

Sociocultural Anthropology in 2016: In Dark Times: Hauntologies and Other Ghosts of Production

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ABSTRACT This essay reflects on sociocultural anthropological scholarship in 2016. The review does not create categories or rubrics—as some reviewers have done in the past. Rather, it narrativizes emergent issues and offers a number of ways of considering how a range of analytics have predetermined our anthropological practice. I survey “dark” anthropology through the ontological turn this year and conclude by amplifying the research and call to decolonize and engage our methodologies. Through this review, I revisit particular conceptions of structure and agency, especially in the context of neoliberal capitalism, and consider how that has forced us to rethink the classic tension between culture and materiality. The year 2016 was marked by a certain specter of death at the interstices of life, crisis, and a burgeoning urgency and sense of reflection on the various kinds of reifications the production of anthropological knowledge manifests. As such, the year saw important pleas, correctives, and reengagements of anthropological discourse and thematic production. The operative framework for this review deploys an anthropological hauntology, a modality through which to make sense of the specters of our discursive being. This raises questions about ethnographic research in relation to its modes of production. [*sociocultural anthropology, ontology, death, decolonizing methodology, disenchantment, crisis*]

RESUMEN Este ensayo reflexiona sobre la investigación antropológica sociocultural en 2016. La revisión no crea categorías ni rúbricas—como algunos críticos lo han hecho en el pasado. Más bien narrativiza cuestiones emergentes y ofrece un número de maneras de considerar cómo un rango de análisis de la información ha predeterminado nuestra práctica antropológica. Examinó la antropología “oscura” a través del giro ontológico este año, y concluyo amplificando la investigación y llamo a descolonizar y enfrentar nuestras metodologías. A través de esta revisión, repaso concepciones particulares de estructura y agencia, especialmente en el contexto del capitalismo neoliberal, y considero cómo este nos ha forzado a repensar la tensión clásica entre cultura y materialidad. El año 2016 estuvo marcado por un cierto espectro de muerte en los intersticios de vida, crisis y una creciente urgencia y sentido de reflexión sobre los diferentes tipos de reificaciones que la producción de conocimiento antropológico manifiesta. Como tal, el año vio importantes peticiones, correctivos, reabordajes del discurso y la producción temática antropológicos. El marco operativo de esta revisión utiliza la hauntología antropológica, una modalidad a través de la cual se da sentido a los espectros del ser discursivo. Esto genera preguntas acerca de la investigación etnográfica en relación con sus modos de producción. [*antropología sociocultural, ontología, muerte, metodología descolonizadora, desencanto, crisis*]

Time is out of joint.

— Karl Marx, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

William Shakespeare,

— *Hamlet*

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

INTRODUCTION: REVIEW AS HAUNTOLOGY

The year 2016 marked a particularly dark moment in time. The world continued to witness rising numbers of deaths related to ongoing humanitarian crises. The role of effervescent social media and news around contemporary political conditions fostered, moreover, a gnawing inability to trust sources, and ultimately ideas. Indeed, *Oxford English Dictionary* declared “post-truth” the international word of the year, attesting to its heightened use. This compound word, which marks notions of truth and time in particular ways, also signals that facts have become replaced by feelings. *Oxford English Dictionary* president Caspar Grathwohl, noted: “It’s not surprising that our choice reflects a year dominated by highly charged political and social discourse.”¹ In these dark times, the work of anthropology becomes equally entangled with the very anxieties that—to echo Marx above—“conjure up the spirits of the past to their service.” We create battle slogans and costumes to herald new ideas and approaches.

By convention, this 2016 year-in-review article surveys some of the major trends and discussions published in sociocultural anthropology this past year. Since they began in 2009 in *American Anthropologist*, year-in-review articles have thought through important emergent themes and categories. This approach is important because it asks us to look back at our production and speaks volumes about the nature of our labor. While this review will not taxonomize emergent categories, I argue that the very process of gazing back toward our production reveals important analytics. Because many of the same themes still pervade (i.e., infrastructures, materiality, human/interspecies, Anthropocene, nature/culture, power), I pay special attention to how these themes and frameworks become entangled with or linked to particular modes of production, methodologies, postures, and even sentimentalities around the creation of our knowledge. I will begin by exploring what Sherry Ortner (2016) has termed “dark anthropology,” or production in response to urgent issues in dark times. This includes our contemporary moment, led by a resounding sense of disenchantment, of which research on refugees and (anti)humanitarianism figure prominently. I then consider looking back at our disciplinary posture as a kind of hauntology, or the specters of our discursive “being through our presence and absence,” and

examine the ways it has ushered in various responses. Much of this research revisits the structure-versus-agency debate and, especially in the context of neoliberal capitalism, forces us to reconsider the classic tensions around culture, nature, and materiality. I also explore the debates and tensions that the “ontological turn” both reified and reinvigorated this year, reminding us to consider the analytic purchase of some of these recursions in relation to social transformation and contemporary political order. I conclude by examining the call to both decolonize and engage our discipline in 2016 beyond this production and recent debates.

Like many disciplines, ours is forever haunted by the kinds of practices, ideas, and methodologies that came before us. These foundational debates become visible through iteration and time, and therefore a hauntology (a portmanteau of haunting and ontology) ensues in our work. Sometimes these debates haunt the intellectual scaffolding onto which we mold analysis, responding or agreeing and aggregating as such. The process can be mimetic, because first we learn through copy and replication before we become synthetic. In this way, ours is a kind of hauntologist production, because voices of our “dead forefathers”² hover relentlessly in our etic. The discipline of anthropology rests on a kind of representation that is almost already ghostly, and the very charged debates about how to configure the contours of an ethnographic purview speak to this kind of ontological haunting. As Colin Davis frames the concept, it is a “being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead or alive” (2005, 373). This review asks us to consider our anthropological being and posture alongside contemporary methodology and impulses, revealing the tensions between epistemic and ontological knowledge (not unlike the conceptual framework proffered through analytics like emic or etic).

A hauntology can help anthropologists understand the discursive presence of a past alongside collective sentiments with regard to production. For example, Joseph Hankins’s 2014 *AA* sociocultural review essay urged US anthropology to confront an enduring moral optimism with a necessary skepticism. I respond to this call by showing the ebb and flow of these light and dark readings, and troubling the nature of hope and skepticism. Hankins (2015) framed this tension as foundational to our enterprise. These kinds of dialectical oppositions can—as Hankins shows—serve to help us think through the very process of synthesis in ethnographic production: “Sympathetic proximity to an other—whether that other be precarious or vulnerable, emergently or ontologically different, or savagely noble—still fuels vision for ‘our’ self-transformation” (554). Anthropological practice has been premised on a heterology, or “science of the other” (de Certeau 1986). Mimesis, as I mentioned earlier, along with alterity, has long served as the backdrop for authoring discoveries (Clifford 1983; Taussig 1993). The AAA conference theme in 2015, “Familiar Strange,” was a cozy reminder of the not-so-radical reversal of the classic leitmotif in the discipline of anthropology. In this very tension of making

the strange familiar, and vice versa, anthropology creates an object via subjects, a discursive conquest at the very minimal. The romantic figure of difference that is often the subject of representation has historically and under colonialism been the straw man of modernity and not always coincidentally the object of analysis by anthropologists.

Thus, the anthropological “imaginary” is a cacophony of varied approaches to debates and analysis in which our products tend to simultaneously reveal disciplinary concerns, and therefore our positionality and politics to the knowledge we produce. Even the very term “imaginary” reveals these kinds of frictions, as Stankiewicz (2016) argues. His robust genealogy of the term and its critiques demonstrates the various uses and abuses of such “catch-all devices.” Such excavations of recursive concepts in our discipline act as urgent hauntologies, backdating and revealing important moments of conceptual conflation that have the potential to trouble classic analyses. Indeed, invoking Durkheim, Stankiewicz reveals the cunning ways such recursive concepts reconcile structure and agency. If, to follow Stankiewicz and Hankins, we must be more skeptical, I ask: In what ways? Is our enduring moral optimism a kind of “politics of hope,” as McGranahan (2016) frames it in her research on how refusal is instrumentalized in Tibet? She writes: “What if to refuse can be an element of group morality, a generative act, a rearrangement of relations rather than an ending of them? I believe . . . such a reading of refusal is both optimistic and possible” (335). In other words, do anthropologists impel hope as a form of collective solidarity toward better conditions of possibility for subjects?

WEATHERING DARK STORMS

Is this hope that pushes our practice forward the other side of the skeptical coin? Sherry Ortner (2016), in her recent hauntology, suggests that we have not operated so optimistically. Indeed, anthropology has been rather “dark,” to echo her term. Precisely because our work, “at least in the social sciences, cannot be detached from the condition of the real world in which it takes place” (47), Ortner contends that the corpus of work generated from this context—especially in the face of a globalizing “neoliberalism as a new and more brutal form of capitalism” (48)—resonates in a rather dismal register. By way of gazing backward nearly three decades, Ortner’s survey of theory since the 1980s recounts literature that emerges out of an urgency to consider the inequality rampant under increasingly pessimistic trends in political economy and the resultant subjectivities of these processes of exploitation.

This dark theory and ethnography, as she suggests, came out of a need in the discipline to push beyond cultural critique and, instead, address the material conditions of culture: “Treating culture as literary texts, they ignored the harsh realities of power that drove so much human history” (49). Anthropology turned to an emphasis on the spatial politics of (accumulation by) dispossession; resultant suffering and the surveillance and governmentality alongside these

conditions necessarily took center stage. One example is Mark Fleming’s (2016) analysis of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system and its workers’ relationship to “neoliberal time.” In these ethnographic examples, anthropologists unpack a persistent disenchantment with the fruits of contemporary political economy. Some of these darker themes were taken up this year through the lens of death—for example, through excavations of a Russian biopolitics that evaluated the power of the state over the management of bare life by exploring “crimes of compassion” (Bernstein 2016). This kind of necropolitical governmentality was also witnessed in Parla and Özgül’s (2016) research on Armenian cemeteries in Turkey. This kind of anthropology is necessary and urgent, and tends to reveal a critical analytics of power operative under contemporary conditions even as it “focuses on the harsh dimensions of social life (power, domination, inequality, and oppression)” (Ortner 2016, 1). Ultimately, much of the arch of this new research still reflects the classic tensions between culture and materiality.

The anthropological “ends” (Hankins 2015) gave way to the birth of “emergent cultures and material life,” seen in last year’s review (Koenig 2016). Reviewing the trends in 2016, I shift the engagement to think hauntingly about these two central tensions, cultural and materiality, as they index ontology as a logic of practice. If we have been “dark” for nearly forty years, it does not seem things are getting much “lighter.” Last year saw a tremendous amount of research that matched the times: urgent and macabre, often about death or dying, and with pronounced disenchantment about the failures with our contemporary order and conditions. If once disenchantment in (post)modernity, in the Weberian sense, signaled a valuation of cultural reason over mysticism, then today’s disenchantment is with the very product of this rationalization. Disenchantment and other dark themes emerged in anthropology as a way to push back against the failed promise of modernity and secularism.

Disenchantment through normalization and the banality of violence made its way into analyses of the state, power, and the role of citizenship. This sentiment is not only found in exceptional cases but also is rampant in quotidian politics, as Insa Koch (2016) demonstrates in England today. In “Bread-and-Butter Politics: Democratic Disenchantment and Everyday Politics on an English Council Estate,” Koch examines the ways in which residents of council estates mediate the relationship between elected representatives and a distant political system. By examining the vernacularization of politics, particularly with respect to the Labour Party, she explores how democracy becomes emptied out for many citizens despite their participation in these processes: “In short, many residents have come to associate politics with an illegitimate world of hostile corrupt dealings. This is how residents experience democracy: as a failure on the part of the politicians to listen and respond to the needs of the common people” (287). This sentiment can be found across the globe in relation to the efficacy of politics and reason. Turning to the class-based politics of the Free

Worker's Party (FWP), she shows how alternative forms of personalized politics have an emancipatory potential—in the face of chronic disillusionment—to push beyond the system of representative democracy.

As such, anthropologists have turned their attention to the ways in which reason and sentimentality order contemporary politics. Ghassan Hage (2016), on the other hand, explores how the exceptional enters the everyday in settler colonialism. In “*État de siege: A Dying Domesticating Colonialism?*” he examines the ways in which sentiments of siege and war, especially in settler colonies, are symptoms of a particular ethos. Combining the analytics of Fanon on (de)colonialism and Agamben's state of siege, he examines the ways in which this state of exception has become the paradigm of governance: “Settler-colonial societies always hover on the borderline between democracy and dictatorship” (40). These kinds of governmentalities increasingly encroach on civil liberties and rights at large under “global civil wars.” As the “domain of war” becomes inseparable from the “domain of peace,” features of settler-colonial societies—religion and race—become markers of civilization or lack thereof, and a savagery or “hardening” of humanity ensues (41). He argues these residues of colonialism structure society and a globalization of this ethos is accompanying capital exploitation, propelling a refugee crisis and global apartheid order, where, for example, Islam becomes a “manufactured threat” in the face of state and border barbarisms.

This ethos, as Hage argues, is being exported abroad and apparently outside of settler colonies, too, especially with heightened xenophobia accompanying the entrance of displaced people on a global scale. The very notion of a crisis serves to exceptionalize state-sanctioned terror and violence. Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram (2016) show the ways in which the Hungarian state responded to these refugees/migrants as they traveled toward Western Europe: “A rhetoric of ‘crisis’ enabled the deployment of a citizen-foreigner binary that legitimized state against a group that was held in a conceptual, and eventually, material stasis” (27). In this context, borders were closed and fences were built as migrants were immobilized and criminalized. Moreover, in their “ethnography of immobility,” the authors explore the limits of a form of state and outside interventionist “vertical” politics in granting these figures agency in the “complex structures” that simultaneously depoliticize these cases for humanitarian work and discourse. In opposition to these processes, they argue that a counterpolitics of “unexpected horizontal solidarities involving private citizens” nonetheless emerged in this dark landscape (27). In Budapest, through public protests, refugees, migrants, and citizens performed a kind of intertextuality described by Sian Lazar (2015) in her research on political action in Argentina and Bolivia. These mobilizations embody a kind of symbolic and aesthetic politics, highlighting the salience of capturing movement and relationality beyond the event. These actions were well represented as 2016 saw many people take politics to the streets.

Other anthropologists assess these crisis dynamics from an equally oblique approach. Holmes and Casteñeda (2016), for example, examine the vertical politics of the “refugee crisis” in Germany. In particular, they explore the ways that the media stage a symbolic, Gramscian “war of position” that forces accountability onto displaced people instead of a broader geopolitical landscape. What is more, the symbolics of this media discourse pit a “deserving refugee” against an “undeserving migrant,” marking bodies in particular ways for which death or life is at stake. Similarly, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2016) research on representations of displacement deploys a politics of visibility to theorize the ways in which competing images of refugees, ideal or otherwise, enter into a European public sphere and are subject to North versus South tension with respect to the Syrian case.

I wonder if all this darkness, as Ortner sees it, is also a response to the postmodern “crisis of representation” in the 1980s and the accompanying loss of meaning making. This crisis, along with the responses to it, might have propelled anthropologists to align with more critical themes. This urgency, often for an alliance, to find people for whom an anthropologist could potentially advocate can easily lead us to forget that “studying down” has consequences (Nader 1972). This portrait of poverty, victimhood, and suffering was subject to critiques around unevenness of representation. In response, Joel Robbins (2013) urged an “anthropology of the good” to emancipate the “suffering subject” by focusing on more idyllic notions like hope, well-being, care, and empathy. This analytical approach, branded by Walter and KavedZija (2015) as the “happiness turn,” is seen in Fischer's (2014) usage of the “the good life” and “well-being” as a form of “positive anthropology,” which became a buzzing counterpoint to the haunting of darker themes (requoted in Ortner 2016). Thus we are driven, through these dialectical responses, to examine our underlying morality and ethics (Lambek 2016). Ortner concludes her survey by revisiting an anthropology of critique, activism, and resistance, as seen in 2016 in the work of Allen and Jobson and Loperena, discussed below.

It is precisely because there can be so much at stake in the kind of work we do that these debates are not only effervescent but also require rehearsal and reflection, especially as these discussions relate to ethnographic production. In this landscape, we have witnessed not just a return to light or dark but also to the need to rupture representational ways to portray subjects and a push toward sensorial ethnographies that do not necessarily privilege subject over object (Pine 2016). Indeed, an allegiance to “new materialisms” approaches to ethnography trouble these relationships between subject and object of discourse. There is, at times, an uneven relationship between anthropologists and the subjects/interlocutors who contribute to the ethnographic process. We saw this theme revisited in the historical and anthropological attempts to demonstrate how “ethnographic entrapment” was produced out of the residues of colonialism “that obscured the structural and historical foundations of

the sort of racial oppression Srole had noted in Wisconsin” (Arndt 2016). These attempts to decolonize our methodology are urgent, as Allen and Jobson (2016) insist in their survey of the decolonizing generation. That ways to deliver new perspectives about humans hinge on an “other” is, by now in our discourse, fairly germane. But we should pause—and pause often—to evaluate our modes of production while we continue to produce. If we seek newness, in others and in ourselves, in our analytical questions, in processes and methods, and in the way in which we relate to our production, we should do so with care so as to not reproduce inequality.

In 2016 this is the case with the reinvigorated debates on ontologies, which I suggest, as novel as they are, nevertheless return to a relentless past haunted by recurrent tensions (hence the title of this review)—in particular, a haunting of an inquiry to assess being at essential limits. Last year coalesced a number of debates around what has now (rather infamously) been coined “the ontological turn” (Boellstorff 2016; Graeber 2015; Povinelli 2016; Viveiros de Castro 2016). As Hankins makes explicit about these transformations: “Anthropology partakes of [an] in this steady sense of epochal shift, demonstrating a fascination with the new that is not so new” (2015, 554). If, as he insists, as an antidote we should be skeptical in the face of moral optimism, does that mean we have been naïve in our impulse to go native?

Or is our work simply reliant on and a reflection of the generative contradictions with and between humans and their social and cultural worlds, as Berliner et al. (2016) proffer in their dossier on “Anthropology and the Study of Contradictions”? As Lambek writes: “The fact of differences in the world—whether understood as contradictory, oppositional, or incommensurable—leads to the following in practice: we can attempt to select exclusively one of the other (‘either/or’) or we can try to select both (‘both/and’)” (2016, 7–9). These categories around differences produce, however, very real and material consequences. Sally Falk Moore’s (2016) collection of essays reminds our practice of the salience of process, unpacking the vicissitudes of the comparative approach in anthropology, as she discovered between various “cultures of control” of global scope. Her collection reminds us that comparison is part of process, and as such we understand this process as incommensurable and uneven in relation to power. Given this, though, does not mean we must discard difference as a powerful analytic. Indeed, difference in the face of similitude has long been a tension in our anthropological tool kit. The call to make universal assumptions about human behavior is at odds with the production of locality, as in the singularity of reality in the face of multiple worlds. These are recurring themes in anthropological theory with the character of resultant essentialisms and anti-essentialisms that find subjects entangled in these narratives of worldviews but whose material realities reveal their relationship to power. Although alterity and relational ontology are more foundational than new to our discipline, this recent “ontological turn” marks a return

to these foundational debates. By revisiting these debates through research published this year, we can simultaneously examine the tensions between both culture and materiality, on the one hand, and knowledge and power, on the other.

MATTERS OF MEANING AND ONTOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Perhaps we have approached a juncture in our work and tradition that requires that we know where we stand on certain matters. How does research this year take from our past, and in this presence so heightened by awareness and thickened by global urgencies, think about our future production? In what ways does effervescent research look back at the ghosts of our production? I posit in this review that a hauntological framework can function in various ways, from the ways in which our anthropological ancestors inflect our work to the ways in which we look back at old debates. In this review, looking back is—quite literally—in part a rehearsal of debates around ontologies. A hauntology in the very sense of it. This debate is, of late, a bit of an anthropological überdebate. As Boellstorff reminds us in his excavation of the lived reality of online ontologies, these debates even have “reviews of reviews of reviews” (2016, 387). This is because this debate signals so much around how meaning is made and who gets to make it that the stakes in these kinds of reifications have inspired much thought. Ontologies capture so much more than singular realities and, as such, can also approximate worldviews and cosmologies outside the anthropological tool kit. In this way, ontology will always be an absence through presence.

The impulse toward ontology beyond epistemology figures prominently as an antidote to the limits of representation. There exists a politics to how one enters the discussion about the reality, worldview, or ontological difference of an “other” or “otherwise,” as Povinelli insists (2014, 2016). Precisely because of the slippages that discussions around cosmologies and ontologies can deliver, central figures in this debate, such as Povinelli, require preconditions for the ways in which these kinds of analyses take place. Understanding the source for defining the ontological also requires accompanying working definitions and key terms in order to distill the kinds of operative analytics proffered vis-à-vis power. As such, we must consider how, to invoke Povinelli’s 2016 monograph, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, geontopower is much more than the “difference between the lively and the inert” (5). She centers her analysis on a “carbon imaginary” in relation to a finitude of existence. Three figures of this analysis remain central—the animist, the desert, and the virus—as ways to think beyond classic “being.” The material reality of a subject’s connection to land, heritage, and communities of belonging force anthropologists to both bracket and amplify ontological analysis. The limits of biopolitics, as Povinelli excavates, leaves open a politics of being that includes categories beyond the bios/zoe, or even previously understood dualisms. She writes:

The simplest way of sketching the difference between geon-topower and biopower is that the former does not operate through the governance of life and the tactics of death but is rather a set of discourse, affects and tactics of death used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife. (4)

From this discourse emerges a range of ontological constellations that can manifest power in radically uneven ways: new materialisms that disrupt the mind/body to think about meaning and matter, object ontologies, and actants in spiraling networks, to give just a few examples of modalities for framing ontology.

We see these impulses woven into the framework of contemporary ethnography, such as in Jason Pine's (2016) "Last Chance Incorporated," in which he shows us the world of methamphetamine and dispossession in small, rural Iberia, Missouri. With alchemy as a "clumsy" metaphor for industrial capitalism, he ruptures objects and subjects, conjuring a psychogeographic poesis in which "material things competed with people for my attention" (Russo 2016). In this analysis, we see the aesthetic and affective bypass classic epistemological renderings for an experiential ontological ethnography.

These frameworks are terribly provocative in terms of how we assess contemporary subjectivity and how particular modes of intellectual production can be employed. They also provide a platform to understand the very processes that sustain the relationship between nature and culture, or nature-culture (in Haraway's words). The year 2016 witnessed a resurgence of inquiries that distilled culture from materiality. Processes of replication and mimesis, reification, and representation are just some of the ways in which ideation and materiality come together.

Patrimony is such a concept, too. It ties ontology to objects (a subject to object) in ways that have consequences, such as those seen in heritage economies and territorialities around monuments that also mark location and land that imply politics, too. Patrimony—and heritage, for that matter—almost always involves a haunting of the past that hinges on a production of history carrying the weight of a kind of political subjectivity. Indeed, to study the process of patrimonialization is to study the linkages between nature, culture, and materiality that form communities of membership. This process of heritage making can be highly politicized. For example, as Lynn Meskell (2016) reveals in "World Heritage and Wikileaks: Territory, Trade, and Temple on the Thai-Cambodian Border," UNESCO sites conjure all sorts of contestations, especially as these places index state sovereignty and national interests. Using the case of the Preah Vihear Temple in Cambodia, she demonstrates "the site's connectivity across national political intrigues, international border wars, bilateral negotiations surrounding gas and steel contracts, and military alignments" (73). The temple was largely invisible until it was deemed a UNESCO site by the European-dominated World Heritage Committee and became the cipher for competing interests.

Meskell traces these developments to consider the making and unmaking of heritage, gesturing to the various ways in which this hinges on a global politics of recognition. These politics are not only international, she argues, but have the potential to reconfigure regional politics, too. In particular, she shows how the temple caused violent tensions—and even a military standoff—between Thailand and Cambodia, threatening the unity of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). What is more, the Wikileaks scandal revealed classified information sent to the CIA as intimately tied to foreign policy and around potential multinational investment and interest in Cambodia. Thus, the opening of economies is a critical component of heritage building, and the concomitant ontologies associated with this terrain must be understood rather delicately and as imminently political.

In a *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* dossier called "Matters of Patrimony," Rozental, Collins, and Ramsey build on tensions between tangible and "intangible" patrimonies, which have been previously assessed by scholarship as "an encompassing property regime capable of sedimenting the terms of sovereignty and subjectivity" (2016, 7). The introduction to the selection of articles unearths older debates about the residues of power within patrimony to think about the processes of cultural heritage in a novel way. In this way, patrimony can be positioned as generating citizenry and economies as well as "the modern subject." Membership and belonging can be attached to both intangible and tangible "things." The ways in which patrimony is produced vis-à-vis representation has consequences for research on the production of locality, through tourism and their markets, the communities from which they derive, and the state and public policy along with the civil society that expresses them (NGOs, etc.).

Moreover, in their survey, Rozental, Collins, and Ramsey suggest studies have "overlooked in the turn to a patrimony-based hermeneutics . . . a focus on multiple valences, voicings, and disciplinary effects convincingly accounts for the endurance and open endedness of patrimony as a political idiom that generates truths by linking cultural properties to specific communities" (8). However, this amplification "glosses over important aspects of the generation of human commitments towards specific instantiations of patrimony" (8). The authors urge a move beyond "spiraling social construction" to think about reproduction, replication, and multiplication through iteration onward. Thus, their intervention emphasizes the ways that anthropologists might "begin to approach difference and copies, as more than assessments of the ontological states of real things, perceived as holding some kind of essential identity" (8). The stakes in this process are high because misrepresentation produces political quandaries.

In these representations of particular essentialisms are various faultlines that spiral as they reproduce. Alessandro Angelini (2016) explores the nuances of these processes as they relate to the production of *favela* replicas by local youth in Rio de Janeiro, testing the changes in meaning

and value enacted in various locations as these replicas (and their artist/makers/curators) circulated. Through this we can consider how iteration and “repetition produces difference as well as sameness” (39). These concerns are critical for assessing all types of cultural production. Roger Sansi (2016) examines these processes as they relate to the naturalization of the production and codification of ritual authenticity in religious practices, citing Candomblé in Bahia to consider multiple and competing historicities. Practices that are historically linked to cultural policy and patrimony become authenticated, while “found” entities or other moments of creative and religious spontaneity and poesis resist legitimation. Candomblé, in this landscape, has shifted from being “recognized as cultural heritage, to how it has become cultural heritage” (64). This slippage carries material consequences that index culture in very particular ways.

Thomas Abercrombie’s (2016) exploration of the semiotics of “Rich Mountain” in Potosí, also a UNESCO site, reminds us that similar signs can carry radically variant meanings of place, cosmology, and patrimony. He explores the ways in which signs—from coins and images of Satan and saints to ore—become charged, thinking through their agency in a way that transcends classic theories on the *fetisse*, or theories that frame these processes as symptoms of radical ontological alterity of these hybrids (in this case Andean). Culling from linguist Peirce, and echoing one of Povinelli’s central figures, Abercrombie writes, “we are all animists, particularly with regard to the things we labor with in making a living, and especially when those things are held to be the common patrimony” (2016, 85). As we saw earlier in the work of Pine (2016), the rupturing of a dualism in materiality continues to contribute to the ontological debates that give agency to matter.

Whether through the geontological figures of the animist, the virus, or the desert, as explored by Povinelli (2016), we are left wondering in what ways these ontologies can regain agency once contemporary power structures have hijacked them. For example, Sandra Rozental (2016) explores the ways in which the Mexican state, in their efforts to brandish indigenous heritage, reshifted the material ecology of Coatlinchan. In other words, a stone-sculpture instantiation of an ancient rain deity was absconded and placed at the entrance of the National Anthropology Museum in Mexico City as a marker of its *patrimonio*. Since then, the town that once possessed it has faced drought and other social disruptions. The residues of these material ecologies resonate in ways that challenge the limits of materiality as a sole analytic, as seen in often static notions of artifacts. Indeed, research that speaks to the potential fluidity of patrimony confirms this, as Kimbra Smith (2016) reveals in her research on how Agua Blancans authenticate indigenous objects in Ecuador. But what haunts relentlessly in the background of these questions around patrimony is a further question: When these objects are capitalized, who gets, not the residues of culture, but the capital?

Issues around biopiracy make this especially relevant. Christopher Morris (2016) examines how the uneven translation of “Access and Benefit Sharing” (ABS) rights in post-apartheid South Africa demonstrates how ethno-commodities have served to legitimize particular structures of power and partnerships, namely around chiefs and territoriality. In particular, he uses the case around the burgeoning pharmaceutical sourced as *Pelargonium* in a village in the Ciskei called the Masakhane. These and other cases remind us that claims around particular rights discourses hinge on how “an other/wise” might indeed perceive a relationality to land and objects. Of liberal-democratic rights, he writes, “they are abstractions with a capacity for translation and distortion” (526). In echoing Anna Tsing’s (2005) analysis of these discourses as “engaged universals,” showing how rights discourses come to be instrumentalized becomes especially relevant. This, indeed, continues to be a theme if we are to understand how power operates both horizontally and vertically, especially as claims for rights have been increasingly important to our production.

Omolade Adunbi (2016) reveals this process of verticality in relation to international NGOs’ topography of modernity and power in Nigeria, a power ushered in by civil society, which as its counterpoint tends to demonize the state. In the case of Brazil, Alexander Dent (2016) suggests that antipiracy NGOs train the police to ferret out and “clean up” civil society’s unauthorized use of music and films. In response, we see vernacular forms of pushing back from these purveyors of pirated material, as vendors invent new underground locations that mark the creativity and mobility of informal markets. At the heart of this research lies an unearthing of the relationship between indigenous and local rights and neoliberal capitalism.

Questions around how community and membership are defined have long been at the forefront of anthropological inquiry. Whether it is questions of kinship, indigeneity, autochthonous connections to land, or connections to land built up through notions of patrimony and heritage, human connections to one another will continue to be part of our scholarly impulse. In their research on intercultural relations in gulf country Australia, Trigger and Martin (2016) indicate that contestations over identity and belonging occur precisely from an incommensurality over ontological belonging and notions of homeland. In their analysis, they demonstrate the bypassing discussions of Whitefellas’ worldview while privileging indigenous connections to land “inhibits analysis” (833). They seek, instead, to round out these readings by contributing to postsettler visions of relatedness to land and highlight the historical interconnectedness of these understandings. But given that our discipline has been critiqued for being neutral in the face of injustice, it is no wonder cases like these can be read as being against indigenous claims for land, when the authors see their work as simply revealing “parallel yet highly differentiated understanding of the same landscapes” (824).

Therefore, our heightened interest in how to frame ontological belonging has come center stage. As McGranahan writes about the context of our work on urgent themes, “the ethnographic and the political are codeterminative” (2016, 335). In her exploration of Tibetan refugees, she demonstrates the ways in which the gift of citizenship is disavowed. In this refusal, ontological belonging is reclaimed: “This refusal disrupts and bypasses established post–World War II political possibilities for refugees in favor of different ontologies of becoming and belonging” (335). Indeed, the fault lines of ontological belonging have occupied our concerns this year. Moreover, the ways in which these forms of belonging are operationalized continue to reveal the relationship between culture and power. What is at stake of late in anthropological debates is not only human relatedness to land, as discussed above, but also the power/agency of nature itself. What is more, the ways in which humans relate to this power has become a central theoretical thrust.

ACTIVATING OUR MODES OF PRODUCTION

At the heart of reinvigorated discussions of the Anthropocene in anthropology is the question of where to locate ontology and agency such that redress and social transformation is made possible. Povinelli’s analysis links these two concepts rather deliberately while simultaneously asking us to consider the role of agency in these kinds of configurations: “The attribution of an *inability* of various colonized people to differentiate the kinds of things that have agency, subjectivity, and intentionality of the sort that emerges with life has been the grounds of casting them into a premodern mentality and a postrecognition difference” (2016, 5). Her concepts render visible political tactics and uneven relations to power. This, indeed, is at the heart of debates around the tension between ontological injunction or a broader configuration of politics. Michael Cepek’s (2016) analysis of “petro-being” does just that. His work on the Cofán in Ecuador troubles the singularity of some approaches to ontology in relation to the cosmology of land and, in this case, petrol, which is understood in Cofán myth to be the blood of their ancestors. He probes, especially, the singularity of these ontological renderings in relation to the cosmopolitics of oil in Ecuador and beyond. What is more, he shows the methodological quandary of approaches to ontology that make abstract assumptions about being: “Although it aims to create a more inclusive political practice, scholarship that accepts the cosmopolitical and ontological injunction—that is, to humble ourselves by taking our interlocutors’ statements seriously as declarations of multiple real worlds—tends to suffer from serious methodological problems” (624). For him, these problems have consequences in indigenous readings, and he pays special attention to how easily plural cosmologies—after abstraction—can cunningly become singular ontologies. He also begs us to nuance this approach. Indeed, the ways in which humans inflect land and water, and resultant power differentials, have become classic tropes of these problems.

Contemporary ethnographic research has increasingly unearthed these tensions. Christine Folch (2016) examines the contestations around “hydro-electric sovereignty” with regard to Paraguay and the Itaipu Dam, reminding us that indigenous rights discourses preceded colonialism, and advocating a need to return to ways to give indigenous people, and their relatedness to land, a form of agency. Moreover, Daniel Cohen’s (2016) article, “Specters of Rationing Haunt Metro São Paulo,” on water politics in Brazil, examines a hauntology of the Anthropocene. Even the language chosen in the title and first line of the article conveys this relationship to a political economy that makes clear how culture links up with materiality. His argument, which examines the lack of a “collective consumption” politics in São Paulo, foretells this approach. Through this analysis, he unearths the inequality in shifts in water distribution—namely, measures that reduce water pressure that overwhelmingly affect the poor and those who live in the favelas, or periphery slums. Jerome Whittington (2016) asks, as a sort of speech act: “What Does Climate Change Demand of Anthropology?” He assigns responsibility and accountability and urges our discipline to consider the process of climate change if, as it were, humans (our central protagonists) are to blame. He writes: “Indeed—in contrast to the apocalyptic tenor of much public discourse—the ‘indefinite future’ might capture the temporality of the predicament. If global institutions are being transformed in the face of such a historically unprecedented, planetary event as climate change, anthropology can expect to do a little soul searching, when its object, the human, is being held accountable for such far-reaching effects” (7). If we are to look back at the specters of our practice, the soul searching must continue beyond our analysis of what humans do but must also consider what anthropologists do. Thus, the call, in looking back at our practice, this hauntology, must impel us to “activate” our research. There have been various calls this year, as demonstrated earlier in Stankiewicz’s revisions of the anthropological imaginary, to look to the past in order to better frame an ethnographic present and future as modes of discursive and engaged activist anthropology.

Engaging the “turn to decolonize,” Jafari Allen and Ryan Cecil Jobson (2016) urge anthropologists to revisit and deploy these tactics in contemporary modes of anthropological production, especially in terms of who can be considered foundational to our genre. If, indeed, we rely on the voices that came before us, then excavating those that have been silenced serves emancipatory purposes and is not just a “nettle issue of citation” (144). Some of us take for granted, and already partake of in our everyday anthropological practices, the genealogy Allen and Jobson present with such gusto. We rejoice in their call to re-center marginal production in a colonized/colonizing discipline as an important antidote. There is much work to be done in this regard, as they argue: “Decolonization is not what it is used to be . . . the contemporary political landscape appears increasingly bleak and bereft of alternatives to liberal capitalist democracy” (143). Indeed, this work requires more than classic

epistemological observation. Instead, only an urgency to assess the politics embedded in our practice will emancipate our discipline from the shackles of uneven production.

This moment in our discipline has provided us with the ability to raise new questions about the exigencies of our time. If these times are dark and urgent, our work often calls on us to do more than observe. Often, participant observation is a political enterprise. For Christopher Loperena, activist anthropology can do just that: “Thus, activist anthropology entails a deliberate coupling of politics with academic inquiry, which is, in my experience, a very messy meeting, one that requires constant revision, dialogue, and deep self-reflection” (2016, 335). His ethnography of Garifuna land politics in Triunfo, Honduras, sheds light on how to navigate these impulses, despite emergent frictions. He lives up to the difficulty of this work, but it was no small feat, as death threats tickled the heels of his production. For him, it was as urgent to enter into a space, albeit volatile and macabre, to align himself with a political project worthy of advocating. If, as a discipline, we labor over the contours of ontologies and being, then why do we stop there? If, as a discipline, these ontologies can’t be quite captured in an epistemological sense, then why not follow Loperena’s lead? In the face of enduring incommensurability, a politics of production that makes space for common goals and alliances seems a worthy attempt.

CONCLUSION: TIME IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL BEING

Anthropology translates the ontological. It should not really surprise us that the “ontological turn” has garnered so much attention in anthropology. I find interesting, in the recent debates between Graeber (2015) and Viveiros de Castro (2016), that competing visions of the ontological nevertheless rest on the impulse to “speak of” and/or represent “reality,” “ontology,” “belief,” or the “otherwise” understood as a sort of ontological experience. These kinds of discussions of an ontology or “radical alterity,” to echo Graeber (2015), define our very practice insofar as we approximate a form of knowing or worldview that is ultimately an epistemological enterprise. We can never know being. In this swift sleight of hand, however, rests so much of what is really at stake, this ontological presence in relation to power. As Cepek reminds us of these ontological attempts to decolonize epistemology, “their work reflects more accurately the abstraction, antihumanism, and interpretive excess of such theoretical traditions as structuralism. Their approach maintains no necessary relationship to accurate ethnography, ethical methodology, or liberatory politics” (2016, 624). We must take seriously the impasse of analytics that distills agency from subjects in lieu of singular difference. Povinelli offers us a way to think beyond this without bypassing politics. Her ontological analytics make space to think about the human and the nonhuman, the lively and the inert, vis-à-vis a horizon of finitude that is not cosmologically elsewhere but rather all too real and in the now. This “time of the now,”

a *jetztzeit*, transcends historical materialism, like Walter Benjamin invoked in his angel of history; it is new, and with this newness comes transformation. This is a kind of temporal life in the specter of death. Similarly, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida gestured at Hamlet and a “time out of joint” to convey an enduring lateness in our being. For our practice, time is never present, because even fieldwork relies on a relay through which we conceive our production. This specter of death, from our intellectual predecessors and the ensuing distancing, is forever time unsyncopated.

The year 2016 was marked by a certain specter of death at the interstices of life, crisis, and a burgeoning urgency and sense of reflection on the various kinds of reifications the production of anthropological knowledge manifests. As such, the year saw important pleas, correctives, and reengagements of anthropological discourse and thematic production (Cepek 2016; Ortner 2016; Stankiewicz 2016). From the ontological turn, now framed by issues of the Anthropocene (Povinelli 2016), to questions of energy sovereignty (Folch 2016), water politics (Cohen 2016), and death (Bernstein 2016); from humanitarian and “refugee/migrant” crises (Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Hage 2016; Kallius, Monterescu, Rajaram 2016) to the call to rethink patrimony (Rozental, Collins, and Ramsey 2016) in order to push past materiality (Pine 2016) to ultimately call on the tools of “the decolonizing generation” (Allen and Jobson 2016) and effectively decolonize methodology (Arndt 2016); and onto the engagement of activist research (Loperena 2016) toward contradictions that rethink ethics, morality, and cultural relativism (Lambek 2016)—this was a year filled with provocative inquiry that forced questions around anthropology as praxis. Hauntology, as a conceptual heuristic conjured here, deploys a kind of looking back to unearth anthropological production that centered on a critical approach to production as iterative and recursive. This framework, as I demonstrate through a survey of 2016, has the potential to show the ways in which contemporary research can help us to rethink major debates by excavating the past in a critical way to rethink future practice. As Marx gestures in the epigraph that began this review, humans must relate their sense of history through borrowed language. Anthropologists do not always choose the circumstances, but the weight of dead generations forever hovers on the minds of the living. Reviewing our past is, indeed, the best way forward.

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NOTES

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1. <https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/press/news/2016/12/11/WOTY-16>. Accessed January 23, 2017.
2. I use this phrase to imply “foundational,” though it is also a gesture to Jacques Derrida’s (2006) *Specters of Marx* and call to consider political economy, and our positionality to it, as a way to strategize social action and transformation.

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