



OPENING EDITORIAL

MATILDE CÓRDOBA AZCÁRATE

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3680-8717>

ALBERTO CORSÍN JIMÉNEZ

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1360-4060>

JULIA ELYACHAR

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3627-9707>

JOANNE NUCHO

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2489-8196>

ABDOUMALIQ SIMONE

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1630-1997>

MANUEL TIRONI

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2733-8071>

ATHER ZIA

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7210-2239>

Our generation of editors faces a shared set of critical challenges (ESTS Editorial Collective et al. 2021; Neale et al. 2022). This is no different for our collective, which in addition has an experimental distributed organizational structure. We view those challenges with both familiarity and alarm. The problematics at issue have, we know, been around for a long time. Like so many, we feel both the urgent need to do something *now* and anxious awareness of how little we *can* do—right now, at least. How to steer an informed, confident, and yet modest editorial course through challenges of earthly habitat loss, global energy crisis, Cold War revivalism, right-wing theo-political awakenings, pandemic mismanagement, white supremacism, massive urbanization, dataveillance, and platform capitalism? How

can we do so while remaining attuned to this period's huge potentials: Black Lives Matter, Sanctuary and Fearless cities, Indigenous resurgence, renewed feminist internationals, atlases of parasites, modest witnesses, other-than-human diplomats, and anthropological companions?

As members of the editorial collective of *Cultural Anthropology*, we stand as humbled witnesses to this crucial moment. We began work wondering: What is relevant? What is called for in this historical moment of world history and in the history of academia, anthropology in particular? How can we help give form to experiences and experiments in other than a reactive mode? Such questions have guided *Cultural Anthropology's* signature orientation to anthropology since its foundation. Our vision for the journal builds on this trajectory to intervene in the affordances of editorship as a platform for connective transformations in anthropology and beyond.

Our approach to editorship also reflects our desire to enable a multiplicity of sensibilities, methodological practices, and scales of consideration. There are many stories that need to be told, and many stories that can no longer be told in the same way. Stories require specific kinds of arguments and styles. This goes beyond simply amplifying our intellectual and political concerns. Rather, different modes of analysis might help us better understand—and engage with—contemporary experiences and movements of justice and reparation, autonomy and solidarity. This moment demands, we think, more than analytic engagement with ongoing and radicalizing systems of extraction, displacement, violence, and subjugation—crucial as that analytic work remains. Nor can we only document intransitive worlds of affectivity, improvisation, vulnerability, and silence. The moment, as many have pointed out, demands a retooling of anthropological methods to concretely prefigure more judicious dispositions of social and collective experience. As such, we imagine editorship to include the collective design of concrete tools to further anthropology's salience to the exigencies of transformation, resurgence, and collaboration.

What does this mean concretely? As editors, we do not aim to weigh in on matters of academic credibility, to force adherence to any particular canon, or even to render judgment on contributions to the literature. Rather, we want to be useful: to engage with writing that speaks to a broad range of interests and audiences. We do not aim to exhibit or bolster a collective academic background. Rather, our collective wants to emphasize operating procedures that really attend to the difficult experiments and work scholars are taking on in complicated terrain, and to draw concrete lines of connection among different kinds of places and experiences.

Our editorial collective is composed of individuals with extensive experience in editorial, curatorial, and administrative work in universities, journals, digital platforms, activist organizations, and learned societies. Together, we have more than ample expertise in writing, curating, mentoring, and editing scholarly works and journal articles. We take that work traditionally conceived with the utmost seriousness. However, we also envision our team as more than a group of well-prepared individuals. We propose instead a collective that responds to this moment with organizational as well as theoretical innovation. We build on our experience in collective projects and distributed organizations to imagine editorship differently, as a curatorial platform that circulates and amplifies ongoing conversations and controversies around the world. Can editorship become a catalyzer of transversal connections between publics and counterpublics as much as a manuscript-processing stationary office?

To this end, we have expanded the collective to include seven scholars from around the world, a change of scope and scale that is the only way, in our view, to compensate for structural inequalities embedded in contemporary academic geographies of knowledge production. Our collective comprises scholars with diverse backgrounds, institutional locations, and experiences—across race and ethnicity, migratory routes and roots, academic settings of structural precarity and illicit wealth, as well as intergenerational and interdisciplinary backgrounds in anthropology, urbanism, STS, poetry, the environmental humanities, and scholarly communications activism. We bring a plurality of voices, perspectives, and sensibilities to our collective, fully aware that simply having them in the same room does not lessen the difficult work of simultaneously finding common ground, respecting singular ways of doing things, and getting specific jobs done. For we are moved by epistemologies and experiments of coordination in an age largely beholden to epistemologies of crisis (Whyte 2021).

EXPERIMENTS OF COORDINATION: Attunement, Curation, Intervention

Shortly after taking over as editors in 2015, Dominic Boyer, Cymene Howe, and James Faubion invited the journal's past editors to reflect on *Cultural Anthropology's* trajectory over the thirty years since its founding in 1986. Recalling an essay he wrote in 1991 toward the end of his term as the journal's inaugural editor, George E. Marcus (2015, 8) noted that "perhaps the most enduring legacy" of the journal lay in its orientation toward engaging "with events in the world as they unfold with ever more perceived rapidity . . . and by an alignment and critical

analytic engagement with found thinking.” The unfolding temporalities of irruption, novelty, and situated endurance, and the forms of innovative response they demand, were central concerns of the journal from its earliest days. Along those lines, Daniel Segal (2015, 197) recalled how the legacy he inherited as the journal’s third editor was shaped by Marcus’s “deserved reputation for always looking ‘for the next thing.’” Segal felt uncertain that newness should indeed drive anthropological curiosity. Yet a conversation he had with Donna Haraway, who did in fact value such an inclination toward “the new” for “fostering a sense of the possibility of radical change” (Segal 2015, 199), gave him pause for thought. In time, Segal came around to articulate a space for novelty in the pages of the journal in terms of anthropology’s complex inhabiting of the histories and margins of modern empire and statehood.

Over the years, *Cultural Anthropology* has led the way in shaping intellectual modes of attention toward the emergent and the novel, an orientation carried through the tractions of ethnography, its grounded obligations and responsibilities, and the glimmers of adventurousness and mobilization that energize it—an orientation swaying forward in between temporalities, a “method,” as Anne Allison and Charles Piot (2015, 528) have put it, “of untimely timeliness.”

Inevitably, expressions of untimely timeliness have shifted over the course of the journal’s thirty-five-year history. Already in 1991, when Fred Myers (1992, 3) took over from Marcus as editor of the journal, he noted how “a principal dimension of this change has been the shifting of boundaries between those who study and those who are the subjects of study, as well as a radical reorganization of the boundaries between disciplines and their relocation in the world.” *Cultural Anthropology* has undoubtedly been at the forefront of the human and social sciences’ navigations of these shifting boundary formations and epistemic equivocations. The journal’s brazen commitment to keeping alight the “magical mix of theory and ethnography” (Allison and Piot 2015, 525) has driven its unrepentant experimental ethos, from its early inquiries into the genres of textual reflexivity to the cross-examination of anthropological positionalities, on to more recent experiments with the infrastructural designs of anthropological publics. “Experimental work that brings new problems, concepts, and political possibilities into play is critical,” have noted Kim Fortun and Mike Fortun (2015, 366); “so is the infrastructural work on which those experiments depend, and which is itself a form of experimentation.”

Cultural Anthropology’s experimental vocation has opened new vistas and possibilities for the digital futures of the human sciences. Building on Kim and Mike Fortun’s foresighted design of a lively digital scholarly platform during their term

as editors (2005–2010), the journal became in 2014 a fully open-access operation. Its website has since grown to become the premier site for rapid-response conceptual prefigurations in anthropology and related disciplines. These are not simply technical add-ons to a scholarly operation: They lie at the heart of how *Cultural Anthropology* has redesigned itself as a knowledge exchange in recent years. In the words of the journal's outgoing editors, we are witnessing how publishing programs are "swinging away from bespoke systems and processes toward new forms of interdependency" (Weiss, Paxson, and Nelson 2019, 2). Such pressures and opportunities prompted Boyer, Faubion, and Howe (2015, 5) to reimagine the editorial office as an "editorial collective," an organizational framework enabling "a greater decentralization of authority and responsibility as befits an open-access model of publication."

Our own vision for the journal partakes of this distinguished genealogy of critical possibility, untimely timeliness, and experimental expansiveness. We could not do otherwise. We treasure the journal's long-standing exploration of the forms, media, and designs of scholarly inquiry and accompaniment. We recognize ourselves as heirs, too, to its critical explorations of the uneven epistemic geographies and decolonial aspirations rushing through the structures of the academy today. In response, we are committed to both the "blurred genres" and "complex trajectories" of situated apprenticeships, to paraphrase a distinction once made by Marilyn Strathern (1999, 25), in the belief that there is room for reimagining scholarly, community, and infrastructural alignments for "dealing with the unpredictable."

A PROGRAM FOR COLLECTIVE UNPREDICTABILITY

We image our editorial vision for *Cultural Anthropology* as a concerted effort to bring to the fore unpredictable sensibilities and readings of various social fields and more collectively based experiments for engaging and representing them; to distill multiple ways of reading from them and to find practical ways of putting them in touch with each other, learning from each other.

As such, we have invested in a specific suite of pragmatic operations. We have expanded the editorial collective into a group of seven scholars, including academics based outside the Anglo-American academy. Our collective is inclusive and diverse, and includes senior and junior scholars with experience of academic work in universities and activist organizations in the Global South, Europe, and the Americas.

This expanded editorial collective allows us to distribute the editorial workload among scholars who have otherwise no access to service and teaching buy-

outs. It is only by expanding the collective that we can set in place an ethics of care in academia, including a division of labor that is mindful and attentive to the structures of academic employment outside elite and wealthy institutions.

While deeply invested in world anthropologies, our editorial collective is also interdisciplinary, including scholars well known for actively shaping emerging debates in STS, media and design studies, the environmental humanities, and urban studies. A plurality of sensibilities and trajectories offers us the means to attend to emerging intersections, diffractions, and invisibilities in boundary-making and boundary-policing between and within disciplines.

An expanded editorial collective will further enable us to effect a “distribution of the sensible” (after Jacques Rancière), learning to listen and attune to conversations, controversies, and struggles in a wide variety of regions, places, and problem spaces. For instance, we are opening *Cultural Anthropology* to submissions in Spanish. We are excited about the possibilities that this modest experiment at bilingualism generates for pluralizing the arts of journal curation by allowing us to stage more complex and diffracting conversations across different publics, intellectual sensibilities, and empirical traditions.

We are particularly keen to experiment also with the curatorial philosophy of the journal’s digital venues—the Theorizing the Contemporary and Hot Spots series—to cultivate choral exchanges and collective compositions that address the aspirations of a younger generation of engaged thinkers in the South. The pandemic has brought to light emergent alliances of scholars whose orchestral productions are not always easily accommodated in mainstream publishing venues. We wish to explore and engage with these ways of working and commoning that remain unreflected in mainstream academic publications.

Our collective is ideally positioned to tap into currents of transitional thinking, epistemic disturbances, and grassroots counter-philosophies in university systems and activist arenas across the world. From Cairo to Dakar, from Karachi to Santiago de Chile, one finds tectonic transformations in public debate taking place across public universities, civil organizations, and social movements. These debates sometimes get “stuck” in systems of circulation that do not travel, or have no connection to normatively valorized academic venues; say, conferences, roundtables, or public discussions at places like Cairo University or the University of Karachi, where one can find inspiring intellectual work that rarely exceeds the confines of those institutional structures. We believe that *Cultural Anthropology*’s digital venues offer an ideal platform for hosting and transducing some such conversations.

Finally, as regards our editorial line or agenda, we remain committed to the journal's long-standing investment in refunctioning the richness of ethnography through ongoing innovations in method and collaborative designs. We will be open to submissions in all areas of anthropological research and will welcome in particular redeployments of ethnographic sensibilities in an interdisciplinary register. We are keen to explore modes of writing and storytelling capable of prefiguring new forms of gathering, valuation, and social becoming.

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