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SOCIAL COMPLEXITY AND THE QUESTION OF SCALE: GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropological knowledge may have become increasingly theorized in the 21st century, but it is as solidly based in empirical research as always. The empirical studies of different societies were conventionally organized in geographical regions. This implies that notions like the „anthropology of Europe”, „Arctic anthropology”, or „Inuit studies” have sliced up the world for anthropologists, pre-empting larger issues of distinction and similarity. An attempt at dismantling regionalism in anthropology was made by Richard Fardon (Fardon, ed., 1990), seeing it as a strategy of ethnographic writing that favored particular kinds of questions and silenced others. While not continuing the discussion of regionalism *per se*, my aim here is to discuss how anthropological knowledge in the global era by default transcends both cultural and regional boundaries, while still is based in located understandings and actions.

In what follows I shall discuss social complexity as the outcome of social action and thought, rather than their frame, and the scaling of anthropological knowledge as a function of a particular interest, rather than geographical size or numerical density. My argument is based in recent fieldwork in northwest Greenland, where global climate change processes are conspicuously part of the continuous reshaping of the social. This case therefore highlights some of the challenges with which anthropology is faced, while also underscoring the continued value of fieldwork. However, I shall also look back into the history of anthropology in order to provide some baseline against which we may more easily grasp the nature of these challenges.

Social complexity

When anthropology was first established as a field-discipline, ethnographic fieldwork was clearly an extension of the Enlightenment project bringing new knowledge about other worlds back to Europe. One could argue that at a time when many peoples of the planet were still unknown (to Europeans, certainly not to themselves or to their neighbors) the fieldworker served as a telescope, a mechanism by which the far away could become visible to the home audience. From the door of the tent, the fieldworker could observe the natives at close range, to invoke Malinowski's famous phrasing (Malinowski 1922), and bring back his observations for further scrutiny. Fieldwork was also linked up with the idea of bounded societies, be they primitive or modern, which could and should be described in their totality by the keen observer provided he stayed long enough.

In the social sciences in general the idea of a positively (empirically) identifiable society had dominated thinking since Auguste Comte's work in the first half of the 19th century, suggesting a development of human thought from its theological and metaphysical stages to its positive stage, where society was founded on science, industry and positive politics. For the new social order to be properly understood and founded, a new science of positive sociology was needed. This new science was supposed to provide a system of scientific ideas, which could preside over the necessary reorganization of society (Aron 1965: 96-70). Later in the 19th century, Émile Durkheim (1895) took this further in his work on the sociological method, giving logical priority to the collective over the individual, and from where he proceeded to discuss the distinction between modern and primitive societies. This is all very well known, but it is worth emphasizing that what started as a new concept of the social order quickly became naturalized. Society – as distinct from both state and nation – soon became a fact. This has had wide implications not only for the social sciences in general, but also for people living in a world where „modern society” was conceived along 19th century lines of thought. Along with the conception of modern society, primitive society was born as its opposite. They were distinguished by their relative complexity, the primitive societies being by default far more homogeneous and inherently uniform than the modern individualistically inclined societies. Ethnographic fieldwork took root as the method by which one could access the primitive (non-written) worldview, whether seen in terms of a mentality as the Frenchman Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1922) suggested or as a culture, as propagated by Franz Boas (1911), coming out of the German tradition and founding the American school of relativism. This is a well-known story, but the question naturally arises of what fieldwork might mean in the present era, when the idea of closed cultures and stable world-views are definitively abandoned, and the distinction between modern and traditional socie-

ties have become untenable, given the fluid nature of „the social” so extensively documented by anthropologists among others. An essential quality of fieldwork lies precisely in its power to document the emerging nature of the social, and to theorize social complexity as a result of actions taken and moves made rather than as a framework of these actions and moves. Fieldwork implies engaging with people who are always busy processing their own lives, and it shows how social complexity is the outcome of „worlding”, seen as the practice of making and claiming worlds, and thus of figuring relevant social worlds (Tsing 2010: 48). By going along with them and socializing en route, so to speak (cf. Ingold and Vergunst 2006), anthropologists bring forth both a particular knowledge of a world-in-the-making, and a general knowledge of human worlding propensities of a universal scale. Neither the particular nor the general depends on walled-in cultures, however; they are configured within specific knowledge interests or concerns emerging in practice and imagination.

On the strength of these preliminary observations, I want to argue that there is no *a priori* distinction between simple and complex social fields, because any field springs from what I shall initially call a bottom-up social complexity. My argument runs parallel to other recent attempts at redefining the field of anthropology, given that our faith in fixed and bounded social orders has been definitively undermined. Complexity, in the form I am going to discuss here, implies that whatever cohesion and predictability we may find in the field, this is always generated in practice. The perceived regularities are not reducible to rules, pre-dating and pre-empting individual action. On the contrary, it is by investing their interest in particular actions that people make society happen; social worlds are continuously performed into being (Hastrup 2007). In a similar vein, Marshall Sahlins (1985) has suggested that institutions are objectified histories, they are not prefabricated charters for action and meaning. This is of course a very simple rendering of a richly faceted critique of holism, once casting worlds as empirical wholes, regulated and institutionalised as such. At this age and day we have to „reassemble the social”, as Bruno Latour has it (Latour 2005). The complexity of social worlds is not only difficult to describe, it is also unobservable and literally unverifiable. It is real enough, but as a matter of implication rather than observation its reality can only be presented in theoretical terms; this is where an epistemological awareness becomes of paramount importance. The „whole” by which people know their world is always emergent and premised both by past experience and by anticipation. So also for the worlds described in anthropological works: they cast anthropology itself as a worlding practice, and although tradition would have us study local, small-scale communities on the ground, the delineation of their worlds in monographs and articles is the result of a theoretical practice, depending on particular modes of imagining and conceptualising the worlds under study. It remains a challenge to portray social worlds without imprisoning them in particular regional or cultural enclosures.

Let me briefly present the community in northwest Greenland, where I am currently working. Thule District, roughly between 76° and 78° North, is cut off from the rest of western Greenland further south by the violent Melville Bay. Ever since people came into Greenland from North America, this district formed an extensive hunting area for a very small and very mobile population; the first unofficial census, made by Robert Peary in the 1890s named some 250 people (Peary 1898). In prehistoric periods the strait between Ellesmere Land on the American side and the Thule District was crossed by waves of Eskimos (as they were to become known in archaeology) who gradually, if sometimes only temporarily, peopled the shores of western Greenland further south, or traveled (north-) eastwards to descend along the east-coast to form new settlements there – some of which were quickly abandoned, while others remained isolated. At Peary's time, the Smith Sound Eskimos – one of the names by which the population became known – had been cut off both from America and from the rest of Greenland for some time. Accordingly, they were seen as a distinct and totally isolated tribe, and this impression was further underscored in Knud Rasmussen's work (1905, 1908), later to be echoed by Jean Malaurie (1956), and still hanging on in the work of Rolf Gilberg (1984). Today, there is still a distinct sense of isolation, due to the distance from other communities, but there is no way to maintain an idea of a closed society or a distinct culture. The population is now c. 700, most living in the main town, Qaanaaq, (c. 600) and the rest living in three (steadily dwindling) settlements ranging from 14 people in the tiniest to about 45 in the biggest. The inhabitants of the district are perfectly aware of their position on the margins of the globe. Evidently they are at the centre of their own world, but even so they are in no doubt that they constitute a small and isolated community; yet they are constantly orientating themselves towards a wider world, both Greenlandic and global. They are wary of the political development in Greenland that tends towards centralization and (possibly) forced resettlement further south, and they have strong misgivings about the administration of international species protection measures and quotas, that allow for no admission of their own, experience-based knowledge of the stock of their prey (Hastrup 2009b). Thus, however isolated they are in terms of geography and infrastructure they act upon a wider knowledge. Occasionally, they may also call upon on a shared Arctic or Inuit vision of their history, but even this draws its force from international discussions of colonialism, indigenusness and so forth.

The general point is that the people we work with in our quest for anthropological knowledge are constantly engaged in worlding practices by which they make sense also of their position in the larger world. Where classical social (anthropological) analysis began with the aggregate, and explained individual action from there, we are now at a point in anthropology where we are able to turn this 180° around – as has been suggested by Latour (2005) in his actor-network theory, the so-called ANT. Thus instead of starting from a notion that the north-

west Greenlanders, being so far away from the main part of Greenlandic society, speaking their own dialect, and having a rather distinct history, constitute a well-bounded culture, we must now recognize that they constantly form and reform their associations with the local as well as the non-local world: material, social, and imaginative. When the anthropologist enters the scene, another possible association emerges, and the network extends. From his or her placement in that network, the anthropologist is in a position to identify the nodal points in the relevant world-making process. This, in turn makes it possible to address questions and concerns that are certainly located but vastly transcend „the local” and which are mediated by a variety of agents, human or non-human. An important notion in Latour’s vocabulary is „figuration” (Latour 2005: 53-54), which partly explains the nature of agency. Figuration points to a rather abstract process of identifying significant, agentive particulars; in Latour’s sense figuration takes us beyond the empirical and carries an analytical message: something happens around them. As Anna Tsing (2010) has argued, the notion of figuration thus adds a dimension to the proclaimed flatness or two-dimensionality to which the ANT explicitly adheres; it invokes a kind of framework without which it would be impossible to identify figures at all. I do not want to go deeper into a discussion of ANT and its paradoxes, I just want to identify a possible starting point for the creation of an anthropological knowledge that transcends the immediate, horizontal ordering of nodes or actors in an unbounded network, and makes a world transpire, however temporary, beyond the empirically identified actors but still without the totalizing claims of holism. In the Arctic, one prominent figure is the hunt; it is not only an action undertaken by a select group of able-bodied men on dog-sledge or in kayak, but also a nodal point in the local sense of emplacement, survival, and vulnerability. The climatic, the political, and the biological challenges that feature in the villagers’ sense of uncertainty centre on the hunt. But as Tsing has it: „worlds are results of attempts to grasp the contours of a situation, to find its figures, but they do not describe what is actually happening” (Tsing 2010: 50). To describe what is actually happening, the anthropologist must follow multiple lines of action and thought, not lean back on obsolete notions of identity and belonging. By being there, the anthropologist enters into a complex order of doing and imagining, but not as part of a given whole. The particular anthropological interest gives the fieldworker a position to start from, a point of departure into the worlding processes under study – and in progress. I would argue that the anthropological worlding renders it irrelevant whether the anthropologist is at home or abroad. Where does home stop and abroad begin, if we have given up on holism in terms of cultures or nations? As Marilyn Strathern once argued, auto-anthropology is precluded if we recognize that anthropology itself implies a distinct organization of knowledge, which anywhere will result in distinct conceptual registers (Strathern 1987). Once again, it is the epistemological project rather than the empirical that distinguishes anthropology. To round off this discussion of social complexity,

I see it as the result of a bottom-up process of world-making, infiltrated by past experiences and future expectations. Locally, the actions and words of people in other places (e.g. international climate researchers in the case of north Greenland) may come to figure prominently at certain points of this process, thus further complicating the notion of locality, and entailing both practical and imaginative connections and associations far beyond the observable – and even beyond the concrete. This evidently reflects back on the location of the field, addressed also by others (e.g. Coleman and Collins, eds., 2006). The field in some sense may be seen as an „event of place”, in the sense suggested by Doreen Massey (2005), highlighting the ways in which particular gazes and knowledges constitute the „same” location as different places (see also James 2000); each of them may even be differently charged emotionally (Hastrup 2010). In anthropological fieldwork, multiple social encounters make the anthropologist realize that the relevant field is produced in action and conversation. Even if there is no culture in the sense of a given scheme, each event and each action makes a particular frame manifest, which exists only in its being implicit in the event, and which may extend in various directions and sustain different knowledge spaces. We may articulate this frame at different epistemological levels and present our knowledge in more or less universal terms, but it remains an implication. As such it is no explanation.

Scales of knowledge

Discussing social complexity and opening up for vastly differing figurations of the social (by locals and anthropologists alike), we are also led to revisiting our notion of scale, most often thought of in quantitative terms. The traditional holistic ambition entailed an idea that whole societies or cultures had to be known, and they therefore had to be quite small (or at least portrayed as such). It is not as simple as that. Scale is not only a matter of size or extension but also of complexity, dynamics, ideology, and quality. Thus, it has less to do with (geographical) extension than with (social) processes of worlding, producing their own scales of attention, action, imagination, and connection. Again I shall start by briefly looking at the anthropological tradition, before turning to the emerging vocabularies of scaling in the wake of manifest global connectivity. Looking back to early anthropology, we note how the division of labor between anthropology and sociology in the first place was owed to their distinctive objects of study, being small-scale communities and large-scale societies respectively. This was also seen to cover a difference between traditional societies outside of Europe and modern societies within Europe. Durkheim, one of the founders of both disciplines, made his well known distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity along these lines, the former operative in traditional and primitive societies, the latter belonging to the modern, and much more complex world. In this view

it is as if the world itself operated by way of specific models, and the „smaller” the world, the more repetitive, collective and dogmatic. By contrast, the region of Europe in particular seemed to be unpredictable, individualistic, and open. Then was a time, when Europe was still implicitly recognized as the pinnacle of civilization. This is hardly the case today, where we have also had to acknowledge that even the „smallest” of cultures navigated purposefully in a larger, partially unknown world, such as for instance the Pacific islanders, gradually populating even the most distant of islands (Turnbull 2003).

In anthropology, there was a sense of cultures or societies that were more or less alike could be aggregated in larger regions, hence the regionalism mentioned above. They could be seen as variations on a similar theme. An interesting example of such comparative differentiation is found in Robert Redfield’s well-known discussion of the „little” and the „big” traditions. The distinction is cast in terms of size, and masks a distinction between the largely uneducated rural population on the one hand, and the educated, even learned urbanites on the other (see e.g. Redfield 1941, 1960). The two groups might adhere to the same cosmology, but their perceptions and practises were seen as either impoverished or fullblown. Behind the quantitative wording, we thus find a qualitative distinction that we would find slightly disturbing today. We could see Redfield’s analysis as an early effort at getting the local and the global into one and the same model, yet it was also a continuation of a paradigm that placed anthropology squarely on the side of the oral, „little” traditions of the hinterlands, while leaving the big traditions to philologists and other branches of (high) scholarship. Thus, within the culturalist tradition of American anthropology there was a sense that anthropological knowledge consisted in explicating the principles of small, local communities, and their little traditions in the backyard of the larger, more comprehensive and refined knowledge traditions.

We find a significant twist to the discussion of scaling in Claude Lévi-Strauss’ distinction between mechanical and statistical models, i.e. models by which society operates (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 275ff). In suggesting this distinction, Lévi-Strauss explicitly addressed the relation between the scale of the model and that of the phenomena, thus (once again) addressing a rather basic issue in science from an anthropological position. Depending on the nature of the phenomena studied „it becomes possible or impossible to build a model, the elements of which are on the same scale as the phenomena themselves” (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 275). The mechanical models are of the same scale as the phenomena portrayed, while the statistical models are built from elements of a different scale. Lévi-Strauss illustrated the difference by pointing to marriage rules, and suggesting that for instance cross-cousin marriage reflects a social rule on the same scale as the empirical reality (it covers every marriage), while the marriage pattern in Europe can best be ascertained by applying statistical models – resulting in probabilities and identifying propensities.

Even though Lévi-Strauss was keen to stress that there were middle forms, and that the same phenomena might lend themselves to both kinds of models, he still operated with a distinction between the West and the Rest – or between „thermodynamic” and „mechanic” societies (in Charbonnier 1961) – as defined by the scale needed for analysis, and he squarely placed anthropology as a science of mechanical models – also of time – while sociology of necessity adhered to statistical models. I shall not go deeper into this save for noting the Durkheimian legacy inherent in the dichotomy, and reminding us of an earlier attempt at dealing with the relationship between the scale of the world and the scale of the analysis. This is still a productive question in my view. One more precursor to the current discussion of scale should be mentioned here, however briefly. In 1978, Fredrik Barth explicitly addressed the question of social organization and scale and suggested that it could not be taken as an *a priori* analytical distinction. Instead he propagated scale as part of the empirical reality with which anthropology had to deal. In every case, anthropologists had to qualify geographical extension, population numbers, intensity of interaction etc. In Barth’s well taken view, it was neither immaterial whether the society studied consisted of 500 or half a million people, nor whether these people live in a vast desert or in a metropolis (Barth 1978). Scale in this sense more or less explicitly integrates extension and quantity with intensity and quality, which was an important step forward, even if Barth’s main focus was still on scale as a measure of size; this may be why it dropped out of view all too soon along with related trends in anthropology.

In many other ways, the qualitative nature of scale continues to be subsumed under the quantitative, the latter tending to gloss over the former. An example is provided by „minority studies”. It is a disturbing fact that anthropology has found it easier to generalize the „minority” than the „majority”, and has only rarely paused to scrutinize the ideological and relational – that is qualitative – dimensions of such apparently quantitative terms. Again, anthropologists have studied the „smaller” part, the minorities, even when these may outnumber majorities elsewhere, having often gone unstudied precisely because they are majorities (McDonald 1988). The majorities have generally been studied through the identification of smaller, often part-time, communities, be they construction workers, health professionals, actors or other groupings with some shared interest. By contrast, declared minorities are still subject to a degree of orientalism, to invoke Edward Said’s notion (Said 1979), that we might want to reconsider in the anthropological present, where regionalism, culturalism, methodological nationalism and other holistic starting points have given way to a dynamic view of grouping and regrouping as significant forces in an ever fluctuating process of world-making (Hastrup and Olwig 2012).

The point I want to make is that anthropology as such neither lives off the small-scale, nor the closed community, but off its general power to study social worlds – always constituting their own qualitative scales – and being the meeting-

-place of individual action and shared understandings. This is where my puzzlement about „an anthropology of Europe” comes back; is there still something about Europe that requires a particular kind of anthropology – such as Durkheim implied? Or are we victims of a particular spatial reasoning that derive from the Enlightenment and has created its own distinctions of people „within” and „beyond” certain borders (Schippers 2001: 173). This again was historically related to the making of the nation-state, and the invention of a people – culturally, geographically, and administratively (Gellner 1983). Clearly, politico-geographical regions (such as the EU) and individual nation-states still contribute to the perception of the world, but then again what do they mean in anthropology at this age of global connections? Seen from the perspective of social agents, national boundaries do not stop people from thinking and sometimes moving beyond them. Another example from my own field will illustrate how regional and national thinking has become rather blurred. In north-west Greenland people live from hunting for marine mammals. Seal, walrus, polar bear, and narwhal are their stable crops, so to speak, and while not all inhabitants are hunters, hunting remains the only natural economic base. Thus the people appear to be an archetypal High Arctic population, since times immemorial adapted to the extreme natural conditions of the circumpolar North. These seem to fit into categories engendered by Arctic anthropology, a discipline with its own conferences and journals. Yet the people are also very much part of modern Greenlandic society, modelled on the Nordic welfare state, and they are certainly part of the global community, suffering some very tangible consequences of climate change for instance, and intensely following the international debate on global warming all while struggling with the thinning of the sea ice, and the increasing difficulties for hunting and moving about (Hastrup 2009a, 2009b). As everybody else, they live locally and have a distinct sense of place that makes it possible for them to survive as hunters in the first place. Yet, their social imaginary, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor (2004), extends far beyond the immediate horizon set by their emplacement within a particular Arctic landscape.

More generally, I would go along with Latour’s point that it is a mistake in the social sciences to define a particular scale before doing a study; because

scale is what actors achieve by scaling, spacing, and contextualizing each other through the transportation in some specific vehicles of some specific traces. It is of little use to respect the actors’ achievements if in the end we deny them one of their most important privileges, namely that they are the ones defining relative scale. It’s not the analyst’s job to impose an absolute one (Latour 2005: 183-184).

The relevant scale is a function of the study of social actors, whose concerns may outstretch the obviously local by far, without becoming less located, of course. In the worlding process of any people, the near and the far intermingle

and contribute to a particular figuring of the world. In the process, apparently diverse scales become part of the same picture (cf. Latour 2005: 171). This actually sustains the continued value of fieldwork, even when both the local and the global have become destabilized. Within fieldwork based on anthropology, scale can no longer be understood in terms of measurement, or of size such as big versus small. It is not a „well-ordered zoom” (Latour 2005: 185); rather it is a function of knowledge interest and therefore of epistemology. With Marilyn Strathern, we may see scale as more of a matter of perspective than of magnitude (Strathern 2004: xiii-xvi, 47ff). The complexity of empirical matters is the same at any scale, however, as is the ethnographic perplexity; „each single element that appears to make up the plurality of elements seen from a distance on close inspection turns out to be composed of a similar plurality that demands as comprehensive a treatment” (Strathern 2004: xv). Scaling, in this sense, is deeply and irrevocably entangled in the world-making of particular people living in particular places, yet drawing from a host of different repertoires of understanding and from their practical engagement with their surroundings – social, material, and imaginative. Scaling is the operative word; it is part of the process by which we understand the world both in its own terms and with a view to particular scholarly knowledge interests. Depending on what we, as anthropologists, want to know, we may scale our inquiry differently, as already Lévi-Strauss intimated. Given that anthropology itself is a kind of worlding exercise, it also creates a particular „knowledge space”, in the sense suggested by David Turnbull, as an „interactive, contingent assemblage of space and knowledge, sustained and created by social labour” (Turnbull 2003: 4). Knowledge spaces are located, which is altogether different from being local in the conventional anthropological sense of for instance „local knowledge”. Depending on the knowledge interest, the anthropologist will recognize the strategic value of particular phenomena and scale them appropriately, i.e. with a view to the intended explanatory range. The actualities of located concerns certainly affect the questions that one might deem relevant, but the scaling of anthropological knowledge has less to do with geographical extension than with explanatory range. Scaling is both an empirical and an epistemological matter.

To exemplify the process of scaling in this dual sense, I shall once again revert to my fieldwork in north Greenland. If one focuses on distinct local patterns of sharing the game, one might see them as expressions of either historical necessities or present family bonds, implying each their own scale. One might also aim at studying the unstable biological regimes of marine mammals as the sea warms up, and the human-animal relations change and contribute to a deep-seated uncertainty about the future in the wake of global climate change. All kinds of knowledge will be generated from observations and encounters with people over a period of time, and they will be equally located, but they will be of vastly different epistemological scales and perspectives. In the field, we must scale our attention accordingly (Hastrup in press).

I would argue that irrespective of quantity and location, the shared feature of anthropology – of whatever region – is a concern with a social field that unfolds between the universal and the individual, and reducible to neither. Anthropological knowledge can be up- or downscaled along this axis, but it has nothing to do with the local or global as conventionally understood. It is an epistemological scale relating to what we want to know, and to the ways in which our collaborators in the field choose to scale, space, and contextualize particular practises or points of concern. There is no hierarchy of knowledge here; there are simply distinct ways of scaling knowledge, capturing the ways in which people themselves contextualize their concerns.

Anthropological knowledge

Above, I suggested that social worlds – as temporary frames for action and interpretation – emerge through a confluence of empirical and theoretical interests. They are identifiable only by implication and not by observation. Here I would go further and suggest that this is what scholarship is about in more general terms. It also goes for the natural sciences that they by and large deliver interpretations – just think of the climate scenarios – based on a careful observation of phenomena and a processing of them into models of different scales. The social and the natural sciences may study different phenomena and identify different figures in their work, but they are equally engaged in worlding – of making and understanding the materials and forces out of which life takes shape (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 377; see also Ingold 2007; Hastrup 2012). In anthropology, we get there by participating and observing what goes on between people and their surroundings. From the „ethnographic moments”, identified by Strathern (1999) as those moments where empirical and analytical frameworks of understanding obviously clash, we literally seek to figure out the worlds by which people make sense of events and encounters. Thus, far from suggesting an entirely new method, my deliberations lead directly back to fieldwork as the cornerstone in our scientific practice, even if it is now – due to the combined force of world history and epistemological development within the discipline – freed from earlier demands of identifying a totality that would also explain the parts. In my vision of our enterprise, such conception of parts and wholes, as independent identifiable and belonging to each their logical level is no longer tenable. They are completely enfolded in one another, just like the genus and the species are mutually defined (Tsing 2005: 88ff). This logic of the particular and the general constituting each other also extends to the notion of global climate change that I have evoked in the preceding pages, but which is real only through its particular effects. It therefore makes no sense to see either local voices as „disrupting” the global discourse on climate change (Smith 2007) or to cast global climate change

narratives as a threat to the making of Arctic citizens (Bravo 2009), because they are already implicated in each other and in the ongoing worlding processes, that are not confined to the modern social imaginary belonging to the nation state and its embrace of the citizens, as suggested by Taylor (2004). In a truly post-colonial moment, the equality and entanglement of diverse knowledge regimes must be recognized (Verran 2002) Social complexity is bottom-up in the sense that it is constituted in these worlding processes, where it is impossible to distinguish between indigenous (or local) voices and external (or global) narratives. By following the actualities of encounters, actions, interpretations, imaginations, relations etc. anthropologists may eventually identify the figures that distinguish a particular, temporary world – smaller or larger, short- or long-term, partial or total – but even so, it is never closed off from other connections. In contrast to an earlier understanding of context as both a totality and an explanation, we may now see it as a temporary outcome of a worlding process to which anthropology itself is constantly contributing. As Tsing has put it so eloquently: „The gift of worlding is its ability to make figures appear from the mist and to show them as no more than figures. Worlding of this sort has potential for both orientation and disorientation, and the interplay between these states continues to be central to social analysis” (Tsing 2010: 64). It is the flux of social life that is our key subject matter, as are the ways in which people temporarily make sense out of it and take further steps along the lines that are opening up in the process. In their untiring attention to the everyday, anthropologists seek to articulate its implications at many different epistemological scales, and even in the absence of „external” evidence, they produce solid knowledge of the social (Hastrup 2004). Because the process of worlding is an immanent feature of the social, anthropology itself is a never-ending story that contributes importantly to showing the surplus of the present.

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SOCIAL COMPLEXITY AND THE QUESTION OF SCALE:
GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO ANTHROPOLOGY

(Summary)

At present, there is a sense that anthropology is being tested by new global realities. In actual fact anthropology has been permanently tested since its inception, because history has always been on the move. In this article the author discusses the current challenges with a view to identifying various scales of knowledge that all of them are in some sense local. By taking off in a discussion of social complexity as the result of bottom up processes of action and deliberation, it is possible to rethink scale in anthropology without losing the precious foothold in actual social life that was always the hallmark of anthropology. What is being tested right now is not anthropology as such but some of its concepts – notably those that depend on social boundaries.

Key words: social complexity, scale, globalization, world making, figuration