A BOOK OF MEMORIES

Annette B. Weiner
(1933-1997)

A collection of thoughts spoken in fond remembrance of Anna March 3, 1998

KRISER DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
DEAN, NYU GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCE (1991-1996)

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There was a queer relationship between Annette Weiner's work as anthropological theory and her work as everyday practice, a relationship that only those of us who were lucky enough to know her ever understood. Annette's pioneering work on gifting, on material culture and on the production of hierarchy and difference was related in peculiar ways to her fearlessness, to Annette as Big-woman, to Annette as chieftain, to Annette as queen. There was always something deeply moving to me about this American Trobriander, whose force was like a current of clear water, or like a reed of green bamboo. To me, this aspect of Annette—her strength and her courage—was captured in her stumbling, sometimes even a bit clumsy, form of intellectual discussion. Annette's brilliance usually came forth in fits and starts. She was not a smooth talker. In those bumpy discussions a keen ear could hear her building bridges across the void, hear her building her own road even as she traveled on it. In this respect, she was more alive than most people. For she learned magic and she learned gifting in order firstly to build herself and then generously to help others discover how to live in a world without parents, how to be big men or big women.

When I came to New York ten years ago I was drawn in by this magic, and I learned and studied Annette's theories and her practice. She is one of my true influences. When my brother Jorge died four years ago, I recalled Annette's first book as I sat shiva in his house outside of Mexico City: Trobriand women making bundles of money out of banana leaves and distributing them in a flurry of exchanges, trying to settle the complex web of acknowledgments, debts, obligations that death left among the living. I remember thinking, too, that closure cannot be fully achieved in these exchanges, that there is a more transcendent sense of loyalty that gets consolidated after death and that reflects the fact that one's self was shaped and transformed by one's relationship to the deceased. This question of transcendence beyond death was treated by Annette in her second major book on inalienable possessions, as well as in the book that she and Jane Schneider did on cloth.

There is something about the muteness of things or, more precisely, about the humming muteness of coveted things, that allows us to objectify the transcendence of a relationship and mark it in our memories. Personal transcendence is in fact the transcendence of a relationship that has shaped you, and when one party of the relationship is gone, is in another place, then the objects that were touched by the relationship hum. Just coming to New York brings Annette back to me. I need no big effort to remember things that Annette touched: the generosity of the food and drink that was served after the Thursday colloquia in Anthropology—a tradition that I know still exists and which allows poor graduate students and a strained faculty to elevate their conversation with a good glass of wine; her flowers, her books, the generosity of her direct manner and of her curiosity for the world.

I have in my mind an image of her when she and Bill visited Elena—who could not be here today—and I in Mexico and I took then to Tlaxcalla and Puebla. In the late afternoon we drove to Santa Maria Tonantzintla, the famous baroque Indian church. It was dusk, and the village had the kind of grandiose abandon which is Mexico's great undercurrent. The church on the outside is rather modest and I did not prepare Bill or Annette for what it
truly was. I hold the image of Annette inside that baroque coffer of jewels, inside that multicolored, golden foliage of indigenous Catholicism, turning and turning like a girl.

The generosity of Annette's direct manner was probably less significant to most of her friends than it is to me. I came to New York from the courtly world that is the Mexican academy, where political relations are all obliqueness, all tangents and insinuation. The forthright and purposeful way in which Annette conducted herself as chair of the anthropology department stunned me and changed my view of power. For Annette's relationship to power had a kind of Nietzschean quality. Somewhere Nietzsche said something like "be good, but not out of weakness, not out of a lack of alternative;" or maybe it was something like "be good, but with heavy claws." Annette enjoyed power and she used it generously. Students at NYU may not know how much she did for them, but I am in a position to know how much she did for me, and no amount of banana leaf money could still the transference of my allegiance at her death to Bill, to Tom, to Fred—to all of Annette's friends—to Linda and John, and to Annette's grandchildren. Even to some extent to NYU. And I say "to some extent" here because I have always believed in loyalty to people and not to institutions, it is simply that in this case the personal is still close to the institution.

I want to end by returning to what I earlier called Annette's clumsiness of speech. When God appeared to Moses and told him to go to see pharaoh, Moses objected that he was not nimble of speech—"tongue tied," I think, is the way he said in the English version. God tells Moses to take Aaron with him, for just as God has his voice in Moses, so Moses will have his interpreter Aaron. Because God does not appear directly to people, but can only be discovered indirectly, he shows a preference for the stutterer. There is something more godly about someone who makes his own way, stumbling forward, than about the one who can afford to be smooth because he knows the road by heart. In Machado's overused but nonetheless beautiful phrase: "caminante, no hay camino/ solo estelas en la mar." Annette discovered all of this in the way which we make objects signify or, to use social science jargon in the "underdetermination" of things, in their humungous muteness, as I said earlier. Life's movement forward, the need to build bridges across a void, to grow and to shape oneself into an adult, occurs in daily exchanges and its presence is made palpable in places and things. Annette's interest in moving forward, and her consciousness of the limitation of words in the process of self-fashioning, makes her more of a dancer than a talker.

On the day that Annette died I was in Bogotá, Colombia, honored by an invitation from the Colombian Anthropological Association. I learned of Annette's passing in the early afternoon. That night there was a party to close the conference. It was a dance that was held in the kind of building that my Brazilian friend Beatriz Jaguaribe has written about: in a modernist ruin. An enormous acoustic conch that was designed to eternally inaugurate the future of Colombia, but that is now decrepit. There was a band playing, with drums and two clarinets. A hundred or so university students and anthropologists were dancing—little figures that were dwarfed by the cavernous modernist shell. The sweet sound of the clarinet reminded me of my dear friend, and like her, I danced in the void.

Lomnitz
We miss Annette. Her friendship was unconditional. This is over, and it is painful. Her anthropological work remains. It mirrors her life and personality. But now that she is here no longer, it also shows that it is animated with a life of its own, the encompassing dimension of a scientific achievement. Annette Weiner first walked this path because she was a feminist. And her feminism did not result from personal frustration but from a generous faith that each social being, be it a woman or a man, plays a role in society. Although she used the term, her vocabulary was not that of imposed power, but that of the relative value and meaning of the social beings as against each other. She did not please herself with assertions, she grounded her arguments on hard reality. Yes, Malinowski missed women's exchanges. Yes, these exchanges are of utmost value for the reproduction of Trobriand society. Yes, Mauss was wrong in solely focusing on exchange. Yes, exchange goods only have value if other things are "immovable." Yes, women are in command of some of these immovable goods. They therefore cannot be considered as deprived of value, only worth to be submitted to male domination. Annette’s work has inspired us when advocated by her fascinating charm. And it will still accompany us for a long time by the worth of its unquestionable strength. In Annette’s work personal involvement has come in tune with anthropological maestria.
Sometimes, she had a swagger. After a difficult meeting ended well, or a large pile of work was done, or a piece of particularly good news arrived, she walked with a slight but unmistakable swagger. It meant she was in a good mood, ready to tell a story or two, ready to laugh. Working closely with Annette was exhilarating, and days with the swagger were high energy.

Working with her was occasionally a little terrifying, too. It depended on her mood. The hair told the tale. When her silver halo was pert and bouncy, so was she. When it was limp, we knew that her day, and thus ours, was more likely to be difficult. A difficult day meant that Annette was at her most demanding, and her impatience was quick. Her clothes were another sign. She was always an elegant dresser, and a few favorite pieces were easy to read. The bandanna-blue blouse that ignited her blue eyes was a sure sign that she felt good. She knew how sexy she looked in that blouse. It often accompanied the swagger.

Whether Annette wielded her power with sharp commands or warm hugs, she never asked anyone to meet a standard that was out of reach. The occasional terror and the continual excitement of being around her came from the fact that we were never completely sure we could live up to her extraordinary expectations. Some had trouble with her precisely because the challenges she offered were like dares. It was as if she were saying, I dare you to do this as well as you must. I dare you to keep up with me. Someone nicknamed her Tiger Lady, a moniker she loved. No doubt there were even more colorful descriptors. She knew it. She reveled.

One glowing autumn afternoon she and I walked down the Hudson to Battery Park. A musical revue was rehearsing for a beautiful young woman belted out show tunes. I said that I wished I could sing like the woman. Annette asked what I thought she might be if shuck her head. A trifle impatient with my lack of imagination, I tried a few more guesses. "Or maybe governor." "What about mayor?" "Than mayor."

Annette wore the title Dean with a grace and ease that suggested she would have been equally comfortable with Senator or similarly comfortable with our own abilities, she left a most enduring legacy. Many of us generosity that left deep marks on our sense of imagination. I tried a few more guesses. "Or maybe governor." "What about mayor?" than mayor."

Her intellectual beneficence was one of her most remarkable qualities. Her ease in signing up for a yoga class at the gym, and one into. She immediately offered a solution. "Sweatpants." I asked what she would wear. "I covers enough." "It's true that she had on the world's preeminent anthropologists, who School, volunteering to walk through the university gym essentially half nude. She was not even a little self-conscious. She tugged once on the hem of the T-shirt, which reached the top of her hips, and then gave it no more thought. After yoga, she put on her jacket without redressing. The jacket was only slightly longer than the T-shirt. On the street walking home, I told her she was sure showing a lot of leg. "Yeah," she laughed, "and you know what's sad? I won't get a single comment!"

The energy which with which she gave of herself, intellectually and personally, was equal to the energy she gave to the craft of her own life. One morning during a brief respite when the cancer seemed eradicated, we were power-walking around the Square and she said out of nowhere, "I have to decide what to do with my life." She was 61.

If we can learn to be even a little bit like Annette in our courage, and determination, and creativity, and beauty, and generosity, and high expectations of ourselves and each other -- then, like her, we don't have to arrive at a stopping place. We can know the exhilaration of always becoming. She was my mentor, but more than that, she was one of the best friends I'll ever have. Through her guidance and her love, I learned the secret about those expectations. They sometimes feel impossible, but they are never out of our reach.

Robin Nagle
Some days, she would call what should I eat for lunch?" This and forth discussion on sandwiches from a woman who, at the stroke of changes to an entire graduate school contradiction was endearing and
Annette asked me to work chance to work with the new dean formidable woman at that, was As the new dean, one of her decorate her office. Aesthetics were had extraordinary style. I first the walls were loud and garish but statement of her personality -- bold, exuberant, distinctive and elegant.
She surrounded herself with beautiful things. She dined in fine restaurants. She always seemed to relish and absorb her experiences and she shared them with an infectious enthusiasm. Travel excited her. Her eyes sparkled when she recalled trips to Venice or Paris. I have a vision of her racing down the streets of Paris on the back of a friend's motorcycle, arriving at her destination, whipping off her helmet and astonishing the on-lookers. I can also see her squatting around a campfire in the Trobriands a bit drunk, impishly puffing a cigarette. I can taste the juicy hot pastrami sandwiches from Second Avenue Deli and I can smell summer's blossoming peonies and lilacs at the farm. I recently told Annette's daughter, Linda, that I felt I had visited her home from the vivid accounts of her time spent there.

The extraordinary strength and creativity that Annette exhibited in negotiating her illness was inspirational. Over the course of her cancer, she experimented with many alternative treatments. She researched and chose what was compatible with her needs and lifestyle and eventually decided that a "traditional" western path did not work for her. Understandably, she was not willing to compromise and limit her active and healthy life. Being an anthropologist, her healing quest explored different cultures and included a variety of rituals that radically changed her lifestyle. One treatment even involved Orthodox Judaism and pigeons.

Another therapy was yoga. A small group of us shared this weekly ritual with her. Yoga evenings were magical. Stretching out in sun salutation on Annette's living room floor, chanting wahe guru, was the perfect end to a hectic day -- though I sometimes wondered what her downstairs neighbors thought.

Annette wove a productive determined in her pursuits. She never expectations of herself and of those expectations made you feel insecure. But the tremendous generosity and upon you was a strong indication of I deeply admire her unforgettable style. My memories will generosity of spirit has made an very fortunate to have known Annette rich and brilliant fabric of her life.

out to me from her office, "Sarah, question would follow with a back vs. soup. This indecisiveness came a pen, could make sweeping and redefine financial aid. The made her very human. with her some years ago. The of the graduate school, and a daunting but a real honor. first undertakings was to re-extremely important to her and she thought the colors she chose for when finished, the result was a

Sarah Morse
When my mother returned from her first trip to the Trobriand Islands in 1971, she asked my brother and me to call her "Anna." Going to the Trobriands was a turning point in her life. She would no longer be the same person. She had experienced the challenges and the joys of a world much larger and more complex than she had been living in up until then. She had become an anthropologist and anthropology became her life.

Everyone she met after that time was drawn by her commitment to her work and her compassion for her friends. I think that is why for me, her death is not the overwhelming void that I had feared. I feel surrounded by her presence. Whenever I speak with someone who knew her, they stop me, and say, you know, she was a wonderful person. And they go on to describe something she did for them, how she was important to them, personally or professionally, or both.

She died too young. There was so much more she would have liked to do. But she has left us all a wonderful legacy. I thank her; I thank her for gifts, her struggles, her honesty, and her deep support. During her illness she was working on a memoir telling of how she became an anthropologist and what it meant to her. When she could no longer work, and was very disappointed, I told her I would finish this book for her.

In a few weeks, I am going back to New Guinea, and I will visit Kwaiwbwaga, the village where we lived together in 1972. I can't imagine that this trip has come about except through her strong desire for it. I will be taking her ashes back to the Trobriands. I know that it is there that I will have to say good-bye, but I will think of this moment, and of all of you, her colleagues and friends and family, and know that each of you make up the fibers of her cloth.

In one of her essays, she mentions Hesiod's advice: "Weave closely, make good cloth." Anna wove beautiful cloth and we are all part of it.

I would like to thank New York University and all of you for honoring Annette today. I'd also like to thank you on behalf of my brother and all of our family.

Linda Hoffman
I'm here in a double role, as Annette's successor as Chair of the Anthropology Department — a project to which she was devoted — and as her friend for over 27 years. We took classes together as graduate students at Bryn Mawr College, I as a neophyte 22-year-old fresh from college and she as a mother of two who returned to college and then graduate school. I knew her, then, before she undertook her research in the Trobriand Islands, the veritable ancestral homeland of anthropology. She became a major figure in our field — and took on another name in her own personal identity: as "Anna," because the Trobrianders couldn't say "Annette," but I always knew her as Annette.

The change from "Annette" to "Anna" exemplifies a theme in Annette's life, of change and movement. Annette was a romantic person. I mean that she was not afraid to take chances. She was prepared to change her life — even to giving up her comfortable situation for the exciting but rather less stable and certain life of an anthropologist. And, I should say, she took great pleasure in ritual, in dramatic occasions such as this.

When I first knew her, she was a sparkling, energetic presence — but the only graduate student I knew with a Mercedes, a mink coat, and a house! She was married, with two young children and had gone back first to college at Penn, and then to graduate school at Bryn Mawr. She gave all the parties, then, and splendid ones they were, too, even if -- as I told her ludicrously when I first went there were too many "old people." Of course, I didn't believe she was so old, to what must have been her horror.

Could I have realized what it took for her to fly off for the first time to Papua New Guinea, on her way to those beaches where Malinowski vividly imagined "the anthropologist" landing as on the archetypal foreign shore? She cried halfway across the Pacific, she told many of us, wondering how she could have left her children behind for this. She imagined always there was more out there. In these life changes, the other experiences and knowledges did not leave her, and she could always turn her attention to a range of apparently mundane and domestic circumstances and find pleasure there.

My memories of Annette are rich and many. She was always incredibly generous, not only materially but also equally in her appreciation of people's quirky qualities and her ability to accept them. The most remarkable of her qualities, I think, is the emphasis she gave to pleasure -- the positive -- instead of the negative. It gave her an extraordinary capacity for joy as well as an attention to growth and change, and also a basic trust in herself and what she "knew," -- if I can put that word in quotes. Annette -- once a talented painter -- was incredibly visual, trusting what she saw, and knowing what she perceived. It made her an extraordinary anthropologist -- prepared to take on the truisms of one of anthropology's greatest practitioners, Bronislaw Malinowski, who preceded her in the Trobriands, and also the biases of generations of male anthropologists who never really saw women or what they did in the field. Whether it was Marshall Sahlins, Edmund Leach, or Roger Keesing -- anointed all by their histories and the prestige of their institutions, Annette (all five feet three inches of her and dressed in the stylish manner of few academics) never doubted what she saw or what she knew. This surely could be infuriating, as many of her closest friends can attest, but it was her strength and also a source of joy.

Annette's accomplishments are many. Within two years of having completed her Ph.D., her first book was generally regarded to have succeeded in revising our understanding of one of anthropology's historically most discussed societies by demonstrating the centrality of women's role in exchange. This was one of the few and most marked cases where the focus on women succeeded fundamentally in revising the ethnographic record. More substantially even than this contribution to feminist anthropology, in the next fifteen years, Annette succeeded in rethinking what anthropologists call "exchange," by forcing us to move beyond the simple categories of "reciprocity" and understanding the practices of giving, receiving and taking as part of much more complex temporalities -- extending the effects of the gift beyond death -- as we attempt to do today. She also contributed famously to the study of material culture by her emphasis on the substantial properties of the objects of exchange. In all of this intellectual production, I cannot help seeing Annette's personal vision, her willingness and ability to engage with the concrete, material, sensual properties of the world -- too often rejected by intellectual abstraction.
I want to end by replacing my words with hers, and then by those of someone she very much admired. Late in 1997, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and I were interviewing Annette and she explained some of her own development:

“I felt very diminished by the fact that I had not [gone to college],” she told us. “I got married when I was very young and I had two children and I found myself searching for something else to fill out my life, something to do intellectually. Although I was by no means an intellectual, I hadn’t even read any literature of note. I read pop best sellers at the time.”

“And for a while when I started at Penn, I decided I would be an art major and then I decided where would that really take me? Would I end up teaching art in some place? And that idea didn’t seem very interesting to me. Having written off the fact that I could really be an artist, I mean that seemed to be something that I couldn’t be.”

“So I found anthropology along the way as an undergraduate because someone I knew gave me a copy of Hortense Powdermaker’s Stranger and Friend. I found there this romantic notion of living in New Guinea. And she studied with Malinowski. Then she worked in the South of the United States and then she worked in Hollywood. What could be more spectacular? It was all so wonderful. I had never really heard of anthropology before and there I was and I was totally convinced that that was it. Love at first sight. And I thought that this person Malinowski must be really important because she’s always referring to him. So I went and I ordered a hardback of Argonauts of the Western Pacific. I had only read this book and there I had Argonauts. I mean, about six years later I’d be there! It was quite unbelievable that that was going to be my life.”

It did become her life. And anthropology became inseparable from her life.

A number of people have written to me, in response to this memorial. I cannot read what all of them have said. I think Annette would most have wanted to hear what Frederica de Laguna said. Freddy was our former teacher at Bryn Mawr, and one of Franz Boas’s last students, and is now herself 91. Annette really admired Freddy, and we had talked of doing her life history together. Freddy wrote as follows:

“Annette was such a warm, vibrant person, that it’s hard for me to realize that she is gone. She accomplished much in her life, and I hope she realized how proud we all were of her. I tried to tell her that, and also how much I admired her courage... I remember our long association at Bryn Mawr College with great pleasure; I loved meeting her daughter, and I triumphed in her Trobriand work that showed how much that egoist Malinowski had missed! From that start, her career just took off.”

Last October, Annette told me that she was going to leave some money to the department to help cultural anthropology graduate students here. We have decided to establish a fund in her name that will honor her contributions to the field of anthropology, to the department which she rebuilt, and to the future of our field. And in small recognition of all that she did for us, the department’s graduate student lounge will be named the Annette Weiner Graduate Library.

Shortly before her death, Annette received the Distinguished Service Award from the American Anthropological Association, a recognition given to very few in the field. She was an anthropologist of great accomplishment, and her three books attest to a remarkable growth. If they didn’t change the field as much as Durkheim or Malinowski did, and Annette certainly hoped they would be part of that canon, they still present an entirely original intellect and a grand vision of human life sustained over time in the struggle to maintain identity and social continuity in the face of entropy. She thought death the challenge to this project and in this memorial for her, we make our own contribution to the human enterprise as she understood it.

Myers
Obituary for Annette Weiner, American Anthropologist, September 1998
by T.O. Beidelman and Fred R. Myers, New York University

Professor Annette B. Weiner died in New York City on December 7th, 1997, after a long battle with cancer. Weiner was one of the most prominent American cultural anthropologists, having distinguished herself as President of the American Anthropological Association (1991-93), and President of the Society for Cultural Anthropology (1987-89), and serving as Chair of Anthropology (1981-91), Dean of Social Science (1993-96), and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Science (1991-96) at New York University. She earlier taught at the University of Texas, Austin, and at Franklin and Marshall College. At New York University, she held the David B. Kriser Distinguished Professorship in Anthropology from 1984 until her death.

Born Annette B. Cohen in Philadelphia, February 14, 1933, Weiner began her academic career late, having earlier worked in business, married and raised a son and daughter, before receiving a B.A. in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania (1968) and a Ph.D. at Bryn Mawr College (1974). At Bryn Mawr, Weiner studied principally with Professors Jane C. Goodall and Frederica de Laguna. Her major fieldwork was in the Trobriand Islands, and her rich ethnography and brilliant analyses of that society are her most lasting achievements. Her fieldwork there (1971-2, 1976, 1980, 1982, 1989) led to major reappraisal of Trobriand culture and to reassessment of Malinowski's pioneer contributions to anthropology. Weiner also conducted archaeological work in Guatemala (1969-70) and ethnographic fieldwork in Western Samoa (1980).

Weiner published some of the most significant and influential works in Pacific region anthropology in the post-war era: Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange (1976), The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea (1988), Inalienable Possessions: the Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving (1992), and a symposium volume co-edited with Jane Schneider, Cloth and Human Experience (1989). She also advised an award-winning film, The Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea (1990) by David Wason for Granada Television. She published over thirty articles and numerous reviews, the most important supplementing her monographs on the Trobriands or modifying her deep concerns with the value and circulation of goods.

Weiner made significant contributions to ethnography and anthropological theory in the areas of gender and women's studies, kinship, material culture, and exchange. With her dissertation and first book on the classically central Trobriand Islands, Women of Value, Men of Renown, Weiner became a leading figure in the anthropology of Oceania and its contributions to anthropological theory. Her work is characterized by a profound originality in recognizing the gendered and political ramifications of exchange and kinship, rethinking such classic questions as reciprocity, incest, inalienability, and hierarchy. For example, her first publications on the Trobriands, illuminating women's roles in mortuary rituals, recognized that women were involved in exchange and therefore expanded the earlier picture of Trobriand culture and society provided by Malinowski. She showed that women's exchange in sagali (mortuary) rituals occupied a central role in the total Trobriand system of social organization -- through which subclans (dala) reproduced themselves. They did so, she showed, by reclaiming dala valuables that men had "given" to their sons and daughters, who were not members of the matrilineal dala. Such reclamation was a central political moment in the subclan's reconstitution, a show of its strengths and durability. These gifts were significant components of the larger exchange cycle and ought not to be understood as a "free gift," an expression of love, as Malinowski had wrongly done due to his ethnocentric view of reciprocity. In The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea, Weiner's approach to exchange is reflected finally in her innovative discussion of gifts to children and sexuality and in her analysis of the kula as realized through different media and cycles of exchange, with distinctive attributes for producing power and hierarchy in the social system. This second Trobriand book also raised new questions about the ways magic related to wealth, power and sexuality.

In Weiner's work, the problem of recognizing women's value in social systems is never satisfied simply by an acknowledgment of women's power. Instead, she used the gendered perspective to stretch social theory further. In doing so, she pointed out that Trobriand men's gardening for their affines, rather than for their wives, is part of a system in which the ongoing bond between brother and sister, rather than husband and wife, is critical. Subsequently, using comparative work in Samoa and ethnographic materials from other Pacific societies, she developed a comparative analysis that emphasized the relative importance of the brother-sister tie, as opposed to the husband-wife tie, which only emphasized women as central by way of offering sexuality in marriage. This emphasis drew attention to the centrality of reproduction, seen as a complex and total cultural phenomenon, as a framework for understanding men and women, a framework which did not reduce women to the role of mothers, but placed reproduction in a broader cosmological framework. One of the keys to following this in Weiner's work has been attention to "women's wealth" and its circulation, usually in the form of cloth. The failure to recognize the significance of such forms of value, she showed repeatedly, has led to an inability to recognize the full nature of exchange and the role of different actors within such a system. The book she co-edited with Jane Schneider, Cloth and Human Experience, was a major contribution to this project, expanding on her study of reciprocity, fostering complementary work by other scholars, and re-establishing cloth and weaving as major material modes of cultural expression and understanding.

Finally, Weiner's work on exchange, gender, and kinship culminated in a series of papers and the book Inalienable Possessions, drawing her insights about exchange and gender into a theoretical confrontation with some of the most enduring confusions about "reciprocity" as the central question involving exchange. Pursuing the subtle intimations of Mauss, she challenged the simplistic "gift/commodity" dichotomy for exchange and argued that exchange should be understood as having the capacity to express identity and to produce hierarchy -- ranked or valued difference.Hierarchy is produced or sustained in
the ongoing political struggle among social agents to claim their identity through holding onto valued objects or forms of property, such as those claimed by Trobriand subclans in mortuary rituals. This is an interpretation that recognizes not a class of objects called “inalienable” but rather a set of social processes in which the capacity to exchange or withhold can become a marker of social strength and identity.

Weiner succeeded in rethinking what anthropologists call “exchange” by forcing us to move beyond the simple categories of “reciprocity” and understanding the practices of giving, receiving and taking as part of much more complex temporalities -- extending the effects of the gift, as she often said, beyond death. She also contributed famously to the study of material culture by her emphasis on the substantial properties of the objects of exchange. This body of intellectual production expresses a personal vision, her willingness and ability to engage with the concrete, material, sensual properties of the world -- too often rejected in the course of intellectual abstraction. In recent years, the insights deriving from her theorizing of what she called “inalienability” have become significant not only in Oceanic ethnography, but in many other areas of work on material culture and consumption.

As an institution-builder, Weiner was highly successful. Shortly after gaining tenure at the University of Texas, Weiner arrived at New York University to take over the Chair of a department in disarray. Through her energy and vision, she turned Anthropology into one of the strongest disciplines there. Part of her legacy was the introduction of Linguistic Anthropology and the program within social anthropology that has become known as the Program in Culture and Media. After a lengthy period as Chair, Weiner’s tenure as Dean of the Graduate School displayed the same energy, as she transformed the structure of graduate funding and shaped a transition to a smaller, Ph.D.-focused set of programs. She gave a similar attention to her work as President of the American Anthropological Association, a period during which the Association undertook substantial reorganization.

Annette Weiner’s personal qualities were central to her successes and the social presence she had. There was little division in her life between the private and the professional, both sides incorporated in the romantic project of personal becoming in which Anthropology became her life. Late in 1997, in the course of an interview about her interest in material culture, she explained her development to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Fred Myers in terms that illuminate anthropology’s meaning for her as well as the gendered situation of anthropological study at the time: “I felt very diminished by the fact that I had not [gone to college],” she said.

I got married when I was very young and I had two children and I found myself searching for something else to fill out my life, something to do intellectually. I was by no means an intellectual; I hadn’t even read any literature of note. I read pop best sellers at the time.

And for a while when I started at Penn, I decided I would be an art major, and then I decided, where would that really take me? Would I end up teaching art in some place? That idea didn’t seem very interesting to me. Having written off the fact that I could really be an artist, I mean, that seemed to be something that I couldn’t be.

So I found anthropology along the way as an undergraduate because someone I knew gave me a copy of Hortense Powdermaker’s Stranger and Friend. I found there this romantic notion of living in New Guinea, and she studied with Malinowski. Then she worked in the South of the United States and then she worked in Hollywood. What could be more spectacular? It was all so wonderful. I had never really heard of anthropology before and there I was and I was totally convinced that that was it. Love at first sight. And I thought that this person Malinowski must be really important because he’s always referring to him. So I went and I ordered a hardback of Argonauts of the Western Pacific. I had only read this book and here I had Anthropology. I mean, about six years later I’d be there! It was quite unbelievable that that was going to be my life. [Annette Weiner, interview, New York City, December 7, 1997]

In the course of her fieldwork, she became “Anna,” a name the Trobrianders could pronounce and an identity she embraced as a changed person. She was deeply generous, not only materially but equally in her appreciation of people’s quirky qualities and her ability to accept them. Despite the intensity of her commitment to intellectual life, she had a remarkable capacity to emphasize pleasure -- the positive -- instead of the negative. Despite her sense of iconoclasm, she loved ritual and formal occasions and saw them as productive, as fun, and as providing an excuse for elegance and pleasure. This positive orientation towards pleasure and even ambition gave her an extraordinary capacity for joy as well as an attention to growth and change, and also a basic trust in herself and what she “knew.” Annette -- once a talented painter -- was strongly visual, trusting what she saw, and knowing what she conceived. It made her an extraordinary anthropologist -- prepared to take on the truisms of one of anthropology’s greatest practitioners, Bronislaw Malinowski, who preceded her in the Trobriands, and also the biases of generations of male anthropologists who never really saw women or what they did in the field. Whether it was Marshall Sahlins, Edmund Leach, or Roger Keesing. Annette (all five feet three inches of her and dressed in the stylish manner of few academics) never doubted what she saw or what she knew. This surety could be infuriating, as many of her closest friends can attest, but it was her strength and also a source of joy.

Weiner’s accomplishments were many, and her contributions widely recognized with fellowships from the J.S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. Weiner was strongly committed to anthropology both as an intellectual discipline and as a practical means to better human appreciation and the ability to change social life. Her impact on Pacific studies and American anthropology in general was recognized by the profession when shortly before her death she was given the American Anthropological Association’s Distinguished Service Award. Weiner is survived by her husband, the anthropologist William Mitchell, and by her two children, two step-children and many grandchildren.