

Introduction

Two Stories of the Arts and Humanities – and a Third Version Emerging

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During the past few decades, the arts and humanities in the Western world have been challenged by a strange contradiction between two very different stories about their *raison d'être* and value. The first story focuses on the expansion of universities, including the faculties of arts and humanities. The second story is dominated by a feeling of distress prompted by the constant questioning of the usefulness and applicability of the arts and humanities. As the contributions to this volume of *Academic Quarter* indicate, however, a third story may be about to emerge.

The Story of Success

It goes without saying that an expansion of historically unseen dimensions has taken place in higher education since the 1930s, accelerating during the 1970s. In terms of growth in student numbers and in the range of subjects and institutions, this development is exceptional. According to Collini, for example, there were 21 universities in the United Kingdom¹ in 1939 with 50,000 students. Today there are 130 university-level institutions with 2.25 million students (Collini 2012, 26 ff.).

An important context for the spectacular expansion of higher education was the student revolt during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1970s in particular saw a vigorous movement in the arts and humanities towards embracing the social sciences. Cross disciplinary studies were launched, the motto ‘Research for the people, not for the profit’ was widely adopted, and new universities with new agendas and new models of teaching were founded.

Since then, a new movement has combined universities with other higher education institutions or, in the case of Denmark, established public sector research institutions. Today, cross disciplinary studies have been redefined, and the dominant agenda focuses more on creative industries, commercial benefits and employment than on education per se. In terms of society, the idea of research for the people has been transformed into the concept of ‘societal impact’.

This development can be observed everywhere, but it took different forms and was implemented at different times. The overall ambition has been to conform to the standard university model, outlined by Collini. This model prefers to be national rather than local, to offer a full spectrum of subject fields, to offer postgraduate as well as undergraduate degrees, to support research as well as teaching and to invest in autonomy and prestige (*ibid.*). Regarding the range of subjects, the arts and humanities have expanded with the rise of what was labeled ‘the new humanities’, such as linguistics (including programmes for computer assisted translation) and a wide spectrum of media and communications studies. During this process, the arts and humanities have participated increasingly in cross-disciplinary research and contributed to the development of various emergent research fields in collaboration with both the social sciences and the natural sciences. As a result, new hybrid disciplines such as cognitive science, humanistic informatics, science technology and society (STS), and design studies are now transgressing the traditional divide between the natural sciences and the arts and humanities and between the humanities and art and crafts.

In spite of backlashes and repercussions, not least in the United Kingdom, the overall development highlights the democratization of education. It is a testimony to the benefits for the individual as well as for society of the great educational movement. However, this movement has also occasioned a second story.

The Story of Doubts

The second story can be labeled *the story of doubts*. The societal esteem and the self-esteem of the arts and humanities have not prospered as could be expected from the story of success. Instead, questions abound about the usefulness, quality and relevance of the arts and humanities. This is the background for a paradox that has often been noted: never before have teaching and research in the arts and humanities been so comprehensive, and never before have the arts and humanities suffered so severely from a lack of confidence and from doubts about identity. It is hard to say to what extent this phenomenon derives from actual difficulties in predicting the applicable outcomes of humanistic studies. The quest for knowledge and understanding seldom reveals in advance the answers to 'what' and 'why', let alone how and where these answers may be found. Such uncertainty does not appeal to 'quick fix' oriented political investors.

The historical turn from ideas of education and 'Bildung' (cf. Gimmler, this volume) to ideas of the market place based on competition and profitability was launched by Conservative governments in the United Kingdom from the 1980s onwards. Higher education per se was no longer considered 'a public good'. To an increasing degree, universities were seen as actors in a competitive marketplace, where customers were attracted and where the market mechanism largely regulated how and what was taught. Later, in the United Kingdom, the idea of 'societal impact' was promoted as an important standard of judgment in the assessment of the value of research (cf. Nelson in this volume). This idea had many implications for research proposals and the way in which researchers organised networks, as well as for their chances of career survival and consequently for their prospects of teaching at all.

Concurrently, the natural sciences and engineering seem to have acknowledged the importance of the topics (e.g., culture, meaning making) and methods embraced by the arts and humanities. These methods can analyse and contextualize the individual and his/her subjective and social dimensions in ways that are useful, for example, to product development and to technology. Many natural science and engineering disciplines have incorporated knowledge that was previously an inherent part of the arts and humanities.

In Denmark as in the United Kingdom, the arts and humanities have been through troubled times. In 2014, Sofie Carsten Nielsen, the former minister of higher Education and Science, demanded regulation of the number of university students, first and foremost dimensioning the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences. The primary argument was the need to reduce unemployment. This was a plausible argument that appealed to common sense as well as public opinion. The minister's arguments had been carefully prepared by the *Commission for Quality and Relevance in higher Education and Science* (Reports April and November 2014, last report January 2015).² However, the homework done by the ministry was not impressive: the unemployment rate is not the same for all candidates and regions, and the methods of estimation were dubious. It took great efforts to achieve a milder model of dimensioning, which was implemented in 2015. Nevertheless, universities can expect consequences in the shape of the downsizing of staff in the years to come in the United Kingdom, in Denmark and beyond.

In Finland, the University of Helsinki is facing demands for cutbacks amounting to 106 billion Euros per annum by 2019-20. 570 administrators and teaching faculty staff lost their jobs during the spring of 2016 and a further 300 are expected to leave by the end of the year. The wider consequences are yet to be seen. Surely, however, in times of economic crisis and increasing unemployment rates, the consequences of political decision-making are uncertain: as recently as 2009, the Swedish parliament decided on an extra budget of 8.4 billion SEK to create an additional 23 000 opportunities for new students during 2010 and 2011. However, this parliamentary decision was overruled by the next cabinet, and another wave of cutbacks in student numbers commenced.

The initiative of the Danish minister of higher Education and Science was thus part of a common trend. Reports on quality in higher education have become a vast genre that continues to grow. On a global level, evaluation reports of all kinds are produced and proposals are formulated to downsize the arts and humanities.

In spite of the overall trends, analyses and political solutions do differ somewhat, depending on the country and the context. The debate about the challenges facing the arts and humanities has not only spurred reports from various commissions set up to investigate the above-mentioned questions, but also a number of scholarly

contributions. These contributions indicate that the common challenges prompt different analytical results and different political solutions in different countries and contexts. This is the case even within the Scandinavian countries, which are so similar to one another, and also in the United Kingdom.

Usefulness and legitimacy

It might be useful to venture a constructive rephrasing of the question ‘What is the use of studying the arts and humanities?’ The modified question would be ‘Which needs in society do the arts and humanities respond to and accommodate?’ In this context, it is worth emphasising that the idea of higher education as ‘Bildung’ has not been totally abandoned. It is even defended – for instance by Martha Nussbaum. The title *Not for Profit* (2010) directly illuminates her point. She assumes that the purpose of higher education is not profit, but the individual and common good: “Education is not just for citizenship. It prepares people for employment and, importantly, for meaningful lives” (Nussbaum 2010, 9).

The option of rephrasing mentioned above is thoroughly scrutinized and discussed by Helen Small (2013) on a historical basis. Warning against comparisons between incommensurables, her last chapter “On Public Value” presents a number of core reasons why the humanities have public value. They include the argument that the humanities make vital contributions to the understanding and maintenance of culture and democracy (Small 2013, 174 ff.).

On the one hand, then, the usefulness of the arts and humanities is fairly obvious, as Nussbaum and Small suggest: our society would be badly off without knowledge of languages, history, culture, media, technology and ethics, all of which are connected to our existence as human beings in society. On the other hand, the legitimacy of the arts and humanities, the value of their contribution to society and their impact on the economy are constantly questioned. The consequences of this doubt have manifested themselves in difficulties affecting funding and decreasing recognition of the arts and humanities, which has resulted in considerable downsizing, diverse forms of crisis management and, as a consequence, renewed questioning of the arts and humanities in general and in particular of the validity of the various subject fields, of the research and teaching methods and of the results achieved.

However one phrases the question regarding the challenges facing the arts and humanities, several answers may be offered. The primary aim of this special issue of *Academic Quarter* is to confront shared challenges and to compare different analyses and possible answers. The second aim is to identify and discuss the societal challenges, possible objectives and roadmaps that are relevant to the arts and humanities.

The volume is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the “Historical positions of Arts and Humanities in society: criticism, control and collaboration”. Here, the overall question is discussed at a general level. The aim of the second section “How to reinvent the Arts and Humanities: Defining disciplines and cross disciplinary developments” is to discuss a possible renaissance of the arts and humanities, focusing on different disciplines and cross disciplinary developments.

Historical positions of arts and humanities in society:

criticism, control and collaboration

The double story of the arts and humanities is expanded and further developed by Anders Ekström in his article “A Failed Response? The Humanities in Transition”. The aim of his article is not only to map common types of reactive critique in academia and to refute their relevance, but also to present the contours of a viable alternative. In the light of the deep crisis at the beginning of the 21st Century, Ekström points to the necessity of a new “generative critique” that would focus on “the transformative power of knowledge in contemporary societies”. In this connection, he foregrounds three salient renewals: 1) redefining impact definitions, 2) reconsidering knowledge policies and 3) rediscovering the role of universities as public institutions and their importance in shaping public culture.

The historical and philosophical background against which this rediscovery can take place is further pursued by Antje Gimmler. To what degree are the ‘new’ humanities still covered by the traditional ideals of ‘Bildung’ and ‘pure science’? This salient question forms the point of departure for an article in which Humboldt’s university reform is revisited. Gimmler pursues the idea that higher education provides its citizens with a national awareness that takes the form of language, culture and mentality, and she argues that Humboldt’s

thinking was revolutionary: if they were disinterested in what purpose their education could serve, students would learn to gain the autonomy to fulfill different purposes in the long run. Unlike Humboldt, however, Gimmler evokes the contemporary practice turn and a radical version of the practice orientation developed by the classical pragmatist John Dewey. Dewey's approach is understood as an open and experimental process between the individual and the environment. From Dewey's point of view, 'Bildung' and 'science' do not exclude purposes and social and cultural needs.

Current policies at universities in England, Scotland and Wales are interesting in their own right. From a Nordic point of view, however, these policies are particularly interesting in the light of the United Kingdom as a first mover. Trends and university policies from the United Kingdom will inevitably inspire policies elsewhere and eventually spread – not necessarily in the same form or with the same consequences, but always available to serve as an inspiration. In his contribution, Robin Nelson addresses three related concerns: 1) the worth of the arts, 2) the impact of research audit culture in the United Kingdom, and 3) the idea of practice as research within that culture. With a point of departure in the observation that universities and academics do not generally welcome research audit culture, Nelson maps some developments in this culture. Scrutinizing 'impact' as a new dimension that appeared in 2014, Nelson argues that it can function as a valuable link between 'the academy' and 'the professions'. Similarly, Nelson sees practice as research in a positive light because it opens up to a multidisciplinary context.

Falk Heinrich's article reflects on the role of aesthetics in multidisciplinary research projects. It discusses the potential of fiction and fictionalisation in a multidisciplinarity that is characterized by sensemaking processes on two intertwined levels: the procedural level of the research project and the level of the project's subject matter. On the process level, aesthetic contributions to sensemaking are seen as the fashioning of heuristics that serve the multilayered and creative interaction between the meaning-producing participants. On the level of the subject field, aesthetic competences generate spaces of potentiality through restrained conceptualisation and recognition processes that open up intermediary spaces of *non-sense*. These spaces are seen as necessary for the emergence of novel solutions to complex social challenges.

How to reinvent the arts and humanities: Defining disciplines and cross disciplinary developments

Birthe Mousten and Anne Lise Laursen present the linguistic field of Language for Specialized Purposes (LSP) as a humanistic discipline that is inherently cross-disciplinary. The task of specialized languages is to cut out a well-defined piece of the world by using a precise and common terminology that is used in trade and industries as well as in science and technology. However, cultural contexts and the different cultures of professions and disciplines make a one-to-one translation impossible. Mousten and Laursen argue for an academic approach to specialized language that can take into account the contexts, registers and different back-ground cultures that constitute meaning. Terminology, lexicography and textual linguistics are the sub-fields of specialized language where, as Mousten and Laursen show, humanistic research contributes to the ever more demanding task of enabling meaningful and useful communication across disciplines, experts, layman and society.

Karl Erik Schøllhammer considers the cross-field between art and science. His article addresses the challenges that contemporary history poses for Latin American and Central American artists who articulate their societal and political engagement. Schøllhammer shows how artists' commitment to social and cultural content amplifies the reach of scientific engagement and stimulates its search for a performative impact through enhanced visualization and sensible materiality, thus redefining the borders between critical research and artistic creation and realization.

Chunfang Zhou, Hui Zhang and Lene Tanggaard Pedersen's article examines the creativity found in craftsmanship as a complex and context-based phenomenon characterized by a range of socio-material aspects in practice. This article's subject field is but one example of the need for cross-disciplinary research that includes disciplines such as psychology, cognition, arts, humanities, design, and learning.

Bolette Rye Mønsted's contribution draws on her PhD thesis *Ad nye veje* [Finding New Ways], in which the specific higher education study programme of Humanistic Informatics is explored as an example of the development and future of humanities. Mønsted develops a methodologically and theoretically based mapping design in which the complexity of the development can be understood and

explored, and she documents how the relevance of the educational programme is closely associated with technological development. The example of the social media is used to underline the importance of an increasing humanistic focus on digital media and technology development and of the need for humanistic perspectives, methods and theories in the collective understanding and development of interpersonal user aspects in the social media.

The educational aspect of *pondering* as a core concept and competence is addressed by Frederikke Winther, Thomas Duus Henriksen and Gorm Larsen. For many years, the arts and humanities have been under political pressure to adopt the more solution-oriented attitude of hard science. Students have quickly adopted this trend, and they are requesting classes and tools for quick-fixing rather than activities that facilitate deep learning. Winther, Henriksen and Jensen argue for a two-sided approach where critical reflection through pondering is in dialogue with and mutually supportive to problem-orientation. The article refers to an experiment that employed learning portfolios as a student-driven tool for facilitating the reflective pondering that is necessary for the development of a professional identity. The portfolios helped participants to become academic, reflective students.

How do horror games so effectively foster immersion? Why are certain psychophysiological responses predictable in connection with horror games? These questions have been posed by media psychology as well as game studies. Taking their point of departure in the concept of consilience, Mathias Clasen and Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen discuss the benefits and pitfalls of such an approach, illustrating their discussion with an analysis of the horror video game *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. They argue that this video game is structured to target the human fear module that has developed through evolution, thus eliciting predictable psychological responses and attendant behaviors. On that background, they conclude that the consilient approach is promising for further studies.

In their article "Liberating methodological thinking in psychology from grand theories", Nikita Kharlamov and Einar Baldursson argue that while grand theories are tremendously popular in the social sciences and the humanities, they do not actually contribute to the critical debate and empirical research that might lead to breakthrough knowledge. Instead, Kharlamov and Baldursson rec-

ommend the modest but more productive approach of middle range theories. With reference to the sociologist Robert Merton, the authors propose three guiding principles for the development and application of middle range theories in psychology. Not only do middle range theories allow a truly falsifiable approach to research and knowledge, but they also contribute to an understanding of the humanities as capable of bridging the gap to neuroscience and other natural sciences.

In her contribution to this volume of *Academic Quarter*, Lone Dirckinck-Holmfeld shows how a piece of art can contribute to the development of new, engaging ways of seeing and discussing humanistic issues in the intersection between arts and meaning. On driving Benthe Norheim's "Camping Women" from one place to another, Dirckinck-Holmfeld and her co-drivers share this experience with us in her essay, urging us to rethink art as a boundary object to create bridges between communities and to "open up" humanities.

References

- Collini, Stefan. 2012. *What Are Universities For?* London: Penguin.
Nussbaum, Martha. 2010. *Not for Profit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Small, Helen. 2013. *The Value of the Humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(Endnotes)

- 1 We have decided to use this term until it is formally abolished.
- 2 <http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/councils-and-commissions/the-expert-committee-on-quality-in-higher-education-in-denmark>, accessed February 2016.