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UCI.

Criticism Inside, Alternatives Alongside: Organizing Otherwise to Intervene in Anthropology's Future

>> We'll get started in just a minute, as we wait for people to file in from the virtual waiting room.

Thank you for your patience. Once again, we'll get started in just a couple minutes here, as we wait for folks to sign in and file over from the waiting room.

>> Good morning and welcome or whatever time zone you're in, welcome. I'm Bill Maurer, the Dean of social sciences here at UC Irvine and I'm delighted to welcome you to this, the last series in our ten, exploring social science in the crazy times we're living in today. Today we are joined by can Noelle Stout who will be introduced in a minute for this our tenth conversation. For those who have been following align through our live or through the recordings posted on the Wenner-Gren Foundation, we'll do a debrief and share it later on in the infectious couple weeks if you're interested to have some final caps and reflections of the discussions we've had so far in the series with our guests, and the thinking that we've done and how we think this helps us carry anthropology forward. I see that people are still filing in. Maybe I just the gun and started.

Welcome to "Criticism Inside, Alternatives Alongside: Organizing Otherwise to Intervene in Anthropology's Future." This is the 10th and last of a ten-part series on the future of public anthropology. And public social science.

I am Bill Maurer, the Dean of the School of Social Sciences at the University of California, Irvine.

This event and the UC Irvine campus are within the ancestral and unceded shared territories of the Acjachemen and Tongva peoples. The region extends from the Santa Ana River to Aliso

Creek and beyond. As members of a land grant institution, we acknowledge the Acjachemen and Tongva as the traditional land caretakers whose efforts to steward and protect the land continue today. And my co-host, Taylor Nelms, will jump in now. Taylor?

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Hi, Bill. Hi, Noelle. Welcome, everyone to the last in our series of webinar conversations about the future of public social science. We're thrilled today to be joined by Dr.

Noelle Stout, who is on the Research Faculty at Apple University. Public scholar, lecturer, author, public scholar extraordinary. Her most recent book called *dispossess*, how American democracy foreclosed on middle class, also a book *queer extra love*, post Soviet Cuba, Noelle both were incredibly informative for me as an anthropologist and we're really excited to reflect with her on the transition from academia into some kind of alongside, outside, inside position with Apple University.

And to talk more broadly about what public social science is and can do these days. So Noelle thank you for joining us.

>> NOELLE STOUT: It's so great to think about anthropology, feels like we're at a crossroads in term of our discipline and exciting to think about the possibilities ahead. Thank you so much for the invitation.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Thanks. I think we'll ask you about what you think about those crossroads in just a second. So we'll be joined in

few minutes by three PhD students: Kim Fernandes from the University of Pennsylvania, Nina Medvedeva from the University of Minnesota, and Nima Yolmo from the University of California, Irvine. As Bill mentioned, we will try to record a debrief on this series in the coming weeks but for now we're really excited to jump into our conversation with Noelle.

Thanks the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the UCI School of Social Sciences. Please feel free to jump in using the Q & A feature on Zoom. Noelle maybe I'll ask with a question from folks who have looked at this series and seen your name and title, can you tell us, what is Apple University and how did you end up working there?

>> NOELLE STOUT: I can tell you but then I'll have to kill you.

(laughter).

It's top-secret. Not really, is not secret. I'm faculty member at Apple University in program and teaching research,

I spent ten years in Anthropology Department at NYU where I taught in the culture and media program so not only did I do kind of typical anthropology gig but I also taught graduate students to make documentary films and then spent two years at Stanford in center for advanced study in behavioral sciences and during that time I gave a talk at Apple University and became really interested in what they're working on and invited me to join the faculty. Two and a half years ago. About a year into my time there, I ended up giving up my tenure position at NYU and making a full-time transition to Apple. So my position at Apple is really unique, I'm still an academic anthropologist but working in the private sector, there's not a lot in this vein that exists, not doing applied anthropology or user research, I'm doing what I've always done, research and teaching typically around issues focusing on inequality but I'm just doing it now at Apple, so for Apple employees and executives.

And my anthropological research and really kind of plain terms has focused on the social toll of market creation and disruption. So my most recent book *Dispossessed*, which you mentioned, was based on two years of research among homeowners who were tracked in these public/private mortgage assistance program in the midst. 2008 foreclosure crisis, my research was based in Sacramento valley especially hit by the foreclosure crisis and there I worked with homeowners on the brink of eviction and lending employees at big banks like Bank of America and Wells Fargo who were basically tasked with denying the appeals of millions of homeowners.

So in *Dispossessed* I looked at these kind of bureaucratic failures that came to define what became a stratified social world after 2008. My first book that you mentioned *After love, intimacy and erotic communities in post Soviet Cuba* looked at these broader trends around economic crisis and focused on intimate effects of crisis, as Cuba transitioned post Soviet socialism looking at how that played out in people's queer identities and kind of desires they had and their relationship to commodities and then during my time in Cuba I also shot and directed a feature length documentary *Unchovo*, followed lives of sex workers, are film circuit and afterlife as a pirated film which I wrote a bit about. Before the pandemic hit I was exploring these questions of markets, reciprocity, capitalism through a new project looking at inequality around AI machine learning, but I put it on hold for the past year because I'm trying to figure out kind of what the social world

is now that we're look be at and what inequality means today, it's changed so much over the past twelve months. So the questions I'm interested in are changing, my research is on a bit of a hiatus as I kind of reposition my interest. So kind of in the forefront as I'm thinking about these issues at Apple University in the most pragmatic sense I develop and teach courses that are very similar to what I would do in the University.

Oftentimes a bit more with an interdisciplinary focus because at Apple, I'm not necessarily training the next generation of anthropology students as I was at NYU so the conversations can be much broader and I'm pulling from different tradition and is theoretical models than I would in an Anthropology Department. But basically, I teach courses in feminist studies, critical race theory, one course that focuses on gender and organizational culture called gender participation and influence. Another that is more similar to what I would do in Anthropology Department called technologies of gender. I teach a forum on Audre Lorde, I teach a class on Isabel Nucosom's new book called Caste, looking at anthropology going back to Allison Davis and most recently launched a course called race and justice in the United States a third reconstruction and that class was really inspired by the killing of George Floyd and the global uprising that followed and that's of course I co-teach -- a course I co-teach with a political philosophy Josh Cohen who still teaches at Berkeley who was at MIT for many years and Stanford and is also an editor of the Boston Review. So he and I launched this course to think about is this moment, could it qualify as a third reconstruction. So reconstruction is a major upheaval in society, the first reconstruction coming after the Civil War, second reconstruction is Civil Rights Movement, and then today can we think about what's happening in the world in terms of racial justice as our third reconstruction. In that class in particular I focus on economic justice and the wealth gap and we do some really great exercises around redlining and focus on property.

So that's kind of in a nutshell kind of how my research has evolved and then what I'm up to at Apple.

>> BILL MAURER: Thanks. I would love to hear a little bit more to the extent you're able to discuss it about kind of the mechanics of all of that. Like how many students are in your class, do you have a teaching assistant, are they meeting like three hours a week? What's the -- you know, and sort of what's

in it for them, right? To the extent that you're able to say like what does Apple want out of this? What's supposed to happen? The other question I want to ask you in term of your own assessment, how are you assessed? How does Apple say, you did a good job, Noelle, and here is a rate, what are the metrics upon your performance is evaluated?

>> NOELLE STOUT: Great questions. There's no grading. That's a big plus from our perspective and I think it's a different -- the evaluation is a bit different because we're not training students in the same way that I did at NYU. And I think that the program that I'm in in particular, it's really about helping people think deeply about the world that Apple acts in and on. So it's not, you know, while there are courses and programs that focus more on Apple, we're really brought in to kind of help people think broadly and deeply about major social issues and questions, you know, about democracy, about equality, about really big topics and then sometimes to help them make the connections but oftentimes not. I mean, it's really similar to what you would find in a University and in term of evaluation, it's a bit different, it's more amorphous, there's no kind of evaluation structure that determines our salary or anything like that is correct it's not like we're not doing like peace work so much.

>> BILL MAURER: There's no publish or perish, you publish X articles and that's great. Nothing. Just --

>> NOELLE STOUT: That's right. There's not a like tenure process or promotion process linked to levels of Associate Professor, full professor although our work outside of Apple is supported and valued but it's not necessarily fundamental to our promotion status. Yeah.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Noelle, maybe you could reflect a little bit for us on the transition moment from NYU to Apple. What was that like for you? What were some of the commonalities, some of the real differences? I know you did it in pieces or phases, I should say? Maybe you can talk about that process.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Mary Gray was a huge help, she had been something similar. I was at the center for advanced behavioral scienceless which is at Stanford, finishing Dispossessed, I had just received tenure the year before, and while I was at CAS biS I became involved in this project where we were helping to bring together social scientists and technologists who were developing grant applications for this multimillion dollar grant to develop some kind of AI technology that would address major social problems and I was so

fascinated by how open the technologists were to receiving kind of this information from social scientists. They were really hungry; they had certain kind of assumptions about the world and they were (Correction, hungry) and they were trying to develop solutions or make interventions and there was this real openness to receiving what social scientists had to offer. Part of the idea was some of us as social scientists end up studying the downstream effects or consequences of so much of this technology or policy decisions or whatever it might be and to see what would happen if we brought those relationships into play earlier, so if we could have some influence from the inception period rather than just downstream effects. So I was working on this project and I became more and more interested in process of kind of putting people into conversation.

So I started doing interviews around AI and ML and ended up meeting Josh Cohen at Apple University and invited me to do a talk and from that and I just gave a talk on my research on Dispossessed, and I was just super interested in what was going on. I mean, when they invited me to spend some time there, it just felt like a really great opportunity because I mean, Apple's products and services touch over a billion people's lives, it's like the influence that they have is really extraordinary, and because they have products and services in so many different areas, it's not just iPhones and iPads, it's credit card lending, it's, you know, emoji design, it's all kinds of, now they have film and television that they produce content for. So they have so many different pockets of interesting things going on that are really relevant and so I thought, you know, to have the opportunity to influence even a really small way how leaders or employees in the company are understanding the world that they're working in, like what an incredible opportunity.

So I spent a year there, I kept my position at NYU and I spent a year there at Apple and I really just felt like a kid in contain did I store in so many ways because there were so many opportunities to work with really smart, super interesting people who shared a lot of my political values.

So I really was learning so much. So when they made the full-time, when they asked me to come on board as a permanent faculty member, it just kind of made sense to me.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: This might be a difficult question.

Do you feel that you've lost anything in the transition?

>> NOELLE STOUT: Sure, of course, I mean, I miss training

students. You know, that's a big issue.

And I think that my work, many of the things that I might learn through my research at Apple, I can't share in the same way. Now, I'm kind of used to this in a sense because I think these issues of confidentiality and privacy exist in any kind of field work that we do, in any ethnographic project that we might have, so there's a lot of times that we have to manage these relationships around privacy, so that is a piece of it. I think at the same time if you're in a position where there is kind of more of a spotlight on what you're doing, then you have to be even more careful, so I think that's new for me and that feels like kind of a loss.

And I had a great department at NYU. I really loved my colleagues there. I really had like a wonderful experience, so I wasn't run ago way from something. But I feel like this is kind of an experiment and I'm a bit of an experience junkie so this is like a great way to kind of push those boundaries and those limits and to see what does anthropology look like when it's really just out in the world, when it's out in the wild, what kind of things we create and how might that speak back to the discipline. So I don't feel like I've given up necessarily on my role as an anthropologist. I'm not doing applied work. I still think of myself as a theoretical anthropologist, but it's just, you know, I'm interested to see what are the kind of limits that I'll hit up against in this new experiment.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: I really like that framing, that resonates really powerful with me in my own transition out of academia at the University of California to Filene this nonprofit research organization.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: It really felt like I was going and doing field work, right?

>> NOELLE STOUT: Right.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: I have a job but of course lots of field work involves getting a job these days but in some ways it takes like taking anthropological work and really embracing the experience or the participant observation piece of it, right? It's not as simple as that, but like you said, it's like investing really in that, those kind of insights about applied anthropology that really foreground the importance of practice.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah, and I think there's this great question that Bill actually asked in the first session of the

series where he said how do you get aligned without subsuming yourself. And I think that that is a question that I'm constantly thinking about because I do feel like my journey at Apple, I do feel like a researcher. I'm seeing it from the perspective of an ethnographer and I'm not sure what the projects I don't know what the book will be, but I can tell that everything I'm learning is kind of I have that feeling, you know, that sense that you get when you know you're doing research and you get one of these great conversations and you know that that story somehow will end up influencing how you're thinking about your work. But now, I just don't know what the end-product will be. I don't know where I'm headed. But I do know that this is all kind of forming some kind of new thinking about what the field might be.

And it's not easy. I think also the transition through the transition I think I lost some credibility with some colleagues, and that's like a difficult transition also because there is a really I think kind of limited understanding of how anthropology can exist in the world outside of the University. There's a kind of closed mindedness about that. You know, there's this assumption that people only take jobs outside of the academy because they can't get an academic job. And that's actually not the case. I mean, there's some really important exciting stuff going on outside of the University, and I think it's weird in a sense and it's a shame really that so many other disciplines have a kind of open-door policy where you have economists going to the fed and coming back to academic be can department or involved in policy centers doing great work and then go back to the academy and we don't have that same kind of revolving door within anthropology, it's very bifurcated and kind of this either/or situation.

And I think, you know, we can get into trouble when we start drawing these stark divisions between inside and outside of the academy. If we turn an anthropological lens on that question, immediately we recognize thateth a false distinction, right, it's something that there's a kind of boundary maintenance exercise we're doing through everyday practice.

And I think it not only limits our potential and what we can do in those public conversations and our influence, but I think it also obscures the kind of politics that exist within the University.

So when I started at Apple, just a couple of my colleagues, more senior anthropologists who I've really known since



graduate school, who I've collaborated with, there was this way they would use the term corporate that was definitely, you know, an insult in our conversations. And I harbored those same feelings, I spent my entire career critiquing capitalism, I still do, I'm definitely not an apologist, but I realized through this approach how NYU was wrapped up in racial capitalism, relied and exploited slave labor to build campuses in an into Abu Dabi, issues around tuition increases and President had interest free multi-million dollar home for summer home and undergraduates were using Sugar Daddy websites to pay tuition and Houston writes eloquently in his article about the neoliberal University but this narrative that I was leaving an anti-capitalist academic utopia for this greed driven corporate world I think erases how University are completely riddled with these same politics and economics and some of these issues and I think it's important that we kind of keep those things and tension when we're thinking about the choices that people are making and our different opportunities that we might have to influence inside the university and outside of it.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: I think it also obscures the heterogeneity that exists out in the world of quote, unquote, capitalism, right? Something that Bill and I and you have really been really concerned to highlight as well.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah, definitely. Definitely. Yeah.

>> BILL MAURER: I wanted to dig into some of those limits that you mentioned and shifting from the limits of, you know, anthropology to deal with people who were going inside, outside, and then taking it into your work at Apple University. So the limits around, you know, what you can and can't say, what you can and can't publish. We spoke earlier offline about, well, everything is online, but you know what I mean, about nondisclosure agreements and what they are and what they do and I wonder if you can share a little built about that process and experience with us.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Sure. Yeah. I think a simple way to think about it is just that, you know, what I learn about Apple really is for Apple, not the anthropological community. That's really how I've come to understand it. And then I'm free and welcome and encouraged to have any kind of research project or commitments kind of outside of that realm. And I think that there's kind of more of a buildup around these nondisclosure agreements, because like with any notion of secrecy or what's taboo as we know with anthropologists, it

creates a kind of energy around it, where in fact the things that I can't tell you, you wouldn't care about, you know. Like kind of boring and it's really more a concern about, you know, tech competitors and the kind of world that Apple exists in, which is one that anthropologists we really don't care much about so I think there's a lot of emphasis maybe on that but then of course not to be coy about t there's also real implications, you know, I did a project with Fannie Mae and I signed an NDA there around some mortgage research and I think for me personally, I felt like we have to become more comfortable with those kinds of collaborations and the worlds that they exist in, which include certain limitations on what we can and can't say. That's really no different than when I was making *Luciando* when I was making that film my collaborators in that film said we don't want this film to circulate in Cuba because they were doing illegal activity and Cuba has a heavy policing state especially at the time around issues of prostitution so I agreed and we really came together with a list of places we could show the film and I wouldn't sell it and even though we had buyers interested I wouldn't sell it because it would kind of break this contract I had made with the collaborators.

And the film was then pirated and it did circulate in Cuba against their wishes and my own and through that experience I came to recognize the kind of lack of control that we have over how things circulate. Luckily nothing happened to anyone in the film but it was a huge learning experience for me around the ethics of collaboration and around how we deal with people's ability to control the information they share with us and that's something I think as an anthropologist we always have to negotiate no matter who we're working with, studying up, it's much more structured and the people we're work with have a way of handling those issues and people from more marginalized community might not have that same kind of influence over how we share their knowledge.

>> BILL MAURER: Yeah, I think it's a fascinating problem and one I wish more an throw anthropologists would think about. Too often when an anthropologist or social scientists is asked to sign an MDA it's framed as oh we can't -- I can't do XY and Z but in other contexts there's never that thought of well I shouldn't do XY and Z. We were talking about this the other day, anthropologists have long tracked secrets but shared no notion about sharing them about coming home because there was assumed a complete separation of wealth between the field and

world of professional anthropology so you can read about how to do a secret society in West Africa, you can look at pictures, on and on and so, so for me, the kind of NDA really poses instead of seeing it as a limit, I like to think of it as ethical challenge back to anthropology.

>> NOELLE STOUT: I love that. Yeah.

>> BILL MAURER: The example is perfect take tea such a great example. Like you said Noelle the difference is absolutely one of power and remedy because Apple happens the legal and political capacity and capability to act on the ethical challenge it poses anthropology for good or for ill while many of our collaborators and interlocutors around the world simply do not, even when they would like to.

>> NOELLE STOUT: And to give kind of previous generations of anthropologists the benefit of the doubt, there was a real separation I think between the field and home and that's just completely been collapsed. For our generation, we're coming up in a moment where everything is viral all the time so there's not the same kind, I mean, information to get information from Samoa to New York City when Meade was working is an entirely different thing than it is today when everyone is on Facebook so I think the conditions under which we do our research has also change, not how we're more enlightened, I think it's a different world we face. Maybe we're slightly more aligned.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Maybe I can ask you to reflect a little more on this inside outside question and in particular I'm interested, Apple aside, what do you hope to do with this experience? In other words, I think that throughout this series we've been thinking hard about what does it mean to quote, unquote, have this impact. Early on Bill and I had a conversation I think in the very first video about the idea of theory of change for anthropologist that doesn't get befuddled around this question of what does it mean for anthropologists to have relevance in the public sphere or something but actually takes that as a research question to reflect on. So I wonder if you might talk a little bit about how do you hope your experience is an intervention and what kinds of outcomes are you thinking about even if you're not necessarily strategizing in that really, you know, kind of vulgar way.

>> NOELLE STOUT: I love that question, Taylor. I think what I really like about this year is that a lot of these questions we're constantly reflecting on and I know you're probably having this experience too Taylor where in the back

of your mind you're having these reflexive moments but don't have a chance to pull them together in the analysis so I appreciate the opportunity to really think about this and I don't know that I'm completely settled on what this will mean, but I've had some kind of moments of realization through this process and I would say I'm a feminist anthropologist, visual anthropologist and both of those kinds of anthropology require having multiple conversations with different audiences and I came into anthropology as an activist, I had been a community organizer, many of us I realize who are really in this kind of public anthropology fear have a background in activism so for me I trained in anthropology as an undergraduate at Stanford and I think Bill you probably had been there just a few years before I was there as an undergrad, I think you finished your Ph.D. and I don't know if you had the same experience, but when I arrived, it really was feminist anthropology. But I didn't know that. I thought that was just mainstream anthropology. It turned out to be a very culturally studies inflicted and I worked with are (?) and I thought that was mainstream anthropology and I didn't know until I arrived at Harvard grad school what I had learned was a critique of anthropology and not anthropology I was. It was a rude awakening, I was at a mixer first week of grad school, I was there and Mary Steedley, became my advisor accident since passed, came up to me and said oh are you interested in studying women? I thought what year is this? Are we deconstruct being the category of women women? She said no if you're interested in studying women you have to say it because it's radical. It was so we're not in Kansas anymore, it was this moment where I was so nervous about the future of my career.

But I think that, you know, there are these kind of pockets of anthropology and ways that we get trained and what I thought was anthropology was always about translating the kind of work that we do and the research that we do for a wider audience in order to make some kind of difference and some kind of social change.

So I still believe that is what the field does.

I think that there are so many ways that we, you know, question the notion of expertise, that we put people in conversation who would normally not have the opportunity to talk to one another, that we have this incredible ability in terms of our epistemology to take what happens in the world on the street, on the ground, and to use that to speak back to our theoretical models, and that kind of back and forth is so revolutionary,

if you think about how other social scientific disciplines work where it's very top down, right? So they're the sense that we can get to the edge of something, we have this theory and we're in the field and we're thinking about it, and it doesn't fit people's lives, then we use people's lives to speak back to that theory and that process I think is so important and so revolutionary.

So for me, you know, I think what I see as anthropology is always public. It's always about being engaged. It's always about creating some kind of change. It's always about speaking truth to power in one way or another. I think one limitation, you know, of our current model of anthropology is that we're speaking a lot of truth but we're really not speak that go truth to any power. We're just kind of speak it go to one another and there's a lot of inside baseball, just talk to go experts about our own expertise rather than trying to open and broaden that conversation to other people who are -- broaden that conversation to people who are making really important decisions and who are hungry for the kind of knowledge we can bring. It reminds me of I attended there's this Boulder summer conference. There were a bunch of social scientists, a ton of policymakers, someone was dog a presentation, really bright, nice, young scholar, was doing a presentation on why people don't make their payments, it was around some kind of dealt product -- (Please stand by for captions to resume) there's a real kneeled for what we have to offer in terms of our methodology, participant observation, storytelling, there's a real hunger for that, but anthropologists are not doing enough to make those conversations happen outside of our own field. . We're.

>> We can critique anything in brilliant, creative innovative ways.

But we are not very good at thinking about potential strategies for addressing the issues that we're identifying.

And so I think that that can be for me a kind of something that I hope will come out of this experience is to get that kind of practice and that kind of orientation toward having conversations about strategies.

I don't want to say solutions because.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: We've been talking about solutions, intervention, instead of critique.

Because the conversations are ongoing and flows all around you. The most I can hope for in a realistic and humble perspective at least here for me at Filene is to intervene and redirect

some of those flows.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yes.

>> BILL MAURER: Can be such a tiny thing. Taylor, thinking back to the thing you and I did ended up in a World Bank report where there was one sentence that said, and some people think, and it cited us, that maybe there should be enhance the public investment in, you know, these infrastructures, these things are a public good.

And that's kind of how that report ended.

And it was just that, with a footnote. But it's like yes, hurray.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Amazing. Yeah. So incredible.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: We were not, there's no causal link here, right? But we were part of a conversation ten years ago, Bill, about the importance of public aspects and use of and potentially ownership over the infrastructures through which value circulate, in other words, payments, and now we have a proposal on the table in Congress for coastal banking, now we have major conversations about what it means for especially if you think about the distribution of aid payments, what would it mean for people to have public accounts and public access to the movement of money into and out of those account, right? That was not us but we were a part of that conversation very early on in a way that really shaped what I thought was possible for anthropology in the public sphere.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah, I mean, take a little credit. (laughter).

>> BILL MAURER: My experience is I hardly ever get identified as an anthropologist then.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yes.

>> BILL MAURER: People come up, note on this the steps and afterwards they're like where did you get your degree? I was like Stanford and whatever. Oh, well, and I -- they start listing names on people on the economics faculty. I'm like, uh, no, that's not me.

Or people identify me as a cultural economist, like not in the --

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yes.

>> BILL MAURER: Not in the journal of cultural economy sense but oh it's econ but there's culture.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah. We're totally missing. And part of little our fault, I mean, in so many of these conversations where you have someone from the World Bank and then you have someone who is part of Obama's administration and then you have

an economist and then there's me.

And this isn't although Apple, this is like out in the world, and I think that part of the problem is I even struggle with this, once he was outside of this anthropological context and no longer in Anthropology Department, I really struggled with figuring out what it was that I had to offer. People think anthropologists just do culture, but we don't really do that anymore, so what is it that I have to provide. If you think about sometimes I would think about this kind of joke format, it's like if you have an anthropologist economist and sociologist and they all walk into a bar, like what's the anthropologist's punchline? What is it that we do that's so unique that people want us, they want our perspective for particular reason? And it's not just, you know, it's not just qualitative research because sociologists also do that, but there is I think a way where our method is so unique and important that it really provides a certain kind of context that's so often missing from so many of these conversations and that that context which feels obvious to us because we're kind of swimming in it and this is all we think about and talk about, but it's so often, they about kind of individuals in a certain way that are completely removed from history from social context, from reciprocity from relationships and that we add that back in and I think that for me it's important to train students to think about not just how their work is influencing the field or the mark they're making on the field of anthropology but how that helps broaden a conversation that's happening out this world.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: 100 percent on board and also I think it's important for us to be willing to let go of anthropology.

>> NOELLE STOUT: That's where you'll end the series.  
Okay.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: In some ways I think a letting go is really important.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Interesting.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Especially in that moment of critique where we're redefining what it is that counts as anthropology, what is our presumptions. What you put forward, that that is the feminist critique of anthropology.

>> NOELLE STOUT: You're right.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: That's great. In some ways I think we need to be willing to let anthropology die and that will be some ways. Just to hearken back to something that one of our previous not an anthropologist but a fellow traveler in

anthropology said to us about the importance of hospicing ideas.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: This is a great conversation, I want to be able to bring in Kim, Nina and Nima to jump into this conversation and maybe ask a couple questions as well. Not sure which one of you wants to jump in first but if you have a question for Noelle or a conversation starter, please do.

>> NIMA YOLMO: Thank you, Noelle. You've touched a bit on how you see your research at Apple as being geared more towards international for internal purposes and I'm imagining in this realm of market creation where like the constraints of funding and et cetera that you see in traditional universities may be different. So could you talk a little bit about how the difference between student audience and institutional setup shapes the courses you teach?

I'm more interested in what people are interested in learning and why. Thank you.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yes. That's such a great question thank you so much and you're really picking up on all these different dynamic inside such an intuitive way quickly, it's really impressive. I think what's interesting is that in my particular position and this is why it's so different and unique than if I was in a learning development although Google, Apple University has a kind of independence to it so I really for almost the first time arrived kind of thinking, you know, what do I think is important and then let me develop and design classes around that. Steve Jobs has this famous quote that we hire smart people not to tell them what to do but so they can tell us what to do and that ethos is really present throughout Apple and I think whereas when I was in a department you would get an assignment, you teach intro, they need to cover this graduate seminar, I would teach my documentary film class, year long seminar.

And there's a kind of assignment in that same sense, it's more like what issue do I feel is particularly pressing at this moment, where can we have really rich conversations and then he just develop courses around that and when I had that space to think about it what came out was primarily feminist study courses, critical race theory, you know, thinking about revisiting some issues around intersectionality with Audrey Lord work and thinking about what might help people to think about the issues we're facing in the world. Audrey Lourde.



It's a weird answer because I think it's so particular to my orientation where I have this amazing opportunity. So it's not really like a very top down process.

>> NINA MEDVEDEVA: Thank you. I'm trying to figure out how to ask this question without being a jerk, which is always a challenge.

>> NOELLE STOUT: , no, be a jerk. Jerk away.

>> NINA MEDVEDEVA: Always talks to me about not just thinking about the University is exceptional. So holding both the University and the corporate sort of University I guess in the same space, what are some of the different constraints on what not only you can say but also on what you can do in these two spaces? So I can critique a University's research projects or investments in gentrification for example but like Apple is -- Apple's contract with let's say a government institution to like better deportations or something like that, like a database project, I imagine that the constraints on that are a little bit riskier, that there's a more cost in making those sort of critiques. I guess I'm asking what are the constraints that can be said and done and how can those change across institutions and I guess this broader question of how do you -- do you feel secure in your position as an acadenuc at Apple compared to someone who is tenured at NYU and how do you navigate that shift?

>> NOELLE STOUT: Great questions. There's no hint of jerk in either of those questions. I think they're really important.

You know, to start with the last question, which is easier, I mean, of course not having tenure there's a difference. I think whether tenure offers the kind of protection that we imagine it to, just having that be the goal of your entire life from the time that I was an undergraduate all the way through and then it's kind of like I have this safety finally after all these years and then I spend a year with tenure and then I say okay I'm going to let it go and go to something else, in a way I felt like I had graduated like I went all the way through and that's as far as you can go and then I finished and get a real job part of it did feel that way so of course there's more vulnerability but think of Cornell west who gave up tenure and can't get it back and so the idea that tenure is somehow fair or we've seen so many colleagues who are brilliant and do really important work and are political and struggle to keep tenure at these universities and it's a bit of this fool's gold in a way and that's of course coming from

a very privileged position where I had a full-time faculty position, I realize that's not the case for many struggling with adjunct position and is that kind of thing so this is a very privileged position to speak from. On the other issue of where the limits of critique are, to be frank, I am very curious about that and I haven't head up against those limits yet, so I think in some ways I'm lucky because Apple's business model and different than some other tech companies like Google or Facebook, so they're really big on privacy and that's like a big push of theirs is privacy as a human right and they're trying to really kind of stand apart from other tech companies in that way. And so some issues, you know, for instance, I was asked to participate in this project at Facebook years ago where it was helping them to develop some kind of fact checking infrastructure for places where they don't have that, where there were issues of political violence. And that for me there was a lot of kind of ethical, didn't do the work, and it just felt like, you know, big tech is not all the same, there are a lot of different relationships that people have to these issues so Apple is always doing something different than Google or Facebook might be not to say that it's not a -- I mean, it's the richest corporation in the world, there's a lot of room for criticism but on some of these fundamental issues I think realizing those differences has been kind of enlightening for me.

>> NINA MEDVEDEVA: Thank you.

>> KIM FERNANDES: If you don't mind, I just wanted to get to Ian's question the chat as a way to bring us towards the end of this, which is to what extent do you feel like Apple University is the next wave in the corporatization of the University or logical next step in relationship between academia and the corporate world?

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah, that's a great question. Thanks, Ian and Kim.

I think that I can say what I would like to see, you know, I can't really predict the future. I don't think that we're going to see -- I don't think we're going on see corporations with universities. I don't think we're headed in that direction. I think that there's definitely financial pressures on universities in terms of kind of a neoliberal approach and I think that is much more the trend or the direction.

But, you know, I would say for anthropology, I can answer that question and I would say what I would like to see more of is

for people who are working in these contexts to continue to speak back to anthropology.

And I understand it's difficult because you have this full-time job, and you're not -- you don't have the pressure to publish or perish, you don't have the pressure to have research projects.

But I feel like what happens, and there's some really wonderful people who are working on really terrific projects, but there's a way in which then there's a kind of gap between the work that they're doing out in the world and how anthropology is shifting and changing and how we're understanding the discipline.

And I think part of that is because there's a stigma attached to working outside of the University. Part of that is because people get very busy. But we need to create more opportunities like this one where people speak about their work. It was either Bill or Taylor who earlier in the series said something about when people are invited to give talks, it's always just how do you get a job outside of the academy, it's not really about what their work is on.

So we need to develop a kind of space or orientation to let people have those conversations to kind of speak back to how the field is developing from those insights rather than just see it, okay, someone is doing applied research, they're no longer really part of our community.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Noelle, I have a cup of follow-up questions.

One is, you know, if you were to think with academic anthropologists, University, you know, academics within the University, anthropologists within the University, in rethinking professional training, for example, what would you do, how will you advise them? Because you made a comment earlier auto about how at Apple University you're not teaching future anthropologists or students in anthropology. One might argue, not to be too snarky, that what's true in the University setting, whether we recognize it or not, right?

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: I wonder if you might talk a little bit about that kind of professional training piece and what would you do in terms of curriculum design.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah, I think about this great grad seminar that Emily Martin who is one of my close friends and colleagues and heroes taught at NYU which was on public anthropology and would have editors from the New Yorker come and talk about writing articles and founded Anthropology Now

which is an incredible journal and I encourage all of you to submit where it's peer reviewed but you can translate your research for a wider public audience and getting that kind of practice I think is so important so just really basic things but I would say four main things, some of which I already mentioned, but develop our capacity to offer suggestions and strategies to think about and train in conversations around policy to understand that world, to think more critically about the fields we're drawing on. Say you're doing an infrastructure project and you want to have some influence on environmental justice. Maybe on ontology is great but not useful to have those theoretical conversations with other people so to think really strategically about the kind of other disciplines we're drawing on as we get closer and close to her literary study the less relevance we have for some of these conversations and just be aware of that, there will have to be some translation happening, recognize what is inside baseball that we're really fascinated by our own field and our own kind of self-criticism but nobody else cares. They don't care whether or not we think we're a neocolonial enterprise, like that's not interesting to them. What they want to know is can we help them in what they're trying to get done. And then be able to articulate what's distinct about anthropology, which I mentioned before, what's the kind of perspective that we bring that's different from economics and different from sociology and why, what is it that we can offer once we're at the table, I would say to kind of think about those four questions as part of the training rather than as something that we have to do as an extracurricular once we're out in the field or once we're trying to publish that first book or once we get that NPR to build our research and build that into how we get the foundation of what we're working on.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: That's helpful. One thing I would be curious to hear not just your thoughts, notice tell, but the whole group, as we've been talking throughout this whole series we've also been talking about not just what we say as public scholars but what we do so thinking about building stuff infrastructures and systems but especially institutions and organizations and networks and I wonder, this is like a wild thing, but like if you were to imagine, right, the alternative, I don't know if alternative is the right word, the alternative anthropological institution that's not the private sector University, Apple University, and it's not the University of California, what would it look like, right? What kind of

laboratory what kind of organization, I hate the word think tank, what kind of think tank would there be for a social, you know, publicly oriented social science organization that's not just invested in translating, which I think is incredibly important, it's a lot of what I do, I know that's a lot of what Mary gray does and Bill too but is actually doing.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Right.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: What would it do and what would it look like?

>> NOELLE STOUT: I feel like you've probably thought about this a lot more than I have Taylor and I know we have only a couple minutes, but I think it's so exciting, and all I can say is like I'm coming, you know, whatever we're doing, I reserve my seat.

Because I think that we haven't had the opportunity or the space to really answer that question. I haven't had the chance to think about it because my entire career whether it be as a visual anthropologist or feminist anthropologist, activist anthropologist, whatever I am now, this experimental engaged anthropology has always been about translation, it's always been about we have this the field and then we find a way to help people understand its relevance but if it was just completely on our own terms and we weren't caught up in that process of transformation, what kind of world making exercises could we engage in and I think it's a really great way, it's an opening and it's a way to also end, I really love that.

>> BILL MAURER: And that might be the way that we end this conversation.

And this last talk in this series.

Thank you, Noelle, so much.

For the discussion and for kind of blowing our brains open. I did have a linkerring question, which is do they force you to use all Apple products like the way the Gates Foundation used to force you to use those tiny phones and whatever Microsoft's iPOD was called we had to use those, so everybody had secret iPhones and secret blackberries.

>> NOELLE STOUT: No. Aside from the discount, there's no forcing.

>> BILL MAURER: Great, excellent.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: It's a soft nudge, right?

(laughter).

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Market incentives.

>> NOELLE STOUT: Yeah, well, this is so much fun. Thank

you both.

>> BILL MAURER: Also thank you again to the grad students, Kim, Nina and Nima who have been with us the whole way through posing challenging questions to our guests. Thank you Taylor for doing this with me and making this happen. I also want to thank Jenny Fan and Lori Yeager Stavropoulos, Jenny has been in the background making Zoom work and Lori has been CART captioning so we have captions and also a transcript. Thank you to the School of Social Sciences and Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

>> TAYLOR NELMS: Noelle, I wonder if you have any final go-dos for us.

What would you suggest that we do next?

>> NOELLE STOUT: I would just keep it up. I'm curious, it's like you have a set kind of momentum, I think you both have identified and you're both so involved in this in different ways, but I think you've identified a real need within our field, whether, you know, hopefully it's not 100 percent hospicing anthropology. But there is definitely a kind of space opening I think for some of this and therapy the younger generation of anthropologists I think they're not as interested in these old binaries that existed before. And there's an openness to the new possibilities.

(Captioner leaving the webinar 10:00am PST)

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