The Tyranny of Transparency

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ABSTRACT   *What might an academic and a social anthropologist have to say about 'making the invisible visible'? Taking its title from a paper by Tsoukas ('The Tyranny of Light'), the result is a short excursus into the social world of accountability. Techniques for assessing, auditing and evaluating institutions are often defended on the grounds of transparency. What is interesting about this case is that in a social world where people are conscious of diverse interests, such an appeal to a benevolent or moral visibility is all too easily shown to have a tyrannous side—there is nothing innocent about making the invisible visible. How are we to understand such deliberate striving for transparency when it is applied, for instance, to research and teaching in higher education? This experimental account tries to avoid simply adding more visibility and more information.*

> That more knowledge could cause problems, that light might prove another tyranny … were not thoughts the philosophers of the Enlightenment were prepared to entertain. (Haridimos Tsoukas, 1997, p. 839)

What might an academic and a social anthropologist have to say about 'making the invisible visible', the rubric of a symposium which prompted this paper? Its problematic was the fact that scientific practitioners who are 'engaged in extending and probing new, especially visual evidence which comes with ever more sophisticated simulation and modelling techniques, are often pushing the boundaries of what is assumed to be real … beyond the intentions of the modellers themselves'[1]. I wished to take the question of visibility into a social arena where it has been the subject of explicit promotion.

The arena is one which the notion of surveillance would seem to have made familiar, where visibility as a conduit for knowledge is elided with visibility as an instrument for control. My subject comprises contemporary social practices of audit, quality assurance and accountability and the interest here is the way in which one kind of reality is *knowingly* eclipsed. My example is audit in British higher education[2]. What is being tested would seem to be the performance and productivity of academics, but 'everyone

knows' that what is being tested is how amenable to auditing their activities are or how performance matches up to performance indicators. What intrigues me is that here people both deploy, and are sceptical about deploying, visibility as a conduit for knowledge. Higher education professionals at once accede to the idea of accountability and regard performance indicators as highly constructed and artificial means of measuring real output. As the term accountability implies, people want to know how to trust one another, to make their trust visible, while (knowing that) the very desire to do so points to the absence of trust.

At this point visibility no longer seems securely attached to knowledge and control, and the idea of audit as an obvious instrument of surveillance is thrown into doubt (cf. Power, 1997, p. 133). Instead, a question arises: *what does visibility conceal*? Yet this is a curious kind of question to try to address directly. Let me try indirection. What resources do I have?—not just the words at my disposal but a narrative structure entailing time. I am going to use the time it takes to produce an account by initially hiding my subject matter and thus delaying the juncture at which it will 'appear' again. Read non-linearly, it would appear to be 'dispersed'. I shall of course be talking about it all the time, so how do I hide it? By concealing it within something else.

What does visibility conceal? The question is also inspired by certain visual practices from Papua New Guinea. Visibility is there used to probe and test the state of the world in a way which is highly sensitive to the evidence proffered (external form, outward display) and where, as a consequence, the visible is taken to be in a perpetually indeterminate relationship with the invisible. Appearance is used to evaluate people's claims; scepticism and doubt about what one is seeing is at the root of the spectator's stance.

I take as an example situations where people put themselves on display before an audience, parading in special decorations. Now this is not the outward display of regalia, or a matter of cosmetics or masking, where what is true and natural purportedly lies underneath (cf. Strathern & Strathern 1971). On the contrary, what is displayed on the outside is supposed to be the person's 'inside'. The point about making the inside visible is to draw other people to one (Munn, 1986), to hold their attention, to fix their eyes, to have them act as witnesses. Public display engages an audience, by contrast with private occasions which can be treated as 'invisible' even though they can be seen (Biersack, 1982).

The practices to which I refer were once more widespread than they are now, although they have taken on many new meanings since Papua New Guinea achieved independence in 1975. My archetype comes from Mt Hagen in the Western Highlands Province, and from the ostentatious display put on by men on public ceremonial occasions in which they present themselves to spectators in order to be judged by their appearance. These are tense occasions: success or failure depends on the audience's verdict, although that is not given at once but is to be gleaned from the behaviour and reaction of individual spectators in the months to come. So while those on display present themselves at a single moment, they are, so to speak, suspended in a timeless frame. They do not know immediately what impact they have made, and indeed their effectiveness is only gradually revealed over a period of time. This comes out through the long-term relations between performers and spectators, and through effects which can only occur in the future, for those on display will be making claims about their own future prestige, well-being, health. While they enrol all the spectators as witnesses, some will be free agents, visitors and tourists; others will be locked more directly into the display.

In the past the rationale for the display would have been the handing over of amassed wealth from one clan group to another. This payment might have had its origin in war reparations, but these highly politicised occasions invariably took off on a trajectory of their own. The object became the size of the 'gift' which the donors could press on the recipients, and in pressing it on them coerce them into receiving it. The recipients thereby became bound on some future occasion to make as good a return or else admit to not being able to match the donors' power and prestige[3]. Any one occasion was thus half of an exchange, in which the two sides either matched their wealth or else—there were standard ways of achieving this—expected that each return would bring an increment. Those on display were donors of wealth; the spectators would have included the actual recipients of the gift. These people at once see and take. Reception is crucially contingent on the initial willingness of the recipients to be put into the position of taking (Gell, 1998, p. 116)[4].

I remarked that the performers cannot at that moment see the effect they are having. That is hidden inside the minds and judgements of the spectators, through whom they hope that their reputation will 'grow' and news of their success spread abroad. In parallel, the wealth they hand over is at the end of the day taken off and hidden in people's houses. It goes back 'inside'. There it too grows, and the donors hope for a return with increment (the identical wealth objects cannot be given back; they are invested via further transactions with others). The development of contacts with exchange partners and the negotiations that lie at the back of these investments are inevitably carried out in secret. No one knows the scope of other people's transactions; they remain hidden until the moment, usually some years later, of subsequent publicity when the erstwhile recipients become donors in turn. Groups thus confront one another in an alternating relationship which turns on what is now knowingly concealed, now knowingly brought out into the open. Concealment is taken as a condition for growth[5]. Time becomes an important dimension: without a lapse of time there can be no growth.

The donors of the display are being judged by the quality of the display. They are also being held accountable, in so far as they are judged by how well they make good the debt. They are accountable directly to those to whom they owe the return gift; other spectators will simply witness the overall size and effect.

What do these Hagen men, donors and recipients alike, engaged in a visual display, make visible to themselves? They bring literally out into the open (large public grounds, full daylight) a kind of information. This is information about performance, about whether the donors have managed to do what they said they would, the number of items of wealth the men were actually able to get hold of, the size of the group that is able to assemble on the occasion, and—through the impressiveness of their decorations and stature—their general well-being. What is made visible is what until now they have kept within themselves and within their houses. They demonstrate the productivity of their assets, including human assets—relationships with other groups and powerful exchange partnerships. Now this is shown above all in the size of the gift the donors have collectively assembled for the recipients, and here their performance is explicitly measured against their *own* claims, the expectations they had implanted in the minds of the recipients, in short, their past promises. Given the fact that the present recipients look to receive a return on what they gave the donors in the first place, there is a sense in which what is now being made visible is that original gift, brought afresh from its hiding place.

Yet if that is what we may deduce these Hagen participants imagine they are making visible, as an observer the anthropologist would point to something else altogether. What

is made visible to the external observer on such occasions are various intangibles such as social structure, cultural values, modes of organisation, and so forth. It is the anthropologist's observations which bring them to the surface. Of course, such invisible entities are there to be made visible by whatever segment of life the anthropologist chooses writes about. Nonetheless, elaborate ceremonial occasions such as these are often taken to be akin to the *participants'* own reflections on their society, although obviously they are not going to conceptualise it in these same terms. The anthropologist inevitably produces a second-order description in his or her account. The anthropologist might then reflect on a crucial difference between what he or she does with what is seen and what the participants do (Strathern, 1988, p. 344). For these Hagen performers and spectators subsequently conceal what has just been revealed—put the decorations away for a future occasion, wait until it is appropriate to make a return gift, harbour their opinions until it is time to show them. They do not keep one another in a constant state of activation. The anthropologist, on the other hand, would probably want to keep that knowledge out in the open, keep it active, circulate it as information (as I am doing now)—not hide it again.

That is partly because the anthropologist belongs to a Euro-American world which privileges information as a source of knowledge and the constant communicability of knowledge as a source of the academic's own standing. In social science it is knowledge about society (social structure, cultural values, modes of organisation) that is at issue. This becomes visible through the observer's efforts at description, and more description makes for more information. 'Making society visible' is of course a project that went hand in hand with the development of 'modern social systems' (Cooper, 1997), and depended on the concomitant development of practices of examining, recording and description, that is, after Foucault, concerned with creating certain practices (technologies) of 'visibility'.

Now suppose Euro-Americans had come to live in a world so habituated to description as an artefact of visibility that they took it for granted that social structure, cultural values and modes of organisation were visible as such to participants as well as to observers, and in these self-same terms. This might be a world where they had come to expect participants to produce their own second-order accounts of their activities, and to produce these as indeed accounts of society and culture, as accounts of how they were organised and thus as accounts of *their own organisation*. Corporate bodies, companies and associations of all kinds might come to think of themselves as first and foremost 'organisations'. This would lead to the possibility that that second-order activity could then be folded into the first, in a self-referential manner (Luhmann, 1990, p. 184). For an organisation's description of itself would become part of the organisation. Anything an observer added would then become a new second-order activity, another way of making it visible, through redescription, until, that is, the new descriptions became likewise absorbed into the organisation's knowledge of itself. The constant absorption of the external observer who then becomes part of the system under study would reveal the organisation's capacity for growth through self-reflection. Would anything be concealed?

We could imagine numerous immediate answers, including the disguises of power. However, part of the answer has to derive from what visibility itself is meant to convey. If the assumption is that much of what is invisible is what is simply *not yet made* visible, then there will always be more to learn about the organisation, further realities to uncover. Here I propose to go outside social anthropology and take as my guide Haridimos Tsoukas's[6] paper, 'The tyranny of light'.

Tsoukas (1997, p. 831) points to the recent proliferation of audits and league tables, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, as a 'testimony to the emergence of a distinct managerial rationality centered in the notion that institutional behaviour can be shaped if the right kind of reinforcement is combined with the appropriate information'[7]. Thus, it was with approval that a cover story in the UK magazine *Managing Higher Education* (intended 'for decision-makers in higher education') opines that surviving the research assessment exercise (RAE) has entailed higher education institutions trying to influence or anticipate changes in national strategy, 'adapting institutional policy to maximise achievement under the Exercise' (Muckersie, 1996, p. 15). This was published in the year of the 1996 RAE, the 4-yearly evaluation of research output of all universities funded by the British Higher Education Funding Councils, conducted by peer review, discipline by discipline, at departmental level (for a recent overview see Scott, in press, and in a policy context, Kogan & Henkel, 1998). It is the work of the individual scholar which is immediately assessed, but the institution (the university) which is under ultimate scrutiny and which loses or gains by the financial consequences of its performance.

Here indeed is a world which has institutionalised second-order description. In the case of higher education auditing, it has done so through an assumption that a university is first and foremost an organisation whose performance as an organisation can be observed. A second assumption is that publicity and visibility make for transparency of operation. This rests in the proposition that if procedures and methods are open to scrutiny, then the organisation is open to critique and ultimately to improvement. Transparency is in turn embedded in certain practices (artefacts, technologies) of accountability, epitomised by the notion of 'audit' in the devolved sense in which it is being used here[8]. An organisation being audited is *ipso facto* being transparent about its dealings. We might, after Latour (1991), say that audit is transparency made durable; it is also transparency made visible.

Tsoukas is concerned with the axiomatic value given to increasing information. He points to what is lost: more information, less understanding, and in particular *more information, less trust*. This especially applies (following Giddens, 1991) to expert systems, such as characterise the undertaking of scientific research or the teaching of students. Such practices cannot be made fully transparent simply because there is no substitute for the kind of experiential and implicit knowledge crucial to expertise, and which involves trust of the practitioners ('respect', Scott, in press) and, we may add, among or between them ('tacit knowledge', Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). On the contrary, the information society which promises to deliver 'the ideal of transparency … undermines the trust that is necessary for an expert system to function effectively' (Tsoukas, 1997, p. 835).

Now, the leaking away of trust is a highly visible loss, an attrition remarked upon many times. In the case of the RAE, the story goes like this. What is made visible is part of a department's, or unit of assesment's, research output, principally in terms of quality of certain selected publications. (Other indicators include numbers of graduate students, success in attracting research funding, how convincing its research policy sounds.) Research output is in turn taken as an index of the effectiveness of both department and university as organisations—in holding on to active staff, attracting high quality young researchers, being successful in getting projects funded, in short and in audit language, provisioning and encouraging the right 'research culture'. While the transparency demanded of a department's output in the RAE is nothing compared to the transparency demanded by the teaching quality assessment (TQA) or by institutional audits (the

scrutiny of the university's internal auditing and monitoring procedures), documents of research verification (after Power, 1997) join mission statements and guidelines to good practice, as well as mountains of records and exhaustions of audit trails: information piles up. Meanwhile, the 'real' workings of the institution, its social structure, cultural values, modes of organisation, it is argued, are ignored. What is lost is the working assumption that despite their different trajectories, members of staff may be engaged on common purposes simply not captured in their research publications. The long-term effect of research creativity, a process that may require several scholarly generations to show itself, is a case in point. This is one answer to what this kind of visibility conceals.

In this view, what is concealed are the 'real' facts about how the organisation operates[9]. Those who protest about the inflexibility of audit may regard it as doing a poor job of *really* describing what goes on. And that includes a department's output in terms of investment in researchers, the experience they have built up, the effectiveness of relationships between them, and the social skills involved in lateral networking or in the transmission of knowledge across generations. I take the emphasis on 'trust' in all this as a sign pointing to the implicit knowledge that makes interactions between people in an organisation work to make the organisation work, and thus as an outward indicator pointing to otherwise invisible processes which contribute crucially to the operation of an organisation but simply get left out of the picture[10]. It is equally readily asserted that such invisible dimensions cannot be measured in any case.

Thus, there is much complaint about the arbitrariness of performance indicators. Tsoukas (1994, p. 4) elsewhere describes the self-defeating specification of indicators, not in higher education but as it might apply in the sphere of local government. In 1993, new regulations mean that local authorities in the UK have to publish indicators of output, no fewer than 152 of them, covering a variety of issues of local concern. The idea was, he reports, to make councils' performance transparent and thus give them an incentive to improve their services. As a result, however, and he pursues this as an illustration of the absurd[11], even though elderly people might want a deep freeze and microwave rather than food delivered by home helps, the number of home helps is the indicator for helping the elderly with their meals and an authority could only improve its recognised performance of help by providing the elderly with the very service they wanted less of, namely, more home helps. Of course, performance indicators are highly selective objectifications of performances. But we have to appreciate that the very process that is known as 'objectification'[12] is in effect a translation across domains— in this case, from service to assessment. The local authorities see this very clearly when they aim for high scores. The language of indicators takes over the language of service[13]. Or, to return to the audit process, the language of accountability takes over the language of trust.

Power (1994, p. 13) refers to the regress of mistrust that results: 'if those engaged in everyday work are not trusted, then the locus shifts to the experts involved in policing them, and to forms of documentary evidence … Ultimately … [to] the performances of auditors and inspectors themselves [being] subjected to audit'. If you put your trust in the measures themselves, it is because you cannot put your trust in other outcomes of performance. But I suspect auditors are not mistrusted simply because they are external agencies; indeed, the current trend is everywhere towards 'internalising' audit functions, thereby increasing an organisation's own capacity for self-inspection (Power, 1997, pp. 131–133). Rather, the process of translation which turns one kind of description into another leads to suspicion about the selected descriptors.

The auditor or assessor here is little different from the anthropologist translating

across cultures. The anthropologist's analytical categories (social structure, cultural values, modes of organisation) turn one kind of description (e.g. people's perception of themselves) into another and thereby conceal certain truths in revealing others; it is standard ethnographic practice to acknowledge the point. Concomitantly, what a higher education institution actually produces, what kind of impact research really has, cannot be made fully visible by assessment indicators. To auditor and auditee alike, the language of assessment, in purporting to be a language that makes output transparent, hides many dimensions of the output process; as we have seen, this, too, is standard (self-)criticism. The rhetoric of transparency appears to conceal that very process of concealment, yet in so far as 'everyone knows' this, it would be hard to say it 'really' does so. Realities are knowingly eclipsed[14].

In sum, commitment to transparency is overtly commitment to putting an organisation to the test. But it is widely agreed that the technology of transparency embedded in audit is not a good procedure for understanding how organisations 'really' work. It gobbles up one kind of information (e.g. publications scores), so the criticism goes, but cannot get at the 'real' productivity of the knowledge being generated. These observations could apply to any organisation, which is why I brought in Tsoukas's example of the local authorities. I now wish to be more specific about higher education, where one of the academic's own tasks is not only to convert knowledge into information but also to change it back again, for a teacher has to impart information in such a way that it becomes knowledge for a student.

Auditors are, Euro-American scholars and academics would be the first to admit (Brenneis, 1997; Davis, 1999), ourselves. And if the information society, in striving to turn all knowledge into information, undermines the human capacity of understanding (Tsoukas, 1997, p. 834), we have arrived at the academic's late twentieth-century dilemma. The anthropologist—the scholar—goes on bringing things to the surface. The idea is to make as much as possible visible, because that is part of the investigative process[15]. Yet if making more information visible is our problematic, that also creates a nice problem of exegesis. Should we be thinking of how *not* to make everything visible? Again, how we might use time suggests itself. Might it be possible, for example, to uncover things for transient use? I did create one small resource: we could go back to what was concealed in my earlier rendition. I initially hid my account of audit in an account of ceremonial display in Mt Hagen, tucked it away, kept it for later, from which it has since emerged. We can always return to that account again—see if there are more things to uncover than one might have thought. But of only transient utility perhaps.

What I now find I have hidden was the fact that while showing themselves as a group was important to Hagen men's display, *they were not intent on improving their organisation as such*. Like RAE and TQA, the assessment of Hagen display was an assessment of what the donors themselves chose to reveal[16]. They were being measured against their own previous performances and the promises they had made. However, the wealth was a material financial asset which could be fed into other relationships, made to bring returns, even as the display was a literal performance, a spectacle to dazzle the audience. Wealth certainly revealed the donors' capacity, strength and extent of following or support. The event itself certainly required tremendous organisational skill and public relations finesse, and this was admired in those who had the energy to undertake its orchestration. Yet neither finance nor spectacle was particularly valued as a coefficient of organisational competence, to be improved by better

management. The organisation of the event was a means not an end. This prompts me to query the axiomatic configuration of the university as 'an organisation'.

Of course the prompt could have come without the Hagen example; but the example gives it contours, concretivity, momentarily makes one pause. Two apparently trivial contrasts, visible in the earlier account, are helpful here. One was the fact that Hagen conventions are explicit about the interdependence between performer and spectator; what someone gives on one occasion is what they have received on another, and reciprocity is a clearly enunciated cultural value. On any one occasion, however, the distinction between donor and recipient is absolute. Auditors, for their part, are very conscious that they create auditees, and in turn adapt their techniques to the interests of the organisation, but must strenuously avoid any accusation of collusion. For at times each would seem to blend into the other. Second is the way in which Hageners build time into their relationships, and the guarded intimacy between time and growth. In auditing arrangements, time obviously has to be allowed for an institution to improve its performance or for a fresh round of publications to be available for scrutiny, but this is taken as a self-evident fact of nature. Now these tiny but concrete circumstances enable me to draw a couple of parallels which apply to aspects of research and teaching; the point is that they take us beyond the university as an organisation. They concern those changing conceptualisations of the professional self which promote the auditable, competitive and ever active performer in the place of, to use the words of Shore & Wright (2000), the 'independent scholar' and 'inspiring teacher'. So what is being replaced?

Research: the independence of scholars. Regardless of the state of reciprocity between groups, what motivates a Hagen clan to make a return gift rests in the individual motivations of its members, each of whom has his own partners, debts and agenda. Indeed, relations of reciprocity between individual exchange partners may now work in favour of group relations, now against them.

This would be recognisable enough behaviour in terms of those changing management practices where reflective action has overtaken social engineering, as Tsoukas describes, for this in turn implies a view of an organisation that is never grasped in its entirety. On the contrary, organisational knowledge is utilised by individuals in ways that are adapted to their own conditions, personally and partially. For 'it is impossible to know in advance the entire range of responses an individual is capable of … [Rather] the requisite variety of an organisation is enhanced through the intrinsic capacity of its members for self-organisation' (1994, pp. 15, 16). The output of the organisation cannot be pro-grammed in advance, then, but emerges as the result of an interaction between (minimally) organisational requirements *and* individual responses.

We do not have any anthropological investigation from the university sector to substantiate the point[17], but a recent anthropological account of a research organisation is suggestive. Born's (1995) ethnography of an experimental French organisation (IRCAM) for research into and development of computer software with musical and acoustic applications points to the importance of its investment in personnel. The organisation depended on knowledgeable persons, on first attracting them and then on having them commit themselves to the project about which—over time—they built up expertise, and finally allowing them to leave as others took their place. Effective relations between colleagues were a part of this process. She argues that this dependency on personal expertise was particularly crucial in a research environment which discour-aged the production of texts or other objectifications of creativity. For the policies and overt aims of the IRCAM management included enhancing the researchers' creativity

through transparency of operation, and parts of the research community developed a deliberate and specific ethos of openness and shared creativity. This included doing away with protocols for proprietorship over inventions. But while ready communication facilitated a vital flow of knowledge through people's relationships with one another, within the research community blocks and closures were also enacted on a daily basis. What was embedded in relationships had to be hidden as often as it was in the open. Constant activation was impossible. The same people who gave so much value to openness and transparency in the communication of ideas also needed to exercise ownership over short stretches of their activities, to work at night to avoid having to interact with their colleagues or be overseen by others, to withdraw from communication. In other words, motivation and commitment was at times carried forward by people communicating actively with one another, while at other times communication was put into abeyance.

Interaction between the researchers, then, worked best on a periodic basis. That alternation between activity and inactivity was essential to the very maintenance of (good) relations. Born's study thus shows how relationships within which certain expertises were also fixed, most notably skill in transmitting ideas, had an inbuilt intermittency as far as their expression was concerned. Interaction worked in an on–off mode, through an alternation between periods of openness and closure. Organisational knowledge, including knowledge of the organisation's aims, was being utilised by individual researchers, in very partial ways, that fitted their own conditions.

Teaching: the inspiration of teachers. The whole expectation of increment in Hagen ceremonial exchange is premised on the fact that growth of wealth and reputation, as in the growth of a baby inside its mother or the growth of root crops underground, takes place off stage (to borrow Biersack's 1982 phrase). The lapse of time—months, years—between displays is crucial to the growth that goes on in the meantime. However, the single final occasion of display is of a different order of event. The claim to wealth and well-being made by those on display has the character of a timeless proposition.

A final observation from Tsoukas is relevant. It comes from the same analysis of new thinking in organisational behaviour I have just quoted, and which deployed the local government example of indicators. He is talking about the internal relationship between the social engineering description of a social system and the nature of the system itself: social engineers capture regularities through propositional statements which are then translated into rules of action, and the outcome is an unlooked for oscillation. He quotes an erstwhile anthropologist:

> The reason is, as Bateson (1979: 63) explained, that the 'if, then' of causality contains time, but the 'if, then' of propositional statements is timeless. The application of timeless propositional logic to time-dependent phenomena leads to paradoxes. (1994, p. 7).

Time turns a paradox into an oscillation. To follow his example, the more elderly residents ask the local authority to attend to the problem of meals (meet their demand), the more the local authority responds by using home helps (does not meet their demand). The problem is that the residents' 'real' demands (for microwave and freezer) are represented by the timeless logic of a standardised indicator (home helps per thousand of population). There is a confusion of logical level which time (now one attends to residents' needs, now one considers the performance indicators) ordinarily holds apart. '[C]onflating meeting elderly residents' demands with "meeting" their demands as the

league table prescribes … creates paradoxes, and makes the management of a system oscillatory' (1994, p. 7).

What has this to do with teaching? It has to do with the fact that teaching is about learning, and about the particular kind of transparency routinely advocated through evaluation (audit) practices. This is a transparency of communication that is not so much about enabling mutual creativity, as in the experimental researcher's situation, as about the clarity of what is communicated and thus assimilated by the pupil[18]. University teaching is audited as though immediate assimilability were the goal. I am prompted to think about a particular gap which clarity conceals. For is there not a gap between the striving for perfect clarity which is an audited goal of many teaching methods and the demand that students absorb, digest and make relevant to themselves what they have understood? Clarity has the character of a timeless proposition: if what I say is clear, then it is understandable, and if it is understansable it is reproducible. But it is not at all clear that the process involved in the assimilation of information, the growth that turns information into knowledge, is a simple consequence of clarity itself. So where does my hesitation come from?

For a start, we know that that kind of (educational) growth, too, must take place over time. Learning may manifest itself weeks, years, generations, after teaching, and may manifest itself in forms that do not look like the original at all. However 'direct' a teacher may be in his or her presentation, the student's experiences will introduce his or her own 'indirection'; however permanent one hopes the lasting effect will be, the act of inspiration is necessarily transient. If understanding involves process at all, then it must be predicated on some kind of self-knowledge that takes doubt, ignorance, hesitation, confusion, or simply despair at digesting all the facts, as a starting point. It would be interesting to know if there have been any studies of the oscillatory effects of superclarity in teaching[19].

Making the invisible visible has had two locations in this narrative. On the one hand has been the 'real' productivity of organisations which auditing overlooks, but which is there as a potential source of more information. In so far as it is the subject of wide debate, or at least of general academic folk knowledge, that knowledge in turn will contribute to the information which organisations can gather about themselves. On the other hand lies the real-time nature of social phenomena into which audit's timeless propositions lock in unpredictable and probably oscillating ways. (The overstimulation of research output, with scholars—in the humanities and social sciences at least—aiming for the high indicators of journal papers and full-length books has resulted in a rash of 'febrile' journals[20] and book publishers racing against time with grotesquely swollen and underprepared lists.) This kind of reality is not necessarily 'known' by the organisation in the same way, for it is not only about itself, that is, it is not immediately about 'organisation' at all. The real-time nature of social phenomena is about the real-time nature of social phenomena.

And Hagen? Hageners engineer what they make visible and invisible, an alternation of social states that may also have oscillatory consequences[21]. In the Hagen case not everything need be brought to the surface, but everything that is brought to the surface is then deliberately hidden inside again. People ask about what is true or false, about the deceptiveness of appearance, about the fickleness of people's motivations and intentions, and about what is being made visible. But I would hesitate before translating any of these as though they were questions of the kind that Euro-Americans ask about reality. In any case we can close it all up again: you don't have to keep the Hagen information

open and in the light. It was a transient device—no need to retain it. Then again, if ever you were to return to these ethnographic resources perhaps there would be something fresh to be drawn out of them.

Acknowledgement

NOTES

[1] From the symposium brief, '*Shifting the boundaries of the real: making the invisible visible*', organised by Helga Nowotny (Collegium Helveticum, Zurich).

[2] On which there is now a small British literature in social anthropology: Shore & Roberts, 1995; Strathern, 1997; Davis, 1999; Shore & Wright, 2000. The proceedings of a workshop convened at the 1998 meeting of the European Association of Social Anthropologists is to be published by Routledge under the title *Audit Cultures*. 'Auditing anthropology: the new accountabilities'.

[3] The phenomenon is widely reported in numerous ethnographic accounts, versions of such gift-giving being fixed as a theoretical object in anthropology by Mauss (1954/1925). The classic on Mt Hagen is A. Strathern (1971).

[4] What is made visible is an act of transfer between the two parties. There is no space here to develop the point that the seeing is itself an act of agency, and indeed that there is a sense in which it is the spectators who have elicited or brought forth the display in the first place. The way in which displayer and spectator are locked into one another's sight bears some, if limited, comparison with the Hindu concept of *darshan* as described by Gell (1998, pp. 111–121). Worshipping an image is a means to obtain *darshan*, a blessing conveyed through the eyes. It is imagined as the 'gift of appearance', and a guru making an appearance to his disciples may confer such a blessing. Seeing creates a physical bridge between them: the gaze confers the god's blessing while the worshipper reaches out and 'touches' the god with his eyes. 'The eyes of the god, which gaze at the devotee, mirror the action of the devotee, who gazes at the god … the devotee does not just see the idol, but sees herself (as an object) being seen by the idol (as a subject) …' (Gell, 1998, pp. 118, 120). Seeing is here a tactile action similar to anointing or feeding. For a fascinating set of comparative (but non-anthropological) essays on sight, see Brennan & Jay (1996).

[5] After Biersack (1982), who describes a similar logic for the 'growth' of Paiela boys through initiation ceremonies which entail the little boys' removal from everyday life for some months, and forced seclusion, before they re-emerge as tall young men.

[6] Department of Public and Business Administration, University of Cyprus.

[7] He adds that 'to know' in this context 'means having information on the variation of certain indicators that are thought to capture the essence of the phenomenon at hand' (1997, p. 831).

[8] By contrast with the original and narrower connotations of financial audit, see Hoskin (1996), Power (1997).

[9] Shore & Wright (2000) would include here the whole edifice of power relations contained in the relationship between the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) (and its partners) and universities. Among the various flaws which Scott (in press) identifies in the RAE are anachronistic assumptions about how knowledge is produced and the manner of its organisation.

[10] The same issue of *Managing Higher Education* (see earlier) contains a feature article about the importance of communication, encouraging all segments of an organisation to talk to one another—provided the managers are in control. It would thus like to see informal channels kept in check. 'Without planned and co-ordinated communication from the top down, these unoffical channels will gain in status as the only, or principal, source of information'; it then immediately follows this by suggesting, 'An audit of employee attitudes towards communications will show how staff would

like to receive information, *thereby providing guidance on the most appropriate channels [for managers] to choose*' (Millmore & Thornhill, 1996, p. 29–30, my italics).

[11] Quoting the vice-chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Margaret Hodge (*Independent*, 11 September 1992).

[12] They are first and foremost objectifications of principles of assessment. On performance indicators as poor measures, ses Strathern (1997).

[13] A student pointed out to me apropos the University of Cambridge mission statement that its opening assertion, 'to foster and develop academic excellence across a wide range of subjects' immediately gives as its rationale, 'and thereby to *enhance its position* as one of the world leading universities', that is, its league table position. (Strathern, forthcoming, offers a commentary on mission statements.)

[14] 'The information society spawns paradoxes that prevent it from satisfying the temptation it creates. The light that the information society promises to direct upon itself may well constitute a new tyranny … the tyranny of radical doubt, of disorientation, and of heightened uncertainty' (Tsoukas, 1997, p. 828), to which could well be added cynicism.

[15] A process that is forced constantly to reproduce itself in so far as every time new information is brought to the surface old information is overlaid, with greater or lesser transparency, not unlike the piling up of documents which Riles (1998) describes.

[16] It is a department's own aims which TQA authenticates, and in the case of RAE, a discipline's own judgement of its internal standards of 'quality'.

[17] Though we might expect interesting findings to emerge from the (HEFCE funded) National Teaching and Learning Network in Anthropology, convened by Susan Wright (University of Birmingham), currently under way in British universites where anthropology is practised.

[18] I acknowledge the stimulus of conversations with Michael McIntyre (University of Cambridge) and his interest in the clarity of scientific teaching.

[19] A hint of the likely self-defeating effects of superclarity in course guidelines (laying everything out requires ever more documents to add further clarity to what might remain even remotely ambiguous) is given in Shore & Selwyn (1998).

[20] The phrase comes from Scott (in press), and the following sentiment (but my words) from Jeremy Mynott, Cambridge University Press. For a rather different assessment, see Kogan & Henkel (1998).

[21] Donors do not want an immediate return gift—they want the recipients to go off and work hard at raising the gift which they hope will come back to them with increment added; but as time goes on, their interest in the delay turns into impatience as their *own* creditors start pestering them for the wealth which they hope the return gift will bring and they start putting pressure on the erstwhile recipients to make a quick return.

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