

Epilogue

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Keith Hart

I divide my comments into two parts. In the first, I draw briefly on five individual papers when presenting a historical analysis of the crisis faced by university teachers of social anthropology today; this is focused on Britain in particular, as are the majority of papers here. In the second, I consider the remaining nine papers collectively to show how concerns with specific techniques and media of learning point to the possibility of an anthropology which would stand the twentieth century academic discipline on its head. The inspiration for this speculative exercise is Kant who after all invented the modern term ‘anthropology’ (Kant 1978); but the dialectic of actual and possible worlds employed here is, of course, Hegelian.

In my report on the Frankfurt conference where I met many of the contributors to this volume and its companion (Hart 1998), I likened the contemporary discipline to a driverless bus whose passengers were looking out of the back window. I was particularly scathing about a failure of collective reproduction which now sees a few established academics enjoying much improved privileges, while the majority of young anthropologists languish in casual labour and unemployment. This is a reflection of what has been happening in world society for the last two decades. If we are to take heart from the teaching manifestos on offer here, we must also ask why now is an appropriate moment in history to imagine a more positive future for anthropology.

The Crisis of the Universities

Universities seem to have been with us a long time. The earliest of them are almost a thousand years old; but the modern university is very much a by-product of twentieth century society. A hundred years ago, if the British middle classes wanted some higher education, they were more likely to go to a theological seminary; and the universities themselves were still very much tied up with the reproduction of established religion. The design of the syl-

labuses with which we are now familiar with belongs to the period after the First World War and universities only began mass enrolments after the Second World War. In many cases, the 1960s and 1970s saw a considerable expansion of the role of universities in national society, while the 1980s and 1990s were characterised by a sense of crisis and decline. Each country has its own trajectory within this general picture.

Nowhere can emulate the U.S.A. for the sheer quantity, range and quality of its universities, nor for its unique mix of public and private funding. Most Western European countries decided after 1945 that access to higher education should be a democratic right. They have since had to cope with mass numbers and the exigencies of state funding and control. In Britain, a high quality university education was maintained for about one in eight of the population, until in the last decade the number of institutions labelled 'university' was doubled and the proportion entering them was increased to around one in three. State control of this process has been expressed through a number of intrusive bureaucratic measures; the university teachers struggle to maintain standards while being underfunded and overwhelmed. It is no wonder that many of them are demoralised.

It is important to recognise how short-lived modern universities are. Academics are among the most conservative people I know. We typically demand a great deal of control over the reproduction of our ideas, which we imagine to be based on timeless principles. This leads us to cling to outmoded practices as if they were not radically undermined by developments taking place right under our noses. Elsewhere (Hart 2001) I have tried to outline the history of the twentieth century's dominant social form, which I take to be 'state capitalism', the attempt to manage markets and accumulation through centralised national bureaucracies. The last quarter-century has seen a shift to 'virtual capitalism', a condition where information services have overtaken the place of material goods in the economy and the money circuit has become increasingly detached from real production and exchange. This has been speeded up by the convergence during the 1990s of telephones, television and computers into a single digital technology of communications. World society has consequently become more connected and unequal than ever before; and nation-states are losing their grip over the social monopolies they exercised for less than a century.

This is the context for the highly contradictory developments now transforming British universities and similar institutions everywhere. Having once turned their backs on modern mass higher education, the British universities are now enduring a paroxysm of dirigiste modernisation, featuring some of the most atavistic forms of the twentieth century academic division of labour, all of this administered with a passion for market rhetoric and coercive bureaucracy which has become the hallmark of the 'neo-liberal' consensus. It is hard to resist the conclusion that we are witnessing the death throes of an institution which failed to adapt. No doubt the names and the buildings of many universities will persist in some form; but what goes on in them will be unrecognisable within two or three decades.

British social anthropology's relationship to all this has been and remains anomalous. The leaders of the profession after the second world war (Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Forde, Gluckman) formed a trade union (the Association of Social Anthropologists of the U.K., later the Commonwealth) to which they admitted only their own Ph.D.s, after a vetting process. A decision was taken to keep social anthropology not just out of the schools and other institutions of further education, but even out of two-thirds of the universities licensed as such at the time. Social anthropology was thus taught to undergraduate and graduate students exclusively in the top fifteen or so universities. When several of the founders were approached by UNESCO to take part in its 1950 survey of race, they declined on the grounds that they did not want to be mixed up with anything that smacked of public controversy.¹ For these anthropologists were set on establishing their discipline as a social science capable of meeting the needs of a national bureaucracy of which the universities were now such an integral part. Links with archaeology and biological anthropology were retained in only three social anthropology departments. More often, these were associated with sociology, which itself enjoyed only a belated expansion in Britain during the 1960s, after decades of having been held back by a reactionary alliance of classicists, engineers and their ilk.

Once the links with folklore, ethnology, archaeology and similar 'amateur' Victorian pursuits had been broken by Malinowski's functionalist revolution, social anthropology in Britain settled into being 'the sociology of primitive societies' (Evans-Pritchard 1951). When sociology itself exploded as an academic discipline in the 1960s, many of the founding chairs were occupied by social anthropologists, since there were not enough experienced sociologists to fill them. An uneasy truce has been observed between the two disciplines in subsequent decades, but the distinctive position held by social anthropology as a social science remains vulnerable and moot. Some take refuge in the notion that we join the people as part of our research method ('fieldwork'); others maintain that we study the exotic parts of the world that the others cannot reach. While this particular demarcation dispute is monitored anxiously, it largely passes without comment that the experiment known as 'social sciences' is fast running out of credibility.

The social sciences, branches of applied impersonal knowledge formed at the turn of the last century on a loose analogy with the natural sciences, arose to meet the needs of middle classes released from commerce to staff the national bureaucracies erected by state capitalism. They had a corporate structure which organised teaching and learning as a rigid hierarchy of specialisation. At one level, post-war social anthropology conformed to this model and generations of students have been forced to endure turgid syllabuses dominated by the positivist ghost of Radcliffe-Brown (1952), but, as most insiders know, ours is also an anti-discipline which allows its individual practitioners to embark on free-spirited intellectual journeys where we do anything we like and call it social anthropology. There has long existed a ten-

sion between this romantic quest of lone rangers and our obligation to reproduce a collective discipline within the academy. Appealing to a small minority of students, we have attracted our fair share of bright mavericks, as well as some looking for an undemanding or 'doss' course. This is why I claim that social anthropology has had an anomalous relationship to the twentieth century universities. In its open-ended anarchy may lie the seeds of an adaptation to the world lying beyond state capitalism.

Dracklé's paper, the only one considered in this section from outside Britain, reminds us that teaching and learning anthropology can draw on a counter-cultural discourse which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and has its roots in a longer tradition of co-operative socialism and anarchism. Her emphasis on an egalitarian alternative to hierarchy is well-taken. What remains is to place such a call within some sort of historical analysis. Why now? Mascarenhas-Keyes, drawing on more than a decade's experience, some of it spent working with Wright, addresses what has been seen by many, including elements of the national bureaucracy, as an increasingly critical problem. Far from being over-adapted to state capitalism, social anthropology is seen as being insufficiently geared to its labour markets, being too academic, élitist and withdrawn from the real world. In addressing what is needed to make anthropology suitable training for professional practice, she has been forced to develop innovative teaching methods. Wright's own paper is based on an engagement with British social anthropology's need to escape from its former ivory tower that is second to none. The word 'reflection' comes up a lot these days, since most academics feel that they no longer have any time for it. Here Wright makes a persuasive case for social anthropologists to study themselves and their working environment in order to develop reflexive teaching and learning practices.

The last two papers considered here truly provide battlefield reports from the crisis of the universities. Landres and Hough give some indication of the sort of pressures being placed on university teachers by the British government, resulting, among other things, in a drive to make courses more 'transparent' and 'accountable', that is, more visible as a mountain of paperwork. Their approach, based on an appeal to the fieldwork tradition, conforms to the classical canons of social anthropology. It describes and analyses the behaviour of collectivities, reported at first hand, but mostly devoid of reference to individual experience or to personalities. Coleman and Simpson's account of teaching social anthropology in Stockton/Durham, however, makes a sharper break with traditional methods. They have been trying to develop courses aimed largely at a local, working-class and mature student body, quite unlike the students for social anthropology in its post-war élitist heyday, who were mobile, middle-class and adolescent with, until recently, good prospects of jobs similar to those of their parents. Their approach is striking for its emphasis on getting students to use anthropology to reflect on their own lives. The authors are aware that this may be construed as amateur psychology, journalism or worse, but they stick to their guns and the results are, to my mind, impressive. The next section, deal-

ing with various innovations in university teaching methods, takes up this theme of individual subjectivity.

A Copernican Revolution in Anthropology?²

Copernicus solved the problem of the movement of the heavenly bodies by having the spectator revolve while they were at rest, instead of them revolve around the spectator. Kant extended this achievement for physics into metaphysics. In his preface to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998), he writes, 'Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects... (but what) if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge?'³ In order to understand the world, we must begin not with the empirical existence of objects, but with the reasoning embedded in our experience itself and in each of the judgments we have made.⁴ Which is to say that the world is inside each of us as much as it is out there. Our task is to bring them together as individuals who share things in common with the rest of humanity.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in identifying society with the nation-state, constitute a counter-revolution against Kant's Copernican revolution launched by Hegel, whose *Philosophy of Right* (1967) contains the programmes of all three founding fathers of modern social theory rolled into one.⁵ This counter-revolution was only truly consummated after the First World War. The result was a separation of the personal from the impersonal, the subject from the object, humanism from science. This is the split which the decline of state capitalism in the face of the digital revolution is allowing us to reverse; and the nine papers considered in this section provide ample evidence of how teachers of anthropology are responding to the challenge. A good portion of them address the possibilities inherent in the new technologies of the digital revolution as it unfolds: de Theije and Brouwer, Engelbrecht and Husmann, Pink, and Zeitlyn. The rest, however, are concerned with exposing individuals and groups to new contexts of experience and performance: Bouquet (museums), Edgar (imagework), Ramnarine (world music), Russell (study tours) and Tescari (drama); and this is where Kantian subjectivity is especially relevant.

One of the principal arguments of my recent book, *Money in an Unequal World* (Hart 2001)⁶ is that the cheapening of the cost of information transfers as a result of the digital revolution makes it possible for much more information about individuals to enter into transactions at distance that were until recently largely impersonal. This repersonalisation of the economy has its counterpart in many aspects of contemporary social life, not just in the forms of money and exchange. It involves a new idea of the person, one which is based on digital abstractions as much as on the emergence of more concrete forms of individuality. The customised interactions that most academics now have with amazon.com and similar suppliers of books reflects this trend, at the same time personal and remote. Clearly one consequence of the use of

new technologies in teaching is that learning can now be much more individualised; and this in itself poses a threat to the traditions of the academic guilds. Here is one source of a renewed emphasis on subjectivity.

At the same time, the last two decades has seen a revival of interest in objects. As Bouquet points out, museums are enjoying a renaissance, spurred on in no small part by use of the new information technologies. The history and sociology of science has borrowed extensively from social anthropology's ethnographic methods; and with this has come a focus, in the work of Latour and Callon (e.g., Latour 1993), on objects as well as the practices of ordinary actors and their networks. The work of ethno-archaeologists has fed into social anthropology as a greater prominence given these days to material culture (Miller 1998). Films and television are becoming indispensable to teaching at all levels of the educational system; and with this development of audio-visual techniques comes a much more sophisticated scrutiny of the role of the different senses in communication. All of this adds up to a radical revision of conventional attitudes to subject-object relations, grounds indeed for us to reconsider the positivist dogmas on which so much of modern university disciplines are based, including social anthropology's paradigm of scientific ethnography (Grimshaw and Hart 1995).

It has long been obvious to me that learning anthropology would be impossible if we were not, each of us, human beings in the first place. A further development reflected in these papers is an increased focus on performance (music, drama, etc.) and with it on the human agency of individuals and groups. Anthropologists who once could rely on public ignorance as support for their exotic tales must now cope with mass travel; and, as Russell shows, they are organising tours of their own. We have to consider seriously what our expertise can offer that is not delivered more effectively through novels and films, journalism or tourism. We live in a time of mass communications and mobility where both the rhetoric and the reality of markets encourage individuals to choose the means of their enlightenment. It would be surprising if trends in the teaching of anthropology did not reflect all this. Perhaps the most surprising of all the innovative papers on show in this volume is Edgar's probing of the relationship between the conscious and unconscious minds through exercises in visual imagination – I can just imagine the reaction of Disgusted (Cheltenham) to that. But it is so refreshing to see today's anthropologists pushing back the boundaries of anthropological education in this way.

It is only a decade since the end of the Cold War and the social consequences of this event are just beginning to filter through. One feature of the post-war universities has been the rise to a position of dominance of research as a means of evaluating the status of institutions and their individual members. This was led by state and corporate funding of armaments-related research in the period of the Cold War. The social sciences, without the same funding or prestige, followed suit. Social anthropology was no different. Teaching was marginalised to the point of professional insignificance. The

papers of this volume show that some anthropologists are interested in teaching again, not just as a way of improving the service they give to their students, but as part of their own intellectual development. I would suggest that the trend is already moving against corporate funding of large academic research enterprises; and that the universities are entering a period in which they will attract a new public, interested in self-learning or die. The humanities in general and anthropology in particular are well-placed to take advantage of such a trend. All is not lost – but our methods will have to change significantly and Kant’s Copernican revolution is one beacon lighting the way.

Notes

1. Verena Stolcke: personal communication.
2. I have begun to air my views on possible developments for anthropology in *Anthropology Today* (Hart 2000) and several earlier journalistic efforts, as well as in collaboration with Anna Grimshaw (Grimshaw and Hart 1993, 1995).
3. See Cassirer (1981: 148–49 and *passim*) for an accessible introduction to Kant.
4. I have explored the issue of judgement in relation to critique in Hart (in press).
5. Marx, Durkheim and Weber; see Giddens 1971.
6. This was first published in London as *The Memory Bank*. See also www.thememorybank.co.uk.

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