



Applying Anthropology in Everyday Life

Chapter Outline

- Anthropology in the World at Large
- Practical Applications
 - Doing Business in Japan
 - Urban Social Planning and Restructuring in Canada
- Anthropology and Policy
- Anthropology and the Challenges of Global Citizenship
 - Anthropology and Democracy
 - Anthropology and Multicultural Politics in the New Europe
 - Anthropology and Human Rights
- Awareness and Uncertainty
- Freedom and Constraint
- Going Somewhere? Concluding Remarks from Roberta Robin Dods

Key Points

1. Anthropological research can be challenging to conduct in today's world, but it is also very rewarding. Applied anthropology can contribute to contemporary solutions of various social issues. Applied anthropologists do their work using holism, comparison, relativism, and a concern for particular cases.
2. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, people everywhere face the challenge of defining citizenship in a complex, diverse, and difficult world. At this point in their studies, students can consider how to apply what they have learned about anthropology to their own positions, and can anticipate their potential efficacy as global citizens. Anthropology is not just an esoteric exercise. Even if students do not go on to work as anthropologists, they can refer to their knowledge of anthropology as a guide for a way of living in the world in a state of reflexivity—a state of constant engagement and growth.
3. Recently, anthropologists involved in expanding the understanding of human rights have participated in organizations for the defence of human rights. In particular, they have contributed to the recognition by human rights legal advocates that the collective rights of groups (such as Indigenous peoples) deserve as much attention as the rights of individuals. Additionally, forensic

anthropologists have worked to uncover evidence of genocides and ethnic cleansings in various parts of the world.

4. Cultural anthropology brings us into contact with different ways of life and challenges our awareness of just how arbitrary our own understanding of the world is as we learn how other people have developed satisfying but different ways of living.
5. In addition, anthropology helps us understand our place in and responsibility for the historical and present-day worlds of colonialism and post-colonialism. The consequences of colonialism resonate, and we can become aware of just how much the Western tradition has to answer for in the modern world.
6. Our survival as a species, and our viability as individuals, depends on the possibility of choice, of perceiving and being able to act on alternatives in the various situations we encounter during our lives.
7. Just as many anthropologists worked in the service of colonial governments helping to manage affairs with colonial subjects, today many applied anthropologists work in a postcolonial context as advocates for indigenous peoples seeking greater independence and self-determination.
8. Forensic biological anthropologists play a key role in identifying and recovering human remains in the aftermath of war and genocide in both recent and historic contexts.
9. Applied anthropologists can serve the cause of democracy in an era of increasing nationalism and hostility toward internally displaced people and refugees. Anthropologists are uniquely positioned to provide guidance on multiculturalism and the integration of migrant populations.
10. In Canada, applied anthropologists have consulted with First Nations, governments and industry to facilitate or oppose mega resource development projects.

Key Terms

Coloniality Identified and described as the present legacy of colonialism in the societies of today; manifest as the social discrimination from Eurocentrism yet also from the outlived formal colonialism integrated in succeeding social orders.

Review Questions

1. When the authors state that anthropology helps “us” to understand our place in and responsibility for historical and present-day colonialism and post-colonialism, whom do they mean by “us”? What assumptions might underlie this understanding of who anthropologists are and who you, the students, are?
2. Choose a contemporary problem and design an applied anthropology project that will ameliorate the problem.

3. What are some of the skills that anthropologists need to be successful? List them and write a cover letter or proposal for a job.
4. Find a contemporary problem and then discuss the ways that anthropological theories and methods might assist in finding a solution to the problem.
5. Why is there a conflict between individual rights and collective rights?
6. Does applied anthropology conflict with any anthropological ethical guidelines?
7. Can you think of examples of how applied anthropology might be utilized in each of the four subfields of anthropology?
8. In what ways might it be difficult to balance the demands of an academic career while also working as an applied anthropologist?
9. Applied anthropologists sometimes work as advocates, consultants, and expert witnesses for Indigenous groups. Is there a potential downside to this sort of advocacy?
10. Some applied anthropologists with a knowledge of Afghani languages and customs have recently worked with the United States military during combat operations to help minimize civilian and military casualties. Is there an ethical downside to this?
11. How might anthropologists best aid the cause of human rights at home and internationally?

Additional Resources

Films

- *The Future of Food*. Directed by Deborah Koons Garcia. Lily Films. 2004.

This film investigates the unlabelled presence of genetically modified foods in the North American marketplace.

<http://www.thefutureoffood.com/index.html>

- *Beyond Organic*. Produced by John de Graaf. 2002.

Beyond Organic is the story of farmer Michael Ableman and his struggle to maintain his 12-acre organic farm in the centre of a suburban community.

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/bo.html>

Annotated Video Links

- *Applied Anthropology in Australia*
This exploration of applied anthropology career opportunities features interviews with anthropologists who work in Sydney, Australia and explores the job opportunities that exist for students of anthropology that want to work in the “real world”.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTCqCj_I5UY
- *Tennessee’s Farm of Rotting Corpses*
A fascinating tour of the University of Tennessee’s body farm with Dr. Bill Bass. Learn how applied biological anthropology helps law enforcement solve murder cases. Disclaimer: Graphic images and representations of the dead.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDU0X9VVQn4&list=PLKYYhtWMLz6OoRwI3EEVqi_wd_R_mBmHN
- *Human Terrain System Deployed in Afghanistan*
A brief look at the controversy of US military program that has cultural anthropologists working with combat troops to better understand and help the Afghani people.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBkHWb6Iurw>
- *Why do Companies Need Anthropologists?*
A brief look at how anthropologists have increasingly found a home in many of the world’s largest companies.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0uxqukfBSI>

Websites

- “Canadian Multiculturalism: Global Anxieties and Local Debates.” Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka. 2010. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23.1.

This article analyzes multiculturalism in Canada and Europe and the growing debate over whether or not multiculturalism has ‘failed’.
http://post.queensu.ca/~bantingk/Canadian_Multiculturalism.pdf
- *Anthropologists at Work: Responses to Student Questions about Anthropology Careers*. The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, American Anthropological Association. 1994.

This document answers questions about anthropology as a career, including work conditions, job demand, and getting hired.
<http://www.brianhoev.com/resources/applied/articles/napa.pdf>

A Critical Look

BY ROBERTA ROBIN DODS

Going Somewhere?

And so we arrive at the end of this book with a sense that we are on a metaphorical road to *somewhere*. Without an awareness of where we have come from and where we are now, the map for this road lacks context. It is context that situates us in the meaning of things, indeed the meaning of *us* and the potential meanings of *future destinations*.

In archaeological findings from very ancient times—the Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age—we have some indicators of material culture altering our relationship to the natural world we were and remain a part of. One was the invention of tools—first simple and later more complex—made from stone. Then came fire. Without fire we would have remained in the long-running and deeply stable Paleolithic, chipping away and staying near to what warmth we could find.

Fire came to us first in its wild form from the sky—a place where fire shone in the day and sparkled in the night. It came from a brilliant light show in the sky, through a bolt of lightning striking the ground, essentially a gift from above. Once found, this gift had to be cherished, fed, and protected. Of course, it could be a difficult gift as well—a fire raging over the grasslands of Africa had the power to burn us out of our place in the world.

Who was our first ancestor to understand that stone struck on stone could make fire? That friction could warm? That fire could be “domesticated”? Once this discovery had been made, we became the keepers of a crucial technology, one that must have seemed magical and that was certainly transformative. Fire allowed us to alter our relationship with our world. It turned cold to warmth, night to day. It altered what and how we ate, and it provided a circle of protective light from the predators and scavengers of the night. It gave us a cozy, intimate place for family and friends to gather and a way to communicate over great distances. Its heat altered materials, allowing us to shape malleable metals and create pottery. It allowed us to fashion diverse forms of weapons. As we studied the light and the heat of fire, and its ability to transform our world, we became

chemists and physicists. Much later, fire gave us the Industrial Revolution—the steam engine to drive us into a different cultural world. Of course there were other “great” inventions and innovations: domestication of plants and animals (food economies) and the wheel (transportation), to name only two, but fire was transformative in a foundational way.

Today, with the dawn of the digital age and the diffusion of information technologies around the globe, we are in the midst of another unparalleled transformation. Technology lights our minds, sparks our imagination in new ways! For the younger generations born into this world of change, these technologies are not so surprising. They are merely a part of daily life, and the immense changes they have brought about are generally taken for granted. But for many others, the change has been quite startling.

Of course, there were a number of forward-thinking individuals who anticipated the ways in which such technologies might change our lives. We can find many examples in the realm of science fiction, perhaps most notably Arthur C. Clarke, whose mid-twentieth-century works explore such contemporary concepts as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and gene mapping. In the realm of anthropology, Edward T. Hall was a similarly forward-thinking individual. In his 1976 book *Beyond Culture*, he discussed *extension transference*, a term he coined for the relationship between our biology and our technology. Hall understood that technological change could lead to biological change, although our human culture (both ideational and material) is capable of adapting much more quickly than is our genetic makeup.

What does our future hold? No one knows, but many continue to speculate. Theoretical physicist Michio Kaku, for example, gives us some insight into what might be possible in the world of the future. One troubling question that Kaku poses is “Can consciousness exist by itself, free from the constraints of the physical body?” (2014: 266)? This question speaks to our deep desire not to be transient. While Kaku cannot give us a definitive answer to this question, he explores a number of new and evolving technologies that may one day make it possible for us to separate our consciousness from our body—for example, cloning and mind transfer, and computer-based “backups” of the human mind. He even suggests the possibility of our consciousnesses existing as beams of light, pure energy able to roam free through the universe. While such developments may

seem far off and even fanciful to some, they also represent the unlimited possibilities available through human creativity and agency.

While we wait with anticipation to see what the future holds, we should consider what we are currently giving of ourselves to technology. How deeply do we rely on our gadgets to make our way through the world? How much of what makes us *us* have we given over to their digital systems? What might we be losing as we increasingly choose to connect with one another through digital technologies rather than face-to-face interactions? Can digital connections ever replace the sensation of sharing the same physical space with another person, perhaps sitting around a nice warm fire roasting marshmallows and eating s'mores? As anthropologists, we cannot help but ask these sorts of questions as we contemplate what our technological advancements might mean for the future of humanity.

This is a perilous and fearsome freedom. Nevertheless, the freedom is there, and in this dialectic of freedom and constraint lies our future. It is up to us to create it.