumination, are much more pronounced than they might be in a more conventional interview where intersubjective immediacy is assumed.

The following is a redacted transcript of the recorded interview, as prepared by Vicente Rafael. In it, Siegel addresses questions about his relationship with Indonesia and his approach to anthropology, while reflecting on what he is seeing in Aceh (a list of the questions he is responding to is attached as an appendix). What comes through strongly in this interview is Siegel’s conviction that anthropology ought to retain its footing as a discipline capable of registering the effects of otherness and remaining open to the unexpected. Arguably, this conviction has as much to do with Indonesia’s past as it does with anthropology’s present. Siegel is disturbed by the fact that when he conducted research in Aceh in the early-1960s, he saw no foreshadowing of the neighbor-on-neighbor violence that occurred there during the bloody anti-communist pogroms in 1965–66. He is also deeply troubled by the fact that these killings were so easily forgotten by those he knew in Aceh and by Indonesian society more broadly. What approach to studying Indonesian society might help to account for such violence and register its unacknowledged effects? In this interview, we learn how Siegel has sought to address this difficult question.



James T. Siegel in a *warung*, Aceh, 2007. Photo by Joshua Barker

The Interview, edited by Vicente Rafael

Aceh, December 2007

1. (*Machine comes on, ambient sound of birds chirping.*) I think it's recording now. So, Ben asked me ... you know ... I'm ... when ... we should turn it off. (*Machine goes off.*)

2. Ben [Anderson] asked me why it is that I've kept coming back to Indonesia for over forty years. I'm answering this question in Tapak Tuan, where I've come with Arief Djati and Joshua Barker.³ When you come to Tapak Tuan you come over a road that goes along a very high cliff. There's a crumbling road, and right below you is the sea, a long beach. You come down a curving steep road, and you come to Tapak Tuan [which] is right by the sea. In the market, there are wooden houses on both sides of the street two stories high. They have arcades. They don't serve much purpose for pedestrians because, of course, they're encroached on by everybody for everything. But what's interesting is that the street runs along the ocean and you can't see the ocean (*very loud sound of motorcycle rushing by*). The rest of the city and the other Indonesian cities I know of are also laid out like this. There could be spectacular beauty, but it's rarely taken advantage of. It's always seemed to me that Indonesians turn their back on nature in a way. For me, that makes them part of the landscape. Instead of being people who view it, they are people who are part of it. At the same time, here at least, the rest of the place announces itself, because you hear the waves even though you are on the other side of these shops. Now, it seems ... (*Long pause. Sound of waves in the background.*) From my point of view, that makes everything more interesting. It means that whatever I see going on around me on the street has, in fact, something behind it that makes it difficult to comprehend because it's not at all what it seems to say. And I think I've always been wrong in interpreting it. I've been wrong from the very beginning and that has fueled my attraction to the place.

I came to Indonesia because I read a book, Snouck [Hurgronje]'s *The Acehnese*,⁴ and I thought "this is a brilliant book. [Yet], how is it possible that someone this brilliant could be on the wrong side?" (*Birds chirping in the background.*) Well, that tells you where I started from, and maybe where I'm not far away from now. I'm an American born before Vietnam, who grew up before Vietnam. I therefore thought that whatever I learned did me good. But, in fact, that's not been the case (*sound of roaring car*). I went to Aceh to show that Snouck was wrong, and in trying to do that I found myself on the side of the Acehnese.⁵ But when I came back in 1969, I was appalled because the people that I was so close to, and that I had defended, were, in fact, enthusiastic about the murders [i.e., the anti-communist massacres of 1965–66]. So I found myself exactly where I put Snouck. That's to say, following all the thoughts I could find, thinking that I had it right, and finding out that it left me somewhere that I didn't at all want to be. So I came to think that the solution to that was to know I am and will be mistaken and to find out what it was that I wasn't understanding. In other words, that I should

³ See James Siegel, with Joshua Barker and Arief Djati, "Notes of a Trip through Aceh, December 2007," *Indonesia* 86 (October 2008): 1–54.

⁴ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, trans. A. W. S. O'Sullivan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1906).

⁵ See James Siegel, *The Rope of God* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969; new edition, University of Michigan Press, 2000).

understand some more. But, of course, it always means that you are led to error, that's to say that you're always led to more mistakes. But these mistakes in Indonesia are particularly interesting, and they seem to have a locus, they seem to have a place. And at the same time they seem enticing, the way it's enticing to come to Tapak Tuan and to see all this beauty and then see the opposite of it, as it were, or at least its denial in the life that goes on around it.

Between the two things, one wants to keep on coming back. Indonesia always entices, (*sound of roaring car*) yet it always misleads. It always takes me some place that I don't really want to be. But I think when I'm going there that's where I want to go, to the point even where the process itself has become a kind of end, an end that doesn't end. And that becomes itself an attraction. So forty years isn't a long time. It's even longer than that I think. But that's the way it is. Okay, now I've got to turn this off. (*The machine doesn't go off. Sound of waves in the background. Birds chirping. Cars passing by. The machine keeps going for another 4:42.*)

3. I'd like to turn to the questions that several people asked about what anthropology is and what anthropology does. It's a big question. It is, of course, always the question of the other. In your transcription [you] capitalize "Other," and I think it's right to do that. But the problem with the capital "O" is that it names. It's a proper name if you capitalize it. It says there is a unique Other somewhere there, and that seems to me both right and wrong. It's right in the sense that the Other is unique. The problem is always to find that uniqueness and to find how it is that uniqueness is built upon for some kind of social usefulness which can never at the same time be completely domesticated. And at the same time, "Other" is an idea that gathers under itself various forms and therefore, as an idea, does not designate uniqueness.

John [Pemberton] asked me, I think, a similar question but posed it in different terms about possession. He says that possession occurs in societies we're interested in but seems to be of less interest here [i.e., in the United States]. I think that the problem is always to find the sources of possession.⁶ Possession is just one word among others, the problem being that the otherness of the Other always changes form, and it changes form before our eyes and we don't even recognize it. Now take the case of smoking. I asked myself "why is it that in America where capitalism rules like nowhere else in the world, except maybe Russia now and other new liberal societies, an enterprise with such world importance as tobacco can be defeated—smoking can be successfully banned? (*Cars rushing by, birds chirping.*) Why is that?" What is it about smoking that makes that possible? One can speculate that smoking is an addiction. Addiction is something new in the world. It comes with modernity. There are no addictions in tribal societies, for instance. One doesn't speak of it. Addiction points to something that calls you, something of that Otherness of yourself that you want to recuperate in some way. But that seems to be, in the case of an addiction, individually yours and unusable in the rest of society. Of course it was made use of by the tobacco companies and by the kind of capitalist societies that we live in and we study. Now there is something new on the scene. There is another kind of liberal capitalism that I think probably makes addiction, as such, less tolerable, and it points to another source of Otherness that

⁶ Possession receives extensive treatment in much of Siegel's work, but see especially *Solo in the New Order*, and, more recently, *Naming the Witch*.

would stand in some kind of ambiguous opposition to the kind of multicultural Internet-based kinds of communication that we have. But it wouldn't any longer be smoking. It might no longer be called addiction. The question is always to find it.

Look at what's happened to anthropology in France, for instance, or, at least, to a section of anthropology. In the Musée de l'Homme the section of ethnography has been dismantled entirely. The enormous collections made during the colonial period, which are fabulous, have been put into [another] new museum.⁷ But, of course, only after a fight between the ethnographers who want to say that they defend the Other. If you want to know who the Other is, I don't say the colonized Other, I say [rather] the Other of the colonial period, the Other whose Otherness is apparent to us and who we have to get to know, you could find it in the Musée de l'Homme. A man named [Germaine] Viatte, who guided the project of the new museum to fruition, said "but you know we see these people in every place in Paris, you can't go through Paris without seeing that these people exist." The implication is that, in fact, you do not need ethnography any more, at least not ethnography as it was presented in the museum. But, at the same time, you need these collections, because these collections are going to show you something, but not what ethnographers showed you. What they [will] show you isn't clear. When [Jacques] Chirac opened the museum, he spoke of the need to have multiple points of view because, in fact, so far as I can see, he didn't know what point of view it was that would be consolidated in the new museum. [Moving] the collections [to] the [new] museum was meant to repair, among other things, relations between France with its former colonies by honoring them, and, of course, it honored them by showing them some of the things that France pillaged from them.

But at the same time, putting these objects on display and having them attract huge crowds indicates that something else is going on, that there's something in this idea of beauty that is not a Kantian idea of beauty any longer, by which I refer to the notion of beauty that formerly governed the aesthetics of Western museums. That's to say, [the Kantian idea of] an end that you can't find but you know is there, that comes somehow out of Nature. It announces itself in some way, but you can never formulate what it is that it's about, but it entrances you by being beyond formulation, and it gives you pleasure. I'm not sure that's the idea of beauty that is at work in the Quai Branly [the new museum]. I'm not sure what else it is at work in attracting people to these objects, which were the objects of our studies before and which now have become (*pauses, says "thanks" to someone*), which now have become aesthetic objects but of an aesthetics we do not understand and which puts aside ethnography elucidation.

Now as [Louis] Dumont said, the value of ethnography, its capacity, for instance, to show other aesthetics, has been suppressed. Anybody who took part in the formation of the Musée de l'Homme, as he did, knows very well that something has been lost, that, in fact, there's a kind of ethnocentrism in the idea of beauty. And with that, what he's saying is that we are now betraying the people that we studied, that we used to speak for them, we used to be on their side, and now we can't be. "They" are hidden under aesthetic appreciation. And I think that he's both right and wrong. Historical identity is certainly obscured in this new museum. This [new] museum [i.e., the Musée

⁷ The reference here is to the Musée du Quai Branly. See James Siegel, "'Tout Autre est tout Autre': Objects and Objections of Ethnography," in *Objects and Objections of Ethnography* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2010).

du Quai Branly] *wants to say* that there's something else going on, that there's another kind of Other in the world, *but it isn't the historical personage*. The formerly colonized peoples are the "heirs," to use Jacques Chirac's phrase, to these beautiful objects. The appreciation of beauty is universal. At the same time that the museum was opened, the "heirs" were deported for lack of visas. This is part of a policy of the right, which clearly draws on prejudice. The museum claims to wipe out that prejudice. But in fact, by denying the historical specificity of peoples as they were treated in the Musée de l'Homme and, since then, by anthropologists, prejudice prevails. Now these people are known by nationalities and, as such, need papers. They do not have them. They are expelled. Rationalization has gone to the point where the specificity of lives counts for nothing. But that specificity is the object of prejudice that needs to be neutralized, whereas it is instead hidden. Those who deport Senegalese in France can be suspected of hating blacks. It is no longer that blacks are inferior by a standard of historical comparison but merely by an automatic reaction that fastens on whatever can be taken as different. The appreciation of artifacts as beautiful that once were called embodiments of superstition supposedly removes the stain. But instead, it allows it to remain. The deported are said to be merely citizens of other places, rationally classed peoples, not different from others. But they turn out to be the "heirs" of objects whose appreciation blinds viewers to facts. Why does not seeing these objects lead to protests against the treatment of their "heirs"? Because the heritage might be real. The otherness these objects present is held fast under the aesthetic. It is presumed to be unplacable, thus separated from their "heirs." These objects once fascinated visitors to the Musée de l'Homme, then they ceased to do so as the mixing of peoples became common. Now they do so again as beautiful objects originating in a world now past but in fact imbued with a beauty accessible to everyone in the world. Fascination has presumably been displaced not to be sealed off from history as claimed but rather left to inflect the rationalized version of these objects' "heirs." The word "deportation" in France is reserved for the deportations of World War II, as if that crime could not be repeated. The original deportees were rationally classified, but this classification contained a terrible prejudice. Something like this seems to me to be the case today. The solution is not mystification. In part, it is the extension of ethnography of these "heirs" into the present. This, of course, is done and thankfully continues. The more general answer is the cultivation of otherness as such, in any form—the recognition of its forms today not in order to make them part of a bland, supposedly demystified world, but to live with what we cannot grasp, no matter what forms it takes. I stress the plural—"forms"—because I think the recognition of forms of otherness is something ethnography can and does do. So I hope that's not too unclear an answer to some of these questions here. (*Machine goes off.*)

4. (*Sound of waves, cars rushing by.*) Maybe I could add just something else to that. Roz [Rosalind Morris] says that "anthropology used to be the discipline that taught us that everyone is wrong because someone does something differently somewhere else. And now it is one that says everyone is right because someone does things differently somewhere else." Well, I think that's an accurate characterization of much anthropological practice today. It is made possible because anthropology has become a profession rather than a calling and been separated from the humanities where unique objects of study are more easily understood. This is to answer also Danilyn's [Rutherford] question about the place of anthropology amongst the disciplines. When I

was young, it was thought that anthropology could show us a reflection of ourselves in a kind of supplementary way, even though it had a very kitschy side in Margaret Mead and so on. That we needed the Other because it would correct us. It was Mead's idea, for instance, about adolescence. Adolescence doesn't have to be stormy. Just look at the South Pacific, no problem at all. So we could be like that, too. But the idea that we should look at the Others and be like them, that, in other words, they reflect themselves back to us, isn't the case in most of anthropology today. (*Car honks its horn.*) It doesn't have that force, and it doesn't have that force for a reason. The world has changed. But it doesn't mean that Otherness doesn't exist and that we don't have reflections of ourselves that come back to us in such a way that they startle us and unsettle us. The problem is always to find out what these are because they can't be known in advance. There's no way to say in advance what the otherness of the other really would consist of. And one is, I think, always wrong about it. But, you know, you do what you can. (*Pause.*)

To come back to Rosalind Morris's observation—that nowadays anthropology endorses a bland relativism, accepting whatever any people do. Such acceptance by the ethnographers who find this view congenial has underneath it the assumption that every practice is assimilable by everyone once one simply agrees to do so. It misses the necessity of otherness and to that degree represents a different anthropology than I practice.

Vince [Rafael] asked about [Jacques] Derrida, and I think it should be evident from these questions that I've just answered why it is that Derrida is important to me. (*Sound of waves, cars rushing by, low rumbling motor of a vehicle.*) The fact of the matter is that I think history is indispensable, and I think anthropological studies are indispensable. I don't think that they're enough. And the reason that they're not enough is that they always tell us what happened, they tell us what it is that already occurred, whereas in a certain way you have to know what it is that is contained, what it is that's achronic, let's say, and that therefore might be the future. And the places that speak about that are literature and philosophy, those two in particular. They give us ideas on how to think about places.

Now, Danilyn says that I used to tell her that we study people like Derrida in order to say that everything is different someplace else, and I hope that's true. But of course you can't find that out unless you know first what it is that's being said, that is to say, what's central to the conversation. And it's in thinking about how this kind of Otherness might be formed out of language in the way that Roz says in her question, for instance, that one can see that there *is* such a thing, for instance, as comparative literature. Now, comparative literature isn't, in my opinion, the comparison between literatures of different parts of the world. Comparative literature in French is *littérature comparée* (literature compared). The problem is to find the place where literature can be compared to something else and what that might be. I thought, for instance [of] witchcraft.⁸ [In witchcraft, there is] the possibility of making your own law as it happens in literature. Literature can say what the rules of reality are. [That] is something that you find also in witchcraft. But you find it differently. You don't find it in the way that writers find it. [As] Pierro [Pucci] puts it so precisely in his question,

⁸ See Siegel, *Naming the Witch*.

literature always leaves something out. Simply by saying what it says, literature always writes to the point where, in fact, there's something left to be said that can't be said yet. (*Low rumbling sound, waves.*) And I think in witchcraft what you find is that people are absolutely right, and it's that absoluteness that doesn't need any confirmation. It certainly makes its own reality, but it leaves no space for something possibly left unsaid. The "proof" of witchcraft is always found, and it doesn't matter what it is. Here you find an expression comparable to that of literature, but not the same, and interesting as much for the difference as the similarity. And I'm sure there are other places in society where that's true. Of course, the other point about that is that those places don't remain entirely outside of history. They can be what moves history, too. When they become incorporated they change their tone, and they become part of a social discourse that's formed in a recognizable way. But there are moments when, in opposition to extant social discourse there [arises] something like witchcraft accusations, and witchcraft can create things. When witch hunters burned down a police station in East Java, it was the first step in a revolutionary moment. It didn't go any further, but that's beside the point. (*Machine goes off.*)

Witch hunters seem compelled to take action because only by doing so can they close a gap in discourse. This gap appears, I believe, when constituted authorities are seen to fail. At that point, what is usually taken for granted becomes doubtful. If they could not find "proof" of an otherwise hidden menace, they would be threatened with an unnamable force. A proper name, a word with a singular referent, a name of something incomparable to anything else, is said to be recognizable. Action is necessary because there is no other way to tame the fear produced. I disagree with Lévi-Strauss, who thought that when the accused could actually tell a story about this hidden force, his accusers would forget about his witchcraft because they would be so taken with his story. In fact, the case he cites was quite different in reality. The threat of the American authorities saved the accused. That is, naming the witch did not suffice because language itself lost its authority. The story was believed, but this belief only showed that supposed mastery of language ultimately could not contain a hidden force. The gap of language and referent could not be closed, and the gap could not be cultivated for other purposes.

5. So, that leads me to also say something about Vince's good question about the difference between historians and anthropologists. He says I say, and of course, as usual, I can't remember anything I ever said, that historians are more interested in justice and anthropologists in truth (*voices in the background*). Maybe that's true. I don't stand by any of my statements (*small laugh*). But, it seems to me if it's the case, it's because anthropologists are lucky to see the moment of the formation of something. At that point, there isn't necessarily any justice. Justice is something ahead of us. The law is not necessarily just. The law always needs something more. But once the law is formed in the name of justice, then one can look at it, and historians do that. With anthropologists, they are interested in truth (*loud insect sounds*), and the truth is the truth of witchcraft, that is to say, the truth is something unique which hasn't yet been translated into something that can be socially used like, for instance, justice. Ah ... (*Long pause. Jim has a conversation in Indonesian with someone. Machine goes off.*)

[...]

6. (*Faint sound of voices in the background speaking Indonesian.*) You asked me about "method." It's a strong word, stronger than I'd like actually. It seems to me that anthropology starts when people immerse themselves. People say [Bronislaw] Malinowski was the beginning, but there were others like Frank Cushing, who simply lived in the "field," as it came to be called, for a long time, and then turned their experiences into accounts of various kinds. I think this is still the method of anthropology insofar as there is anything that's called a "method." At one point, this kind of experience was called "participant observation." This term has dropped out because it's embarrassing for its naiveté, as though one could put oneself in the place of someone else and understand his or her practices simply by doing what they do. I think, nonetheless, there's still a truth to that, and the truth of it is, to allude to a question of Vince, that through a certain kind of habit one learns what one couldn't learn otherwise.

Anthropology in its relation to the disciplines always brings something in [that] the other disciplines can't. And it doesn't depend in any way upon, or very much at least, the work of the past. I mean there are no classics in anthropology. I asked my department [at Cornell] once "what books should every student read?" Most people had an answer. Five years later, I asked the same question, everybody had different books. Well, that's scarcely a discipline by comparison to, let's say, classics, philosophy, or literature. Anthropology doesn't seem to have a corpus that one necessarily has to join oneself to and feel the weight of. Instead what one has to do is to read with all the other disciplines, right? And [then] say "you're wrong." "And why are you wrong?" "You're wrong because you don't take account of this." And that's the question of difference. That's to say, difference consists of something that can't be taken account of. And that has everything to do with method. That's to say (*gentle laugh, voices continue in the background*), how would you formulate what hasn't yet been known? Because of course, if you formulate it, then you already have an answer. The answer doesn't rest in the formulation. The answer rests in a certain kind of experience. And that experience, then, is habit, that's to say, doing something that simply through the doing hasn't yet reached the stage of formulation. (*Voices of people speaking in Indonesian continue in the background.*) And I think we still do that, and it's not out of date. What's out of date is the humanistic notion of exchange, the one that's put forward in American anthropology now. [It is] the necessity for "them" to speak and for "them" to determine the conversation. I'm not against that. I think it obviously adds something. And it does something to question our practices, I would say, rather than our "method." That's all for the good. But to think that anyone simply speaks for himself or that the neutrality of the ethnographer can be guaranteed by his silence seems a bit naïve.

The value of anthropology is the same as the rest of the humanities today, that's to say, it's to study things people think are insignificant and to bother people by doing that. The more you can bother people, the more insignificant what you do is, the better the chances are that you're saying something that will later be taken as important. So it's the insignificant that matters because the insignificant comes in a way that we can't know in advance, and that we might therefore call "habit," the repetitive experience of something that works on us in some way. Maybe later on we can make something out of it. This, of course, is the idea of the new, which is quite a Christian idea and is still subject to the charge of ethnocentrism. I think, first of all, that's a charge that's

probably unavoidable (*audible sigh*). The answer to it doesn't come from the [question of] method. The answer to it comes through the questioning of how the *new* is defined. When the new is defined as the *outside*, and the outside is simply a given: that, of course, is ethnocentric. When, on the other hand, the very [matter] of boundaries is put into question, as it is today, and when we've absorbed that in some way or another, then our understanding of our experience has also changed. The result is that our method continues to be useful. So I don't think that the object of anthropology has disappeared. I think the object of anthropology has simply changed, as it always does, even when the same peoples have been studied, and maybe now they no longer are, but even when the same peoples are studied, of course, they have different significance. And there's no reason to think that there will ever not be an Other, [nor] in a deconstructive way, an *outside*. Already it is not always "peoples" we study, but differently delineated objects of study, yet always with a difference between "them," no matter how the boundaries are drawn, and the ethnographer. This difference has already been radically redefined and will necessarily continue to be.

7. (*Tape machine starts, sound of a motor idling, cars passing, sound of someone coughing faintly.*) Twentieth-eighth of December, 2007. You asked me about the other, about deconstruction and its place in anthropology. Well, we can see deconstruction is one more step in a long history which says that "there is an outside but it affects the inside." And, finally, to make this so short that it seems absurd (*deafening sound of a vehicle*), finally, there is something unrepresentable. You see that in the arts, or you see that wherever you really want to look. The failure of representation is political and aesthetic at the same time. (*Rumbling sound of a vehicle, sound of car horns.*)

Before deconstruction, whatever [was thought] to be unrepresentable was simply *outside*. But what Derrida did (*a man clearing his throat in the background*) was to say that, in the notion of the sign itself, and therefore in communication itself, there is something that's necessarily left out. That's called the Other in that you can't quite get to [it]. That's something that, whatever we call it when it's already constituted, is there already within us. The division between "us" and "them" that was so common in anthropology [is] now so much under question in anthropology. [...] The trend in anthropology today is to say that "yes, the idea of the Other does not exist," that the Other is really just like "us." You go somewhere on the other side of the world and find somebody in the middle of nowhere, as it were, and one discovers that, in fact, there's an identity recognizable through common sense. This to me is the American democratization of anthropology. (*Low rumbling sounds, cars honking.*) Equality is natural rather than historical. They should speak to us, and we should speak to them. There's no problem in doing so, no problem of translation, for instance. Equality means sameness and self-sameness. There are no important differences. Louis Hartz said this so well,⁹ and Tocqueville¹⁰ said it before him: in America, equality pertains between identities, as opposed to the European idea, where difference is retained. The American assumption is that otherness is unnatural and will eventually disappear.

⁹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955; reprinted 1991).

¹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, with several English editions. See the edition edited by Isaac Kramnick, *Democracy in America* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2007). *Democracy in America* was originally published as *De la démocratie en Amérique*, in two volumes, the first in 1835 and the second in 1840.

When colonialism ended, the Other, as such, disappeared. But in deconstruction, the Other still is there, and it's there, as I was trying to say, in the nature of communication itself. Now, this has lots of implications. It means that the Other can appear anywhere, and that's what ... (*sound of cars and motorcycles passing by, someone coughing*), and there are lots of examples of it. Ah, (*long pause*). Now (*sound of coughing in the back*), we were speaking yesterday, for instance ... (*Machine goes off*)

8. Maybe I can give an example, or some examples anyway. They have to be much more cryptic than they ought to be, of course, but the compass of the interview doesn't permit more. For instance, you take someone who's had a baby. The woman has the baby, and the man seems to have the baby, too, somehow. But [in fact] nobody *has* the baby. The first thing that everybody does, and for a while it seems the only thing they do, is to stare at the baby. They just stare and stare and stare. And why stare? Because you don't know who it is. You don't know, in a certain way, where it came from. Of course, the woman gave birth to it. She did all the work. It's her labor, precisely. But still one doesn't know where the baby is from. It has features and characteristics that are taken to indicate its origins because its physical origin doesn't yet mean that is "mine" or "ours." One doesn't know to whom the baby belongs or if it ever belonged at all to anyone or any place. Whose is it? Who is it?

Now, when you adopt a baby, the situation seems to become clearer, but, in fact, that is not evident. Let me explain. There's an enormous worldwide market in babies. In America, if you want to adopt a baby, you get a license to do so from some social service agency, and then you can go online. You get catalogues [from] the adoption agencies. The catalogues are likely to have pictures of babies from different countries who are taken to be typical of their national origins. That is, this is the kind of child you would get if you adopted from, say, Colombia. You then pay a fee and, and you get the baby. The baby is obviously a commodity. If you need more proof of [this], it's [the fact] that a few years ago, it cost about \$14,000 to adopt a baby from an agency. The cost of fertility treatments, I am told, was exactly the same at that time. Now, that's the market at work. So the baby is a commodity, but of course nobody who adopts a baby thinks of it that way. They couldn't afford to, as it were. In other words, the baby that they have, insofar as it's theirs, becomes unique. It's only in its uniqueness that it comes to be a member of the family. But there's a gap between the two notions one can apply to her. The difference between the adopted and the biological baby that's born to the mother and the family isn't really great. When the mother gives birth, [we have] a classic example of the outside [coming]. Something new appears, and it appears from nowhere, and that nowhere [it seems] is unlocatable. When you adopt a baby, you know where it comes from, but, in fact, that nowhere still prevails. The baby that's yours doesn't come from anywhere. Its commodity nature is denied. But in some ways it was [once] a commodity. But even saying that it was once a commodity only pushes the question of its origin back a step. An origin has to be posited, it is not self-evident, and it is necessary, and it can't be definitively established. How this is done is, I think, an anthropological question, not one I am going to answer, but one that [nonetheless] arises. (*Pause*.)

The point [here] is that if you start from the question of uniqueness, the uniqueness of the baby, for instance, or the uniqueness of anything, of any object, already [you assume that] the uniqueness of an object means that it's not exchangeable. Insofar as

it's unique, it's incomparable. If it's incomparable, it has no value. If it has no value it can't be exchanged. But in that uniqueness, and this is one of the contributions of deconstruction, something somehow still seems to speak, even though it's untranslatable. Now, being untranslatable, understood, stimulates positing comparability and, with it, origins. "The baby has its mother's eyes." So between the uniqueness of the moment and the moment of comparability, there's a gap, and the gap is nonetheless bridged. But not entirely satisfactorily bridged. And the preservation of that gap in analysis is one of the insistences of deconstruction. (*Low rumbling noise, honking cars.*) That somehow or another the untranslatable produces the translatable, and the other way around, you could say, when it comes to cases of adoption: these are problems that are plausible in terms of deconstruction and that lead to questions of social structure and so on. Now once again, I apologize because these are cryptic examples. (*Machine turns off.*)

9. Pierro Pucci asked me about the difference between reading a literary text and reading a ritual. In the first place, as he says, in the literary text there's always some excess and something missing. The play of differences produces discontinuities. Isn't it the same situation when the anthropologist reads a ritual? I think, increasingly, anthropologists would say "yes." At [the] point when ritual is understood as an expression of social structure, then one only had to reduce the events of the ritual to preceding understandings of the way social structure was institutionalized and was established and so on. Today I think it's rare to find that, and, instead, when you analyze a ritual, of course you read it differently than [the] people who put it on understand it. (*Sound of door opening.*) People who put it on, of course, understand that [the] ritual form was given to them. In that sense, it's inscribed. It's already a text for them. But for us, the text both establishes and controls a certain lack and a certain excess, as we [might] put it.

For instance, death rituals: there's an example from fifty or sixty years ago, or even longer, by Clifford Geertz of a ritual [in Java] which didn't take place when someone died, and there was no one to perform the ritual.¹¹ Well, life stopped—out of nervousness, let's say. There was no longer any credibility in the ordinary forms of life. They didn't work any longer. Something seemed to be at work that prevented it, something that made people nervous, that made people upset, no matter about what, and they simply couldn't go on until finally the ritual was [re]established. What you can understand from [his] reading, and in re-reading after him, is that the ritual itself has established death. It "discovers" what it is that made people nervous. That is, at first it looks as though when someone dies there already is an understanding of what death is, and then we only have to apply something, to confirm that the person actually is "dead." It remains only to put "the dead" apart from "the living." But, of course, the implication of that is that everyone knows what [death] is, and the ritual reminds them of it. It puts death in its place, and so removes the source of nervousness. At the same time, we know that there are various deaths that occur without any ritual. In war, for instance, in mass disasters, [and] other occasions like that, and probably

¹¹ See Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 142–69. Originally published in *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959): 991–1012. Siegel has returned to this example a number of times in his work. For example, see "Images, Odors, and Javanese Death," which appears as chapter 10 in his book *Solo in the New Order*, pp. 257–76.

even ordinary ones, people die and there is no ritual to cover [their death]. Sometimes nervousness ensues, but not necessarily and not everywhere. But when there is supposed to be a ritual and it doesn't happen, then one feels that something disturbing is at work. It seems, then, that the ritual itself has invented or named a place that was felt to be unnamable. So the ritual has established death, while death seems to call for the ritual. One can't say which comes first and which comes second. The two operate together because neither of them can control the other that's established by the very establishment of the text.

On this trip, we passed through the cities affected by the tsunami. In the capital of the province of Aceh, Banda Aceh, there are very large mass graves. Now, at one of these, there are elaborate boundary markers with an impressive doorway. There's a walkway that goes straight back [made of] cement. All of this had been erected at some significant cost. When you go in, there are small signs that say "no one is allowed to walk on the area outside of the walkway." So you see people on the anniversary of the tsunami come, people who often, of course, don't know whether the relatives they lost are buried there or not. It's solemn and moving when one sees them at the edge of the mass graves squat and pray and read the Quran and so on and then leave. Of course, all this definition of space is arbitrary. The walkway that [goes] over the grave[s] has been smoothed out and there are plaques, and especially there's the gate.

Now in another city on the west coast, where also the devastation was enormous, there are also mass graves. But these mass graves are much smaller. [Their construction] was never apparently centralized under a single authority, as they must have [been] in Banda Aceh, when they collected the bodies and had to dispose of them. So [the graves] were done the best they could, I'd say. Some of these graves are also fenced off, and some aren't fenced off. One that was fenced off, for instance, was fenced off with a wooden post and barbed wire in between. Well, we were astonished to see someone slip in under the barbed wire in order to rest under the trees which were already growing in this area. The area itself of the graves is uneven. Nothing had been planted. It's been filled in with rubble so it looked like a garbage dump that's been filled over. Young people are known to use this area of the mass graves as a trysting place. At least on the day that we were there, and later when I went back, there was absolutely none of the solemnity that we felt in Banda Aceh. But the graves still have an effect. I think it's not an accident that this area [has been] used as a trysting place because there *is* still something at work. Here the lack of the ritualization of the place has led to an entirely different definition of the relation between death and life. In Meulaboh, we can say, "death"—to use a shortcut—is sublated into life without the centralization that one saw in Banda Aceh, where it is then co-opted by the government itself. It's the government that tells you to keep off the graves. In Meulaboh, nobody says "keep off the graves," or "don't keep off the graves." And still, the charge that results from the fact that no ritual was ever made, that there was this terrible event that has never been, as it were, properly defined, has left the city itself in an amorphous state. On the one hand, there are the lovers that I mentioned. On the other, we [also] met one woman, and I'm sure there have been many more, who for three years after the tsunami, came daily to the grave where she thinks perhaps her daughter is buried. She lost two teenage daughters. This is, of course, an individual act. For her, the grave has a charge, but for the lovers the grave has a different charge. Neither, I think, would be the case if there weren't something at work that would not

be if the dead were confirmed as such ritually. We wouldn't be able to see this, let's say, to answer your question, unless we had a prior understanding of the nature of ritual, which we then revise when we see its workings, or its failure to work.

(Pause.)

Vince Rafael asked me about Derrida, and his influence on my work and what importance he has for thinking about Indonesia, where, of course, I've spent most of my professional life and maybe most of my imaginative life as well. When did it happen that Derrida appealed to me and how did it affect my thinking about Indonesia? I think it came after I wrote *The Rope of God*, and then, in 1965, there was the massacre of Communists and presumed Communists. It was obvious right then [that] I had missed something essential because I didn't foresee this, and the people who did it were people whom I never expected to do such a thing, or to be in favor of it if, as in fact I learned, they were when I went to back Aceh later. So the question is: how is it that this event occurred? (*Sound of a door squeaking on its hinges, closing and opening.*) Well, I still don't have an answer for that question. And the fact that I don't have an answer for that question after forty years indicates that the usual places where one looks for it don't yield it. When suddenly people (*sound of voices in the background*) who were your neighbors, people whom you knew, even though you ideologically might have been against them, who you had no trouble getting along with, and who were a part of the society, are suddenly massacred, and it's thought to be a good thing, what you want to know is, as they say, "how was the Other formed?" What is it, how is it that it came about? It's not enough to be historical about this, though it's essential to be that. It's not enough. One has to get to the point where one can think about how the Other might possibly take shape. Derrida gives one clues about how to proceed, and in that way he inflects my thinking about Indonesia.

It seems strange to think that Derrida can help one think about Indonesia. I am sure he never even mentioned the name of that country. Derrida is useful in the analysis of authority, of course, and that has an obvious use anywhere. When one says "authority," one thinks "political authority." But it is much more. The force of my own words, the authority of my thinking, comes into doubt, not because my thinking is wrongly structured, necessarily, but because I hear my own words differently, consequently I revise. But Derrida is not the only one to do that to me. The first person I remember having that effect was Ben Anderson when he and I taught a course on Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Ben would look at a word that I thought I understood and see what I had missed. I want to call that a revelation, the same sort that occurs from such a radically different approach in Derrida. There are others as well. But I think strangely I can explain the effect of Derrida by speaking about Ben. When Ben wrote *Imagined Communities*, for instance, no one had used the word "imagined" as he did. Now, unfortunately, they do. Unfortunately because it has been made the central word of a formula. When he wrote that book, however, it was after working so long on the Indonesian revolution. The course of history made it impossible to keep revolution at the center of analysis. Revolution had been understood simply as a force for nationalism until Ben wrote. After Ben, its effects were obviously important but unclear. There is no direct connection between Javanese revolutionary force and imagining the nation. Except that one finds the same transforming forces at work before people know what they are doing. There is little direct connection between the

Indonesian experience of nationalism and what happened in the rest of the world. But through a sort of slippage, in the move away from Indonesia to the then new world of emerging nations, Ben understood that the connection between revolution and nationalism had to be loosened. The European experience in which revolution produces nationalism was made secondary. Revolution and nationalism were made current rather than being already worked out, a matter of history, and so available as a pattern for other places and even other times. The force of the explanation is in the slippage itself. Not in the idea, but in something that does not get said but nonetheless seems to inform the work. Now permit me the leap—when I read Derrida and think of Indonesia, something like that happens. The authority of words crumbles, and one has to find a way to shore it up again. It takes careful, linguistically powerful achievements to make one read carefully, whether one wants to or not, [a talent] that one finds in some people. Not all of them, by the way, are writers. One finds people, quite ordinary types, in Aceh that can speak in that way when they talk about the tsunami, for instance. So, in short, to come back to Vince's question about Derrida, I would say that it is the power to be current, to talk about this time, and yet seem somehow to embody other times and other places and other thoughts that produces effects on me. So that would be, once again, an inadequate answer, as with a lot of these questions, even, perhaps all of them. The questions are extremely good and I can't answer them because they take too much, precisely because they are so penetrating. (*Long pause. Sound of shuffling papers.*)

Okay. Once again, I don't know when the light blinks [on the machine] if it is recording [or] is it not recording? Once more this machine has defeated me. I'm probably only talking to myself. Well, again I have to repeat the question, the answer rather, because I think I didn't record.

This is in regard to Andrew Willford who asked me about the obligation that's been imposed upon us to get a subject's permission when we want to interview him or her and therefore to give up the possibility of the oblique techniques that we use when we simply talk with people. Now if we followed the rules often imposed every time we open a conversation we have to get permission. Wouldn't that certainly be the end, or at least an enormous truncation of our research? And of course I think it certainly would be. But I think that we have to be able to answer. I think we have to be able to say to the people who imposed this upon us how it is that we are responsible, and how it is that the very things they want us to avoid depend on the informality of our method: the fact that we simply talk with people, and muse about what we hear, and we don't know when it is when we're doing research sometimes, and when we're not, when we're just engaging in ordinary conversation. It seems to me that it's [through] the ordinary conversation [that we are] in fact engaged in a relationship. It gives us a sense of responsibility. We feel responsible to those people whom we know and who we've worked with. Whether we agree with them or don't agree with them, whether we think what they did was horrible, or whether we think what they did was good, nonetheless there is a sense of responsibility. We answer to them when we do our work, and we answer to them because we feel obliged to do so. The obligation comes from the nature of our engagement. To understand what people tell you, you have to engage with them. And when you engage with somebody, you feel obliged to answer to them, and that's what comes out in our work. The alternative is the imprisonment of formality and the limitation to questions given in advance. Nothing that we don't

know already can be learned that way. That's why I think that these new regulations are a real danger. Not to mention the obvious political censorship unavoidable when we work in certain places.

I have talked at length with dozens of murderers. I feel responsible for accurately reporting their views. That is an obligation. Not to be able to speak with them because if I would have to frame the questions, "Tell me what you did in 1965," or "Tell me about killing witches," in ways designed to protect these people (from what or who exactly?) would have meant, in some cases, that I would not be able to speak to them at all. This is censorship. A censorship decided thousands of miles from the place the conversation would take place by people who know nothing about the place or the topic and do not speak the language. A censorship that allows murderous currents to continue. But these murderers too are, alas, part of the human scene, and I have an obligation to be even more especially careful to be honest and comprehensive in writing about them. (*Machine goes off.*)

Appendix, Interview Questions

Benedict R. O'G. Anderson

What ties you to Indonesia these forty years or more?

You often used to describe yourself as an ethnographer, mainly, I guess, grapher, with "ethno" shaded. Can you say what the Task of the Ethnographer might be, and distinguish it from the Anthropologist?

You may remember Abish's splendid book *How German Is It?* In your later writings, the figure of the Jew in various guises appears quite often, but not the American. How American are you?

Rosalind Morris

The turn to genealogy that we see in so much contemporary social theory, and in so much political practice (from identitarian social movements to demands that queerness take the form of a reproductive family), seems to turn away from both literature and revolution. I remember Jim saying to me, "Anthropology used to be a discipline that taught us that everyone is wrong, because someone does things differently somewhere else." "Now," we agreed, "it is one in which we say only that everyone is right, because someone does things differently somewhere else." Is a critical anthropology possible in this milieu? What shall be its form?

John Pemberton

Starting with the assumption that everyone is, in certain respects, possessed—by the social, by language—certain places (languages? cultures?) demarcate a space for this and recognize it as such: "possession." Indonesia/the Malay world is certainly such a place; enter *prewangan*, *dukun*, spirit mediums, and all the rest. Other places like New York (and Paris?) don't really say much about possession, although occasionally the term does pop up sometimes, for example, in talk about performance, particularly

musical performance, where a musician is so compelling that it calls to mind, uncannily, possibilities of possession. But New Yorkers (as do Parisians as well, for sure) do have much to say about “music” per se: enter Lincoln Center. So one wonders, in Indonesia, where the uncanny is taken care of, as it were, elsewhere, where possession already has found articulation, how might one go about speaking of music, about what could be really compelling in music, there?

Pietro Pucci

When we read a literary text, we know that there is always some excess and something missing: the play of difference produces discontinuities; do we confront the same situation when an anthropologist reads a ritual or a segment of the social life?

When we read a text, even a text of a different culture, we “create” its own meaning, independently from what the Author meant: do we operate in the same way when we read a ritual or a segment of social life? If so, how to legitimate their intentional meaning and our uncovered meaning?

Vicente Rafael

Derrida’s work permeates much of your thinking, at least since *Shadow and Sound*. Could you talk about how this came about? At what moments do you see your thinking, especially about Indonesia, revising or differing from Derrida’s concerns (especially around questions of justice and truth)?

One of the most intriguing suggestions you made in *Naming the Witch* was that, where sorcery is concerned, historians are usually more interested in justice, anthropologists in truth. One could see in your detailed discussion of Levi-Strauss how the latter is the case. But what about the former?

A recurring motif in your ethnographic work is the matter of habit. I was hoping you could say more about that. For example, what is the difference between the habitual and conventional? How is habit (for example, that of walking) related to thinking? Does habit arise out of a certain relationship with the uncanny? And what about repetition: how is that related or not to habit?

Danilyn Rutherford

You once taught a course called “Anthropology among the Disciplines.” What is the place of anthropology among the disciplines? Has it changed since you began teaching? In what ways has it changed?

I think you once told us that the point of reading the wide range of texts we covered in your classes—Derrida, Heidegger, Hegel, Levi-Strauss, Victor Turner—was to prepare us to see what was different about the situation we were studying, not what was similar. What is the role of comparison in anthropology? I’ve had many students lately who have been inspired by your recent books on criminality and witchcraft. What should I tell them about the sorts of comparative insights they should be seeking from this work?

Andrew C. Willford

There is a new surveillance coming into force within the university system regarding human subjects research clearance protocols. Some might argue that, by following the new protocols, we, as anthropologists, jettison our most important ethnographic techniques. To be specific, the informal techniques of casual conversation could be replaced by signed consent forms when conducting research, if formal protocols are followed. How do you feel about this and its implications for the future of our discipline?

What is nationalism in a multi-ethnic context in the absence of revolution? Must it always take negative and dissonant forms? How might we come to study this as anthropologists?