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In Memoriam et ad Futuram:

The Anthropology of Richard F. Salisbury

(1926-1989)

by

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> Crees believe that all honourable men belong to the same tribe. Richard Salisbury was an honourable man (Philip Aashish, Executive Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, Memorial service for Richard F. Salisbury, September 28, 1989).

It sometimes happens that a profoundly influential and extremely active anthropologist emerges who gains international renown and respect. Such anthropologists spend years in the field, publish widely and intensively, and profoundly affect those around them and those who come after through their writings, teaching, personal dedication and organizational acumen. One such anthropologist was Richard F. Salisbury.

Born in Chelsea, England, in 1926, Salisbury served in the Royal Marines between 1945 and 1948. He then studied Modern Languages at Cambridge University (B.A. 1949), received a certificate in Spanish in 1950 and studied anthropology with Meyer Fortes during 1950-1. He went on to do graduate work in Anthropology at Harvard University (A.M. 1955) and the Australian National University (PhD. 1957). While studying at Harvard, he married Mary Roseborough, a fellow graduate student from Toronto. He taught at the Harvard School of Public Health, Tufts University and the University of California before coming to McGill University in 1962 as an Associate Professor. He remained at McGill for the rest of his life. He was appointed Full Professor in 1966 and, in 1967 and 1984, he held Visiting Professorships at the University of Papua and New Guinea. He was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1974, and was awarded the prestigious Killam Foundation Senior Research Fellowship for 1980-82.

During this time, Salisbury was the author (or co-author) of 20 books, monographs and reports, more than 60 articles, and numerous other reviews and commentaries. This immense corpus spanned several locales (New Guinea, Guyana, Canada) and a wide spectrum of anthropological topics: economics, kinship, religion, linguistics, politics, development, and human rights. His numerous insights, theoretical ideas, and applied concerns helped to shape how his generation of scholars around the world did anthropology. They also underlie much of contemporary Canadian anthropology in particular and social anthropology in general. Moreover, Salisbury was not simply a highly productive and influential scholar. He also was a fine teacher who supervised over 30 graduate theses. Through them, and their subsequent careers in anthropology, Salisbury helped to reproduce the discipline both in Canada and abroad.

Salisbury also was extraordinarily active in promoting the organizational and institutional infrastructure of the discipline. The list of his administrative involvements is daunting: from chair of McGill's anthropology department and Dean of Arts to president of five anthropology associations.[1] He served also on the Social Science Research Council of Canada (1969-72), the Academic Advisory Panel of the Canada Council (1974-1978), the Board of the *Institut Québécois de la Recherche sur la Culture* (1979-84), and as Programme Chair for the Eleventh International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (1983). He was co-founder, and later director, of the Centre for Developing Area Studies at McGill, he served on the board of the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, and he was a member of the Quebec Commission on Higher Education (1977). Throughout, he

> combined a career of high-quality scholarly research and active publication with a devotion to teaching, promoting the scholarly growth of social science organizations, and service to the people of Canada and New Guinea. His brilliant intellect, personal integrity, and the energy with which he worked to help others won him widespread admiration (Trigger 1989:3).

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> I enrolled at McGill for graduate studies in anthropology in 1976, drawn mainly by the work of Dick Salisbury and his students at the Programme in the Anthropology of Development. ... As Dick let me know in our very first conversation, he thought that my view of the politics of development was overly polarized. ... I thought Dick's view of the world was too optimistic, assumed too much liberal *decency* on the part of social actors; and I certainly let him know. If this ever taxed his patience, he never lost his humour. He was adept at seizing the right opportunity to inject an unsettling comment, question or fact that as often as not left me with the feeling that *he* was the realist, not I (Scott 1990:18).
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> When graduate students returned from the field, our discussions ... [often] ... took place in each other's apartments. ... Dick Salisbury was a frequent visitor at these gatherings, usually sitting on the floor with four or five students gathered around. Who can forget those sparkling eyes, wavy black hair combed straight back, the omnipresent bow tie, or those large hands poised in mid-air? (Hedican 1990:16)

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An academic whose career has spanned 27 years has necessarily touched many people who retain stories, recollections and memories. Perhaps the most insightful are those of his students. As both an undergraduate and graduate student at McGill, I have many recollections of Dick. Like others, they offer glimpses into the style and essence of a fine scholar and mentor.

I recall, for example, how disconcerting it was as an undergraduate to sit in a small class with a professor who knew so much. In a fourth-year theory class, in 1966, we were discussing Lévi-Strauss. A question was asked, and Dick proceeded to answer it. To do so, he gave an impromptu, one-hour lecture on culture and personality theory, Freud and Jung. I remember looking around the room. In typical fashion, we undergraduates had put down our pens for this stuff obviously would not be on the exam. Yet I remember being profoundly struck, and still am, with the breadth of his knowledge, with his ability to move into other disciplines, and with his capacity to pursue issues laterally, into adjacent theoretical areas. This marked not only his teaching but was an essential part of his ability to contribute theoretically to the discipline.

But it sometimes made it difficult to follow his thinking. Most of Dick's students can recall his "quizzical look" – which usually followed what the student thought was a particularly erudite question. This look, as I recall it now, came about because, for Dick, the answer was so often self-evident. I remember taking away with me several of his responses which followed on his quizzical look: answers which seemingly were off-topic and not at all self-evident. It would take about 48 hours, a lot of thinking, and occasionally a trip to the library. Then the penny would drop. "Why," I asked one day, "did American acculturation studies move in such a sterile direction?" With a quizzical look, Dick told me that it was the influence of Fred Eggan. I was already on my way to the library before he had finished his sentence.

Sometimes, though, the quizzical look was because Dick genuinely did not understand the student's logic, motivation or, more often, his or her desperate fear of failure. The quizzical look, as I see it now, always meant that he had more faith in us than we had in ourselves. Just before my PhD defence in 1973, I went to his office for some reassurance. I said, trying to be light, that I was very nervous about being able to answer the questions which would be asked. With his quizzical look, Dick blurted out: "But you're the world's expert on the topic. You're the only one who knows the answers!"

Dick taught anthropology, however, not only by in-depth lateral extrapolations and by quizzical looks. He also taught by example; and there was no better model than Dick Salisbury in the field. The Research Institute for the Study of Man (RISM) in New York provided funding for M.A. students from four universities to do field work for the summer of 1966 in the Caribbean. The McGill team, along with Dick, went to Guyana – to a bauxite mining town which he had chosen in the interior, accessible only after an eight-hour boat ride. We all met up in Georgetown, at a hotel. The first afternoon, we met for drinks. At the bar were several West Indian literati. Amongst them, as I remember, were novelists George Lamming and Jan Carew and McGill economist Kari Levitt. The students, along with Dick, joined their group. The students listened in silence to the conversation, feeling tentative, and preferring to explore the taste of real rum. After an hour, the group broke up. Dick disappeared, the students went for a walk. Two hours later we were back in the bar. Dick emerged, waving a sheaf of about a dozen, single-spaced, typed papers. He sat down, handed the papers to us and announced: "These are field notes of the conversation!" And we had thought that he had retired for a nap!

The next day, we went up the Demerara River, to Mackenzie, the mining town. At the time, we wondered why we were going to that particular place. Looking back, the answer is obvious. Dick was concerned with indigenous local development. And Mackenzie, under the aegis of the Alcan Aluminum company, had literally been carved out of the jungle and set up as a company town. Dick saw this as a perfect opportunity to investigate socio-economic change. The students, in the politicized late-1960s, saw it as a case of Canadian colonialism. Dick saw our point, but his quizzical look, which he often wore as we argued this point over the weeks, was that it still provided the chance for original research. The students took the line that, by simply being there, we were lackeys of western imperialism. So Dick was the only one who talked to the expatriate company officials that summer while the students studiously maintained a boycott and talked only to Guyanese. Looking back, I realize that Dick had to exercise the patience of Job that summer and, most importantly, the patience that came from a man secure in his own convictions.

Such generational and political differences, however, were highly instructive – both in theory and practice. In Mackenzie, the students had all moved into a house which Dick had rented from the company. The first morning, Dick arrived – in khaki bermudas and a sports-shirt, carrying a clipboard. Immediately, the thought crossed my mind that the field was clearly a different and liminal place: I had never before seen Dick without a bow tie, and certainly never in shorts. The lesson continued beyond the etiquette of dress in liminal places, however. We students were sitting around, drinking coffee, vaguely thinking that, now that we were in the field, we ought to do field work, and wondering if we were experiencing sufficient culture shock to be allowed to stay home all day. Dick joined us for a cup of coffee. He then stood bolt upright, announced that he had three interviews with Alcan executives set up for the morning, and had to be off. He marched out. A few of us struggled out a few hours later, for our own initial forays, following his example.

An anthropological colleague has since observed that "the hardest thing about field work is getting out of the house in the morning." Dick was a sublime researcher. It came out of the particular kind of detachment, and engagement, which he carried with him to the field and with which he approached other people and places. He became, for many – both students and others – a model to emulate.

> I ended up on the Gazelle Peninsula ... half way between Matupit and Vunamami, where about 25 years earlier Bill Epstein and Richard Salisbury had worked. Frequently I travelled to both places to listen to Tolai telling me their histories. In order to explain what I was doing I only had to refer to my predecessors, who were both held in high esteem, by elders, and by people who had never met them, alike. ... In Vunamami I first elicited no recollections when

> I mentioned the name of the scholar who made the village known among anthropologists and historians working in the South Pacific. Soon I found out that Richard Salisbury called himself (or was called?) ToMas. "Oh yes, ToMas, of course." And I was told where he had lived, I was told about his two kids, and that his wife had been such a good dancer of the customary *malagene*. Most of the men ToMas had interviewed were long dead in 1986/88. ...
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> During ToMas' stay, Vunamami was probably indeed "the most advanced village in New Guinea" (*Vunamami*, p.15). When he wrote about the achievements of Vunamami villagers, his writing reflects their pride. And, in a way, his pride to have been accepted, if only temporarily, as one of them. As one of them, ToMas was a committed advocate of their interests and rights (Neumann 1989:23-4).

Dick also was a model thesis advisor: one who could find money for a graduate student whose funds had run out or who had missed a deadline for a grant competition. He also was extraordinarily prompt and sensitive to the needs of students. Harvey Feit recalls that he gave the final draft of his 1000-page thesis to Dick, for his comments, on a Friday afternoon. The next Monday, Dick gave it back to him, with comments duly written in the margins, along with several, tightly-typed pages of additional comment.

Such commitment to students, whilst respecting always their rights to independent thought and their own visions of their own work, was accompanied, however, by explicit techniques for getting students on-line. Several of us arrived back from the field in 1970, after a year or so of research for our doctorates. We naturally went to see him for the first of what we thought were to be a series of meetings for discussing our theses. He told each of us that he was very glad to see us back, and wondered had we written our Conclusions yet. The response of a surprised "no" elicited his comment that we should begin our theses with the Conclusions and that we should come back to see him when they were done. I disappeared for three months, struggling, as he knew I would, with the central issue of what exactly I was going to do with a trunk full of data and only a vague idea of what it all added up to. I never did write

the Conclusions at that time. But I was forced into doing a lot of thinking about what exactly I wanted my thesis to be. I now use the technique with my own graduate students. They also never write the Conclusions first and, in fact, I don't really expect them to. But the task, especially if I keep a stern face while setting it, certainly centres their thinking. I have often wondered though, but never remembered to ask, if Dick wrote his Conclusions first.

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In academia today, the pressure for theoretical novelty is so great that intellectual approaches are old before their implications have been thoroughly explored and young followers of particular gurus barely have time to write their dissertations before their modes of reasoning have been rendered obsolete. In such an atmosphere of rapid change, the new must be quickly and dramatically legitimized and, for this to happen, dialectical reasoning requires that the old must be trashed. Indeed, "as each successive approach carries the ax to its predecessors, anthropology comes to resemble a project in intellectual deforestation" (Wolf 1990:588). In such a context, a discipline is in great danger of losing sight of its roots, of its own history – as the new not only displaces the old but also designates the past as irrelevant, ignores its essential place in the present, and denies it a role for the future. The present volume is in small part an effort to restore some balance: to take the opportunity to explore our shared anthropological past, to bring that past forward into the present, and to try to ensure that the past will extend into our future.

When Dick Salisbury died at the very untimely age of 62, he left behind not only a massive corpus of work, but also a younger generation of social anthropologists whom he had trained at McGill. Four of us, all academic anthropologists, decided that his life and work should be celebrated. In the ordinary course of time, had Dick enjoyed a normal span of years, we would have prepared a festschrift in his honour. Now that he was gone, we asked ourselves what we might do to honour his work, express thanks for his accomplishments and speak to his present place in anthropology. A book made up of our own articles on diverse topics, *in memoriam*, would not have accomplished this: it would have shown too little of Dick, the depth of his work, and the extent of his contribution to contemporary anthropology. So we decided on something different. Given his extraordinary influence on anthropology, and given his extensive publications and the facts that a few pieces have never been published while others are scattered in difficult-to-get-at places, we decided that it was important to produce a readily-available collection of his writings.

We also decided, however, that we did not want the book to be seen as having only an antiquarian value. Rather, we wanted to show how Dick's work,

and the issues which he confronted and raised, are also relevant to anthropology, to the academy, and to a younger generation in the present. We therefore decided to contextualise his writings: to provide background essays on the kind of anthropology which he did, the context in which he did it, and the implications which it has for contemporary anthropology.

To do this, we divided the volume into five sections, each reflecting one of Dick's major analytical or empirical areas and each reflecting as well a period of his career. Each section was assigned to a contributor(s) who chose which of Dick's many writings to include and who wrote an introductory essay for the section. Our aim was to bring together the most representative materials and to bring out, as well, those which have never been published. Our concern also was to produce a volume which had an historical authenticity: about an anthropologist who worked at a particular time and in particular socio-historical contexts, who had an impact on another generation, and who confronted theoretical and applied issues which still are central to the discipline. Finally, our goal was to provide a volume which would be of interest to numerous constituencies: to those who are involved in economic and/or political anthropology; to those who are concerned with the anthropology of development and public policy; to those who work in Melanesia and amongst Native Peoples; and to those who wish to learn something about what it was like to be a social anthropologist in Quebec and Canada in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Notes

1. Salisbury served as Chair of the Anthropology Department at McGill (1966-70) and as Dean of Arts (1986-89). He served, *inter alia*, as President of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association (1968-1970), the Northeastern Anthropological Association (1968), the American Ethnological Society (1980), the Society for Economic Anthropology (1982), and the Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada (1986). See Scott's essay, section VI of this volume for a more detailed rendering of Salisbury's immense contribution.

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