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## Introduction: In the World, and a World in Itself

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*Anthropology's World*, as in the title of this book, can mean at least two things. On the one hand it is anthropology as a social world in itself—the community of a discipline, with its internal social relationships, its ideas and practices. On the other hand, anthropology's world is the wider outside world to which the discipline must relate in various ways. For anthropology, which more than any other discipline may have a constant ambition to be global in its scope, this involves humanity everywhere, and the attempt to understand its variety of ways of life and thought and its conditions of existence. It is a world anthropologists are inclined to think of as made up of a multitude of “fields”: research sites, actual or potential. In a more close-up sense, however, that outside world also includes people and structures which demand attention on a more everyday, often practical level: wider academic environments, student populations, local or national publics, the media. In both these senses—or perhaps I should say all these senses—the world of anthropology keeps changing.

This book is about some aspects of contemporary life in this world. Anthropology is now a global discipline both through engaging in research everywhere (at least in principle) and in having local practitioners everywhere. Yet within that worldwide community there are variations in scholarly interests and in working circumstances. In what follows I will draw continuously on my own experiences, taking my own path through anthropology's world. My enduring perspective is from one corner of Europe, but looking out. Over the years, I have developed close ties with anthropologists in this part of the world, but I have also had, and continue to have, some of my own formative experiences in American anthropology. When I have a chance (and such opportunities have included various stays and visits in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Australia), I cultivate contacts with colleagues elsewhere in the world as well.

The subtitle of this book specifies that its focus is on what the discipline is or can be now: in that twenty-first century we have

already moved some distance into. Generally around us, these are times of many surprises: on the front tables in bookstores there are bestsellers with titles like *The Black Swan*, or *The Age of the Unthinkable*. What will happen next in anthropology, or to anthropology, is not easy to forecast. But some questions will be there, to be definitively answered or (more likely) to be debated again and again, perhaps wherever there are anthropologists. What, in these times, is anthropology for? What is its place in the world? How do we go about our work? Who should work where? How do we want to be understood, and how do we not want to be seen? For whom do we write, and whom should we read?

I will try and confront here some of the challenges that anthropologists face today and will face in the future. But I am inclined to take the long view towards them—in large part that of a twentieth-century anthropologist. It is almost 50 years since I began as an undergraduate student of anthropology (strictly speaking, in something then still named “general and comparative ethnography”). Some of the changes in the discipline and in the world since then have been fairly quiet and gradual, others more turbulent. I would hope that my sense of the present may in some ways be sharpened by a sense of the past. Moreover, as I will argue particularly in Chapter 7, that past can also be explored as a resource for the continued renewal of the anthropological imagination.

The period when I began in anthropology was, for one thing, still one of decolonization: Asia had mostly come through it, Africa was still in it. That dramatic historical process had much to do with my choice of direction, and no doubt many in my generation of anthropologists shared this interest. Yet if it was decolonization and newly independent countries that attracted us to the discipline, the growth of anthropology had until then clearly had its links to colonialism itself. Scholarship had developed most strongly in those European countries which were also major colonial powers, and in those other countries where European settlers had established their domination over indigenous populations. For a period in the latter half of the twentieth century, consequently, new cohorts of anthropologists and anthropology students were preoccupied with figuring out—revealing, debating, pinpointing—the nature of this factor in the relatively recent history of the field.<sup>1</sup>

After a decade or two, that issue had more or less sedimented as a part of the discipline's past. It had become more a topic of intellectual curiosity, less a moral burden or a topic of conflict between academic generations.<sup>2</sup> The decolonization of anthropology

itself, however, had some enduring consequences. One of them was that it was no longer intellectually, morally or politically defensible to have a separate discipline for those parts of humanity which were “non-western”—sharing only the characteristic that they were exotic to the Occidentals from whom they were thus separated (although through colonialism they had also been linked to, and mostly dominated by, these Occidentals). It is from this point on that anthropology has moved towards being more explicit and consistent in identifying itself as a discipline concerned with all of humanity.

But that concern also meant that it became legitimate, perhaps even necessary, to engage as well in what became known somewhat loosely as “anthropology at home.”<sup>3</sup> For a variety of reasons, this has become a rather large proportion of anthropology as currently practised, although it works out in different ways in different places, depending on a number of conditions. It cannot now be taken for granted that the anthropologist, in the field-working, ethnographic phase of his or her work, is an expatriate. This fact has implications for the world of anthropology both in its internal relationships and in the interfaces between the discipline and its surroundings, inside academia as well as with the wider society.

It has also been in the times after colonialism that anthropology has really developed as a worldwide community of practitioners, becoming more or less well-represented in countries that never had colonies (or only briefly, or on a very limited scale), and in those that were themselves once colonies. In that way anthropology has diversified, and the question is reasonably raised to what extent we should now speak of anthropologies in the plural form—national and regional varieties, shaped by differing histories, circumstances and interests. I have something to say about this in Chapter 2, where I also comment on the relationships between such anthropologies. It is also one aspect of this global spread of the discipline that it is now conducted (thought, spoken, taught, written) in more languages, for different purposes. That has consequences for its internal cohesion, as well as for its relationship to its local and national environments. I turn to these matters in Chapter 6.

Anyhow, for a discipline self-consciously defining itself as global in scope, a more recent development has also had implications for how research fields are defined, and where they are found. The term “globalization” really worked its way into everyday language only towards the end of the twentieth century. In reaction to its becoming a buzzword, it has been pointed out often enough that the realities of global interconnectedness have been around much longer, although

they may not have been equally acutely experienced by everybody: to take one example, the West Africans transported away across the Atlantic a few hundred years ago in the slave trade, for deployment on the plantations of the New World, were certainly being forcibly “globalized,” and colonialism was itself one form of globalization. Yet the rapid spread of the new label reflected a new intensity in such interconnectedness, new forms, and not least a new diversity of forms. An integrated world economy with built-in inequalities, new material consumption patterns, media with new capacities to carry a great variety of cultural forms efficiently across great distances, transnational labor migration, refugee streams, diasporas, long-distance tourism, a plethora of international organizations and transnational movements, international crime and terror syndicates—all of these are conspicuous ingredients of the emergent global ecumene.

If the dominant mode of work in anthropology during much of the twentieth century, not least in field research, had involved a standard operating procedure of focusing on bounded local units (always, to a degree, an analytical fiction), the varieties of globalization and transnational connections posed new challenges to the discipline, which thus switched to seeing the older types of units as more open, and at the same time increasingly took on other units with not-so-local characteristics. Perhaps, after all, such steps came fairly readily to anthropologists, once they moved away from more distinctly local circumscriptions of their fields: they had never been as committed to the nation-state as the unit of societal analysis—what has been termed “methodological nationalism”—as some other scholarly disciplines have tended to be.<sup>4</sup> Rather, they followed their topics wherever they would take them in the global terrain, allowing ethnography to show the ways the world comes together.

This, of course, is not to say that the entire discipline has now turned to the study of globalization. I became involved quite early in anthropology's global and transnational turn; although, not much later, I suggested that the time would come soon enough when global connectedness would itself hardly be so much of a research focus, but would be largely assimilated within the background understanding of much ethnographic work.<sup>5</sup> Yet this connectedness has also added a range of new research topics to all those fields of study which were already established, and which mostly continue to be cultivated. The new topics and experiences have also played a part in provoking some reconsideration of key concepts, and of methodology. What should we mean, for example, by “culture”—

and what should we ensure that we are not taken to mean? (See Chapter 3.) And again, what is now a “field,” and what is field work? (See Chapter 4).

The introductory course through which I passed into anthropology’s internal world was offered in a minuscule unit which had only very recently been constituted as a university department—it actually functioned as part of a much older ethnographic museum. The course had drawn a mere handful of students, perhaps a dozen. By now, in any more sizeable university, such a small number would very likely be considered a disaster. Over the last fifty years or so, the discipline has grown, I would say enormously, in terms of its number of practitioners and students, and also in terms of the institutional structures they inhabit. While it has been argued, as above, that anthropology was a child of colonialism, in terms of its population size, it really grew up in the postcolonial era.

Academia, in its varied shapes, at present makes up a large part of anthropology’s world (in most places, I am sure, much larger than museums, which had a proportionately greater part in the discipline’s earlier history; these seem to have become less places of work, and more objects of study). If there are thus now many more people teaching and learning anthropology, it is likely to have something to do with the way the central concerns of anthropology match changes in their world. More of these people seem to sense that this is a discipline which speaks to their personal experiences: one where they may expand on these experiences, organize them, and even put them to use. In my own introductory course those many years ago, probably all the students in the class were ethnic Swedes like me, mostly of similar background and experience (a large part perhaps even stereotypically blond and blue-eyed). Certainly that continues to be true in some places: students are embedded in everyday milieux of mostly cultural sameness, and meet the facts and stories of anthropology, the message of diversity, with a fresh sense of wonder. But in other places, many students now receive more of their own impressions from encounters with the foreign, whether in their own neighborhoods or from backpacking around the world. Some of them, too, will have their very own roots in the distant places we lecture about and make them read about, and their own views of them.

So classroom encounters may show us how some facets of contemporary global interconnectedness impinge on the way we do anthropology, think anthropology, talk anthropology—even when globalization is not itself our intended topic. But it makes its

appearances elsewhere as well, as we now engage in our long or short conversations with people around us. A certain amount of cultural relativism may long have been a part of the anthropological message (at least as a critique of simple-minded ethnocentrism). That may have come more easily, perhaps too easily, when other cultures were mostly somewhere else. Does it make a difference that, for many people, some of those controversial ideas and practices of Others are now in evidence among neighbors and work mates, in their children's classrooms, even among new members of their families? And generally—in the flow of information or disinformation about other parts of the world and their inhabitants, through news media, entertainment channels, and political rhetoric—how should anthropology be heard in the crowd? What can be its part in the public division of communicative labor? Chapter 5 takes up some of these questions, examining how varieties of anthropological research and reporting can contribute to greater transparency in a world combining interconnectedness and diversity.

Getting out of the classroom, on my memory trip, come along for a moment to the office as well. The department office in the 1960s was fairly low-tech: there were typewriters, carbon copies, and rather untidy mimeograph machines. A bit later on, photocopiers and fax machines already made a difference. To the field you perhaps carried your portable typewriter, and a likewise supposedly portable tape recorder which was in truth quite unwieldy. What certainly makes the practice of anthropology in the twenty-first century different from what it was during most of the twentieth, in a development which also has its obvious connections to globalization, is the arrival of the Internet, and everything that goes with it. Anthropology's world, in both the senses identified above, is now also a cyberworld. This has become quite central. It entails changes in social and cultural life generally, and consequently in our field studies of that life, and it can even provoke debates about what should count as field studies. Taking the more internalist view of the discipline's own smaller world, the ubiquitous presence of that screen penetrates our everyday activities—our reading, writing, publishing, teaching, and chances of collaboration.<sup>6</sup> I will touch on this in several chapters, though we can be reasonably sure that some of its possibilities have not yet been explored, or fully exploited—including, perhaps, some new ways of spending time less well.

But back to the classroom, and the growing student numbers of the later decades of the twentieth century. While the expansion of anthropology in the universities of the world sounds like a success

story, and the attractions of anthropology itself surely had a large part in this growth, we cannot disregard the fact that it also reflected the overall expansion of higher education in this period. In much of the world there are now more colleges and universities, they have become larger, and it follows that there are both more students and more teaching jobs. Yet academia also has its problems, mostly not peculiar to anthropology. It is quite widely recognized that in much of Europe, and in many other parts of the world as well, the increase in resources for teaching and research has lagged behind the growing student numbers, particularly in the wide field of social sciences and humanities where anthropology usually finds itself. In many places and too many fields of study, too many students (I am thinking particularly of undergraduates) get too little teaching, hang around for too long, sometimes drift away without the degrees or other qualifications they were supposed to get, and finally head off towards what would appear to be an uncertain future in occupational life. These are not the circumstances in which it is always possible to carry out either teaching or learning in the way one might have liked; even so, the challenge is there to ask what kind of curriculum, and what sort of pedagogy, would best serve the purpose of introducing newcomers precisely to anthropology's world.<sup>7</sup>

While we may have been inclined to see some rather irresponsible politics, often at a national level, at the roots of some of the difficulties of the academic teaching industry, we have more recently also seen the political reactions to them, forming in combination with wider conjunctures. I tend to be wary of terms that come into fashion for which the border between analytical scrutiny and political cliché threatens to become blurred. Yet it seems undeniable that, in the last couple of decades or so, we have seen the emergence of a major, more or less worldwide set of ideas and practices which I would describe as a neoliberal culture complex, and which also—I believe especially since the turn of the millennium—has tended to affect lives and institutions in academia. It is obviously a central assumption of neoliberalism that “the market” generally offers a superior model for organizing activities and social relationships. Yet, in Europe at least, where universities tend to be in one way or another closely tied to the state apparatus, this stream of thought is conspicuously present in the reshaping of state management. Some of its manifestations actually seem less in evidence in North American universities, which are more pluralistic and under rather less centralized control; although since the late twentieth century, they and their professoriate have come under more pointed ideological attack, largely as part of



the “culture wars.” So here as well one finds critical or pessimistic pronouncements suggesting the demise of the university in its more scholarship-centered form.<sup>8</sup>

A number of recurrent keywords—accountability, transparency, privatization, quality control, branding, auditing, excellence, ranking—signal the presence of the neoliberal culture complex. When it makes its way across continents, like other such complexes in history it takes somewhat different shapes in different settings, as it interacts with what was already in place. The complex may acquire national characteristics, and in academia its encounters with different disciplines work out in varied ways. It seems to have merged most effectively with the natural sciences, medicine and technology, partly because their products tend to be those of greater interest in the marketplace, but probably also because there are other intellectual, organizational and procedural affinities. By contrast, when the neoliberal complex meets the humanities and at least some of the social sciences, the frictions tend to be greater. There seems often to be little insight within higher-level political decision-making into the varied modes of knowledge production in different scholarly fields, and little curiosity about the unanticipated consequences of decisions. The recently popular practice of concentrating research funding into large lump sums in the hope of an instant creation of “centers of excellence,” for example, probably fits better with the research practices of some disciplines than others. Yet decisions on such matters seem not always to be preceded by much careful analysis. Generally, the politicians of neoliberal academia would not appear to attach any particular importance to the reproduction of disciplines, or the survival of departments.

Perhaps it will eventually—I would hope sooner rather than later—be understood that universities cannot be run quite like businesses, that their multifaceted cultural roles demand some particular care, and that different disciplines may work according to different logics.

This is not to say that all changes are to be resisted. Who can be against accountability, transparency or quality control as a matter of principle? It is true, too, that the anthropological understanding of human ways of life has in no small part been a study of varieties of environmental adaptation; and at this point we may want to give some thought to how our own community may best not only resist the neoliberal culture complex, or argue for changes in it, but also make such strategic adaptations to it as best serve our long-term interests. Perhaps we may even occasionally find that

the environment involves not only constraints, but also some emergent opportunities.

Personally I have also spent a fair amount of time, on and off over several decades, as a ground-level academic administrator, chairing my department (and also a couple of years running a small institute of advanced study). Academic organizations have their peculiarities, but in some ways a department head is indeed much like a small business owner: trying to make ends meet, keeping employees reasonably happy, attracting a flow of customers, and turning out a reasonably satisfactory line of products. That role is not always easy to combine with that of a scholar (although one had better try), but it may breed a certain sensitivity to what goes on at the interfaces between a discipline and at least some segments of the external environment. For one thing, especially in a period when that environment seems more turbulent than usual, one may worry about how that discipline which is one's business presents itself, and how it is understood by a wider public. That kind of concern provides a point of departure for Chapter 3.

Then again, as I pointed out above, this book deals only with some aspects of contemporary life in anthropology's world; it makes no claim to a complete overview. As may already be clear, it largely stays away from the particularities of the "-isms"—the sort of things anthropologists usually think of as theory and theoretical debate. The focus is on more general, and probably more durable, principles and practices in anthropological work. Some issues that could have been raised have also been left out because I know less about them, have never thought much about them, feel less strongly about them, or have already dealt with them elsewhere. A few of those areas which the book mostly does not deal with, however, I at least want to identify.

One involves a major change in academic anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century. As late as the 1960s, there were remarkably few writings in anthropology focusing on gender or on women's lives—despite the fact that this tended to ignore half of humanity, and despite the early presence of a number of quite prominent women anthropologists. As it happened, one of my first published articles in anthropology was on a gender topic.<sup>9</sup> Since then I have not added much to the body of writings on such topics myself, but probably there are now about as many women as men among professional anthropologists (if not more), and gender issues are continuously dealt with along varying lines, theoretically and ethnographically, just about everywhere in anthropology's world. You will

no longer find one of the flagship journals of the discipline named simply *Man* (as it was until 1995). (English, which I usually think of as a language rich in nuance and distinctions, is remarkable in not having a simple word for “human being” without that ambiguous gender bias.)

By now, my perspective might even be a bit contrarian. Quite often these days, in many places, the students in undergraduate anthropology classes include strikingly large proportions of women. Assuming that this is not in some country which has recently lost a great many young men in war, or which keeps them incarcerated in jail instead of sending them to school, they must be out there somewhere, exercising some choice of their own. So why are they not coming, in the same numbers as the women of their cohorts, to introductory anthropology? Again, this discipline is about all of humanity, there is room in it for very varied personal interests, and it is probably widely agreed that it benefits from a diversity of interacting perspectives. So I see no intrinsic reason why it should tend to become more a part of general education for one gender than for another. In certain places, a significant challenge to anthropology teaching may now be to find a way to reach these young men—without losing the women students it has gained.

I should also note here that an increasing number of anthropologists now find their working opportunities outside academia—in government, in business, in other organizations. In some parts of the world, not least those with weak and erratically functioning universities, NGOs have offered desirable alternative employment, with implications for the shape of anthropological practice. In large part, the growth of such a professional anthropology is surely itself an outcome of the expansiveness of universities, and I do not see any reason to regret that some considerable proportion of the community extends outside the campus environment. A discipline that merely reproduces itself as an inward-turning ivory-tower specialism does not seem like an entirely attractive and easily defensible prospect. While I will not focus so much on these other parts of anthropology's world in what follows either, I see it as an important challenge for the discipline to keep its borders open, and the conversations going, between what remains on campus and what has ventured outside it.

The world of anthropology inhabited in these pages, I should likewise acknowledge, may seem a bit limited to some readers: I am largely concerned with the one-field discipline of social and cultural anthropology, rather than that of the “four-field approach”

prevalent in much of North American anthropology. It is a difference I am recurrently confronted with, for one thing, when I arrive at the immigration desk of an American international airport; as I am identified as an anthropologist, the officer in charge starts joking about bones and potsherds. As I understand it, the gathering of cultural anthropology (sometimes labeled ethnology) with archaeology, linguistics and biological anthropology under a single disciplinary roof was largely a historical product of the early focus of American anthropologists, more or less until World War II, on North American Indians, which included an inclination to gather all knowledge about them in a single academic space. Meanwhile, the horrendous memory of some of their continent's twentieth-century history (in which one version of physical anthropology did indeed play a part) may have made European anthropologists particularly averse to blurring the boundary between what is, or what is alleged to be, biology and what is not, and therefore to one seemingly threatening implication of the four-field combination. I realize that this contrast between European and North American maps of anthropology has not been, and is not now, entirely stable—where it has been institutionalized, the “four-field approach” is at present under debate, and is at times more celebrated as a principle than it is actually maintained as a strong scholarly practice. Meanwhile, there are signs that something resembling it may be growing in certain corners of European anthropology.<sup>10</sup>

Then again, other kinds of disciplinary boundaries and border zones can also complicate the place of anthropology in the academic landscape. In the late decades of the twentieth century—and mostly, I believe, in the Anglophone parts of the world (especially Great Britain)—the rise of “cultural studies,” perhaps as much a movement as a discipline, caused some consternation and irritation both in anthropology and in other established fields.<sup>11</sup> One could argue that it found its intellectual niche because some of these fields had for too long disregarded a number of increasingly significant phenomena and issues: popular culture, the media, class, youth, gender, transcontinental migration and minorities. On the whole, it may seem by now, cultural studies was ultimately more successful as a concept for marketing books and journals, and in launching a handful of successful scholarly careers, and less so in institutionalizing an autonomous existence within academic structures—even the University of Birmingham, England, where it all began, turned out not to provide a secure base. I will refer to it again in passing, but

I would assume that anthropology by now has learned something from its rise: one should not ignore emergent social and cultural phenomena that are near at hand.

Meanwhile, other countries and regions may define disciplines in yet other ways. That can also add to the diversity of anthropology's world, as will already be evident in the next chapter.