

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF DESTABILIZATION: PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

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# THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF DESTABILIZATION: PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

Glenn Alcalay

The most potentially disruptive development for U.S. relations with South Pacific is the growing antinuclear movement in the region. A nuclear-free zone would be unacceptable to the U.S. given our strategic needs, and I am convinced that the U.S. must do everything possible to counter this movement.

Former U.S. Ambassador to Fiji, William Bodde Jr., speaking in Hawaii in 1982<sup>1</sup>.

## Introduction

When one thinks of anthropological research in the Pacific, such luminaries as Malinowski, Firth, Fortune and Mead come naturally to mind. Because of the historic twist of fate that caused Malinowski to be stranded in the Trobriands during World War I, we were all enriched by the new ethnography--and especially the revelations about the *kula* ring--of this century's early anthropological light. Likewise, Fortune's Dobuan sorcerers titillated our images of "the other" in an exotic setting, and Mead's controversial work in Papua New Guinea and Samoa continues to stir heated debate even today.

In the immediate post-World War II period, a regiment of applied anthropologists fanned out across the 2,100 islands of Micronesia in what one anthropologist referred to as a "massive ethnographic salvage program<sup>2</sup>." In what was called the CIMA program--Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology--some 35 anthropologists simultaneously collected data for their Ph.D. dissertations and assisted the Navy Department in the administration of the former Japanese Mandated Islands. According to official Naval historian Dorothy Richard, the CIMA program (which began in 1947) was intended "to

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determine precise trends in the local development of governments and to recognize, if possible, incipient conflicts and socially disruptive patterns for correction<sup>3</sup>." The symbiotic nature of the relationship between the CIMA anthropologists and the U.S. military was captured in the following passage from Goodenough:

Important for the orientation of our study was the Navy's sponsorship of the research and the interest it expressed in using the results to develop an informed administration in Micronesia. While it was made clear from the outset that participating ethnographers were free to study whatever aspects of Micronesian culture interested them, the prospect that our reports would be used as an aid in solving administrative problems induced considerations which might otherwise have been neglected. In the study of property organization, for example, it required that a report on land tenure so formulate the principles of native property law that an administration would be equipped to assess claims and settle disputes in whatever form they might arise, and do this in such a way that the natives would feel that justice had been done in accordance with their principles<sup>4</sup>.

George Murdock, the director of the project from Yale's Institute of Human Relations (and later HRAF), described CIMA as "a model for the collaboration of lay scientists and government agencies... The expedition is certainly the largest, and probably the best equipped, in the history of anthropology<sup>5</sup>."

It would not be until several decades later that anthropologists began to question their role in the larger scheme of things. It was in 1968 that Kathleen Gough issued her now-classic quote about our discipline being "a step-child of western imperialism<sup>6</sup>." Since then, a torrent of self-conscious critiques were to appear, including the

important anthologies of Hymes<sup>7</sup>, Weaver<sup>8</sup>, Asad<sup>9</sup>, and the pungent reflection by Diamond<sup>10</sup>. More recently, we have the excellent collection of essays contained in the 1986 anthology by Clifford and Marcus which challenge even more vigorously our notions of what it means to collect data in third world settings<sup>11</sup>.

As Asad posed the question in 1973, "there is a strange reluctance on the part of most professional anthropologists to consider seriously the power structure within which their discipline has taken shape<sup>12</sup>." Though Asad's observation is now 16 years old, the fundamental tenets of his challenge to our discipline remain unchanged.

In this context, then, it will be the aim of this essay to highlight some of the more subtle--and therefore more sinister--forms of metropolitan power hegemony operating throughout the Pacific today. As the member nations of the South Pacific Forum attempt to de-nuclearize an increasingly militarized part of the globe<sup>13</sup>, and as an immensely popular grassroots nuclear-free and independent Pacific movement proliferates, it seems imperative for the contemporary Pacific anthropologist to be fully appraised of the myriad ways in which certain metropolitan powers are attempting to subvert and roll back these historic expressions of sovereignty following centuries of foreign rule. Accordingly, a brief historical overview of the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement shall be provided at the outset.

### **Brief History of the NFIP Movement**

Having suffered the most in the nuclear age--from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Bikini, Enewetak, Christmas Island, Monte Bello Island, Emu and Maralinga in Australia, to ongoing nuclear testing at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls near Tahiti--Pacific islanders are intimately aware of what World War III may look like. Several recent works have appeared which thoroughly document the abuses perpetrated against Pacific peoples, including an account of Britain's Pacific nuclear program in Australia in the early 1950s<sup>14</sup>, the Danielsson's update version of their earlier work on French nuclear testing in Eastern Polynesia<sup>15</sup>, and a new excellent review of the U.S. nuclear tests in

the Marshall Islanders with a short history of the NFIP movement<sup>16</sup>.

When the regional push for independence gained momentum in the early 1970s--with Fiji becoming independent in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati in 1978 and Vanuatu in 1980--the island nations experienced an admixture of national pride and opposition to French nuclear testing. This potential thrust led ultimately to a dynamic drive for a nuclear-free Pacific.

This movement took organizational form in 1970 with the founding of the ATOM (Against Tests on Moruroa) committee in Fiji. The group was comprised of activists from the University of the South Pacific in Suva, the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific trade union movement. The ATOM committee organized the first nuclear-free Pacific conference in Fiji in 1975. The attending delegates drafted a People's Charter calling for the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Pacific on the model of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty and the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco for a Latin American nuclear-free zone.

A second nuclear-free Pacific conference was held on the Micronesian island of Pohnpei in 1978, and the People's Charter was officially adopted. In addition to demanding a ban on all nuclear tests and other nuclear-related activities, the charter stipulated that the dumping of nuclear waste in the Pacific--as the U.S. and Japan were eager to do--be prohibited.

A third nuclear-free Pacific conference in Honolulu in 1980 drew 55 delegates from twenty Pacific Rim nations. Delegates at the Honolulu meeting agreed to establish a Pacific Concerns Resources Center (currently based in Auckland, New Zealand) to serve as a clearinghouse for information and communication, and to coordinate actions in the region.

The 1983 regional conference expanded its scope to include ongoing Pacific independence struggles, and it became obvious to the 1983 attendees that a nuclear-free Pacific was contingent on Pacific island independence. Appropriately, delegates in 1983 met in newly independent Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides), considered the region's most progressive nation

and denounced by the U.S. State Department as the "Cuba of the South Pacific". There more than 100 delegates renamed their campaign the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement, to stress their concern with the liberation struggles underway in New Caledonia, French Polynesia, East Timor and West Papua.

Regional representatives came together again for the fifth NFIP conference in late 1987 in Manila to hammer out a 24-point program. Prior to the formal meeting 200 delegates and observers from twenty Pacific nations, an indigenous people's caucus met to discuss their particular struggles. The caucus focussed on economic justice and independence as integral features of the campaign for a nuclear-free Pacific.

The 1987 Manila conference examined three Pacific "hot spots"--Belau, Fiji and New Caledonia--and condemned the U.S. and France for blocking the indigenous struggles for nuclear sovereignty and independence. The successive coups in Fiji sparked the hottest discussions, as issues ranging from indigenous land rights to repeated U.S.-imposed "referenda" in Belau were aired. Conference resolutions targeted the U.S. bases in the Philippines, advocated renaming New Zealand the indigenous Maori name of Aotearoa, supported independence for New Caledonia, French Polynesia, East Timor and West Papua, backed Belau's unprecedented antinuclear constitution, and called for an end to U.S. Navy bombardment of Koho'olawe--a sacred island near Maui--during the bi-annual Rimpac exercises. (A fuller account of the rise of the NFIP movement may be found in Stewart Firth's excellent new book, *Nuclear Playground: Fight For An Independent and Nuclear Free Pacific*<sup>17</sup>. In addition, a more comprehensive analysis of the strategic importance of the Pacific has appeared in the near-encyclopedic *American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific* by Hayes, et al<sup>18</sup>.)

## U.S. and French Destabilization in the Pacific

And just what are the stakes for the U.S. and France in the Pacific? According to Fijian political scientist James Anthony, the U.S. policy of

"strategic denial"--rather than the popular claim of "ethnic rivalries"--was probably a cause of a recent military coup in his native country. In a paper written in 1985 for the U.N. University's project on militarization in the Pacific, Anthony predicted that the Pentagon's "strategic denial" policy was anathema to democratic institutions throughout the Pacific region. Stating that the policy of strategic denial is clearly delineated in such monographs as the 1980 National Defense University work entitled *Oceania and the United States* by John Dorrance, a Pentagon Pacific analyst<sup>19</sup>, Anthony spells out the U.S. policy:

What emerges is that 'strategic denial' is now very much the cornerstone of American policy in the region. Its pivotal preoccupation is the 'right' (of the U.S.) to deny access to the islands to any present or potential enemy and to assure that, whatever political changes may take place... the government thereof will remain friendly to the interests of the United States.

Translated into operational terms this means that the U.S. reserves the right to prevent, by whatever means necessary, any Pacific island state from entering into any foreign relationship of which the U.S. does not approve<sup>20</sup>.

Although the overthrow of Dr. Timoci Bavadra's Labor Coalition in May 1987 was viewed as the first coup in the South Pacific, Anthony believes it was preceded by a string of related events. These include the June 1985 (still unsolved) assassination of Belau's first elected president, Haruo Remeliik, and the sabotage of the Greenpeace flagship "Rainbow Warrior" by French agents the following month. "We are beginning to see," said Anthony in a recent personal interview, "the Latin Americanization of the Pacific region."

Anthropologists have been relatively quiet about recent events occurring in the Pacific<sup>21</sup>. The following summary of some of the more salient, as well as ominous, variants of neocolonialism and hegemony is intended to stimulate discussion about how we as anthropologists--in the role of participant/observer--are to reconcile our research and academic aims with blatant (and not so blatant) attempts by certain metropolitan powers to undermine the burgeoning historic wave known

as the NFIP movement in the last remaining part of the world still colonized.

## Trade Union Infiltration

While attending a conference on Pacific issues with the World Peace Council in New Zealand in October 1987, I had the opportunity to interview Graham Kelly, a labor Party member of the New Zealand Parliament. In light of U.S. attempts to persuade the New Zealand government to reverse its controversial ban on nuclear-powered and -armed warships imposed in 1984 with the ascension of Labor's David Lange as Prime Minister, I asked Kelly to address the issue of outside pressures intervening in the affairs of his nation and others in the region. Because of the insights Kelly offered on the interview, I shall quote at some length in order to retain the substance of his thoughts:

I worked for 25 years in the trade union movement, and it doesn't take you very long when you see events taking place to politicize you very quickly about the very subtle--and sometimes not so subtle--activities of people and organizations from outside your own country that want to determine your future and the way you should operate. There was a scandal that broke in Australia in 1975 where the CIA was known to be involved in the trade union movement there. The labor attache working out of the US Embassy in Canberra was CIA-trained, as they are in New Zealand and elsewhere in the world<sup>22</sup>.

These labor attaches work to influence the course of elections and to influence the policy of unions at the national level on their political and economic international issues. We found in 1977 in New Zealand a spin-off of that. In my own case with my own union we were challenging the then-Tory government over some national legislation on shop trading hours, and in the course of that we shut New Zealand down for two days: it was unprecedented. It was a golden opportunity for those who would like to see some dissent within the union to capitalize on that, and they did. We later learned that the dissenters were being orchestrated with the help of the US labor attache from the embassy, and we resented the heavy-handed nature of US involvement in our internal affairs. After all we did not

ask these people to come to our country, actually, and they are most welcome if they actually stop interfering, but they seem to feel that they have some God-given right to determine history. It's not an anti-American thing--we want to live peacefully in this world together--and trade and enjoy each other's positive contributions. But one has to say quite bluntly that enough is enough.

Various US agencies have poured money into third world countries, whether it's Turkey or South American countries, or Asia and the Pacific. The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in fact financed an office in Fiji for the trade union movement--the Asian-American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI). It was an offer that was too good to be missed by the Fijians who haven't got much money, and in fact, they're doing this in other Pacific island countries as well. AAFLI, as it is called, is one of three foreign affairs arms of the AFL-CIO: there is one operating in Latin America, one in Europe, and AAFLI in the Asian-Pacific area. These have been known to have CIA involvement from its formation during the Cold War. Also, we now know about the National Endowment for Democracy (N.E.D.), which I think had \$18.9 million in its budget in 1985, most of which went to try to overthrow and reverse the policies of France's confederation of leftwing unions, and an amount was also spent in the Pacific. Now we know that all of these things are going on, so, for example, when the Fiji coup occurred, it didn't happen in a vacuum, it didn't happen in isolation<sup>23</sup>.

With AAFLI we have a means by which US interests are furthered in the Asia-Pacific region. With its major funding from the AFL-CIO, Agency for International Development, and the N.E.D., AAFLI has links with the American Institute for Free Labor Development, a creation of the CIA<sup>24</sup>. In 1984, AAFLI opened an office in Suva, Fiji's capital, where for the next two years it spent \$1 million to defeat a resolution for a nuclear-free Pacific that had been placed before the Pacific Trade Union Forum<sup>25</sup>. That campaign was outlined in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* based on documents released under the Freedom of Information Act<sup>26</sup>. With its job successfully completed, AAFLI closed its doors in Suva in 1986 and moved to Honolulu.

Some intriguing insights about US influence in the Pacific may be gleaned from the following passages contained in documents released under the FOIA. For example, submissions for funding from the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute, AAFLI's parent, to the National Endowment for Democracy, states:

The trade unions located in the island nations of the South Pacific are fragile institutions ... their ability to draw distinctions between the Soviet bloc and the democratic nations of the world is sometimes clouded, especially when emotional issues as colonialism, nuclear testing and economic protection zones are introduced<sup>27</sup>.

Another document recounts the proceedings of a 1985 Pacific conference of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions:

The Australian and New Zealand representatives attempted to gain approval for a political resolution endorsing a Pacific 'nuclear freeze' (sic) zone and supporting New Zealand in its dispute with the US. However, only one South Pacific delegate spoke up in favor of their approach, and the conference rejected it. This was in no small measure due to the close collaboration and friendship nurtured between AAFLI and the South Pacific trade union leaders<sup>28</sup>.

## Soviet and Libyan "Threats" in the Pacific

US concerns about Soviet and Libyan influence in the Pacific gained currency during the Reagan Administration. One of the clearest statements concerning these Soviet and Libyan fears came in the form of the "Hawaii Declaration" issued in early December 1987 at a major conference organized by the rightwing International Security Council based in New York City. In the "Hawaii Declaration", the 36 scholars who signed the final document had these ominous and chilling things to say:

The results of this comparative description and analysis provided a compelling picture of a Soviet strategic design to dominate the entire basin. That drive for

preeminence employs a variety of means including intimidation, manipulation, regime transformation, subversion, the support of anti-American nationalism, and the promotion of chaos. The evidence of the Soviet commitment to hegemony includes its own policy statements, naval deployments, covert activities, basing patterns, support of insurgencies and activities of its clients<sup>29</sup>.

This preceding passage, co-authored by Eugene V. Rostow and Joseph Churba, is an abbreviated version of how the State and Defense Department perceive the Soviet "threat" in the Pacific.

In 1984 the State Department commissioned University of Hawaii anthropologist Robert Kiste and New Zealand political scientist R. A. Herr to research Soviet Penetration of the South Pacific. Their study, "The Potential for Soviet Penetration of the South Pacific Islands: An Assessment," concluded that Soviet influence in the Pacific was rather limited, and the authors pointed to the nearly universal perception by Pacific peoples that the US and France posed a much greater threat to stability in the region. In their conclusion, Kiste and Herr note that

By the usual objective criteria, the South Pacific ranks as one of the most vulnerable regions in the world and yet it has perhaps the least Soviet influence of any area of the globe. Further, as evidence by Namaliu's (i.e, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea) assessment of threat, the prospect of a physical or political danger from the Soviet Union was not regarded as high<sup>30</sup>.

This sentiment was shared by none other than Admiral William Crowe, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the July 26, 1986 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, Crowe stated that

The Soviets are in real trouble in the Pacific. They haven't been able to make much headway ideologically or politically. They have acquired some shabby allies (e.g., Kiribati and Vanuatu, with whom the Soviet Union entered into fishing agreements) ... whose economies are either stagnant or declining.... The whole Far East--not just Japan--is becoming the most active, most

prosperous market in the world, and the Soviets can't even penetrate it<sup>31</sup>.

And even more recently, the exaggerated Soviet "threat" in the Pacific caused some degree of embarrassment when U.S. officials stumbled all over themselves in a morass of contradictions. In attempting to rally support for the US' continued use of the Philippine bases during the recent round of negotiations, the US ambassador to Australia, Nicholas Platt, warned about a "Soviet buildup"<sup>32</sup>. Citing Australian-US intelligence reports, Australian Foreign Minister (and currently Governor-General) Bill Hayden claimed that Soviet naval deployments in the preceding 12 months had in fact been reduced by half<sup>33</sup>.

In other instances, American officials tend to shoot themselves in the foot. For example, the U.S. Navy consistently propagandize about the threat posed by the Soviet base at Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay. But after the Soviet Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev's recent offer to withdraw from Cam Ranh Bay if US forces withdraw from the Philippines, US militarists contradicted themselves; one US expert said that "a trade-off would require the US to yield a pivotal strategic position for the Soviet evacuation of what is, despite its advantages, at most a peripheral facility"<sup>34</sup>.

The Libyan "threat" is even more fictitious. In a front page article in the April 23, 1987 *Washington Times* (owned by the Rev. Moon), it is stated that

the Libyan dictator has laid the groundwork for subversion with a program of secret paramilitary training for political radicals<sup>35</sup>.

Without citing a trace of evidence, the *Washington Times* piece may be viewed as one of the more vulgar propaganda efforts in the US to fabricate a Libyan "threat" in the Pacific.

Not coincidentally, former UN ambassador Vernon Walters perpetrated a Libyan scare campaign during his 12-nation swing through the South Pacific in April and May of 1987. Walters' efforts bore fruit during his visit to Australia, and accordingly, Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke--picking up on Walters' cue, ordered the closure of Libya's People's Bureau in Canberra on

May 19, 1987 due to unspecified "clandestine activity"<sup>36</sup>. Many Pacific observers believe that Walters' Libyan scare campaign was designed to distract attention away from Fiji's military coup on May 14th of that year<sup>37</sup>.

When one takes a cool and rational look at who is in the process of destabilizing the small Pacific island nations, one must laugh at the suggestion that either Libya or the Soviet Union has more than a minor presence in the region.

### Sabotage and Militarism in the Pacific

To most Pacific peoples, the real culprits in the Pacific are the French and the US. For example, when two French intelligence agents bombed the "Rainbow Warrior" in Auckland harbour on July 10, 1985, it became obvious who the real threats to the Pacific were. Having been aboard the "Rainbow Warrior" prior to its demise and during the Marshall Islands' Rongelap Atoll evacuation in May 1985, I can personally attest to France's cruel tactics in the region.

Quite interestingly, the former director of France's intelligence unit, the DGSE, provided a startling picture of French attempts to destabilize the region. In a candid interview with the conservative *New Zealand International Review*, Count Alexandre de Marenches, who departed from the DGSE (the French CIA) in 1981, well before the 1985 "Rainbow Warrior" bombing, boasted that

During my eleven years (between 1970-81) we carried out about fifty successful operations in the region. Now to me an intelligence operation is only successful if you never hear about it<sup>38</sup>.

Prior to the military coups in Fiji on May 14 and September 25, 1987, Israel maintained a low-level trade mission in Fiji's capital of Suva. Following the military coups, Israel boosted its trade office to a full embassy status. According to the respected *Israeli Foreign Affairs* newsletter, "Israeli army officers are helping Fiji military coup leader (then) Col. Sitiveni Rabuka with surveillance and intelligence work"<sup>39</sup>. It is also wryly noted in the article that "The first coup struck Fiji's tourist

and sugar industries a mortal blow; it is hard to imagine the Israeli embassy has been opened to catch a trade wave<sup>40</sup>."

In the eyes of most Pacific islanders, the continued nuclear weapons experiments conducted by the French government at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls near Tahiti have made France a pariah in the South Pacific. Also, the situation at New Caledonia--where the indigenous Melanesian Kanaks are struggling to become independent--has become a prime issue for Pacific peoples.

Likewise, past US nuclear testing at Bikini, Enewetak and Johnston Atoll (between Hawaii and the Marshalls), as well as ongoing missile testing and SDI experiments at Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshalls are recognized as destabilizing activities by Pacific islanders.

Additionally, the violent policies unleashed against the indigenous people of East Timor and West Papua by the Indonesian government (with tacit US support) have caused that nation to be perceived in the most negative way by Pacific Islanders.

It is these aforementioned forms of aggression and militarism--including the refusal by the US, France and the UK to sign the Law of the Sea Treaty and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (i.e., the Treaty of Rarotonga)--that causes the most concern by Pacific peoples in their not-so-pacific Pacific.

## Rightwing Media Buyouts

When arch-conservative press mogul Rupert Murdoch of Australia (and now a US citizen) bought the highly acclaimed *Pacific Islands Monthly* (known affectionately by its readers simply as PIM), the fifty-year old magazine took a sharp turn to the right. Accordingly, longtime columnists and harsh critics of French nuclear tests in the Pacific, Bengt and Marie-Therese Danielsson were quickly "relieved of their duties" as the Eastern Polynesia correspondents for *Pacific Islands Monthly* following the Murdoch takeover of the Melbourne Herald and Weekly Times group in 1987.

Another rightwing organization, the French-based Hersant Group, owned by French press baron Robert Hersant, is poised to buy the now-defunct *Fiji Sun*, which went under because it opposed the draconian censorship restrictions imposed by Fiji's military regime. According to Auckland-based and widely respected New Zealand journalist David Robie,

Should such a takeover succeed, the paper (i.e., the *Fiji Sun*) could become a powerful instrument supporting French policies in the region. It could even undermine the traditional consensus of the South Pacific Forum<sup>41</sup>.

Robie sees these media buyouts as destabilizing factors in the region:

The implications of this move should not be underestimated by the governments of countries which have a natural sphere of influence in the region.... Newspapers carry far more weight in island nations because of the lack of television and little private radio. In the wrong hands, these newspapers could have a disastrous influence in the region<sup>42</sup>.

## Conclusion: Where Do Anthropologists Go From Here?

I have attempted in this essay to broadly sketch some of the subtle and not-so-subtle changes that are occurring in the vast part of the globe we call Oceania. For those of us who conduct research in this part of the world, it seems imperative that we come to grips with some of the "realpolitik" issues that face the people we research. If culture and the culture concept are the substance of our academic undertaking, we must begin to ask how indigenous Pacific cultures are changing under the auspices of such military influences as "strategic denial" or France's so-called "*force de frappe*," the equivalent of France's nuclear deterrent policy.

In early 1988 during a Pentagon-sponsored National Defense University conference titled "Patterns of Cooperation and Pacific Basin Security", Sir Peter Kenilorea, the Foreign Minister of the Solomon Islands, addressed a large

audience composed of top military brass and noted defense intellectuals from the Pacific Rim:

The fact that the U.S.A, France and Britain did not concur to sign the protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty is itself a destabilizing factor for the region. The region could not understand why their friends had let them down while the USSR and China happily signed the treaty. Their only explanation appears to be that the USSR and China's signatures should not be trusted. They say one thing and do the opposite<sup>43</sup>.

In conclusion, it has been the purpose of this essay to help stimulate discussion about the role of anthropology in the Pacific, and if it achieves a new round of debate about our discipline in the real world around us, then it will have succeeded.

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