

Public of the Economic and Environmental Impacts of Biodiesel and Ethanol Development in Carlisle, PA." Karen was also awarded a year's student membership in C&A. Entries covered a broad geographic and topical range, and the selection committee was very pleased with the number of submissions and their quality. We thank all students who submitted papers and encourage others to submit in next year's competition. Look for the 2009 call in an upcoming C&A column and look for summaries of the winning papers in next month's column. Thanks to Lisa Markowitz (U Louisville), chair, Ben Blount (C&A President), Anita Hill (C&A President-elect), and Carla Roncoli (U Georgia) for their work on the committee.

Our column welcomes all materials of interest to C&A members. Please direct inquiries to Ronald Rich at rdrich95@sbcglobal.net.

Evolutionary Anthropology Society

JOHN P ZIKER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Evolutionary Anthropology in Europe

The fourth European Human Behavior and Evolution (EHBE) meeting, and first of the newly formed EHBE Association, will be held at the University of St Andrews April 6–8, 2009. The conference will bring together researchers across multiple disciplines who are studying human behavior from an evolutionary perspective. EHBEA aims to provide a genuinely interdisciplinary European research forum representing the main branches of human behavioral ecology, evolutionary psychology, cultural evolution and related subdisciplines. The conference doubles as a flagship meeting for "Cultaptation," a European Union-funded interdisciplinary project investigating dynamics and adaptation in human cumulative culture. The EHBEA Steering Committee includes Kevin Laland, Rebecca Sear, Tom Dickins and David Lawson, and the conference is organized by Kevin Laland, Gillian Brown, Luke Rendell and Lewis Dean. Plenary speakers include Monique Borgerhoff Mulder (UC Davis), Rob Boyd (UCLA), Val Curtis (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), Marcus Feldman (Stanford U) and Joan Silk (UCLA). Further information is available at <http://biology.st-andrews.ac.uk/ehbe2009>.

Cultaptation is a research project sponsored by the European Commission through the Sixth Framework Programme. Based at the University of Stockholm, the project has generated a number of anthropologically relevant publications and has organized a computer-based tournament to explore how people learn about unfamiliar environments. The tournament is now closed but additional information can be found on the project website: www.intercult.su.se/cultaptation. The Cultaptation project asserts that human culture is cumulative, which means that beliefs, art, technology, social norms and other aspects of what is termed culture

results from many generations of change. In light of biological evolution, the rise of human culture is very rapid, and so is adaptation to new environments.

An example of a 2007 publication coming from Cultaptation collaborators is Magnus Enquist, Kimmo Eriksson and Stefano Ghirlanda's "Critical Social Learning: A Solution to Rogers's Paradox of Nonadaptive Culture" (*American Anthropologist* 109[4]: 727-34). This article expands on Alan Rogers's game theory model of the evolution of social learning. Rogers's paradoxical conclusion was that social learning did not increase the fitness of a population. These authors add imperfections in individual and social learning and incorporate "critical social learning," which "solves an adaptive problem first by social learning, and then by individual learning if socially acquired behavior proves unsatisfactory." Critical social learning is an evolutionarily stable strategy under predictable conditions, but not when transmission is highly unfaithful, the environment is highly variable, or social learning is much more costly than individual learning, according to the Enquist et al model.

Contributions to this column are welcome and may be sent to John Ziker (jziker@boisestate.edu). Columns are archived at www.evanthsoc.org.

General Anthropology Division

LUKE ERIC LASSITER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

GAD Committees and Interest Groups

The General Anthropology Division benefits from several committees and interest groups, all of which provide ways to engage our membership in the mission of GAD. This month, Christopher Furlow (U Florida and Santa Fe C) offers a brief synopsis of the Committee for the Anthropology of Science, Technology and Computing (CASTAC), a standing membership committee of GAD.

The Committee for the Anthropology of Science, Technology and Computing

By Christopher A Furlow (CASTAC Chair)

CASTAC was founded nearly 20 years ago by anthropologists working on the newly emergent topic of computing. The Committee for the Anthropology of Computing, as it was first known, soon developed into CASTAC as anthropologists working at the intersection of anthropology and the interdisciplinary field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) joined together to grapple with new theoretical and methodological questions. For example, at a time when ethnography was being critically reexamined in anthropology and uncritically adopted in STS they asked: How should anthropologists study "technoscience" in contexts unfamiliar to anthropology like laboratories, hospitals, universities, corporations and the virtual worlds of computing? What is the boundary between humans and machines?

In the 1990s, CASTAC constituted the primary institutional setting within the AAA for anthropologists working on technoscience and it was during this period that the anthropology of technoscience came of age. Michael Fischer and then AAA President Annette Weiner lauded the anthropology of technoscience as a major new area of innovative research. Gary Downey, Joseph Dumit and Sarah Williams organized a prominent invited double session at the 1993 AAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco featuring a who's who of anthropologists of technoscience. CASTAC also organized a series of summer conferences and produced directories that facilitated the expansion of the anthropology of technoscience.

As the "science wars" in anthropology flourished in the mid to late 1990s, so did the anthropology of technoscience and STS. With success came the expansion of institutional venues for anthropologists of technoscience. CASTAC was no longer the only place within the AAA for them to affiliate. Thus, CASTAC has transformed its mission.

Today, CASTAC's mission is to facilitate communication within the AAA among anthropologists and groups working in areas related to science, technology and medicine, and to promote the visibility of anthropological research on technoscience. CASTAC thus offers a forum in which to organize sessions for meetings, exchange ideas and network with anthropologists who have similar research interests. To accomplish these activities, CASTAC (1) operates a listserv, (2) maintains a website, (3) publishes a directory and (4) awards the Diana Forsythe Prize, jointly with the Society for the Anthropology of Work (SAW).

CASTAC works closely with several groups like SAW and the Science, Technology and Medicine (STM) interest group within the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA). For example, CASTAC/GAD cosponsored with SMT/SMA the invited double session "Collaborations, Experiments and Care" at the 2008 AAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco. In addition, CASTAC is reaching out to anthropologists working on environmental sciences, nanotechnology and other emerging areas. Please join us in the following activities.

The CASTAC listserv, managed by David Hess, is used to help organize sessions; inform members of upcoming CASTAC events, sessions and activities; post job openings; and occasionally debate the current and future directions of CASTAC. The listserv membership continues to grow and now includes approximately 135 subscribers. If you would like to join the listserv, please email David at dhess@rpi.edu. CASTAC publishes a directory in even numbered years. The directory is being updated for 2008. Please contact the editor, Ramon Solorzano, at ramons@anthro.umass.edu if you would like to be included.

The Diana Forsythe Prize was created in 1998 to celebrate the best book or series of published articles in the spirit of Diana Forsythe's feminist anthropological research on work, science or

technology, including biomedicine. It is awarded annually at the meeting of the AAA by SAW and CASTAC and supported by GAD and Bern Shen. For more information, please visit <http://stswiki.org/wiki/CASTAC>, the CASTAC space at the GAD website, or contact me at furlow@ufl.edu.

Please submit news, items of interest and ideas for future AN columns to Luke Eric Lassiter (lassiter@marshall.edu).

Middle East Section

EMILIO SPADOLA, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Visual Representations of Iran: A Conference, Photo Exhibition and Film Series

By Roy Dilley and Pedram Khosronejad (U St Andrews)

During June 13–16, 2008, the department of social anthropology at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, hosted a conference, film series and photographic exhibition on visual representations of Iran in ethnographic and documentary films and visual media. The event successfully brought together anthropologists, ethnographers, filmmakers, photographers and artists from Iran and elsewhere to foster an international discussion of key academic, aesthetic, moral and political issues of the visual anthropology of Iran. This first of a kind program attracted major financial support from the Iran Heritage Foundation (UK), the Wenner-Gren Foundation (US) and the PARS Foundation (US), with additional support from the Houtan Foundation (US), the Iran Society (UK), IB Tauris (UK), the Royal Anthropological Institute (UK), and the Centro Incontri Umani (Switzerland). The conference also benefited from numerous partners within Iran, including the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Society, which advertised the event and collected and dispatched more than 250 documentary and anthropological films with English subtitles from Iran to St Andrews.

Conference attendees included 23 international guest speakers, among them Beeman (U Minnesota), Haeri (Boston U), Nafici (Northwestern U), Crawford (U Tromsø, Norway), and Husmann (Institute for Knowledge and Media, Gottingen, Germany), eight Iranian filmmakers and one film critic. Eleven postgraduate students presented papers as well, all currently undergoing revisions for publication in a special issue of an Iranian studies or visual anthropology journal. IB Tauris awarded a prize for the best postgraduate paper and plans to publish an edited volume of conference proceedings. The conference was also digitally recorded, and the resulting video material will be posted online for use in research and teaching.

One aim of the conference was to foster dialogue between academics (anthropologists, visual anthropologists and film critics) and filmmakers. Toward that end, the St Andrews department of social anthropology signed a letter of

cooperation with the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Society, based in Tehran, to further academic collaboration between the organization and the university. In particular, each year the society, with financial support of PARS Foundation, will offer around 100 documentary and anthropological films to the department in order to help create the first Iranian Anthropological Film Archive within the university. In future years the three partners will work on different aspects of Iranian visual anthropology by organizing workshops, conferences, book exchanges and so forth.

Other proposals developed in the conference include organizing a biennial Iranian anthropological film festival; creating an Iranian anthropological film association or society (with financial help of PARS Foundation); and, within the St Andrews department of social anthropology, publishing an online journal or newsletter titled “The Visual Anthropology of Iran,” and establishing a PhD scholarship and visiting fellowship for anthropology of Iran (with financial help from the Houtan Foundation, PARS Foundation, Iran Society and Centro Incontri Umani). Finally, conference attendees also proposed collaborative links with other European centers to circulate and disseminate ideas and to develop joint projects in the domain of the visual anthropology of Iran.

Looking forward, the department of social anthropology of University of St Andrews and the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association are pleased to announce a special session on ethnographic films about Iran as part of the 29th International Nordic Anthropological Film Association Festival, to be held in Koper, Slovenia in September 2009. For more information regarding details of this program, please contact P Khosronejad at pedram.khosronejad@st-andrews.ac.uk.

MES invites a variety of contributions—CFPs, conference summaries, field notes, blog entries or short articles—from all scholars and students of the Middle East and related fields. Please send all submissions, questions and comments to Emilio Spadola at espadola@colgate.edu.

National Association for the Practice of Anthropology

CHRISTINE MILLER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Notes from the Field: An Anthropologist's Perspective on Building Communities of Practice

By Bradley Trainor (MITRE Corporation)

Note: The opinions expressed here are those of the author alone and do not represent the position of any government organization.

Shortly after my starting work as a program evaluator at the US Government Accountability

Office (GAO) a senior colleague walked by my cubicle and asked if I wasn't going to the “CoP” meeting. I didn't know what that was, but it seemed like I was expected to be there, so I followed. I didn't know most of the 20 or so people present. A manager called us to order explaining that we were going to have a presentation from a team of evaluators about their current project. The presentation was very specific to their project and so not of much general interest. A call for questions at the end was followed by silence. Finally, someone dutifully supplied a question, and we were sent back to work. I left the room knowing only the people I already knew going in.

GAO is a policy and program evaluation agency under Congress that helps ensure that tax dollars are well spent. When Congress wants to know how a program or policy is doing, GAO sends its people out to gather the information. At the time, a lot of GAO's older employees were retiring, and the agency wanted them to share more of their hard won knowledge before leaving. One result was our Community of Practice (CoP), designed to increase knowledge sharing. The CoP meetings were held every 4–6 weeks and were typically similar to the one I had first observed—the information presented was very project specific and few interpersonal interactions occurred.

The managers leading our CoP wanted to become less involved, so they asked some of us to join an evaluator level steering committee. I had become interested in the CoP after discovering some anthropologists, including Jean Lave and Julian Orr, had a lot to do with developing the concept. Therefore, I accepted the invitation. A CoP is a semi-naturally occurring group designed to grow interpersonal connections and knowledge sharing. It is semi-natural in a manner analogous to that of a garden—you can plant the seeds, but you can't make them grow. Managers can, likewise, start a CoP, but how it evolves is beyond their control. I had come to believe our CoP wasn't living up to its potential, in part because managers organized it based on their own agendas, schedules and interests. I sent several articles on the subject to my fellow committee members, but the message didn't penetrate. For several months the CoP meetings continued on in the same vein. Finally, I was given the opportunity to organize the next CoP meeting.

I decided to gain steering committee agreement for my plans by telling them about how Xerox copier repair people share knowledge via storytelling, something I got from Orr's *Talking About Machines* (1996). The story served as a simple metaphor that informed the committee about a complex subject. After getting their agreement, we decided that the next CoP meeting would center on an “Old Hand” telling one of his “war stories.” After finding an agreeable Old Hand, we settled on a story that would have a general appeal to evaluators working with government agencies. To further promote interpersonal interactions, I gained a

