

Why Anthropology Matters matters

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There are probably two sorts of academics: those who stand by everything they write, and those who wish they could. Being one of the latter, this exercise in collective remembering brings up long-repressed anxieties. Did we really give our seminar that title? Did anthropology need all those acronyms? Did we do enough to change SOAS? But it also highlights quite what was achieved, with a little money and a lot of determination

A few things stand out. Like most anthropology students, we cared for our discipline. We wanted to open up new spaces, not just to support each other, but also to talk about what the increasing influence of cultural studies, literary theory, and postcolonialism might mean for anthropology. Our efforts were partial, fragmented, unfinished. Perhaps, anticipating Danny Dorling (2019), we wanted to create a kinder anthropology. We mobilised an ethic of care and solidarity as postgraduate anthropologists. We did what we could and then, gradually, we moved on. Several of the second cohort launched Anthropology Matters and made it into an invaluable intellectual space. A few of us found our way into academic posts and up the disciplinary hierarchy. Others jumped field or left the academy altogether. They were unwilling, or unable, to tolerate serial precarity and enforced mobility.

These accounts reveal our naivete about the political economy of academic practice. We knew we wanted to open up our discipline, but could only hazily imagine its future. We sensed that Open Access mattered, but undervalued the importance of cultivating disciplinary patronage. We could tell the internet opened up all sorts of possibilities, but only a few of us had the requisite technical or editing skills. Perhaps we should have been more audacious. Today, the 'projectification' of the academic self has turned into a career strategy. Compare our stumbling efforts with the role that social media, blogs, and online journals now play in Anthropology. The full story of *HAU* remains to be told.

In 1971, the feminist Jo Freeman wrote an important essay on the 'tyranny of structurelessness'. Whilst our group was hardly structured, over the space of a few years, we left our mark, and this journal continues to thrive. Anthropology matters more than ever, and we should be proud of ourselves.

References

Dorling, Danny. 2019. 'Kindness: A new kind of rigour for British Geographers', *Emotion, Space and Society* 33: 100630. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2019.100630>.

Freeman, Jo. 1971. 'The tyranny of structurelessness'. Available at: <https://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm> (Accessed 20 April 2020).