FROM THE EDITOR

Reviewing review

Let's talk about peer review. The "best" type of review is usually considered to be double-anonymous review, where reviewers do not know the identity of the authors, and authors, similarly, do not know who has reviewed their work. The idea is that this allows reviewers to be objective and impartial in their evaluation of the work. The assumption is that this process is the best way to determine what work ought to be published.

There are many reasons to challenge the assumptions baked into double-anonymous review, but let me say first that so far in my term as editor-in-chief at *American Anthropologist,* double-anonymous review has worked as it is supposed to almost all the time. Reviewers are, overwhelmingly, generous and thoughtful in their comments, even as they are rigorous and demanding. On the rare occasions when someone gets snarky or rude, I retract those comments from reviews, notifying authors I have done so and giving them the option to see the unredacted review. And while some authors no doubt believe that they know who at least one of their reviewers may have been, I can tell you with certainty that they are quite often wrong.

I am not convinced that double-anonymous review is the best form of review, nor am I convinced that a one-size-fits-all approach allows the best work to emerge from the process. To that end, along with the editorial collective, we have been experimenting in small ways with alternate forms of review with a limited number of submissions.

In the case of multimodal submissions, particularly those that work in and through such media as film, photography, sound, or graphics, we often opt for a critique rather than anonymous review. Critique, or "crit," comes from the world of fine arts and design and constitutes the dominant review model in many studio practice programs. In its simplest form, crit is a conversation between the author(s)/maker(s) and a group of knowledgeable interlocutors. Unlike double-anonymous review, crit takes the form of a conversation and may involve lively back-and-forth, and, of course, in crit nobody is anonymous. There is no doubt that, like anonymous review, crit can go terribly wrong: at my own institution there are still-circulating stories about people's work being set on fire or being ripped to shreds. A shared value set and clear ground rules are an absolute must. Crits, for us, focus on identifying the key intervention or contribution and digging into theory, practice, method. In other words, the key issues are exactly the same as in anonymous peer review, but the process through which the work is evaluated is different. Crits push further into technical and aesthetic considerations appropriate to the media or practice: "Why did you establish this pace in the cuts in the film?" or "Can you talk about your choice of visual style here?" or "How do the sound clips work as more than simple illustrations (so to speak) of the writing?" The rigor with which the work is evaluated remains high, but the conversations are much more enjoyable, to be honest, than writing up an anonymous review, alone, in the wee hours of the morning.

With special sections, we have developed a workshop process that kicks in as the group of papers reaches the minor revisions stage. We were finding that because special section papers move through their reviews individually, reviewer comments sometimes moved them apart, resulting in papers that no longer really worked well as a cohesive group. The whole-group workshop with all the papers at minor revisions allows the editors and authors to come together and rediscover or reinvigorate common themes and harmonies in the work as they prepare final edits before publication.

The common element in both processes is face-to-face (or screen-to-screen) communication, something I think is incredibly important as part of good writing and scholarship. It's a pleasure to be in a room—whether physical or Zoom—where people have come together to discuss good work and to push and prod it to be better. We all learn in the process, and that's very much an added bonus.

There are a range of other models that are possible, and many other journals in the AAA portfolio are undertaking their own experiments in this area. Double-anonymous review is time-tested, is respected, and usually works just fine, but it is far from the best, or the only, model we should employ, especially since it is also anxiety-provoking, alienating, and isolating. There's room at this journal for other ways of doing the important business of publishing good work. Challenging the orthodoxies of peer review is just as important as developing theory and presenting new ethnography. As our discipline and output continue to grow and change, our ways of reviewing must grow and change as well.

Note about the cover: Designed by An Pan, this issue's cover focuses on themes of connection addressed in several articles. If you look closely, the geometric shapes are created from an image of a homemade antenna, discussed in Steffen Köhn and Nestor Siré's article "Fragile Connections," which explores SNET, the community computer network in Cuba. Connections are also made possible by the Una River in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as Azra Hromadzic shows in "Life in an Age of Death: War and the River in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Togetherness as "collective presence" is the topic of "The Limits of Bodies: Gatherings and the Problem of Collective Presence" by Charles Zuckerman and John Mathias in an article that, appropriately, is coauthored.

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