

# REGIMES OF IGNORANCE

## AN INTRODUCTION

*Thomas G. Kirsch and Roy Dille*

The chapters that appear in this volume are based on a set of commissioned essays that were initially written by, and then discussed among, a group of invited scholars. A number of those scholars met at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Konstanz in August 2012 to begin a conversation about how to tackle from an anthropological perspective the production and reproduction of non-knowledge, glossed as ignorance.<sup>1</sup> A series of areas were outlined for intellectual reflection, and contributors to this volume were invited to approach the problem of ignorance from at least two points of view. They were asked to consider first how to present ethnographic examples of social contexts in which ignorance (both actors' and analysts') features as a significant element. The second consideration was how to provide material that would lend itself to theoretical elaboration about the significance of ignorance within a broader field of social analysis. From this conversation, the concept of ignorance came to stand as a portmanteau term that embraced various forms of not-knowing (intentional and unintentional), unknowing and secrecy. These types of concern are approached from the perspective of how they each constitute an absence, an epistemological gap, a lacuna, the presence of which has social consequences.

The problem of ignorance addresses as much the subject of our own conceptions of non-knowledge as it does any attempt to try to plot the variety of uses and abuses of ignorance in the cultural institutions, social relations and political dynamics among other peoples (see also Dille 2010). In this volume, we wish to go beyond a limited 'ethnographic' treatment of ignorance as a series of case studies and instead tackle questions about the production and reproduction

of ignorance within specific socio-cultural regimes of non-knowledge and power. Part of the aim of this Introduction is, therefore, to provide some background to the constructions of ignorance we encounter in our analyses. It also attempts to plot out a brief genealogy of ignorance that might provide us with the grounds for defining ignorance as being part of a regime – that is, a constellation of discursive practices and power relations giving rise to epistemological gaps and forms of un-knowing that have generative social effects and consequences.

### Looking out on Ignorance

To conceptualize the reproduction of non-knowledge requires a consideration of the ontological status attributed to ‘non-knowledge’ in specific socio-cultural settings. This is not to say that this Introduction seeks to provide an exhaustive classification of the diverse manifestations of non-knowledge in all social worlds we know of, past and present, distant and near. They are simply too numerous. Instead, reflecting on empirical examples of how non-knowledge forms part and parcel of historically situated ‘social ontologies’ (Searle 1995, 2010) can help to underline a main proposition of this volume, namely that non-knowledge, even if it is defined in negative terms, should be treated not as a residual category but as though it has a social life.

For the latter case, take the example of a canonical text by the Bahá’í Faith, which was founded in the nineteenth century by the Persian prophet Bahá’u’lláh and nowadays has an estimated membership of five to six million worldwide. This scripture states:

Evil does not exist. Death is only the lack of life; therefore death does not exist. Darkness is only the lack of light. Evil is only the lack of good. *Ignorance is only the lack of knowledge.* Poverty is the lack of wealth. Misleading is the lack of guidance. ... All these things are non-existent. (Holley 1923: 440; italics added)

In terms of its history and theology, the Bahá’í Faith draws inspiration from Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other religious traditions and claims to fulfil the end-time promises of previous sacred scriptures. At the same time, as is evident in the quotation above, some teachings of the Bahá’í Faith differ from ontological assumptions in previous scriptures. For example, Bahá’ís do not believe that evil in the form of a demonic entity exists. In other words, from their perspective, ‘the devil’ has neither agency nor ontological meaning. This might be compared to Christianity, whose history is replete with attempts to counter what are felt to be real effects of the malicious workings of the

non-human actant called Satan. And the Bahá'í statement referred to above, which says that 'ignorance is only the lack of knowledge', denies 'non-knowledge' an existence in its own right.

Contrast this with another form of non-knowledge that is commonly not only said to exist but also, depending on the perspective, either treasured or feared – the secret. Generally speaking, the notion of 'the secret' describes the unequal distribution of knowledge in a social field, with some people sharing a certain stock of knowledge and others being ignorant of its contents. At the same time, this ignorance of the contents of a secret is usually more than just a residual category of 'knowledge' and is instead something that actively contributes to the social construction of reality, for example in the form of conspiracy theories. The social construction of reality through secrecy can, moreover, take two different forms. On the one hand, as Beryl Bellman has pointed out, secrecy follows certain linguistic conventions, for example when certain acts of communication become labelled as 'secrets', meaning that the 'informant who is telling a secret either directly or tacitly makes the claim that the information he or she speaks is not to be spoken' (Bellman 1981: 10). On the other hand, secrecy contributes to the social construction of reality when those who are not participating in a given stock of secret knowledge communicate among themselves about other actors who have secrets, of whose contents the non-participants are ignorant (see also Kirsch, this volume). The conspiracy theories mentioned above are thus a good example of an ontology of non-knowledge that attributes ignorance a catalytic role in social life.

However, examples are also found of situations where non-knowledge is not just felt to be a troublesome thorn in the flesh but considered an agent in its own right that actively works against the strategies of other social actors. In Mexico there is a board game, very similar to the English-speaking world's Trivial Pursuit, in which players have to answer questions on history, geography, politics, sport and so on. Called *Maratón* (Marathon), the game pits players one against the other; but the unusual feature of the game is that it also pits them against 'Ignorance'. Every time a player gives a wrong answer, Ignorance moves forward in the race. Players are thus competing individually against each other, but also collectively against the progress of Ignorance. An online version of the game was available that carried the strap-line 'defeat ignorance in cyberspace'.<sup>2</sup>

The role of ignorance in this game resonates with a recurring image of ignorance in European art and literature. For example, Andrea Mantegna's Renaissance painting in the British Museum

entitled the 'Allegory of the Fall of Ignorant Humanity' (also known as the 'Allegory of Vice and Virtue') illustrates the idea of the hold of Ignorance over humanity. Ignorance is represented by the figure of a nude woman without eyes, and she is led by Error, a man with ass's ears, towards the edge of a pit. He is encouraged in this by a satyr, a half-man/half-goat with bat's wings and bird's feet, playing a pipe, and is accompanied by a man with a sack over his head, leading a dog. Here ignorance is again reified, but this time represented as a being in female form.

In this example and that of the board game *Maratón*, knowledge and ignorance are thrown together in antagonistic relationships: in a battle over the fate of humanity or in competition with players to win a board-game marathon. This speaks of a very particular conception of the relationship between knowledge and ignorance: knowledge has the potential to eradicate ignorance in the progress of humankind, who will be all the better for the triumph.

Another example of the idea of a strained relationship between knowledge and ignorance is provided by Plato's well-known allegory of the cave, in which prisoners are chained since childhood, condemned to see only the reflected shadows on the cave wall. This invokes the image of a world unknown directly to those set in chains. Ignorance and knowledge are here located in different spatial positions, quite separate from each other, and each one is exclusive to one sort of being or another. The mutual relationship between knowing and not-knowing is again antagonistic, and it defines opposed categories of living and being: either those who know and live in the truth or those who lack a full knowledge of the world and live in the shadows.

In terms of the ontologies of non-knowledge expressed in them, the latter examples have in common, first, that they set ignorance and knowledge in a mutually antagonistic relationship, and second, that they tend to reify ignorance as a thing or as a being. In combination, this type of perspective runs deep through the way we think about knowing and not-knowing; it is a powerful trope that underlies areas as diverse as educational policy, systems of restorative justice, the spread of global democracy or the onward march of science.

The contributors to the present volume are aware of the challenges involved in the attempt to steer clear of the conventions and preconceptions implied in these sorts of perspective. They seek to develop an analytical angle on ignorance that takes account of the fact that 'non-knowledge' is thought and experienced by people throughout the world to be more than just a residual category of 'knowledge' but something that has palpable effects in the world. For instance, in the

English-speaking world, proverbial sayings have it that ignorance is 'bliss' and 'the mother of superstition'. At the same time, while acknowledging the positivity of non-knowledge, an appraisal of the significance of ignorance within the broader field of social analysis also needs to avoid its reification. As will be elaborated in the closing paragraphs of this Introduction, a balance between these notions can conceptually be reached by showing consideration for the fact that every 'regime of knowledge' simultaneously is a 'regime of non-knowledge' that is socially produced and reproduced through time.

### **Studying Ignorance**

Many years ago Mark Hobart pointed to the 'growth of ignorance'. It would seem that in the intervening years since the publication of Hobart's edited collection in 1993, ignorance has burgeoned; there is simply a lot of it about nowadays. But the shape of the configuration of knowledge and ignorance has started to shift too. A concern with ignorance and not-knowing has been the subject of numerous seemingly unconnected enquiries by researchers from diverse fields including not only anthropology but also sociology, political science, history of science and information technology studies, among others.<sup>3</sup> By pushing at the boundaries of our knowledge of knowledge, researchers have increasingly become aware of the flipside to ways of knowing: the place of ignorance, not-knowing and nescience in their own academic disciplines and in their daily social life. Specifically, anthropologists, in their intense desire to discover knowledge about the native Other, have increasingly become aware of how often they have overlooked informants' own accounts of ignorance: those points where the people themselves recognize the limits of local knowledge.<sup>4</sup> These concerns are developed and addressed in this volume.

Moreover, it has lately become much harder to overlook the fact that a form of ignorance sits at the very core of anthropological method. It is built into the very method of social anthropological fieldwork, whereby an anthropologist goes to the field in order to learn and perfect skills in another language and to adopt the habits, dispositions and appropriate bodily responses that make up what passes as a competent cultural performance. Fieldwork allows the anthropologist to turn his or her ignorance into a positive strategy for learning, assimilation and insight; it allows for culturally specific knowledge to fill the gaps left by broad-brush anthropological training in the academy. Indeed, we suspend the seeming certainty of our own knowing

(which comes through training) when we enter the field, and our ignorance opens up for us areas for comparative reflection and contemplation. Ignorance is productive, therefore, in highlighting the nature of the taken-for-granted worlds in which others (including ourselves) live, and to which we adapt over the course of our fieldwork. Indeed, our conscious recognition of other people's taken-for-granted understandings of the world opens up for us another dimension of ignorance within anthropological methodologies.

The recent increase in scholarly attention given to questions of ignorance, unknowing and non-knowledge is striking. What might be the reasons for this recent efflorescence in the topic? Why has ignorance become a topic of research at this particular historical juncture? While the U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld's observations in 2002 on 'known knowns', 'known unknowns' etc, in answer to a question about the relationship between the Iraqi regime and weapons of mass destruction, may have brought the issue of non-knowledge to the forefront of popular consciousness, it is unlikely that his contribution was anything more than an amusing distraction from an otherwise serious debate of critical importance on the situation in the Middle East.

More importantly perhaps is the idea that there is a general crisis of confidence in contemporary society about what knowledge is, what it is for and what its impact on others might be. The debate going on at the heart of education in the U.K. and elsewhere at present is stimulated by the policies of governments aimed at making teaching and research more accountable, more relevant to tax payers and the labour market. These concerns act as triggers of epistemological doubt, and they raise our awareness of how not only knowledge, but also ignorance, is produced.

In addition, that we live in an age of information, in a so-called 'knowledge economy', has no doubt also stimulated a critique of the worst excesses and the contradictory tensions of our current situation. Democratic access to information, so the story goes, will help eradicate ignorance, the scourge of oppressive political regimes and of faulty market mechanisms in economies across the globe. As Christos Lynteris has argued, however, 'the dominant doctrine of information capitalism is that everyone can know everything, that ignorance is a thing of the past, and that this is a desirable state of equality and freedom' (personal communication). Our sense of scepticism, however, is triggered by the alternative forms of knowledge and practices of learning that are being nurtured by politicians and educationalists, by governmental controls on the flow of information and debates about

access to state knowledge; furthermore, our sense of unease is heightened by the way in which lives can be manipulated through information technologies and by the sheer superabundance of things to know. All these considerations render us critical about what is being left out, what is absent – namely, non-knowledge and ignorance.

This is not the first time that ignorance has caught the imagination – if only temporarily – of scholars, who appear to be both attracted by the topic and then equally prone to ignore it after a while. It is a subject that pops its head above the academic parapet from time to time, only to disappear again for long periods. The term ‘agnoiology’, the ‘theory of ignorance’, was first coined in the nineteenth century by the philosopher James Ferrier (1854), who also proposed the concept of ‘epistemology’. His project came to nought, and it no doubt died a quick death on the swords of those philosophers who would have pointed out that the production of knowledge of ignorance dissolves the object of study at the outset.

There is, therefore, a paradox in the idea of examining ignorance in the hope of coming to know it. Linsey McGoey (2012b: 3) echoes this view: ‘Ironically, once ignorance is identified, it loses its own definition’. Also, once ignorance is claimed to have a degree of concreteness, once it is reified, then its very conception is undermined. This paradox should not necessarily mean that once grasped, ignorance loses its significance, potentiality or positivity. But it does present the task of determining how to represent a field of ignorance and how to capture the positivity of ignorance. The following excursion into the poetics and politics of anonymization can provide some insights into this issue.

### **Representing (Non-)Knowledge: An Excursion into the Ethics of Ethnography**

Writing about the distinction between ‘risk’ and ‘danger’, Niklas Luhmann once asked: ‘Is the common shared assumption still justified that more communication, more reflection, more knowledge, more learning, more participation – that more of all of this would have positive, or at least no negative, impact?’ (Luhmann 1991: 90; cited in Japp 2000: 235). Reading present-day primers on ethnographic methods and ethics in anthropology, one gets the impression that this question would nowadays be answered in the positive by most anthropologists. This stands in contrast to earlier generations of ethnographers who entered into long conversations with ‘native

interlocutors' about the latter's specific ways of knowing, yet mostly left their interlocutors in a state of ignorance when it came to communicating the possible risks these conversations could have for them once they were made public.

Partly due to the geopolitical transformations following political independence of former colonies in the global South, this situation started to change in the 1960s. Consequently, the unequal structural relationship between 'research subject' and 'research object' was problematized and checked for potentially adverse ethical and political implications. Since then, anthropologists have been called not only to take responsibility for the poetics and politics of ethnographic representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986) but also to be accountable to people in their research sites as well as to the wider public in their respective countries of origin (see, for example, Strathern 2000). On the one hand, this process brought about a multiplication of the audiences with which anthropologists were expected to engage actively. On the other hand, it influenced what and how ethnographers communicated in fieldwork encounters. Most importantly for this volume on the topic of ignorance, the researcher now has to procure people's 'informed consent' (Fluehr-Lobban 2003; Kelly 2003) which, in turn, entails the expectation that a negotiated balance will be achieved within a knowledge/'ignorance economy' of research.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the Committee on Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 2010 listed ten characteristics of how valid and informed consent can be attained. Included in the list were the following: to 'engage in an ongoing and dynamic discussion with collaborators ... about the nature of study participation, its risks and potential benefits' and to 'demonstrate, in the appropriate language, all research equipment and documentation techniques prior to obtaining consent so that research collaborators, or participants, may be said to be adequately informed about the research process' (Clark and Kingsolver 2010). Anthropologists are here called to fend off potentially adverse effects of scientific knowledge production by selectively reversing the flow of knowledge between themselves and (nescient) people in their fieldsites.

Yet, most notably, one of the items listed in the AAA *Briefing Paper on Informed Consent* is also indicative of the difficulties anthropologists face when trying to draw a conceptual boundary between knowledge production and ignorance production: 'Inform potential subjects of the anonymity, confidentiality, and security measures taken for all types of study data, including digitised, visual, and material data' (ibid.). Rendering anonymous the names of persons, institutions and



places of one's fieldsite certainly represents one of the most common and commonsensical strategies in protecting the interests of the persons being studied. Yet, we suggest that the anonymization of ethnographic data produces a peculiar ambiguity within the heart of the anthropological method. While imparting knowledge about a particular 'epistemic object' (Knorr Cetina 2001), the method casts a veil at the same time over basic aspects of the identity of this object, thus amalgamating the production of knowledge with an intended production of ignorance.

Vincent Crapanzano's controversial book *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*, published in 1985, may be taken as an example. In the acknowledgements of this book, Crapanzano writes: 'There are a great many people in the United States, Europe and South Africa whom I should like to thank. To protect the identity of the people with whom I worked in South Africa, I have chosen not to name them' (Crapanzano 1985: ix).<sup>6</sup> For the most part, the book consists of descriptions of encounters between the ethnographer and 'white' South Africans, in which the latter give fine-grained and self-reflexive accounts of their biographies and of how they position themselves in the wider context of apartheid South Africa. There is a lot one can learn from these descriptions, which are among the first of their kind, making not 'black' but 'white' South Africans the topic of ethnographic research (for an overview, see Niehaus 2013). At the same time, however, the reader of this book is – apart from a rough indication of the region – deliberately kept ignorant with regard to the question of the particular location of the study.

Another, even more extreme example is Richard Rottenburg's *Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid*, which states in the prologue that 'the case depicted in this book has been fictionalized' (Rottenburg 2009: xvii) due to the sensitive political and moral issues involved and in order 'to direct attention away from the strengths and weaknesses of specific real actors and toward the significance of general structural principles and the contingencies of the mundane practices of the development world' (ibid.). Presenting his book as an example of experimental ethnographic writing on the basis of field research and professional engagement in development aid in 'Ruretania', a fictional country in sub-Saharan Africa, Rottenburg professes that 'characters in the present text have been given fictional names and are literally figures in a play. They do not depict any real, existing people but are constructed from the cumulative characteristics originally belonging to the various people I met during my tenure in the field of development cooperation' (ibid.).

We are not simply concerned here with the questions of the moral justification or political adequacy of anonymizing ethnographic data to such an extreme extent. Instead, what these two examples make clear is that anonymization introduces an ambiguous epistemic logic to ethnographic representation in which readers are simultaneously equipped with a specific type and stock of knowledge (e.g., the fact that something was done by social actors) and left in the dark or ignorant as concerns other types and stocks of knowledge (e.g., who in particular did it).

When seen in the wider semantic context of 'knowledge' and 'ignorance', anonymized ethnographic representations of this kind are neither 'lack of knowledge' nor 'false knowledge' nor an expression of ignorance in the sense of Nicholas Rescher's definition of it as the 'inability to answer meaningful questions in a way that manages to convince people' (Rescher 2009: 2). Instead, anonymization is a deliberate and conventionalized hybridization of abstracted knowledge and ignorance about the particular details of any individual case study. As such, it is an apt – though in part counterintuitive – example not only of the positivity of ignorance, mentioned above, but also of how a specific (in this case: well-meaning) scientific regime of ignorance becomes established and put into effect.

### **The Shifting Sands of Anthropological Nescience**

When seen from the perspective of the history of science, cultural and social anthropology has long been driven by an encyclopaedic desire to identify, document, classify and archive to the greatest possible extent what was previously unknown. This desire is shared with other scientific disciplines with historical roots in the Enlightenment. Confining themselves to the 'savage slot' (Trouillot 1991), anthropologists up to the mid-twentieth century drew up a mythological charter to shed scientific light on what they acknowledged to be areas of ignorance, thus 'supplanting that ignorance with knowledge' (Merton 1951: 417). In turn, associating 'culture' with stocks of knowledge of given groups of people who were assumed to live in spatially separated and bounded territories (Ferguson and Gupta 1997), the world was imagined as a knowledge map with a gradually shrinking number of blanks to be filled in through field research. Thus, by continuously expanding the anthropological horizon and systematically compartmentalizing the knowledge gained this way, such as in the form of the Human Areas Relation Files,<sup>7</sup> there was a sense in which, at that time and for those

who believed in this accumulative logic of scientific progress, the end of anthropological nescience was attainable – at least in principle.

In the decades that followed, a well-rehearsed argument was formulated claiming that this epistemological self-confidence was only possible on the grounds of questionable premises concerning the nature of society, such as ‘the overemphasis on consensuality as the basis for orderly social interaction’ (Smithson 1985: 152). These premises led some anthropologists ‘to define culture solely in terms of shared cognitive orientations and symbol systems’ (ibid.) and to stress societal equilibrium. By the 1960s (with notable precursors such as Max Gluckman’s ‘Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand’ (1940)) new theoretical developments in anthropology which highlighted the important heuristic role of historicity, contextuality, ‘situativity’ and conflict for anthropological analysis (see, for example, Werbner 1984; Evens and Handelman 2006) gained momentum. What has increasingly been taken into account in the wake of these developments is a series of ideas: that knowledge is not just given but socially constructed, debated and negotiated; that knowledge is distributed unequally within any society as well as between societies (Weinstein and Weinstein 1978: 151); that knowledge can be used to establish but also to criticize and subvert power; that the value of a certain type of knowledge depends on the standpoint taken to evaluate it; and that one and the same person can in specific situations take recourse to different – and partly contradictory – stocks of knowledge. In addition, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, anthropologists increasingly started to study ‘up’ (Nader 1972) and ‘sideways’ (Hannerz 2006), to shift their fieldsites from societies in the global South to the global North (Jackson 1987) and to focus their attention less on empirical phenomena in the (alleged) ‘periphery’ (Ardener 1987) than on the ‘centres of calculation’ (Latour 1987). These developments resulted in a pluralization of what could (and should?) be known by anthropologists as well as, most important for our argument here, a diversification of the other side of knowing; that is, in a diversification of co-produced non-knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Shadow of Ignorance in Anthropology**

To grasp the nettle of ignorance in the discipline of anthropology is an act of politics. While Bronislaw Malinowski (1974) grappled with questions of native knowledge, practical know-how and the native need for psychologically reassuring practices of magic in stressful and

dangerous situations in the Trobriand Islands, Sir James Frazer proposed a conception of magic in terms of 'the bastard sister of science', a native discipline which, although it sought causal connections between events, was nonetheless based on error – that is, it enshrined an ignorance of the 'true' nature of the world. He argued: 'The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence'. He continues some lines later:

The principles of association are excellent in themselves, and indeed absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied they yield science; illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science ... [A]ll magic is necessarily false and barren; for were it ever to become true and fruitful, it would no longer be magic but science. (Frazer 1976 [1922]: 64–65)

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1985) was equally forthright in his assumptions about how natives thought. His idea that non-European peoples lived in a state of mystical participation with the world was predicated on a conception of the inability of such folk to know that things and events might be ontologically separate. His theory also suggested that natives were content to entertain logical contradictions. This attribution of ignorance to other cultures fed debates about the political and ethical stance that anthropologists might adopt with respect to strange and exotic statements such as 'twins are birds' or 'men are storks'. As Godfrey Lienhardt argued, even generous interpretations of Lévy-Bruhl's 'impressionistic accounts of primitive peoples being utterly mystical in the apprehension of reality' are a form of 'old-fashioned literalism' which often made other people 'seem childish and irrational' (Lienhardt 1954: 106). These folk, Lienhardt stated, are no less practical or logical than us, nor do they lack empirical knowledge and skill. The attribution of ignorance to other cultures, even if only implied, carries a heavy postcolonial political loading. Moreover, the political dynamics of the study of knowledge, non-knowledge and of the ethics of anthropological methodologies point to the way in which we might conceive of the idea of regimes of production of ignorance, which lie at the heart of our discipline.

Another perspective on the shadow of ignorance within anthropology can be gained by considering arguments developed by structuralist thinkers and then by those opposed to their perspective. In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss draws attention to two important references to motivations for knowledge, both of which relate to affect and/or need rather than pure intellect or rationality. First, he states

that ‘the thirst for objective knowledge is one of the most neglected aspects of the thought of people we call “primitive”’ (Lévi-Strauss 1989: 3. In the French original this begins: ‘*cet appétit de connaissance objective...*’ (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 5)). This thirst/appetite for knowledge comes from an intellectual or theoretical interest to create order in the world, rather than imperatives predicated on biological needs or practical uses. Second, he talks of a ‘desire’ (*désir*) for knowledge, and how the desires of Western observers and those of natives might be regarded as being ‘out of balance’ (Lévi-Strauss 1989: 6). Lévi-Strauss gives examples that suggest that the attribution by the native of ignorance to Western observations is as likely as Western attributions of ignorance relating to native practice and classification. Lévi-Strauss addresses by implication a double form of ignorance: there is on the analyst’s part a supposed ‘ineptitude’ – or perhaps a better translation from the French would be the ‘[mental] incapacity’ (*inaptitude*) – of ‘primitive people’ for abstract thought; there is also the idea that analysts who suggest the opposite thesis are ‘ignored’ (*omettait* in the French text), for these commentators ‘make it plain that richness of abstract words is not a monopoly of civilised languages’ (*ibid.*: 1). The other’s desire for abstract knowledge is overcome by the analyst’s wish not to represent it as knowledge: it is ignored.

But there is another dynamic between knowledge and ignorance in Lévi-Strauss’ work, one which he himself creates, that draws into tension the interpretations of analysts and those of natives. It is here that Lévi-Strauss himself ignores, or discounts, those forms of native interpretation that go against the grain of his own favoured analysis. With respect to the logical nature of classification discovered by the analyst, he notes: ‘There are cases in which one can make hypotheses with regard to the logical nature of classification, which appear true or can be seen to cut across the natives’ interpretation’ (1989: 59). That is, native interpretation is something that might either be confirmed as true by the analyst or dismissed by him or her because it is at odds with an anthropological interpretation. Or again, in the chapter ‘Do Dual Organisations Exist’ in *Structural Anthropology*, he remarks: ‘Today, this distinction appears to me naive, because it is still too close to the native’s classification’ (Lévi-Strauss 1977: 150). And finally, he claims in his *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* that there are instances in which the ethnologist allows him/herself to be mystified by the native (Lévi-Strauss 2002 [1950]: 45–50). In all these cases, Lévi-Strauss does not seem to hesitate to attribute either ignorance, a lack of clarity or an absence of proper scientific knowledge to the native. Anthropological knowledge trumps native knowledge if the

status of the analytical structures envisioned in the anthropologist's own writings about ethnographic material is put in doubt.

The political and ethical implications of this analytical stance were questioned by, among others, Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik (1981, 1983), whose body of work raised a major methodological concern about what warrant the anthropologist possesses to go beyond native knowledge and impose interpretations on a specific people. For them, the problem related to the idea that if anthropological categories of analysis did not coincide with those used by the people under study – more particularly, if the anthropologist's analytical models were at odds with native folk models – then the anthropologist's methods of study were in error. Thus, according to Holy and Stuchlik, we should not be allowed to consign to the rubbish bin of ignorance those native ideas that folk use to interpret and give sense to their own day-to-day lives.

While the pendulum of interpretative power may have begun to swing during this period in the direction of native exegesis, the question of ignorance raised its head yet again but now in a different form. This new concern had less to do with analysts discounting forms of knowledge and instead highlighted the problem of how to deal methodologically with 'protestations of ignorance' by informants in the field. As Richard Fardon points out, anthropological accounts usually paper over protestations of local ignorance and indeed fill in things left unsaid. When anthropologists go beyond what informants say, their accounts 'rest of the shadow side of their [natives'] assertions: the absences, ignorances and unsayabilities which must exist for things to be as they are claimed. Yet systematic attention is rarely given to these ethnographic non-events' (Fardon 1990: 8). Indeed, there is a range of reasons Fardon puts forward as to why things might not be made explicit or articulated by natives, and these include the following: there may be purposeful concealment, folk trying to protect secrets of one form or another; people might alternatively have tacit or implicit knowledge, in that they may know how to do something but not why it is the way it is; knowledge might axiomatically be mysterious and ineffable to them; or it could be the product of unknowable generative schema of the sort proposed by Foucault, Freud or Lévi-Strauss. Fardon argues that in a complex institutional context of Chamba social relations, his informants ran out of interpretations in 'interestingly different ways', and that 'there are reasons for the unknowns and unknowables clustering in Chamba accounts as they do' (1990: 22). In his anthropological account, Fardon not only points to the disciplinary dispositions that attempt either to attribute ignorance to

others or to acknowledge forms of native knowledge, but also points out that at a micro-level in the production of ethnography and the writing of analyses different types of knowledge and ignorance are engendered in a range of social relations at various phases during the process of investigation.

In terms of the disciplinary practice within anthropology outlined above, it is apparent that ignorance is not eliminable through a simple widening of knowledge horizons. Ignorance is part of an anthropological regime of knowledge; it is part of a disciplinary practice that constitutes an economy of ignorance. Moreover, anthropological non-knowledge nowadays seems to take a rhizomatic form with endlessly extending ramifications, paralleled by the emergence of new disciplinary subfields and thematic specializations devised to keep track of what is found to be not known within and in relation to heterogeneous research sites. Moreover, in contrast to earlier periods, present-day anthropology has shifted its main focus of attention from wondrous unknowns in exotic places – regarding, for example, witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1937), notions of ‘virgin birth’ (Leach 1966) or spirit possession (Boddy 1994) – to manifestations and modalities of non-knowledge that are closer to the anthropologists’ own life-worlds in terms of spatial proximity as well as in terms of similitude of the respective ‘epistemic culture’ (Knorr Cetina 1999), meaning the socio-cultural configuration that determines how we know what we know. In this process, non-knowledge is less and less defined with a view to modernity’s Other, but increasingly found to be located in the disquieted heart of (post)modernity itself.

### **Contributing to Ignorance**

All the chapters in this volume subscribe to the idea in one way or another that ignorance and knowledge are mutually constitutive, and that ignorance is not simply the absence of, or a gap in, knowledge. Ignorance is a social fact. Indeed, all contributors point towards the positivity of ignorance, that it has generative social effects, that it is produced in specific socio-cultural contexts and that there are political consequences that flow from its production and reproduction.<sup>9</sup>

Carlo Caduff’s analysis, based on fieldwork among U.S.-American microbiologists, focuses on ‘the regulation and appropriation of ignorance in the context of ... the discourse of emerging infectious diseases’. He explores scientists’ understanding of viruses, which constitute ‘a heterogeneous population of mutant strains in constant

flux'; and he points out how the scientists' awareness of their own ignorance has been normalized. Caduff shows that the unpredictability of their object of knowledge has given rise to an institutionalized approach to what microbiologists anticipate they will be ignorant of in the future. What is more, awareness of the scientists' ignorance in these matters has even been made productive by incorporating a conception of the unknown into new experimental research designs that expressly take account of the 'eventfulness' of viruses. Caduff concludes that ignorance is a discursive object; that it is a 'stratified' not a 'flat' object; and moreover, as a stratified object, ignorance has a political history and a geopolitics.

Christos Lynteris' chapter examines another example of biopolitical practice, but his focus is on interpretations by early Russian ethnographers, Chinese scientists and others of a highly contagious, airborne form of plague in Inner Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He examines the so-called 'native knowledge hypothesis' – that is, 'the contention that Mongols and Buryats knew plague as a zoonotic disease, being thus able to prevent the perilous bacterial species-jump leading to human outbreaks of plague'. At the turn of the twentieth century this hypothesis had many adherents in popular and professional science in both China and Russia, and Lynteris traces the history of this hypothesis, which is replete with misunderstandings and mistranslations. Lynteris' analysis exposes the persistent reproduction of a scientific epistemological practice that, paradoxically, did not allow 'natives' to be ignorant of their own physical environment. Furthermore, while native populations were burdened with an epidemiological knowledge they did not have, they were simultaneously deprived by scientists of a mythical and ritual knowledge, which formed a central part of a precarious social autonomy that they had developed at the borders of powerful centralized polities. It is evident here how the denial that others can not-know led to all manner of social and political consequences.

In the chapter by Trevor Marchand, where he reflects on his own experiences during his training as a fine woodworker in a college in London, ignorance appears in a variety of forms. For example, ignorance is used actively to structure social relationships within the class as well as between trainers and trainees because "not knowing" where to find the information or "not knowing" where to begin a task were the premise for asking others to show and lend a hand'. Furthermore, the trainees' utopian ideas of autonomy about becoming an independent bespoke artisan suggested a wider significance of not-knowing. As 'authors of utopias', trainees 'wilfully suspend[ed]



for a temporary period their knowledge of the fuller spectrum of forces at play in daily life'. Ignorance was therefore a central defining feature of the artisans' attempts to create and maintain a utopian vision. Within the broader institutional set-up of the college, ignorance of marketing, an area concerned with 'the critical importance of basic business and marketing skills to succeed, as well as the reality of the U.K.'s narrow and highly competitive marketplace for makers and sellers of bespoke furniture', slowly became apparent to a number of trainees. Marchand's analysis thus makes clear that the productivity of ignorance within specific contexts is at once something that is sought and something that creates feelings of unease. Indeed, when utopian visions could no longer be maintained in the face of the realities of marketing and business promotion outside the college, the strategic concealments of individual social projects became visible and their exposure had serious personal consequences, fracturing utopian visions of budding bespoke artisans.

Casey High's chapter on Waorani people in Ecuadorian Amazon discusses how anthropologists can deal with ethnographic contexts 'in which the people we study insist on ignorance as a social value'. The examples he chooses to illustrate this idea are set within local debates about shamanism and are concerned with intergenerational conflicts in relation to educational issues, more particularly the allegation by older generations that young people lack a particular type of bodily knowledge. Concerning the shamanism, High argues that 'Waorani people are "wilfully ignorant" of shamanism in part because its practice is associated with assault sorcery'. In both instances, the claim to ignorance – whether evaluated negatively (as in the intergenerational conflict) or evaluated positively (as in the case of shamanism specifically) – is embedded in specific relations of power and social morality, which define what should and what should not be known. Not knowing about shamanism is, therefore, not only a strategic claim in a particular context, but also a statement about a 'desired state of being that confers a person's moral position' within a wider set of social and political relations. Furthermore, the strategic claims of ignorance about shamanism and the laments about the ignorance of young people give a lie to the disciplinary predisposition by which anthropologists claim that other people cannot not-know. Ignorance, High concludes, is 'produced and conceived and acquires meanings in ways that depart significantly from economies of knowledge familiar to the West'.

John Borneman's chapter deals with the therapeutic treatment of child sex offenders in Berlin. In the context of these therapies, the

offender's ignorance is perceived to be a problem that needs to be overcome through introspection and empathy. Offenders adopt strategies to protect themselves from accusations, for it becomes self-incriminating for them to attempt to assimilate their experiences as the perpetrators of sexual abuse. As Borneman shows, the accusation of 'sex abuse' not only requires the accused men to organize the details of their past experiences according to certain schemata, but also presupposes that these men are not ignorant of their deeds but rather 'motivated to ignorance', a view held by the therapists involved. The problem thus focuses 'not on what the victims of sex abuse experience or know but on how the offenders come to know, and what they then in fact do know, in light of what we know about the intersubjective experience of the child' at the centre of the accusation. Borneman argues that more 'information' cannot overcome the issue of motivated ignorance; nor can the intersubjective experience of the child be revealed straightforwardly. Indeed, since child molestation and sexual abuse are taboos, Borneman concludes that 'they are structured in part by silences that one might characterize as integral to a regime of ignorance'. This chapter is an example of a powerful institutionalized approach to ignorance, taboo and the uneven distribution of knowledge.

While Borneman critiques the notion of 'the uncovering of the truth of sex' and the power of the confessional in Foucault's work, Leo Coleman takes us beyond the same author's ideas of power-knowledge, especially with respect to the way spectacular ceremonial and disciplinary ritual practices can be read through them. Instead, he offers a Freudian reading of 'the metaphysics of the British Crown, as they were personified and substantialized in the Imperial Durbar, and as they contributed to the making of an imperial state'. The Foucauldian conception of power-knowledge is inadequate to deal with a situation in which governmental knowledge in colonial India was unstable and insecure. Indeed, 'individuals and institutions within the colonial state worked to constitute ... absences in the fabric of governmental knowledge'. Rather than systematic knowledge being the outcome, it was systematic ignorance that was promoted and produced in rituals of display. Coleman constructs a powerful argument to unpick the ritual and political logic of the Coronation Durbar by recourse to Freud's theory of the fetish, an account of which is used to understand the dynamics of power-ignorance within the operation of colonial government. Coleman argues that the Crown played a special role as fetish, since it obscured real governmental knowledge about the needs and interests among the

Indian population, and operated by means of secrecy and through processes of concealment.

The production and reproduction of ignorance within parts of the French colonial apparatus and within networks of social relations among colonial officers in West Africa are examined in Roy Dille's chapter. Two problematic areas for the colonial regime are considered here: the offspring of colonial officers and indigenous women; and slavery within West Africa, especially how individual officers reacted towards it in specific local contexts. The analysis focuses on how non-knowledge was created through contradictory pressures operating within the colonial regime and through intimate social interactions in colonial outposts. The production and reproduction of non-knowledge is conceived as an artefact of colonial relations – a function of a regime of governmentality – and of the effort expended by social actors in creating 'holes', 'positive absences' or zones of non-knowledge. Dille shows, for example, how a desire for secrecy around the issue of slavery resulted in forms of social practice being obscured from the view of metropolitan France; how individual officers, caught within the contradictory currents of colonialism, chose to ignore or conceal certain unpalatable issues; and how as a system of relations, French colonialism created, sustained and reproduced not-knowing. Both institutions and individuals worked to produce and reproduce zones of ignorance, positive absences in the fabric of colonial understanding. Knowledge and ignorance were not simply the result of abstract epistemological relations, but they were created and recreated simultaneously within a regime of colonial political control and in relation to human emotions and desires.

Thomas G. Kirsch's chapter explores secretiveness as a specific form of asymmetrical (non-)knowledge that has generative social effects. Questioning the widely held assumption that 'human beings are epistemophilic; that is, that they have "a natural desire to know"', he takes African Christianity in Zambia as the example to show that use of the category of 'the secret' presupposes the existence of (real or imagined) Others who are interested in the disclosure of what is concealed from them. In other words, contrary to Simmel's definition of secrecy as 'consciously willed concealment', Kirsch suggests that the fact of concealment is not enough to account for the form of sociality constituted through secrecy. An example to illustrate this point pertains to controversies with regard to the herbal substances used in prophet-healing churches: while some people classify them as 'curative medicine', others categorize them as 'witchcraft items'. Yet, in both cases, the covert storage of these substances does not mean that

'epistemophilic Others are ... already out there prior to acts of secretiveness'; instead, Kirsch argues, they 'are performatively constituted and thus brought into existence through acts that are classified in that way', for example by healers who, in an act of self-aggrandisement, insinuate the existence of epistemophilic Others in relation to the 'secret lore' of their own religious expertise. The positivity and social productivity of secrecy thus lies in the insinuation that people have a desire to know what they are kept ignorant of.

### **In Lieu of a Conclusion**

Those who have travelled on French motorways will have seen signposts at the roadside that pose an intriguing ambiguity about holes: '*trous en formation*', the signs say – 'holes in the making'. This statement does not, without doubt, refer to spontaneous, self-generated events, but implies that there are agents responsible for making the holes. As all good road-workers who dig holes in the ground are aware, the production of absences is a strenuous and tiring business. And this is where the '*trous en formation*' dovetail with our concerns in this present volume: it is the social, cultural and political processes that go into the production and reproduction of the absences of knowledge that is of empirical and theoretical interest in the chapters to follow. More particularly, we contend that the anthropological study of the significance of ignorance within the broader field of social analysis should pay regard to three overarching conceptual commitments, all of which are shared by the chapters in this volume.

#### ***Conceptualizing Ignorance as Positivity***

As elaborated above, recent work on ignorance suggests different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between knowing and not-knowing, and these provide fruitful areas for further research. Rather than knowledge and ignorance being seen as the negation of each other, they are instead construed as intimately related, each one deriving its character and meaning from a mutual interaction. As Giorgio Agamben states: 'The ways in which we do not know things are just as important (and perhaps even more important) as the ways in which we know them' (2011: 113); and he points out that 'the articulation of a zone of non-knowledge is the condition ... of all our knowledge' (*ibid.*). Agamben goes on to observe that 'we lack even the elementary principles of an art of ignorance', and that 'there is no recipe for

articulating a zone of non-knowledge' (ibid.: 114). The relationship, therefore, between knowledge and ignorance appears to be less antagonistic and more complimentary and mutually reinforcing than one might have initially imagined. But there is more to it than this. As we have tried to demonstrate in this Introduction, there is a positivity to ignorance, a potentiality that provides the grounds for action, thought and the production of social relations.

Specifically, Agamben argues that: 'The art of living is ... the capacity to keep ourselves in harmonious relationship with that which escapes us' (2011: 114). This is one sort of ignorance at the core of existence, an existential ignorance as it were. Luhmann points to a similar conclusion in his discussions of an ecology of ignorance, a kind of systemic ignorance, in his book *Observations on Modernity*. He quotes from one of Socrates' dialogues: 'Man is capable of taking actions only because he is capable of being ignorant, and of contenting himself with a portion of the consciousness that is his singular oddity' (Luhmann 1998: 94). In other words, at the heart of human choosing and doing is a form of ignorance that makes possible future courses of action.

This positivity of ignorance can be seen too in the acknowledgement of the fact of ignorance as a central idea to sociological theories of action (for example of the type proposed by Robert Merton, 1951). If action is employed to bring about conditions that would otherwise not exist, then the foreseen and unforeseen consequences of that action hang on the potentiality of ignorance. To know all the consequences of an action, anticipated and unanticipated, is to become incapable of action. Luhmann suggests that the relationship between knowing and ignorance reaches a point at which 'ignorance becomes the most important resource of action', lest we be frozen in inaction due to the burden of contemplating all possible outcomes of an act (1998: 94).<sup>10</sup>

Building on these insights, the chapters in this volume highlight the idea of the positivity of ignorance in order to underscore the relationship of ignorance to power, ethics and social practice.

### ***The Reproduction of Non-Knowledge***

A major challenge in studying 'non-knowledge' that needs to be taken into account is the question of the reproduction of that non-knowledge. In different ways and to different degrees, the issue of reproduction certainly lies at the heart of the social sciences and humanities, for example when dealing with the reproductive dynamics of power

relationships, practices of cultural transmission between generations, and the reproduction of ignorance rather than just knowledge alone. We suggest, therefore, that the focus of anthropological study should be on the production and reproduction of ignorance or non-knowledge, rather than on the illusory qualities of ignorance as a (reified) thing in itself. In doing so, we need to keep 'the right relationship with ignorance, allowing an absence of knowledge to guide and accompany our gestures', as Agamben (2011: 114) says. He goes on to observe that 'it is possible that the zone of non-knowledge does not really contain anything special at all. Perhaps ... [it] does not exist at all; perhaps only its gestures exist' (ibid.).

Turning Agamben's observation into a question, we ask: How can we come to a conceptualization of what is addressed in the subtitle of this volume – the reproduction of non-knowledge? Conceptualizing this notion poses difficulties because it requires developing an analytical approach that allows us to grasp the reproduction of an absence – of knowledge that is lacking, non-existent. Metaphorically speaking, the puzzling question is how a 'void' can be reproduced through time if the 'void', characterized by emptiness, does not have content or substance in and of itself?

At first sight, the answer to this question seems clear: A 'void' is reproduced by establishing a frame; that is, through the reproduction of those characteristics that demarcate and define the void's categorical opposite – that is, the 'frame'. When seen from this rather obscured vantage point, the reproduction of non-knowledge through time is simply a by-product of the reproduction of knowledge through time because, in a manner of speaking, non-knowledge is here located at the lee side of knowledge and conceptualized as residual negativity if positive knowledge is lacking. By contrast, we would emphasize the social and cultural labour that goes into the production of frames and the evacuation of their contents; that is, the production and reproduction of voids and absences.

### ***Regimes of Ignorance***

It is noteworthy that much anthropological and sociological work has for a long time almost exclusively addressed genealogies of knowledge; that is, the historical processes of how one field of knowledge is transformed into or replaced by another field of knowledge. However, as Andrew Mathews (2005) has recently pointed out, Michel Foucault's analyses of the reorganization of knowledge in its interconnectedness with the emergence of new forms of power neglects the idea that these

processes are not just about 'knowledge' but also about 'non-knowledge'. In other words, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the fact that the emergence of new forms of power is linked to the momentous transformation of one field of non-knowledge into another field of non-knowledge. Following from the above, we argue that every 'regime of knowledge' simultaneously is a 'regime of ignorance': by determining legitimate types, modes and objects of knowing, parallel forms of non-knowing with their respective modes and objects are (more or less implicitly) determined too.

To explicate what we mean by this, it is worthwhile remembering that Foucault has time and again stressed the productivity and positivity of power: 'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms ... [P]ower produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 1977: 194). In combination with our argument above with regard to the positivity of ignorance as well as concerning the interlinkage of power and non-knowledge, we might therefore come to an appreciation of the powerful productiveness of non-knowledge; that is, to an appreciation of the fact that the phrase 'knowledge is power' represents just one aspect of study and that the productiveness of power can also be constituted through what is ignored or not known by subaltern others or by those holding dominant positions. The Foucauldian conceptual pair power/knowledge must consequently be broadened to include those aspects of power relations that are associated with people's unknowing, non-knowledge, nescience and ignorance.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, our analyses should be mindful of the cultural specificities of how 'knowledge' and 'non-knowledge' are configured, first, towards each other and second, in relation to socio-political asymmetries and to processes of power, domination and hegemony. It is with this in mind that, in this Introduction, we speak of a 'regime of ignorance' in order to acknowledge the wider social and political field in which the production of ignorance is set. We take a regime of ignorance to be the total set of relations that unite, in a given period or cultural context, the discursive practices and power relations that give rise to epistemological gaps and forms of unknowing that have generative social effects and consequences.

## Notes

1. We would like to thank the Centre of Excellence at the University of Konstanz for providing us with the funds and the facilities to enable us to

bring this group of scholars together for discussion of this set of anthropological concerns.

2. Our thanks go to Professor Will Fowler, Department of Spanish, University of St Andrews, who provided us with the details of this example.
3. See for some notable examples of recent publications: Gershon and Sarhadi Raj (2000); Littlewood (2007); Proctor and Schiebinger (2008); Roberts and Armitage (2008); Gross (2010); High, Kelly and Mair (2012); Beck and Wehling (2012); Firestein (2012); and McGoe (2012a).
4. See for accounts of a growing anthropological awareness of ignorance, Fardon (1990) and Last, who points out 'the importance of knowing about not-knowing', of the understandable 'reluctance in ethnography to record what people do not know ...; [for] it is hard enough to record what they do know' (1992: 393). This Introduction will return later to the debate of which this sort of work forms a part.
5. See Roberts and Armitage (2008), who first coined the phrase 'ignorance economy', and also High (2012: 120–23).
6. That *Waiting* is a controversial book is also reflected in the fact that Crapanzano has even opted 'not to name the Europeans and Americans who have also helped me with my research. They will all understand, I am sure' (Crapanzano 1985: ix).
7. Based at Yale University, the Human Relations Area File organization aims to encourage and record comparative studies of human culture across the globe.
8. This statement reflects one of the most momentous insights gained in studies on non-knowledge, namely that the scientific endeavour to increase the available knowledge about the world does not automatically lead to a concomitant decrease in non-knowledge. Almost to the contrary, there are several ways in which scientists intentionally or unintentionally contribute to the growth of ignorance. First, as Wilbert Moore and Melvin Tumin pointed out as early as 1949, ignorance is used to preserve 'social differentials' (Moore and Tumin 1949: 788) either between scientific competitors or in attempts to maintain knowledge-based positions of authority vis-à-vis non-scientists. Second, instead of eliminating ignorance, knowledge production can be said to co-produce non-knowledge in systematic ways. This is because, conceived of as 'the other side of knowing' (Luhmann 1998: 81), what is not known is always and necessarily specified in relation to existing knowledge. Moreover, as Robert Merton has noted, 'As new contributions to knowledge bring about a new awareness of something else not yet known, the sum of manifest human ignorance increases along with the sum of manifest human knowledge' (Merton 1987: 10). It therefore becomes clear that – despite claims to the contrary by scientific modernists – there can never be an end to ignorance: the more we know, the more we do not know.



9. Raj (2000: 31) captures an important point when he states: 'Ignorance is *the presence of an absence*' [italics in the original]. We develop this particular idea by trying to grasp how the presence of an absence can be produced and reproduced in different social and cultural contexts.
10. A kind of positivity of ignorance also runs through in a number of other social theories. One example is Georg Simmel's study of the social functions of ignorance in his 1908 book entitled in English *Sociology: Investigations on the Forms of Sociation*, in which he argued that there were positive social functions resulting from not-knowing, and benefits for the conduct of social relations and for interactions between individuals in the practice of reciprocal concealment (see for further commentary on Simmel's work, Gross 2003, 2007, 2012). This line of sociological analysis, later developed by Merton, was specifically taken up by Wilbert Moore and Melvin Tumin, two Princeton sociologists, who published in 1949 an article in *American Sociological Review* entitled 'Some Social Functions of Ignorance'.
11. In a similar vein, Paul Rabinow (2004) has argued, in an address to an audience of biological scientists on the topic of ethics within an ecology of ignorance, that we have a certain responsibility to ignorance in that we must acknowledge that ignorance is part of a social and political field that implies relations of power and ethical concerns.

## References

- Agamben, G. 2011. *Nudities*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ardener, E. 1987. "'Remote Areas": Some Theoretical Considerations'. In *Anthropology at Home*, ed. A. Jackson. London: Tavistock, 38–54.
- Beck, U. and P. Wehling 2012. 'The Politics of Non-Knowing: An Emerging Area of Social and Political Conflict in Reflexive Modernity'. In *The Politics of Knowledge*, ed. F.D. Rubio and P. Baert. New York: Routledge, 33–57.
- Bellman, B.L. 1981. 'The Paradox of Secrecy'. *Human Studies* 4, 1–24.
- Boddy, J. 1994. 'Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23, 407–34.
- Clark, L. and A. Kingsolver 2010. *Briefing Paper on Informed Consent by the AAA Committee on Ethics*. Available at <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/bp5.htm/>. Accessed 16 August 2013.
- Clifford, J. and G. Marcus (eds) 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Crapanzano, V. 1985. *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. New York: Random House.
- Dilley, R.M. 2010. 'Reflections on Knowledge Practices and the Problem of Ignorance'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16, 176–92.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1937. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Evens, T.M.S. and D. Handelman (eds) 2006. *The Manchester School: Practice and Ethnographic Praxis in Anthropology*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Fardon, R. 1990. *Between God, the Dead and the Wild: Chamba Interpretations of Religion and Ritual*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, London.
- Ferguson, J. and A. Gupta (eds) 1997. *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ferrier, J.F. 1854. *Institutes of Metaphysic: The Theory of Knowing and Being*. Edinburgh: Blackwell.
- Firestein, S. 2012. *Ignorance: How it Drives Science*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fluehr-Lobban, C. 2003. 'Informed Consent in Anthropological Research: We Are Not Exempt'. In *Ethics and the Profession of Anthropology: Dialogue for Ethically Conscious Practice*, ed. C. Fluehr-Lobban. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 159–77.
- Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Frazer, J. 1976 (1922). *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. London: Macmillan.
- Gershon, I. and D. Sarhadi Raj 2000. 'Introduction: The Symbolic Capital of Ignorance'. *Social Analysis* 44, 3–13.
- Gluckman, M. 1940. 'Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand'. *Bantu Studies* 14, 1–30, 147–74.
- Gross, M. 2003. 'Sociologists of the Unexpected: Edward A. Ross and Georg Simmel on the Unintended Consequences of Modernity'. *The American Sociologist* 34, 40–58.
- . 2007. 'The Unknown in Process: Dynamic Connections of Ignorance, Non-Knowledge and Related Concepts'. *Current Sociology* 55, 742–59.
- . 2010. *Ignorance and Surprise: Science, Society and Ecological Design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 2012. "'Objective Culture" and the Development of Nonknowledge: Georg Simmel and the Reverse Side of Knowing'. *Cultural Sociology* 6, 422–37.
- Hannerz, U. 2006. 'Studying Down, Up, Sideways, Through, Backwards, Forwards, Away and at Home: Reflections on the Field Worries of an Expansive Discipline'. In *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*, ed. S. Coleman and C. Peter. Oxford: Berg, 23–42.
- High, C. 2012. 'Between Knowing and Being: Ignorance in Anthropology and Amazonian Shamanism'. In *The Anthropology of Ignorance: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. C. High, A. Kelly and J. Mair. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 119–35.
- High, C., A. Kelly and J. Mair (eds) 2012. *The Anthropology of Ignorance: Ethnographic Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hobart, M. (ed.) 1993. *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance*. London: Routledge.
- Holley, H. (ed.) 1923. *Bahá'í Scriptures: Selections from the Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá'*. New York: Brentano's Publishers.

- Holy, L. and M. Stuchlik (eds) 1981. *The Structure of Folk Models*. London: Academic Press.
- . 1983. *Actions, Norms and Representations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, A. (ed.) 1987. *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock.
- Japp, K.P. 2000. 'Distinguishing Non-Knowledge'. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 25, 225–38.
- Kelly, A. 2003. 'Research and the Subject: The Practice of Informed Consent'. *PoLar* 26, 182–95.
- Knorr Cetina, K. 1999. *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2001. 'Objectual Practice'. In *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. T.R. Schatzki, K. Knorr Cetina and E. Von Savigny. New York: Routledge, 175–88.
- Last, M. 1992. 'The Importance of Knowing about Not-Knowing: Observations from Hausaland'. In *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*, ed. S. Feierman and J. Jansen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 393–406.
- Latour, B. 1987. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Leach, E.R. 1966. 'Virgin Birth'. *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1966, 39–49.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1962. *La Pensée sauvage*. Paris: Librairie Plon.
- . 1977. *Structural Anthropology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- . 1989. *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- . 2002 [1950]. *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. 1985. *How Natives Think (Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures, 1910)*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lienhardt, G. 1954. 'Modes of Thought'. In *The Institutions of Primitive Society: A Series of Broadcast Talks*, ed. E.E. Evans-Pritchard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 95–107.
- Littlewood, R. (ed.) 2007. *On Knowing and Not Knowing in the Anthropology of Medicine*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Luhmann, N. 1998. *Observations on Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
- Malinowski, B. 1974. *Magic, Science and Religion and other Essays*. London: Souvenir Press.
- Mathews, A.S. 2005. 'Power/Knowledge, Power/Ignorance: Forest Fires and the State in Mexico'. *Human Ecology* 33, 795–820.
- McGoey, L. 2012a. 'Special Issue: "Strategic Unknowns: Towards a Sociology of Ignorance"'. *Economy and Society* 41, 1–16.
- . 2012b. 'Making a Buck in a Blind Man's World'. *Charisma: Consumer and Market Studies*, 19 February. Available at <http://www.charisma-network.net/markets/making-a-buck-in-a-blind-mans-world/>. Accessed 15 March 2014.

- Merton, R.K. 1951. *Social Theory and Social Structure: Toward the Codification of Theory and Research*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press.
- . 1987. 'Three Fragments from a Sociologist's Notebook. Establishing the Phenomenon, Specified Ignorance, and Strategic Research Materials'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 13, 1–18.
- Moore, W. and M. Tumin 1949. 'Some Social Functions of Ignorance'. *American Sociological Review* 14, 787–96.
- Nader, L. 1972. 'Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up'. In *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. D.H. Hymes. New York: Pantheon Books, 284–311.
- Niehaus, I. 2013. 'Anthropology and Whites in South Africa: Response to an Unreasonable Critique'. *Africa Spectrum* 48, 117–27.
- Proctor, R. and L. Schiebinger (eds) 2008. *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Rabinow, P. 2004. *Assembling Ethics in an Ecology of Ignorance*. The closing plenary lecture of the First Conference on Synthetic Biology at MIT, 10–12 June. Available at [http://openwetware.org/images/7/7a/SB1.0\\_Rabinow.pdf/](http://openwetware.org/images/7/7a/SB1.0_Rabinow.pdf/). Accessed 9 November 2011.
- Raj, D.S. 2000. 'Ignorance, Forgetting and Family Nostalgia: Partition, the Nation-State, and Refugees in Dehli'. *Social Analysis* 44, 30–55.
- Rescher, N. 2009. *Ignorance: On the Wider Implications of Deficient Knowledge*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Roberts, J. and J. Armitage 2008. 'The Ignorance Economy'. *Prometheus* 26, 335–54.
- Rottenburg, R. 2009. *Far-Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Searle, J. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. London: Penguin.
- . 2010. *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Simmel, G. 1908. *Soziologie [Sociology: Investigations on the Forms of Sociation]*. Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot.
- Smithson, M. 1985. 'Toward a Social Theory of Ignorance'. *Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour* 15, 151–72.
- Strathern, M. (ed.) 2000. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*. London: Routledge.
- Trouillot, M.-R. 1991. 'Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness'. In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. R.G. Fox. Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 17–44.
- Weinstein, D. and M. Weinstein 1978. 'The Sociology of Nonknowledge: A Paradigm'. In *Research in Sociology of Knowledge, Sciences and Art*, ed. R.A. Jones. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 151–66.
- Werbner, R. 1984. 'The Manchester School in South-Central Africa'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13, 157–85.