

anthropology that has been generated from North America about the South and the rest of Latin America. The goal, instead, is moving from the concept of territory to the idea of people “reading against the grain or in reverse,” and developing upside-down interpretations that combines views from different locations and perceptions.

The society is experiencing a moment of identitarian transition. The executive board, together with the members attending the meetings, agreed on changing the name of our society and journal from Society for Latin American Anthropology to Society of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology (SLACA), while our journal will now be the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* (JLACA). With these changes, the society attempts to include the Caribbean region not only as a geographical and physical reality but also as a conceptual and historical referent that has been, in some ways, marginalized from the holistic conceptualization of Latin America.

The Caribbean has been related to the rest of Latin America during centuries through economic, political and social networks. These regions have shared colonial and postcolonial experiences that have common historical roots. We cannot forget, for instance, that it was in Haiti (1804) where the first attempt to Republican independence took place, an event which inspired the subsequent independence movements sprung in Venezuela, Paraguay and other South American countries.

During the keynote address organized by the society, we were also encouraged to think critically about Latin America by Lynn Stephen's talk, who argued for the reconceptualization of Latin America and the anthropologies of the Americas. In her thorough presentation, she proposed to work with a wider concept: “The Americas” in order to recognize and conceptualize the flowing conditions of people, capital and culture.

Beyond the nation-states frontiers, she suggested to consider the understanding of “transborder processes,” in which identities and institutions are modified and adapted according to cultural contexts. She also discussed the significant contributions of Latin American and Caribbean anthropologists in redefining the anthropologies of the Americas. The epistemological contribution of the anthropology of the periphery has not, said Stephens, always been considered and we cannot forget that Latin American studies were “created as a geographical discipline in large part to generate information that could be used in advancing US foreign policy.”

The understanding of Latin America from other perspectives, latitudes and academic traditions is not something new; artists and intellectuals who work in Latin America and with Latin Americans have tried to grasp the complexity and diversity of their peoples, languages, cultures, histories and political realities.

This was the case of a drawing of the Uruguayan modernist Torres-García, whose artistic effort pursued to reclaim the importance of the South American continent while presenting a critical understanding of this region in relation to

the world vision. Anthropologists of the Americas are currently challenged and encouraged to promote novel discussions and theories that account for the ongoing cultural and political changes that Latin Americans are experiencing at home and abroad. We hope this short column will serve as a platform for developing new ideas and discussions about the reconceptualization of Latin America. All are welcome!

*Please send any comments, suggestions, ideas, including photos for future columns, to Hortensia Caballero-Arias at [hcaballe@ivic.ve](mailto:hcaballe@ivic.ve) or at Centro de Antropología, IVIC, Carretera Panamericana Km 11, Caracas 1020-A, Apartado Postal 21827, Venezuela.*

## Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists

DAVID L R HOUSTON, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### *Spy Versus Spy*

If it were so simple as that: the funny looking little guys with the big pointy noses and funky hats, one wearing all white, the other wearing all black, each outdoing the other, mustering helicopters and dropping safes from buildings. *These are spies?*

Revelations that the US Government spies on selected citizens is not a big surprise. It seems less a matter of “this” administration than it does the nature of any large body that must subsume and implement a complex set of ordering principles and rules to build a social, economic and political structure. Moreover, it certainly appears to have been going on for a long time.

As a methodology in the so-called “war on terror,” spying seems almost unavoidable. The “enemy,” defined by the administration, has at its disposal the same sophisticated toolkit grown from the telecommunications revolution of the past 20 years. Without a way in to the “other side,” spying may well be mandatory. That the administration bypassed what the citizenry might assume are mandatory steps—judicial oversight and permissions—may be more political tactic than pragmatism. The current surveillance operation, in place since 2002, is supposedly limited to those whose international contacts might include possible Al Qaeda operatives.

One wonders about such claims, however, when we learn that the government spies on gay groups opposing the “don't ask, don't tell” policy. It does seem, as the executive director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network put it, “absurd” that a gay kiss-in is a “credible threat” to national security.

In one sense, a dual-purpose rationale—national security versus gathering data about other political undesirables of the moment—helps hide such activities, allowing the spies to rationalize their actions. Given the government's obvious interest in protecting the country, applying the “national security” argument to other areas that, at least in some circles, might be characterized as a “threat,” makes a certain kind of perverse sense.

Under some circumstances, one might suppose that gathering data on the intimate details of other

peoples' lives provides a legitimate basis for making better decisions about how to thwart terrorist attacks. Knowledge about the daily rhythms of a life, coupled with intelligence about other activities, provides a special kind of insight. Both the level of detail and how it is gathered are open questions.

Understanding the “other” has a strangely familiar ring; it brings to mind the process of securing permission to do this kind of work. Review boards—“Institutional” in the US, “Ethics” in Canada—serve a role that parallels that of the judiciary: thoroughly evaluate the proposed activity, balance value against a larger common code of ethical and acceptable actions of the observer-to-be, and render judgment. A simple thumbs-up or thumbs-down will do, thank you.

As anthropologists, we undergo this routine inspection frequently. Sometimes we complain—it is overbearing; it might interfere with our work—but we soldier on, and the research takes place. When someone slips, we turn to other parts of our practice to evaluate the mistake, sometimes with mixed success. But the process is there, and we must hope that no executive board of any anthropological body will secretly authorize covert data collection outside this established framework.

As soon as you have operatives in the field whose mission it is to collect this intimate data, the process is inherently at risk for misuse. It is not that all such fieldworkers are morally bankrupt, nor that the stakes are so high as to drive the fieldworker to undreamed of riches, but rather that as the depths of the lives so inspected are plumbed, boundaries between what is relevant to the mission and what is not are blurred, sometimes badly.

Our practice has seen this before: doubtless, we will see it again. It is inconceivable to think that, even under the best of conditions, the practitioners of the NSA would not experience this same pull. The evidence seems obvious: spying on gay groups questioning military policy may appear to us to be absurd, but in the course of duty to country, it seems clear that those particular fieldworkers somehow succeeded in rationalizing their quest. As anthropologists, we have much to learn ourselves about self-policing and regulation; we have much more to teach others.

*Join us. SOLGA wants you! Visit [www.solga.org](http://www.solga.org)—news, mentors, listserv and more. Please send comments, suggestions, ideas for columns or just say “hi” to David Houston at [drlrh+an@uvm.edu](mailto:drlrh+an@uvm.edu).*

## Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

### Grief, Love and Indices

*By Mark Allen Peterson*

### Is Love Indexical?

Indexicality has become central to anthropological linguistics. Indices link cultural categories to

quodidian practices, and foreground slippery deictic shifters in the process. Attention to deixis, intertextuality and indexicality generally, has blossomed in recent years. Most of this concerns intellect rather than affect.

In January, though, I suffered a series of experiences that led me to wonder about the broader role of indexicality in human emotion, especially the most visceral of human structures of feeling, including those of grief and love.

On the second Saturday night in January I put my bright, active four-month old foster daughter to bed. In the night she apparently suffered a quiet seizure, or series of seizures, resulting in a long period of extremely low oxygen flow to the brain and the death of large sections of brain tissue. Over the next few days, in the emergency room, these dead tissues swelled until their pressure on the brain stem ended her life.

An examination of the baby's retinas indicated that she had suffered no suffocation or head traumas. EEG readouts showed that she was capable of seizing with little or no physical signs. Doctors who could read MRI scans reported evidence of dozens of seizures during her brief life, only two of which my wife and I had been able to recognize as seizures on the basis of her physical movements.

As she lay in a tiny bed nestled in an array of machinery, a half-dozen wires carried electronic signals that monitored heartbeat, blood pressure and other physical characteristics to devices that convert them into displays. All of these were trustworthy indices of her condition but offered only vague clues as to causality. The working hypothesis, an undiagnosed seizure disorder presumably rooted in prenatal exposure to heroine, cocaine and alcohol, remains a best-guess effort to account for a bewildering variety of confusing indices.

Such reading of symptoms, and formations of hypotheses about their meaning, is exemplary indexicality. Charles Sanders Peirce often used just such examples to explain the index. But indexes don't only produce intellectual recognitions of patterns; they can also generate emotions.

Grief comes in waves, and it is often triggered by an indexical sign. I rise in the morning to write before my children awake and brush past the now empty basinet. My daughter comes out of her ballet class for a break and glances around to see where I've parked the baby. The objects and the habitual acts associated for four months with the baby operate as indexes, drawing our attention to her absence, and triggering often overwhelming emotions of grief and loss.

I went to see her body once after she was declared brain dead, to say goodbye before they turned off her respirator. There I met the hospital's grief counselor, who offered me a bereavement "kit." It consisted of a number of ways to create indexes of the dying loved one. The first was a small cloth envelope with a clear plastic window for holding a lock of hair. A metonym, a part standing for the whole, the lock of hair also has a vast number of connotations in Western cultural codes. The second was a tube of paint, a brush and a card to capture hand and footprints, icons of metonyms. A third feature was a set of frames for photographs, icons as indexes. All were contained

in an elegant cream-colored box that had room to also hold additional mementoes.

But the most interesting objects were a pair of ceramic hearts. These were not iconic indexes, like footprints or photos, not yet "natural" indexes like hair. The function, the counselor explained, was to put these into the hands of the dying child. Afterward, they could be carried in one's pocket as a reminder of one's loss. The hearts become indexes by virtue of their contact with the body. I was reminded of the principle of contagious magic described by Sir James George Frazer.

I settled for a lock of hair, but the child's birth grandmother took the entire kit. And I wondered about this. Whence derives a grandmother's love for a child seen but fifteen times, never for more than an hour, always under supervision? Is her love just a culturally-conditioned response to her role in an arbitrary kinship system?

Perhaps blood calls to blood. I am reminded of Helen Fisher's argument that love at first sight is not an arbitrary cultural belief but a psychological response to unconsciously recognized similarities between the loved one and others who have loved you. Does the grandmother see herself in the blue eyes and startlingly thick dark hair her infant granddaughter shared with her?

My wife, who spoke with the grandmother, offers an additional thought. Throughout the months of the daughter's pregnancy, the grandmother had invested the unborn child with hopes that this baby would be the means of transforming her daughter's "wild" lifestyle, of settling her, of bringing her to take an interest in her other two children, in custody with family members. Her granddaughter was a person to her for the same reasons she was a person to us: because she had invested the baby with meanings, hopes and desires.

The grief kit works by offering the possibility to make the person we have constructed present again through signifiers. It builds on the power of indexicality to make the index and what it stands co-present in the context of situation. The study of indexicality may in truth be hampered by what William Hanks calls its "formidable abstractness." But when it comes to loving and grieving, indications are all we really have.

*Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw at stanlaw@ilstu.edu or Mark Peterson at petersm2@muohio.edu.*

## Society for Medical Anthropology

JANELLE S TAYLOR, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### Three Important SMA Announcements

*By Marcia C Inhorn (SMA President)*

#### New MAQ Co-Editors

In 2005, SMA's President Craig Janes and President-Elect Marcia Inhorn appointed Gay Becker, former editor of MAQ, to head a search



**SMA President Marcia C Inhorn**

committee for the new MAQ editor. The committee consisted of Gay Becker (UCSF), Janice Hutchinson (U Houston), Marcia Inhorn (U Michigan), Craig Janes (Simon Fraser U), Carolyn Sargent (Southern Methodist U) and Lesley Sharp (Barnard C). The search began in summer 2005, with numerous queries and nominations over a six-month period. Six editorial candidates were interviewed by the search committee at the AAA meeting in December.

On behalf of the search committee, we are delighted to announce the appointment of two new co-editors: Mark Luborsky and Andrea Sankar of Wayne State University. Mark and Andrea run a dynamic medical anthropology program at Wayne State, and Wayne State has offered generous institutional support of the journal. Together, Mark and Andrea bring a wealth of editorial and SMA executive board experience to the MAQ editorship. We are delighted that they have agreed to serve as co-editors when Pamela Erickson's term officially expires at the end of 2006. Please look for Mark and Andrea's vision for the journal in the next issue of *Anthropology News*.

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#### New Millennium Book Award

At the SMA Executive Board meeting in December, a new SMA book award was officially approved. The New Millennium Book Award has been established to recognize and promote excellence in medical anthropology, broadly defined. The award will be given annually to a scholar within the field of medical anthropology for a solo- or co-authored book published since the beginning of the new millennium (2000 or later). Beginning in 2007, this new award will be given to a book published within the preceding three years.

The New Millennium Book Award will be given to the author whose work is judged to be the most significant and potentially influential contribution to medical anthropology. Books of exceptional courage and potential impact beyond the academy will be given special consideration.

The New Millennium Book Award is designed to complement the Eileen Basker Prize and the Council for the Anthropology of Reproduction book awards in the area of gender and health. Thus, books on gender and health topics will not be considered eligible for the New Millennium Book Award.

The award winner will be publicly announced during the SMA business meeting, held during the annual AAA meeting. The winner will receive a \$500 cash award and a plaque. Books that did not receive the award but are considered exceptional will receive honorable mentions at the award ceremony.