

# Collaborative conundrums and respectful partnerships

Medical anthropology and disciplinary others

Eileen Moyer and Vinh-Kim Nguyen

At a time when the world seems to be increasingly concerned with erecting walls and closing borders, we are pleased to offer two back-to-back issues of *Medicine Anthropology Theory* that tackle interdisciplinary collaborations. In these issues, we offer two firsts: our first special issue, devoted to therapeutic landscapes, and, in our regular issue, a new section focusing on anthropological engagements with and within health and development interventions.

The therapeutic landscapes special issue, edited by Margaret Winchester, contains six peer-reviewed articles, a think piece, three photo essays, two commentaries, and an introduction by Winchester and Janet McGrath. The articles – written by Amy Cooper; Jesse Hession Grayman; Matusmi Karasaki, Narelle Warren, and Lenore Manderson; Martha King; Jennifer T. Mokos; and Margaret Winchester and Brian King – cover a wide range of issues relating health to space, place, and geography in sites around the world, including Venezuela, Indonesia, South Africa, and the United States. Marlee McGuire's think piece reflects on the ways booms and busts in a Canadian oil economy shapes the ways society and individuals think about the cost of treating rare diseases. The three photo essays work together to illustrate the ways that health, bodies and memories are shaped by, embedded in, and limited by space

and place. Heather McMillen, Lindsay Campbell, and Erika Svendsen's photo essay reminds us that memorial spaces are often alive, constantly being recreated by those who visit them; Nina Nissen's intimate photos of men restricted by physical disability in Denmark invite us to think about the ways that gender and mobility are interlinked in our imaginaries of public and private spaces; and Sarah Phillips and Jill Owczarzak take us to Ukraine in a photo essay that highlights the fragmentation of HIV services. Two invited commentaries round out the special issue, one by Wil Gesler, who coined the term 'therapeutic landscape', and one by Allison Williams, whose important edited collections have brought together medical anthropologists and health geographers over the past decades.

Our regular April issue also offers plenty of space for reflecting on collaboration. We could not be happier with our first Interventions collection, which contains three peer-reviewed articles related to HIV interventions in various settings in Africa and an invited commentary by Craig Janes. Born out of conversations between ourselves and (often frustrated) anthropologists working in interdisciplinary research teams that focus on health and disease, or within global and public health or development projects, the new Interventions section aims to provide a place where academics, health professionals, and activists involved in interventions can reflect critically on what happens behind the scenes of project-related work.

The Interventions collection was co-curated by Denielle Elliott and Eva Vernooij, both of whom have also written articles for the issue. Elliott's piece, co-authored by epidemiologist-cum-interlocutor-cum-research subject Timothy Thomas, provides insight into the challenges of interdisciplinary research partnerships, even when among good friends, and especially when politics, theory, and collaborative norms get in the way. Vernooij's article, which draws on her experience conducting ethnographic research for her PhD while embedded in a large-scale HIV treatment intervention-demonstration project in Swaziland, critically reflects on the challenge of wearing two (or more!) hats as a researcher, especially when one of those hats is anthropological. The tension between maintaining critical distance and the requirement to feed results back to intervention implementers before analysis is complete seems to be inherent to the task of simultaneously attempting to do anthropology in and of a health intervention where lives are quite literally at stake. The third Interventions article, by Kirsten Peterson and Morenike Folayan, takes yet another angle, examining their own collaboration within a wider network of activists and others debating the merits and ethical limitations of a multi-sited trial to test the use of antiretroviral medication to prevent HIV. Their thoughtful article highlights the socially complex, diverse, and multisited and multiscaled field of HIV research today, as well as the important role anthropology plays in interrogating the medical-industrial complex of HIV intervention. The commentary by Craig Janes offers a bit of history, reflecting on the ways that collaborations between anthropology and epidemiology have become both increasingly common since his co-edited seminal collection on the subject (Janes, Stall, and Gifford 1986) and increasingly fraught as global health interventions are increasingly driven

by metrics and money. He remains optimistic, however, even as he reminds us anthropologists that ‘scholarly partnerships depend on flexibility, tolerance of different perspectives, respect, and trust’.

In addition to the three articles, the regular issue contains three think pieces, and book reviews of Kelly Knight’s *addicted.pregnant.poor* and *Traces of the future: An archeology of medical science in twenty-first-century Africa*, a co-edited volume by Paul Wenzel Geissler, Guillaume Lachenal, John Manton, and Noémi Tousignant, which beautifully illustrates the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration to uncover traces of colonial medicine in tropical African settings. The think pieces continue the theme of boundary crossings, both disciplinary and spatial. Patrick Cloos, a medical doctor, reflects on how dealing with his own mother’s Alzheimer’s disease made him rethink the pathologization of aging in biomedicine; Benjamin Hegarty asks us to imagine being transgender, and sexual identity more broadly, as something shaped by time, place, and work; and, finally, Ashish Premkumar and Kareem Raad question the ways that place differentially shapes media coverage and humanitarian framings of terrorist attacks.

We are pleased to offer these two issues as a wide-ranging discussion of collaboration and multidisciplinary, and hope that the reflections and conversations in these pages lead to further reflections and conversations outside of them. Echoing Janes, we believe that this is best accomplished when trust, respect, and tolerance are cultivated among those with differing perspectives and knowledges.

## Reference

Janes, Craig R., Ron Stall, and Sandra M. Gifford, eds. 1986. *Anthropology and Epidemiology: an Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Health and Disease*. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: D. Reidel.