
DIRECTIONS

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Intellectual Vocations in the *City of Gold*

What follows is the foundational myth of the *City of Gold*. After World War Two, the mandarins of the victorious North Atlantic powers founded the City by fostering the “economic” integration of “free” peoples (especially those defeated in battle) across national borders. Economic integration was intended to break the identity of geography, government, economics, culture and emotion that had too often engendered violent nationalism, and to create instead a new cosmopolitan situation, in which geography, government, economics, culture and emotion are polymorphously linked rather than conterminously arrayed. Integration was to be accomplished in three major ways: the Allied Reconstruction of the Axis powers, the Bretton Woods Institutions, and, a little later, the European institutions. The mandarin effort was more profoundly successful than could have been imagined by men born into another age. We now plainly see that their efforts amounted to the redesign of Western Europe and Japan, the transformation of North America, the development of great swaths of Latin America, Asia, and even some of Africa, and, through the Bretton Woods Institutions, the establishment of a supranational regime that linked and interconnected what was then called the free world, and what has since come to include most of the planet. In short, this was the birth of our world, a world which has now, in the wake of the Cold War, reached its majority. [Westbrook 2003]

The occasion for our conversation is David (Bert) Westbrook’s *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent*. The lines of thought we have been experimenting with, reflected in this conversation, can be glossed as an effort to reconcile the emergent political economy that Bert so masterfully portrays in *City of Gold* with our efforts to refunction the norms and the forms of anthropological ethnography. This may be a meaningful way for readers to orient themselves to the discussion that follows.

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However, as the readers will discover, we are actually addressing a deeper affinity between the two bodies of work: Bert's innovative political economy draws on an implicit method, and our reflexive method is predicated on an inchoate political economy. Deeper still, we are not simply suggesting that there is a reciprocal relationship between method and political economy; rather we are arguing that a particular type of intellectual practice is integral to the operation of the City of Gold. What we found in Bert's text was, if not confirmation, certainly support for one of our most eerie and unsettling insights: namely, that something like an ethnographic style of analysis is built into the communicative space of the contemporary. Our subjects and we are compelled (one might say fated) to employ similar strategies for the social mediation of knowledge in order to work, live, and think under the jurisdiction of the supranational markets that govern the City.

The political economy of our time, which Annelise Riles likes to describe as a system of "infinite scale and complexity," depends on representational strategies focused temporally on the near future (the time horizon of finance), through which knowledge and experience are relentlessly mediated (Riles 2004).¹ Furthermore, these strategies engender cultural practices that are neither fully nor necessarily contingent on convention, tradition, and the past, nor are they susceptible to conventional tactics of social criticism and cultural critique. For the purposes of this discussion, our most important postulate is that intellectual vocations in the *City of Gold* are marked by reflexive ethnographic strategies that comprise the representational grammar of contemporary political economy.

Conceived in the 1940s and 1950s, most famously by J. M. Keynes, "City of Gold"—as Bert so provocatively terms it—encompasses the global polity that is now the preeminent institutional context defining our lives together (Skidelsky 2000). The City came into being by virtue of a devastating appraisal of the nation-state: centrally an evaluation of the role of the European nation-state in unleashing the horrors of the First and the Second World Wars. The founder and architects of the City were driven by this searing moral urgency: the dismantling of the nation-state (as a unity of society, political enthusiasm, territory, military infrastructure, and especially economy), thus precluding any recurrence of the orgies of death and destruction that marked so deeply the history of the twentieth century. This remarkable political insurgency was pursued by a small and unlikely group of actors, "mandarins" as Bert describes them; we term them "symbolic analysts" (after Reich 1992) or "technicians of general ideas" (after Rabinow 2003; Lyantey 1973) who engineered the diplomatic, the institutional, and the procedural arrangements by which supranational markets, particularly financial markets, would integrate a new and enigmatic polity. By shifting our theoretical preoccupations about capitalist markets from conceptualizing them in relationship to those commercial transactions organizing production, distribution, and consumption—realms seen as opposed to politics—to conceptualizing markets as constitutional devices, Bert distills the logic governing the City's

operation and establishes criteria for a reflexive politics, broadly conceived, by which we can appraise, as he puts it, the truth, beauty, justice, and tyranny of our time.

To understand the way we now live rests therefore, on a restatement of politics as it appears in the context of supranational capital, legitimated through our faith in the institutions of money and property, as opposed to the modern nation state, legitimized through the familiar mechanisms of the liberal republic. . . . The communicative space formed by financial markets is the object of political thought in our time, as the nation state was for most political thought during the time we still regard as modern, the pope, king, or emperor were the protagonists of the medieval political imagination, and the *polis* was the context of classical Greek thought. This book uses urban imagery and self-consciously revives the old Marxian personification, “capitalism,” in order to solidify the understanding of financial markets as the grammar through which much contemporary political thought should take place. [Westbrook 2003:12–13]

Bert’s scrupulous appraisal of the hegemony of supranational markets, as discernible in their constitutional logic, reveals the deep and abiding predicament of political thought in our time: the cultural negations of what we have termed “fast-capitalism.”

The market’s grammar, the dialectic between property and money, does not express many things important to being human. Capitalism is therefore radically impoverished as a system of politics. Insofar as we long for community, necessarily experience life in capitalism as a sort of exile . . . The construction of markets—the creation and alienation of property rights—involves the destruction of meaning, and in longing for that meaning, we complain not only about the market before us, but about the arrangement of social affairs through markets per se. [Westbrook 2003:164]

Bert’s text is about political economy, and insofar as it works out the economic logic and legal conventions defining contemporary political economy, it is absolutely essential, but it is also much more. The text is about the at times excruciating and at times exhilarating possibilities of contemporary intellectual life, and this latter theme is what has sustained our recent conversations with him. The following extended quote is just one example of his technique of analysis and his style of argumentation that he frames rhetorically as an “apology.” In this case, Bert is concerned with the character of social criticism available to us in *The City*

of Gold and the difficult task of creating an “authentic,” as he would put it, or “reflexive,” as we would put it, basis of political and moral inquiry.

And here we come to a weakness that seems entailed in the doing of social criticism, and that therefore infects the criticism of monetization, and so this apology. Social critics depict ruin in part because they are social critics. As already suggested, social criticism attacks developments that are seen to be contrary to life as we have come to understand it, not so much our actual life as our current ideals. Social criticism tells stories, always already begun, which if continued will destroy the meanings we have constructed. A coming must also be a going—to say that a situation has come to mean something is also to say that the same situation no longer means what it once did. . . . Insofar as we are fond of the way of life in which we grew up—and because it made us who we are, we have to have a certain respect for it, whatever might be said against it from the outside—then we will tend to view such change as a bad thing, and we may even speak of dehumanization. Social criticism thus tends to rest, if only implicitly, on a sense of dislocation, a sense of losing a pattern of meaning, along with the past in which such meaning was formed. Social criticism is always, at bottom, a charge of impiety, betrayal, leaving home. [Westbrook 2003]

Money (like technologies and wars) dehumanizes because it changes patterns, destroys meanings that human life has built up so far. Capitalism, in its relentless commitment to the future, remakes home, for better and worse. And yet there are reasons that capital is attractive, that people choose to treat themselves and others as slaves. Any successful impiety has its attractions, which ideology presumes to state in general terms. Money provides, if in the abstract, the realization of our will, which most of us conceive to be happiness, and what could be more tempting? The dramatic expression of destructive conflicts between goods, such as old meanings and new temptations, is tragedy.

It is also important to remember, however, that humans are resilient. People make meaning all the time. Culture reconstitutes itself. While people leave and die, they also find one another and babies are born. As an intellectual matter, however, it is much harder to say much about things which have not yet come together, about meanings as yet unconceived. So the narrative structure of social criticism—the effort to understand this moment inevitably in terms of a past that we suspect we are losing (indeed, that is a condition of our mortality)—fosters the sense that things are falling apart and that one ought to be alienated. Social criticism tends to spring from a partial vision, a formal, analytical, and ultimately tragic perspective, as opposed to an intimate, synthetic, and comic perspective. Knowing when one or the other perspective is appropriate would be wisdom (2003:285–286).

This is just one partial example of how Bert's political economy presages an ethnographic method that is both reflexive and radically future-oriented. As such it provides a link or a bridge to our preoccupations, specifically how the communicative space of supranationalism presupposes an unlikely configuration of ethnographic practice, what we term paraethnography. This assertion can be restated historically: Insofar as the power of the state and society to mediate our sentiments, our expectations, and our experience has lapsed, we are fated, within the communicative space of the City, to become ethnographers unto ourselves. To put it in a reductive and formulaic fashion, the statistical mode of analysis that served as the representational calculus for analyzing and managing the functions of industrial societies is augmented or superseded by ethnographic modes of articulation as decisive forms of knowledge production sustaining not only the operation of the City in its "infinite scale and complexity" but also, crucially, our individual ability to maneuver within it (Williams 1981; Rabinow 1999).

We noticed at first more or less by accident breaches in various forms of technical knowledge in scientific, political, artistic, business, and legal contexts (our key example draws on the work of central bankers). What caught our attention was that these breaches, limitations, and outright failures of institutional knowledge delimited a space of experimentation within which actors creatively conjured imaginaries, social imaginaries that conferred definition on their contemporary circumstances. These reflexive practices—which we have glossed as paraethnography—typically emerge at the margins of professional or disciplinary discourses as shoptalk, as anecdotal accounts, as rumors, or as fugitive alignments of feeling that circulate covertly and are manifestly antibureaucratic in their substance. Paraethnographies are, in other words, already out there; what they need is an anthropological staging, a *mise-en-scène*, to give them articulation within complex discourse on the nature and operation of the contemporary. These reflexive narratives provide alternative meanings and explanations within high modernist milieus that derive their authority from a technocratic ethos (an ethos that may be faltering) underwritten by scientific management and various quantitative modes of analysis.

More broadly, paraethnographies continually arise as an intimate artifice, by which subjects seek to reconcile abstract technoscientific knowledge with highly personal struggles. The paraethnographic impulse thus gains expression under circumstances in which novel or unprecedented insights emerge in settings where there are limited, if any, means available to contextualized or otherwise socially mediated emergent ideas and findings. In this case, these practices are not merely compensatory, but mark communicative space where doubt and uncertainty can give way to experimentation and to exploration.

In our key example of paraethnography, we demonstrated how senior officials of the U.S. Federal Reserve System rely on complex networks of interlocutors for "anecdotal reports" that capture shifting configurations of expectations and

sentiment (under circumstances in which statistical data on the performance of the economy are unavailable or otherwise unreliable). These reports would have little force if it were not for the fact that these interlocutors speak from an intimate sense of situated business practices and predicaments. These anecdotes are not just a different kind of supplementary data with some place in the schema that organizes the various stats (housing starts and packaging orders and the like) routinely collected by the Fed; rather they have cogency in their own right in that they represent “a native point of view” mediated through an implicit ethnographic imaginary. These intricate exchanges on the economy constitute “internarratives,” the discursive practices that reproduce the City in time and space, and they are also the means by which the paraethnographic attains a political articulation.

In the spirit of the approaches we are advocating, we treated this conversation as an ethnographic instrument with which we are experimenting. What we are trying to do in this piece is make this kind of experimentation plausible to a readership, to an audience.

* * *

GM & DH: *City of Gold* is a remarkable, not to say idiosyncratic, book. In discussions with colleagues and students who have not read the book, we’ve sometimes found it difficult to get across what we think the text achieves, to put it bluntly, why we find this book more exciting than so many other large-scale accounts of the current “great transformation.” Why do you think the book is so difficult to transpose?

DW: It is difficult to resist reducing a book to an argument, and an argument to its conclusion, “the big point.” In the current intellectual climate in the law and in other discourses, one is encouraged to pledge allegiance, or opposition, to such points. So, globalization, good or bad? In writing *City*, I struggled to avoid this sort of intellectually therapeutic reduction, and so I’m gratified to hear you’ve had difficulty getting the book across. If the point of *City* had been easy to get across, the book would have been merely another argument. Instead, and despite the scholarly apparatus and the assumption of an educated readership, *City* is fundamentally a literary effort. What I mean by that is the text claims to be worth reading in its own right, not as a report on some reality that may be paraphrased, and certainly not as a commentary on the texts of others.

Aside from being what I wanted to write, a literary effort is required because the topic is a myth serviceable for our time, or as you two might say, the effort to articulate the contemporary imaginary. In contrast, however “postmodern” or “reflexive” their intentions, standard academic discussions of globalization tend to reconstitute traditional modern dualities, starting with a subject, the author, discussing an object and, by implication, situating the reader vis-à-vis a more or less familiar state of affairs. Most of the logics of the world analyzed, and the act of understanding, and even a great deal of moral sentiment are tacitly assumed to be

understood. The result is inevitably a book that invites the reader into one of several well-established positions about the relationship between the individual and society. Such books of instruction in how to think like a modern academic are quite familiar, and thus fundamentally old-fashioned, which is not good if this is understood to be a time of great transformation.

Because they are written from within inherited myths, out of the modernist imaginary, any number of books on globalization read as strangely superficial, as not coming to grips with the depth of the problem. Consider, by way of example, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2001). Whatever they *say*, such books inscribe the modernist stance, and indeed the modernist intellectual apparatus, that the transformation, which is their ostensible topic, calls into question.

City is comprised of essays because that is mostly what I write, but also because through the essay, we may be able to avoid reinscribing precisely what has changed. At the same time, the essay allows us to focus most acutely on the problem at hand, the imagination that permits argument, scholarship, and other more mannered forms of thought. The essay allows us to ask, what do I think?—that is, to articulate our half-thoughts and so make them accessible.

Practically, rather than claiming some sort of institutional (that is, traditional) stance from which to report on some event, I self-consciously present a situation with which (it is presumed) most affluent and educated readers can identify to some significant degree. And from that perspective, what and how seems worth thinking? The reader is thus invited to think: Is this my situation? If this is my situation, what has already been decided? What is entailed in my actual practice? What does it mean to be here? More specifically, *City* asks what is the logic (or grammar, a little looser) of our participation in global markets?

In *City*, critique is thus a process of explication. This is also a source of difficulty for many academic readers. Since at least Marx, critique has tended to mean the uncovering of a deeper truth, the delegitimation of the practice under examination, and hence an opening for a new political practice. More simply, critique is negative, antagonistic. In contrast, *City*, like many essays and virtually all theater, relies on the reader's willingness to begin with a social practice and imagine what it might mean. In *City*, critique is sympathetic (which is not to say nice!).

In a similar vein, while *City* is comprised of arguments, and so at first appears scholastic, the book uses argument in a way rather foreign to the academy. Over the years, I've lost faith in argument in the sense of advocacy, mostly as a student at Harvard's law school, where they do nothing but argue, and partially because, as a law professor, I train people in argument. For a well-trained lawyer, argument is always available, but understanding is another matter altogether. So when writing the book, I constantly avoided making arguments just because I could. I tried instead to write simply what seemed importantly true to me, what advanced the expression of my understanding. While such writing is sometimes argumentative

in form, another one of the difficulties of *City* is that what initially seems to be argument is something considerably more delicate. As an analogy: if chess is an image for academic argument, what I am attempting in *City* is much closer to a chess game played against oneself, in which no deception is possible, in the hopes that others will find the game worth watching.

At this point the antagonism between *City* and the academy is fairly serious, if perhaps not naked. If argument is widely available and expository rather than exclusive and compelling, and if the reader's participation (to say nothing of understanding) is achieved through sympathetic imagination, and if the present "great transformation" bids fair to transform our understanding of knowledge itself, then there can be little authority to academic disciplines, most created in the nineteenth century, under considerably different intellectual circumstances. So in writing *City*, I tried to eschew reliance on disciplines as such, although scholarships (and thus disciplines) are mentioned where helpful to the thinking, and by way of example.

Of course the problem of authority is considerably more difficult, and the completely honest text is impossible. I cannot deny that erudition provides a certain authority for my voice, which is the sort of dishonesty (that Plato didn't like, but employed) entailed in literature, even when used for philosophical ends. To be even more candid: This last sentence is an example of the problem—a nice little truth simultaneously imports authority. But still, *City* is basically a painfully honest book, designed to be read so that all such authority, all proper nouns, could be stripped out and the argument (sequence of thought) would be untouched.

It would have been intellectually easier (but beside the point) to argue from bibliography, to say, "As Prof. D _____ has shown . . ." Such tropes are inappropriate because the question is, what does it mean to have authority? To have shown what, to whom? Obviously, this is not a professional question, not one for those who are in, or who aspire to join, a discipline. But disciplines themselves are open to question, are unconvincing not just for the standard pomo substantive reasons, and not just because other disciplines present other truths, but also because for people with options, with money, there may be more fun things to do, and maybe even more serious things to do. So one way to read the book is as an effort to explain contemporary politics to serious amateurs, not professionals like academics. And one of the book's hopes is that there are serious amateurs.

Let me finish by pointing out that *City* is not only difficult to explain; it was also difficult to write. What I said above about the sympathetic imagination and the essay is true for readers for whom *City* should be read as an invitation. For me, however, *City* was a very agonistic book. I wanted to write a naked text, in which I was my own worst enemy where no tricks, no fake authority, was possible. As you phrased it in an earlier exchange, Doug:

You wrote yourself into the text fully implicating yourself in the operation of the City. Neither did you legitimize your analysis from the

standpoint of some real or imagined alternative, nor did you claim some privileged scholarly stance. Rather than starting with nostalgic critique, you created an expansive new imaginary. You frame the *City* rhetorically as an “apology,” but it is by no means an acknowledgment of some transgression but an aggressive experimentation with the intellectual possibilities (and limitations) of what we term “complicity” as the key trope in an era of supranational capitalism.

There are at least two great anxieties here. The first is that in writing the book, I was at war with myself, constantly undermining my own arguments, which is exhausting. The second anxiety is the fear that the dialectic so displayed, my chess game, will not be interesting. Convinced epigones of any number of disciplines are free to say “he doesn’t get it—the truth is [. . .]” Perhaps they are right. Thinking in public carries a substantial social risk that people will simply conclude one is not smart enough to be so engaged (hence the importance of fools). In bureaucratic meritocracies such as the university, and elsewhere in an information society, such condemnation can be painful, even expensive. Our jobs are quite literally to be smart, which is why we tend to argue rather than think.

But if the book works, it does so by drawing the reader in and helping him or her think through this new historical situation. This is not only a kind of literary experience but also an exercise that is hard to summarize to a colleague, is hard to read, and, for that matter, was hard to write.

GM & DH: How does *City* create an imaginary that has broad academic (interdisciplinary) significance?

DW: I think the previous question starts to address “how”—as a technical, rhetorical, writerly matter—*City* creates an imaginary of the contemporary global. But does this imaginary have broad interdisciplinary significance? I think so. Disciplines, and these days, subspecialties, presume and participate in some imaginary. Disciplines require an imaginary as a condition of their articulation, but while each discipline has its own perspective, the imaginary is hardly exclusive to the discipline. You suggested above that successful internarratives were reproduced by and circulated among numerous different sites. Similarly, one might think that an imagination of global politics along the lines put forth in *City* might be useful for any number of intellectual projects.

There are, of course, imaginations of markets and politics quite different from the political economy set forth in *City*. Indeed, by way of contrast, I discuss three modern imaginaries in Part Three of the book, Exhausted Philosophies, viz., social thought in the Marxian tradition, economics, and rights-based liberalism. One way to think about how *City* creates an imaginary of multidisciplinary significance is by contrast with one of these familiar worldviews. For example, Marx—understood as a loose set of attitudes, not even as text—has informed generations of intellectual work. Marxian concepts and divisions and ideas about

what it is to be an intellectual still pervade the academy. In its response to contemporary uses of Marx, *City* sets forth its own imaginary as of at least commensurate scale, and hence implicitly of similar interdisciplinary significance—which, as I hear myself, is stunningly presumptuous. But any account of global politics entails large claims. Whether anybody takes such claims seriously is, of course, an entirely different matter.

Understanding these imaginaries academically—as a constellation of objective claims about the world—is already to miss something very important. To pick up on your earlier point, I believe humans literally need to locate themselves within a global context. We may understand this need psychologically, as the mind's desire for orientation. We may also understand the matter epistemologically: The imaginary is a condition of thought. However one approaches the problem, it is not “academic” in either the professional sense of a set of objective claims made within a discipline, or the pejorative sense of irrelevance. What is interesting about the present time—the widespread consciousness of a “great transformation”—is that it makes the need for new imaginaries acute. This need for an imaginary (I usually say myth) drives the strangely ethnographic character of the confrontation with modernity that you're trying to express with paraethnography, intimate artifice, and internarrative.² These are aspects of the storytelling that global inhabitants must do, especially now.

Just for fun, let me try to relate *City* to another imaginary, a postmodern one that I did not really discuss in the book. Doug, as I think you mentioned in your lectures at Emory, *City* stands in interesting tension to Foucault's ideas about the contemporary condition. While I've done some reading, I make no pretense to being a deep student of Foucault. But certainly *City* is antagonistic to the usual American (at least law school) reading of Foucault, that power/knowledge is “out there,” and if we just understand that, then we can . . . what? Be liberated? Sure. Say it quickly and it might be plausible. But what do we do with the relationship between power and knowledge in the *City*?

To venture an especially tentative thought, I think Foucault was fundamentally interested in the troubled status of knowledge, inextricably bound up as it is in those things we call the public, and especially the institutions of the state, and most bureaucracy. How is thought possible here? While *City* shares this concern for the possibility of thought under current conditions (hence this conversation!), *City*'s attention is directed elsewhere. As you put it rather bluntly, Doug, Foucault is concerned with knowledge and power as instantiated by the state, and thus doesn't serve as much of a guide for the creation of a politics that is not most deeply represented in the institutions of the state. In contrast, *City* is about the grammar that bureaucracy sets in motion (symbolized by Keynes), and sometimes bounds (Greenspan), but whose operation is only bureaucratic—front brain, textual—at such margins. If Foucault is asking after thought in a world in which bureaucracy has assumed intellectual authority, *City* is asking after thought in a

world where markets have made thought irrelevant—beyond the “rationality” beloved by economists.

At the very back of *City*, however, after hundreds of pages of understanding economics *as* politics, the economics/politics distinction that marks contemporary political thought (and that virtually all discussions of globalization reinscribe), and with which *City* has been at war, sort of reemerges, albeit in very different forms. At the end of the day, I can’t quite bring myself to say that politics is simply a matter of the gut rather than the head, so I have to reestablish places in which bureaucratic action is possible. Thus, even if *City* is right, and I think *City* certainly needed to be said, I’m currently trying to think about bureaucracy (and intellectual life) after *City*. So I’m turning back towards Foucault’s kind of questions. Maybe.

GM & DH: What is the status and place of the university in the City?

DW: As a social matter, I don’t think the university has ever been healthier. The university is more central to the operation of the City than it has been to any society in which it has existed. A society founded on meritocratic capitalism that espouses democratic ideals needs institutions in which large numbers of people can be assigned to their places. For the foreseeable future, we may be assured that universities will continue to teach “business,” “law,” “creative writing,” and “philosophy,” and down the ladder a few rungs, “criminal justice” and “social work.” The university, like bureaucracy more generally, is a well-nigh universal technique. But the fact that a curriculum can be devised and students can be sorted hardly constitutes an argument that this is the best institutional form for a given *intellectual* activity. Indeed, there is a substantial risk that the university so conceived will cease to be respectable as a place for thought.

It is widely argued that the modern ideal of the university, associated with Humboldt’s University of Berlin, exported from Germany to the United States and thence the rest of the world, has died. What we might, following Bill Readings, call the “university of culture” has been silently and almost completely replaced with an essentially bureaucratic concatenation, unified by the notion of “excellence.” The causes of the university of culture’s decline have been many. Substantively, the fragmentation of knowledge, the fundamentally indefensible divisions among the disciplines, and the decline of authority of various claims to knowledge all played roles. Exogenous factors, such as the great social pressures placed on universities in recent decades by their democratization (and the associated professionalization of vast stretches of economic and cultural life) have made the university of culture’s often amateurish ideals for intellectual life (“the well-rounded student,” the “love of learning”) seem stunningly impractical.

At the same time, the bureaucratic university is threatened by contemporary political developments. In particular, the bureaucratic university remains deeply nationalistic. The state licenses the professions through the university (one of

Kant's points in *The Conflict of the Faculties*), and outright nationalism—the nation as organizational trope—is substantively evident in the social sciences and the humanities (national histories, literatures, ethnographies, economics), if less so in the natural sciences, where an inordinate amount of funding is provided by national governments or justified as in the national interest. More subtly but much more pervasively, the bureaucratic university is committed to bureaucracy, to a view of modern life as rational, to Weber, to policy, to the exercise of collective power through the state and cognate institutions.

There are huge problems with bureaucracy as a model of intellectual life, and hence with the place that the bureaucratic university has carved out for itself in the City. *Bureaucracy* is hardly a term of affection. Pedantry has always been a problem, but never more so than now, when bureaucratic principles of jurisdiction and procedure (method) are held up as the essence of intellectual life. Once it becomes obvious that thinking is not done in the academy, thinkers will tend to go elsewhere, and the intellectual honor due the institution will (and should) decline accordingly.

Moreover, while bureaucracy is undeniably an aspect of contemporary life, the city is structured less rationalistically. The point of doing politics through markets is that the gut leads the head; we have constructed a politics of desire. In such a world, bureaucratic structures are always less interesting than the mediation and negotiation of desires. Rephrased, Weber's iron cage is hardly erotic; contemporary life is. But bureaucrats—and so professors—are not usually very sexy.

From this perspective, I think that the postmodern critiques of the academy (which achieved a certain critical mass in anthropology and elsewhere in “the eighties”) did not go far enough. If the nation, and particularly the notion of rational argument as political participation (republican democracy) has come to seem implausible (because markets and bureaucracies in different ways make the nation-state less than rational), then the intellectual worthiness of the frame of the university is called into question. Why are we to treasure islands of bureaucratic rationality (that is, of a rationality that is widely despised as senseless) adrift in a sparkling but hardly rational ocean of global capitalism? There are answers, of course. Indeed, those of us who teach have little choice but to give ourselves answers.

GM & DH: And what might be the place of cultural anthropology and ethnography, as we have discussed it, in the university?

DW: Claiming that an activity constitutes a discipline, a part of the contemporary university, entails an idea of the university. But as I tried to suggest in response to the last question, the idea of the university cannot be taken for granted. What is the university for? is also an important question at present. In relatively recent years, the university's animating conception and social role has shifted. By way of shorthand, we may now speak of such changes as the emergence of the

bureaucratic university. So to ask the question again: Why, if at all, does the bureaucratic university need ethnography? More threateningly still, supposing that the bureaucratic university in fact does need ethnography, should we respect the activity so defined? In a world in which writing is ubiquitous and reading is rare, what gives cultural anthropologists their authority to write? Why should we, particularly those of us on the outside, bother to read?

As an aside, I find it modestly amusing that so many folks seem to have been so upset about the things you, George, have said over the years about the status of anthropology as a discipline. To my mind, you tend to be too conservative on this score. The situation is far worse than you argue! (As a now old song has it, desperate but not serious.)

One way to approach this question of what good is ethnography, now, would be to ask, what other disciplines or forms of intellectual production would make ethnography redundant? Ethnography is hardly the only way to articulate the significance of modern worlds. Journalism, for example, does a far better job of reporting on the emergence and importance of this or that corner of global society's mansion. No graduate student can compete with the *New York Times* magazine when it comes to sketching the significance—at least as the *Times* understands significance—of some social phenomena. At the same time, it must be remembered that the *Times* is informed by, and devoted to, an idea of newsworthiness, that is, an understanding of significance validated by mass attention, structured by celebrity. Moreover, in the *Times*, the articulation of significance is necessarily quick. The story must be filed before commercial interest wanes. In contrast, ethnography is slow. Conversations occur over months, even years, and are written—and placed in various sorts of context—over further years. Ethnographers tend to be obscure, and it might be hoped that their questions are not those of *tout le monde*. Ethnography might be unbearably slow, as George has played on Kundera recently, but it is precisely the languid quality of ethnographic thought that is precious in contemporary circumstances.

Similarly, history might be considered the best way to understand the significance of social phenomena. We learn with the passage of time, because in hindsight we can see how one thing influenced another, and consequently, which things were influential, that is, important. (Journalism, in contrast, is famous for missing “the real story,” the truly consequential development, while reporting events that rehearsed narratives already familiar to the journalist.) While history is indispensable for just such reasons, it also has its limitations, which are of course the converse of its strengths. To the point here, history can at best suggest, but cannot articulate, what it feels like to experience. In contrast to history, ethnography offers the possibility of a contemporaneous sensibility.

Without developing this argument further here, the comparison with journalism and history is perhaps enough to suggest how ethnography, as a method, offers access to truths that are implausible for other disciplines. But again, assuming that

ethnography fills a role not performed by some other discipline in the bureaucratic university, however, does not suffice to make ethnography worthy of respect. A competitive advantage within the academy, a successful specialization, is hardly enough to make ethnography more than crassly worthwhile. Although “ethnography through thick and thin” has a certain harmonic resonance to it, we might be disinclined to say “farm subsidies through thick and thin,” or “zoning variances through thick and thin.” A given bureaucracy may have a competitive advantage over loosely analogous enterprises, may even be socially necessary, without demanding intellectual attention, still less affection. Simple truth might be enough of a justification in the university of culture, but in a world drowning in data, truths must be somehow compelling. So what makes ethnography worth doing?

I'm sure you'll both be delighted to hear that I think ethnography is in fact worth doing (legal scholarship, now, that's another question!). But let me approach the question by turning the tables and turning to your work, the *Late Editions* series that George conceived and edited, and to which Doug contributed. The last volume of the *Late Editions* series was entitled *Zeroing in on the Year 2000*. In this phrase, zero has a number of meanings. To “zero in on” is to focus. But at the time of writing, there was nothing (yet) there at zero; none of the authors knew what 2000 would bring them. Indeed there need be nothing at a focus, which is a defined point in space that may, or may not, be occupied by some object. Zero defines numbers by being a placeholder: two thousand and zero hundreds, zero tens, zero ones. Whether imagined geometrically or numerically, however, the zero could be filled, indeed would be filled as the years pass. Until then, and at the time of writing, the places had to be held, in order to ensure that our “2” represented two thousand years of (Christian) history, as opposed to merely two years between congressional elections, or perhaps two of something else.

In the final edition, zero is proposed as the symbol of the activity of ethnography, which is less an affirmative action than a sort of social and intellectual placeholder, to be occupied. Less fancifully, the ethnographer suppresses his own personality in order to do fieldwork in which he learns from someone else: “For me, the experiment has always been approaching the zero and what kinds of different texts can be produced, encounters with people in which you zero yourself out as much as possible” (Mike Fortun quoted in Marcus 2000).

In contrast to most disciplines, ethnography does not present itself as philosophy has taught, as a master discipline, or even as much of a method in the sense of technique. Instead, ethnography is a very loosely construed “method” (“attitude” or “stance” are perhaps too passive) through which the university confronts other contexts for the construction of meaning, imaginaries, and worlds. Through ethnography, ways of making meaning in economies of knowledge outside the university (e.g., central banking, biotechnology, right-wing politics, strategic planning) can be appropriated by the university and articulated within the academic context. Thus, rather than preaching the findings of the discipline, that

is, repetitively modulating what I have been trained to think, ethnography holds itself open to meanings made in “foreign” milieus, often other professions. From this perspective, ethnography is the patient transcription, translation, and evaluation of systems of meaning that have been articulated, in their own idiom, elsewhere. Ethnography is thus the antidiscipline. It operates not on its own account, not in its own interest, but in the interests of truths defined through and by others.

Having an antidiscipline is quite useful not only for the bureaucratic university, but for all of us. Because so many institutions plausibly justify themselves in terms of the production and management of some sort of knowledge, the university’s claim to be the preeminent site of knowledge is open to question. A way in which to appropriate, evaluate, and otherwise cope with claims of knowledge made elsewhere is required; ethnography can fill that need. Ethnography cultivates a sophisticated understanding of what this moment, this stage of events, feels like in this place, where a particular phenomenon seems significant. And that sensitivity is something worth having, especially these days.

GM & DH: By providing a feel for our time and a feel for our place in the world, the ethnographer (or the paraethnographer) participates in the creation of those narratives that express our personal predicaments within an inchoate social imaginary. We are particularly interested in how these narratives can be transformed notably by agile political actors to align a complex discursive field: the communicative space of the City. We’ve coined three terms to describe types of communicative action in this discursive field, namely internarrative, paraethnography, and intimate artifice. How, if at all, do these terms describe your writing of *City*?

DW: The most obvious point is that *City* provides a giant narrative. Is this an internarrative? Yes, I think so. But *City* might also, and perhaps more usefully, be considered as a kind of guide to several currently significant—and generally underarticulated by the participants—internarratives. Consider, for example, the anxieties about “confidence” that pervade banking and securities law. *City* provides some intellectual and cultural, temporal if not academically historical, context for that anxiety. (Law is full of this stuff.) At the same time, *City* provides much of the grammar of finance and hope that fuels bubbles. Between the two, the *Wall Street Journal* ought to begin making more sense.

In *City*, it is always presumed that the reader, or sometimes the characters that the book makes up by way of example, has to construct some sort of view of the world. I usually say myth. And myths are both constructed and constrained. So much of the book is about the tension between the impulse to construct a myth (identified with philosophy) and the constraints that the world (identified with history) places on such construction.

The very important point that both of you have been making for some time now is that this process of creating an imaginary is universal. In this light, *City* is an idiosyncratically informed and just plain long example of something almost everybody does—try to provide themselves with a picture, a mental account, of

the contemporary, globalized world in which they live. In response to Question 2, I discussed this need for an imaginary in terms of psychology or epistemology, but it might also be associated with Aristotle's "political animal." How do we relate to other people of whom we are aware? One cannot *not* relate; even exclusion is a form of relation. Thus the ethnographic subject in modernity already has some sort of anthropological and sociological view of the world.

As I understand it, the paraethnographic is the ethnographer's openness to using this "found" ethnography and presumably helping to occasion its further articulation. Thus the ethnographic subject is literally a subject, a builder of the ethnography, and the academic anthropologist finds out what his topic is by doing the ethnography rather parasitically off the work done by the subject. Doug finds "Europe" as already imagined by Le Pen. Without Le Pen (and other work, obviously), Doug would have been wandering around France. In contrast, the Malinowskian anthropologist "found" the subject objectively, by going to a place where "the other culture" was to be found.

Inevitably, there will be differences between the ethnographies imagined by various subjects, such as Le Pen and the imaginary set forth in *City*. On the other hand, *City* is an effort to think through anew current conditions. *City* is an effort to think in a highly conscious mode, but without assuming the inherited intellectual apparatus, most notably of the enlightened imagination of politics. And so we may expect to see certain startling resonances between *City* and others who are either already outside the inherited imagination of politics, such as consumers in a global market, or better still, who are attempting to articulate where they are as does Le Pen. Then, if there is antagonism, it is antagonism on the same plane.

The entire writing of *City* could be seen as an invitation to intimacy. Hence the essay form, as discussed above. But "intimate artifice" is a very difficult idea. Suppose one were to substitute, for a Ralph Lauren label, an ironclad money-back guarantee that an item of clothing was well made, from natural fibers, by a genuinely nostalgic and mildly delusional member of the anglophile WASP gentry. I think Ralph Lauren stuff, so labeled, would still sell, because many people who buy Ralph Lauren stuff want third parties to know what they've bought. More precisely, they want that which is coveted by third parties, a prestige item.

My hypothetical is meant to suggest that branding is successful because of the consumer's need to create community and context, even if only on the basis of a retail purchase. There thus seems to be a deep link, even an identity, between the impulse that makes paraethnography possible (why the subject always already has an anthropological view) and the impulse that motivates intimate artifice. Connections are created, must be created, even if the only connection is the imaginary evoked by a specific brand, a specific marketing campaign, in this case, an idealized version of an anglophile leisure class.

We've gone a long way towards Marx's idea that the natural would be replaced by the artificial. Intimacy, or the gestures of the personal, must take place in a

context of pervasive artificiality, which is what “popular culture” is about, the creation of identity out of the raw material available in the agora.

GM& DH: Does our figuration of ethnography address or encompass the challenges of intellectual life in the City?

DW: As I suggested in the discussion on the role of ethnography in the bureaucratic university, I think your method is an appropriate way to organize (teach) thinking through the ways we live now. But “encompass” is the wrong word, as it suggests a master discourse that somehow gets around, contains, and stands outside of the City. The last thing we need now is another Olympian description. What you are doing is more receptive, sympathetic, synthetic, reflexive, and constructive. What a revitalized ethnography offers is, pace your earlier language, a way or method with which to understand, to imaginatively “enter in” contemporary relationships, most (disarmingly) simply by talking to people about them. And it does so by discarding much of the conceptual frame that Malinowski could presume. At the same time, a revitalized ethnography presents the possibility of a structured discourse, and hence a new (often localized, specific, ad hoc) frame, purpose built.

The gist of my thinking is that your method is a very suitable way to do something interesting out of the university setting even though the university, as idea, seems to be fading. That said, anthropologists and other professional academics tend to take the university far too seriously. As insular as law professors are, they by and large have some experience and surely have friends (or at least classmates) in other institutional contexts, such as government, large firms, courts, and etcetera. The university is thus hardly universal; in many ways it is not even best. In a similar vein, your method must confront the problems of the university, which might be done, but it needs to be done, not merely assumed.

GM& DH: What kind of intellectual life is possible in the City?

DW: Somewhere in the e-mail stream, Doug, you wrote of using both *City* and a revitalized ethnography “for the far broader project of differentiating practices that can sustain intellectual life under contemporary conditions.” As a practical matter, it seems to me that markets—and especially the bureaucratic fights over jurisdiction and subspecialization that mark the contemporary university—will go far towards differentiating us and requiring that we differentiate ourselves one from another. In a knowledge economy, everyone is an expert, that is, an intellectual, for whatever that might be worth, and, as I’ve suggested, it might not be worth very much. Participating in an excruciatingly complex symbolic economy is not in itself thoughtful and tends to make communication difficult. Once we’ve been differentiated, it becomes very hard to see how to “sustain” intellectual life, and especially intellectual conversation.

City treats three facets of the problem, viz., bureaucracy, celebrity, and sympathy. (As you both know, I’m continuing to work on the constellation and considering a much more elaborate discussion.) Briefly, bureaucracy—especially at its higher

reaches—is the institutional form established to make specific forms of intellectual life possible, and such lives are not without their own, indeed intellectual, rewards. Consider, for example, your work with central bankers, Doug, or George’s work with financial planners or military strategists, or, to be very blunt, the institutional life of any professor. The problem with bureaucracy is that it is difficult to communicate (and seems to become more so the more one talks about transparency). Communication, however, is the core of celebrity, which exists in numerous inverse relations to bureaucracy. For present purposes, the difficulty with celebrity is that it tends to be intellectually impoverished.

Which brings me to my third focal point, sympathy, and pleasingly back to the first question. The difficulty with contemporary politics is at some level very simple: the world is so big, we cannot feel at home. In such circumstances it is difficult to feel community, solidarity, that one is part of a group, and so politics as it has been traditionally understood is difficult if not impossible. Such alienation is only exacerbated by the fact that most of one’s representations in capitalist society are made through the profoundly impersonal institutions of property and money. Even under these circumstances, however, it remains possible to feel sympathy, to understand that the stranger is also human.

What does this mean for intellectual life? If we begin from a presumption of alienation rather than shared culture or community, the first move might be to establish grounds for talking. More attention must be paid to the early stages of communication, a task for which the essay form is well-suited.

Let me close by making two rather simple, and I hope strangely practical, points. The first is that, under current conditions, intellectuals should stop relying on the moral and political qualities of their thinking to give their intellectual lives a sense of purpose. The world is too big, rationality is too hard, and politics, even of enlightened republics, much less markets, doesn’t work like that. Thus the attitude prevalent among the bureaucratic class (including especially academics) that thinking matters for political reasons should be abandoned, at least for intellectual purposes. Should we still be “engaged”? Sure, why not? I grew up talking like this. But I’ve learned a lot about politics since then. Basically, we shouldn’t confuse thinking with political or moral action.

To put the matter slightly differently, we may come to understand thought (again) as an essentially gentle pursuit. It is afforded by capital and status. It may or may not make a difference practically or morally or politically; it probably does not. But even when it is useless (as it usually is), thinking is worth doing, an ornament to existence.

Which brings me to my second point about intellectual life under contemporary conditions. It is rather liberating to understand how generally thoughtless political life is; it is if anything more liberating to realize that thinking is not just a job. It is better to love than to be paid, to be an amateur than a professional. While the City tends to differentiate and thus intellectually impoverish jobs, particularly in

the university, its inhabitants are very free to think, if they are so inclined. And this is an interesting time.

Afterword

We close this piece with four brief commentaries on some of Bert's assertions that are worth repeating in light of our aim to reformulate critical method in anthropology.

I

Defamiliarization—By Other Means

"This book uses urban imagery and self-consciously revives the old Marxian personification of 'capitalism,' in order to solidify the understanding of financial markets as the grammar through which much contemporary political thought should take place" (2003:13).

One important way in which *City of Gold* has been important for us is in the affinity that its governing insight has with a signature mode of critique in anthropology that is deeply problematic in its traditional form—defamiliarization or the lesson rooted in doctrines of cultural relativism for unreflected-upon conventional and dominant categories. Anthropology has classically stirred the reconfiguration of categories by juxtaposing "otherness" to them as a product of ethnographic research elsewhere (for example, Clifford Geertz rethinking "our" notion of the polity at the end of his study of the Balinese theater state, Negara). This specific modality is in difficulty today, and debates about cultural analysis have been trying to deal with its problems, at least since the 1980s. In the meantime, there are alternative maneuvers and foci by which one can continue to deploy this favored aesthetic of argument for anthropology and the challenges it poses for inquiry.

Bert's work is such a challenge for inquiry in this classic anthropological mode. He offers the idea of displacement, a tectonic shift in categories and functions from one conventionally understood domain onto another—in his work, he provocatively shows how the domain of markets has become, and is becoming, the arena of political constitution. To grasp this shift, that is perhaps widely sensed but not clearly conceived, requires the same sort of frisson of thinking (and ethnographic demonstrations, we believe) that classic acts of defamiliarization through juxtaposition sought to achieve. We are sure that the anthropological idea of culture returns to the analysis of this major historic displacement of constitutions onto markets that Bert evokes as a supranational communicative sphere developing since World War II, but the essential maneuver of defamiliarization arises in a different way, fully appropriate to the major structural changes in large formations that are at once political, economic, cultural, et cetera.

Here it is the style and ambition of his critical thought that make Bert's analysis so suggestive for what anthropologists might do in their own tradition, but beyond its specific modality of cultural juxtapositions that no longer seem to fit what is

creating fault lines of difference in new arrangements. In the provocation of the major historical displacement he suggests lies the kind of refunctioning of standard ethnographic research that we have in mind.

II

Is Bert a Paraethnographer?

“Over the years, I’ve lost faith in argument in the sense of advocacy, mostly as a student at Harvard’s law school where they do nothing but argue, and partially because, as a law professor, I train people in argument. For a well-trained lawyer, argument is always available, but understanding is another matter. So when writing the book, I constantly avoided making arguments just because I could.”

“In this light, *City* is an idiosyncratically informed, and just plain long, example of something almost everybody does, namely, try to provide themselves with a picture, a mental account, of the contemporary, globalized, world in which they live.”

“Thus the ethnographic subject in modernity already has—has necessarily constructed for himself—some sort of anthropological/sociological view of the world.”

“As I understand it, the paraethnographic is the ethnographer’s openness to using this ‘found’ ethnography, and, presumably, helping to occasion its further articulation. Thus the ethnographic subject is literally a subject, a builder of the ethnography, and the academic anthropologist finds out what his topic is by doing the ethnography rather parasitically off the work done by the subject.”

Is Bert an actual exemplar of the kind of “counterpart” or collaborative subject on which the orientation and management of the fieldwork projects we imagine depend, in which anthropological ethnography works through and in relation to overlapping sensibilities and perspectives found in the “field”? Well, sort of; perhaps, if we were pursuing a specific ethnographic project in which we were traversing the domains of his own participation that Bert has made his deep intellectual concern in ways that have clear affinities with ethnography which increasingly defines its work in worlds of subjects who are already connected to the intellectual apparatus that informs it. This is just the breaking of the frame of the privileged domain of scholasticism that Pierre Bourdieu warned against (thus going down the misbegotten path of putting the “practical” thinking of subjects on the same plane as the anthropologist or sociologist), but there is no way to enter the world of actors and counterparts such as Bert without having something like the conversations we have had with him here. The problem for ethnographers is where such conversations and collaborations go from there—how they play out in a project that somehow exceeds the functions, interests, and bounds of such conversations.

Still, Bert does usefully suggest the sort of subject position in which such partners and collaborators will most likely be found in the multi-sited ethnographic project

that we imagine—someone with a deeply felt and worked-out intellectual skepticism about the worlds in which she or he functions (although we are certainly open to the “paraethnography” that is shaped by less alienated styles). As a law professor, he is constantly reminded of the instrumental functions of the intellectual styles in which he is implicated and to which he is obligated (see his footnote 1 on “the neoliberal triumphal economics that dominates so much legal and regulatory discourse”). He exemplifies cynical reason in the best sense, as an art. He is restless, suspicious, a bit cynical, a person who is not about to take his own discipline or its practices on in its own terms, and most importantly for us, he exhibits vast curiosities, and consumes the predicaments of our own discipline with quickness, depth, and edges that have changed our thinking about what we do. In the end, Bert finds ethnography as he has sharply understood it, “good to think with” for his own purposes. This found mutuality of interest and cross-translation in shared (or sometimes conflicting) ideas and practices, and revealed as such in the basic structure of a research project, is what strong anthropological science depends upon today as ethnography constitutes difference in worlds that are already conventionally understood by experts and others.

III

Critique Today Is “Elsewhere”

“Once it becomes obvious that thinking is not done in the academy, thinkers will tend to go elsewhere, and the intellectual honor due the institution will (and should) decline accordingly.”

Among scholars and intellectuals who understand critique and critical analysis as what they do in their work, the university, the world of academia, has become an object of disappointment, and this sentiment has been increasingly articulated over the past two decades. The critique of the contemporary university and the academic culture of scholarship and teaching within it is one primary focus of Bert’s thinking. A key aspect of this disaffection with the university as a site in which critical scholarship can progress that Bert shares with several others whom we have heard or read recently is the idea (and hope) that critical thought is actually being generated in unsuspected and not immediately apparent ways in the work of the world, in the complex structures and management of institutional orders dealing with major transformation in modes of operation in spheres of religion, science, technology, government, corporations, education, the military, et cetera. The time has perhaps come for academics (who for Bert are appended to their own specialized bureaucracy, and indeed, are even becoming bureaucrats) to develop other conversations in places they do not know and with interlocutors with whom they do not usually speak. Whether or not this idea and the hope it expresses will prove fruitful, the impulse and the curiosity that it indicates are very important for anthropologists, and more generally for academia as well.

This same impulse and curiosity have been embedded in anthropology from its inception, and much more explicitly so after the critiques of ethnography two

decades ago. Ethnography is one of the very few practices out of the university that puts academic social thinkers directly in touch with thinkers “out there.” What further can be done with this form in anthropology might only be thought in the most open and even radical terms by someone, like Bert, addressing his own dissatisfactions with and critique of academic and professional life. The idea that there are other interlocutors (in the realm of the *City of Gold*, those who make and regulate markets) and that ethnography might provide a promising context for communication with them is a potentially liberating idea that applies to anthropologists as well in their traditional pursuits today.

IV

Limits and Uses of Ethnography

“So to speak the question: why, if at all, does the bureaucratic university need ethnography? More threateningly still, supposing that the bureaucratic university in fact does need ethnography, should we respect the activity so defined? In a world in which writing is ubiquitous and reading is rare, what gives cultural anthropologists their authority to write? Why should we, particularly those of us on the outside, bother to read?”

“In contrast to history, ethnography offers the possibility of a contemporaneous sensibility.”

“The comparison with journalism and history is perhaps enough to suggest how ethnography, as a method, offers access to truths that are implausible for other disciplines.”

“In contrast to most disciplines, ethnography does not present itself as philosophy has taught, as a master discipline, or even much of a method in the sense of technique. Instead, ethnography is a ‘method’ very loosely construed (‘attitude’ or ‘stance’ are perhaps too passive) through which the university confronts other contexts for the construction of meaning, imaginaries, worlds.”

“Ethnography is the patient transcription, translation, and evaluation of systems of meaning that have been articulated, in their own idiom, elsewhere. Ethnography is thus the antidiscipline it operates not on its own account, not in its own interest, but in the interests of truths defined through and by others.”

“The gist of my thinking is that your method is a very suitable way to do something interesting out of the university setting even though/while the university, as idea, seems to be fading.”

We could not have expressed our understanding better than in the Delphic, aphoristic words of Bert, of what still might be of particular value in ethnography at the present juncture of intellectual life that incorporates and renews what has been special all along about this modernist invention of humane critical inquiry.

* * *

Notes

We have been engaged in an extended conversation about *City of Gold* and its significance for anthropology for a number of years now. We are indebted to Annelise Riles for proposing that we open our discussion in a public forum under the auspicious of the Clarke Program in East Asian Law and Culture at the Cornell University Law School. The colloquium that ensued took place in Ithaca on March 7, 2005, with the title “Intellectual Vocations in the City of Gold: Internarrativity, Paraethnography, Intimate Artifice.” We are also grateful to Donna Hastings for her work in scheduling and coordinating the session. This text represents key elements of our conversations before, during, and after the March 7 meeting.

1. For an overview of the anthropology of finance, see Maurer 1995, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Miyazaki 2003; Miyazaki and Riles 2005; Zaloom 2003.
2. For a more extended discussion of these terms, see Holmes and Marcus 2005a, 2005b, 2006.
3. *City* similarly uses a quarrel with other familiar modern imaginations of life in capitalism, namely economics and rights-based liberalism, as a way to develop its own imaginary. It is just a guess on my part, but I don’t think most readers of PoLAR are likely to be as deeply enmeshed—or, generally speaking, to understand in any nuanced fashion—the neoliberal triumphal economics that dominates so much legal regulatory discourse as they are in the remnants of the Marxian tradition. And the “rights talk” of liberal politics is probably central to their understanding of political aspiration, but less central to their understanding of how the world works. However, each of these (modern) imaginaries of political and economic life serves as a useful foil, a background against which the broad significance of the (postmodern) imaginary set forth in *City* is asserted. Whether such assertions are successful I leave to the reader’s judgment.

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