The University in scaffolding…
or 'What do we do with benchmarks'?

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My office in Birmingham University is on the twelfth floor of the Muirhead Tower; an unforgiving1950s monument to high modernism. Not everyone's architectural taste perhaps, but a landmark none the less. The block is enshrouded in scaffolding and tarpaulin, and has been so for the last 5 years. It is shrink-wrapped, like a permanent Christo artwork. Each time I arrive my eyes are drawn to the sign at the entrance. The passer-by is told that the Tower is 'undergoing repair works at present, and the University 'apologises for the inconvenience these works are causing'. Every time I am hit by the bad faith inhering in this sign. Everyone knows that the disruption is permanent. There is no building work, and none is planned. And the university is supposed to be a place of truth-seeking and knowledge. It was from the same tower that the department of Cultural Studies and Sociology was defenestrated from the eighth floor last June. It didn't jump, it was pushed.

This image of the 'university in scaffolding' is not just an acerbic metaphor. Across the country buildings put up in the post-war university boom are showing their age, blighted by concrete cancer, architectural misadventure and a lack of paint. It also captures something of the certainty and speed of change within UK higher education, whereby both the edifice and the 'idea' the university are almost constantly encased with ladders, poles and 'under construction' signs. Most commentators would agree with Halsey that over the last two decades 'British higher education has undergone a more profound reorientation than any other system in the industrial world' (Halsey 1992, 302).

The title of my paper is intended partly as a jocular refrain to Bill Reading's influential 1996 book *The University in Ruins*. Building, if that is the right metaphor, on Lyotard's ideas about the performative dimension of knowledge in the postmodern, Readings argues against any foundational justifications for the academic life. Readings insists - contra Newman and many who have written in his wake - that there can no longer be one 'idea' of the university. For Readings, the grand narrative of the University 'centred on the production of a liberal, reasoning subject is no longer readily available to us' (ibid, 9). There can be no one single justification for higher education; globally universities are engaged in too many activities to now simply be classified as places of 'higher learning'. But this is a process of accretion rather than displacement, and new roles and justifications are being added onto old. Burton Clark's influential description of the University of California Berkeley as a 'multiversity' captures this new development (1963) – universities have an increasing number of different functions and roles, of which the pursuit of knowledge is but one aim.

Readings warns against indulging in historical nostalgia for universities past, a habit critics of the present turmoil are apt to slip into. But if nostalgia is bad history, it is better than no history. I am no fan of the ahistoricism and occasional dystopianism that lurks within this vision. After all, the establishment of University College London in the 1850s was predicated on the production of 'useful' knowledge: an instrumentalist approach to knowledge is not simply a postmodern phenomena. So I prefer the image of scaffolding to ruins. Scaffolding is more ambiguous, signifying both maintenance and repair, construction and demolition. But any metaphor is hard pushed to capture a hugely diverse set of histories, architectures and institutions in the UK. At first sight, very little unifies crumbling bastions of social and intellectual elitism with shiny new campuses espousing life-long access to 24/7 education for all. With different aims, different student communities and acutely different levels of financial, cultural and intellectual capital, the task of

analysing 'the sector' as a singular whole is an impossible one. Can one really compare like with like? But if comparison and induction are key dimensions of both our anthropological habitus and of knowledge-creation more generally, we are beholden to move beyond what Bourdieu calls our own 'scholastic enclosures' (2000, 41) and to try and make ethnographic sense of this complex new social construction of international 'higher education'. Any analysis of the imagined whole has to grapple both with internal inequalities and hierarchies, and also with the way disciplinary and institutional memories and legacies are being used to map out new blueprints and maps.

As anyone who has lived in a house undergoing renovation knows, it is not just the house that is affected. For all of our identification with our disciplinary communities, our working lives are partly determined by the institutions we are employed in. If, underneath the tarpaulins of international ideology and national economics, universities are being reinvented, then there are also new ways of being an academic or a student. One task facing us is to try and understand exactly where, how and what type of students and academics our discipline and institutions are striving to make us into. These are not simply new subjectivies and social identities, for the restructuring is having profound material impacts – student debt, the casualisation and flexiblisation of academic labour, and growing inequalities in pay and conditions.

In this paper I want to explore the financial imperatives and educational discourses we find ourselves studying, teaching and working within. Imagining you, dear reader, as one who is teaching within universities, or about to do so, what languages are you now encountering on a daily basis? And in particular, how are the dialects of 'quality enhancement' and 'quality assurance' being promoted as the key means of talking about learning and teaching. My aim is to help us step back, and think anthropologically about our teaching and learning experiences – what core values do academics and students hold, as opposed to funders and administrators. What do we share, and where do we differ? What's important in a university education, and how can we ensure it is protected? There is one question I want to keep returning to: How do we deal with the insistence on tabulation, exhaustive description and transparency that lies within debates over the quality of the learning and teaching process – what Strathern captures as 'everything on the table all the time'. Certainly a surfeit of explicitness characterises much of these contemporary reforms; a new language that seeks to sugar-coat embedded scholarly practices and implicit academic habits. Instinctive cynicism about the educationalists' language is not always appropriate. If this is not a language we are familiar with, some of this work contains important insights for our own teaching practice. But the saccharine evangelical certainties - and in the case of the Quality Assurance Agency, attempted compulsion - that encase such debates leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

Is our best response to reject such categorical imperatives, and in response, as Strathern put it, 'to reduce information flow', fostering the 'conditions for tacit and implicit knowledge to grow unknown' (Strathern 1997, 319)? For much of its existence social anthropology been a guild knowledge, a craft acquired through informal apprenticeship and unspoken socialisation. In a sector whose size and scale and pace has changed, this may no longer be fully possible. It is not a question of being either for or against 'explicitness'. The palimpsests of academic culture will continue to be visible through any new covers we seek to throw over the past. The very act of discussing teaching is an act of making explicit, but this is easiest within a context of disciplinary embeddedness – where some things don't need to be articulated or explained. So what sort of admixture of the formal and informal, the documented and the tacit, the textual and the sub-textual, do we need to create? Being explicit is important, but in what language, to what degree, and for whom?

All-new Nostalgia?

Much has changed over the last fifty years within higher education, and within the discipline of anthropology. Yet this is more than simply a change in scale. The change is also one of an accelerating pace and complexity of institutional knowledge production, distribution and circulation. The stream of policy initiatives that have accompanied the demand for accountability and efficency across the public sector illustrate this trend. Academics have not been the only receipients of what Lyotard (1984, 66) called 'the temporary contract supplanting permanent institutions', but in a sector that has gone from 'academic oligarchy' to 'new managerialism' in less than a decade 'policy revolution' is increasingly dominant. Rothblatt describes the UK in 2000 as 'obsessed with evaluations of every kind' (278).

What is fascinating is what hasn't changed. For all the 'commodity logic' (Strathern 1988) that has increasingly beset institutional priorities, a curatorial logic to preserve and defend disciplinary traditions – the tacit and unspoken - has become ever stronger amongst academics. At any one moment, disciplines are less sites of intellectual practice than of political identity. Indeed, one might argue that a principled nostalgia is an effective strategic response to a government interventionism that seeks to standardise and control many aspects of higher education. But in this newly contested terrain, are the agendas of academics, administrators and students ever likely to reconverge? The implicit attitudes, expectations and practices that characterised a small, cohesive and research-dominated academic community may no longer to be appropriate. Anthropologists are well equipped to explore the relationship between explicitness and institutional complexity.

One can try to understand university and disciplinary expansion from three very different perspectives - those of the administrator, the academic and the student. Yet no one story now suffices. The narrow utilitarian analysis of the administrator's concern over the efficient distribution of useful knowledge may well have supplanted the stated priorities of the professoriate to train critical, questioning students. Neither perspective really acknowledges the needs of students, even if, in a consumer society, their position counts for more. Yet student qua consumer qua sovereign is no solution either. Perhaps there can be no one privileged point of view, and that 'neither the administrator taking the system in hand, nor the professor taking the student in hand, nor the student taking him or herself in hand will do the trick' (Readings 145). The very tensions and contradictions between the different interests is a key driver of both forces for stability and change. Academic ideals and administrative regulations need to be tempered by an attention to the pragmatics of teaching as a collaborative exploration and discussion. Questions remain more important than answers.

Academics have always shape-shifted, juggling different roles. They have long been administrators as much as researchers and teachers. As Strathern notes, 'auditors are not aliens; they are a version of ourselves (1997, 319). The difference now is in the explicitness pre-ordained in each of these roles, and their increasing bifurcation. There are increasing numbers of roles, and more ways of being both students and teachers. Our task is, I suggest, imaginative dissent. We need to take risks by engaging with and reworking these policy narratives, imagining an anthropological or sociological education that is not dominated by any singular disciplinary, consumerist or administrative logic. For Strathern, it is about defining the kind of 'transparency and moral responsibility that social anthropologists and others might wish to nurture for themselves, in relation to others whom they value' (Strathern 2001, 291). I read this less as a retreat to the implicit and embedded than as an attempt to articulate what our responsibilities to our students might be. In this

spirit, I turn now to discuss contemporary higher education policy, and the shapes we as anthropologists might seek to shift.

The rise and fall of the QAA

In discussing teaching, we have chosen a topic on which none us can plead academic detachment, especially as this workshop is being funded by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), a Higher education quango set up to promote learning and teaching. We are part of the policy environment we seek to understand. However, through the events and development work we support at C-SAP, we are seeking to encourage exactly this style of imaginative dissent and contructive engagement with the languages of educational policy makers. The policy environment in which we are all both working and working to make sense of is the 1997 Dearing Report, the second commission into Higher Education. Ron Dearing was a civil servant, and the report has been criticised for exactly its pedestrian, civil-service approach, and lack of 'vision'. Trow (1998, 116) condemned it for 'its ignorance about the evolving nature and diversity of British higher education, and its ignorance of its ignorance'. It had to provide short-term answers, such as addressing the gross existing funding shortfall, by recommending the introduction of fees.

Yet it also did look to the longer term, making one of its priorities the 'professionalisation' of teaching within higher education. It said rather less about what it thought professionalisation meant in this context. Or rather, this was left implicit, hidden within numerous bureaucratic recommendations, including the creation of an Institute for Learning and Teaching to accredit training courses for lecturers, an expanded role for the Quality Assurance Agency, and a requirement that institutions came up with clear learning and teaching strategies and CIT strategies. It went further to make specific educational recommendations, suggesting that institutions moved to the use of 'progress files' (PDPs, or Personal Development Plans) for assessing student progress, and encouraged work-based learning and work-experience for students. Much of this was in the context of finding ways of making cost reductions. Yet the most divisive and wasteful aspect of Dearing's recommendations was the new model of quality assurance it envisioned, embodied in the QAA.

The QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) was formed in 1997 to provide an 'integrated quality assurance service' for UK Higher Education. Its aim was to bring together the existing process of subject-based Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA, under the auspices of which Anthropology was assessed in 1995) with related processes of professional accreditation and academic audit. In seeking to move on from what was almost universally agreed to be a costly, inflexible and counter-productive approach of the TQA, in which many subjects scored highly, the QAA sought to develop a 'new method', intended at finding a better balance between 'assuring' and 'enhancing' learning and teaching.

At the heart of the envisaged new method, as Jary (2003) points out, was an 'Outcomes based approach' – an approach which makes explicit what it is that students on a particular programme are intended to learn, the processes that enable these outcomes to be achieved, and criteria for assessing these outcomes. Such outcomes were to be articulated in programme specifications written for each degree programme. Whilst the principle seemed important, its implementation verged on the Kafkaesque. In a further extension of what might cynically be viewed as Taylorian management techniques such Outcomes could then be compared and evaluated against a tool-box of national reference points, including Subject Benchmarks, Codes of Practice and Qualification frameworks.

For many academics, the tension surrounding the QAA bureaucracy lay in the division between academics acceptance 'of the principle of accountability and their misgivings about its practice' (Wisby 2003, 35). The costs involved in this audit were staggering, and one estimate was that the TQA cost the sector £100 million. From 1998 -2000 only four of the 665 departments assessed were classed as failing (Baty 2001).The high-handed way in which the QAA - and in particular its head John Randall - sought to introduce these new methods caused a rebellion during 2001. Led by the Russell Group of elite universities, anger at the QAA's approach was shared by many academics. Paper-targets, growing managerialism, ritualistic game-playing, a compliance culture and a loss of trust were all cited as the inevitable consequences of this sort of external audit process. Particularly resented was the loss of academic autonomy experienced in 'subject reviews'.

Resistance from the sector led to a Ministerial compromise in 2002, whereby institutions themselves were to take prime responsibility for their own quality assurance, and there were to be no further external subject reviews. However, a number of conditions were set, including the expectation that external reviewers would be involved in internal reviews of subject provision, that the national reference points (such as benchmarks) should still be used, and greater use would be made of student and employer feedback. Whilst this climb-down was taken by many to be a victory for academic autonomy (and in particular for the powerful 'research-led' universities), the new 'new' method still involves institutions in preparing and publishing a great deal of quantitative and qualitative material on their courses and students, necessitating the creation of a new cadre of 'quality' bureaucrats and committees, and more thorough use of external examiners. There is also an expectation that, within England and Wales at least, a six-yearly Institutional audit will focus closely on a sample of academic subjects, carrying out a 'discipline audit trail' of standards achieved by students and the teaching and support offered them. For all the talk of a 'light touch', audit culture is not going away. The situation in Scotland is different, and there is to be more emphasis on enhancing rather than assuring learning.

The most unfortunate aspect of the politics surrounding the new method was the way it has overshadowed an intriguing potential for disciplinary dialogue. Disciplines tackled the process of writing subject benchmarks in very different ways. The benchmarks were intended to serve a number of purposes – to provide frameworks for use in programme specification and programme review, reference points for examiners and information for students, and employers. According to the QAA representatives, they were never intended as a rigid check list, but rather a frame of reference to promote discussion and debate, ie 'an aid to interrogation of tacit practices' (Wright and Williams, quoted in Jary 2003, 20) and as tools to be used in curriculum development. Again, the process of making explicit, but in whose language and on what scale?

Within anthropology, the process was delayed after a lengthy and heated dispute with the QAA over its attempts to force the discipline into a common subject grouping with Sociology, a requirement that both disciplines forcefully and successfully resisted. Eventually a team of twelve were assembled, headed by Professor Alan Bilsborough, and a relatively inclusive and 'defensive' document was assembled, though there was some dispute within the panel as to how much descriptive material to include. The document consists of an exhaustive but rather predictable description of anthropology as a discipline incorporating biological and social anthropology, but is non prescriptive. Compared to some, it takes a fairly conservative position on the actual process of learning, and on transferable skills, listing only 4 skills compared to Sociology's 22. There were virtually no responses from departments to the draft when it was finally prepared in January 2002, perhaps partly because of the size of the discipline and its alienation from the process as a whole, In this regard, Anthropology was the exception amongst the social sciences. In Sociology, the panel

made presentations to departments, whilst in Politics departments were consulted twice through their Heads and reports to the PSA.

The big question that remains to be answered is how such ambiguous documents will be used. Does their concern to cover all bases mean that they cover none? Can such texts be useful for both regulation and enhancement? Drawing on the experience of Sociology benchmarking process, Wisby (2003) argues that one can understand 'regulation and development as intrinsic to one another' (2003, 48). This depended on how disciplines worked with the process. Some dealt with what they viewed as an onerous and pointless process in a detached and instrumental way, whilst others saw it as an opportunity to think about the process of student learning through debate and dialogue. Many ended up making statements at a high level of generality, in order to ensure that the document had few substantive implications. Institutions have varied in the extent to which they have encouraged the use of Benchmarks in programme revalidation. Rosie (2003) describes how a new degree programme in Criminology was developed within Sheffield Hallam, leading to the subject groups using the different benchmarks to define the distinctiveness of their contributions to the degree, using benchmarks in a more explicitly political way.

What impact have these deliberations had on academic staff? It is still far from clear just how the various aspects of the QAA apparatus (such as subject benchmarks) will be used, either voluntarily or mandatorily. For Jary, subject review is 'far from being a 'dead duck'' (Jary 2003, 147), and there is 'much to play for'. In recent months, bruised by its rebuffal and under new leadership, the QAA has sought to re-position itself as involved in enhancement as much as assurance, and as an organisation aiming to foster dialogue and trust. The QAA ironically, now wants to foster a debate on the role of higher education. For most academics, the war-horse has already fled the paddock, and they are in no mood to talk. It remains to be seen whether the QAA will transmogrify into a Trojan horse, as institutions encourage their staff to use these benchmarks in preparing new degrees and self-evaluation documents (Shore and Wright, 1999, 2001). Again, research into how they are being used is limited. Do they strengthen disciplinary political identities or cede power to institutions?

For all the furore over the QAA's destructive effects, the 'Outcomes based approach' that is at the roots of the idea of benchmarks and specifications has important roots in educational theory. Jary suggests that whilst it is also illuminating to consider the QAA's discourse as 'colonising, changing and distorting academic subjectivities/identities and curricula', there are also positive and enabling aspects of such discourses (Jary 2003). Making clear what we expect our students to learn, whether from a lecture, a course, or a degree programme, and finding out what they expect to learn, makes it much easier to assess both their progress and our provision for them. Much of the educational literature on 'deep' and 'surface learning' or on assessment strategies, is about encouraging a synergy between the methods and content of what we teach and where we expect our students to end up. Hardly complicated, but often wrapped in a language foreign to that of anthropologists. In seeking to translate and make sense of this research, we have once again to find a balance between the explicit and the implicit, between clarity and formulaism. Perhaps not everything needs to be on the table at once, but we need to think about which aspects of learning remain unspoken, and which might benefit from being discussed.

Learning through dialogue?

When they choose to, academics are skilled at shape-shifting, creating and moving between many different personae. They learn to tell different stories and to inhabit different identities. Social scientists are blessed with a double ability, given that one of their disciplinary skills is to be able to critically reflect on the situations of which they are a part. But we can't simply call once more on

our home-grown brand of anthropological reflexivity to understand these new policy worlds. In an institutional environment where knowledge systems are now able to reflect on and learn from their own production, the advocacy of reflexivity is no longer enough. Bureaucracies have learnt that trick too. So how are we to adapt to the demands of working within 'smart' policy environments, which learn, adopt and appropriate ideas as they unfold?

I suggest that in dealing with the administrative demands of making sense of benchmarks and programme specifications we also return to the fundamentals of our work, seeking to understand it with renewed vision. A key demand on new lecturers is the ability to shape-shift, moving between the personae of researcher and teacher, juggling our different demands. But what do we really mean when we say that we 'research' and we 'teach'? And for all the rhetoric of 'research-led teaching' how do we actually bring them together? Perhaps we need to be more careful about reducing the diversity of our scholarly activity to a simple and often polarised dichotomy. One of the problems with such debates is that terms such as 'research' and 'teaching' convey academic ideals and 'ideal-types', and occlude both the blurred boundaries and the diversity of practice included within them. We each learn and teach in different ways, and probably are similarly diverse in our approaches to research.

Back in 1963, the Robbins Report declared that 'there is no borderline between teaching and research; they are complementary and overlapping activities' (Robbins, 1963, 181-182). This continues to be the view of many anthropologists: that the two are integral, and should co-exist in a balance within any department. Yet as Scott (1984) recognises, the 'professionalisation of academic knowledge has made it increasingly difficult to regard teaching and research as harmonious activities'. This separation is exaggerated by the declining resource allocated for teaching, and by the oppositional demands of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and teaching quality audits. Succesive RAEs have thus led to a 'gradual separation, structurally of research and teaching (McNay 1998, 196), a view shared by HEFCE itself (2000). There is a risk that with the appearance of 'teaching-only' contracts and the development of specialist advanced research units, research and teaching will become the responsibility of two different cadres of academic staff. The new education minister Charles Clarke has already raised the possibility of teaching-only universities. Many academics might share Baker and Rau's comment (1990 quoted in Harrison 2003) that 'we need students to survive, but they offer negligible opportunities for professional advancement'. Yet this emphasis on a research career as the only viable model is also part of the problem. Solutions might be to reward research that has a more immediate impact on teaching, or to encourage 'inquiry-based learning', stimulating our own students to do research.

Perhaps the policy focus on explicitness is good reason to approach our everyday teaching habitus with a fresh eye. We do not need to subscribe to the educationalists talk of 'constructively aligning' learning activities to learning outcomes' (Biggs) or of 'professionalising learning and teaching' (Dearing) to carefully re-examine how we actually learn to teach. What remains tacit and why? What teaching methods get unused? What expectations are not conveyed in our reading lists and course outlines? What 'learning outcomes' remain unarticulated? Do our students share our aims at encouraging a 'critical questioning attitude' or an 'anthropological imagination'? We spend a great deal of time talking about the way we carry out our research; can we articulate a distinctively anthropological approach to helping our students learn? Or do we tend towards the views of Ingold that social anthropology is 'a very odd subject' because 'it is hard to say what it is the study of', and 'it is not at all clear what you have to do to study it' (2000).

If we open up this dialogue, we may find aspects of our teaching, and the teaching we received, that are worth keeping, and some worth discarding. What is intriguing about the artefacts of teaching - Reading lists, Course outlines, Lecture courses and Essay questions - is how little the genres

themselves have changed over the last half-century, if not longer. Is this mark of intellectual stability and consistency to be applauded or queried?

Given our skill at unpacking texts, one simple place to begin is to look more closely at our reading lists. What assumptions do we, and they, bring to them? How much of a responsibility do teachers have to make explicit what we intend our students to have learnt from the course, even if our objective is actually to show how learning is often implicit, bodily and non-linguistic! How often do we actually discuss the syllabus with the class, justifying our choices for what gets included and what gets left out. Such texts are never as self-evident as they can appear. First year introductory courses in Anthropology make interesting reading. Whilst most course outlines (but by no means all) provide an introduction of varying length to the whole course and to each week's work, almost none delineate in clear succinct terms what students are expected to gain from the course as a whole. From my own sample of more than a dozen UK universities, St Andrews is the only one to list clear 'learning outcomes' for its courses! Several dwell extensively on student study skills to be gained, but these are usually of a more generic nature, and not always course-specific.

What is new within institutions and departments is the increasing rhetoric of empowerment and student-choice. A huge variety of competing courses and options are now open to students in what Selwyn and Shore call the 'marketisation' of higher education (1997). There is an increasing policy attention paid to student's subsequent careers, with a focus on 'employability' (a catch-all word which is notoriously difficult to define) and the development of transferable skill. The views of students as expressed in course feedback are also being given increasing weight – though both students and academics are cynical about the bureaucratic function such surveys serve (Johnson 2000) Like it or not, students are increasingly being interpellated as consumers, and using that identity to good effect, such as the mature student who in 2002 successfully sued Wolverhampton University over the poor quality of the teaching on his law degree. Like much of the contemporary rhetoric 'empowerment' and 'student choice' are ambivalent concepts. They can be both inflexible dogmas that discourage questioning and critical thinking, and potential openings for activism and change. But politics apart, there are still vital intellectual reasons for attending more closely to the student's story, listening to their account of their learning experiences.

There is relatively little UK-based literature on teaching anthropology (but see Mascarenhas-Keyes with Wright 1995 and Simpson and Coleman 1997, 1999, 2000), perhaps because universities have been 'out-of-bounds' for ethnographic research. Mascarenhas-Keyes and Wright (1995) propose that contemporary anthropology undergraduate curricula fall into two broad types - those that adopt a substantivist approach and those that seek to nurture the 'anthropological imagination'. An important reminder of the diversity of approaches taken to teaching, the volume does not attempt to offer ethnographic insights into the process of learning within these different anthropology classrooms.

What might anthropologists contribute to the literature on student learning? If one agrees with Prosser and Trigwell that 'good teaching is about bringing the teacher's perceptions and understanding of learning and teaching into closer relationship with the students, and that good learning involves a focus on the meaning and understanding of the material students are studying' (1999, 11) then anthropologists are well placed to make use of their disciplinary attributes. Our ethnographic sensitivity should be able to help us understand and develop the perceptions and meanings that students are bringing to the classroom with them. Social meaning may be as much anthropological grist, but how much do we really know about our students' expectations and experiences amidst the discourses that surround 'the student'. The more we can articulate and uncover about where they are coming from and where we intend them to head, the better we can

assess their progress along the way. Given that misunderstandings about the relationship between learner and teacher derive from its silences and tacit assumptions, perhaps this is a place for dialogue, and for a broader conception of intellectual sociability that includes undergraduates.

A final question. Do we, as budding anthropologists, need to take a position on the importance of continuing to expand access to higher education – creating universities that genuinely represent the racial and class composition of our society? This is a question on a scale that, as with many of the policy initiatives that impact on us, we are rarely encouraged or forced to address as disciplinary specialists. Our answer to it will shape our attitude to the changes we see in the system today, and to our daily academic practice. If one supports the principle of democratising access to knowledge, as I believe we ought to, then we have to work within the scaffolding we find in practice. The irony is that our support for it may be in the face of threats to our own future identities, status and working conditions.

In a time of few certainties, we can be confident that the increasing institutional control of both research and teaching practice is unlikely to be reversed. The papers in this collection try and reclaim this dynamic for ourselves, opening up an intellectual dialogue about what it means to learn and teach anthropology. For all its potential value beyond the academy, anthropology has great potential for understanding its institutional home and role in helping students to learn. If the scaffolding is important as the foundations, then as students and teachers we too can take an active part in giving new meaning to these practices. Of the many intellectual-administrative shapes we have now learnt to perform, let us focus on shifting the shapes that matter. The classroom is ours.

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