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Opening Anthropology: An interview with Keith Hart at Savage Minds

December 2012

This interview is part of an ongoing series about open access (OA), publishing, communication, and anthropology. The first interview in this series was with Jason Baird Jackson. The second interview was with Tom Boellstorff. The third installment of this OA series is with Keith Hart (See [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#) on Savage Minds). Full text also posted on [The Memory Bank](#).

Part 1

Ryan Anderson: Thanks for doing this interview, Keith. Let's just jump right in here: What do you think about this whole 'open access' conversation going on in anthropology?

Keith Hart: Obviously I am in favor of it. The form that the discussion takes in contemporary anthropology seems to be specifically American, where the contradictions of established practice are most acute. In the most general sense, OA is a strategy of resistance to privatization of the commons, any commons. As such it is central to the intellectual property wars. But here I think we are talking about a much narrower issue of how to make research publications freely available without undermining their role as cultural capital in academic career advancement. This reflects the interests of a mass of unemployed young researchers who can't afford to pay for information and yet still hope to find academic employment some day. The tension is between maintaining the intellectual commons and conserving ideas as private property. The situation is exacerbated in American anthropology by the peculiarly obdurate policy of the professional association (AAA) which elevates a closed regime of private production for profit above sharing knowledge with the general public. I am reminded of Marx's early journalism against restriction of peasants' access to fallen wood in the Westphalian forests. Most OA activists can't fight privatization with his polemical intensity because they have already bought into the premises of an academic career. I met some anthropology friends on Twitter in 2009 who were as agitated then by the AAA's restrictive (I am inclined to say "insane") policies as they are now. We formed the Open Anthropology Cooperative—but we will return to that later. I am still struck by the insularity of American anthropologists who rarely consider if the French, for example, have come up with interesting responses to this general problem. Is OA an issue in Brazil or Scandinavia, in Japan or India? American anthropology isn't the world and I hope that the OAC's global membership will discuss these questions fruitfully. But then we run up against the limitations of language. Being able to read and write in English is not universal, yet how often is concern with OA extended to the issue of language barriers?

RA: These are some really important points you bring up. First of all, let's talk about the idea that American anthropology "isn't the world," as you say. What do you know

about some of the OA-related conversations that are taking place in France, Scandinavia, Brazil and elsewhere? Where can or should we look to connect with those conversations? Also, why do you think *language barriers* are so rarely addressed in OA discussions in the US?

KH: It doesn't take a lot of effort to put "open access France" or wherever in a search engine. If you do, you'll find a government paper of 2010 in English on the subject. But you won't get far without French. Still, the translation machines are getting better all the time. My wife, Sophie Chevalier, edits an open access online multimedia anthropology journal in French called ethnographiques.org which was founded a decade ago by a cooperative of young French and Swiss researchers. It now has the highest rating awarded by the Agency for Evaluation of Higher Education and Research (AERES). The journal is open to the English-speaking world, having published interviews with Goody, Sahlins, Barth etc, and it provides French subtitles for clips in other languages. It is extremely open in its form and content, but effectively closed to monolingual Americans. The French are very sensitive to having lost their status as the global lingua franca in the 18th and 19th centuries and that has led the universities there to turn inwards. Curiously the Americans and the British often exhibit the same tendency despite benefiting from the rise of English as a second language. Sophie is on the editorial board of a more traditional journal and has taken up the issue of open access publishing as a leading administrative figure in French anthropology. She is an active member of revues.org, a platform for electronic resources in the human and social sciences run by the Centre for Open Electronic Publishing (Cléo) in Marseille. This innovative portal publishes many open access journals and scientific documents and is now joining up with similar operations in Spanish and Portuguese. You may be interested to know that France also has the second largest blogosphere in the world after you-know-where. But the first question for any researcher concerns the language of publication, rather than open access as such.

Only an American would ask why language isn't an issue for Americans. Just think "Empire". The rest of us know that Americans expect us to come to them, not the other way round. It was so for the British when we ran the world. It used to be said that African colonial politicians could only meet each other between the wars in Paris and London. It is the same for the world's anthropologists these days, with the AAA annual meetings offering us all a chance to meet colleagues from our own country! SM's readers should check out what open access means for Africans today, for example. For many there OA means having access to any research publications at all and of ensuring that national research standards have a point of comparison. The obsession in much of the periphery is with not dropping off the table altogether or somehow finding a place at it, however precarious. In South Africa, where I work, the government pays researchers handsomely for publishing in accredited international journals. The fear is that South African universities will be parochial (little do they know!), but this institutional drive is conservative and does little to promote OA there. Brazil is an interesting case. It is a huge diverse country, like the United States, with a flourishing anthropology that has recently broken out of the Amazonian ghetto to offer commentary on urban life in general. It is also rather insular, like the US. The academic publishers there are experimenting with OA, but, until I brush up on my Portuguese, much of that is closed

to me. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is well-known for his “perspectivist” approach to ethnography, but he has also put a lot of effort into online cooperation and dissemination of Lusophone research. We live at a time when the old imperial anthropologies are giving way to many national and regional varieties. The institutional framework is everywhere different. There is a debate over at WSIS on [“Is open access only for rich countries?”](#). You would think that anthropologists would study open access in comparative perspective, but apparently they don’t.

RA: And where does the creation of the Open Anthropology Cooperative fit within all of this? How and why did that come about?

KH: In the 90s, after launching Prickly Pear Pamphlets (the predecessor of Marshall’s Prickly Paradigm), I founded a mailing list called the *amateur anthropological association* or the *small-triple-a* (motto: amateurs do it for love). It was supposed to be the anti-AAA, giving a place for outsiders as well as professionals and students. It lasted a few years. Then in May 2009, Kerim Friedman expressed his disappointment over the AAA’s foot-dragging in a blog post. (The same issue was brought up again in 2012 by you, Matt and others at SM). Kerim’s post led to a heated denigration of the AAA’s impenetrable bureaucracy. Chris Kelty said it had become a mini-welfare state for its employees; a “neurotic institution” run by non-university staff. Casual griping quickly spread to Twitter, where a loose network of anthropologists had already formed. Before long, quasi-revolutionary suggestions were made to start a new, open, less bureaucratic and more inclusive worldwide community of anthropologists. Twitter was ideal for spreading the news and gaining momentum, but more space and organization were needed when the discussion actually became a movement to build a new network for anthropologists. Justin Shaffner and I set up a forum on *The Memory Bank* website with that in mind.

A small group of us committed to specifying a name and purpose for this proposed collective. The key voices were: Kerim Friedman, Paul Wren, Keith Hart, Fran Barone, Carol McGranahan, Jeremy Trombley, Steven Devijver, Cosimo Lupo, Olumide Abimbola, Àngels Trias i Valls and Justin Shaffner. We shared a strong attachment to anthropology, an interest in new media and a commitment to open access. In the new forum, participants brainstormed about two pressing development issues: “structure” and “function”. What would a new organization look like and what would it do?

Jeremy Trombley suggested that “we should begin by offering a structure that is open enough to allow it to become whatever it can down the road”. In contrast to the AAA’s bureaucratic intransigence, he proposed that “every member [should] be able and willing to take an initiative. There’s no need to get bogged down in unnecessary voting; if there’s something you think needs to get done and you can do it, then go for it”. The team, in hosting a new online organization for anthropologists that used only digital tools, aspired to a truly global scope, egalitarian ideals and the abolition of hierarchy. Its model was the negation of formal academia’s typical malfunctions. This antithetical framework proved to be both liberating and stifling in the weeks, months and years ahead. We made a lot of mistakes and some of the founders left in a huff. We have been trying to catch up with our own uncontrolled expansion ever since.

Fran Barone and I are finishing a chapter for a book, *Media, Anthropology and Public Engagement*, edited by Simone Abraham and Sarah Pink, so it's hard to compress our thoughts in a few sound bites. We moved to Ning on the suggestion of Max Forte who joined us later and left soon afterwards. Membership exploded: 1,000 in the first three months, 7,000 today. The OAC consistently receives on average 500 visits a day. The top ten countries varies, but the United States accounts for most visits with Britain a clear second, followed by India, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and Brazil. Visits are divided roughly United States 30%, other Anglophone 30%, Europe 30%, Rest of the World 10%. This distribution understates the remarkable geographical and social range of the OAC's membership which is much broader. The leading countries are much the same, but the OAC has drawn members in double figures or more from over fifty countries. Active participation through posting comments on the site is much lower and skewed towards the main Anglophone countries, although the OAC early on hosted specialist groups operating in German, Norwegian, Italian, French, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. The language issue is crucial. Despite this initial diversity and the OAC's global reach, the trend is inexorably towards the dominance of native English-speakers. We are, however, running an online seminar by a Brazilian anthropologist in English and Portuguese later this month.

You can see that this history links the OAC closely to SM. I think you do what you do well (certainly I am a regular reader), but the focus on American academic anthropology is rather narrow. I have even seen the OAC described as being "European" on SM, which says something about the insularity of American anthropologists. The OAC is still searching for an identity, but there is no parallel in world anthropology for the kind of interaction on offer there. I could say a lot more, but that will have to do for now. I am really grateful for the bridge that you make personally between our two organizations, Ryan.

Part 2

Ryan Anderson: Earlier you referred to OA as "a strategy of resistance to privatization of the commons". Would you care to elaborate on that?

Keith Hart: I meant that private property is still the great unresolved contradiction of modern society, not least because its ubiquity often makes society invisible. For Rousseau, the invention of private property was the origin of social inequality. The liberal Enlightenment looked to anthropology for the knowledge needed to realize a democratic revolution against the Old Regime. Morgan (followed by Engels) used Rousseau's framework to make the history of unequal society the main object of a democratic anthropology. More recently, Lévi-Strauss, Wolf and Goody renewed this tradition, each in their own way. Now David Graeber has taken it up again. But the ethnographic turn made this a marginal current in twentieth century anthropology.

I grew up in a working class district of Manchester. The doors of our houses had to be kept open for neighbors to come in and out as they wished. Even inside the house, bedroom and bathroom doors were never closed. Privacy was the opposite of being open to the free flow of solidarity. I thought that spirit had gone forever, but I found it again

when I moved to France fifteen years ago. Here the tradition of people occupying the streets (*manifestation*) is very much alive and the notion of a public sphere that belongs to all is palpable.

In my lectures I refer to the example of a Masai warrior who works as a nightwatchman in Nairobi. He buys a watch with his wages. What could be more personal or private than a wristwatch, attached to your skin? He returns to the village and a friend immediately says "Give me your watch". He has to give him the watch. Why? The solidarity of age-mates, so vital for the defense of the village's cattle, is undermined by distinctions based on private property. In our societies, we take private ownership for granted. The institutions that secure it for us are hidden most of the time. Only when we are relieved of our possessions or a contract is broken do we realize that we normally depend on the law; and we complain about the inadequacy of police protection.

Modern economics insists that individual exchange is universal, but the barter myth of money's origins is based on the assumption of private property. All that is missing from barter is the money. In fact private property law has been invented independently only two or three times, by the Romans, the Chinese and maybe the Aztecs. It was invented by centralized states to secure the property of traders. The Romans made a distinction between rights in persons and rights in things. Ownership was normally based on having made something or using it; and this right was secured by being a member of a particular social group. Traders neither made nor used what they owned, but the state guaranteed their right to the thing against local brigandage, as they would put it.

There has never been a society so committed to private property as the United States and this goes with unusually weak social protection by the state. In the movie *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore asks why American society is so prone to gun violence. He inserts a cartoon at one point to explain that it is because of the history of racism. But the cause is more plausibly an unchecked system of markets based on private property without the social protection of an effective welfare state. This also accounts, in my view, for the apparent anomaly of the US being the most modern society and the most religious. God and guns fill in for the welfare state. Canadians are both secular and less violent. The Europeans are hardly religious at all.

The euro crisis also hinges on privatization. After the Cold War ended, the Europeans decided that the winning side was the free market, forgetting their own long history of formal and informal public institutions shoring up markets. So they introduced a new currency to make a single market, without addressing the gap between North and South or developing fiscal institutions in common. They supposed that markets based on private property would lead them to political union. (The Americans, in contrast, fought a civil war before centralizing their currency.) The basic flaws in all this were hidden by the credit boom, but the financial crisis brought them out with a vengeance.

This is why I spoke of Marx's early journalism. It underpinned his lifelong attempt to expose and replace an economy founded exclusively on private property. I am suggesting that, if we are distressed by what is going on in the universities today, we need to stand back and address fundamental issues first.

RA: You also highlighted what you call the tension between the maintenance of an intellectual commons and the conservation of ideas as private property.

KH: We still think of private property as belonging to living persons and oppose private and public spheres on that basis. But what makes property private is holding exclusive rights against the world. Abstract entities like governments and corporations, as well as individuals, can thus hold private property. We are understandably confused by this, especially since the corporations' rise to public power rests on collapsing the difference between real and artificial persons in economic law. This constitutes a major obstacle not only to the practice of democracy, but also to thinking about it. Sadly, it has become commonplace for intellectuals to obscure the distinction between living persons and abstractions, as well as between persons, things and ideas.

Private property has not only evolved from individual ownership to predominately corporate forms, but its main point of reference has also shifted from "real" to "intellectual" property, that is from material objects to ideas. This is partly because the digital revolution in communications has led to the economic preponderance of information services whose reproduction and transmission is often costless or nearly so. A similar sleight of hand is at work here as in the claim to corporate personhood. If I steal your cow, its loss is material, since only one of us can benefit from its milk. But if I copy a CD or DVD, I am denying no-one access to it. Yet corporate lobbyists depend on this misleading analogy to influence courts and legislators to treat duplication of their "property" as "theft" or even "piracy."

The term "information feudalism" is highly appropriate for our era. Human work was once conceived of as collective physical energy, as so many "hands". The internet has raised the significance of intangible commodities. Now that production of things is being replaced by information services, labor is increasingly understood as individual creativity, as subjectivity. And it is this shift that has been captured by big money in the claim that "intellectual property" deserves closer regulation in the interest of its owners.

The fight is on to save the commons of human society, culture and ecology from the encroachments of corporate private property. This is no longer just a question of conserving the earth's natural resources, although it is definitely that too, nor of the deterioration of public services left to the mercies of privatized agencies. Increasingly we buy and sell ideas; and their reproduction is made infinitely easier by digital technologies. So the larger corporations have launched a campaign to assert their exclusive ownership of what until recently was considered shared culture to which all had free and equal access. Across the board, separate battles are being fought over music, movies, literature, software, GMOs, pharmaceuticals, the internet and the universities without any real sense of the common cause that they embody.

RA: In your opinion, is this a conflict that can be resolved? Is there some sort of middle ground solution here?

KH: Well, we do have to take on the corporations, but my answer is yes, there is a middle ground solution and it is one we are well-placed as anthropologists to make use

of. Durkheim believed that individuality was more developed in societies with an advanced division of labor because of their increased interdependence. The problem is that this pervasive individualism makes it harder for us to perceive the work of society in shaping our lives. This is especially so in a regime of private property, where the collective forces underpinning individual ownership are for the most part invisible. His key idea was “the non-contractual element in the contract”. In a market transaction, only the buyer and seller appear to be involved; but it rests on an invisible array of institutions — of state law, social customs and shared history — without which it could not take place. How can people be made more aware of the importance of this social glue in their lives?

Some three decades later, Marcel Mauss wrote his famous essay, *The Gift*, which may be seen as a renewal of his uncle’s mission to make the non-contractual element in the contract visible. But he focused on a range of phenomena that were more prominent in “archaic” societies than our own, systems of competitive gift-exchange. He saw these as an individualized variant of a more general form of obligatory community service (*prestation*). The principle of giving with the expectation of a return persists in societies dominated by capitalist markets. A cooperative socialist, Mauss worked for an anti-capitalist revolution, but one based on developing the human dimensions of market institutions that existed already. He considered the Bolshevik revolution’s violent repression of markets to have been a disaster.

For Mauss, being human always means reconciling freedom and obligation, individual and collective interests. The “free gift” is not the opposite of self-interested contracts. It is always interested and often a source of inequality. Nor is “capitalism” the whole story when it comes to the modern economy. *The gift is the non-contractual element in the contract*. By obscuring, marginalizing and even repressing the more humane aspects of markets as well as their intrinsic inequality, bourgeois ideology prevents us from seeing how our current practices might sustain new directions for the economy. Much more sustains the market than the exchange of spot contracts. Most contracts (notably relations of credit and debt) involve deferred payment and thus resemble gifts whose defining characteristic is delayed return. This is to say nothing of the role of institutions like the welfare state in capitalist societies.

Mauss introduced three new elements to his uncle’s original approach. First, he abandoned Durkheim’s sociological reductionism, seeking rather to identify social phenomena in their totality, a dynamic assemblage of persons, networks, groups, things and ideas more readily revealed through ethnography than by specialist disciplines. Archaic gift-exchange brings together individuals and communities, law and economy, magic and religion, art and technology. Mauss advocated an economic movement from below for contemporary societies, aiming at consumer democracy through a combination of cooperatives, mutual insurance and professional associations. The generosity of the archaic gift does not point to a non-market alternative, but rather to the humanity inherent in markets that remains to be liberated by such a modern movement.

Second, Durkheim oversimplified the contrast between primitive and modern societies. Against his uncle's implicit evolutionism, Mauss held that all economies were plural in practice; indeed, the basic human economic arrangements co-exist in any society, a position later associated with Polanyi and revived by Graeber. It is counter-productive to imagine economic change as the radical replacement of one set of institutions by another. Third, Mauss's had an inclusive vision of human history with the boundaries of local societies being pushed ever outwards. Both gift-exchange and markets extend society by taking members out of their locally grounded system of rights and interests to engage with foreigners. Markets and money in some form are universal, since no society can be self-sufficient. Where Malinowski opposed the Trobriand *kula* to money and markets, Mauss saw a parallel with the free market, at least with the invisible infrastructure of human expansiveness and trust that he believed made markets possible.

Mauss's counter-intuitive idea that gifts and markets share a common human substance soon gave way to the old notion that they are each other's opposite, now reified as "gift economy" *versus* "market economy", the very contrast that he wrote his essay to refute. He rejected brutal contrasts of this kind and that makes him an ideal starting-point in any search for a middle-ground between extremes of right and left.

Part 3

Ryan Anderson: Let's bring things back to the issue of OA and the academy. You have said that many OA activists are inhibited from fighting against the privatization of the intellectual commons because they have already "bought into the premises of an academic career". Why do you mean by this?

Keith Hart: Intellectual life is intrinsically individualistic. We may like to think of ourselves as social creatures, but unfortunately they only hand out brains one at a time. Collaboration is particularly developed in the hard sciences and the academy has always depended on an informal cultural commons: teaching, seminars, conferences, free sharing of ideas, equal access to libraries and so on. Everyone wants personal recognition, but up to the 1950s, this aspect of academic life took a back seat to the university as a community of scholars, teachers and their students.

The Cold War and the drive to restore home food supplies after the Second World War boosted research on armaments and agriculture. The post-war boom saw lots of public money being directed to universities for research. Private companies also poured money into research on chemicals. Student enrolments took off in the 1960s, so that universities now became big business. We think of them as medieval institutions, but the late twentieth-century university was something unique, a mass production line for workers in bureaucracies and the main research arm of the state. The academics had always ruled their own institutions, but this expansion gave power to administrators. Research came to dominate other academic activities. The humanities and social sciences didn't have much to offer, but they too jumped onto the research bandwagon.

I have discussed what happened next, at least for Britain, in “[How my generation let down our students](#)”. The watershed of the 1970s culminated in the neoliberal counter-revolution that saw Reagan and Thatcher come to power. Competitive pseudo-markets based academic assessment on so-called “objective” indicators, especially research publications. Bureaucracies became more interventionist along with the wholesale corporatization of university culture. What was left of academic community was destroyed by the growing gap between a few established professors who took leave often and a reserve army of precarious young teachers. The publishing oligopoly exhausted library budgets with their over-priced journals, while the academics competed for the status of getting published in them. Everyone agrees that the contents are worthless and are not read. Faced with the challenge of the internet, most academics did their utmost to maintain the system of feudal private property that has now overwhelmed the universities.

Yet we are living through a genuine revolution in the production and dissemination of knowledge; and the vast army of graduate students queuing up for admission is well aware of the freedom and opportunities afforded by a digital commons. The “bourgeois skeptic” accepts in principle the system of private property and competitive markets, but maintains a critical attitude. He complains about one isolated aspect of the system and then rests content when a minor concession is made. The AAA is an endless source for such skepticism, not least when it comes to OA. Yet most of its critics are tied to the labor market it serves. At least the AAA knows that it is 100% for the private property system.

Academics have been on the losing end of a class war for almost half a century. We are extremely unself-conscious about how we got into this situation and have no idea how to get out of it. This makes us easy pickings. Wedded to bourgeois ideology and ignorant of Mauss’s actual teaching, we failed to recognize the social conditions that preserved our individuality and sold our commons for the illusion of personal advancement. The mass of young researchers who are now desperate to gain a toehold in the academy did not bring about this situation. We did — those of us who got in while the going was good and then acquiesced in the destruction of what we had.

RA: So what’s stopping us from making changes, from going OA, and building a strong digital commons?

KH: Don’t underestimate the power of the academy to shape its inmates even when they are out of school. Most of us have been in school all our lives after all. But yes, one strategy must be to make the most of the social and technical possibilities afforded by the digital revolution. This requires some other means of economic support, of course. It doesn’t make sense these days to bank on an academic job for life. But I can say that every online initiative I have been in was compromised by attitudes and habits formed in the academy. The main clients for any forum concerned with anthropology are graduate students. These inevitably wish to conserve the status quo they hope to join, even as they like to think of themselves as critical.

Our experience with the Open Anthropology Cooperative has been that there are many complications when trying to build an open network. We were surprised by the flood of enrolments and found ourselves struggling to catch up without ever really solving tough problems of organization and navigation. We discovered that we had to moderate admissions in order to control spammers and trolls. Any member could open up a discussion group, but many that did so soon neglected it. The result was a proliferation of pages without a clearly recognizable shape. We allowed too many decisions to be debated openly and that sapped our spirits and energies. We opted for Ning as a platform which allowed newcomers to get started without any preparation. But it had a Facebook feel that put some people off; it was tackily commercial; and above all we conceded significant control of our data to them. People only turn to the OAC when they have dealt with their email, Facebook account and existing favorite sites.

In our drive to establish an egalitarian community, we didn't pay enough attention to the leadership needed and fell back on a muted managerial style whose demands diverted us from developing the site's potential. We mixed an academic network with social media and the resulting ambivalence inhibited our members' participation. The administrative team consisted mostly of graduate students whose other priorities drained their energies. As we know, anthropologists already have a problem with making their public presence felt; and this reticence surely affected the quality of life on the network. The fact that anything you write there is stored forever by Google must be yet another source of inhibition. Most newcomers are at first astonished by the vitality and diversity of the site, only to discover that it is hard to find your way around and much of what is there appears to be dead.

There is an upside to all this, of course. The OAC has attracted a large and genuinely global membership. At one stage we hosted discussion groups in some ten languages. We have stayed true to our founding mission to keep participation as open as possible. Professionals, students and outsiders interact with remarkable freedom and without central direction. Apart from the many blogs, groups and forum discussions, we have accumulated a remarkable archive of spontaneous commentary, visual and literary artifacts, plus thousands of personal pages. We initially aimed at accumulating a repository of materials that would be valuable in research and teaching, but lack the manpower to see this through. The OAC Press publishes working papers, classical texts and book reviews online and we hold interdisciplinary seminars lasting two weeks that have been a marked success. These succeed perhaps because they replicate what is already familiar within the academy. In sum, there is still plenty of potential for development here, but we face complications that strain our part-time energies and don't diminish over time.

Our discipline seems to have little to offer when it comes to thinking through these problems theoretically and practically. Anthropologists, it seems, suffer from an inability to catch up with a changing world at the same time as we meticulously document it. It was never anthropology's priority to change the world and that leaves us rather helpless to solve issues that we ought to be expert in. The fastest-growing sector of world trade is in cultural commodities – entertainment, education, media, information services – increasingly online. The universities are doing at best a flawed

job of providing people with the education they want when they want it and at an affordable price. Everywhere sclerotic corporate hierarchies are outsourcing to smaller flexible units or being replaced by them. This is particularly true of research today. There are massive opportunities out there to address the demand for lifetime self-learning and anthropology should be admirably suited to that. With imagination and less dependence on the universities, anthropology could enter a new golden age. Yet discussion of OA by anthropologists today focuses on a minor liberalization of research publications conceived of in the traditional way. We are too tied to existing academic expectations (scholarship more than education) and don't ask enough what the people want and how to give it to them.

RA: That's a good point—a lot of the OA discussions just focus on freeing up traditional academic research publications. That's a pretty limiting way of looking at the possibilities we have right in front of us. So what would happen if we dropped the attachment to all of those academic expectations? What *do* people want, and how can anthropologists, in particular, find ways to “give it to them”?

KH: I don't disparage academic work. I have devoted my life to it. But anthropology was born as part of a democratic project and the academy has become enmeshed in a particularly coercive kind of bureaucracy. I have a pseudo-Maoist slogan: Walk on two legs (it's better than standing on one foot and falling over). By all means keep one foot in the academy, if you can, but don't settle for the status quo and keep the other foot out there, in the market, moving forward while shifting your balance as circumstances permit.

“What the people want” is the mainspring of a genuine democracy; it is not something we give to them, but rather what we have to find out in order to be socially useful. I have said already that anthropology was an Enlightenment project to discover what all humanity has in common as the basis for a democratic revolution against the arbitrary inequality of agrarian civilization. Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) was the culmination of that project and yet modern anthropologists never refer to it in their histories of the discipline. It is my inspiration. He elsewhere summarized “philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense of the word” as four questions:

What can I know?

What should I do?

What may I hope for?

What is a human being?

The first question is answered in *metaphysics*, the second in *morals*, the third in *religion* and the fourth in *anthropology*. But the first three questions “relate to anthropology”, he said, and might be subsumed under it. Kant conceived of anthropology as an empirical discipline, but also as a means of moral and cultural improvement. It was thus both an investigation into human nature and, more especially,

into how to modify it, as a way of providing his students with practical guidance and knowledge of the world.

He intended his lectures to be “popular” and of value in later life. Above all, the *Anthropology* was to contribute to the progressive political task of uniting world citizens by identifying the source of their “cosmopolitan bonds”. The book thus moves between vivid anecdotes and Kant’s most sublime vision as a bridge from the everyday to horizon thinking. Anthropology is the practical arm of moral philosophy. It does not explain the metaphysics of morals which are categorical and transcendent; but it is indispensable to any interaction involving human agents. It is thus “pragmatic” in a number of senses: it is “everything that pertains to the practical”, popular (as opposed to academic) and moral in that it is concerned with what people should do, with their motives for action.

The *Anthropology* was a best seller for its day. It sold 2,000 copies in two years. The rapid development of global communications today contains within its movement a far-reaching transformation of world society. “Anthropology” in some form is one of the intellectual traditions best suited to make sense of it. The academic seclusion of the discipline, its passive acquiescence to bureaucracy, is the chief obstacle preventing us from grasping this historical opportunity. We cling to our revolutionary commitment to joining the people, but have forgotten what ethnography was for or what else is needed, if humanity is to succeed in building a universal society. The internet is a wonderful chance to open up the flow of knowledge and information. Rather than obsessing over how we can control access to what we write, which means cutting off the mass of humanity almost completely from our efforts, we need to figure out new interactive forms of engagement that span the globe and to make the results of our work available to everyone.

Ever since the internet went public and the World Wide Web was invented, I have made online self-publishing and interaction the core of my anthropological practice. It matters less that an academic guild should retain its monopoly of access to knowledge than that “anthropology” should be taken up by a broad intellectual coalition for whom the realization of a new human universal – a world society fit for humanity as a whole – is a matter of urgent personal concern.

RA: That’s a good thought to end on. Thanks, Keith, for taking the time to do this. If anyone has comments or questions, please feel free to share and join the conversation.