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5

MAKING ANTHROPOLOGY RELEVANT TO OTHER PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

Steffen Jöhncke

The editors of this volume have asked contributors to reflect on 'why the world needs anthropologists'. I must admit that sometimes I think the real challenge is to remind anthropologists that *they* need the world. In much anthropological writing and debate I find a certain complacent and self-gratulatory tone, assured of the marvels of the discipline and of the enormous difference anthropology *could* make, if only the world would listen. I like to call this approach 'the Church of Anthropology', as a parallel to the Roman Catholic church's response to critics who want it to modernize: it is the world that should follow the Church, not the other way around. I am uncomfortable if a similar notion is implied in the question 'why the world needs anthropologists', because today the task of anthropology is less to preach than to humbly listen and critically explore the big and small problems that humanity faces. The world does not *need* anthropologists per se, unless they are willing to contribute to the collaborative effort of saving the planet, creating a more just world, or whatever fair cause we choose. Or perhaps we want to contribute to the rather more mundane task of helping private and public organizations succeed, which is how most anthropologists today make a living. To me, anthropology does not *in itself* hold a particular message to the world, beyond the promise of enlightenment. Anthropology is a professional, analytical tool that we need to keep sharp and relevant.

AnthroAnalysis: breaking new ground through collaborative projects

My approach to anthropology that makes a practical difference starts with an interest in problems that are initially defined *outside* of the discipline, by the practical and political concerns of people – professionals and citizens – in public institutions, private companies and civil organizations. AnthroAnalysis – Centre for

Applied Anthropology, the research unit that I headed for just over ten years in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, explicitly aims to take anthropology into new fields and forms of application. Since 2005, the staff at AnthroAnalysis have been using anthropological skills and competences to help solve practical problems in collaboration with partners in society. This work has been done in a deliberate attempt to demonstrate how and why we need to do away with the unproductive split between academic and non-academic anthropology. In the process, it has become clear that in this work we do not so much 'apply' anthropology as a finished package of knowledge that is 'put to use'. Rather, we explore and develop new formats and adaptations of anthropological university-based research through on-going exchanges with collaborative partners in potentially all sectors of society.

Around 2005, Kirsten Becker, a visionary young anthropologist in the department, noticed the growing interest in the use of ethnographic methods in fields like industrial and service design in Denmark, as well as the effort to use anthropology in 'user-driven innovation' as an approach to technological and commercial development. In order to pursue and study at close sight these emerging trends and their implications for the discipline, Kirsten raised funding and established collaborative projects, particularly between start-up companies and young anthropology graduates who were keen to use their skills in practice. One example was a project with a medico-technology company that was developing an early-warning fit alarm for young people with epilepsy. The company needed a better understanding of what daily life with epilepsy means to children and teens. The project is an example of the anthropological approach that focusses on living with a chronic disease (Wahlberg 2009) and it gave the company key insights into the conditions under which their new product should function. The study revealed how developers' ideas about their potential product did not match the reality and needs of families dealing with the disease in their everyday life. This and other projects drew on the vast expertise within medical anthropology that has been developed in the department since the 1980s, not least through the efforts of professor Susan Reynolds Whyte. Later, Kirsten – then with the new surname Lauritsen – moved to Ida Institute to work with hearing loss and afterwards to the large pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk. There, she is currently employed as a specialist in user insights, translating ethnographic knowledge about daily life with diabetes, haemophilia and obesity to engineers in device development, and generally sensitizing the organization to the value of understanding the social and cultural circumstances in which chronic conditions are treated.

Laying new tracks in academia

While working in the Department of Anthropology, Kirsten realized that activities she was developing needed an identity, a name of its own. She came up with Antropologisk Analyse, which was later anglicized by me to AnthroAnalysis. In 2008, I had the good fortune to take over the management of the unit. Since

then, and particularly since 2015 with my close colleague Bettina Skårup, we have continued to explore new formats, themes and fields for projects at the interface between academia and practical problems. In this work we have found no obvious models to follow within our own or other universities, so we are laying the tracks while the train is moving. Consequently, a considerable amount of time and effort is going into agile project management and leadership. The challenge is to negotiate the administrative, legal and budgetary requirements of the university while we develop project contents, frameworks and contracts with external partners, secure funding and recruit research workforce among department staff or recent master or doctoral graduates – all at the same time. Projects are funded by our partners or by grants from private companies or foundations, or from public sources at the local or national level. Once a project is agreed on, the research process must be implemented and supervised. Afterwards, the dissemination of results – usually through presentations, a published report and academic articles – must be completed. Projects are also used as case material in the training of anthropology students in the department. Thus – unlike the common practice of consultancy companies – it is essential for AnthroAnalysis not to renounce rights to data material, analyses and reports; we need to retain these as accessible contributions to the development of anthropology as a practically oriented professional activity.

Over the years, we have completed over 30 small and large projects in the most diverse collaborative arrangements; space allows for just a few examples here. We have done a number of evaluation studies of projects and services. Among those was a project with the Danish Board of Health on the experience of care among people with diabetic foot ulcers (Andersen, Pedersen and Steffen 2017), which pointed to the inconsistency and incoherence of services as a central concern. We have done a study with the Danish Cancer Society in relation to counselling and support services for people with cancer (Tonnesen, Jöhncke and Steffen 2011). There, we discussed, among other things, the sometimes-hidden mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of social groups in the way that services were presented. In an entirely different field, in collaboration with the Rockwool Foundation, we have studied the effects and implications of a large agricultural development project in northern Tanzania as seen from the perspective of local farmers (Lilleør and Lund-Sørensen 2013). In this study, we shed light on how different new techniques and crops affected individual households in various ways, thus helping to explain the overall outcomes of the development project. We have done studies of how Danish fire-fighting services may improve recruitment and retaining of part-time staff (Weisdorf 2017) by exploring what really motivates fire-fighters to do this low-paid and risky work. We have studied how staff of nursing homes deal with requirements of documentation in their work (Christensen 2014) as well as how they handle professional learning and skills development (Felding et al. 2017) amidst the complex and sometimes conflicting requirements of care work.

It may be taken as an illustration of the fast-growing interest in anthropological perspectives in Danish society that increasingly projects have been initiated

by external partners who call on us. But it is also clear that collaborative projects rely first of all on our active and continuous networking and long-term relationship building. Many large engagements commence with short pilot projects. An example is a current three-year industrial postdoctoral project with the company Exruptive on new security and information technologies for airports (Ilkjær 2019). Another one is a project on the management of innovation in the Danish postal services (Lex 2016). In fact, new technologies have been the focus of several projects in recent years. In particular, they concern the challenges that developers and organizations experience with implementation and daily use of new technologies. Here anthropology helps to shed light on what happens in practice when technologies travel from the drawing – and management – boards to the everyday working conditions of practitioners. We can offer insights into how and why technologies are always assessed, adapted and used differently than anticipated. In this line of work, we have worked with a wide range of professionals: craftsmen on the job who use cell phone apps to order spare parts (Karsten 2019), captains on ships of the DFDS shipping company who use (or do not use) navigational decision support systems (Jakobsen, Skårup and Jöhncke 2017), nursing home staff who use welfare technologies in care work for people with dementia (Felding 2018), as well as builders, engineers and developers who negotiate the potentials of using robots on building sites (Leeson 2017).

Recasting problems anthropologically

A crucial element of our work is the critical interpretation and translation of organizational needs and collaborator organizations' understanding of problems into anthropological research questions. In this, we use the capacity of anthropology – theoretical and methodological – to account for good reasons people have for doing what they do. However strange, problematic or unknown a field might seem from the outside, anthropologists will assume that there is an abstract systematicity to it. We can refer to it as culture – something that we know how to study, understand and explain. It is no coincidence that in many of the projects mentioned, we are initially called in to study staff, users, patients, customers, project recipients or other 'groups' who are the target audiences of some form of intervention; be it in the form of medical treatment, a training or support system or the introduction of a new technology. It is usually a powerful and high-ranking group of professionals who call on the anthropologists to help them explain the thoughts and behaviour of some 'others', namely, the target groups of their professional intervention.

However, as anthropologists, we can do more than just explain the experiences and life worlds of these 'target audiences'. We can use these insights to challenge the assumptions and perspectives of the professionals, managers, policy makers and technology developers who defined the interventions in the first place. These groups may not realize (or understand) this at first, but, in fact, they are as much a part of the ethnographic field that we account for as are the target groups of their endeavours. In the end, the professional groups that we

collaborate with are very much the objects of our critical examination as the limitations of their assumptions are exposed. It is then an essential part of the anthropological task to disseminate this critique to them in such a way that they may actually understand and appreciate it – and act on it appropriately. Findings are also made available to the professionals' target groups that we study, so that they too may take their own course of action. We strive to make our reports available and accessible for non-academic audiences, which is one more reason why keeping our publication rights is essential.

The general purpose of AnthroAnalysis is to be part of the ever-evolving ways in which anthropology is being put to work in Danish (and global) contexts and to organize and develop innovative ways of incorporating this knowledge and experience *into* the practices of teaching and research taking place in the Department of Anthropology in Copenhagen and elsewhere. The point is thus to *expand* the field of possibilities of anthropological research by giving researchers *access* to new sites and new problematics that they might not otherwise have thought of as accessible or even interesting. In this way, we hope to give rise to new forms of engagement and interaction. In addition, we have strived to find ways to further increase the short or long-term participation of faculty members in our projects, in order for more of them to gain additional first-hand experience with practically oriented work. This should also develop their understanding of the skills and competencies that it requires, not least in terms of collaboration with external, professional partners.

FIGURE 5.1 Steffen Jöhncke and Bettina Skårup of AnthroAnalysis facilitated a workshop on collaborative projects at *Why the World Needs Anthropologists* symposium in Tartu, Estonia, 2016. Courtesy Aivo Põlluäär.

Collaboration is key

Probably 'collaboration' remains the best shorthand term available for the core characteristic of the work that we do. Collaboration means working together to take the interests and perspectives of all concerned into consideration. I notice that it has become common among some anthropologists to employ the term 'collaboration' for any kind of relationship with people during fieldwork so that 'collaborator' appears to be simply a new euphemism for people formerly known as 'informants' or 'interlocutors'. This is sometimes the case even when there does not seem to be any other purpose of the 'collaboration' than the production of data for the advancement of the anthropologist's analysis and, one may add, career.

In our work, 'collaboration' connotes something different and involves rather more mutual forms of obligation and consideration. First of all, it is based on the premise that we are dealing initially with a practical problem that our collaborator has identified. The definition of the problem has been made from a particular *perspective* within the collaborating organization – usually management – who has successfully claimed the right to speak for the organization as a whole. But the premise is also that this definition of the problem does not provide the answers, since a decision has been made to consult with university-based anthropologists in order to get the practical problem solved, or – which is often the case – to have the problem approached and explored in novel ways. As anthropologists in policy and practice, we have an obligation to take the collaborative partners' problems seriously – otherwise we should decline to work with them. However, and this is crucial, we are not obliged to adopt their definition or theory of the problem and in that sense, we never simply reply to a given question. Our collaborative partner must give us as anthropologists the liberty to explore the problem, the people who define it, as well as those who are affected by it in different ways.

For instance, in our project with the DFDS shipping company mentioned earlier (Jakobsen, Skårup and Jöhncke 2017), the initial question was why particular technologies that were designed to assist navigational decision-making, save fuel and reduce CO_2 emissions, were being used differently by identical ships. Did this have anything to do with differences between ships in terms of the local management culture on board? What we found during fieldwork on board four ships at sea was that the notion of 'identical ships' was misleading. One of the main problems was miscommunication between the shore and the ship in the introduction of new technologies as well as some lack of appreciation within the company for the decisive role of professional experience, discretion and the strong sense of responsibility that is essential for navigation. Consequently, the solution suggested was not to strengthen management tools, as was probably expected by the company, but a more careful implementation of new technologies on board the company's ships. Definitely the problem

had to do with social relations, as the company management had anticipated, which is probably also why they had approached anthropologists in the first place. But the challenge was in no way limited to on-ship conditions. Rather, it was a question of relations between land and sea sections of the company, which became clear when we saw the company as a whole from the perspective of the ships' crews. As it happens, the company later reported that our study has helped to increase general attention to how route optimization tools are designed, implemented and used, thus substantially helping to save fuel and reduce CO_2 emissions from DFDS ships.

So, in this manner, to us in AnthroAnalysis, 'collaboration' implies the meeting of practical challenges with the expertise of anthropologists to conceptually recast problems based on empirical observation and critical analysis. What is being 'applied' here is less an existing body of anthropological knowledge (though that may play a role, too) and more the ability to reframe problems and therefore recommendations and possible solutions. Often it has to do with fundamental anthropological epistemology: what may be known about the world and how it may be known. Frequently we get the response from collaborators that not only are our insights as such new to them, but that they also did not know that this *kind* of knowledge could be produced.

From discipline to profession

This idea of collaboration – in the sense of a mutual and professionally based obligation – as a crucial aspect of contemporary anthropology is akin to what American anthropologists Les Field and Richard Fox (2007) argued already more than ten years ago in their book *Anthropology Put to Work*. Based on evidence from a range of anthropologists working in and outside the academia, they explain that the ability to collaborate across disciplinary and professional boundaries amounts to a new paradigm of anthropology. They suggest that approaches to social relations in fieldwork focus less on the often self-absorbed and emotionally laden ideas of 'rapport' and 'reflexivity', and increasingly more on collaborations as forms of professional and responsible engagements with the field. Building on this, I would argue that this shift of emphasis is but one expression of a more general development in the status of anthropology from being a *discipline* to becoming a *profession*: that is, from a discipline with its centre of gravity in academia as the obvious and undisputed source of legitimacy, to a profession with a broader set of potential criteria for relevance and competence, not to speak of a broader set of legitimate career patterns and experiences. The ability to professionally handle collaborative relationships of a multitude of types has always been essential for anthropologists working in policy and practice – a format of work that parts of academic anthropology are now beginning to catch up with and that is essential for the training of future generations of anthropologists.

FINDING MY PLACE IN ANTHROPOLOGY

I was only eighteen years old when anthropology became my vocation of choice. Towards the end of high school in 1981, I had convinced myself that I wanted to go to university and that anthropology should be my subject of study. After a year of travel in Iceland and Israel/Palestine, I started as the youngest student out of a group of only 25 – and with a seemingly endless and foggy road ahead of me. Traditionally, university programmes in Denmark are long and monodisciplinary, which was even truer 40 years ago than it is today. In anthropology, there was one degree only, the 'magisterkonferens', roughly corresponding to a Master of Philosophy, which was awarded after seven years of studies. If you stopped before that, you left with nothing. In Denmark, anthropology is still taught in predominantly monodisciplinary programmes, but at least it is now possible to leave with either a bachelor's or a master's degree – and to combine anthropology with courses or degrees in other disciplines. Today I find it difficult to recall what exactly made me embark on such a project: seven years of studies in a virtually unknown subject and with absolutely no idea of employment prospects at the end of it. Still, anthropology seemed to combine arts and social science in an attractive way, and most of all, it allowed me to postpone the decision about what I really wanted to do for a living. As it turned out, anthropology proved flexible enough to be adapted to the many different interests and phases of my life. In fact, I have chosen and re-chosen anthropology several times.

I come from a working-class family that was highly devoted to learning, social commitment and cultural outlook. My parents were not wealthy at all, but they prioritized sending us three kids to a private, Catholic school – exactly because we were *not* Catholics and my parents thought it would be good for us to meet a different culture in addition to what we knew already. As a family, we travelled as much as the budget allowed. This did not include aeroplanes, but holidays in the car enabled us to see the mountains of Norway and Austria as well as the war cemeteries of Verdun in France and the cathedral of Aachen in Germany; no reason why a summer vacation could not be educational. Travelling and meeting people in other countries were passions of mine as far back as I can recall, and I am sure this formed a crucial part of my decision to study anthropology. (What other subject could provide better excuses for global travel?) Still, I am not sure how exactly I first became acquainted with the existence of the discipline. It might well have been through the Ethnographic Collection in the National Museum of Denmark, which I loved, or through reading about the peoples of Amazonia and the Andes in high school.

FIGURE 5.2 Steffen Jöhncke and Peter have been partners and comrades in arms since 1983. Here they are in 1988. Private archive of Steffen Jöhncke.

At any rate, anthropology caught me. Anything could be treated anthropologically, I realized. When I came out as a gay man in my second year of studies, I wrote a major assignment about accounts of same-sex relationships in historical ethnographies from practically everywhere. As friends of mine started to succumb to a new disease – what we found out only later was HIV – I took courses in anthropology of health and analysed public media reactions to AIDS and my own observations of fear and stigma in the community. Reading Foucault was a revelation in the 1980s and the Copenhagen Department of Anthropology allowed me to thrive. Although I spent long periods of time away from my studies as a writer and activist in the LGBT movement, I still felt at home in the discipline and involved myself in the running of the Danish Association of Anthropologists. In 1987, Anders Dahl, a fellow student with a background in social work, invited me to join a group of social workers and anthropologists who were setting up a study of male-to-male sex work in Copenhagen – a theme of particular interest due to the HIV epidemic. The National Board of Health and the Copenhagen city council decided to fund us for a year, during which we conducted fieldwork with sex workers as we tried to understand the rapidly changing scene and the possibility of supportive interventions. Authorities regarded the sex workers mainly as *a risk* in terms of spreading HIV to 'the general population' whereas our approach acknowledged that sex workers were *at risk* themselves. Based on this, we

(*Continued*)

called for health and counselling interventions to take account of that. As it turned out, my part of the study of male sex work became the basis of my 'magisterkonferens' thesis in 1991, after a very inspirational year studying social anthropology and social policy with Susan Wright at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

After working in practice for ten years – mainly in the field of social work, and particularly in relation to services for drug users (described in the next section) – I was fortunate enough to be able to choose to study anthropology yet again in 2001. This time I joined the Copenhagen Department of Anthropology as a doctoral student. I partly worked with the material that I had collected as a practitioner and my doctoral thesis thus combined my interest in critical anthropology with making a practical difference beyond the discipline. My supervisor, professor Susan Reynolds Whyte, whom I have known since my first days in the department in 1982, reminded me that this had been my sceptical approach from the start: 'Anthropology is *interesting*, yes ... but I need to see how it makes a *difference* to the world'. I must admit: that still drives me.

APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY IN SOCIAL WORK

A leitmotif in a life course is usually a reconstruction of apparent coherence that might not have been clear at the time, and least of all the result of a strategy. At any rate, applying anthropology to social work has been a recurrent theme in my trajectory. The work with HIV that I began in relation to male sex workers in the project described above continued with an evaluation of information and support work directed to men who have sex with men (Jöhncke, Jørgensen and Hald 1993), in collaboration with a psychologist and a fellow anthropologist. This further led to a European Union funded project on services to immigrants living with HIV in three European cities, within which I was responsible for the Copenhagen study (Jöhncke 1996). The study was hosted by HIV Danmark, an organization founded and run by people affected by HIV in order to work for their rights and provide counselling. In this context, the project found a very welcoming and fertile ground for anthropological perspectives, in the sense that we analysed services 'bottom-up' with a focus on the experiences and predicaments of users and professionals alike.

Working with people living with HIV drew my attention to the situation of intravenous drug users as another highly vulnerable group. In 1996, the social services department of the Copenhagen city council advertised a one-year

position to do an evaluation and user study of four public treatment centres for drug users in the city that had been set up a few years earlier. Their main tasks consisted of intake assessments of drug users seeking treatment and administering methadone treatment on a daily basis as an out-patient service. I applied for the job and got it; apparently, I successfully argued that if the department wanted an evaluation with an emphasis on users' experiences with treatment, they needed an anthropologist who would do participant observation in the centres in order to study the daily practices, interactions, and get to know the users and their lives. In practice, it was the handling of methadone that took centre stage in my fieldwork.

Methadone is a form of medication, ideally with a day-long effect, given as a substitute for other so-called opioids, usually heroin. If given in the right amount, methadone covers the tolerance to opioids that users have developed, thus preventing withdrawal symptoms and allowing users to live a steady life without illegal drugs; though for most users, methadone alone does not achieve this. As it turned out, conflicts and negotiations over methadone prescriptions and drug intake were major concerns for users as well as staff, and this dominated the relations between them. Many staff members were more or less openly opposed to the prescription of methadone that they handled on a daily basis. Conditions of methadone use were also the single most regulated element of treatment by the Danish health authorities and the local centres. Users' appearance, behaviour and drug habits were continuously monitored by staff, including compulsory urine testing. As a consequence, users felt constantly subjected to suspicion and the threat of expulsion for breaking the rules (even though this rarely happened in practice). Everybody's firm focus on the methadone use was in sharp contrast with the formally stated policies and intentions of treatment in which methadone was supposed to only be a 'supportive' means. 'The real treatment' was to be the social and psychological services that users were (ideally) to be offered – a never realized ambition about which users and staff actually agreed would be ideal.

My initial report to the social services department outlined the problems that I had observed and the criticisms and concerns raised by the users during our conversations and interviews (Jöhncke 1997). Some of my findings were met with scepticism: drug users were by some perceived as invariably disturbed and hence the real source of trouble. However, many staff members and certainly the department management accepted my point that the daily conflicts in the clinic should be regarded as expressions of underlying inconsistencies in the approaches and practices of methadone use in the treatment system. Despite the fact that many users clearly benefit from methadone, as also shown by numerous studies, the substance has never been fully accepted by a treatment system and by public opinion that fundamentally

(*Continued*)

values abstinence over everything else. Hence, this results in the reluctant and control-obsessed regime that surrounds it.

By way of conducting several other projects in the same field, while working as a research associate and an assistant professor, I eventually finished my doctoral thesis on the subject of drug use treatment in 2008. My initial observations of the evident contrasts between intentions and clinical realities sent me on a long journey into the cultural and political history of drug use treatment. I realized that my bewilderment about the many meanings and uses of the emic term 'treatment' was actually at the core of the issue. In short, 'treatment' in relation to drug use has no specific meaning or content. The floating notion of treatment represents a piece of political wishful thinking, the idea that the unfortunate and illegal behaviour of drug use may be eradicated, one individual at a time. Users are subjected to a series of institutionalizations and various forms of influence, often regarded and handled in isolation from users' general conditions of living. Closely related to this is the cultural misconstruction of drug use as a specific 'disease', which perfectly suits the idea of treatment as a form of cure.

In my eyes, anthropology is well suited to expose and critique the consequences of these harmful and irrational cultural notions of drug use, drug users and treatment (Jöhncke 2009). It is also an example, I think, of how social indignation can be an important driver of anthropology. At least for me, what started as the subject of a one-year job more than twenty years ago not only continues to be a source of outrage but has also worked in tandem with my attitude to anthropology: use anthropology as a tool for what you think is important and what you want to challenge, change or help improve – 'interesting' is not quite enough.

FIVE TIPS FROM STEFFEN JÖHNCKE

1. **Use your ethnographic skills to study and decipher each potential employer.** What is important for his or her organization and how would your anthropological approach support him or her?
2. **Anthropology is not just a set of methods, it is a theoretically informed approach** to understanding why people do as they do – practice explaining that in plain words.
3. **When you apply for a job, explain what you bring to the job**, not how the job will interest or develop you.
4. **Your competences are not recognized until you can explain that you have them** – know what you know and show it.
5. **Dare do with anthropology what *you* think is important** – the university will not teach you what that is.

About the author

Steffen Jöhncke, PhD, was trained in social anthropology at the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) and the University of Sussex (United Kingdom). Since his postgraduate studies, he has applied anthropological perspectives to social work and health issues, being employed as an evaluator, civil servant and independent scholar before returning to academia in 2001 for doctoral studies. From 2008 to 2018, he was manager of *AnthroAnalysis – Centre for Applied Anthropology* in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. In 2019/20 he was visiting professor in the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus (Denmark), and from 2020 he is senior lecturer in social anthropology in the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden).

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6

SEARCHING FOR VARIATION AND COMPLEXITY

Tanja Winther

To me, anthropology's mission is to search for and document variety in human experience. If the goal of religious leaders is to translate what established doctrines imply in terms of how people should live, anthropology has explored the organization, meanings and implications of religion in a given context. If economy as a science is about trying to optimize the production and use of resources in a given society, anthropology seeks to explore how material resources and representations, such as money and the use of light bulbs, are entangled in social relations and cultural values. If engineering is about developing energy efficient and technology smart solutions, anthropology is concerned with the ways different groups of people potentially start using these technologies, and the social implications thereof. (I am presuming here that sociologists and other academics affiliated with Science and Technology Studies continue to focus on developers and engineers as an important group for social analysis.)

Hence, in contrast to religious leaders, economics and engineering, anthropology is less normative in its purpose, and more explorative, rather than attuned towards finding solutions to pre-defined questions. We cherish and celebrate the complex and often surprising and intriguing aspects of human living. Clifford Geertz (1973: 30) referred to the mission of (interpretative) anthropology as being 'not to answer our deepest questions but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man [sic] has said'.

Today, having moved from the mainly interpretative approach of the 1970s towards studying social practices (Ortner 2006), we do not only pay attention to what people say but also to what people do, what they do with things and the relations of power in which people and objects are entangled. (To keep up with the changes in language, we would also replace Geertz's term 'man' with people or human beings.) Otherwise, the anthropological purpose of being witness to the variation in human experience seems to stand.