

From a political anthropology to an anthropology of policy

Interview with Cris Shore

By Susana Durão

Cris Shore is one of the few anthropologists who have been studying “the makings of politics” and has put forward creative bridges connecting anthropology, political science, organisational studies and sociology. Shore is currently Chair of Anthropology and Head of Department at the University of Auckland (New Zealand), after lecturing at the Goldsmiths College, University of London (UK), between 1990 and 2003.

Shore’s works include titles such as *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power* (edited with Susan Wright, Routledge, 1997) and the recent *Policy Worlds: Anthropology and the Analysis of Contemporary Power* (edited with Susan Wright and Davide Pero, Berghahn, 2010), focusing on the cultural uses and meanings of politics in different social contexts, or *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives* (edited with Dieter Haller, Pluto, 2005).

But Europe’s inter-nationalist project has been a strong presence in Shore’s work since *The Anthropology of Europe: Identities and Boundaries in Conflict* was published in 1994 (edited with Victoria Goddard and Josep Llobera, Berg). Research on European integration policies, namely through the project “Constructing European Identity: EU Civil Servants and Cultural Policy”, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), led him to conduct fieldwork in different offices of the European Union’s institutions in Brussels from 1995 to 1997, giving rise to *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (Routledge, 2000) and *European Union and the Politics of Culture* (Bruges Group, 2001). Further research interests include the debates about the meaning of ‘European government’, institutional reforms and UE’s role as a global actor.

Along with Marilyn Strathern, Susan Wright and others, Cris Shore was one of the first researchers to approach a most original topic in anthropological studies in the 1990s: audit cultures. Guest editor of a special issue of *Anthropology in Action* on “Universities and the politics of accountability” (with Don Brenneis and Susan Wright, 2005), Shore has done research on university reforms and the economy of knowledge, using ethnographic methods to study the new labour and knowledge production regimes at universities, as well as the notions of person and subjectivity involved in them.

General anthropological themes such as the discipline’s methodological and epistemological distinctive features were explored by Shore in works like *Anthropology and Cultural Studies* (edited with Stephen Nugent, Pluto, 1997) or *The Future of Anthropology: Its Relevance to the Contemporary World* (edited with Akbar

Ahmed, Academic Press, 1995). Cris Shore is currently engaged in an ethnographic study of universities in New Zealand. This is part of a wider international collaborative project between The University of Auckland, Aarhus University (Denmark), and Bristol University (UK) entitled “University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanization”, which is funded by an EU Marie-Curie IRSES grant and the New Zealand Ministry of Research Science and Technology.

IN THIS INTERVIEW, DONE IN 2008 IN A WARM BAR IN LJUBLJANA (Slovenia), where the EASA Congress was taking place under the suggestive title “Experiencing Diversity and Mutuality”, Cris Shore provides a retrospective reading of his own diverse biography within anthropology, while presenting, in a very clear manner, some paths for reflection that, in the English researcher’s opinion, are open before this plural discipline.

SUSANA DURÃO Why did you become an anthropologist?

CRIS SHORE I think it has something to do with encountering “otherness”. There was a certain point in my life when I became aware that the things that define my own culture and society are arbitrary. Everything that I thought was “normal”, “natural”, “axiomatic” was, in fact, culturally specific and context-bound. Most of us grow up thinking that our personal worlds, our families or our society are the centre of the universe. I think the reason I became an anthropologist was that, at a certain point, I became acutely aware of class differences. I grew up in London in the 1960s and 70s. Britain is arguably one of the world’s most class-divided and class-conscious societies, but what is interesting about Britain is that class isn’t just about status, occupation or income-differences; classes in Britain reflect quite profound cultural differences. This is partly because Britain was one of the first countries to industrialise and therefore has a much longer history of class difference. So you find striking differences between working-class and middle-class cultures. I began to notice how some of my friends’ houses had no books on their shelves; how class was reflected in particular ways of acting and talking; how it shaped what people said, their expectations about what they wanted to do – or be – in life, what they thought mattered and the sort of things they aspired to. My dad was a socialist and a politician. I guess both my parents were atheists. But they were also intellectuals. Both of them had gone to Cambridge University, an elite institution, but they weren’t from a particularly privileged or elite background; certainly not my dad. He was just a bright kid

who'd grown up in Liverpool during the 1930s, in the time when it was very depressed, who won a scholarship to Cambridge to study history and politics. That's where he met my mother. She was reading medicine and became a doctor – I think she was one of the first women doctors in Britain – and the first woman to be appointed Deputy-Chief Medical Officer for Britain's National Health Service. So I grew up in that family, this household, where there were four children, where my parents' values were quite left-wing, and where the outlook was very public-service oriented but also very politicised: all we ever seemed to talk about was politics. My dad was a member of the Labour Party: he was head of its research office and wrote several of the early Labour Party manifestos. Then he was elected to Parliament in 1966, and shortly afterwards became a Minister in the Labour governments of the 1970s.

Unlike most intellectual middle-class left-wing people, my parents strongly believed in comprehensive education so they sent all of their children to ordinary, local state schools. The school my brother and I went to was a big London comprehensive, with over two thousand boys from all kind of backgrounds. It was very mixed in terms of race and ethnicity and most of the kids were from working-class backgrounds. It was a tough school; quite violent with a lot of bullying. People were beaten up almost every day in the playground. One boy in my class got stabbed and died there in the playground. I think I was about 13 when it suddenly hit me how divided my world was. At home I talked about the politics, books and ideas and I'd use a language that was very much what Edward Bernstein calls "an elaborated code", with long and complex words. Then when I was at school, I'd find myself talking in a thick South London slang ("You what, mate?"). It was almost a schizophrenic change of personality, but it seemed to come naturally and I wasn't even aware I was doing it; shifting between a middle-class register at home and a South-Londonese "restricted code" at school. I suppose, looking back, it was all about survival; learning how to survive in that large, all-male, institutional context. At school you'd be ridiculed or get into a fight if you used terminology that people considered to be too "posh", and I used to get into a lot of fights at first. Even my name was an embarrassment; my full name is "Crispin", which was unusual in my South London school, so I shortened it to "Cris".

One of my closest friends at that time was from a working-class family – his mum, a single-mother, was a part-time social worker – and they lived on a Council housing estate. We used to spend a lot of time at each other's homes, but I only really registered how different our home life was around the age of 13. I guess that is when I started to become interested in other "cultures".

In 1978 I went to university to study history and politics. That was what I was interested in then – and I guess I am still, which probably explains my interest in things like the anthropology of policy and bureaucracy. I went to Birmingham University, but I didn't enjoy it at all. I didn't like Birmingham

and I was disappointed with the course. Politics is a really fascinating subject but somehow they managed to kill it. The material seemed so dry and boring: dull stuff about comparative political systems and “models”. But my brother had just died in an accident and there were other complicated things going on in my life at that time which made it hard for me to study. So I dropped out of Birmingham University and I worked for a year (driving vehicles, working in pubs and doing manual jobs). But I knew I wanted to go back to university at some point. I’d seen this “modular degree” course at Oxford Brookes University which excited me; it gave you the freedom to select courses from a whole range of different subjects, so I chose this subject called “anthropology” and combined it with social geography. All I knew then was that anthropology dealt with “people” – and I was curious about how other people live. I also felt there was something deeply wrong with “English culture”, but I didn’t quite know what it was. So I studied anthropology and geography and got completely hooked on them in my second year.

After finishing my BA Honours I started to apply for jobs. I really didn’t want to be an academic, but I had a supervisor, a social anthropologist, who encouraged me to do a PhD because I guess I was quite a good researcher. For my final-year dissertation I had spent the summer doing fieldwork on a small island in the lagoon of Venice and had written my thesis about ideological conflict in a small face-to-face community. I was interested in using Durkheim’s theories on the division of labour to theorise the social relations between Catholics and Communists on that small island. I became fascinated by the anthropology of the Mediterranean. But I was interested in left-wing politics, especially debates around Communism and Euro-communism. I had planned to do fieldwork in Poland studying the relationship between the Communist Party and the Catholic Church. I was all ready to leave and had sorted out somewhere to stay in Warsaw for my pre-fieldwork reconnaissance visit. But this was 1981, just when the *Solidarnosc* strike had begun in the shipyards of Gdansk and General Jaruzelski had declared martial law. So Poland was off the agenda.

At the time I started studying anthropology, the discipline was still primarily concerned with studying “third world” societies, particularly poor peripheral peoples and small, lineage-based, face-to-face societies. But with the move towards peasant societies, the Mediterranean and Latin America thinks started to change quite dramatically. What interested me was urban anthropology and topics like ideology, conflict, organisations and institutions, trade unions and political parties. I wanted to do fieldwork in a European city. Somewhere not so big you’d be lost in it, but big enough to have a strong middle class. I searched out three or four medium-size cities in Italy, in the so-called Communist ‘red-belt’ zone (*la cintura rossa*) – Ferrara, Bologna, Pisa – but in the end, I settled on Perugia. Perugia is the regional capital of Umbria, a region with a long history of militancy and a tradition of electing first Socialist and

then Communist local governments. Since the end of the Second World War Perugia and Umbria had been governed by the Italian Communist Party or PCI – the *Partito Comunista Italiano*.

SD The *Partito Comunista Italiano* was very strong in Italy.

CS In 1981, when I started, it was the largest communist party in the Western world, with some two million members, *iscritti*, and a huge local organisation that in many ways was modelled on, and rivalled, the Catholic Church. What interested me too was the fact that the PCI had been pioneering a new model for the Left: what Eric Hobsbawm termed the “Italian road to Socialism”, or what critics denounced as “Euro-communism” which was a way of saying it “was a (Stalinist) wolf in sheep’s clothing”. But the PCI had pioneered a very different interpretation of Marxism which I thought successfully removed “Leninism” from the “Marxism-Leninism” equation whilst retaining core elements of Marxism and a commitment to constitutionalism and democracy. Eventually I wrote a book from my thesis.¹ Originally I had gone to Italy to study the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Communist Party but I eventually gave up on the Catholic Church. I found it too difficult to be based in both camps simultaneously, especially given the antagonism between them. That was an important finding and one that contradicted David Kertzer’s study of PCI activists in Bologna, which was entitled *Comrades and Christians* (1980). My ethnography explored the party from the bottom upwards. I spent a year and a half living in Italy, working with local PCI activists (*militanti di base*) in Perugia, but I also shifted focus from the local section to the PCI Federation and regional organisation, and spent some time in Rome interviewing party leaders, attending national congresses, rallies and marches, and even participating in a two-week training course for party leaders (*quadri*) at the PCI’s national school outside of Rome (*La Frattocchie*).

SD It was a new kind of ethnography.

CS It was new on several counts. Firstly, doing anthropology in a European city context and working with political activists and middle-class intellectuals was quite novel at that time. Second, no one, as far as I know, had ever done an ethnography of a major political party, and certainly not a communist party. I was interested in the way party organisation and ideology intersected with issues of identity and culture. The PCI in Italy had created a counter-culture that was a “way of life” for many of its activists. Within the anthropology of

1 Cris Shore, 1990, *Italian Communism: The Escape from Leninism, an Anthropological Perspective*, London, Pluto Press.

the Mediterranean, several people were doing work on social movements like Anarchism in Spain. But most of this work was still based on small communities and villages. That Mediterranean ethnography had a major influence on my own intellectual formation. But I combined it with a real interest in politics, political theory, debates around nationalism, nation-state formation and identity, political organisation, and even organisational theories.

SD And what were your main theoretical influences?

CS I was really inspired by the literature on nation-state formation, particularly the work of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson. One of my supervisors at the University of Sussex where I did my PhD was Ralph Grillo, who had done some interesting work on the history and concept of “nation” and “state” in Europe. I was also encouraged during my MA year to do a study of Trotskyism in the British Labour Party, so I was very honed on Marxist theory – and I particularly liked Gramsci’s work. During my undergraduate years, I was also influenced a lot by one of my lecturers who had worked in Greece. That was Renée Hirschon, a close colleague and contemporary of João Pina Cabral. Renée’s fieldwork was among displaced migrants from Anatolia in a slum area near Athens. I worked as a research assistant for her while she was writing her book, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*. She had a big influence on me, sparking my interest in anthropology and encouraging me towards further study.

SD That kind of intellectual encouragement is still very important.

CS I owe a huge debt to some of my university teachers. I really do believe, quite passionately, in the value of teaching. I like teaching and am very aware of its importance in forming us. It probably sounds like a cliché, but a good teacher can really change a life and make a difference.

My other main subject at that time was urban geography and I had some wonderful teachers at Oxford Brookes who introduced us to debates in philosophy. Geography was an eclectic subject and introduced me to some fantastic debates: we studied environmentalism but also Liberalism, Marxism, Anarchism, phenomenology and the history and philosophy of science. And that had a big influence as well: this bringing together of politics, geography and philosophy with the methods and concerns of social anthropology. And I say *social* anthropology; I see myself very much as a social, not a cultural anthropologist, in the North-American sense. If you ask me what the *main* influences were, I think the answer is social theory in general: Weber, Durkheim, Marx and their legacies. In a way, these are “The Greats” and they still provide a fantastic platform for making sense of societies.

SD And after the PhD how did you start studying this specific topic of “anthropology of policy”?

CS I had no intention of being an academic. We all pick up certain values from our parents and like my parents I thought academia was not really engaged enough with the world. The professions or jobs that they valued were things like doctor, politician, lawyer, and journalist: something where you were actively engaged in an influential public-sector role.

I was in a hurry to finish my PhD, get a job and get on with life. I finished my PhD in just three-and-a-half years, which is fast for social anthropology. I only had three years’ money and I’d spent eighteen months already in the field and six months doing my MA year. That left only six months of funding to write up my thesis after returned from fieldwork. So I had to get a job somewhere and found one teaching geography and anthropology.

At that time, I really wanted to work for the trade union movement. Looking back now I think, “why on earth did I want to work for the British trade union movement?” [laughs] Wisdom comes with hindsight. Actually, I wanted to work for a political research department, I didn’t want to be a trade union official or anything like that. My ideal job would be one where you could work on forming policy or providing documents or research that would help the trade union movement or help in terms of political thinking about government or whatever.

I applied for a lot of jobs very much on spec and sent out letters to about forty unions. I got called for interviews by about two or three, and one of them offered me a job, working for the Electrical Engineers Union, which is quite a big one in Britain.

But at the same time I also got an offer of a job back in Italy. A friend telephoned me to say that the university was looking for someone to teach in the Faculty of Political Science. It was a job that combined being an English language teacher and political science lecturer because they wanted someone who could teach second year and third year courses that combined political sciences with English language learning. It was a dilemma: on the one hand, the start of a serious political career working for the labour movement and on the other, a chance to return to the city where I had done my fieldwork. My partner was very interested in the prospect of living in Italy, so that sealed the decision. But I also didn’t like the idea of being on a “career” ladder. I think attitudes are different nowadays. Students worry much more about jobs and job security. They really are very cautious and acutely aware of how much their education is costing them. When I was a student, we still had the privilege and the good fortune to be more relaxed about all that and to study a subject out of interest rather than as a kind of vocational training.

I worked in Italy for about a year and found teaching in an Italian university enormously interesting and revealing, but also frustrating. George Orwell wrote

in *Down and Out in London and Paris* that you only really get to understand a country properly after you've spent some time working there. I think I discovered a lot of things about Italian culture and society that I had missed during my fieldwork. Being a public employee in the Italian state-sector, *impiegato dello stato*, I saw Italy from a new perspective. And what I saw wasn't very nice.

My friends used to say that Italy is a great country to live in if you are self-employed, on holiday, or have enough money to be free of all the webs of clientelism that dominate most spheres of work. But if you are working for a public-sector organization it's hard to avoid becoming embroiled in the system of *raccomandazione*. The unspoken question was always "which group do you belong to?", i. e. what faction or network are you part of, and who is your protector or patron? I sort of knew about this, being an anthropologist of the Mediterranean, but living it, experiencing it first-hand, was quite different.

I will just give you one example. For the first four months I was teaching in this University, I didn't get paid the salary that was owed to me. I started to get worried about this and with no money coming in, I was forced to offer private lessons just to eat and pay the bills. I asked my colleagues and they said, "*Non ti preoccupare*" – don't be worried – Cris, "you *will* get paid; it's just that people in the administration like to hold on to our salaries in order to gain the interest. You'll get your salary eventually, perhaps in five or six months from now, but it will definitely come." I said: "How do you tolerate this?" Their answer was, "This is normal".

The very first article I ever wrote, in 1989, was an analysis of corruption in the Italian university system. I was trying to make sense of how it all worked. It probably wasn't a very good article because it was borne out of anger as much as curiosity; and it was a difficult subject to write about. The journal I sent it to said, "We can't publish this or we'll risk being sued for libel. You'll have to change it and make the place and the people completely anonymous." I thought: how can this be libel? It's all true! But I did what they asked and disguised the location and the article, my first article, was published.²

I realised that life in Italy was going to be difficult for a foreigner no matter how integrated I had become. There were all sorts of invisible barriers and accepted cultural practices that I found hard to accept. I really disliked the way patronage relations dominated the workplace. And most of my Italian friends – apart from those who are self-employed – don't find the workplace a rewarding environment in which to invest their energies. Having professional autonomy in my work is important to me. I don't like clientelism. I don't much like the indifference of legal-rational bureaucracy either, but I would rather confront that than the seemingly more "personal" – but in reality almost feudal and just

2 Cris Shore, 1989, "Patrons, bureaucrats and the nation-state: social relations in an Italian university", *Journal of the Anthropology Society of Oxford (JASO)*, XX (1): 56-73.

as disempowering – relationships based on patronage. Interestingly, the commonly used term for university professors in Italy was *i baroni*.

After I left Italy I went to work for the European Parliament in Brussels to do an internship as a researcher (*stagiaire*). That was only four or five months but that gave me some interesting insight into the workings of the EU and its institutions. I remember thinking at the time, “this would be a fascinating place for an anthropologist to study”. You had all these different national cultures interacting within this weird institutional environment; all these interesting corridor politics and different ways of operating; united under one political roof. It seemed to combine all the kinds of things I was interested in, like the politics of culture, nationalism, trans-nationalism and state-formation.

That’s part of the reason why, when I got a job as an anthropologist I returned to Brussels. I had an idea for a research project to focus on European integration at an institutional level and viewed from the “inside”. It started off as a study of the EU’s cultural actions, its information and communication policies, and how the EU projects its external identity. But I then got interested in studying the people behind these policy initiatives and representations. Then I took it a step further and started to look at the dynamics and relations occurring inside of the EU institutions themselves.

In our panel,³ one of the aims was to open up the seeming “black box” of organisations and institutions. That’s really what I wanted to do for the European Commission: to gain a picture of what’s really going on in the formation of this new European supranational organisation.

SD You’ve stated in your books and papers that you understand the anthropology of policy to be different from an anthropology of politics, political anthropology. Can you explain this idea? What’s left of the old, classical political studies?

CS There are two things to say about the anthropology of policy but let me answer by putting it in context. I got interested in the idea of an anthropology of policy in 1990, at the time when we created a new journal called *Anthropology in Action*. I was the founding editor and the journal was part of an organisation called the British Association for Anthropology in Policy and Practice (*BASAPP*). Part of the journal’s rationale was to find a voice for people who had trained as social anthropologists but were working outside of academia. They were working in places like hospitals, nursing, local government, social work and in legal firms. Anthropology was producing more PhD students than could ever be employed within the university system. We felt that there was

3 “The World(s) of Bureaucrats” (W052), coordinated by Karin Geuijen and Renita Thedvall, moderation by Cris Shore, EASA’s Biennial Conference, 2008.

something interesting coming out of this work. It wasn't just people using anthropology to reflect on their own practice; but they were bringing new ideas to anthropology from their professional practices. When we created *Anthropology in Action* we wanted to set out a kind of manifesto saying that this is *not* "applied anthropology" but something new and different: we were looking at institutions and organisations, at policy processes and at professional practice itself.

Many languages make no distinction between "politics" and "policy": for example, in Italian *la politica* means both policy and politics. In English, these words have different meanings. "Politics" refers to the whole realm of power relations and the relationship between government and the governed, and all the debates around forms of *governance*. "Policy" refers to something more specific, although it's a complicated concept with a curious history. Policy includes all those ideas and codified formulas that governments use to bring about their particular political visions. But how we define policy is also part of the ongoing debate that we are having in anthropology. Susan Wright and I edited a book in 1997 – *Anthropology of Policy* – which set out a framework for what a focus on policy might entail for the discipline. We have just finished editing a new book – *Policy Worlds* – which pushes the analysis further and revisits many of the questions raised in that first book.

Those old debates are still relevant: i.e. what exactly is this phenomenon we call "policy"? When does a policy begin and end? And how do policies "work" as technologies of power? Policies are programmes for action. They are condensed symbols and floating signifiers. They also have complicated "social histories". In Bruno Latour's sense, we can also think of them as "actants", i.e. objects that have a degree of agency and often very complex social lives. A party manifesto or a government legislative programme is full of policies that are action-oriented. These are typically legal-rational outlines of intention, or plans for what is to be done. So policies are social and political blueprints. But a policy is more than just a blueprint; it's also about power, authority and effects; i.e. how you translate that plan into action, who is authorised to put it into practice, and with what results or unintended consequences? So we are really talking about policy as a socio-cultural process, or a set of related processes.

When we think of policies we think about ideas, about conceptions of what needs changing in an organisation or society, how these decisions get translated into programs of action. We think of different scales or levels, processes and procedures, and the effects that policies have – or the reactions they produce. Thinking about policy in this way you realise that what you've got here isn't simply the study of a linear or rational process by which certain actors try to change society – because policy is always instrumental, always about trying to intervene upon the social world. One of the great problems in anthropology and in social theory in general is how to connect macro-level, global processes

to micro-level everyday practices that people engage in. There have been many attempts at theorising that link. Some people talk about “structure versus agency” or the “global and the local”, or “material culture versus embodiment and practice”. And nobody’s really come up with a very clear methodology for how to do connect these dimensions in a single framework. But when we think about policy or follow its trajectory – its genealogy, the language used to frame and represent it, the way it is translated into practice, its institutionalisation, and the effects it creates – we suddenly realise that what we have here is a methodological tool for connecting the global to the local and for linking structure with ideology, agency and subjectivity.

SD That’s a great insight.

CS If policies are the vehicles used by political leaders or elites to shape the social arena, they also provide an anthropological lens for studying those elites and the way those policy processes work at different levels. Policies bring together actors and institutions across different sites and scales, from the local to the national and international. They also create new networks and new communities; new forms of “culture” if you like. Tracking these connections is easier said than done as it involves multi-sited analysis, but at least it gives us a way of thinking creatively and conceptually about those relationships. It also enables us to take more seriously Laura Nader’s call for anthropologists to *study up*, although a better term is perhaps what Sue Wright and Susan Reinhold call *studying through*.

You asked me earlier on, “How does the anthropology of policy differ from political anthropology?” Well, in a way, it does and it doesn’t. I think both Sue Wright and I come from a background in political anthropology. I probably come from a background where I’ve been more interested in politics and political theory itself. And everything I’ve ever studied, all my work, has been around these political issues. I suppose that’s just a reflection of the indelible stamp of my own formation.

When we wrote that first book, in a way, what I think we were trying to do was to update political anthropology and we drew on a lot on classic works on language, oratory, discourse and power by people like Maurice Bloch, Talal Asad, and Michel Foucault. But we were also trying to think about the relationship between ideology, practice and systems of governance. At the time we wrote that book, political anthropology needed updating. There were some people doing work on language and politics, on colonialism and hegemony, and on forms of resistance. There were some people doing work on the role of symbolism in politics. And there were some people doing work on ethnicity and political organisations. But there were relatively few ethnographic studies of parties or political elites or “studying up” in Laura Nader’s sense of that

term. So, yes, it was an attempt to provide a new dimension; and in that book we made a few quite outlandish claims. I remember thinking, “Why don’t we make an argument that policy represents a ‘new field’ of anthropology – like archaeology, applied anthropology, or linguistic anthropology?” I’m not sure how many people would agree with that, but we tried to make a convincing argument that you could take policy as a way of understanding modern society and culture. Policy was that great “taken for granted”; it was the “elephant in the room”. Everyone was aware of it but no one had ever articulated that policy should be an object of study. Yet it seems quite normal for anthropologists to analyse and problematise the things that appear most prevalent in a society. I suspect in Portuguese society today, *política* is one of those terms that you’ll often hear being used in a wide range of different institutional settings.

If we were ethnographers doing fieldwork in the New Guinea Highlands or the plains of Mongolia and we found that people there kept using a particular word or concept, we’d focus in on it. Most anthropologists have tried to get insights into a culture through particular master symbols, keywords or concepts that seem to shape it. So we tried to take the lid off the “black box” that is policy to examine how it actually works. Of all the projects I’ve been involved in, I think *The Anthropology of Policy* was one of the most innovative. It had arisen from two or three conferences. One of them was a workshop we held at the EASA Conference. We were surprised and pleased by the reaction to that book. We didn’t expect it to have such a big impact.

SD Why did you choose to study European Union bureaucracy from the point of view of visual and communication policy?

CS That was partly because I was really interested in those debates around nation-state formation, nationalism and theories of communication. Both Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner argued that nation-states do not rise to self-consciousness: they are invented where previously they never existed. Benedict Anderson shows how that process occurs. In a sense, prior to the 19th century, there were very few nation-states or very few self-conscious nations. So he asks the question, “what were the technologies and conditions that made it possible for people to imagine themselves not simply as members of a local community or of Christendom, but as subjects and citizens of a nation-state?” And he says it was communication technologies such as the novel, the newspaper, the museum, and the cartographic survey. I was interested in Europe or what this meant for the European Union. What’s the European equivalent of the novel, museum, map, or newspaper? Can you create a European entity without these integrating technologies? How do you forge a sense of “we Europeans”? So that’s why I started focusing on the way Europe has been symbolised; or how it represents or symbolises itself.

SD Could you sum up the main theoretical insights of your recent work? What, for example, do you teach your students?

CS I'm currently engaged in two projects. The first is a study of EU diplomacy and the external delegations of the European Union. At Auckland University my colleagues and I have created a "Europe Institute" and some of us are interested in the evolution of the EU as a global actor. We are trying to do an ethnographic study of the new European External Action Service in the Asia-Pacific region. This is part of a long-standing interest of mine in questions of representation, "Europeanization" and European state formation. The second project is an anthropological study of universities and university in New Zealand, which is a development of the work I've been doing on "audit culture" and neoliberal governmentality. I suppose one of the main theoretical insights there is that these discourses of "efficiency", "transparency" and "accountability" which have become such pervasive features of contemporary organisations and society – and which typically present themselves as 'technical' and politically neutral forms of management – are manifestations of the new forms of governance and power that have emerged with advanced liberalism. These are the political technologies and "techniques of the self" that have become the foundations of what some would call "neoliberal governmentality". These regimes are curiously disempowering and difficult to oppose; we often find ourselves actively complicit in our own subjugation to these bureaucratic and managerialist structures, despite our opposition to them.

SD And this is a bridge to what I want to ask you now. At EASA's panel "The World of Bureaucrats..." you made some interesting remarks about what the anthropology of bureaucracy could be. Can you recall some of these insights?

CS Well, there's a missing area in anthropology, I think, or a very underdeveloped one – let's call it the anthropology of bureaucracy, sometimes it's been called the anthropology of organisations and institutions – and I think that's one of the cutting edges of the discipline. There has been some good work done there but it has tended to be quite fragmented. It's a rich field given that we live in a world dominated by organisations, corporations and bureaucracies.

SD I remember reading a Eric Wolfe text⁴ in which he says that organisations have been ignored by anthropologists and that management theory took them

4 Eric R. Wolfe, 2001, "Facing power: old insights, new questions", in Eric R. Wolf, *Pathways of Power: Building an Anthropology of the Modern World*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 383-397.

over; anthropologists have not conducted interpretive insights about the kind of power these organisations have and are producing at many scales, forms and domains – they’ve left them to others.

CS I think we have. We’ve left the field to others, which is a great pity. Why is that? I believe it’s partly that there is still some resistance within anthropology to the very idea of doing fieldwork, doing ethnography in more local, Western settings. There’s still a kind of old ethic that says that real anthropology is ethnography conducted in remote, exotic, third-world societies. It’s just people who have a vested interest. That’s the kind of anthropology they did. There was the old division of labour which had it that sociology would be the discipline that studied Western capitalist industrialist societies and anthropology could study “the others”. I’ve never done any work in a third world country. I’m interested in Western industrial societies, the conditions of our own existence, the corporations and institutions that dominate our lives – what Laura Nader termed the ‘hidden hierarchies’ of power.

SD And today you can find aspects of the so (wrongly) called “third world” in the (heterogeneous and almost impossible to identify) “first world” and vice-versa. I’m for the combination.

CS Absolutely. The other reason why anthropologists have not developed the field of organisations is probably because we are still a very small discipline compared to, say, sociology, politics, business or psychology; the study of organisations has been largely colonised by these disciplines. A lot of them use ethnographic approaches and qualitative methods, but they don’t use or understand them in the way that anthropologists do.

A further reason why the anthropology of bureaucracy and organisation remains under-developed, apart from our own disciplinary conservatism about what constitutes “proper anthropology”, is that good organisational research isn’t easy to do: you’ve got to negotiate problems of access, then there’s the whole problem of ethics which get complicated if, as often happens with ethnographies of organisations, you are part of the organisation you are trying to research. I edited a book called *Elite Cultures*.⁵ In the introduction, there was a similar question: why is the anthropology of elites such an underdeveloped area in the discipline? One of the obvious answers is that, by definition, most elites like to control the way they are represented and so they’re not particularly happy to have nosy, provocative anthropologists revealing the things that they would rather not show in public. That’s part of it; you can’t go and pitch your tent in the middle of the boardroom of IBM or Coca-Cola or Nike.

5 Cris Shore and Stephen Nugent (eds.), 2002, *Elite Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, Routledge.

It's very hard to get access to those sorts of people and those kinds of field sites. Not impossible, but difficult.

SD There's an ethnography by Gideon Kunda, called *Engineering Cultures*⁶ that explores how management leaders give courses in enterprise cultures. The author studies in depth this kind of training on "corporate culture".

CS Ulf Hannerz and his colleagues in Stockholm were involved in a similar project looking at cosmopolitanism and transnationalism and people who work as professional cultural translators, interpreters, mediators and brokers, such as people who teach businessmen how to do work in Saudi Arabia, and how to respect local customs and protocols when negotiating trade or commercial deals overseas.

SD Do you think a real dialogue is possible between anthropology and organisational studies?

CS I think it is possible. I think it depends where you are. At Auckland, I know that in business studies/organisational studies, there's quite an interesting group of people who have formed a qualitative research methods' group, they meet every week and have seminars. But they're very much a minority within their respective disciplines. Their complaint is that management studies, business studies, international relations and organisational studies are still trapped in the paradigm of positivism. Their methods are still quantitative; they don't really engage with "real people"; and they don't really have a coherent idea of culture or agency. So, yes, there are some people in international relations, in organisational studies who are more predisposed towards interpretative or qualitative methods – and we need to build bridges with them because we can make some very useful liaisons.

SD Like we do or could do with political scientists.

CS We could do, yes. But we still have a problem in anthropology, in that most anthropologists tend to work on their own. There is very much this tradition of the lone scholar doing fieldwork, interpreting his or her own experience, and we don't tend to work in large interdisciplinary teams – which is more typical of the science model of research. Although, having said that, in some areas we do. In the anthropology of health and medicine, there's much

6 Gideon Kunda, 2006, *Engineering Cultures: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*, Temple University.

more of a pattern of an anthropologist being one member of a larger group looking at epidemiology or TB.

SD And this connection between the study of policy and the world economy and market system, do you think it's necessary to link these two areas of study?

CS Yes. I have enormous respect for those anthropologists who have a really good mastery of political economy. There's a strength in it – and a weakness. The strength is that it does give you this fantastic global overview: you can see how historical patterns of inequality or power have shaped the environments in which people work. The weakness is that the level of analysis is often quite remote and distant from the level at which real people operate. The trick is to connect these levels. But you're right; if you're going to do work on politics and policy and how these affect people's lives, you do need that historical material context. But whether or not everything needs to be bracketed in a kind of world systems' theory perspective is open to question. The things that we observe at the ground level very often are manifestations of wider, global patterns; and it's those bigger processes that are more theoretically interesting to reflect on. Personally, I'm more interested in political processes than economic patterns. Some people would say that society is really all driven by economics and I think, well, some of it is, but social and cultural processes are important too. It may seem as though our social system is embedded in the economy, but in reality it is the economic system that is embedded in society, not the other way around.

SD What do you think about this idea of Marilyn Strathern,⁷ and others, that we live in a kind of “audit culture”? You have a text in the book and have dedicated some thought to the issue in a volume of *Anthropology in Action*.⁸

CS I started getting interested in what was happening at universities when I was Head of Department at Goldsmith's College. In Britain, we were going through these major reforms of higher education. They had started to introduce, even in the early 1990s, all sorts of performance measures, new regimes of accountability, and I started writing a bit about it. We need to write about the things that worry us. I don't like sterile, detached, academic writing that's very scholarly but doesn't connect. I guess it's important to try and work out on paper what's going on and shaping not just your life, but

7 Marilyn Strathern (ed.), 2000, *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*, Routledge.

8 Cris Shore, Don Breneis and Susan Wright (eds.), 2005, “Audit culture and the politics of accountability”, special issue of *Anthropology in Action*.

other people's lives. "Audit culture": Sue and I used the term in that article we wrote in 1999. I know that Michael Power used the phrases "audit society" and "auditability". I think it's a really important phenomenon. The book that Marilyn edited was great because it drew on a whole series of other examples. There's a chapter there about the World Bank and there are examples from Canada and India, and so on. I've carried on some of that work in my ethnography of university reform project by asking: what is the effect of two decades of neoliberalisation on academia? How is all this affecting the way in which academics and students conduct themselves? How do they see themselves as a result? How are their subjectivities being interpolated by that? In fact, I've just published an article on that.⁹

It was nice to do that. Having left Britain five years ago, I still had a whole archive of material that I had collected while I was there. A lot of this was on the impact of the audit culture on public-sector professions, particularly the unanticipated and often perverse effects it was having in the field of higher education. I study something like audit culture not because I'm fascinated by higher education or that I think universities are particularly important for the rest of the world *per se*. I mean, who really cares about academics? But this is an environment that I can study because I know it very well. People have said to me, "Why don't you carry this audit culture approach to look at other professions such as banking or insurance companies?" And I think, great, I hope someone will do that, but I don't really have the time at the moment. I also think universities are important to study because they're just one site among many where you can witness all the effects of globalisation and neoliberalisation. They are laboratories for analysing things like internationalisation, new public management, and ideas about accountability. They're all there for scrutiny and we experience them first-hand. I believe the politics of the academy has epistemological and philosophical relevance to anthropology as a discipline and it gives us an angle, a handle, for making sense of our world; this "runaway world" in which we live.

SD You mentioned before, and I was very interested in this question, that when anthropologists do research in bureaucratic fields or organisations, they tend to forget the enormous contribution of the social sciences. You gave the example of Max Weber, how forgotten he is, and it is so important that this is remembered.

CS Yes, I think it is. There's a problem in all disciplines, and anthropology is no exception: the pressure of fashion. At some time in the late 1980s anthropology went through its cultural turn, its linguistic turn, its flirtation

9 Cris Shore, 2008, "Audit culture and illiberal governance: universities and the politics of accountability", *Anthropological Theory*, 8 (3): 278-298.

with postmodernism. It was as if we'd suddenly discovered a new paradigm that rendered irrelevant everything that went before; everything was "socially constructed" through discourse and language – so the focus shifted to representation and deconstruction. The key theorists all seemed to be French and post-structuralist: Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Foucault, maybe a bit of Roland Barthes or Pierre Bourdieu and a few others; and that was about it. You drew a line and pretended that everything that came before 1986 was stuck in an outdated "realist paradigm" and that everything that came after was somehow more critical and liberated. And secondly, after 1989, with the collapse of communism (and this is an example of how political economy can affect the academy), it was no longer fashionable for anyone to read Marx or even classic Sociology like Weber or Durkheim. There are a lot of anthropology departments, or sociology departments, where they no longer teach those authors. They prefer to teach the sociology of culture and cultural studies; or themes like the sociology of violence, the sociology of racism, subject positionality, cyborg culture and so on. You could also say that it's partly the influence of American cultural anthropology and cultural studies, which are not so rooted in a sociological tradition.

Anthropologists like Clifford Geertz argue that we're much closer aligned to literary studies than social sciences. They seem really interested in culture as if it were an autonomous realm. But I think there are some historical explanations. I think that there is a combination of the disillusionment with all left-wing writing. Durkheim was a socialist. Weber was a critic of modernity coming from, I would say, a fairly left-wing position; and Marx, well, certainly. Durkheim may have been anti-Marxist but he was still trying to put forward a left-wing position. And I think that most of the problems those classic writers were grappling with, they're just as relevant today: like the problem of understanding contemporary capitalism, bureaucracy and alienation, and how to theorise the relationship between individual and society. Class is no longer a main problem for anthropologists; it's almost like it's discounted. We look at ethnicity, we look at the politics of difference. We look at race, ethnicity and gender, but where does class figure in all that?

SD Or poverty even?

CS We don't even talk about poverty anymore. We call it "social exclusion". There's a very interesting semantic shift that disguises the real problem by portraying it as something that it's not. We need, at least, to have an awareness of what some of the great social writers, social thinkers in the past wrote about, otherwise we're in danger of trying to reinvent the wheel or there'll be a kind of naivety in our thinking. When we were talking about bureaucracy in EASA's panel, there were a lot of people launching in there without a clear concept of

what is this thing called bureaucracy. We had lots of interesting insider analyses of what these people who are defined as bureaucrats (or maybe don't define themselves as bureaucrats), these administrators, or these police officers do. But if we start from the premise that these people are "bureaucrats", then we should at least spend time clarifying what "bureaucracy" is all about. The other point is simply that sociology hasn't remained static either. It's moved on and there's a lot of really interesting new work. I'm not completely up to date with where Sociology has got to. I know there was a fantastic book by Martin Albrow many years ago called *Bureaucracy*.¹⁰

SD Could you tell me more about New Zealand universities? After five years there, has it been a positive experience?

CS Yes, it has been positive. The New Zealand university system is not as well funded as in other countries. It's not a particularly rich country; but we have a good university system. And certainly, we have academic freedom and intellectual autonomy. Collegial relationships are pretty good. Funding for PhD students is not so good as it might be. I generally get back to Europe twice a year; I can do that. But New Zealand's universities are going through the same pressures and reforms as they are in Europe. They're being told that they have to be more efficient; that they have to compete in the global knowledge economy; that we all have to do more for less, and that research should be more orientated towards the needs of industry and commerce. I don't think it's as bad as some of the reforms in Britain or elsewhere. They've always been quite lean organisations. I know that if you go to Scandinavia conditions of employment would be fabulous by comparison. In New Zealand, they've always been quite tough; and now they've relaxed a little bit. We still have neoliberalism, but it is not as rampant or as vicious as it was in the 1980s. I hope it stays that way.

SD What do you think will be the place or role of anthropology in the next future?

CS Well, I'm a great optimist. I think anthropology is a fabulous discipline. I really do. It is unique among the social sciences in the way it aspires to be holistic, the way it tries to understand the points of view of the people it deals with yet situates its understanding in a wider social-cultural context. Its methodology is empirical but not empiricist. If it didn't exist, other disciplines would find a need to invent it. So, yes, we may be small and marginal but our discipline has a value that is far greater than its numerical or institutional size. I know that in some countries colleagues feel that anthropology is under threat

10 Martin Albrow, 1970, *Bureaucracy: Key Concepts in Political Science*, Palgrave Macmillan.

and that governments don't want to fund anthropology anymore. And it may be the case that this is part of a more global trend or fashion; that governments everywhere want more applied sciences and commercialisable research. But when some of our mature students who've done degrees in business studies, or accounting, or even literature, say to me, "I wish I'd discovered anthropology when I was younger!"... It's that sort of reaction and that level of enthusiasm for doing anthropology that remind me why it is such an important discipline. It does give you a unique perspective on the human condition and on the problems people face in the world today. Not all anthropology is great, not all anthropologists are particularly insightful. But some ethnographies that I've read are really exciting. I would say, for future generations: value the things that are exciting and remember what makes this discipline important.