

## **“The Quickening of the Unknown”: Epistemologies of Surprise in Anthropology**

My title is from an essay by Nigerian writer Ben Okri. It is the subtitle of an essay I wrote ten years ago on poetry as a source in empirical work (just now being published). Now, I move it forward to the main title, to address one aspect of empiricism in anthropology, namely the element of surprise, or “impression” (Hume), as an instigator to thought and evidence-gathering. Quickening: as the moment when a being gives evidence of its own life. In recent years, critical anthropology has struggled with the implications of empiricism in its conventions, great works and current practices. Returning to several important works, I find that surprise has been more important than is recognized. But then, where does it “rest”, or reach satisfaction? I review two differently configured empiricist works from the past (by Morgan and Malinowski), attempt to trace some conventions of instigation and completion back to Skeptic and Enlightenment practices (such as an example of eighteenth century “political arithmetick”), take the question of instigation and completion forward to the “radical empiricism” of the present (Jackson), and finally prefigure my seminar theme for the following day, on “quickenings” in current economic life, particularly a surprising Nigerian complaint that “there’s no money”, in a globally monetized world. Thus does my thinking start and end with Nigeria.