

EXHAUSTING ACADEMIA: IN DEFENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY, IN SEARCH OF TIME¹

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“[T]here is almost no language in the audit culture in which to talk about productive non-productivity. On the contrary, the very concept of overload suggests a management inadequacy on the part of the academic —one has not paced oneself properly. One should make time for time. The result is a vague, persistent and crippling sense of failure. That is compounded in the conflation of management with performance.”

Marilyn Strathern (1997: 318).

Professor Strathern’s writings on measuring performance in education have often drawn on her ethnography (Strathern 2000b). My views on academic work conditions are not direct outcomes of anthropological investigation but they do draw on a key anthropological insight, namely that societies make some things very explicit to themselves, while at the same time making invisible certain other things. One of Strathern’s concerns has been to argue that it is a society-wide loss of trust that fuels our obsessive and constant scrutiny of performance (Strathern 2000b). While taking on board that message, my concern here is a more traditional one; to bring into view a routinely obscured social reality, namely the time-consuming work of nurture. Above all, I am concerned to remind that nurture is necessary in universities too.

All jobs have their good and bad points. Universities, at their best, are havens of learning, creativity and excitement. People can commit to long-term intellectual projects without experiencing the entrepreneur’s need to sell or the consumer’s addiction to fashion. Unfortunately, these conditions are at risk as government policies have increased bureaucracy within universities while at the same time pressuring academics to prove their usefulness. I have become persuaded that constant performance monitoring or audit is at the heart of academics’ complaints (e.g. Shattock 1992, Strathern 2000 ed., Goodlad 2002, Eriksen 2005, Rinne and Simola 2005). Alarming, audit might also be stifling creative academic endeavour (Siikala 2005).

To acknowledge that there is a problem, one need not indulge in a nostalgic fantasy that the universities were once Ivory Towers protecting a unified community of humble truth seekers. But to reduce universities to their utilitarian functions and measure their money-creating potential and then believe one has a representation of its value, is to believe in fiction. No audit can account for the value of a university, because universities belong to the class of things whose significance cannot be measured (Eriksen 2005).

It was my own experience of British academia that inspired me to seek more dispassionate ways of articulating the problem. Three years ago I left what had looked like a dream job in a London University (Goldsmiths College) anthropology department. But after only four years I had my fill of disillusionment, demoralisation and exhaustion. I was in an enviable position of financial security, so I chose to leave. I was soon, however, able to consider my situation within the context of a symposium on World Anthropologies organised by the Wenner Gren Foundation in 2003. I prepared an analysis of the

changing conditions of work in British anthropology.² My contribution ended up symbolising problems that all the participants, working in thirteen different countries, could recognise. At the symposium it also gave rise to the quip that the UK was at the 'cutting edge of the rot'. My view now is that 'the rot' is far deeper, more widespread and more frightening than I had realised.

University business

There is a horrible mismatch between all the talk of innovation, dynamism and wealth in contemporary Western society and a reality of sameness, tiredness and unrelenting fear of failure. Although we celebrate our unprecedented health³ and our growing wealth, we are also constantly being told that we must achieve more in less time. Academia is far from immune from these pressures. In fact as a significant part of the infrastructure of a global knowledge economy, universities are in a position of renewed economic and political importance. They are also losing their right and ability to manage themselves.

The spread and institutionalisation of audit is one aspect of the tendency to treat everything, including learning, as a business enterprise. By audit I refer to constant appraisal. It is accompanied by a culture that normalises 'transparency' and 'accountability' and uses the language of the 'market' and 'management' to discuss universities (Strathern 2000: 2). Adapting to audit means academics must be productive and be seen to be productive. This often generates shelf-loads of 'output', sometimes of a questionable calibre, which few have time or inclination to read. As Strathern put it, above, there is no time for time in the universities. The reasons for this have already been debated widely (e.g. Shils 1992, Strathern ed. 2000, Eriksen 2005, Shore n.d). Here I want to add to the discussion by highlighting the fact that this is part of a systematic denigration of nurture and care that afflicts society far beyond the universities. I begin from personal experience.

Once I had made the shift from post-doctoral researcher to university lecturer, the most draining experience became the difficulty of fitting in adequate research. There was never nearly enough time for reading, discussion, for proper fieldwork, or for writing. This complaint is made by every social scientist I know. It was not just my own struggle to manage my time which caused anxiety, but the knowledge that everyone else's energies had also already been stretched to their limits. Prioritising these scholarly pursuits meant that there was almost no time for 'life', including family, hobbies or even eating. Having ventured into all kinds of college-related and other academic undertakings, gradually I began to retreat from projects I had embarked upon. If I didn't have sufficient time or energy, I found that other involved parties were too overextended also to focus on them properly. From management the message we received was that staff could, indeed must, be even more committed, more productive. We were not, so I was told, in a position to say 'no'; there is no downtime in academia.

One of the things I miss most in my current life outside the university is the students. I taught some very bright and motivated people. Certainly many were there to give themselves time to discover their passion or to improve their earning potential. In Britain university lecturers are often disparaged as living somewhere other than reality, but the students never let me forget that I was actually part of a very real world of true importance, the world of learning and human growth. During the four years I worked at Goldsmiths I became exhausted and frustrated, but I never stopped being amazed at my students' or my own capacity and will to learn. The universities are a literally invaluable arena for nourishing those human qualities.

Beyond a certain point, these cannot be reduced to measurable improvements in results. Nor are they necessarily furthered by the British government's insistence on increasing student intake, particularly not when the resources to accommodate higher student numbers are missing. As admissions tutor I tried to be loyal to my institution yet honest to applicants when they asked about the college's ability to cater to their circumstances. Inadequate child care probably meant that the college lost many young parents who would have had great academic potential.

Copyright restrictions (based on financial pressures within the publishing industry) meant a lack of materials. The pressure to take on high-paying overseas students created its own mixed bag of problems. Although staff regularly pointed out the difficulties of accepting students with a poor command of English, from a management perspective more students paying more money was obviously a good thing. The unspoken assumption was that academic staff would put in that little bit extra to ensure that students' output was not compromised. Many did. Alas, targets based on financial rather than academic criteria are more likely to bring academic performance down rather than up.

Universities do still equip people to articulate critical, innovative and well reasoned ways of thinking (Shils 1992, Smyth and Hattam 2000), and passion and excitement still flourish in them. However, the need to service new administrative requirements, to constantly seek funding and to satisfy students (who are now treated more like customers and who behave accordingly), make unprecedented demands on university employees. Sociologist and philosopher of science Steve Fuller captured the mood when he wrote that "teaching is being reduced to the dispensation of credentials; ... research is being privatised as intellectual property: the one driven by the employment market, the other by the futures market" (1999: 587). How distressing to contrast this with a passage reproduced by Michael Shattock from an interview with Lord Bullock, then vice-chancellor at Oxford University, and which was originally published in A. Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* (1987). For Bullock "the task of the university is not to train its graduates for a particular profession, to give them vocational training or to fill them full of specialist knowledge. It is to educate them: to draw out their powers of thought and imagination in the study of whatever subjects arouse their interest; to encourage them to penetrate below the surface of the conventional wisdom and wrestle with the questions to which there's no simple or single answer; to recognise the limitations of their knowledge" (cited in Shattock 1992: 140). The distress comes perhaps from knowing that most academics would agree with Bullock's aims, but would find it extremely hard to claim that that is what they are doing.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen has even claimed that universities have become like factories (2005). Whether one agrees with him or not, they are undoubtedly subject to management as if they were part of a nation's (or trading block's) trade and industrial machinery. Where knowledge is an asset, investors need up-to-date information about universities' capacity to produce. Arguably it is this, above all, which lies behind the constant stream of ranking lists and indicators of competitiveness, not only of universities, but of other elements of a nation's capacity to serve international capital. Some universities and some countries, including Finland, regularly feature at the top of the resulting ranking lists. What is striking about the winners is their constant fear of falling behind. As soon as one round of measurement has raised spirits and calmed nerves, the next opportunity to do less well comes along. In 2002 as soon as the UK's much resented Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), that ranks and allocates finances for the country's university departments, was over, the talk was of how to prepare for the next round, to be held in 2008! My former colleagues were demoralised but not surprised.

The usual justifications for squeezing more and more out of the universities are based on the assumption that they must rejoin the real world. When 'the real world' is invoked in this way, it is, of course, synonymous with that unwieldy yet all-powerful entity, the economy. The economists and business professionals who are its self-appointed experts have convinced the rest of us that we must be slaves to it (while the disposable income of many in the financial sector defies belief). Having cut my anthropological teeth by engaging with matters ecological, I have no doubt that economics matters. However, the view that 'the real world' is necessarily a world of cut-throat competition to which the universities and everyone else must now adapt, can and must be challenged. Besides ethical arguments, there are ample historical grounds to do so (Buck-Morss 1995, Mitchell 1998) not to mention ecological ones (Martinez-Alier 2002). In fact, given how willingly economic calculation encourages the destruction of life-supporting natural processes and then makes them vanish as externalities, the conceit that 'the economy' equals 'reality' is practically scandalous. In their engagement with these processes as they unfold in the world, academics are arguably far closer to reality than are the financial experts.

It is still true, of course, that as a profession, academia tolerates and even encourages a flight from embodied experience. Perhaps the tendency to live in their heads also accounts for why lecturers and professors are so prone to discount or try to ignore their own exhaustion. But it is not only staff who are evidently paying with their physical and psychological well-being, student life is considerably more demanding than even just ten years ago. Research from the USA, reviewed in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (19.10.2004) goes so far as to claim that today's students are suffering a mental health crisis. It is made worse by the fact that there the resources to attend to their emotional and physical wellbeing are more often being eroded than strengthened. UK students are also at risk, given the pressures within the university system, but also the tendency in the UK as a whole to work long hours (ILO 2004). Anecdotal and mass media reports from Finland suggest grounds for concern here also (e.g. Nurminen 2004).

We are accustomed to thinking that the universities acquiesced to market pressures because it happened by stealth and because there was no choice. Besides, everyone else is drained too (Siltala 2004, Ehrenreich 2005). However, we do not pursue these thoughts too far, since to argue that things, in general that is, are getting worse, is to attract the charge of doom-mongering, of being a habitual pessimist or a neo-con supporter awaiting Armageddon. It is possible, however, to articulate alternative views and without discounting one's own experience of reality.

I take inspiration from Teresa Brennan. In her books *Exhausting Modernity* (2000) and *Globalization and its Terrors* (2003) she laid out a historically grounded, thorough and imaginative analysis of the exhaustion and conflict that characterise work today. She did so by drawing on Marxist political economic theory and psychoanalytic thought, and marshalled a breadth of empirical illustrations to support her argument. Similar views have been articulated elsewhere, for example by Barbara Adam (1998) and Joan Martinez-Alier (2002). Brennan's work is remarkable for the thoroughness of its critique of the dominant economic framework, and for a key insight, namely that it entails organising time in a way that exhausts and consumes without replenishing. Her work provides a platform for going beyond complaints about audit into a realm where we can and must question the justifications for the intensification of labour, including academic, as well as intensifying surveillance of it.

Brennan's argument is that not only does business as usual inflict disproportionate and sustained damage on the usual suspects —the poor, women and nature— it endangers the health and regenerative capacity of all (2003: 148). The catalogue of misery she presents (in *Globalization and its Terrors*), is offered as evidence, not only of the bankruptcy of global capitalism but of the impasse into which modern thought has taken world society. What for convenience we call the West runs a world economy to suit its own needs, promises good things to everyone, but delivers waste and fear. Even in the midst of the plenty child care, education and health care are all being done with fewer and fewer resources. In fact it is possible now to talk of the "prohibitive cost of life" since after all, from the point of view of speedy profits, reproducing the next generation of workers is too slow (Brennan 2003: 87). Robots would be easier to manage than the pliable bodies and creative minds of human beings.

Even while society apparently celebrates 'creative classes' the standardised measures required by audit put both bodies and minds at risk (Kinman and Jones 2004, Kadison 2004). The critics of the new academic regime tend to agree that time for reflection has become a luxury. Perhaps one day it will be available only to those who can afford to buy time for it. Yet like nurture and social reproduction more generally, university work requires time and social interaction, and it requires that people be literally present to each other (Sipilä 2005).

This is so despite the point I made about academic life being lived 'in the head'. Face-to-face interaction with colleagues and students has always been potentially hugely stimulating and satisfying. Those who grew into anthropologists in the relatively confined context of the British institutions described by Spencer (2001) are quick to make the point, but American anthropology also enjoys a vibrant collective

memory of nurturing teacher-pupil relations. Now that information overload and supposedly instant universal access have become the norm, interpersonal, intense relationships are perhaps even more important. Whatever one's view of the social histories of academia, it is undeniable that teaching, conferences and, in anthropology at least, the regular seminar, remain fundamental to the continuity of scholarship. What they require as an absolutely nonnegotiable prerequisite is time, time to absorb and to reformulate (Strathern 1997), otherwise what is going on is not learning but replication.

Globalisation and anthropology

For the moment it seems unlikely that social sciences and humanities will disappear. I do worry that the distinctiveness of approaches and the delight in in-depth learning are in serious danger because it is not obvious how one would make disciplines like anthropology 'count' in a way the auditors would recognise and value. In general the humanities and social sciences, so awkward to mutate into products that can be sold on a market, are vulnerable in the new utilitarian university. Many have responded to the new circumstances by concentrating on honing skills that can be easily marketed. They are now increasingly viewed as providers of transferable skills without which 'the economy' would grind to a halt. This emerging trend is brilliantly parodied in Margaret Atwood's 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*. In the nightmare future she paints, career options are divided into those for 'numbers' people and those for 'word' people. Falling into the latter category, the protagonist enters a college offering Webgame Dynamics, Image Presentation, Pictorial and Plastic Arts and Problematics, nicknamed Spin and Grin...⁴ They render valuable services to the culture industries or to administrations and corporations wanting data on behaviour. But rendering services is a very impoverished definition of what universities do.

Institutionally the human sciences are trying to mimic the natural and engineering sciences that are more highly valued by commerce. Engineers and laboratory scientists work as teams and generally require practical as well as theoretical engagement with each other. This has become a standard to which the humanities and social sciences are being asked to adapt, even though the benefits of doing so are not obvious, unless one accepts that big projects undertaken by broad international networks of participants are advantageous as a matter of course. In fact, one could argue that there would be greater benefits if more people did more research in smaller groups with smaller and cheaper machines (or none at all) (Fuller 2005:44). But alas, such practices do not raise the visibility of an institution or accumulate glory, and so they are discouraged or overlooked, allowed to exist in the tangled undergrowth of university life which audit and management cannot fully control. In sum, the humanities and social sciences do not enjoy the same attention as disciplines whose innovations can be profitably commercialised.

One interesting trend in the UK is that the human and social sciences try to present themselves as having useful expertise in the domain of culture. Such matters are not limited to the ethnic politics of multiculturalism, rather culture is now everywhere as a focus of management and oversight. Government also regularly uses it as an explanation for social problems (a culture of mismanagement can account for ailing schools, ethnic cultures are acceptable explanations for under-achievement, violence and poverty). No wonder since to invoke culture is to turn difference into a voluntary lifestyle choice and to make economics and justice vanish. Unfortunately, in adapting to these definitions, anthropology can end up appearing either like a trivial exercise in describing human diversity or as a sinister tool for manipulating society (Berglund 2006).

Culture is thus perhaps one of those words, like race, that one would prefer to avoid, but that one finds indispensable for making sense of reality. Fortunately, sustained anthropological (and doubtless other academic) enquiry can tolerate such ambiguity. Anthropological analysis is, in fact, brilliantly equipped to indicate where and how cultural difference is invoked as an excuse for withholding economic and ecological justice (e.g. Wilmsen and McAllister eds 1996). What has been less brilliant in the anthropological tradition recently has been a willingness to incorporate economic questions, ones that preoccupy so much of the world's population, into their analyses and to make those analyses available in a language that would make sense beyond academic cliques (but see Robotham 2005).

Globalisation has meant that anthropologists have been confronted by two broad empirical challenges to their work. On the one hand are the overwhelming influence and real-life impacts of standard economics which anthropology is reluctant to take on directly, on the other anthropology has been challenged by the ‘cultural turn’ which has meant the entry of many other disciplines into domains of formerly mainly anthropological enquiry. The situation gives rise to the kind of ‘boundary talk’ that judges what is and is not anthropological (Spencer 2000: 11). At the level of undergraduate teaching, cultural studies and media studies have forced anthropology to reflect on what, if anything, distinguishes it from these (Shore and Nugent 1997). Although we appear to be enjoying unprecedented relevance, the feeling in anthropology departments more often is that one is in danger of losing one’s right to exist. What are needed are the right arguments and the fruitful practices that will change this situation for the better.

Celebrity culture and university life

In 2003, the professional journal *Anthropology Today* took up the problem of anthropology’s apparent loss of nerve and printed some views about what kind of publicity the discipline should seek. Paul Sillitoe’s (2003) editorial argued that it ought to be more self-promoting. This, finally, brings me to one of the features of the academic world that ought to be recognised as the damaging thing that it is, namely the need to invest in raising one’s profile. University managers desire excellence and public visibility. CVs and websites need constant updating and upgrading, publications with maximum impact need to be produced, and possibly, high-profile teaching innovations generated. Where money and resources are directed by audit to those who can be shown to be productive and successful, high visibility will truly count and everyone will know that famous star academics may be a pain, but within the constraints we have accepted, they are also an asset.

This does not come easily to anthropologists. From debates about writing culture in the 1980s and science wars in the 1990s, to what John Hytnyk has called “crisis-mongering without purpose” (2002:30), anthropologists are liable to expend vast energies on comparing and contrasting differing approaches to doing anthropology amongst themselves, while being reluctant to pronounce very much externally. It is true that anthropologists indulge in disciplinary self-critique much more than in self-assertion, agonising over (and sometimes letting students revel in) the discipline’s unedifying collaborations, past and present, with the forces of domination (Kuper 1988, Rosaldo 1989).

If it continues to focus on questioning its own premises anthropology is in danger of becoming a parody of postmodern anxiety. It risks eroding all possible foundations for supporting its own arguments. But insofar as ethnographic research forces an engagement with the empirical realities, the social relations that make up human life, anthropologists can never avoid negotiating relationships of accountability and co-presence. They may not always do this well or in ethically neutral ways, as the CIA’s involvement in American postgraduate research has demonstrated (BBC news 2005), but it cannot avoid confronting the problem. In other words, anthropological engagement makes any simple claims to virtue or to vice on the part of a researcher or of the whole discipline, quite untenable. In fact it can make its partiality an asset, as Strathern’s *Partial Connections* (1991) has inspired so many of us to do.

Constant disciplinary self-critique can also be very frustrating for students, particularly if they are primarily looking for ‘the’ correct answers that will gain them the credentials they think they need. But even where students have more ambitious goals than to regurgitate teaching, they require confident premises from which to proceed. They must also have the confidence to insist on difficulty and complexity when it is warranted. Tim Ingold is surely not alone in feeling “[w]e have a huge way to go in training both ourselves and our students to speak with conviction and authority on anthropological matters” (2003: 23). Rather than wishing that our students were able to pronounce efficiently and unambiguously to the kinds of queries that our fast-paced media world or our measurement-addicted policy world might pose, it might be more promising to consider teaching them how to be confident about ambiguity, how to insist on complexity as well as limitations, and how to study life as process.

But where attention spans are short and where built-in obsolescence is actually a good thing, as they are in market oriented decision-making, sustained effort and a tolerance for complexity always loses out to simplicity and high visibility. This has epistemological consequences but is also has a direct impact on the attitudes of students as well as staff. Rigorous, collective scholarship is giving way to fashionable, even hyped up ‘interventions’ by star scholars, as anyone who has experienced a stampede for plenary at the AAA given by some celebrity academic, will know. There is substantial evidence that it is also driving a broader trend for individual academics to conduct themselves as celebrities in the making.

What American academics recognise as a star system of hiring (Cohen 1993) has now been introduced, perhaps unwittingly, into the British university system. University managers and Heads of Department desperate to find a USP (unique selling point) lure prominent scholars to enhance their external profiles. The problem is now so serious that it is being debated in print (Lipsett and Demopoulos, Aronauer 2005) as well as among university staff on both sides of the Atlantic. The main point is that what looks good does not always translate into substantive improvement. According to Professor Richard Bulliet of Columbia University, interviewed in the *Columbia Spectator* (Aronauer 2005), star academics’ ‘off-campus visibility’ harms ‘on-campus values’, particularly those aspects of running a department that are not convertible into monetary values.

They do, of course, offer the promise of intellectual excitement and help to draw in the best students. But from the perspective of managers, in the UK at least, their value lies in their ability to hike an institution upwards in the ranking lists and to attract high-paying overseas students. In the British funding structure it makes sense for Heads of Department concerned for the continuity of their own department to believe that star academics are necessary. They can, after all, lift audit ratings particularly those of the Research Assessment Exercise that effectively produces a league table of departments. Stars are expected to publish as much as they can in high-impact journals while other members of staff carry disproportionate administrative loads. In the UK some staff have even been threatened with demeaning and demoralising teaching-only contracts (Lipsett and Demopoulos 2005: 1).

This also generates income inequalities within departments, as hires from elsewhere are lured in with offers of higher salaries as well as attractive working conditions. The *Columbia Spectator* makes the further point that the “market for scholarship is influenced by trends in academia. Scholars doing popular research have a better chance of receiving an outside offer. Professors with families and ties to their location have difficulty making credible threats to leave” (Aronauer 2005). This kind of jostling for positions promotes a flexibility within the profession that is also gendered. Where productivity and visibility are rewarded, those who invest most in nurturing and administrative tasks, whether at work or outside it, are valued least. Performance is recognised only with a sell-by date and it is measured in terms of publications with high impact, a visible conference presence and possibly spectacular student satisfaction. Meanwhile other staff carry the constantly growing burdens of teaching and administration while trying to squeeze in what satisfying academic enterprise they can.

The invisibility of so much work is more than an ethical issue. The flourishing of the universities as a feature of society depends crucially on the time-consuming work that goes on in the shadows, of organising, of dealing with periodic crises among students or demoralised staff, of struggling to hold onto resources and, of course, of keeping abreast of developments in the field. In the mean time, the feminised work of nurture, which sustains life both inside and outside the academy, gets completely overlooked. This allows the so-called creative class to hijack recognition for creativity for themselves while reproducing the structural constraints that frustrate the creativity of others.

This bifurcation into stars and invisible nobodies is not, of course, unique to academia, but nor is it simply an import from the world of media celebrity. Image management has become standard across corporate life and all the white collar jobs that are modelled on it, a fact that is having arguably profound socio-psychological effects. Sociologist Richard Sennett (1998) and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich

(2005) have described the pressures of working harder in the USA, but at the same time they have described a social environment where creating an impression of success is fundamental to surviving let alone flourishing in the incessantly audited and relentlessly competitive world of work. Juha Siltala (2004) has written a similar book about Finland. Not only does the speeded up time of information technology exert its pressures so that workers must juggle ceaseless demands for potentially around-the-clock availability, it makes it difficult for people to learn about each other. They carry out more and more tasks as short-term projects as parts of temporary teams and they change jobs with increasing frequency. One result is that there are fewer rewards and in certain situations, even opportunities, for making long-term plans and commitments. Again, instant time has become the tyrant militating against anything but superficial relationships and a kind of structural narcissism (Sennett 1998).

This is neither desirable nor sustainable. At the individual level, the demands of a just-in-time, hyperactive academic life are, perhaps, possible for a few star academics to cope with, but they undermine the long-term health of academic institutions and they erode the quality of and the passion for scholarship. To put it another way, embracing audit in universities also means embracing a soul-destroying cult of celebrity whose suitability to academia is highly debatable.

Being famous has, however, become an explicit aspiration in the West as has making the millions to be able to live the life of the international celebrity. Still working relatively autonomously, academics enjoy, perhaps, rewards whose value outstrips the lure of gold. Presumably they also have the resources to identify the flaws in the system, and to imagine and propose alternatives. Academics have, however, acquiesced to a system of workplace relationships that value image over trust and short-term goals over long-term commitments. They have done so partly, at least, because of their own professional values of competitiveness and the enthusiasm university teaching has always shown for assessing, self critiques brilliantly articulated by Strathern (1997). They should have known that, in the long run, constant measurement means constant change for its own sake as well as raising the targets (average, after all, is never good enough).

I have argued that what goes on inside universities is not unique. Yet the fact that universities should have found themselves struggling with such unsuitable working practices is surely noteworthy. As usual, the fault is partly to be found inside, and partly outside. The time to correct is, however, is now and the same goes for working practices everywhere.

Ways out

The source of the malaise within my former institution can be found in the malaise of work and economic thought around the world. The problems have finally come home to roost. The question now is whether the universities can re-engage with the world in a more embodied, emplaced and time-conscious way. To do so they must begin by acknowledging their own exhaustion and treating it as part of the generalised energy crises of world society.

That there is exhaustion in Finland is obvious to one who is now an outsider, an occasional visitor observing what has changed and what has stayed the same. Besides my personal impressions that people are less satisfied with social trends, recent Finnish-language literature (e.g. Siltala 2004, Seppänen 2004) offers support for my assessment that Finland is a society under growing strain but, as the significance of image-management would lead us to expect, putting a brave face on things. Finland and Finns persist in projecting an image of happiness and success. The economy seems fine, the country still gets to ritually celebrate its firsts or nearly firsts in international ranking lists, and public services still operate more or less as people expect them to, despite years of cuts. But here, as in UK academia, the cost is crippling.

At least part of the reason has to do with the simple but unutterable fact that empirically speaking, the global market economy is working us and the planet to death. Indicators at global as well as national level (Ralston Saul 2005 and Kiander 2001 respectively) show entrenched income inequality combined with haphazard economic policy making over the last two decades. Most depressingly, there are few grounds for individuals or communities to believe that hard work and forward planning might yield satisfying rewards. What is perhaps most significant is that any correlation between effort and reward is perceived to have broken down. This is hardly surprising given the still growing differentials between executives' and others' pay. In the Finnish case, resentment about the rewards of top executives have led to decreased willingness to increase one's own productivity (Siltala 2004: 263). What surprises is that there is not more alarm over the fact that even the creative classes, like academics, are reporting exhaustion, frustration and health problems (Kinman and Jones 2004).

The larger costs are yet to be paid as the consequences of turn of the millennium labour politics mature into coming generations. What will become of them when so much time and energy formerly invested in reproduction – childcare, social relations, recuperation from exertion – has been diverted into the growth of capital? Exhorting all workers to tighten belts and to outperform the competitors, states continue to help capital to roam a borderless world and leaders exhort everyone to keep up with change (Himanen 2004, Blair 29.9.2005). As Brennan argued, women, children and the poor are the first to suffer, and they do so in the responses of their bodies. But those in the rich, or 'brain' (!) countries also have bodies and these too are being weakened (2003: 6). She states the problem very clearly: both "the new right and the third way promote centralization and globalization at the same time as they cut back on spending for human needs, from basic education to welfare and healthcare. They cut back just as everyone gets sicker, and more depressed, and now more paranoid, for fear of more attacks" (2003: 7).

The economists, politicians and managers who claim there is no alternative to speeding up production are simply wrong. Even within market capitalism there are elements that still value things that are not reducible to a price. I have seen this clearly in my experience in the voluntary sector in London since leaving academia. The problem is that this kind of work, of care, nurture, imagining alternatives, what Barbara Adam calls 'moonlighting' (1998), has to lurk in the shadows, the undergrowth. In those unenviable conditions it tries to patch up the mess left by the official economy. The waste in energy is phenomenal, and the dangers while society refuses to accept the cost of its growth fantasies may be devastating.

Academics, particularly in the humanities and the social sciences, must regain their confidence. The managers of the utilitarian university are not going to secure the conditions for slow and careful scholarship or nurturing education. Their assumptions must be challenged. To begin the task, it is necessary to recognise and act on the difference between improvement and degeneration and to refuse to pretend.

Notes

¹ My title and much of the inspiration for this essay comes from Teresa Brennan's provocative book, *Exhausting Modernity* (2000). Thanks to Karen Armstrong for comments, and to Steve Nugent for encouragement and suggestions for sources.

² Arturo Escobar and Gustavo Lins Ribeiro convened the symposium. Besides editing a volume for publication they have established an international network of anthropologists, the World Anthropologies Network (WAN), <http://www.ram-wan.org/html/home.htm>

³ The UK media frequently offers up stories of the 'time bombs' ticking in the bodies of younger generations, from obesity and lack of exercise to skin cancers. The increase in the use of antidepressants

on both sides of the Atlantic, even among children, suggests that psychological problems are also widespread.

⁴ Thanks to Nicola Green for reminding me of this.

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