

*Critical Issues*  
Imaginative Research in a Changing World

**The Intellectual**  
A Phenomenon in Multidimensional Perspectives

**Edited by**

**Nikita Basov, Georg F. Simet,  
Jeroen van Andel, Sechaba Mahlomaholo  
& Vhonani Netshandama**

*Inter-Disciplinary Press*  
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# **The Intellectual**

# Critical Issues

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A Phenomenon in Multidimensional  
Perspectives**

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## **Introduction to Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, Ideas**

*George F. Simet and Nikita Basov*

### **1. Inter-Disciplinary.Net and its Intellectuals Project**

The book we are happy to introduce here is a product of the 3rd Global Conference *Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, Ideas* held in Prague, Czech Republic, May 6-8, 2010. This conference is part of the *Intellectuals* project run by the Inter-Disciplinary.Net, which is a forum for the exchange and interaction of ideas on a wide range of issues of concern and interest in the contemporary world. Founded in 1999, these days Inter-Disciplinary.Net is a global network that aims to promote and sponsor inter- and multi-disciplinary encounters by bringing together people from diverse contexts, disciplines, professions, and vocations, with the aim to engender and nurture engagements that cross the boundaries of intellectual work.

Dialogue facilitated by Inter-Disciplinary.Net is to enable people to go beyond the boundaries of what they usually encounter and share in perspectives that are new, challenging, and richly rewarding. This kind of dialogue often illuminates one's own area of work, is suggestive of new possibilities for development, and is to create exciting horizons for future conversations with persons from a wide variety of national and international settings.

The 'Intellectuals' project is one of the central projects for the Inter-Disciplinary.Net. It seeks to explore the role, character, nature and place of intellectuals and intellectual work in contemporary society. Its purpose is to build, by annual conferences and network interactions between the participants, both an evidenced and critical understanding of the intellectual and intellectual work in the past and present. It also attempts to understand the prospects for the future and to find optimal ways of knowledge creation.

### **2. Major Thematic Areas**

The call for papers for the 3rd Global Conference of the 'Intellectuals' project encouraged papers of two main thematic areas: *Intellectuals and the End of the Academy*; and *Intellectuals after the Cultural Turn*.

Papers dealing with the first thematic area were focused on the transformation of universities as 'academies' into knowledge-producing organizations that takes place in the process of knowledge society emergence. Related questions are: How should we understand the role of intellectuals in this transformation? Are academic values and freedoms dying? Is this a new crisis or symptomatic of past crises or the real face of the academy beneath lofty rhetoric? How will this change knowledge production, intellectual work and the intellectual as a subject? How should intellectuals



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respond and what alternatives are there? Which are the most effective ways of knowledge creation on individual and collective levels?

Papers dealing with the second thematic area focus on the 'cultural turn' from the thinking in disciplines to the promotion of inter-disciplinary practice for intellectuals across the arts and humanities as well as social sciences. Related questions are: How do we look back of the nature of the changes that it brought? Has it encouraged a frivolous post-modern disregard for the intellectual rigour of disciplinary knowledge and particular theoretical approaches to study or has it been a surface layer of creativity atop deep and persistent and entrenched disciplinary bodies? Has it stimulated a greater sense of deep engagement with the experiential in social life or has analysis become superficial and self-absorbed as intellectuals write for intellectuals? How has the cultural turn related to the rise of a media and culturally saturated society and how has that impacted on the intellectual? Has the cultural turn, however much it has transformed bodies of knowledge, been the means by which intellectuals' structures; processes of engagement and practices have remained more continuous than changed?

### **3. The Structure of the Book**

To go deeper into analysis of the two specific aspects outlined above, six themes indicating the types of issues that might be addressed were suggested. These themes were: History, the Intellectuals and Intellectual Work; Intellectuals and their Troubling Relationship to Knowledge; Intellectuals and the Knowledge Society; Public Intellectuals and the Intellectual in Public and Political Life; Intellectuals and Cultural Life; and last but not least Intellectuals and the Development of Bodies of Knowledge. The 15 papers chosen and presented both at the conference and in this book reflect these themes in detail.

Reflection on the themes produced a coherent structure, consisting of three interconnected problem fields, analyzing the intellectuals and the work of intellectuals: *Personality of intellectuals in the contemporary cultural turn* reflecting on the individual, mainly subjective component; the *Post-'academism' in higher education* concentrating on the political, mainly objective component; and *Intellectuals in previous cultural turns of specific contexts* as arts, literature, etc., focusing on cultural turns in the past, usually from a hermeneutic point of view. According to the emerging problem fields, in this book the 15 papers were grouped to three packages of five papers each. In the following the papers of each part will be briefly introduced to describe the logic of the book.

*Part I: Intellectuals and Ideas* concentrates on the self-conceptions of intellectuals in diverse contemporary societies.

First of all, *Jerrold L. Kachur* reflects on the secularist malaise and the relativization of truth that are especially actual for the intellectuals in the

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post-modern Anglo-American societies of today. He suggests viewing truth, like Alain Badiou did, not as equated with knowledge, but as a 'hole in knowledge.' Following the explication of Badiou's concept he analyses the possibility of verifying truth through fidelity. He suggests that Badiou might help to restore a sense of commitment for secular intellectuals who seem to have lost their way in these turbulent postmodern times.

Secondly, *Carlos David Garcia Mancilla* fathoms the role, place and possibilities of philosophy in the life of intellectuals and academics of today. In his eyes, the increasing specification leads to academics full with specialists whose discourses mean nothing to the rest of the non-specialists. In this regard, philosophy is seen as exiled from practical life and its problems almost doomed to die from thirst in the middle of a river.

*Tunde Adeleke* contributes the third paper to this part. He analyses the role and responsibility of black intellectuals in today's America. The author sees a dual positionality of black intellectuals in the academic world, as he defines its demand as twofold. On the one hand, black intellectuals *qua* intellectuals have to deal with intellectual rigor and production. On the other hand, they have as *black* intellectuals the task to take their part in the black struggle for ideological leadership.

The fourth article focuses on a single intellectual, Hrant Dink, an Armenian journalist in Turkey. *Georg F. Simet* reflects on his professional attitudes and beliefs, the intellectual community and the murder as one exemplary case to illustrate power and powerlessness of intellectuals of disadvantaged minorities in Turkey today.

Last but not least, *Olga Procevska* offers an in-depth insight in the self-image of the Post-Soviet Intelligentsia in Modern Latvia. Due to her findings, the common lamentations about their powerlessness hinder them to form a new, western style intellectual. In this regard, Latvia's intellectuals seem to miss out entirely on the challenges of the future by reflecting nearly exclusively on the accomplishments of the past perestroika period.

*Part II: University, Knowledge, and the Intellectual* reflects on the changes in learning and knowledge creation that characterize the emerging knowledge society and interpret the contemporary challenges of 'academia' from five different perspectives.

The part is opened by a paper by *Nikita Basov* and *Anna Shirokanova* who report some of the results of their international research project on knowledge-creating systems and collective mechanisms of knowledge creation. The authors see intellectuals as the primary knowledge creators. Their purpose is to find the most effective ways to create knowledge in knowledge societies through combining the new ICT opportunities and the potential of widespread social network structures of intellectual communication. The paper outlines in short the theoretical framework, as developed so far, in order to discuss possibilities for further improvement.

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Secondly, *Sechaba Mahlomaholo* and *Vhonani Netshandama* provide an insight on how to empower learning environments, taking the example of South Africa and concentrating on the problem of overcoming its apartheid history. Following Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'organic intellectual,' the authors analyze both the school and the higher education areas of South Africa in order to seek ways for public intellectuals to emancipate from the legacy of capitalist apartheid's social arrangement by empowering learning environments.

The third paper of this part is a good example of reflection on the problems of democratization of learning and knowledge creation. Based on his own professional backgrounds and interests in personal and higher education development, sociological research, quality assurance, etc., *Jim Moir* offers a view on the traditional breadth of curriculum in Scottish higher education as a means a retaining the notion of the democratic intellectual tradition. In effect, his paper provides a sympathetic yet critical evaluation.

At fourth, *Jeroen van Andel* looks at the on-going paradigm change in higher education, namely the shift from academic to 'customer culture.' This leads to the paradox of post-modern higher education: although the society has become more fragmented and complex, students are less guided by higher education institutes on how they can best achieve their *Bildung*. Instead, they are more and more regarded as customers who have to decide for themselves what *Bildung* they need.

The last paper of this part focuses on the role of community engagement in South Africa's higher education system. *Vhonani Netshandama* and *Sechaba Mahlomaholo* commonly believe that universities will only come to their 'fullness,' when they are integrated within the communities that surround them and are involved in the major social processes taking place. In this respect, the paper shows ways for the commitment of the particular and the local interest groups under the leadership of academic intellectual 'workers.'

*Part III: The Intellectual and the Cultural Turn* deals with the roles of intellectuals in times of cultural change and their possibilities to influence the transition process.

The first essay presents Shakespeare's exploration of the debate between contemplative and active life. In this regard, *Unhae Langis* analyses Shakespeare's play 'The Tempest.' According to the author, this play underscores, for present-day intellectuals, the necessity despite the difficulty of straddling both the contemplative and active worlds: while knowledge sought for its own sake is always valuable, it also can and must be directed to benefit the world surrounding us at the cost of a human debacle.

Secondly, *Michelle Syba* looks at the emergence of criticism, three centuries before the actual cultural turn. By analyzing the period of 'the critick,' from the 1670s to 1714 in London, she intends to broaden the

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discussion from the question of authorial intention to the public role and perception(s) of the literary critic. Following Noel Carroll's statement of a crisis in criticism she shows that performing aesthetic judgments was not a self-evident activity, even in the beginning of doing critics.

At third, *Kenny K. K. NG* concentrates on Li Jieren (1891-1962) as the last epic storyteller in the People's Republic of China. The author seeks to draw a broader picture of Li's private and public lives in the Sichuan-Chengdu province to examine Li's tactics of alignment with the changing institutions and frustrated attempts in maintaining creative security in the Anti-Rightist movement in the 1950s. The paper throws light on the idea of 'anachronism,' in which an author was always anxious of lagging behind his times and seeking ways of catching up with the ideological ambience by shifting writing strategies.

The fourth essay by *Claire Heaney* reflects on the role of the intellectual in society in the light of J. M. Coetzee's storytelling. Adopting Stefan Collini's definition of the public intellectual as someone regarded as possessing 'cultural authority,' her paper traces Coetzee's rejection of the role of public intellectual in both his critical and his fictional works. It is the author's belief that Coetzee's fiction stages, in both form and content, urgent and compelling paradigms of ethical engagement; values that have too often been neglected by contemporary philosophical and critical praxis.

At last, *Oleksandra Nenko* looks at intellectuals in the field of contemporary art using the examples of the capitals Moscow and Kyiv. Based on an analysis of several art magazines, she identifies three different positions and roles of the intellectual: an art critic; a medium (transmitting meanings about art into the public discourse); and a curator. In order to achieve effectiveness in these fields, the author describes three ways: 'solitude'; *Gemeinschaft*; and 'being one-self as an authentic individual.' These trajectories might be combined to meet the diverse multi-perspectives of art in the post-Soviet societies of the Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

As a result of authors' reflections, which are sometimes coherent and sometimes opposing each other, a ground for inspiring dialogue is brought to life. This multi-disciplinary cross-cultural dialogue provides a multi-dimensional portrait of intellectuals and intellectual work (e.g., knowledge creation and learning) in contemporary society that is of a great importance in the context of knowledge society emergence.

**PART I**

**Intellectuals and Ideas**



# **Trashing Truth in Eight Easy Steps: The Decline of Intellectual Commitment and the Importance of Militant Atheism**

*Jerrold L. Kachur*

## **Abstract**

Anti-intellectualism has deep roots in Anglo-American societies, but in none more so than in the USA. The low profile of intellectuals in American society is not just about the changing nature of the public sphere but more significant is the failure of intellectuals to defend an absolute commitment to atheism and truth. The relativisation of truth is not only the product of neoliberal globalisation and of cultural commodification. The trashing of big T Truth originated with the birth of Modernity and was deepened through the internecine philosophical debates of the 20th century between the positivists, hermeneutic-phenomenologists and postmodernists. The debates have left secular humanists, freethinking agnostics and militant atheists defenceless to challenges from relativist liberal multiculturalists and fundamentalist religious conservatives. I suggest that the reconstructed materialist dialectics of Alain Badiou suggests a way out of the secularist malaise. Unlike constructivists, Badiou argues that truth should not be equated with knowledge. Rather, truth is a 'hole in knowledge' and big T Truth is a philosophical gathering of that knowledge.

**Key Words:** Intellectuals, anti-intellectualism, anti-rationalism, anti-elitism, secularism, philosophy, realism, constructivism, post-structuralism.

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## **1. Intellectuals Speak Truth**

Writing in the early 1960s, Richard Hofstadter, author of *Anti-Intellectualism in America*, would not have been surprised with populist truisms dominating discourse today because the intellectual has rarely been comfortable in the democratic and antinomian USA.<sup>1</sup> For the Anglo-American intelligentsia, this uneasy tension between democracy and intellect at its best remains unspoken common sense and at its worst trashes truth. The demotion of the status of the truth has impacted contemporary cultural life, undermined the value of higher education, and seriously modified the nature of intellectual life.<sup>2</sup> The low and declining status of intellectuals during the 20th century in the Anglo-American world is correlated to (1) the declining status of universal knowledge as objective truth privileging theoretical inference; (2) the reduction of particular 'knowledges' to subjective truths

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privileging personal experience and pragmatic accommodations to capitalist functioning; and (3) the uneasy relation that modern secularists have had with Absolute Knowledge and its many euphemisms (God, the One, the big Other, the Real, Infinite  $\Omega$ , capital X, the set of all sets, or big T Truth). The USA's dysfunctional truth-trashing anti-intellectualism requires important consideration because of its proximity and power as well as its shared values with other Anglo-American countries and its imperial influence on other countries. Furthermore, as Antonio Negri writes 'without the American proletariat, and American intellectuals, and American music [...] in short, without the American multitudes, permanent revolution is not possible, nor is the free development of that great transformation of life we are living through.'<sup>3</sup> However, in the important intercivilisational dialogues of the 21st century a significant barrier to teaching Americans the truth about anything is the dominant intellectual culture: anti-intellectualism, anti-rationalism, and anti-elitism.<sup>4</sup> Secular intellectuals in the West have played a significant role in relativising truth generating the preconditions for what I call 'the trashing of big T Truth.' 'What, then, is truth for an intellectual?' I answer this question based on the understanding provided by Alain Badiou.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Intellectuals, God and Truth

Hofstadter writes 'that the professional man lives off ideas, not for them.'<sup>6</sup> Whereas intelligence seeks to grasp, manipulate, re-order, adjust, intellect examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines. The intellectual's personal truth emerges through a thinking engagement in the gap between historical truth with roots in the secular humanist orientation and Absolute Truth in the dogmatic religious orientation, both held simultaneously in the mind as an ambiguous torsion, filling the internal dialogue with both playfulness and piousness. However, the intellectual also performs a social function, as Antonio Gramsci writes: 'All men are intellectuals, [...] but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.'<sup>7</sup> Gramsci supplements Hofstadter's definition of intellectual as an 'eloquent mover of feelings and passions' and as an active participant in practical life yet superior to 'the abstract mathematical spirit.'<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Edward Said writes of the universalising orientation: 'What I was trying to suggest was the standards of truth about human misery and oppression were to be held despite the individual intellectual's party affiliation, national background and primeval loyalties [...],'<sup>9</sup> and, fundamentally, a relationship to power: public intellectuals 'Speak Truth to Power.'<sup>10</sup> What expresses the intellectual approach to truth? Alain Badiou, as a Platonist of multiplicity, defends the foundational principles of post-Cantorian set theory.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the doctrines of 'inconsistent multiplicity' and 'the void' bridge the gap between set theory's infinity of sets and the multiples of situations.<sup>12</sup> In Badiou's set theory of truth, philosophical Truth or the Void is a gathering



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point of local truths and follows Cantor's assumption: 'The Absolute [ $\Omega$ ] can only be acknowledged and admitted, never known, not even approximately.'<sup>13</sup> However, big T Truth also equates with strong realism, that a proposition is true when things are the way the proposition says they are and this Truth can be known. It is most easily recognizable in monotheism of the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and the first of the Ten Commandments: 'I am the Lord your God [...] you shall have no other gods before me.'<sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI declares in his encyclical letter of 2009, *Caritas In Veritate*, that Love – *caritas* - is an extraordinary force, 'its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth.' Even George W. Bush communes with the Absolute and consulted with a 'Higher Father' instead of his earthly father, George H. W. Bush, about going to war in Iraq.<sup>15</sup> In a message to Americans and Iraqis and broadcasted in October 2003, Osama Bin Laden cites Quran 9:73 and draws on the classical rules of Islamic legal discourse to praise God and the Prophet.<sup>16</sup> And President Barack Obama's January 2010 First State of the Union Address ends with the now mandatory: 'Thank you. God Bless you. And God Bless the United States of America.'<sup>17</sup> If all this God-talk disturbs you, then you shouldn't hide from it. Critical theorist and methodological atheist, Jürgen Habermas (2008) has highlighted the importance of engaging with God-talk as a post-metaphysical philosopher. He has also declared a post-secular age and reflects on the enduring centrality of religion and the limits of secularism.<sup>18</sup> He has personally dialogued with the current Pope Benedict XVI.<sup>19</sup> Cultural studies star Slavoj Žižek calls on the Left to retake Christianity from the religious Right: 'To become a true dialectical materialist, one should go through the Christian experience.'<sup>20</sup> Alain Badiou also challenges and defends assumptions about the Absolute in developing his meta-ontology for militant atheists, a system developed in the axioms of Set Theory implicating the Void and Choice.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Constructing Eight Steps to Trashing Big T Truth

The significance of the modernist denial of 'God' or the Absolute for free thinkers, secular humanists and militant atheists goes hand in hand with its pervasive presence in many guises, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein: 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'<sup>22</sup> However, a defence of freethinking, secularism and atheism can no longer be self-satisfied with variations of Deism, Agnosticism, Negative Atheism or Wittgenstein's silence regarding the Absolute. In contrast, Badiou writes about unicity of the One, the property (+) which defines a multiple as different, as does the empty set: 'Such is the multiple 'God,' in onto-theology [...] Any unique multiple can receive a proper name, such as Allah, Yahweh,  $\square$ ,  $\omega 0$ .'<sup>23</sup> For Badiou, this 'God' may be admitted and acknowledged but not known absolutely. As a counterpoint let us take a short tour of contemporary

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highbrow anti-realism and the eight ways that an intellectual approach to Truth is trashed.<sup>24</sup>

No Big T Truth (Modernity): God, Nature, Man. Nietzsche 'God is Dead;' Foucault 'Man is Dead.' Big T Truth is dead is the Modern break with the pre-modern religious order based on Theism - in particular monotheism.

Many Little t truths: nihilistic postmodernism draws on Friedrich Nietzsche (truth as mobile army of metaphors, a hammer to smash idols); optimistic postmodernism draws on William James (an idea is true if it is profitable to our lives - truth has cash value and lives on a credit system). Another term for this position is multi-perspectivism.

*Postmodern democratic populism:* to fix the relativism in place requires locating a Community of norms and practices. This democratic populist turn breaks with Nietzsche and Foucault's aristocratic aestheticism. We thus get the equation of democratic populism with optimistic postmodernism as an intellectual lobotomy locating truth in the doxa or opinion of the demos. With critique sufficiently cordoned off, the turn to demos implies a cultural turn to ethos which itself can be tyrannical majority and anti-democratic for subordinated minorities.

*Postmodern minority populism:* the ethos of marginalized minorities thus can locate so-called 'critical' challenges to majority power to normalize the Other (e.g. postmodern feminism). However, claims to otherness tied to victimization, a marginalisation requiring 'an inclusion of diversity' within the demos raises the issue about what to do about those other 'not so nice' marginalized minorities and subjugated knowledges: cannibals, serial killers, KKKers, rich tycoons, religious fundamentalists and the long ignored list goes on and on.

*Global ethnocentric populism:* intellectual critique is further reduced to ethical disputes based on communities of difference - you have your truth and I have mine as communities - ethos (ethical communication) is transformed to ethnos (ethnic communities) as is complicit with reactionary nationalism as well as religious fundamentalism, Huntington's Clash of Civilizations.

*Linguistic relativism and the new absolute:* this shift to the absoluteness of the cultural dispute forms an alliance in the post-modern approach to 'truth.' With radical relativism and absolutist certainty as two oars on the same boat, the boat of the new Absolute God: 'language' as Being triumphs. This ends with Derrida's boat sinking in the limits of deconstruction regarding responsibility, justice and other key transcendent Truths.

*Competing political theologies:* an uneasy alliance now exists, strangely between religious fundamentalists and post-modern populists; what started as the Death of God ends with the Triumph of God. Competing big T Truths, which no one believes in except their own.

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*The hegemony of metaphysical constructivism:* but let's not leave Language as the Real God to lay only at the feet of hermeneutists and the vitalists: it is also shared with the hegemonic position on truth, the analytical logicians and positivists drawing on atheist Hume, transcendentalist Kant to the agnostic later Wittgenstein on big T Truth, also understand little t 'truth' as bounded by a finite logic that gets meaning from the senses in language.

In the eight modern cases, there is a fundamental assumption to privilege Knowledge, Language or Meaning and to constitute what I would broadly call the constructivist approach to Absolute Truth. For Badiou, the above eight approaches to truth fail for five reasons: (1) they privilege language over being; meaning over truth; and communication over commitment; (2) 'Truth' is simply a matter of appropriate conformity to widely recognized norms; (3) they equate knowledge with truth and eliminate the possibility of encountering the indiscernible or undecidable; (4) in a constructivist's universe, every definition fits and everything remains in its properly recognized place and apparatuses of control maintain the worlding; and (5) true meaning is equated with habitual use (i.e. cultural tradition); thus, thinking is to leave everything as it is.<sup>25</sup> According to Badiou's use of the Axiom of the Void, there is at least one claim or assumption that cannot be deduced or demonstrated but nevertheless must be asserted as an article of faith. Furthermore, according to post-Cantorian set theory, as a structural condition of thinking there is another generalization that can be made regarding the Axiom of Choice. This function of choice always exists as to what claim or assumption can or may be asserted even though it cannot be shown (or constructed). Therefore, in a well-ordered system of thought, the choice will be illegal (i.e. there is no existing rule for it) and anonymous (i.e. there is nothing to discern). Interestingly, of the eight historical formulations defending relativism, there is always a deep assumption of an 'absent' Absolute Truth in their different defences of a naturally finite or historically limited kind of truth. However, note that such claims about 'no big T Truth' and 'many little t truths' are both big T Truth claims. Radical relativism lives uneasily with an expressed absolute certainty in It. Picture it as a rowboat with two oars - it can only move forward with ignorance of the connection - and one alone takes it in a circle back to the other. If this contradiction is challenged as unintelligible, incoherent or contradictory these are defended as a virtue of an ironical stance in a paradoxical world. Postmodernists are against absolute, universal or objective claims except for themselves. As Habermas points out: 'paradoxically [...] they somehow keep believing in the authority and superiority of philosophical insights: their own.'<sup>26</sup>

#### **4. Re-Engaging Big T Truth Atheism**

According to Badiou and the axioms of post-Cantorian set theory, in any well-ordered system of thought there is at least one claim or assumption

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that cannot be deduced or demonstrated but nevertheless must be asserted or said: it is an illusion to believe that one has escaped one's fundamental assumption, so scientists, philosophers and theologians each have their absolute presupposition and article of faith. Badiou's theory of the Event attends to the nature of secularist revelation and builds a positive theological defence of atheism on the contours of post-Cantorian set theory, which challenges both religious fundamentalism and post-modern relativism. From the point of view of both religious theologians and deflationary secularists, the fundamental assumption may be perceived as based on an irrational and absolute faith, a kind of fundamentalism that the atheist has about Truth and the death of God. Contradiction in atheism creates ambivalence between negative and positive statements of faith in the proposition that God does not exist; atheism can appear both as 'a theism' and 'not a theism.' Pragmatists such as Kai Neilson and Richard Rorty side with the deflationist approach to God and Truth-talk because they see a logical contradiction in denying God's existence absolutely.<sup>27</sup> Other atheists - in their absolute defence of their 'theism' - have been as publicly adamant as religious fundamentalists in defending their atheism and science as an assertion of faith in the non-existence of God.<sup>28</sup> Alain Badiou, however, sees this religious/science split as a conflict between Platonists of the One (God/Nature) who have not addressed 'undecidability' in forcing such claims. While he wants to provide a basis for a militant defence of atheism, that is a fighting spirit, as do vulgar militant objectivists above, he also wants to acknowledge the inherent undecidability concerning the Absolute without falling into a kind of anthropocentric relativism of the pragmatic deflationists and multicultural subjectivists.<sup>29</sup> We still need to be committed to the Absolute in some way. Badiou's two-pronged solution is first, 'regarding the God of metaphysics, thought must accomplish its course in the infinite,'<sup>30</sup> which means treating post-Cantorian set theory of the infinite in mathematics as the ontology of philosophy and, second, regarding 'the God of poetry, the poem must cleanse language from within the slicing off of agency of loss and return. That is because we have lost nothing and nothing returns. The opportunity of a truth is a supplementation.'<sup>31</sup> In this secularist way Badiou resurrects the Absolute Truth of the death of the God of Religion.

The militant defence of atheism must provide an organizational principle for the relationship between state and society to defend against religious fundamentalism and post-modern relativism. However, while the nature of state secularism is a secondary point of contention which I cannot further develop here, suffice it to say, secularists will still disagree over a multiplicity of ways to restrict Religion or God-talk in the public sphere.<sup>32</sup> Whether the theology of Money or of God, or Nature, or Man, or even Nation or Society, there is a time to decide and a time to prescribe. Badiou provides a positive fighting program for Absolute Atheism and a way to defend State

Secularism against reactionary nationalism, religious fundamentalism and post-modern relativism. Intellectuals must speak big T Truth with militant atheism as one of its defining characteristics to enable two demarcations: (1) between a true universal typified by Christian, Islamic or Communist militancy and a false universal typified by the laws of money, exchange and the market and (2) between ineffective and effective eventual truths: respectively revelations in which atheists can no longer believe, for example, the Rapture, versus those related to investigative procedures which atheists can believe in, for example, in science, politics, art and love.<sup>33</sup> This is Badiou's call to the intellectual mind and potential memory in all people, possibly an Event will shake the slumber, to choose and to commit to the Void where truths will gather for those who believe in secular miracles.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> R Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Vintage, New York, 1962, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> F Furedi, *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?* Continuum, London and New York, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> A Negri, 'Living the Imperial Transition: In Order to Struggle', in *Empire and Beyond*, Cambridge Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> R Hofstadter, loc. cit.; also see S Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*, Vintage, New York, 2009 (updated ed.); F Furedi, *Where Have all the Intellectuals Gone?* loc. cit.; L Lapham, *Gag Rule: On the Suppression of Dissent of the Stifling of Democracy*, Penguin Press, New York, 2004; J Kachur, 'Interculturalism and Bad Habits of Mind: a Barbarian Critique of America as Cult Practice', in *Exploring Cultural Perspectives in Education* 2007, H Maitles (ed), ICRN Press, Edmonton, AB, 2008, pp. 366-405.

<sup>5</sup> A Badiou, *Being and Event*, Continuum, London, 2005; A Badiou, *Conditions*, Continuum, London, 2008; A Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, Continuum, London, 2009; A Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, Continuum, London, 2005; A Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2008; A Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, SUNY Press Albany, NY, 1992; A Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 2006; several sources provide excellent overviews of Badiou's work: P Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003; S Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics*, re.press series, Melbourne, 2008; J Barker, *Alain Badiou: A Critical Introduction*, Pluto Press, London, 2002; C Norris, *Badiou's Being and Event*, Continuum, London, 2009; E Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> A Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1977, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> E Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994, pp. xii-xiii, xiv, 109.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 85-102.

<sup>11</sup> See J Barker, 'Appendix: The Basic Principles of Set Theory', in A Badiou, *A Critical Introduction*, Pluto Press, London, 2002, pp. 149-155.

<sup>12</sup> A Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, Continuum, London, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> G Cantor cited in: M Hallet, *Cantor's Set Theory and Limitation of Size*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 5: 6-8. In Islam, the first monotheistic pillar begins with "There is no god but God ...".

<sup>15</sup> B Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, Simon and Shuster, London, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> O Bin Laden, 'Message to Americans', in G Kepel & J-P Milelli, *Al Qaeda In Its Own Words*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 2008 [2003], pp. 72-77, footnote 1.

<sup>17</sup> B Obama, 'The 2010 State of the Union Address', viewed on 4 April 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1PWQtCDaYY>.

<sup>18</sup> J Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> J Ratzinger & J Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> S Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> A Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> L Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 2005 [1922].

<sup>23</sup> A Badiou, 'Dictionary', in *Being and Event*, *op. cit.*, p. 525.

<sup>24</sup> Some would argue that the Absolute exists but it is rationally inaccessible or it exists and is irrationally accessible via magic, mysticism, or poetics etc. Badiou's key point is that we can think the Absolute rationally via post-Cantorian set theory.

<sup>25</sup> For a concise summary of Badiou's critique of the variants of constructivism see: P Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003, pp. 159-161.

<sup>26</sup> J Habermas, 'Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter', in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation*, K. Baynes, J. Bohman and T. McCarthy (eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1987, p. 307.

<sup>27</sup> R Rorty and P Engel, *What's the Use of Truth?*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005; K Nielsen, *Atheism & Philosophy*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2005; A Flew, *God, Freedom and Immortality*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1984; NHG Robinson, 'Faith and Truth'. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 19, June 1966; C Hedges, *When Atheism Becomes Religion*, Free Press, New York, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> C Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 2007; R Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2006; S Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2004; D Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Viking, New York, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> A Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Four discernible existing paradigms of secularism are currently available: Anglo-American Liberal, French Republican, Turkish Republican, and Communist Chinese. The American mode is the most religion-friendly and seeks freedom of religion from state control. The French mode emphasises the role of the state and the freedom of the political sphere from the influence of religion. In these two cases, secularism can mean anti-clericalism or state neutrality or the rejection of religious idioms and symbols in the public sphere. The Turkish mode represents state control of religion whereby institutions control religious symbols, language, leadership and networks, and in this case, seeking to create an enlightened Islam, build national identity and to provide legitimacy for its governance by blocking the use of religion against the state. The Chinese model, following the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist socialist models, also represents state control of religion and similar institutional controls; however, atheist materialism is promoted as the state religion and there is an active suppression of religious freedom and practice. See: MH Yavuz, 'Modes of Secularism', in *Secularism and Muslim Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2009, pp. 144-170; L Zhufeng (ed.), *Religion Under Socialism in China*, M E Sharpe, New York, 1991; D Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> E Balibar, 'Alain Badiou in French Philosophy', in P. Hallward (ed), *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, Continuum, London, 2004, pp. 37-38.

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## A Defence of Philosophy

*Carlos David García Mancilla*

### **Abstract**

This article will try to make an apology in the two senses of the word, as a 'defence' or apologia of philosophy and as an 'excuse' from it. It will try to question the academy and the perspective that society has from it. The philosophy is in trouble, it has always been. Its own essence - in a certain perspective - are the questioning and the criticism. But its questioning voice is silent and silenced. The way philosophy is made in the academy moves away what is originally close. That is why it is silent. We forgot about mankind, we forgot to question every individual in the public market exhorting them to worry about the virtue. But it is also silenced. The soul of philosophy is freedom and disinterestedness. It has no master and follows no direction until its own self-consciousness determines one. It is useless, not for being absurd, but for being free; it is not meant to be used, but to understand. So is philosophy exiled from practical life and its problems. And even if its original message certainly cannot be more important for every one of us, it is not heard.

**Key Words:** Philosophy, power, freedom, emptiness, silence.

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Death is certain, passions are untameable and the world hostile as an enemy, truth unreachable and virtue a dream. What is it left for us? According to Marcus Aurelius, only one thing: philosophy. This article will try to make an apology of philosophy in two senses of the word, as a 'defence' or apologia of philosophy and as an 'excuse' for it. The theme of philosophy is the totality, the existence in all its conceivable extension; but it is also mankind and life in a very particular and important manner. Science and philosophy try to find something true; to solve mysteries, and mankind is maybe the mysterious itself. But an enigma is, at least, known as something unknown. Philosophy is not a hunter for mystery, but its unmasker. To say something about philosophy is difficult. Its being depends on how it understands the real; and reality will always be a mystery. But it could be said that philosophy arises when what appeared as evident and true, becomes doubtful and mysterious. We understand ourselves, life and the world. This understanding allows us to actually live. But we go over our life dwelling on shadows and building enormous castles over emptiness. We persuade ourselves that life should be directed toward the grandeur and the pleasure; and we regret wealth, power and fame that we do not possess, or the delights,

which result in pain, sickness and guilt. Even the Caesar, the most powerful man in his time, was distressed while looking at a statue of Alexander Magnus, who conquered a bigger territory being younger than him. Even the wealthiest man on earth will always search for greater wealth. Are these real ends? Is something actually achieved? We persuade ourselves about our power upon nature and about our fair ideals, and we slave men and beasts. But there is almost nothing in our real power. When we try to dominate and grasp nature or the others, we chain them and we chain our self. The master is slave of his slaves: the paradox of power. Which nation could be able to live without the achievements of its technology or without making others its servants? Who is the servant and who the slave? We all are. Power is a simulacrum, a ghost, which is a herald of tameness and the complete lack of liberty.

Socrates ended up on a trial because of the same ambiguity of power, and he forges an apologia for philosophy at the same time he defends himself. He was indicted for looking for power through illegal means; by misguiding other people, making them fall in their own mistakes and denying the gods as if proclaiming a new religion; who can be more powerful than a prophet? But Socrates was a philosopher, and he was searching for nothing but the truth. Philosophy is freedom and is detached from power. This is the reason why Marcus Aurelius answered to the difficulties of life in the way he did.

Philosophy is freedom. When thinking about power, we can conclude that the only thing that prevails in our finite and weak power is ourselves. Any other course of action may lead us not only to the uncontrollable game of power, but to misery. Self-reliance, philosophy enshrines. But that is not a state of mediocre resignation, but the consciousness of oneself boundaries and of the futility of any other power. Liberty opens its doors when necessity ends; mainly if it is that invented necessity, which grows every time we attempt to satisfy it. It is true, we would not live without the others and the other things, but the desire of power is not a proper and appropriate way of being. Being appropriate (thoughtful toward: showing careful consideration or attention, showing regard for other people) the others is to leave them in their proper way of being. This means to act toward the others in a disinterested way and free of the need of them: we can call that love.

The sign of humility of philosophy and the second seal of its freedom is its uselessness. It is difficult to find something in the world, which has not been interpreted with the paradigm of utility. We use the world as a house, as floor and as shoes, we use the others as sons, workers or lovers. Even the distant stars have been used to find the way back and the tender infants to perpetuate our lineage. We wrench and violate the world and the others; we gather power from them to transform them into something useful.

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But philosophy only wants to know the world and, in order to do it, philosophy must let them be what they are and it becomes, precisely, useless. Because philosophy is free from the need to serve, it is in fact, disdained and silenced. The will of power seeks for servility, for the use of things, and is deaf to this voice, which is undrinkable for its insatiable thirst. The philosopher is like a pariah who takes refuge in the academies, who is misunderstood and despised. His speeches seem mysterious and idle, or appear to be like a trivial decoration to nations, which want to show their gracefulness and vast culture; hilariously not realizing that their decoration has demolished their power only with words. But philosophy is not firstly silenced due to its natural tendency to tear icons apart; its strong voice screams suffocated, its discourse is dissident to the power and dissonant to it; it is silenced not because it is dangerous, but because it seems just like noise.

That does not mean that philosophy has had no relation with power. In some cases it has been not only useful, but has also modified the world. However, philosophy is powerful without willing power. It is not due to the will of power, but to the search of truth, that philosophy speaks. And after every one of these cases, another philosopher raised his voice to pull them down: its spirit of liberty is also its spirit of criticism.

Even power has been considered universally, as the dominance of the possibilities of the others, when speaking about it we normally bear in mind the political field, the power *par excellence*. We can formulate this question about it, why could power be desirable? Because of glory, fame, historical transcendence, wealth or egotism. Or to bring goodness to others? Then it will surpass the normal human wishes and turn into a messianic will. To be the saviour of a nation, a continent or the whole humanity. Can we imagine a greater haughtiness or arrogance?

The second brief part of this article will try to be an apology of a young thinker inside philosophy and from philosophy. The silence I have been talking about is bi-directional. Philosophy speaks with a language different from every day language; different not for being too difficult to be understood, but because of its disinterested relation with power and utility. However, sometimes it does not speak at all. The academy is full with proud specialists, with learned people who take the last name of some philosophers who really dared to think for themselves. Full of Platonists or Kantians who are lonely, isolated and resentful, and who silence the voice of philosophy. What can the milliard of books about Plato say to the world? Books shaped after long years of study and dedicated to the denial of other books with a similar genealogy. Theories of specialists born to be read by specialists like in a hermetic sect of forgotten initiated. The most complicated theory of physics will have sooner or later its place in utility and power. The most complex philosophical interpretation will remain almost speechless. The self-consciousness of philosophy and the eternal mystery of mankind and

existence make philosophy look always toward its past and question not a philosopher, but a conception and an interpretation of reality and mankind. But this task endeavour has fallen in oblivion, philosophers have overlooked philosophy and have founded a new idolatry. What do we do when we write and think about Plato and Socrates, re-creating a borrowed thought without having investigated ourselves? We do, maybe, a void similar to that of the will of power. This means that we make but simulacrums of truth, virtue and of philosophy itself.

These philosophers, who hide in the academy, become gloomy and static characters. Philosophy dies inside the colleges, which were supposed to develop and give it a new spirit. Thought can only be generated by itself and it cannot be borrowed. The philosophers in the academy become borrowers and usurers of uprooted thoughts, become commentators and interpreters which use others ideas as crutches which support their weak steps. We forget to think for ourselves, a way of thinking, which is not subjective or individual, but free because it has no prejudices and gives nothing for granted. It is complicated; philosophy has always been self aware of its own history and emerges from its predecessors; to make philosophy it is necessary to know its history. But the historians of ideas seem like adolescents simulating that they are their own masters, mature enough for freedom, even if they still inhabit in the paternal house.

Besides the borrowed thought, philosophers insist in writing enigmatically. Obscurity immediately reflects the will to draw separations and differences, of speaking to a few chosen learners, different from the rest because of their immense ability for deciphering secrets. Apart from the arrogance for being a specialist in totality - because, as said, the object of philosophy is totality and mankind, - or for understanding, in a certain sense, everything; they persist in solving a mystery with an enigma. The philosopher should be more like an artist, a musician who, after a life of practice, study and will of comprehension, in a few minutes donates its energy and effort to the audience, asking from them just a moment of listening. Thus, philosophy is a difficult task, but its heralds should donate it. That means to request the others not to be philosophers and to clearly give away the profound message.

But if we are not fortunate enough to remain distant and stay in the will of doing philosophy, but being nothing but an apprentice without his own wings, we can fall in the servility to power. Clearly philosophers can find a place in the world of utility. Their universalising and general way of thinking can be an excellent tool for certain purposes. Thus, enslaved and marked by interest, we can become the best apologists for no matter what idea, we can become sophists allied to gravediggers. Since we forget about truth and virtue, with this ability of managing reasons and minds anything

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can have convincing fundamentals. Anything can seem to be just and justified, anything, even war and poverty.

These sophists are similar to that Nazi soldier who, after his duties in the crematorium, went back home and played Chopin in a piano, feeling delighted and deified in his demons. The distance between the beauty of the music and that wicked character is as enormous as notorious is the contrast. The same happens between the sophist and the true philosopher. Thus, these sophist-philosophers are servants of power, wealth, interests and slaves of themselves. They forget that the trees of life and thought are not distant or different; that speaking about the just and the goodness without thinking about them up to the last consequence and without being good and just themselves is the death of this freedom and of philosophy itself. Anyone can apply his abilities to any ideal or end without thinking and analysing the moral consequences, and he would keep on being what he is and being able of doing what he does, but not the philosopher.

What are we philosophers? Proud debtors, servile freethinkers and pleased mystery carriers. We disregard making, thinking and living philosophy. Not even freely have we renounced to freedom. Freedom is not pure irresolution and indifference, but, maybe, the possibility of giving the law to oneself. To shape oneself, like a mass of clay, with the hands of one's self-conscious thought. Thus, philosophising has no direction until its own consciousness determines one. This is the pure thought, the beautiful thought, the thought that is appropriate to its self; it, without ends or prejudices, tries to bring to light a true basis for life and existence or, at least, a provisional one. The first step of philosophy is thus destruction; taking anything for granted. The human world stands on assumptions, prejudices and simulacrum, on immense veils, which take the place of truth and virtue. We should remember Nietzsche and approach the world with a hammer in the thought. Let's first philosophise by hammering. Not, of course, with the hard and rough strike of the metal on the rock, but with the chisel like the archaeologist or the sculptor; gentle and rigorous, but also destructor. It is essential to overthrow prejudices and ideologies to be free. Break apart the idols that power has imposed and that determine our thought and life. Just then it is possible to start the reconstruction out of the wreckage; a positive proposal emerging from life and thought. And this action is not a matter of revolution and change, it cannot be; it is something that should dwell in the heart of the philosopher in every moment. Being just and good is normally a matter of obeying the laws, of following certain pre-established values. Whether they are good or not, they may be solved according to some other given perspective. Dogmatism rules the actions, and maybe it has to. But the laws always find a moment where they become unfair or new situations which mankind has never faced arise; then we reach the limits of the fundamentals that formerly supported us. Rarely someone has descended up to

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the lack of fundamentals and achieved an answer out of the void. Philosophy inhabits these limits, and rarely someone asks for its answer.

Philosophy exists because mankind does; because the ultimate questions of life and existence are inescapable and always provisional, and the wisest man of all can only propose one course in the middle of an infinite and undiscovered land. Totality, the topic of philosophy, will never be understood even after crossing every possible path. To philosophise is also to assume and to know clearly the boundaries of our thought without renouncing to walk through an endless road. Many philosophers have reached a system, a complete explanation of reality; but like every dogmatism, it will find its limits and weaknesses. That is philosophy, a denial and reinforcement of its past steps. That should be also the philosopher.

Let's remember about Socrates, who only knew about his lack of knowledge, and that every step he made led him to a clearer knowledge of his ignorance. The investigations into the goodness and the virtue, the meaning of existence and the essence of mankind are not absurd just because of their elusive nature, but they are inescapable. Let's remember, also, that Socrates was a public man and not a hermit that he went to the public places questioning the others and himself about the truth and the goodness, exhorting them to worry about virtue and not about fame, money or power. Let's remember that he wrote nothing because philosophy dwells upon the thought which loves to think; too free to be contained in books or ultimate pronouncements. Let's remember to live philosophy, which in its free vitality always gives away its self to others.

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# Theoretical Discourse on the Challenges of Black Intellectuals in Post-Modern America

*Tunde Adeleke*

## **Abstract**

Over four decades ago, in his seminal publication, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), the late Harold Cruse bemoaned the failure of black intellectuals to project, 'an autonomous ethnic' vision. He criticized black intellectuals for not assuming effective leadership of the racial and ethnic challenges confronting blacks. Cruse's book helped focus public attention, and ignited debates, on black intellectuals. A major challenge has to do with determining primary responsibility of black intellectuals, and the nature and character of intellectual productions. In other words, should race be the determinant of responsibility, or should that responsibility be to a greater and higher national cause? Should priority be to the demand of the academy for intellectual rigor and production or to the demand of the black struggle for ideological leadership? As black intellectuals, how should they respond to black popular culture, or more precisely, expressions of black cultural resistance such as Gangsta rap and Hip hop? This paper attempts to address these questions through a theoretical analysis of a select group of black intellectuals whose writings underscore the tension between the conflicting demands of the academy and the Black struggle (Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, Manning Marable, and Molefi Asante).

**Key Words:** Grounding, Eurocentric, instrumentalist, gangsta, hip-hop, Afrocentrism, universalism, objectivity.

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## **1. Introduction**

In his *Prison Notebooks* (1977), Italian Marxist Political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) proposed two conceptions of intellectual leadership - traditional and organic. The former is attached to, and in cohort with the dominant ruling class. The latter identifies with the interests, aspirations and ideals of the oppressed and marginalized masses. Organic leadership, according to Gramsci, is embedded with the people, and thus could be trusted to defend their interests. Gramsci challenged the prevailing belief that because the training of intellectuals emphasized abstract and ostensibly universal values and methods, they are supposed to transcend group allegiances and affiliations. He encouraged social groups to generate their own distinct intellectuals.<sup>1</sup>

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## 2. **Black Intellectuals, Knowledge & Power**

Black intellectuals and revolutionaries have equally invoked this Gramscian typology of organic leadership in different contexts. They include the late Guinean and West Indian scholars and revolutionaries, Amilcar Cabral and Walter Rodney, respectively. Both advocated an intellectual leadership that is dedicated to the revolutionary aspirations and empowerment of the masses. This style of leadership results from the commission of class suicide. In the words of Rodney, such leadership must be 'grounded' with the people. This 'grounding' would educate black intellectuals and prepare them to function as revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup>

Walter Rodney described this leadership as guerrilla intellectualism (GI), someone embedded within a hegemonic colonial/neo-colonial order against which he/she had to mobilize his/her intellectual resources.<sup>3</sup> Both he and Cabral exemplified this leadership typology in the context of Africa's colonial and neo-colonial struggles. Rodney urged black intellectuals to embrace the 'first and major struggle,' that is, the struggle over ideas, by using their positions within the academy to challenge Eurocentric ideas. Furthermore, as a product of bourgeois environment, the black intellectual must first be emancipated from the entrapment of bourgeois culture, indeed from what Rodney characterized as the 'Babylonian captivity' of bourgeois society. He suggested two ways of accomplishing this - by vigorously attacking negative Eurocentric and hegemonic ideas and theories, and by fully identifying and grounding with the people, and in the process, undergoing what Cabral called, 'A spiritual reconversion of mentalities.'<sup>4</sup>

Rodney rejected the doctrine of 'knowledge for knowledge sake.' Knowledge is useful only to the degree that it advances the cause of liberation. It is the ability and willingness to use knowledge in the cause of freedom that distinguishes a GI from an armchair theoretician. This commission of class suicide, which Rodney and Cabral prioritised, entailed the cultural re-education of the intellectual 'in the native 'mass character,' and his/her 'spiritual reconversion of mentalities.'<sup>5</sup> Rodney abandoned what would have been a lucrative and successful academic path to immerse himself in the working class struggles in his native Guyana; a commitment that eventually took his life.<sup>6</sup> Cabral also lost his life in the vanguard of his native Guinean revolutionary struggles against Portuguese colonialism. Like Rodney, Cabral could have retreated to the safety and comfort of ivory tower intellectualism.<sup>7</sup>

Black intellectuals in America have historically engaged the dynamics of knowledge and power. Pioneer black intellectuals of the nineteenth century understood the relationship between knowledge and power and sought to utilize their modest intellectual resources for the empowerment of the race.<sup>8</sup> These pioneers mobilized their knowledge in the

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cause of black liberation. Subsequent generations would build on this foundation.<sup>9</sup>

Modern black intellectuals confronted the challenge of helping to chart the path to freedom, equality and empowerment. They took this responsibility seriously. G. N. Grisham, Professor and Principal of a high school in Kansas City, Missouri, described as 'one of the ablest educators and most practical philosophers in the country,' emphasized the linkage between knowledge and power and urged black intellectuals to assume an activist role in the struggle.<sup>10</sup>

Carter G. Woodson, Du Bois and the New Negro intellectuals of the early twentieth century were all inspired by the efforts of earlier generations to adopt a utilitarian construction of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Du Bois underlined the imperative of an intellectual avante garde class. As he explained, 'The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first deal with the Talented Tenth [...] the best of his race that they may guide the mass.'<sup>12</sup>

Woodson and Du Bois, Harvard trained historians used their knowledge to authenticate black history and culture; and demonstrate black compatibility with America.<sup>13</sup> John Hope Franklin's progressive 'Up from Slavery' genre belongs in this category. He used his scholarship to highlight a progressive American culture. This progressive genre soon came under scrutiny and attack as nationalist-oriented scholars advocated a more militant/nationalist historiography; one that highlighted anti-American and contradictory themes.<sup>14</sup>

The aphorism 'knowledge is power' was critical to the civil rights activism of the 1960s. Leading activists such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael underscored the fragility of civil and political rights. Those rights could easily be compromised without the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the demand for intellectual leadership became a critical component of civil rights activism. Similarly, the shift in the 1960s black students' activism from non-violence to Black Power was informed by recognition of the importance of knowledge. Black Power activists concluded that the drive for self-determination would fail without adequate education.<sup>16</sup>

The civil rights context created new challenges. Conflicting responses to civil rights reforms split black intellectuals into opposing integration versus nationalist/separatist schools. Some critics contend that the reforms fundamentally altered the function of the black intellectual from activism to reconciliation. The latter called for de-emphasising nationalist/ethnic vision. Nationalist-minded black intellectuals, however, cautioned against being seduced by the reforms into prematurely surrendering the nationalist/ethnic vision. Thus, there developed conflicting constructions of the role of the black intellectual. Conservative intellectuals such as Shelby Steele and Thomas Sowell de-emphasised race and racism

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and identify black moral failures and shortcomings, and inability or refusal to embrace core American values as major obstacles to integration.<sup>17</sup> Nationalist and left-leaning black intellectuals like Molefi Asante, Manning Marable, Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson highlight racism, inequality, white hegemony and the alienation of blacks. They invoke black nationalist/ethnic consciousness to theorize about the relationship of knowledge to power in America.<sup>18</sup> Black intellectuals also disagreed on the primal function of scholarship, and the role of the intellectual. Is the black intellectual fundamentally a scholar first? Or, is being a black intellectual necessarily also an activist responsibility? The critical challenge is whether a black intellectual who combines dual functions (academic and activist) could or should write from a detached, positivist and objective stance. Some reject objectivity and unabashedly urge black intellectuals to assume activist roles. The end of scholarship should be the empowerment of blacks. Afrocentrism is a modern representation of this ideological genre. This is most forcibly defended by Molefi Asante, former chair of African-American Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, and others such as Maulana Karenga, Na'im Akbar, and the late John Henrik Clark. They denounce objectivity and universalism as trappings of Eurocentrism. They deem the pursuit of objectivity detrimental to blacks. Instead of objective scholarship, Afrocentrism encourages black intellectuals to use knowledge primarily for advancing the black struggle.<sup>19</sup>

Asante, for example, denounces objectivity and universalism as facets of Eurocentric ideology, which have been used to construct culturally, skewed Eurocentric knowledge. The underlying dynamics of black scholarship, in his view, should be the empowerment of blacks. No black scholar, he insists, should be constrained by of objectivity and universalism.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in this battle for the consciousness of blacks, which is critical to the cultural survival of blacks, Asante contends that there is no room for diverse and divergent views and opinions, especially views critical of blacks. The role of the black intellectual, therefore, is to choreograph a monolithic sensibility and consciousness. The black intellectual functions like a thought police, expected to maintain vigilance against opposing critical views that tend to muddle the racial line.<sup>21</sup>

The black intellectual is also a dual performer; with responsibility to two key audiences - the academic audience which requires a distinct medium of communication, and the 'every-day people,' the masses of uneducated, less educated, or mis-educated people. For the latter, the medium of communication/discourse is rooted in popular culture/vernacular. Black intellectuals like Na'im Akbar, Robin D. G. Kelley, Eric Dyson and Cornel West, have had to traverse both worlds; that is, publish research monographs for academic audience, as well as popular writings for the masses. West, for example, has written materials of the highest academic quality, while also

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producing CDs and popular literatures for non-academic audiences. Given the challenge of black powerlessness, the black intellectual cannot afford to focus exclusively on academic scholarship. He/She must consciously identify with the peoples' struggles and challenges, as well as function as advocate for the much maligned, misunderstood and militant anti-establishment genres of black popular culture such as Hip-hop and Gangsta rap. Dyson, for example, has also used his writings to explicate, and defend the negative lyrics of Gangsta rap. Like West, Dyson attempts to rescue these genres (Hip-hop, Gangsta rap) from being dismissed as the ranting of the uninformed, uneducated, bigoted and homophobic black youth.

The preoccupation of West and Dyson with black popular protest genres has not resonated well with some in the academic community. Former Harvard University President Charles Summer, for example, once criticized West for not focusing enough on serious scholarly research, which resulted in West's resignation. West was then performing multiple roles. In addition to scholarly publications, he was also producing rap CDs, advising aspiring black politicians, as well as speaking for various anti-racism and anti-establishment causes.

The black intellectual of today also functions as an arbiter whose role is to challenge and deconstruct Eurocentric scholarship. For example, black intellectuals like Asante, and John H. Clarke have undertaken to rewrite history from black/African perspectives. Among Asante's legion of publications are recent reinterpretations of African history and African American history written from a black or Afrocentric perspective.<sup>22</sup> Also, the Nation of Islam has commissioned its own historians to write texts specifically for its schools; texts, which directly challenge mainstream interpretation of American history.<sup>23</sup> Thus, black intellectuals combine both scholarly and activist functions. This has raised questions about the goal of scholarship. Should scholarship focus primarily on the acquisition of knowledge? Or, should it be knowledge for individual/collective liberation and empowerment? There seems to be a consensus among black intellectuals, irrespective of ideology, that knowledge should have a utilitarian purpose. There is disagreement, however, on precisely the nature of the utilitarian goal - integration of nationalist/ethnic vision?

Explaining the contextual dynamics of black intellectualism, Franz Fanon suggested that since black intellectuals developed in the context of oppressive environments, they often seek to integrate into the dominant society.<sup>24</sup> This is true of black intellectuals in America. The lure of the dominant society remains simply irresistible. Though critical of the dominant society, black intellectuals have not completely jettisoned the dominant 'bourgeois' ethos. Thus far, their leadership style is not consistent with effective 'grounding' with the people. Their education has become a means of escaping the dark and gloomy world of the masses of black America into

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the lofty and affluent world of the dominant white society. Yet, as Fanon underscored, not all leadership is seduced by the bourgeois ethos of the dominant class. Rather than compromise, some black intellectuals choose to identify with the oppressed and marginalized.<sup>25</sup> This revolutionary organic group, in the Gramscian sense, uses knowledge as a weapon in a revolutionary cultural war against a domineering and Eurocentric mainstream. To some degree, Afrocentrism exemplifies this tradition.<sup>26</sup>

Other intellectuals not publicly identified with Afrocentrism have also advocated 'organic' leadership. For example, Cornel West advocates an 'organic catalytic black intellectual' - a thinker who would have a symbiotic relationship with the broader black community. According to him; 'this model privileges collective intellectual work that contributes to communal resistance and struggle.'<sup>27</sup> In this respect, according to William Banks, 'West echoes Gramsci's ideas about the importance of black intellectuals articulating issues and ideas relevant to their ethnic community.'<sup>28</sup> However, while West centralizes race, other black intellectuals such as Shelby Steele and William J. Wilson highlight other elements<sup>29</sup> It should be understood however that Cornel West is not a prototypical organic leader. Often his writings and leadership style are fundamentally self-promoting and at odds. He and other so-called progressive scholars dabble into just about any subject under the sun, solidifying their reputation as 'experts' on black issues. They focus on racism, inequality, and the failures and shortcomings of American democracy. Due to their prodigious academic scholarship, and visibility, they have become institutionalised 'talking heads' on televisions, radios and other popular media. Their ultimate goals are personal enrichment, and career advancement. This is true as well of the Afrocentric, cultural nationalist intellectuals who publicly proclaim identification with, and concern for, the plight of the black masses. They too are little better than the exploitative and hegemonic intellectual establishment they condemn. They seem unable to completely commit the class suicide called for, and seem to be orchestrating the people's cause for purely self-aggrandizement. This is clearly evident in their commoditisation of knowledge.

As public black intellectuals become more visible, assertive and functional, their demands have appreciated exponentially. As source and authority on black life and challenges; these intellectuals become the bona fide voice of, and authority on, black America. Their visibility and enhanced status has spawned a cottage industry around the spheres of public knowledge. These public black intellectuals impose and demand a high price for their services. They have retreated into some private, secluded space or compartment, behind agential barriers. To reach them, one is first directed to agents who are employed primarily to negotiate lucrative booking fees - first class airfare, at times, including family members, five-star hotel

accommodation and hefty honorarium which includes agential commission often for very minimal visits.

Almost all black public intellectuals, regardless of ideological disposition, now sell their knowledge often to the highest bidder. As public intellectuals, their knowledge is no longer for altruistic service, but primarily a means of personal enrichment. They have become intellectual prostitutes and pimps, accessible only to those able and willing to pay for their services. Many have copyrighted their works and now charge exorbitant fees even from students doing research. They all seem unwilling to fully commit class suicide, or return to, and 'ground' with, the people. Instead of escaping the 'Babylonian captivity' of their Eurocentric education, and undertaking the kind of 'reconversion of mentalities' which Amilcar Cabral believed would prepare them to function effectively as the peoples' advocates, they have chosen to prioritise personal gains.

### 3. Conclusion

For the modern black intellectual, the responsibility to 'ground' with the people, in the absence of any sustained revolutionary struggle, means that the intellectual would not use knowledge as an escape valve, a means of migration from the masses to the relative comfort and safety of the ivory tower. It means he/she would be accessible to all, including those unable to afford prohibitive agential fees. Thus, 'grounding' means truly committing knowledge to the service of the masses, identifying with, and sharing in their experiences. It also means remaining in proximity to the masses and not retreating to the seclusion and exclusivity of gated suburbia. This 'grounding' places the intellectual on the side of the people against the forces of domination and oppression. This is the prototypical organic nationalist intellectual in the Gramscian sense that both Rodney and Cabral exemplified. Thus far, black American intellectuals are further from approximating this leadership tradition.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> W Rodney, *The Groundings With My Brothers*, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, London, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> R Hill, *Walter Rodney Speaks: The Making of an African Intellectual*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1990, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> W Rodney, *The Groundings*, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> A Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, Heinemann, London, 1980, p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> P Fontaine, 'Walter Rodney: Revolutionary and Scholar in the Guyanese Political Cauldron', *Walter Rodney: Revolutionary and Scholar: A Tribute*, EA Alpers & PM Fontaine (eds), University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> P Chabal, *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> E Thorpe, *Black Historians: A Critique*, William Morrow & Co., New York, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 27-64.

<sup>10</sup> GN Grisham, 'The Function of the Negro Scholar', *The Voice of Black America: Major Speeches by Blacks in the United States, 1797-1973*, PS Foner (ed.), vol. 1, Capricorn Books, New York, 1975, pp. 629-620.

<sup>11</sup> A Meier & E Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1986, pp. 1-160.

<sup>12</sup> A Paschal (ed.), *A W.E.B Du Bois Reader*, Collier Books, New York, 1971, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> A Meier & E Rudwick, *Black History*, op. cit., pp. 1-160.

<sup>14</sup> S Stuckey, 'Twilight of Our Past: Reflections on the Origins of Black History', *Amistad2: Writings on Black History and Culture*, JA Williams and CF Harris (eds), Vintage Books, New York, 1971, pp. 261-298.

<sup>15</sup> M X, *Malcolm X on Afro-American History*, Pathfinder, London, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> F Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> G Mwakikagile, *Black Conservatives in the United States*, New Africa Press, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2006, pp. 20-103.

<sup>18</sup> H Baker, *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008; W D Wright, *Crisis of the Black Intellectual*, Third World Press, Chicago, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> M Asante, *Afrocentricity*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1989; S Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes*, Verso, London, 1998; W D Wright, *Crisis of the Black Intellectual*, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> M Asante, *Afrocentricity*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> M Asante, *Classical Africa*, Peoples Publishing Group, Saddle Brook, New Jersey, 1993; *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony*, Routledge, New York, 2007.



<sup>23</sup> NOI, *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews, vol. 1*, The Historical Research Department, NOI, Boston, MA, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> F Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Groove Press, New York, 2004 [1961]; F Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Groove Press, New York, 2007 [1952].

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> W Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1996, p. 156.

<sup>27</sup> C West, 'The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual'. *Cultural Critique*, vol. 1, Fall, 1985, p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> W Banks, *Black Intellectuals*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>29</sup> G Mwakikagile, *Black Conservatives*, *op. cit.*; C Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts: The Promise and Peril of Black Conservatism from Booker T. Washington to Condoleezza Rice*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2008.

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## **Power and Powerlessness of Intellectuals in Turkey: The Debate on ‘Turkishness’ and the Murder of Hrant Dink**

*Georg F. Simet*

### **Abstract**

Hrant Dink, Armenian, author and chief editor of the magazine *Agos* was murdered on 19 January 2007 in Istanbul. This tragic incident is taken to reflect the complex circumstances of his murder and the ambivalent role of the intellectuals in the Turkish society. Novelists as Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak stimulated the debate on the genocide of Armenians in 2005. Touching this old wound they opened a controversial discussion on Turkish history and the understanding of Turkishness in Turkish public opinion. In consequence, Pamuk and Şafak - as about 60 authors and publishers in total - were blamed for ‘public denigration of Turkish identity’ under article 301 of the penal code. Pamuk, today, is still one of the most disliked persons by ordinary nationalists. The Dink case shows that, on the one hand, the intellectuals have the power to name different, opposite perspectives and encourage people to express their individuality. On the other hand, the initiation of change provokes these who want to prevent changes at all. Opposing intellectuals are not in power and so they cannot hinder the people in power to use and misuse its possibilities to fight back.

**Key Words:** Dink, Pamuk, Şafak, Gökçen, Turkey, Turkishness, Armenia, Ergenekon.

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### **1. Hrant Dink: A Brief Biography and Socio-political Appreciation**

Hrant Dink was born on 15 September 1954 in Malatya. In the age of seven, the marriage of his parents broke down and Dink was sent to Istanbul, where he was grown up in an Armenian orphanage. He met his wife Rakel in a summer camp in Tuzla that was set up and functioned as a meeting centre for the Armenian youth. Hrant and Rakel married in 1977 and managed the youth camp until 1979 when the land was confiscated. This was justified by the claim that the Armenian Church bought the land illegally. The event left a lasting impression on Dink: ‘This moment I became aware of what it means to be an Armenian in Turkey. I decided to fight for my identity.’<sup>1</sup>

In 1994 Dink started to write articles, first for the Marmara Armenian newspaper. Two years later he founded his own weekly newspaper, ‘Agos,’ which means ‘ploughed furrow.’ Agos is Turkey’s first

and only bilingual newspaper, published in Turkish and Armenian. In total, Dink wrote 19 columns for Agos.

Several times, Dink was tried for 'insulting' and/or 'denigrate' Turkishness' by reference to Article 301 of the Penal Code. The first time he was accused for his statements in a conference held in Urfa in 2002. He said: 'I was not a Turk but from Turkey and an Armenian.'<sup>2</sup> For these words Dink was sentenced to six months in prison (suspended for good behaviour).<sup>3</sup> This was the first final judgment from the Turkish highest judicial authority on interpretation of Article 301 of the new Criminal Code. Last of all, on 12 July 2006, he was again given a half year suspended prison sentence in connection with some, primarily the following two columns in Agos published in February 2004.

On 6 February 2004 Dink published an article about Sabiha Gökçen saying that she is an Armenian by birth. This threw the whole of Turkey into commotion, as Gökçen - born in Bursa on 21 March 1913; and died in Ankara on 22 March 2001 - is an adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first girl student of the Turkish Civil Aviation School and Turkey's first female combat pilot. The statement that this lady, adopted by Atatürk, the 'father of all Turks', an aviation pioneer and hero could be an Armenian was shocking.

Nevertheless, the bone of contention was Dink's suggestion, written in Agos on 13 February 2004: To 'replace the poisoned blood associated with the Turk, with fresh blood associated with Armenia.'<sup>4</sup>

In his last article, published in Agos on 10 January 2007, Dink documents the blatant failure of large parts of the Turkish judiciary, which sentenced him.<sup>5</sup> A few days later he wrote: 'For me, 2007 is likely to be a hard year.'<sup>6</sup>

On Friday, 19 January he was gunned down in front of his office in a city street in Şişli, a vibrant downtown neighbourhood of Istanbul, at 3 p.m., in the middle of the day. His murderer, a 17-year-old man he had never met, was heard to shout 'I have killed the infidel'.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The Term 'Turkishness' as a Life-Threatening Stumbling Block

Dink was killed by the national jurisdiction rather than a single young man. A cartoon of Sever Selvi shows this in a paradigmatic way. The number 301 is written in red against a black backdrop. Inside the number '0,' Dink's face appears like a trophy released for discharge.<sup>8</sup>

The murder of Hrant Dink did and does not keep the public prosecutors from prosecution.<sup>9</sup> Their power is based on the term 'Turkishness.' Bülent Algan comments rightly: 'Many definitions can be found for 'nation,' 'Turkish Nation,' and 'Turkishness.' Vagueness is the common character for all.'<sup>10</sup> In because of its vagueness, Article 301 is a

powerful, adaptable weapon in the hands of the supreme prosecutors and judges for fighting against all who express different opinions.

For the most part, two movements are opposing each other in modern Turkey. On the one hand, the national movement, that built the country, claims to be not only the most but the only party, which guarantees the continuation of the nation. Its values are homogeneity and a more or less quasi-militarily order. Homogeneity is defined for them by Atatürk's principle to build one, coherent *Turkish* nation, a principle, which culminates in the credo 'Ne mutlu Türküm diyene' (How happy is he who can say 'I am a Turk'). All beliefs, behaviour and acting have to be subordinated to this sentence. On the other hand, there are intellectuals who refuse to subordinate themselves of whatever reasons.

Nevertheless, all social and political controversies are still been led under the question what Turkishness means, a dispute which is been led by the nationalists not least judicially. Intellectuals from the non-'nationalist' side counter more creatively. So, Extramücadele (Extrastruggle) published a poster which shows the face of the murdered Dink titled 'Ne ölü 'Ermeniyim'diyen' (How dead is he who says 'I am an Armenian').

### 3. Elif Şafak's Novel '*Baba ve Piç*'

One out of about 60 intellectuals who were accused of insulting Turkish national identity<sup>11</sup> is Elif Şafak, 'Turkey's most famous female writer'.<sup>12</sup> Her case is remarkable, as it was the first time that Article 301 had been used against a work of fiction.<sup>13</sup> Although a public prosecutor in Istanbul dismissed the charges in June 2006, a high criminal court overruled the lower court decision a few weeks later, paving the way for a new trial.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the nationalistic stubborn prosecutors failed. The judges acquitted Şafak on 21 September 2006 soon after the trial opened, citing a lack of evidence.<sup>15</sup>

In '*Baba ve Piç*' (literally translated 'Father and Bastard'), Şafak's sixth novel, the enmeshment of Turkish and Armenian relationships is reflected from both, the Armenian and Turkish sides. Thanks to the accusation, 'The Bastard of Istanbul' - as the book is titled in the English edition - 'has officially gone from 'novel' to 'cultural touchstone.'<sup>16</sup> It became a best seller in Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

The most objected excerpt from the book is the following sentence spoken by Armanoush Tchakhmakhchian, one of main protagonists (who, by the way, are all female):<sup>18</sup>

I'm the grandchild of genocide survivors who lost all their relatives at the hands of Turkish butchers in 1915, but I myself have been brainwashed to deny the genocide because I was raised by some Turk named Mustafa!<sup>19</sup>

This little sentence is very insightful, as it contains first of all two important words. The first is the term *genocide*. The Turkish state tried and still tries very hard to prevent even other states (as France) for naming the massacres of Armenians in 1915 (in the context of the war of the Young Turks against Russia) ‘genocide.’<sup>20</sup> So, the use of this term marks the breach of a national taboo. The second word the prosecutors complained about is the designation of Turkish soldiers as ‘Turkish butchers.’ This as well marks a breach of a national taboo. It is the military, which built modern Turkey. So, Turkish soldiers can’t be bad. In the book ‘Şu Cılgın Türkler’ (‘Those Mad Turks’) by Turgut Özakman, published in April 2005 which achieved 292 editions by March 2006, the Turkish War of Independence is seen as ‘a holy war’.<sup>21</sup> (The same belongs to the battles against PKK. In all reports of the Turkish press, the roles of the good, the soldiers, and the bad, the terrorists, are *a priori* defined). Last but not least, the third breach of taboo is that the protagonist Armanoush, an Armenian, was raised by ‘some Turk named Mustafa’. She doesn’t know, but the readers know, that the protagonist Mustafa is a rapist. The clue of the novel is that the Armenian Armanoush travels from the diaspora in the USA to Turkey, the homeland of the genocide, and becomes a friend of Asya, the Turkish bastard.

#### 4. Orhan Pamuk’s Lawsuit and His Novel ‘*Kar*’

The most famous intellectual who was accused for having ‘offended the Turkish identity’ was Orhan Pamuk. His offence was that he said in an interview in ‘*Das Magazin*,’ a weekly supplement to a number of Swiss daily newspapers that ‘we Turks are responsible for the death of 30 thousand Kurds and a million Armenians and no-one in Turkey dares speak about it, except me’.<sup>22</sup>

The interview was conducted on 6 February 2005. At that time, Pamuk had published seven novels and was already a famous writer. His statements and all what he was doing in public were therefore monitored with close attention. Since the announcement of the Nobel Prize in Literature on 12 October 2006, Pamuk evoked an even larger degree of publicity. However, this does not mean that the Turkish people are proud of Pamuk. On the day of the announcement, the daily newspaper ‘*Hürriyet*’ (‘freedom’) headlined: ‘An Armenian shadow falls on Nobel.’<sup>23</sup> According to survey results published in ‘*Milliyet*’ (‘nationality’) on 4 December 2006, only 20.9% take the view that Pamuk received the prize rightly.<sup>24</sup>

From this perspective, the lawsuit against Pamuk, ‘the lost son’, was and is watched most thoroughly. Although the case has been rejected on 20 January 2006, the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned the decision on 14 May 2009.<sup>25</sup>

In opposite to his statement in ‘*Das Magazin*,’ his novels do not reflect politically charged ethnic themes as the Armenian or Kurdish conflict.



Although the plot of his seventh novel '*Kar*,' published in 2002 (English translation, '*Snow*,' published in 2004) is set in Kars, none of his protagonists is either Armenian or Kurdish. This is amazing, as Kars is a city close to the border to Armenia with Armenian and Kurdish influences. In this respect, there is a certain discrepancy between Pamuk's political statements in public and his literary work.

The personal of Pamuk's novels is always and exclusively Turkish. A debate with Armenians does not take place.

Turkey's intellectuals concentrate primarily on individual freedom rights, not on ethnic rights. Dink's demand that Turkey has to 'put an end to coercive assimilation of all minorities' remains a task for the future.<sup>26</sup>

##### 5. '*Derin Devlet*' - The 'Deep State' and Its Basis of Power

The complaints against Dink, Şafak and Pamuk were almost exclusively presented by Kemal Keriñsiz. This lawyer founded the 'Great Union of Jurists', which he heads. Keriñsiz and his association represent, as Ionnis N. Grigoriadis states, 'a new wave of nationalist mobilization against liberal intellectuals and minorities.'<sup>27</sup> The legal battle is fought out between these two parties. At least in the legal area, the non-nationalistic intellectuals were bolstered up. On 26 January 2008 Keriñsiz was arrested in simultaneous police raids against the Ergenekon gang.<sup>28</sup> The nationalistic movement came under suspicion of conspiracy.

The Ergenekon gang, named after the legendary retreat of the *Göktürk* (Sky Turks), was blamed to plan 'a coup d'état for 2009' with 'the purpose of creating chaos in the country and thus an atmosphere suitable for a military takeover.'<sup>29</sup>

In this context, it is important to remember that the Turkish republic is built by the military in a War of Independence. The importance of the military as the guarantee of the state is still visible even in the expression of non-military associations. Just one example: A poster of the Aydın Chess District Representative in 2009 shows Atatürk in front of marching soldiers saying 'The Turkish nation loves its armed forces; and regards it as the preserver of its ideals.'<sup>30</sup>

The fear of the nationalists, the military as well as the bulk of the population is still that Turkey could be split and fall apart. This scenario is worked out in the novel '*Metal Fırtına*' ('The Metal Storm'), published in winter/spring 2004/2005 by Orkun Uçar and Burak Turna. In this paradigmatic fiction, US forces invade Turkey in 2007 in order to 'divide Turkey between Greece and Armenia and also allow for the emergence of a Kurdish state.'<sup>31</sup> The importance and effect of the book on the public is shown by the fact that it 'sold about 500,000 copies.'<sup>32</sup>

It is obvious that the year 2005 marks a turning point in the debate between the nationalists and their opponents. On the one hand Dink and his

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supporters (as Şafak and Pamuk) published columns and novels and gave interviews. Concomitant with this, they challenged the powerful. On the other hand, the nationalists faced the challenge and reacted. They wanted to prosecute these *crimes* and discovered a powerful ally, the law. The increase of the liberality in the group of intellectuals of the more left-leaning opposition resulted in even more accentuated expressions of the nationalist movement.

#### **6. Indications for a Change in Power**

In the hours after Dink's killing, hundreds gathered spontaneously in Istanbul's central Taksim Square. In the evening they marched from there to Dink's office in Şişli chanting: 'We are all Armenians! We are all Hrant Dink!' On 23 January 2007, more than 100,000 people escorted Dink's coffin repeating the same slogans 'We are all Armenians! We are all Hrant Dink!'

The solidarity Dink did not receive in his lifetime was shown for him after his death. Taner Akçam, one of Dink's close friends, is convinced that the intellectuals marched as they felt ashamed. Pamuk expressed his concern in a similar way. One day after his murder, he visited Dink's family to express his condolences.

Dink's death did not change the fundamental convictions. The clash within the Turkish society, described by Şafak as 'a collision between those who are state-oriented and those who are civil-society oriented' is going on.<sup>33</sup>

Reflecting the last eight years from the perspective of the anti-nationalistic intellectual movement, the year 2005 can be marked as the year of confrontation. The murder of Dink in 2007 happened on hatred and desire for vengeance. In this respect, the year 2007 can be called the year of shame. In opposite, the year 2009 is a year of change.

On 6 September 2008, President Abdullah Gül went to Yerevan to watch a football match between Turkey and Armenia in order to qualify for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Despite of all historical grievances and against the opposition's resistance, Gül accepted an invitation by the president of Armenia, Serge Sargsyan.<sup>34</sup> It was the first ever visit of a president of Turkey to Armenia.

In December 2008, a group of at first 200 Turkish intellectuals published the following apology:

My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.<sup>35</sup>

By March 2009, this petition has been signed already by over 30,000 Turks around the world.<sup>36</sup>

Gül's *football diplomacy* achieved concrete political results, too. On 10 October 2009, the foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia signed two protocols on establishing diplomatic ties and developing relations between the two countries.<sup>37</sup>

These protocols could be an important step towards the fulfilment of one of Dink's dreams. As Taner Akçam reported about his last talks with Dink, it was Dink's wish to open the borders in order to bring the people together. He believed that the offsetting of misconduct (in the past) is not as important as a mutual understanding (now). Today, Armenians do not know much about Turkey and Turks know almost nothing about Armenia. This is to be changed. The Islamic politicians from the AKP and the anti-nationalistic intellectuals try this challenging way. They deserve our support.

### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> H Dink, 'A pigeon-like unease of spirit', in *Opendemocracy.net*, 22 January 2007, viewed on 25 January 2010, [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-turkey/pigeon\\_4271.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-turkey/pigeon_4271.jsp). ; H Dink, 'The Pigeon-like Unease of My Inner Spirit', in *Qantara.de*, viewed on 25 January 2010, [http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/c-476/nr-714/i.html](http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/c-476/nr-714/i.html).

<sup>3</sup> Ü Bilgen-Reinart, 'Hrant Dink: forging an Armenian identity in Turkey', in *Opendemocracy.net*, 7 February 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-turkey/dink\\_3246.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-turkey/dink_3246.jsp).

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> F Corley, 'Hrant Dink: Armenian Champion in Turkey', in *The Independent on Sunday*, 22 January 2007, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/hrant-dink-433200.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> M Keunen, 'Cartoons Illustrate Lack of Press Freedom in Turkey', in *Nrhandelsblad*, 4 February 2009, viewed on 2 February 2010, [http://www.nrc.nl/international/Features/article2134063.ece/Cartoons\\_illustrate\\_lack\\_of\\_press\\_freedom\\_in\\_Turkey](http://www.nrc.nl/international/Features/article2134063.ece/Cartoons_illustrate_lack_of_press_freedom_in_Turkey).

<sup>9</sup> International Freedom of eXchange, 'Two Sentenced for 'Insulting Turkishness' as European Court Rules Against Turkey', in *Ifex.org*, 16 October 2007, viewed on 25 January 2010, [http://www.ifex.org/turkey/2007/10/16/two\\_sentenced\\_for\\_insulting\\_turkishness](http://www.ifex.org/turkey/2007/10/16/two_sentenced_for_insulting_turkishness).

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> R Lea, 'In Istanbul, A Writer Awaits Her Day in Court', in *Guardian.co.uk*, 24 July 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/jul/24/fiction.voicesofprotest>.

<sup>12</sup> O Leonidas, 'Freedom of Expression in Contemporary Turkey: Beyond Article 301', in *Blogs.eliamap.gr*, 2 September 2009, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://blogs.eliamap.gr/en/oikonoleon/freedom-of-expression-in-contemporary-turkey-beyond-article-301/>.

<sup>13</sup> BBC News, 'Top Novelist Acquitted in Turkey', in *News.bbc.co.uk*, 21 September 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5366446.stm>.

<sup>14</sup> S Fowler, 'Turkey, a Touchy Critic, Plans to Put a Novel on Trial', in *The New York Times*, 15 September 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/15/world/europe/15turkey.html>.

<sup>15</sup> S Rainsford, 'Turkish novelist case collapses', in *BBC News, Istanbul*, 21 September 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5366048.stm>.

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<sup>17</sup> S Fowler, *op. cit.*; R Lea, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> S Fowler, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> E Shafak, *Bastard of Istanbul*, Penguin Books, London, 2007, pp. 53-54.

<sup>20</sup> A Chrisafis, 'Turkey Warns France over Armenian Genocide Bill', in *guardian.co.uk*, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/oct/11/turkey.eu>.

<sup>21</sup> I N Grigoriadis, *Upsurge amidst Political Uncertainty, Nationalism in post-2004 Turkey*, SWP Research Paper, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, 2006, p.13, viewed on 25 January 2010, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get\\_document.php?asset\\_id=3380](http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?asset_id=3380).

<sup>22</sup> G Othman, 'Ohran Pamuk, the Armenian Genocide and Turkish Nationalism', in *Asianews.it*, 18 May 2009, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=15272>.

<sup>23</sup> Hürriyet İnternet okurları, 'Nobel'e 'Ermeni' gölgesi düştü', in *Hürriyet*, 12 October 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/5246961.asp?m=1&gid=112&srld=3428&oid=1>.

<sup>24</sup> İSTANBUL Milliyet, 'Türkiye'nin NOBEL yorumu', in *Milliyet Online*, 4 December 2006, viewed on 25 January 2010, <http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:XJ63NI>.

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- <sup>26</sup> H Dink, 'I Have the Right to Die in the Country I was Born In', in *Bilkent.edu.tr*, 25 January 2007, viewed on 26 January 2010, <http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~crs/hrantdink.htm>. The journalist's last interview he granted to Ellen Rudnitsky and Mirko Schwanitz, International Organization of Journalists, two days before he was murdered.
- <sup>27</sup> I N Grigoriadis, *oc. cit.*, p. 15.
- <sup>28</sup> Today's Zaman Istanbul, 'Ergenekon coup planner called army friends for help', in *Today's Zaman, E-Gazette*, 30 January 2008, viewed on 22 January 2010, <http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:tWtACF7Cma4J.www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/>.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Aydın Satranç İl Temsilciliği, '30 Ağustos Zafer Bayramı Turnuvası', in *Aydinsatranciltemsilciligicom*, 30 August 2009, viewed on 26 January 2010, <http://www.aydinsatranciltemsilciligicom>.
- <sup>31</sup> I N Grigoriadis, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.
- <sup>33</sup> E Shafak, 'There Is No Clash of Civilizations', in *Qantara.de*, 2005, viewed on 26 January 2010, [http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/c-476/nr-459/i.html](http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/c-476/nr-459/i.html).
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# **Powerlessness, Lamentation and Nostalgia: Discourses of the Post-Soviet Intelligentsia in Modern Latvia**

*Olga Procevska*

## **Abstract**

During the transformation and collapse of the Soviet system, the intelligentsia was perhaps the most influential advocate of ideological, political and social change. Later a new political elite came to power, gradually marginalizing the intelligentsia in decision-making circles and evoking its yearning for the recent past. References to the accomplishments of the perestroika period (1985-1989) remain an essential foundation of identity for intellectuals in today's Latvia, preventing them from adopting new roles and discourses. Therefore a specific post-Soviet public intellectual now exists - unable to switch from tactics of accusation and reproduction of 20-year-old myths to taking responsibility in a democratic society, unable to maintain the functions of leader and legislator and retreating in nostalgia.

**Key Words:** Intelligentsia, post-soviet, Latvia, power, nostalgia, lamentation.

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## **1. An Obligation of Nostalgia**

Nostalgia is no longer regarded as a disease as it was between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it also has ceased to be viewed as curable. Alienation from home, longing for another time and place are seen as inherent components of modern, postmodern and post-postmodern societies.

Especially distance and strangeness have been viewed as natural characteristics of an intellectual.<sup>1</sup> Intellectuals are said to dwell in the lands of ideals and goals, usually leaving practical matters to others and moving on to new ideals and goals. Thus an intellectual is never home, never settled down; he is meant to be nomadic because being on a quest is the essence of being an intellectual. Attachment and engagement is viewed as a threat to the freedom of his thought and successful functioning of the intellectual.

Post-Soviet intellectuals are especially exposed to risks of nostalgia not just because they are intellectuals, but also because outbreaks of nostalgia are especially common in societies after revolutionary periods. The turmoil of revolutionary and post-revolutionary events makes stability (even stagnation) seem more valuable.<sup>2</sup> Some authors even consider nostalgia an integral component of every social change, including Professor Mitja Velikonja of the University of Ljubljana, who emphasizes its twofold nature of lamentation and glorification in his definition:

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A complex, differentiated, changing, emotionladen, personal or collective, (non)instrumentalized story that binarily laments and glorifies a romanticized lost time, people, objects, feelings, scents, events, spaces, relationships, values, political and other systems, all of which stand in sharp contrast to the inferior present. It is a mourning for the irreversible loss of the past, a longing for it, and it frequently involves a utopian wish and even an effort to bring it back.<sup>3</sup>

However, several sociologists admit that in former socialist states nostalgia is rarely viewed as something that should be acted upon; the desire to restore socialist order is uncommon.<sup>4</sup> Mostly in post-socialist societies nostalgia is mediated by popular culture and media and takes the form of lamentation or irony.

## 2. Perestroika and its Heirs

Initially both the intelligentsia and glasnost were state projects in the Soviet system. However, during the years of perestroika, the intelligentsia gained unprecedented authority and an image as the 'nation's consciousness' by filling in the gaps in official discourse, openly talking about things that previously were silenced and limited only to a small group of dissidents in samizdat or the private sphere of kitchen talk: deportations, ecological problems, unbalanced migration, corruption, and threats to the traditions and languages of Soviet minorities. It has to be taken into account that in Latvia the most important discourses of perestroika were different from those of Soviet Russia - human rights received no significant attention, but there was a huge emphasis on ecology, language and migration issues.

In the late 1980s people trusted the intelligentsia more than any official institution. The organizer of an icebreaking 1988 plenum of Latvian creative unions, poet Janis Peters, remembers the arrival of 'tons of letters' asking for solutions to one problem or another; they were sent to the Writer's Union instead of the ministries or regional party organizations, the rightful recipients, because the intelligentsia seemed more honest and influential - and, strangely, unconnected to the state.<sup>5</sup>

Until approximately 1988 the party still kept public discourses under control, and dissidents still had to limit themselves to a small underground audience. However, in 1988 the intelligentsia formed mass movements throughout the Soviet republics (although such movements existed before in Poland, Hungary, and some other states under Soviet influence outside the USSR, they did not have considerable impact on events within the USSR). In Latvia the driving force of late perestroika, usually referred to as *Atmoda* (revival, awakening), was *Tautas fronte* (the People's Front or Popular

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Front), an organization led by the intelligentsia that consolidated criticism towards the Communist Party and served as a real political alternative to it. In Estonia and Lithuania similar organizations were *Rahvarinne* and *Sajūdis*, respectively.

In 1989-1990 the influence and popularity of the intelligentsia reached its climax. They were the most notable speakers at mass demonstrations, and their articles dominated op-ed columns in almost every newspaper and magazine except the most pro-Communist. In March 1990, the Supreme Council of Latvia was elected. Its primary duty was to officially declare independence from the Soviet Union and prepare for the election of a *Saeima* (parliament). More than 70% of the seats were won by national and regional leaders of the Popular Front - most of them members of the intelligentsia. Critical decisions about the formation of an independent state were made, and the work of the Council was the focus of public attention.

But soon after independence was declared, the public had to face the dark side of systemic transformation: the collapse of the state planned and controlled economy led to unemployment, an absolutely marginal problem during Soviet times; inflation of 300% to 400%; the closing of factories, and a consequent deficit of almost all essential goods.

As already mentioned, intellectuals rarely bother themselves with the practical realization of strategies and goals that they bring to the public agenda. Therefore, when the initial (ideological) stage of changes had passed, the intellectuals, who 'proved to be extremely powerful in their effect on the national consciousness of their societies during the demolition of the Iron Curtain, later [...] were forced to limit themselves to performing more modest roles,' as Lithuanian historian Almantas Samalavicius concludes.<sup>6</sup> The agenda of the people also changed - they were preoccupied with adapting and surviving in conditions that were extremely harsh and entirely new to them.

Two Russian sociologists, Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin, highlight another aspect of systemic transformation, declaring that the identity of the Soviet intelligentsia rested upon two main characteristics: the function of enlightening the public and 'the corporate belonging to the circle of the elite.' As it turned out, first, the intelligentsia lacked the professional skills and knowledge to function as 'rationalisers of everyday life' in a pluralistic public sphere, and second, the bond between the intelligentsia and Soviet political elite was too strong for the former to obtain a new identity.<sup>7</sup> Sociologist Inna Kotchetkova also points out that it is a problem not only for Soviet intelligentsia, because 'overall changes in society demand active reflexive work, reconsideration of previous identities or the search for new ones, something which most people brought up in a communist country are unaccustomed to.' That is why 'instead of the joy of liberation the majority of

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the population experiences frustration, anxiety and longs for the comfortable past.<sup>8</sup>

By the time parliamentary elections occurred in June 1993, most *Atmoda* leaders had moved away from the centre of the political scene to its periphery or completely retreated from the public sphere back to their professional work. The new elite came mostly from an economic background, rather than an academic or creative one. They were former heads of collective farms (*kolkhoz*) and factories or entrepreneurs who made their fortunes during the second half of the 1980s when the state-controlled economy was partially liberalized to allow private enterprises. The next elections, in 1995, made this change of elite even more obvious. Intellectual leaders of perestroika then obtained a role that belongs to them even today: as the so-called locomotives - vote-getters, engines for dragging less popular candidates into office - even if the locomotives have no significant influence on legislation or administration when formally being in power.

The intelligentsia was aware of the changes; they disliked or even despised the new elite, but were unable or unwilling to interrupt or transform this process. As the head of the Latvian Popular Front, Dainis Ivans writes in his memoirs:

The *post-Atmoda* Latvian political elite developed, and in my opinion, it was driven not so much by national as by corporate interests. In opposition to the birth of the Popular front, it was quiet, undercover politics. We could not outdo these boys in sliminess and deceitfulness.<sup>9</sup>

A frequent speaker at mass demonstrations in the late 1980s, the poet Mara Zalite goes even further in depicting the naiveté of intellectuals in contrast to the iniquity of the new elite:

The idealists of *Atmoda* didn't think that there would appear greedy, selfish individuals, who would steal and plunder. It seemed that it could not happen, because all of us [...] forgot, that there is evil in the world.<sup>10</sup>

British journalist Anatol Lieven offers several explanations why popular actors of perestroika did not become national leaders and instead left politics soon after independence was regained. First, 'Balts dislike nonconformists of any kind.' Especially in Latvia and Estonia they are regarded as not 'smart enough to manoeuvre properly in the face of the system.' Second, many dissidents were 'worn out' from resisting the oppression of the system. Third, many found the new political system too corrupt and dishonest to fit their ideals.<sup>11</sup> I believe that these issues may have affected the fate of the

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intelligentsia, but the reason of most significance was the fact that the intelligentsia was too soviet even when being anti-soviet. To consolidate and act as a social power (which is exactly what 'intelligentsia' stands for), it needed an external enemy, a great evil to fight against. Therefore, the intelligentsia could not adapt to the conditions of sovereignty and democracy without such evident and, what is important - an external - enemy.

Yet in 1994 Lieven forecast that former Soviet dissidents, feeling discontent with the functioning of the post-Soviet political and social order, would stimulate a new popular movement.<sup>12</sup> By now it is evident that they did not. Instead they developed an identity based on remembrance and glorification of their past and lamentations about losses in the present. They chose nostalgia.

#### **4. When We Were United and Faithful**

Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that after the collapse of the Soviet Union 'the soviet way of life has acquired a nostalgic appeal to many people in the former Soviet Union, undoubtedly including some who earlier railed against its boredom and restrictiveness.'<sup>13</sup> She mentions several elements of Soviet order that are common objects of nostalgia:

In this Soviet world remembered, a job was guaranteed, as well as a living wage and a roof over one's head, and one did not have to work hard for it. There was camaraderie at the workplace and guaranteed support and loyalty from friends (uncomplicated by the cash nexus) and family; children honoured their parents; the streets were safe; science and culture were respected and generously funded; education was a core value; and the state protected its citizens from pornography and other forms of moral corruption. The Soviet Union was a proud multinational state with a civilizing mission, organized at home on the principle of 'friendship of peoples' and extending a 'big brotherly' hand abroad to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Third World. It was a superpower respected by the whole world, whose successes in space exploration were envied even by America.<sup>14</sup>

Objects for Soviet nostalgia differ among the former socialist republics. For Russians it is clearly the period of stagnation, the so-called long 70s, because it embodies their perception of the system with minimal risks and maximal stability that was simple and comprehensible for its inhabitants as opposed to the conditions of transition.<sup>15</sup>

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But for the Baltic States the main point of reference and nostalgia is not the 70s, but *Atmoda*. A nationwide survey by the research company SKDS shows that *Atmoda* is the period in their history of which Latvians are most proud. Nearly one-third of respondents (32.2%, including national minorities) picked it from a list as the most honourable, while only 9.2% considered Soviet times as such. It highlights what could be called a dysfunction of metonymy - a symbolic borderline between Soviet rule in general (regarded mostly in negative terms of oppression and absurdity) and the period of *Atmoda* that is associated with solidarity, altruism, courage, and hope.

The inability to transform their identity and functions to fit a post-communist society did not go unnoticed by intellectuals themselves. One of the few imprisoned dissidents in Latvia, poet Knuts Skujenieks, notes:

Organizations of the intelligentsia did not adapt to the conditions of an independent state. They have no influence on legislation, on strategic national goals; they do not have enough support from the society.<sup>16</sup>

Academic and political analyst Juris Rozenvalds explains that the architects of perestroika could not switch from the ethics of accusation that were suitable to advance changes in the rigid Soviet system towards the ethics of responsibility.<sup>17</sup> Intellectuals avoid admitting their responsibility for what happened to Latvian society after independence was regained (including the huge gap between the wealthy and the poor, nationalism, and intolerance).

Instead intellectuals continue to exploit discourses and myths that originated in their actions and discourses of criticism of Soviet rule during perestroika. Among the most prominent are claims that the Latvian nation and language are threatened by extinction, the distinction between us (Latvians) and others (so-called occupants meaning mostly Soviet-Russian immigrants), and refusal to think of Latvia as a post-Soviet or Eastern European state, dogmatically sticking to the identity of belonging to Western or Northern Europe.<sup>18</sup> Unable to reach beyond stereotypes and populism and to provide the public with well-grounded criticism and new ideals for development, people who spoke to tens of thousands at demonstrations during 1988 and 1989 and defined the formation of the national identity, now have little influence in the public sphere.

In Zygmund Bauman's terms, the intellectuals of perestroika could not continue to be legislators, but did not learn to be or did not want to be more humble interpreters. Bauman argues that the legislator-type intellectual is a hero of the modern age and is quite unsuitable for postmodern conditions. So the disappearance of legislators of perestroika should be regarded as a natural outcome of the process of transformation of post-communist



societies. However the public sphere still generates a demand for intellectuals, for their criticism and ideas and also keeps alive the discourse of the intelligentsia as a social power. Either it is a phantom pain for the lost driving force of change (for better) or a precondition for the emergence of a new - post-perestroika, post-legislator - intellectual.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Here I limit the definition of an intellectual to a public intellectual (also called a media intellectual) emphasising that 'intellectual' is rather a name for the function in society (agenda-setting, interpreting and commenting on important issues, criticising and offering solutions for issues regarded as important in the public sphere of a particular community) than an umbrella term for educated people or practitioners of mental labour. The Russian term 'intelligentsia,' due to its specific nuances, is used here to refer to soviet and post-soviet intellectuals.

<sup>2</sup> S Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York, 2001, p. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> M Velikonja, 'Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries'. *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 23, 2009, p. 538.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 546; Y Levada, *Ischem cheloveka: sotsiologicheskiye ocherki 2000-2005*, Novoje Izdatelstvo, Moskva, 2007, pp. 287, 296-298.

<sup>5</sup> The plenum took place on the first and second of June 1988 and is primary known by the fact that it was the first time when the thesis that Latvia was occupied rather than voluntarily joining the USSR was declared publicly.

<sup>6</sup> A Samalavicius, *Intellectuals and society in post-communist Lithuania*, 1 June 2004, viewed on 19 June 2010, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-06-01-samalavicius-en.html>.

<sup>7</sup> L Gudkov & B Dubin, *Intelligentsia*, Izdatelstvo Ivana Limbakha, Sankt-Peterburg, 2009, pp. 149, 153, 158.

<sup>8</sup> I Kotchetkova, Dead or Alive: 'The Discursive Massacre or the Mass-suicide of Post-Soviet Intelligentsia?'. *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 9 (4), 2004, viewed on 19 June 2010, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/9/4/kotchetkova.html>.

<sup>9</sup> D Ivans, *Gadijuma karakalps*, Vieda, Riga, 1994, p. 368.

<sup>10</sup> Z Radzobe, 'Gan pele, gan putns'. *Diena*, April 2009.

<sup>11</sup> A Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 1994, pp.105-107.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup> S Fitzpatrick, 'The Soviet Union in the Twenty-first Century'. *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 37, 2007, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Y Levada, *Ischem cheloveka: sotsiologicheskije ocherki 2000-2005*, Novoje Izdatelstvo, Moscow, 2007, pp. 285-286 and 290-291.

<sup>16</sup> K Skujenieks, 'Kāpēc es nebalsoju par plēnuma rezolūciju?'. *Diena*, June 2009.

<sup>17</sup> J Rozenvalds, 'Piezīmes par Latvijas nacionālas elites veidosanos pēc Otrā pasaules kara'. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, vol. 2, 2005, pp.73-89.

<sup>18</sup> The formation of these discourses is explored in my master's thesis: O Procevska, *Discourses of Intelligentsia in the Public Sphere of Latvia during 1980s*, University of Latvia, 2009.

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## **PART II**

### **The University, Knowledge and the Intellectual**



# From Distributed Knowledge to Intelligent Knowledge-Creating Systems

*Nikita Basov and Anna Shirokanova*

## **Abstract**

A prominent feature of contemporary societies is ceaseless production and diffusion of large amounts of information. Under such conditions knowledge gets distributed among growing numbers of actors, becomes dispersed and narrowly specialized. As a result, the rapid growth of information and communications does not bring about any creative breakthrough in knowledge production, while constant creation of fundamentally new knowledge is crucial to building the knowledge society. A possible response to this situation is to develop new forms of intellectual collaboration, which would take advantage of progress in communications and of new forms of organization. No model of collective knowledge creation has been suggested so far that would make ivory towers merge into the open systems of knowledge. We argue that a possibility to develop and implement such a model lies in unfolding the mechanism of co-evolution of knowledge, communication and emotional energy in intellectual networks which would allow the latter to act as a loosely connected and yet unified whole. In the paper, we bring together knowledge, emotional energy, and communication while simultaneously linking the micro-level knowledge-creation ritual to the large-scale structural coupling of network structures, in order to outline the theoretical ground for a model of effective knowledge-creating system.

**Key Words:** Networks, knowledge, communication, emotional energy, knowledge-creating system, knowledge creation ritual, intellectuals.

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## **1. Introduction**

There are three tendencies that attest to the changes in the way how knowledge is produced in contemporary societies. First, there is growing interdependence of social processes and knowledge creation.<sup>1</sup> Second, interdisciplinary cooperation is strengthening.<sup>2</sup> Third, knowledge creation process is democratising.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these tendencies produce dramatic changes in knowledge production, which requires re-examining how the intellectuals' work is socially organized. Once predominant, 'individual' cognitive processes, where ideas originate with a single (though not isolated) person and then spread socially (distributed knowledge creation) - give way to collective cognitive process located within social networks (collaborative knowledge creation), which, potentially, could produce knowledge far more

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effectively. The number and size of social networks appears to grow rapidly. Once remote regions are linked now, and information flows everywhere providing the access to a variety of new ideas essential to novel knowledge creation. Networks of collaborative knowledge creation seem to penetrate all the spheres of human activity and have the potential to merge into integral landscapes of knowledge creation consisting of intersecting knowledge fields that we propose to call 'knowledge-creating systems.'

And yet, knowledge is distributed between a very large number of expertise domains, often poorly connected with each other. The reasons for this are fundamental differences in mental models, discourses, and practices of knowledge creation. As a result, much of the possible emergent effect is lost at the moment. To build knowledge-creating systems, it is necessary to connect fields of specialized knowledge into a heterogeneous yet integrated whole. Getting this task fulfilled is crucial to the investigation of the principal mechanisms that bind intellectuals and intellectual networks together in the common process of collective knowledge creation. This could be a foundation of searching new ways of providing knowledge convergence and conceptualising new perspectives of building knowledge-creating systems.

## 2. Knowledge Creation Ritual

The main process around which a knowledge-creating system could organize is the production of socially recognized knowledge, which means, as the literature shows, *creating original combinations of ideas integrated in group members' personal images of the world.*<sup>4</sup>

Since knowledge emerges as a result of making new combinations, its creation involves receiving new information and forging individual understandings which then internally interact and converge, the integrated result being new combinations of individual images. However, the only way to 'socialize' individual understandings (i.e., to create knowledge) is to make meanings shared by people in the group.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge emerges as a result of continuous negotiations between many actors.<sup>6</sup> This means that *knowledge creation necessarily involves communication* that brings together personal images of the world and mediates their interaction. Further knowledge evolution also depends heavily on the structure of communication network: the more coherent and denser the network, the quicker is knowledge evolution.<sup>7</sup>

Simultaneously, emergence of communication ties is linked to and is embedded in knowledge networks.<sup>8</sup> Sharing knowledge in a network increases the chances for a communication tie between participants to arise.<sup>9</sup> Thus, *communication processes are under strong influence of present and possible knowledge.*

Additionally, knowledge creation is always fuelled by emotional involvement.<sup>10</sup> This is an idea behind a widely known concept of intellectual

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work proposed by Randall Collins.<sup>11</sup> Emotional energy is not energy in the way physics puts it, but rather it is the cognitive expectation of successful interactions and the feeling of emotional lift during these interactions. The need for emotional empowerment makes individuals seek for communication contacts that may deliver emotional energy.<sup>12</sup> Thus, *communication and emotional energy are mutually influenced*.

Knowledge creation consumes large amounts of emotional energy and simultaneously reproduces this energy when insights are collaboratively achieved (i.e., when knowledge is successfully created). Thus, *knowledge and emotional energy influence each other in the interaction process*.

All three aspects, knowledge, communication and emotional energy, form the basis of understanding the shared knowledge creation. These aspects are brought together in the micro-level process we propose to call 'knowledge creation ritual.' This ritual is an intensive micro-level interaction performance in which knowledge is produced. Intellectuals engage in knowledge creation rituals in various spheres of human activity through such practices as consulting, coaching, various trainings, lectures, and other public events; seminars, round tables, brainstorming, and other forms of group discussions; tutoring, benchmarking, etc.

Our idea of knowledge creation ritual builds on the concept of 'interaction ritual' developed by Collins.<sup>13</sup> The author describes interaction ritual as an internally structured mechanism of interaction between co-presenting individuals. At the centre of it lies the process in which participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other's bodily micro-rhythms and emotions.<sup>14</sup> In the process, individuals produce symbols that carry common meanings and emotional energy for those who can decode them. This mechanism generates mutual understanding, solidarity and common emotional mood between participants.

In the 'knowledge creation ritual' individuals contribute their individual understandings and emotional energy to a common event, share information in intensive interaction and, if the ritual is a success, its participants change their individual semantic positions on some subject and gear their emotional conditions toward some common state of 'knowing.' As a result, knowledge is created, and new information flows into communication network (through texts, face-to-face communication, knowledge artefacts, etc.) to influence individual understandings of a wider circle of actors. At the same time participants of a ritual carry with them transformed individual understandings in which produced knowledge is rooted, and then develop them further.

As a result of successful knowledge creation ritual, personal knowledge of participants transforms to a more common state in new combinations. Emotional energy is produced in a similar manner.<sup>15</sup> Knowledge and emotional energy influence each other and co-evolve. Only

when there is a synchronised tension between personal knowledge and emotional energy levels of the interlocutors, the ritual chain may be established and the micro-level mechanism of shared knowledge creation begins to work. Communication, the third element, first serves as a mediator for other two levels of interaction and then integrates as a significant element in the system of knowledge creation ritual.

To sum up, *communication, knowledge, and emotional energy jointly constitute the chains of knowledge creation rituals. Simultaneously, it is only knowledge-creation rituals that make shared knowledge creation a sustainable collective cognitive process taking place on the social micro level.* Series of knowledge creation rituals provide constant production of knowledge constructs, emotions and communication structures.<sup>16</sup>

As the interacting group evolves, its common experience gets filled with shared symbols, narratives, and collective representations that turn the knowledge stored in collective memory into a '*knowledge field*,' which is a basis for creating new shared knowledge. Knowledge does not literally circulate in or penetrate this field as soon as it is individuals who carry it. What we mean by that is that knowledge field is filled with symbols representing common understandings on some key issues necessary for the group to cooperate. Knowledge field represents the principal coordination mechanism between individuals' semantic positions which are not the same.

Similarly to the concept of knowledge field, the concept of '*emotional energy pool*' may be useful to define a field of synergetic interaction between individuals' emotional energies. Analogically to the knowledge field, emotional energy pool is not a store where emotional energy of all group members gathers, but some virtual space where emotional energies of group members co-evolve and where intrapersonal generation of emotional energy is coordinated. As long as group members get involved in collaboration process, it is evoked in the series of knowledge creation rituals.

Communication network serves as a link between the knowledge field and the emotional energy pool, while chains of knowledge creation ritual pull all three of them into a constant process of co-evolution in the common space of experience. Communication conditions information exchange that feeds knowledge production and charges emotional energy. Emotional energy gives impulses to perform intellectual work and stimulate further interaction rituals. Developments in the knowledge field nourish the network communication structure and provoke splash-outs of emotional energy. Bringing all the dimensions together is the way to provide sustainable knowledge creation.

### **3. Knowledge Creation in Intellectual Networks**

While building on micro-level rituals, knowledge-creating system is itself a vast network ensemble that includes dozens of heterogenous groups



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and hundreds of individuals connected by various communication ties. On this level of theorising we face the problem of integrating parts of the system, which cannot rely solely on the micro-level knowledge creation rituals. Here, the principal differences between mental models, discourses, and practices of knowledge creation characterizing various knowledge fields come into play. As a result, these fields remain structurally autonomous. Relations between Academia and Civil Society (including business structures) in contemporary western countries may serve as an example of this. While the latter declares to be an equal knowledge creator and speaks of democratisation of knowledge, the former sticks to its autonomy, impartiality and the right to keep the monopoly on creating 'true' knowledge. Both sides appear to be unable to understand the values, norms, practices and mission of each other. Instead, Civil Society and Business attempt to push Academia into market principles of functioning, with the latter locking itself in the ivory tower, refusing to interact and taking complacent and haughty position. Mutual incomprehension grows, and the knowledge fields of the two become ever more separated structurally.

The problem of integrating knowledge fields on the network level, we argue, is a matter of bridging knowledge, communication and emotional energy, just like on micro-level. And yet the underlying mechanism here is not the knowledge creation ritual, but those of long-term structural coupling (in the sense suggested by autopoiesis theory) and co-evolution between knowledge fields, communication structures, and emotional energy pools. The need for structural coupling between different knowledge fields as well as between communication networks or emotional energy pools stems from functional and structural differentiation and specialization of intellectual network structures that vary significantly.

We take proximity and frequency of interaction as basic variables and distinguish between four types of intellectual network structures. They could be conveniently presented in a Cartesian system of coordinates with the axes 'proximity' and 'frequency of interaction.' For the sake of convenience we label the four quarters of this system in a counter-clockwise way from I to IV starting from the top right-hand quarter.

Examples of Type I (combining high proximity and high frequency of interaction) are ancient scientific schools, local project teams, or problem-oriented laboratories. Its main communication tools are face-to-face interaction, public speeches, and group discussions which allow its participants to frequently perform knowledge creation rituals.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Type III structures (low proximity and low frequency) are popular associations where communication usually happens at conferences, symposia, and via social networking services.

Two other structural positions of this system are not empty either. High level of proximity combined with low interaction frequency (Type IV)

corresponds to official institutions where cooperation is a professional duty. Principal communication tools here are the same as in Type III, but knowledge creation rituals are scarcer far less intensive. As a result, joint work can remain no more than collections of independent pieces. Such structures reproduce existing shared knowledge. At last, the top-left position (II) combines spatial distance of actors with high frequency of interaction and intensive knowledge creation rituals, which can be found in distributed teams, e.g. open content developers. Here interaction is mediated by various IT devices, and the set of communication tools involves e-mails, telephones, sms-messages, video and text chats, web-based software for real-time collaboration, etc. Such groups are most likely to include members from different intellectual areas, cultures, and languages who construct a heterogeneous knowledge field. Groups of this type do not have constant membership.<sup>18</sup>

Type I structures are traditionally considered the most effective form of intensive knowledge production.<sup>19</sup> Such a group may spontaneously organize into an effective problem-solving structure with no centralized control; this type is relatively easy to build and sustain mutual understanding and trust. Members of such groups are tied by numerous knowledge creation ritual chains and act much like entities.<sup>20</sup> However, Type I group is likely to result in knowledge homogeneity.<sup>21</sup> It also risks developing identical cognitive norms that hinder dialogue and variety.<sup>22</sup> If Type I group tries to diversify, it splits into smaller groups rather easily.<sup>23</sup>

One of the reasons for cognitive homogenisation is cutting off weak ties of the group members. Weak ties (i.e. those characterized by occasional, more than once a year but less than twice a week seeing the contact person) are the most important channels of bringing new information to a group.<sup>24</sup>

Types III and IV seem to fit this condition, but weak ties are context free in them and can hardly produce the necessary degree of trust and understanding between the members.<sup>25</sup> Loosely connected network structures allow for conflicting visions of reality and low mutual dependence.<sup>26</sup> In turn, uncertainty favours fragmentation of the network into very small groups or single actors where many theories and ways of doing research are generated, cognitive disorganization proliferates, ideas spread slowly, as do innovations.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Types III and IV do not satisfy the conditions of knowledge creation ritual in themselves.

However, Type II intellectual network structures may represent a new type of social organization where spatially distributed actors create the common ground of virtual experience, knowledge fields, and emotional energy pools. In such groups, it becomes possible to carry out international projects of knowledge creation with a high degree of synchronization through frequent knowledge creation rituals. Gradual shrinking of the gap between sending a message and getting a response leads to a new quality of

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interaction where knowledge creation rituals are possible even in geographically scattered groups. The frame involves multiple realities that allow the intellectuals to deal with the complexity of heterogeneous environment, though it remains coherent and maintains generality through constant verification of meanings between the participants. This provides conditions for simultaneous action in heterogeneous environments. By interacting through media, participants of the teams get instant response to their inquiries - and yet remain immersed in the world of their own working conditions, in many aspects different (culture, language, organization, etc.). Knowledge creation process becomes continuous and constantly synthesizing the understandings of various actors embedded in a wide variety of cognitive situations.

However, in Type II structures it is extremely difficult to reach integration.<sup>28</sup> Effective co-evolution of communication, knowledge fields, and emotional energy becomes a real challenge and, if coordination and integration are poor, performance of the knowledge creating system would be lower than that of distributed knowledge creation. The ways of combining spatial distance of actors with high levels of integration are yet to be investigated.

As we have shown, all four types of intellectual network structures have their pros and cons and should be involved in knowledge-creation process as a whole where they would interchange each other, appearing and disappearing with high speed. This co-dependence may lead to the structural coupling of autonomous knowledge fields in which communication networks are embedded. Intellectual network would then be constituted by the coherent interplay of knowledge fields through continuous micro-level knowledge creation rituals which would bring to co-evolution the whole of heterogeneous knowledge and individuals' emotional energy. Rare loosely integrated parts would then alternate with dense parts of high integration. Channels of communication and energy exchange would be formed and sustained in frequent face-to-face knowledge creation rituals (ad hoc Type I structures), but so that the interaction could be performed again and again by using new information technologies to maintain the feeling of unity (Type II structures). New links would be built, predominantly in Type III structures.

This is the way for a knowledge-creating system to function sustainably in integrating heterogeneous knowledge of contemporary societies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> RN Giere & B Moffatt, 'Where the Cognitive and the Social Merge'. *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 33, 2003, p. 308.; G Böhm, 'Cognitive Norms,

Knowledge-Interests and the Construction of the Scientific Object', in *The Social Production of Scientific Knowledge*, E. Mendelsohn, P. Weingart & R. Whitley (eds), D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1977, pp. 129-141; R Krohn, 'Introduction: Towards the Empirical Study of Scientific Practice', in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, K. Knorr, R. Krohn & R. Whitley (eds), D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1980, pp. vii-xxv; A O'Rand, 'Knowledge Form and Scientific Community: Early Experiment Biology and the Marine Biological Laboratory', in *The Knowledge Society*, G. Bohme & N. Stehr (eds), D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1986, pp. 183-191; B Latour, *Laboratory Life*, Princeton, NJ 1986; B Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1987; R Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002; R Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, Oxford, 2004; J Urry, 'Social Networks, Travel and Talk'. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, June 2003, p. 159; B Cronin, D Shaw & K La Barre, 'Co-Authorship and Sub-Authorship Collaboration in the Twentieth Century as Manifested in the Scholarly Literature of Psychology and Philosophy'. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, vol. 54, 2003, pp. 855-871; L Leydesdorff, *A Sociological Theory of Communication: The Self-Organization of the Knowledge-Based Society*, Universal Publishers, Parkland, FL, 2001, pp. 186-190; E Garfield, *Citation Indexing: Its Theory and Application in Science, Technology and Humanities*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1979; M de Mey, *The Cognitive Paradigm: An Integrated Understanding of Scientific Development*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, pp. 135-136.

<sup>2</sup> K Axhausen, 'A Dynamic Understanding of Travel Demand: A Sketch', in *Integrated Land-Use and Transportation Models: Behavioural Foundations*, MEH Lee-Gosselin & S Doherty (eds), Elsevier, Oxford, 2005, p. 9; Urry, op. cit., p. 159; K Deutsch, *Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control*, Free Press of Glencoe, London, 1963, pp. 165-166; B Cronin, op. cit.; D Rhoten, E O'Connor & E J Hackett, 'The Act of Collaborative Creation and the Art of Integrative Creativity: Originality, Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity'. *Thesis Eleven*, № 96, 2009, pp. 86-87.

<sup>3</sup> M Gibbons et al., *The New Production of Knowledge: the Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, Sage, London, 1994, pp. 4-6.

<sup>4</sup> D Rhoten et al., op. cit.; A Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, Macmillan, New York, 1964; DK Simonthon, 'Creativity, Leadership, and Chance', in *The Nature of Creativity*, RJ Sternberg (ed.), Cambridge University Press,

Cambridge, 1988, pp. 386-426; KD Knorr, 'The Scientist as an Analogical Reasoner', in *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation*, K. Knorr-Cetina, R. Krohn & R. Whitley (eds), D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1980, pp. 25-52; NW Warner & M Letsky, 'Empirical Model of Team Collaboration Focus on Macrocognition', in *Macrocognition in Teams: Theories and Methodologies*, MP Letsky & NW Warner (eds), Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire, 2008, pp. 15-33.

<sup>5</sup> H Garfinkel, M Lynch & E Livingston, 'The Work of a Discovering Science Construed with Materials from the Optically Discovered Pulsar'. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 11, 1981, pp. 131-158; B Latour, op. cit.; S Fuchs, *The Professional Quest for Truth: A Social Theory of Science and Knowledge*, State University of the New York Press, New York, 1992; R Collins, 2002, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> M Gibbons et al., op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> KM Carley, 'An Approach for Relating Social Structure to Cognitive Structure'. *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, vol. 12, 1986, pp. 137-189; N S Contractor & S Grant, 'The Emergence of Shared Interpretations in Organizations: A Self-Organizing Systems Perspective', in *Cycles and Dynamic Processes in Communication Processes*, J Watt & A VanLear (eds), Sage, Newbury Park, 1996, pp. 216-230.

<sup>8</sup> PR Monge & N S Contractor, *Theories of Communication Networks*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> PR Monge & E M Eisenberg, 'Emergent Communication Networks', in *Handbook of Organizational Communication*, FM Jablin, LL Putnam, KH Roberts & LW Porter (eds), Sage, Newbury Park, 1987, pp. 304-342.

<sup>10</sup> AB Rossokhin, & VL Izmagurova, *Lichnost v Izmenennih Sostoyaniyah Soznanya v Psihoanakize i Psihoterapii (Personality in Altered States of Consciousness in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy)*, Smysl, Moscow, 2004; I Mitroff, *The Subjective Side of Science*, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1974; L Feuer, *Einstein and the Generations of Science*, Basic Books, New York, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> R Collins, 2002, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> R Collins, 2004, op. cit., pp. 107-108.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 75-78; R Collins, 2002, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> H G Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1989; K Mannheim, *Structures of Thinking*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982, pp. 194-209.

<sup>17</sup> Communication tools listed from now on are not exclusive for this or that structure type, but the most used.

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- <sup>18</sup> K Fisher & MD Fisher, *Distributed Mind: Achieving High Performance through the Collective Intelligence of Knowledge Work Teams*, Amacom, New York, 1998, pp. 275-276.
- <sup>19</sup> TM Gureckis & RL Goldstone, 'Thinking in Groups', in *Cognition Distributed: How Cognitive Technology Extends our Minds*, I. E. Dror & S. Harnad (eds), John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2008; S Fuchs, op. cit.
- <sup>20</sup> R Collins, 2004, op. cit., pp. 190-194.
- <sup>21</sup> KM Carley, op. cit., p. 417.
- <sup>22</sup> G Böhm, 'Cognitive Norms, Knowledge-Interests and the Construction of the Scientific Object', in *The Social Production of Scientific Knowledge*, E Mendelsohn, P Weingart & R Whitley (eds), D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1977, pp. 129-141.
- <sup>23</sup> A O'Rand, op. cit.; B C Griffith & N C Mullins, 'Coherent Social Groups In Scientific Change ('Invisible Colleges' May Be Consistent throughout Science)'. *Science*, vol. 177 (4053), 1972, pp. 959-966.
- <sup>24</sup> MS Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties'. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 78 (6), 1973, pp. 1360-1380.
- <sup>25</sup> K Hakkarainen, T Palonen, S Paavola & E Lehtinen, *Communities of Networked Expertise: Professional and Educational Perspectives*, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2004, p. 75.
- <sup>26</sup> S Fuchs, op. cit., p. 90.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.
- <sup>28</sup> D A Winsor, 'Learning to Do Knowledge Work in Systems of Distributed Cognition'. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, vol. 15 (1), January 2001, p. 25; K Fischer & M D Fischer, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

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# **Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments: Conversations with Gramsci's Organic Intellectual**

*Sechaba Mahlomaholo and Vhonani Netshandama*

## **Abstract**

In order to understand the role, the character, the nature and the place of intellectuals (us) and intellectual work, we use Antonio Gramsci's concept of organic intellectual as a point of entry. This theoretical position enables us to talk from a vantage point about the public intellectual who has to move in the direction of engaged scholarship where research is about discovery, integration, sharing and application between and among the intellectuals and all instances of civil society. Through this theorization, grounded in Boyer's notion of scholarship of engagement, we look at the unfinished business of emancipation from the legacy of capitalist apartheid's social arrangement. To concretise our argument we use examples from the school and the university education scenes. The point we attempt to make therefore is that; intellectual work is always political because the past and the present experiences (capitalist apartheid) as well as future aspirations (liberation) always inform what we say about ourselves, what discursive practices we value and valorize as legitimate knowledge, and finally, how society in general is ultimately (re-)structured.

**Key Words:** Capitalist apartheid, civil society, discursive practices, knowledge creation, organic intellectual, scholarship of engagement, sustainable empowering learning environments.

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## **1. Background**

One of the recently established research teams at the North-West University is called the *Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments for Social Justice* (SELEN). This name describes both its modus operandi as well as the theme under which its activities are operationalised.<sup>1</sup> In putting SELEN together, we were especially aware of the rampant dysfunctionality in the education, hence the learning of the majority of South Africans. We were also aware of the power of education and learning as important instruments that could be leveraged towards the improvement of the general lives of all South Africans.<sup>2</sup> It was thus strategic and politically prudent for us to focus on the improvement of education and learning through our theorization, research and practice. What legitimatised and gave us a clear mandate, were the new South African government's educational legislative and policy directives which collectively among others emphasize that:

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All teachers and educators are key contributors to the transformation of education in South Africa. The National curriculum Statement visualizes teachers who are competent, dedicated and caring. They will be able to fulfil the various roles outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators. These include being mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of programs and materials, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and life-long learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and subject specialists.<sup>3</sup>

The SELEN team consists of 15 academics from the university and 15 professionals (officials and teachers) from the Department of Education in the North West province. While the team formulates and operationalises research projects, it at the same time informs policy and practice in an action research mode because the professionals therein are better enabled to execute their work practically in the schools and the communities. Academics also are better able to prepare their pre-service teacher trainees through curriculum that has been enriched from experiences in the field. This arrangement complies with, and operationalises Gramsci's views about the organic intellectual who is firmly located in the community and does not see himself/herself as detached from the experiences of that community.<sup>4</sup>

Like Gramsci would assert, the hegemonic discourses and interests of the dominant capitalist apartheid ideology were supposed to be more buttressed through the production of a class of people like us - as academics and professionals - who materially have a stake now in the advancement of the capitalist apartheid ideology in terms of the privilege we have.<sup>5</sup> Thus one could see our place as contradictory in terms of class location as we operate within the perimeters of the context of the dominant hegemonic sphere, but hope to advance the agenda of the underclass in terms of creating opportunities for colleagues, schools and communities from the subaltern social stratum to access the same privileges as us. We see our SELEN work as creating more opening and cracks in the dominant hegemony by encouraging transformatory discourses.

In the implementation of its agenda SELEN has identified 10 schools in the province where the need for support is the greatest. The approach is not to perpetuate dependency syndrome among these schools but rather to enable them to stand on their own and face the challenges of our historical legacies with confidence and strength. To achieve this objective we conduct workshops on monthly basis per schools to help establish what are called communities of learning.<sup>6</sup> These communities of learning in the respective schools are made up, firstly of all teachers in the schools together, secondly they are made up of school management teams (principal deputy

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and heads of department) separately, thirdly of teachers of particular grades together and finally of teachers in particular subject disciplines, respectively. We support these communities of learning in designing strategic plans for each member individually and for the whole team. In a nutshell, these plans are towards the operationalisation of their roles as described in the educational and policy documents of the new South African Government through its Departments of Basic Education and Training as well as the provincial Education Departments requiring them to become competent, dedicated and caring mediators of learning. The emphasis of these strategic plans is on them taking responsibility in refining their own competencies and strengths as interpreters of curriculum, designers of programs and materials for learning, becoming leaders and administrators, scholars, researchers and citizens of a democracy who also provide pastoral care for all.<sup>7</sup> In implementing the above, we do it in consultation with respective teachers as participants and not mere recipients of prescribed 'knowledge.' At every stage of this 'research-in-practice,' all participants have to demonstrate increasing ability to take charge of their responsibility in terms of decision-making and good practice of their roles.

After the strategic plans have been formulated based on SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats as well as identification of priorities for success implementation of their plans) we then support the communities of learning in the implementation and monitoring of their plans. At least once a month we hold report back meetings to identify problems and possible improvements in the implementation of their plans. These meetings take various formats. Sometimes teachers listen and watch their peers demonstrate some new and effective skill of teaching they found useful in enhancing performance of learners and so on, at other times these meetings provide a non-threatening space where teachers gradually practice some of their newly acquired skill towards the teaching of some subject and so on. Sometimes these meetings are for reflection and validation of each other's work and morale support in times of insecurity and uncertainties.

Through these teams at school level, and their monthly meetings, the teachers have gradually come to find power and strength in what they are doing. Researchers in SELEN also report in their publications and conference presentations on the discussions at these meetings as well as the achievements of the participants in terms of learner and teacher performances which seem to steadily increase. The focus has shifted from the deficit approach to learning as we all work towards and search for *stories of success* to tell to each other and beyond, and this has reinforced our believe in ourselves. This has further weakened the hold of the disrespectful and undermining capitalist apartheid on our psyche as we create these alternative counter-hegemonic conversations.

This has made learning in the mentioned communities sustainable because now teachers report to being more confident in taking their responsibilities as subject specialists, action researchers, leaders and managers of their classrooms and schools.<sup>8</sup> They are also supported by the officials who are informed by research in the execution of their duties. All participants are showing signs of empowerment. We have all moved from the position of helplessness to which we were relegated by the system which undermined our status as creative human beings capable of initiative and effecting positive change.

The positive outcomes are not for the teachers and the schools only, SELEN has actually become a community of practice itself where we reflect very intensively on what we do at the university as we prepare pre-service teachers and as we interact with practicing teachers in schools. During these reflective sessions we look at how we are constituted, we debate issues of racism, sexism, oppression and exclusion from all levels of education as well as how these can be reversed using our privileged positions of intellectual workers. We do not affiliate to any particular political organization as SELEN since we are aware also of our differentiated preferences with regard to that. What binds us together is the transformational agenda in educational theory, research and practice. Through our actions we thus advocate for universities to be engaged in community issues in the same manner as we are doing. Based on feedback from the community, our practices are appreciated as we are seen as striving towards equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope, especially in education.

## **2. Gramsci's Organic Intellectual**

Without sounding too presumptuous, it is my view based on the above discussions that our work as SELEN is beginning to define our roles as organic intellectuals. It is true that we may not be making significant dents at the macro-political levels of our unequal society, however our awareness of the role that the economic base of our society plays in assigning educational privileges and opportunities, has enabled us to have this focus as our starting point.<sup>9</sup> As emerging organic intellectuals our target is towards creating the alternative to the current hegemony and monopoly in distributing (or hoarding) educational resources and opportunities hence better jobs according to certain racial and class affiliations.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas our historical past advanced divisive agendas by recreating inequality in education, our work is expressly political in that we are attempting to reach out to those rural and poverty stricken black communities whose lack of access to education still determine their station in life.<sup>11</sup> We may not in the true sense of the concept of organic intellectual be working towards the overthrow of some regime, rather we are strongly playing an advocacy role aiming at ensuring that the declared democratic principles of



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equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope by the South African developmental state do encompass all, especially young people who are the future of our country. It is in these small spaces of class room learning where the fiercest contestation or rather, *wars of position* as Gramsci says are being waged in order to finally to deal a death blow to the divisive capitalist apartheid legacies.<sup>12</sup>

The idea of the organic intellectual enables us to leave the ivory towers of the university and to be in the community where in a reciprocal manner we learn from the cutting edge of practice and thus be informed to refine our theorization of learning. Our interaction in the community is reciprocal because in as much as we provide a service to the communities, we also learn to be members of our society. We are directly exposed to the feelings and heartbeat of communal existence through this engagement. Our research as Gramsci would quip is infused with passion which enables us to move from a pure positivist and cold cognitive position to a more committed position of empathy with the marginalized communities.<sup>13</sup> We are consciously made aware of our privileged status as intellectual workers, but we are at the same time humbled by the resourcefulness of the teachers and schools in these rural and deprived communities.

Our emphasis on the establishment of communities of learning is informed by our firm believe in the power of human agency and that even though humans do not choose conditions of their actions as Gramsci notes, their volitional intends and purposes cannot be ignored in understanding the outcomes of their action. It is this firm believe informed by Gramsci's theorization that encourages our continued action towards enabling teachers to take charge of their roles.<sup>14</sup> We see our roles as that of facilitator of change and transformation. We are aware that as intellectual workers we are not able to give power to other human beings, rather, our role is to create conditions where - us included - other human beings can take power in their own hands themselves by removing all possible impediments to that process.

As emerging organic intellectuals we see ourselves therefore as mediators of learning. Gramsci has emphasized the importance of education and learning in any transformatory process. To date we have come see the dominance of the belief that learners, teachers and schools catering for the subalterns, just like their communities, are bound to perform poorly in every facet of life. According to the views of this dominant perspective in South Africa, at least, it is expected that when results relating to school performance are scrutinized; poor, black, rural and marginalized learners will always come at the bottom of *the league table*. To date when research is conducted the findings confirm exactly that.<sup>15</sup> Research further confirms that individuals from the subaltern categories are more prone to violence and crime, that they constitute the majority of the unemployed and the prison population. It is

people from this poor, black and marginalized category who will not have access to housing, skills and good health.<sup>16</sup>

As intellectuals our role as it is beginning to emerge in the SELEN work above, seems to be to put together programs, projects and all, geared towards creating the alternative *truth*. Creating the counter-hegemonic perspective and facilitating it may seem almost impossible; however through organic intellectuals serving as mediators of learning it is possible to incrementally open cracks on the hold of this dominant ideology. For example, as demonstrated in SELEN, teachers are provided with opportunities to gain confidence in their work by gradually practicing their skills in the company of their peers in sympathetic and mutually supportive environments. Such opportunities are created by organic intellectuals. This may have multiplier effects as more and more teachers come to build the requisite skills and competencies to teach. More learners could learn more effectively and acquire better qualifications for better job opportunities thus reducing the levels of unemployment and crime. Other learners could become entrepreneurs who could create more job opportunities to other people as well. The point I am trying to drive at is that organic intellectuals have a role of mediating these positive learning experiences within and outside the confines of the university. They have to provide the leadership in conscientising the community of the power they have and creating opportunities for them to explore those potentials in freedom.

In mediating learning we have the responsibility of interpreting reality through research in constant conversations with the communities. The power of the current hegemonic interests may be so overwhelming to the extent that individuals (for example teacher and learners) and collectives (schools and universities) within communities accept the inequities engendered thereby as being natural.<sup>17</sup> The organic intellectuals, because of their privilege of being able to see the bigger picture beyond the immediacy of experience now and for the individual, may assist in creating opportunities for individuals and collectives to see themselves beyond the present and the past and to be able to project into the future what may be possible. The intellectual as explained in the work of SELEN is about making it possible for people to dream and to imagine the future which is different and full of possibilities.

Our intention as emerging organic intellectuals, as illustrated in SELEN's work, is to provide spaces for ourselves and our communities to redefine our identity as that of a united South African nation. It is also our intention to focus our entire nation's attention on our common humanity away from emphasizing apartheid and/or diversity.<sup>18</sup> What we need is to infuse the common purpose for all to uplift the lives of us all. Our role as organic intellectuals is to create a sense of community at every opportunity possible that may avail itself. We need through thought and action to model

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citizenship of a democratic society by being vigilant and by sensitizing all to the dangers of inequity, social injustice, lack of freedom, lack of peace and of hope. In this way we will be playing the necessary pastoral role as organic intellectuals.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The above indicate the changed role of the intellectual. They also point out to the many demands on the organic intellectual's expertise and experience. Such an organic intellectual has to be a scholar, a researcher and lifelong learner, a leader and multidisciplinary specialist.

### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> V Netshandama, 'Community Development Approach to Community Engagement in Rural Based Higher Education Institutions in South Africa'. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 24 (3), 2010, pp. 50-55.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Education, *National Curriculum Statement*, Government Gazette, Pretoria, 2003, pp. 7-10.

<sup>4</sup> A Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers, New York, 1977.

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<sup>6</sup> MG Mahlomaholo, 'Towards Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments: Unmasking Apartheid Legacies through Scholarship of Engagement'. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. vol. 24 (3), 2010, pp. 8-13.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Education, *National Education Policy Act 27*, Government Gazette, Pretoria, 1996, pp. 11-19.

<sup>8</sup> MG Mahlomaholo, 'Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments through Community Cultural Wealth: A Story of Hope'. *Acta Academica* (in press), 2010; L Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. New Left Books, London, 1977, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> L Shange, 'Solidarity with the People of Kennedy Road and Abahlali Basemjondolo'. *Democratic Socialist Movement*, 2008, viewed 01 October 2009, <http://socialistsouthafrica.co.za/index.php?>.

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- <sup>15</sup> S Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology - Marxism without Guarantees'. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 10 (2), 1986, pp. 28-44.
- <sup>16</sup> T J Yosso, 'Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth'. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 8 (1), March 2005, pp. 69-91.
- <sup>17</sup> News 24, Idle Youth worry Nzimande 2009, viewed 01 October 2009 <http://news24.com/content>.
- <sup>18</sup> V Netshandama, op. cit., pp. 50-55.
- <sup>19</sup> MG Mahlomaholo, 'Sustainable Empowering...', op. cit.

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# The Return of the Democratic Intellect?

*James Moir*

## **Abstract**

This paper revisits George Davie's notion of the democratic intellect as a feature of Scottish higher education. The role of the intellectual in society has become ever more specialist and bound up with income generation. Gone is the notion of the intellectual being someone who shares their knowledge with the wider public, but rather this is now with interested stakeholders. Yet the professional academic is much more in the business of excluding rather than including others in the activities they engage as 'intellectual work.' Indeed, in Scotland, there have been the beginnings of a debunking of the notion of the democratic intellect. Nevertheless, the myth of the academic as a servant of the public is still strongly held. Knowledge production from above rather than from below is still the dominant epistemological *modus operandi*. This paper argues that academics in universities should consider revisiting the notion of the democratic intellectual in order to consider themselves in a transformative capacity in their relations with students and the wider public. Given the public purse for higher education is open to intense scrutiny this argument may provide a stimulus to intellectuals connecting with the public in a way that they have not had to.

**Key Words:** Democratic intellect, citizenship, higher education, academia, transformative intellectual, graduate attributes, personalization.

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper argues the case for educators within higher education to consider themselves as 'transformative intellectuals,' who can promote 'critical literacy' within their students.<sup>1</sup> This is related to the much-touted notion 'citizenship' and is set within a revaluation of the Scottish tradition of 'democratic intellectualism' which was discussed by George Davie in his book *The Democratic Intellect*.<sup>2</sup> The broad thrust of the arguments developed have been stimulated by the recent critical evaluations of the personal development planning and the notion of graduate attributes in higher education, the 'Bologna Process' and the recent writings of Jean Barr in her critical engagement democratic intellectualism with regard to adult education.<sup>3</sup>

Davie examined the decline of a type of higher education offered in Scottish universities after the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century which encouraged breadth of study and a commitment to public engagement

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through the study of philosophy and broader concern with theoretical and conceptual issues. Even today, the notion of a broad higher education, at least to begin with in the early part of a program of study, is still with many of Scotland's four-year degree programs.

However, to return to Davie's historical account, the argument he advanced was that the democracy of the democratic intellect lay in the way in which the generalism of the Scottish philosophical tradition acted as a barrier to an individualistic notion of learning and in so doing bridged the gap between the expert few and lay majority. In so doing it was argued that this created a 'sort of intellectual bridge between all classes' in which the Scottish intelligentsia remained in touch with its popular roots, retaining a strong sense of social responsibility. In this way Davie argued that a 'common sense' developed in which the expert knowledge of individuals was enhanced by, and held accountable to, the understanding of the wider public. This was 'democratic' in as much as there was a social distribution of intellectual knowledge. This 'democratic intellect' therefore runs contrary to the notion of intellectual elites and rule by experts. It is a perspective on intellectuality in terms of the social function of the intellectual. However, this was very much a male experience and one in which there is more than a little mythology surrounding the relationship between the classes.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The Changing Nature of Academia**

Academia is said to be in the process of transformation in what can be considered as a shift from what may be crudely put as a 'knowledge-for-its-own-sake' paradigm to one that stresses knowledge capitalization.<sup>5</sup> Within this process universities have sought to exploit academic research in order to secure alternative streams of income within what has become a much more competitive environment.<sup>6</sup> This has resulted in, for example, collaborative research between university and industry, with an increased emphasis on using the commercialisation of intellectual property as a means generating revenue.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars have argued that this institutional transformation is a positive organizational development for universities and have suggested that the growing convergence between academia and industry can be thought of as a 'new mode of knowledge.'<sup>8</sup> It is argued that this links the university, private enterprise and government together in a mutually beneficial and productive relationship.

However, others are more critical of this emphasis on the commercialisation of knowledge. In their view, 'academic capitalism' carries with it negative connotations in terms of an encroaching profit motive into academia.<sup>9</sup> This response is based upon what is considered to be a conflict of values and interests; between academic curiosity and objectivity on the one hand, and entrepreneurialism and commercialisation on the other. This is claimed to not only lead to divided loyalties and role conflict but also, at its



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starkest, represents an ideological assault on academic freedom and autonomy. Thus the transformation of academia towards a more market-facing presence represents a major challenge to core academic ideals and professional and intellectual identity.<sup>10</sup>

In parallel with this process towards the development of the entrepreneurial university has been a shift in emphasis in undergraduate education. Universities are now charged with producing graduates who are able to meet the challenges of the knowledge economy. For example, in the context of European Union, much of this has been driven by the Bologna Process and the focus on modularisation, accumulation of academic credit, and the possession of graduate attributes.<sup>11</sup> This was instituted following the Bologna declaration of 1999 which aims to create a European-wide higher educational area. These developments have intensified following the European Union Lisbon Treaty of 2007 and European Commission Lisbon Agenda for addressing the globalised knowledge economy. Aspects of this agenda are aimed at improving graduate employability and competitiveness.

This new vocationalist emphasis has been conceptualised as part of a neoliberal discourse in which 'the market' has come to dictate how we view the 'outputs' of higher education. This new rhetoric represents a fundamental change in how higher education is legitimated; one in which knowledge content is relegated to that of the possession of attributes that equip graduates to respond to the changing nature of the labour market. Given the impact of the current global economic situation there is an imperative on higher education to 'deliver' on employability. However, as with the role of academic, the intellectual nature of higher education has arguably been devalued.

### **3. A Resurgence of the Democratic Intellect?**

Whilst higher education is in a state of transformation across the world in responding to the growth of the knowledge economy, so there has also been a corresponding realization that the process of globalisation requires undergraduates to be exposed to an education that will develop citizenship. The 2009 synthesis report from the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) entitled *Higher Education at a time of Transformation: New Dynamics for Social Responsibility* draws attention to the many challenges confronting the sector that stem from those of wider society: beyond the 'ivory tower' or 'market-oriented university' towards one that innovatively adds value to the process of social transformation. The report argues that this creation and distribution of socially relevant knowledge is something that needs to be core to the activities of universities, thereby strengthening their social responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

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As the GUNI report puts so well, this calls for us to rethink the purpose of higher education; a purpose that is one of transformation rather than transmission:

The central educative purpose of HEIs ought to be the explicit facilitation of progressive, reflexive, critical, transformative learning that leads to much improved understanding of the need for, and expression of, responsible paradigms for living and for 'being' and 'becoming,' both as individuals alone and collectively as communities.<sup>13</sup>

On the face of it, this notion of higher education as educating citizens with a sense of civic awareness may seem to chime with that of the democratic intellect. However, a note of caution needs to be sounded in that it is set within the context of ever increasing costs for those entering higher education and a legitimating rhetoric of 'employability.' There is little room here for notion of citizenship and the democratisation of knowledge that involves, not simply the development of expertise, but also the importance of bringing in 'knowledge from below' in terms of forging a real connection with lived experience. To do otherwise might risk opening up new spaces for critical debate and alternative ideas and practices. As Lyotard put it in *The Postmodern Condition* we are left with an 'exteriorisation of knowledge with respect to the 'knower,' at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge process.'<sup>14</sup> And so as with academic in their research, what more than not transpires is an exclusion rather than inclusion of others in intellectual work.<sup>15</sup>

This can occur even in areas such as my own discipline of sociology, where despite a call for a public sociology, the rhetoric does not match up with the actual practice of the discipline. For example, it has been argued that it has become a 'hyper-professionalized' endeavour in which highly abstract, explanatory theories are valued at the expense of making the social world less descriptively comprehensible from that of everyday experience.<sup>16</sup> The latter is the opposite of the 'sociological imagination.'<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Overcoming the Hurdles

It is at this point I wish to draw upon a Wittgensteinian-inspired analysis of the notion of education as involving practicing.<sup>18</sup> They point out that the notion of education as an initiation into practices can, on the face of it, appear to be somewhat conservative in that it emphasizes the reproductive functions of teaching and learning. However, this need not be the case and they note that different ways of learning or enacting are very much bound up with a sense of self and identity. It is learning through practicing which can

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lead to a transformation of self through interactions and relations with others in the learning process. Practices can therefore transform the self by encouraging certain interpretations but also may lead to subversions that distance the person from these. It is in Aristotelian terms the notion of 'praxis;' how one lives as a citizen and human being and is the personal, social and political embodiment of practice.

This more critical and reflective process of narrativization in relation to the learning process can be found in the recent attempts to encourage personalization as an aspect of the development of graduate attributes (GAs). The major pedagogical implication of such an approach is the adoption of measures designed to encourage students to be self-learning, self-actualising and self-initiating. There is the view that a homogeneous offering is not sufficient in meeting students' needs. Yet, despite this emphasis on meeting students' needs, a major driver behind the move towards personalization is the recognition that mass higher education has also been accompanied by a concern regarding retention and motivation. It is perhaps little wonder that this is the case when knowledge is promoted in an 'exteriorised' fashion; something to be gained for an instrumental benefit rather than to as connecting with lived experience.

One thing is certain: those who are actively engaged in the educational process both inside and outside the classroom are more likely to be successful than their disengaged peers.<sup>19</sup> Influential writers such as Barnett suggest that the 'will to learn' is a key aspect of the student experience that needs to be encouraged and nurtured.<sup>20</sup> According to this view it is not the subject of study or the acquisition of skills that educators need to focus on but rather personal aspects such as authenticity, dispositions, inspiration, passion and spirit. As he puts it:

The fundamental educational problem of a changing world is neither one of knowledge nor of skills but is one of being. To put it more formally, the educational challenge of a world of uncertainty is ontological in nature.<sup>21</sup>

Much of Barnett's focus is therefore directed towards how such qualities or attributes can be developed and in doing so this connects with related concepts such as personal development planning (PDP) and graduate attributes (GAs). Simon Barrie's work has had a significant impact on thinking about the nature of generic GAs in higher education.<sup>22</sup> For, example, in developing a conceptual framework for the development of GAs, Barrie notes a series of factors including, under the heading of participation that 'generic attributes are learnt by the way students participate and engage with all the experiences of university life.'<sup>23</sup>

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The personalization of learning has been applied differently across and within subjects but has effectively become a 'de rigueur' aspect of the higher education system.<sup>24</sup> However, the increasing bureaucratisation of the learning process as a codified product is paradoxical when set aside the ways in which students are encouraged to engage with their curricula in a constructivist manner. Thus, as some have suggested, this has enabled a managerial model of learning to be surreptitiously substituted for the dialogic and critical model which characterizes the ideal of learning in higher education.<sup>25</sup>

To some this process is arguably more about the legitimization of PDP and GAs as a means of showing their operation within an audit-driven and accountable culture. This view has been most strongly put by Evans in *Killing Thinking: Death of the Universities*, who writes that there has been:

[...] a transformation of teaching in universities into the painting-by-numbers exercise of a hand-out culture [...in which] rich resources are increasingly marginalized by cultures of assessment and regulation [...] Increasingly, students are being asked to pay for the costs of the regulation of HE rather than education itself.<sup>26</sup>

But before going down the polemical path too far, if the case for a focus on employability relies on the notion of an adaptation to a global knowledge economy then it can also be argued that an equal case can be made for defending the inclusion of the values that encourage a more global perspective in the curriculum. This is in accord with the notion of the democratic intellect.

It is also the case that GAs are often associated with the notion of creativity and transformation. In this respect it is worth noting Mayo's invocation of Shaul's foreword to Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he draws attention to two diametrically opposed positions on education:<sup>27</sup>

Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.<sup>28</sup>

Although for some this polarization may seem heavily ideological, it can be argued that a vision of higher education as not only contributing to the

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sharing of values but also the shaping of them is a desirable goal related to the notion of GAs. For a university education to be fit for purpose in a globalizing world then students need ‘a set of values that transform them, both now and in the future.’<sup>29</sup>

This chimes with the recent focus on identity within higher education.<sup>30</sup> In other words, there is a concern with how the personal aspect of being a student in higher education is related to GAs in a more engaged and transformational sense. It is also interesting that recent work points to the challenges of teaching and learning within the contradictions of increasing specialization but also at the same time transdisciplinary contexts.<sup>31</sup> This raises the issue of the local-global dimension and how we can begin to encourage students to consider themselves and their relationship to their studies within this much broader context.

## 5. Conclusion

Whether or not higher education can free itself from the relentless drive towards the marketization of knowledge remains to be seen. I would like to be hopeful but this may be more to do with wishful thinking than a realist assessment. The notion that university academics should consider themselves as ‘transformative intellectuals’ is one that has an appeal to many in terms of their pedagogic practice and yet they are caught up in a bureaucratic audit-driven system both in terms of their teaching and research.

However, there are signs that the spirit of the democratic intellect may indeed be something that can be cultivated, not in terms of knowledge as a means of social differentiation in terms of graduate attributes or employability, but rather in terms of a recognition that there is a strong cultural dimension to higher education in which knowledge is set within its social and political context. Perhaps the current economic situation may prompt some rethinking about how universities structure their curricula and how they engage with their students.

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.11.

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# From Academic to Customer: The Paradox of Post-Modern Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

One of the main features of contemporary 'post-modern' society is its deep-rooted culture of 'consumerism.' Over the years both businesses and governmental organizations have increasingly been regarding individuals as consumers. The main values of this 'era of hyperconsumerism' are that 'the consumer' should be able to get what he wants, where he wants, and as much as he likes. Today higher education institutes appear to have adopted these values as well. Whereas a century ago an undergraduate curriculum entailed a largely fixed course of study, higher education institutes nowadays enable students to 'shop' around until they find what they like. This has resulted in what we see as '*the paradox of post-modern higher education:*' although post-modern society is believed to have become more fragmented and complex, students are less guided by higher education institutes on how they can best achieve their *Bildung*. On the contrary, students are more and more regarded as rational customers who have to decide for themselves what education they need and thus how they should achieve their *Bildung*.

**Key Words:** Postmodern society, higher education, consumer culture, *Bildung*.

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## **1. Introduction**

A century ago an undergraduate curriculum entailed a largely fixed course of study. However, nowadays higher education institutes enable students to 'shop' around until they find what they like. Even rather prestigious institutions enable their students to take up the education they desire.<sup>1</sup> Princeton for instance offers its students over 350 courses whereas Harvard offers about forty majors which can be combined into an almost endless array of joint majors. What is more, higher education institutes are more than ever occupied with themes such as 'product quality,' 'customer groups' and 'customer satisfaction.' It therefore appears that higher education has undergone a transformation from *Bildung* to 'consumption good' while students appear to have undergone a transformation from learner to customer. In this paper we have strived to understand this transformation of post-modern higher education by tracing back the 'history of ideas' that gave way to the presumed transformation of higher education.

In the following we will first have a more detailed look at some of the key characteristics of contemporary 'post-modern' society and explain what societal dynamics have paved the way for the so-called 'era of (hyper) consumerism.' Subsequently will go in to the relation between consumerism and higher education and the relation between consumerism and *Bildung*. Finally we will address the change from student to customer which resulted in what we see as 'the paradox of post-modern higher education.' We will end our paper with a conclusion on and a brief discussion of this paradox.

## 2. Post-Modern Society

Contemporary western society is often depicted as postmodern. However, few subjects have been debated so extensively as the presumed change from modern to postmodern society.<sup>2</sup> Although most authors seem to agree that western society has undergone various changes, there is much dispute on the nature, cause and effect(s) of these changes.

There are those who claim that, in the 1960s and 1970s a radical transformation of western society has taken place.<sup>3</sup> This transformation from 'modern' to 'post-modern' society was thought to be mainly driven by technological developments which transformed the organization of work and the structure of society.<sup>4</sup> During that period a standardized western society based on a class or professional structure, strongly linked to industrialism changed into a flexible, highly fragmented, pluralistic and individualized society. In this period, modern society changed into a flexible, highly fragmented, pluralistic and individualized society.<sup>5</sup> Modern society and its 'grand narrative' changed into a society which enables every individual to construct their own personal narrative.<sup>6</sup>

Others disagree to a certain extent with the authors mentioned above.<sup>7</sup> They state that industrialism is still an important element of contemporary western society but industrial plants have been exported from first to third world countries.<sup>8</sup> In their view it is information technology rather than industrial technology that has changed society. In combination with the risen educational level of western countries these new information technologies have created an era of information flows and streams which have had a fundamental impact on individuals and organizations.<sup>9</sup> Post-modern society is therefore seen by authors as Castells, Wuthnow and Wellman as a flexible and complex information or network society in which physical boundaries have declined and in which individuals take control of their own lives.

However, there are also authors who believe that contemporary western society is 'merely' a phase in the evolution of industrial or modern society.<sup>10</sup> They state that there is no new 'post-modern society' but a progressing modern society. According to Beck this evolution of modern society has resulted in a more rationalized social order in which knowledge is

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disconnected from values, norms and contexts. A society in which information is 'on the run.'<sup>11</sup>

Although the above-mentioned authors disagree to a certain extent, all of their views on contemporary post-modern or late modern society have certain characteristics in common. All authors emphasize that society has become (more) complex, flexible, risky, pluralistic, uncertain and/or fragmented whereas individuals are 'free' to write their own personal narrative and take control of their own lives. It are these features which we regard as distinguished characteristics of our contemporary western society. A society which can have various labels or names. However, we agree with Zygmunt Bauman that it is merely a salutary decision to speak of post-modernity rather than late modernity.<sup>12</sup> In this paper we have made the salutary decision to speak of postmodern society rather than late modern or modern society.

### **3. Post-Modern Society and the Personal Narrative**

As said earlier, there are different explanations why western society has become (more) complex, flexible, risky, pluralistic and why individuals are more able to write their own personal narrative. In particular new (information) technologies are thought to provide an explanation. However, although these explain why society has changed they do not fully account for the nature of this grown independence of individuals. An independence of which is far more *laissez-faire* than liberated and far less provided or created than enforced.<sup>13</sup>

The independence of subjects and the ability to 'write their own personal narrative' has for the past years been extensively and actively promoted by western governments through privatization and deregulation strategies. Accordingly the acquired independence was far less acquired than enforced. It is exactly this 'enforcement of independence' which is seen by for instance Bauman as one of the key elements of contemporary western society.<sup>14</sup> A society which according to Bauman has transformed from a producer society into a consumer society.

In the following we have aimed to explain why postmodern western society has become so preoccupied with privatization and deregulation and how and to what extent this has influenced the nature of the independence of individuals to shape their own lives.

### **4. The Rise of Neo-Liberalism and the Gospel of the Free Market**

There is a widespread consensus about the fact that western society has been fundamentally influenced by the turn of events at the end of the 1980s. As the USSR started to break up and East and West Berlin were reunited there could be found a widespread belief that there was no viable alternative to liberal democracy.<sup>15</sup>

In 1992 Francis Fukuyama stated:

The amount of options to politically and economically organize a nation has fundamentally decreased. Of all the regimes which existed throughout history, from monarchies and aristocracies to religious theocracies and totalitarian fascist and communist states of this century, only the liberal democracy has survived.<sup>16</sup>

The belief in liberal democracy and the free market economy seemed unshakeable. It was in this period that neo-liberalism began to flourish and became one a leading principle that would shape the modern west.

In essence neo-liberalism can be seen as 'an economic doctrine which gives supremacy to free markets as a method of handling not only the economic affairs of the nation, but also as a political ideology which can be applied to all manner of governance issues.'<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s neo-liberalism was adopted by parties from either end of the political spectrum.<sup>18</sup> Although there were many distinctions between western states and therefore a variety of 'neo-liberalisms' most of them had many common characteristics. One of these characteristics was 'a remarkable degree of consensus among the political leadership of various countries about what was wrong about the civil service.'<sup>19</sup> As a consequence there could be found a strong and widespread belief that modernization of the public sector was required.

This resulted in the privatization and deregulation of various public services and the introduction of market and quasi market-type mechanisms to raise the 'customer responsiveness' of public officials.<sup>20</sup> Since then individuals have gained influence over the provision of health care arrangements, telephone providers, public transport, postal services and electric companies to name a few.<sup>21</sup> Consequently in, the neo-liberal epoch, individuals are regarded as (potential) consumers not only by businesses, but by their governments as well.

##### **5. An Era of 'Hyperconsumerism'**

The rise of consumer society has for long been addressed by a variety of scholars.<sup>22</sup> These addressed various forms of consumption as well as the so-called 'marketisation' and 'commodification' of western society. However, it is widely believed that in these past years, society has more than ever evolved in a society dominated by consumer culture. The past two decades their could be witnessed a 'renewed and quite astonishing faith in the endless capacity of markets to coordinate human behaviour or activity with a range and a precision beyond that of any other system, institution or social process.'<sup>23</sup>



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As a consequence there has been a boost of what has come to be known as 'consumer culture.' A culture which is based on the ideology of 'non-interference' - 'the view that one should be able to buy what one likes, where one likes, and as much as one likes, with nary a glance from the government, neighbors, ministers or political parties.'<sup>24</sup> A culture which, according to Schor, combines 'a deep respect for the consumer's ability to act in her own best interest and an emphasis on the efficiency gains of unregulated consumer markets: a commitment to liberty and the general welfare.'<sup>25</sup> This consumer culture has become so dominant in our current western society that Benjamin Barber has characterized our time as 'our era of hyperconsumerism.'<sup>26</sup> In this era of hyperconsumerism free markets are favored over government regulation and privatization has become *the* dominant ideology in western society.<sup>27</sup> The past decades it appears that various elements of this 'consumer culture' have been adopted by higher education institutes as well.

## **6. Consumerism and Higher Education**

The commodification and marketization of daily life has also touched (higher) education. In various ways has (higher) education been influenced by the ubiquity of 'consumer culture.'

Education, not long ago provided solely as a public good, is provided more and more by private institutions, schools have become the new frontiers for corporate advisors and education itself seems to have transformed into 'a commodity.' However, one of the most comprehensive changes in education is the transformation from student into customer.

Today higher education institutes seem more than ever occupied with themes such as 'customer groups,' 'customer's needs and wants' and 'customer satisfaction.' What is more, western higher education institutes appear to have put a great faith in one of the core elements of 'consumer culture:' a deep respect for the ability of students to act in their own best interest.

Not long ago an undergraduate curriculum entailed a largely fixed course of study. However, nowadays many colleges and universities enable students to choose and select the education that best matches their preferences or needs.<sup>28</sup> Schwartz states that the modern university has been transformed into a kind of 'intellectual shopping mall.'<sup>29</sup>

Today many higher education institutes offer their students a wide array of different 'goods' and allow and often even encourage students to 'shop' around until they find what they like.<sup>30</sup> Lorenz therefore states that there has been a transformation from Humboldtian University to a kind of 'McUniversity.'<sup>31</sup>

However, what can be said about the consequences of the adoption of consumer culture in higher education? More in particular, what can be said

about the relation between consumerism and the Humboldtian concept of *Bildung*?

### **7. Consumerism and *Bildung***

In general the concept of *Bildung* is ascribed to the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). Influenced by the grand ideas of the French Revolution Humboldt saw *Bildung* as one of the principle tasks of education. That should be used as instrument to give the concept of mankind as rich a content as possible.<sup>32</sup> The principle goal of *Bildung* through education was to prepare the individual for the requirements of future life in all its richness. Therefore *Bildung* is not just about knowledge and skills, but much more about values, ethos, personality, authenticity and humanity.

Today the concept of consumerism appears to have strongly eroded the concept of *Bildung*. Instead of higher education institutes guiding students on their journey through a complex, uncertain post-modern society and prepare them as best they can for the requirements of society, students are more and more left on their own. The consumer culture of non-interference appears to have strongly influenced higher education institutes as they enable their students, as customers, to decide what education they want to take up, when and where they want it. This has resulted in what we characterize as *the paradox of post-modern higher education*: although post-modern society is seen as more fragmented, and pluralistic students are less guided by higher education institutes on how they can best achieve their *Bildung*. What is more, although society has become more uncertain and complex students are thought, just as 'regular' customers, to make rational decisions about the education that best matches their individual needs as well as the requirements of society.

### **8. Conclusion: The Paradox of Post-modern Higher Education**

Although many authors disagree on the exact nature and character of postmodern society, nearly of all of them underline that society has become more complex, fragmented, flexible, pluralistic and/or uncertain whereas individuals have been more and more enabled to 'shape' their own lives. However, the nature of this freedom appears to be rather one-dimensional and specific. Individual's ability to 'write their own narrative' appears to have been strongly influenced by the widespread adoption of neo-liberal ideology from the end of the 1980s. Fuelled by the historical events which took place at the end of the 1980s neo-liberal ideology has had a far-reaching influence on the (re)shaping welfare states and the rise of consumer culture.

Eventually, this resulted in what Benjamin Barber has named 'the era of hyperconsumerism.' In this era both business and governmental organizations enable individuals to get what they want, where they want, and as much as they like. Today higher education institutes have incorporated

various elements of this ‘consumption culture.’ Consequently they offer their students a wide array of different ‘goods’ and allow and often even encourage them to ‘shop’ around until they find what they like.

This has resulted in what we see as *the paradox of post-modern higher education*: although post-modern society has become more fragmented and complex students are less guided by higher education institutes on how they can best achieve their *Bildung*. Instead they are more and more regarded as rational customers who can decide for themselves what education they need and therefore how they can best achieve their *Bildung*.

## 9. Discussion

In the foregoing we have pointed out the paradox of postmodern education. Although we have explained why this paradox has arisen, the question rises why higher education institutes choose not to resolve it. Why do higher education institutes do not guide their students in this complex era of post-modernity and decide for them what education will prepare them as best as possible for their future?

There can be found various arguments why it would be beneficial for students to exert influence on their education.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, when choice is trivial or incidental, a variety of options is seen by most people as desirable.<sup>34</sup> However, Iyengar and Lepper also found that when the amount of options rises and choosing becomes more important and personal, the process of choosing is seen as less desirable, difficult and sometimes even frustrating.

Therefore the question lingers to what extent the benefits of the ‘consumerist approach’ to education outweigh downsides such as the preservation of a complex and dynamic institutional structure which enable students to choose from an abundance of different majors, minors and courses and straining choice processes.

## Notes

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Giddens, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> G Ritzer, *Postmodern Social Theory*, Springer, New York, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> M Castells, *The Internet Galaxy. Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000; S Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton University, Princeton, 2001; R Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1998; B Wellman, 'The Network Community: An Introduction', in B Wellman (ed), *Networks in the Global Village. Life in Contemporary Communities*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Castells, *op. cit.*; Sassen, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Castells, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> U Beck, A Giddens & A Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994; Giddens, *op. cit.*; Beck, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Z Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Z Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> F Fukuyama, *Het einde van de geschiedenis en de laatste mens*, Olympus, Amsterdam, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Y Hartman, In Bed with the Enemy: Some Ideas on the Connections between Neoliberalism and the Welfare State. *Current Sociology*, vol. 53, pp. 57-73, 2005, pp. 58, 59.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> C Pollitt, Justification by Works or by Faith? Evaluating the New Public Management, *Evaluation*, vol. 1, pp. 133-154, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>21</sup> M Hurenkamp & M Kremer, *Vrijheid verplicht. Over tevredenheid en de grenzen van keuzevrijheid*, Van Gennep, Amsterdam, 2005.

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<sup>24</sup> JB Schor, 'Towards a New Politics of Consumption', in *The Consumer Society Reader*, J. B. Schor & D. B. Holt (eds), The New Press, New York, 1999, p. 452.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> B Barber, *Consumed. How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults and Swallow Citizens Whole*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2007, p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> B Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> CFG Lorenz, *Van homo academicus tot homo economicus: over de functieverandering van de universiteit in de 'kenniseconomie'*, Boom, Amsterdam, 2006.

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# **The Role of Community Engagement in Higher Education: Focus on the Discourse Relating to Knowledge Development**

*Vhonani Netshandama and Sechaba Mahlomaholo*

## **Abstract**

This article seeks to discuss the discourse of community engagement in higher education with particular focus on the role of community engagement in the development of knowledge in a South African (SA) context of marginalisation, poverty and underdevelopment for most communities. The article acknowledges the role of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in spearheading an ongoing conversation about community engagement in the higher education sector, namely what it is, what form it takes on, and how it is best undertaken. More and more, knowledge that does not contribute to meeting the basic development needs of the increasingly impoverished population groups is challenged in South Africa. We argue that community engagement in higher education should be viewed as a platform for interacting forms of knowledge. We see community engagement as a space for inclusive deliberations towards knowledge reconstruction and codification. Community engagement space should encourage faculties as reflexive practitioners to interface beyond traditional boundaries of round tables and other discussion forums.

**Key Words:** Community engagement, higher education, dialogue, knowledge, knowledge development.

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## **1. Introduction**

This article locates knowledge development process at the crossroads of the divide between higher education and society with particular reference to South Africa. The article further provides arguments that community engagement (CE) in the South African higher education context may not be simplified to mean community service, outreach and extension because its role is much more complex to fit in any one template.

A consensus exists in South Africa (SA) and probably the rest of the world regarding the role of community engagement towards social transformation and social responsiveness in the higher education sector, mainly departing from Boyer's notion of multiple scholarships, namely scholarship of discovery, integration, application, teaching and engagement.<sup>1</sup> This article seeks to discuss the discourse of community engagement in higher education with particular focus on the role of community engagement in the development of knowledge in a South African context of

marginalization, poverty and underdevelopment for most communities. This article derives from the emerging discourse about the challenges in structuring community engagement in higher education in South Africa. Firstly, there is no discipline called community engagement in higher education, implying that it will have different meanings to different people in different disciplines. For it to be effective however, it is argued, community engagement has to be an integral part of all disciplines. Secondly, community engagement lacks theorization and therefore raises concern as to whether it contributes to information or to what form of knowledge. If it does contribute either way, the question is which measure or criterion is used to place the knowledge generated appropriately.<sup>2</sup>

According to Hall, there is still a level of apprehension about community engagement as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, identifying what kind of knowledge is appropriate for the citizen is of special concern in South Africa. More and more, knowledge that does not contribute in meeting the basic development needs of the increasingly impoverished populations is challenged, probably as 'knowledge for knowledge sake.' We fear the re-incarnation of academic elitism. New constructs are emerging such as 'strong knowledge' and 'weak knowledge.' Reference to 'useful knowledge' as if there is already a universal verdict on what it is therefore is worrisome. It is problematic to define what useful knowledge is without involving the 'users' in the process of defining.

Furthermore, a community of practice, which should include society's knowledge keepers, and which seeks to square society's knowledge with that of higher education intellectuals should be developed. We agree with the notion that for developing countries to address issues of poverty and sustainable development there should be interaction of all forms of knowledge namely practical knowledge, local wisdom, intellectualization, theorization in an equitable manner.

## **2. The Concept 'Community Engagement'**

There are many definitions of community engagement that seem to emerge from a contextual basis, the understanding of people defining it and the reasons thereof. Whilst it is understood that the definitions are not necessarily confined to the geography, for most universities, the geography is still an important point of departure. This article departs from contemporary notions that university-community engagement (also known as civic engagement) is driven by epistemological developments, the changing socio-historical context of the university in a global and knowledge society, and the drive to generate research and knowledge aimed at addressing social and economic problems with others outside the university. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities came to the conclusion that seven guiding characteristics seem to define an engaged

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institution across context are (1) responsiveness (2) respect for partners (3) academic neutrality (4) accessibility (5) integration (6) coordination and (7) partnerships.<sup>4</sup>

The White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education laid the foundations for making community service an integral part of higher education in South Africa.<sup>5</sup> The Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council of Higher Education (CHE) defines 'community engagement' as follows:

Initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the HE institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Knowledge Development**

To introduce the discussion on knowledge development and what community engagement has to offer, we borrow from Kaphagawani and Malherbe's view that knowledge is the means by which we direct our behavior to achieve our ends most efficiently and successfully.<sup>7</sup> This article reaffirms the notion that knowledge is a human construction that by definition has a human purpose hence its association with status and power dynamics in a society.

The challenge to get an inclusive way to re-codify forms of knowledge and the processes of knowledge development cannot be underestimated. This may include a focused endeavor to redefine the character of intellectuals and scholars to acknowledge the previous marginalized knowledge that were often regarded as 'weak' knowledge or information. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge arises from people's social, cultural and historical experiences. The problem that most society in South Africa share with the rest of Africa is that knowledge development and the decisions regarding what knowledge is excluded the socio-cultural and historical experiences of the powerless impoverished majority. Community engagement would therefore integrate these populations into the processes of developing and codifying knowledge.

Through this paper, we also wish to emphasize the importance of practicing in good faith as scholars and or intellectuals and to be both inclusive and trustworthy in interpreting and representing the arguments and knowledge of our society. Deriving from a constructivist perspective, we assume that different knowledge is produced within different social domains and that there is no obvious or transparent way to transfer from one to the next. Rather than concluding, that only some activities can produce 'higher order thinking' of 'strong knowledge,' higher education and the society should engage with the hope view to reach some level of consensus on what useful knowledge is and should be for that domain, as opposed to whether the

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knowledge generated fit into the existing forms of knowledge or what is referred by some scholars as the codified forms of knowledge, however determined. According to Dei, no knowledge is neutral, objective, absolute or value free. It is embedded in the people's cultural, social and political lives.<sup>8</sup>

Upon tracking the knowledge development discourse in SA, one finds Johann Muller's arguments, Michelson's response, and Hall, Slamati and Nongxa's in the CHE's *Kagisano* publications best suited to be used in the context of this article, which seeks to contextually position the role of community engagement in knowledge development in higher education institutions debates in South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Muller puts forth some crucial questions thus:

How can or should the common-sense knowledge of experience and local culture, indeed of the everyday world, relate to the codified knowledge deemed worthy of inclusion and certification in the formal curriculum? How, and under what conditions, can vertical discourse be assessed outside formal contexts of transmission? What should the relationship be between informal and formal knowledge, globalizing and local knowledge systems, 'cultural knowledge and skills' and 'skills and knowledge for economic productivity?'<sup>10</sup>

Part of the response to the questions above was a suggestion to re-codify knowledge. Whilst we generally understand the line of questioning, we also agree to some contrasting views such as those raised by Michelson in his response to Muller who argued that; 'The classification of things reproduces the classification of men - Durkheim and Mauss, Primitive Classification.'<sup>11</sup>

If this is indeed true, what then is the solution towards acknowledging what has previously been discriminated as uncoded, unclassified knowledge, from which we are arguing integration in this article? Who should be given social agency to re-define this as both an epistemological and political question? Whose experience of the past and whose vision of the future will be considered credible? Whose modest testimony will be allowed to contribute to a shared understanding of the nature of the world? If we are to dream a better future, we will have to attend to practical knowledge and local wisdom. Is access to formal knowledge a solution? Curriculum embodies the values and habits of the group that has won the struggle for symbolic mastery. What the disadvantaged need is access to that cultural capital. Therefore, we argue that community engagement function should be able to deal with these questions in an equitable manner.

#### 4. Engagement as Dialogue

The theory of communicative action by Habermas offers a basis for the argument about dialogue as a form of engagement in higher education. 'Free and uncoerced communication,' as the theory puts it, is necessary.<sup>12</sup> Currently, few institutions show evidence of structured dialogue with communities. Often, the dialogue is ad hoc and reactionary rather than proactive integration of the community voices in the institutional planning, curriculum process and research cycles. Few institutions show evidence of structured dialogue and deliberations with communities in their strategy and reports. Gibbons, in a paper presented at the 2006 Council for Higher Education Conference refers to contextualisation as 'Community Engagement and Higher Education' calls for 'contextualisation', a process that requires a move from 'reliable knowledge' to the production of 'socially robust knowledge' that is repeatedly tested in a range of environments.<sup>13</sup>

Gibbons employs the metaphor of the 'agora' to describe this as:

the sites of problem formulation and negotiation have moved from their previous institutional domains in government, industry and universities into the agora. The agora refers collectively to the public space in which 'science and the public meet,' and in which the public 'speaks back' to science. The agora should consist of many domains in which contextualisation occur. It should be the space in which societal and scientific problems are being framed and defined, and where 'solutions' are negotiated. According to Gibbons, it is the space, par excellence, for the production of 'socially robust knowledge.'<sup>14</sup>

Spaces for dialogue between higher education and society require that both parties in some levels have the need to develop to something beyond where they were before the dialogue begun. Currently the practices are such that CE activities are usually driven to academic conceptions with often very little time if any allocated to establishing a common understanding. What then is community engagement for, and for whom? What role can it play in answering questions around its theorization?

#### 5. Reflection in Action - Ways of Knowing and Engagement

Donald Schön made monumental contributions to the development of a postmodern scholarly epistemology in his seminal work of the 1980s when he borrowed from the studio tradition in the arts and professions to describe a process he called 'reflection in action.'<sup>15</sup> His main arguments were that reflection on the interaction of theory and practice is the core intellectual activity that should run through faculty research, teaching and learning.

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Schön coined the term ‘reflective practitioner’ in calling for faculty engagement in the consequences of faculty work.

Shortly before his death, a decade later, Schön argued that institutions and faculty members alike must adopt a new epistemology in order to practice Boyer’s multiple scholarships referred to in a previous section. He contended that ‘action research,’ his term for a scholarship of community engagement requires not only that institutions and faculty members move beyond the epistemology of technical rationality conferred on the scholarship of discovery but that they also engage in ‘reflective action research.’ According to Schön, reflective action research obligates scholars to reflect on both their scholarly knowing and their scholarly methodologies in an ongoing way.<sup>16</sup>

We argue for the reconstruction of the Freireian notion of empowerment education. Freire argued that knowledge should be embedded to a context in order to be useful to the community.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis is on creating a dialogue among group members and on sharing experiences and interpretations. In addition to group dialogue and understanding the social dimensions of problems, Freire argues that true learning requires acting in the world, thus, a Freireian program would emphasize action and subsequent reflection as key to the learning process.

## **6. Concluding Arguments**

Through this article, we argue that the divide between higher education and society by implication perpetuates academic elitism and the notion that only academia can contribute to knowledge development. We see community engagement as a space or spaces for interacting forms of knowledge. We ask that the composition of knowledge development spaces (round tables, workshops, symposia, etc) should be inclusive as it should be the dialogue towards knowing and co-owning the processes. We ask that community engagement in higher education should provide a platform for interacting forms of knowledge to promote inclusivity and partnership in knowledge development.

We ask of knowledge gatekeepers to practice in good faith and to drive the deliberation in an inclusive manner. We caution that the time may not be right yet (unless there is evidence of inclusivity of intellectuals and of society in the discussion) to start developing templates for community engagement in higher education, thus challenging traditional notions of strong and weak knowledge and transformation in the manner in which we view knowledge development processes. We propose a de-construction and reconsideration of the epistemologies introduced by scholars such as Schön’s reflection in action.<sup>18</sup>

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>E Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Princeton, NJ, 1990.

<sup>2</sup>M Hall, 'Community Engagement in South African Higher Education: Debating Community Engagement', in *Kagisano No. 7*, Council on Higher Education, Pretoria, 2008, p. 1-35.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> N Curthoys, 'Future Directions for Rhetoric - Invention and Ethos in Public Critique', in *Australian Humanities Review*, March - April 2001, viewed on 11 April 2001, [www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/pdf/biblio.pdf](http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/pdf/biblio.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Framework for Institutional Audits. Higher Education Quality Committee*. Pretoria, Council on Higher Education 2004, viewed on 11 April 2001, <http://www.che.ac.za>.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> DN Kaphagawani & JG Malherbe, 'Epistemology and the Tradition in Africa', in *Philosophy from Africa: A Test with Readings*, P.H. Coetzee & A. P.J. Roux (eds), Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> GJS Dei, 'African Development: The Relevance and Implications of Indigenoussness', paper presented at the Learned Society Meeting of Canadian Associations for the Study of International Development (CAISID), Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario, May 31 - June 2 1996, viewed on 12 January 2008, <http://www.brocku.ca/epi/casid/dei.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> J Muller, 'Knowledge and Higher Education: Report for Task Group Two', in *National Commission of Higher Education*, Government Press, Pretoria, 1995; E Michelson, 'On Trust, Desire, and the Sacred: A Response to Johann Muller's Reclaiming Knowledge'. *Journal of Education*, vol. 30 (32), 2004, pp. 37-49; Republic of South Africa, Council on Higher Education, 'Community Engagement in South African Higher Education', in *Kagisano 6*, Pretoria, 2010, pp. 1-66.

<sup>10</sup> J Muller, *Reclaiming Knowledge*, Routledge Falmer, London, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> J Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Heinemann, London, 1984.

<sup>13</sup> M Gibbons, 'Engagement as a Core Value in Mode 2 Society', CHE - JET Conference on the 'Engaged' University, Cape Town, 2-5 Sept. 2006.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> DA Schön, 'The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology'. *Change*, vol. 27 (6), pp. 26-34.

<sup>16</sup> DA Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> P Freire, *Education of the Oppressed*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

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## **PART III**

### **The Intellectual and the Cultural Turn**



## **The Role of the Intellectual: Shakespeare's Exploration of Contemplative Life vs. Active Life in *The Tempest***

*Unhae Langis*

### **Abstract:**

In the hierarchy of the Greek city-state, the nobility enjoyed *skolé*, the opportunity afforded by freedom from sustenance labour, ideally to develop virtue and perform political duties. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, western society has engaged in an enduring debate between contemplative life and active life. While Plato and Aristotle privileged the philosophic life as supreme, their Roman counterparts such as Cicero and Seneca held more ambivalent, subtle, and sometimes convergent views about the two ways of life. This essay presents Shakespeare's exploration of this ancient debate in *The Tempest* in the hopes that such an examination will engender self-reflexive insight on the relationship between intellectualism and socio-political engagement, between scholarship and service. Prospero learns through a hard-earned lesson the consequences of avoiding civic responsibility by retreating into his books. *The Tempest* underscores for present-day intellectuals the necessity despite the difficulty of straddling both the contemplative and active worlds: while knowledge sought for its own sake is always valuable, it also can and must be directed to benefit the world surrounding us at the cost of a human debacle.

**Key Words:** Intellectualism, socio-political engagement, civic responsibility, Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, education, contemplative life, good life.

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By way of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, this essay explores the necessity of intellectuals in society yet confusion on how best to deploy their knowledge towards solving increasingly complex problems of political order - within and between nations - in the modern world. In examining the traditional opposition of the contemplative life and the active life and their convergence from a Ciceronian, public-oriented perspective, this discussion touches upon the prospects of a perceived decline of the Academy against the trends to commodify and vocationalise higher education. Indeed, the debate between contemplative and active life has entered our own experiences of teaching: we've had to confront the privileging of practical and technical knowledge and a corresponding de-emphasis on humanities and liberal studies in the current climate of economic decline and its imperatives of pragmatism. Going from the academic side to the political side of our role as intellectuals, we face hard self-examination into whether the politicisation

underlying the now indispensable cultural studies approach in academic knowledge effectively translates into action for socio-political change or whether our work continues to be superficial, self-absorbed, socially detached, and largely irrelevant as intellectuals continue to write for each other. In an incipient attempt to broach these issues, I invoke a more recent turn subsequent to the cultural turn: the return to ethics. Perhaps a neo-Aristo-Platonic ethical approach proposes a workable convergence of the contemplative and active life, of knowledge and socio-political action, of liberal and vocational studies, and lastly of the three facets of our demanding lives as intellectuals - scholarship, teaching, and service.

In *The Tempest* a dozen years prior to the opening act, Prospero was Duke of Milan, a prosperous Italian state flourishing in the liberal arts. As a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, Prospero relegated the governance of Milan to his brother Antonio and 'to my state grew stranger, being transported / And rapt in secret studies.'<sup>1</sup> According to the classical tradition, the happiest human life is one that resembles the life of a divine being, who enjoys a 'single and simple pleasure' - the unchanging pleasure of pure thought.<sup>2</sup> Prospero accordingly sought the divine pleasure of contemplation *per se* over the fleeting pleasures and anxieties of thinking on worldly and human matters. Lost in this divine pleasure, he forgot the moral and civil duties for which the ancient Greek tradition of *skolé* - the opportunity afforded by freedom from sustenance labour - was designed.<sup>3</sup> Leaving himself vulnerable to his brother's machinations, Antonio usurped his throne, and Prospero and his daughter were cast off to sea in a 'rotten carcass.'<sup>4</sup> Prospero's situation illustrates the vexing political phenomenon that 'the evil characters push their way to the top of the political order, while the moral good and humane characters either fail to achieve rule, or, if they do, cannot maintain it properly.'<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Prospero's case poses the following critical question: 'How does a regime combine both wisdom and power when the wise are disinclined to rule and the rulers are disinclined to consult the wise?'<sup>6</sup> The very attribute of wisdom that makes the philosopher fit to rule disinclines him to do so. Paul Cantor, Nathan Schlueter, and others have seen Prospero as a Philosopher-King, who 'would guarantee justice by uniting wisdom and power in a person who rules more from duty than desire.'<sup>7</sup> This is indeed what Prospero aims to do when chance brings the usurpers of his throne within the scope of his magical power and gives him an opportunity to recoup his loss and restore just leadership. Schlueter argues that Prospero's convergence of wisdom and power as a Philosopher-King is effectuated through his exercise of Machiavellian 'ordered virtue.'<sup>8</sup> Insofar as ordered virtue is 'prudence, understood as the ability to suit one's actions according to the necessity of the time,'<sup>9</sup> Prospero exercises Aristotelian practical wisdom, or the art of politics, the art of steering oneself effectively within the polity, whether as a ruler or a citizen.<sup>10</sup> This practical wisdom entails acting

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at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reason in the varying situations of temporal life.<sup>11</sup> The convergence of wisdom and power in the Philosopher-King entails knowledge about the ends in life and how to secure them for the common good.

Prospero's return to active life reflects the Stoic counter responses to the Platonic belief that philosophic contemplation is the highest activity of life. The Romans with their strong sense of public service chipped away at the Platonic and Aristotelian bias for contemplative life. According to Richard Tuck explains, the Stoic rendition of the debate reveals much more ambivalence: Cicero and Zeno leaning more towards civil action and Epicurus and Seneca weighing in more on the side of philosophy and contemplation.<sup>12</sup> It is within this context that Prospero's actions as philosopher and ruler situate themselves.

*The Tempest* portrays 'what would happen if the wisest of men actually had sufficient power to make his rational and humane vision real.'<sup>13</sup> Here, two qualifications are in order. As Peter Lawler notes, 'It becomes real, of course, only imaginatively, on an enchanted island, a utopia or place that is not and cannot become real.' More pointedly, the problems of political rule within and among nations in the modern world are cranked up considerably from those depicted in *The Tempest* by increased terrorism, economic competition, resource wars, and environment degradation - without Prospero's magical powers to solve them. The play, nonetheless, addresses a number of fundamental questions about political rule that merit attention for anyone engaged in statecraft, acting in an advisory capacity, serving as public intellectuals informing the general citizenry or as educators imbuing students with technical knowledge, existential wisdom, and civil responsibility. Shakespeare does much to illuminate us on 'the essentials of human nature, not the accidentals of human history.'<sup>14</sup>

To illustrate, Prospero's relationship with Caliban, lying at the nexus between education and political rule, examines the freedom and bondage within a political body that the rule of reason entails. Focusing more narrowly, the Prospero/Caliban relationship comments upon the roles and the rights of students within the academic setting. Shakespeare's meditation on political rule asks Aristotle's fundamental question: 'is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right, or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature?'<sup>15</sup> Aristotle defines a slave by his inferiority in deliberative powers: 'he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature.'<sup>16</sup> By this dubious reasoning (unlike his sound ethical conceptions), Aristotle concludes that 'some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.'<sup>17</sup> Prospero's master/slave relationship with Caliban is, more or less, founded upon this reasoning: 'Prospero's claim to rule Caliban despotically,' as

Lawler states, 'is partly the philosopher's wisdom and partly the monster's incorrigibility.'<sup>18</sup> Given the abolition of slavery in the present day, the plight of Caliban as a slave is less pertinent to us than certain political and legal restrictions imposed upon all citizens of modern states.

While generally agreeing that Prospero rightly returns to political rule, some scholars have justifiably been critical of his methods of control and education and note that the play testifies to Prospero's education himself as a ruler. Prospero's endeavour to educate Caliban epitomises the colonialist endeavour to 'civilize' the savages with all the self-exalting, ideological trappings of this enterprise: Prospero taught Caliban to speak, to 'name the bigger light' and, by allusion to Genesis and to Christian logocentrism, to love and serve as master the one who gave him the gift of language.<sup>19</sup> But when Caliban makes sexual advances on Prospero's daughter, Miranda, the ruler spurns the creature as a natural brute:

Thou most lying slave,  
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,  
Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee  
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child.<sup>20</sup>

Without making light of attempted rape, Lawler notes that Caliban does what 'any pubescent young man [would] do with a beautiful young woman an arm's length away in the absence of any moral education or habituation, without any moral virtue.'<sup>21</sup> The harsh treatment of Caliban seems to be an effect of the (not only) early modern prejudice against physical deformity as a reflection of moral degeneracy. The Renaissance is replete with images opposing 'the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice.'<sup>22</sup> Instead of educating the creature on moderation, Prospero seems to write him off as a moral reprobate based on his 'monstrous' appearance. Prospero's 'usage' of 'kindness' is simply that: the master used the slave for domestic duties and treated him in kind as a brute when Caliban conducted himself as one.<sup>23</sup> As Lawler rightly observes, 'Caliban was being ruled by Prospero without his consent and as a human being he has the right to revolt to escape slavery.'<sup>24</sup> In exchange for Prospero's care, Caliban had shown him the best uses of the island's vegetation. Caliban had been sovereign on the island until Prospero came to rule as king and came to 'sty me / In this hard rock.'<sup>25</sup> Because Prospero and Miranda have chosen to see him as 'vile' and deal with him more by punishment than education, Caliban can profit from language and its aborted civilising processes only by cursing: 'there is nothing better than to be a free and responsible human being loved by others, which he was in his earlier, better days. But it's better to be a contented, unconscious, self-sufficient animal than an unloved or cruelly isolated human slave.'<sup>26</sup>



Just because Caliban was taught to speak (indeed, impossible to learn alone) does not mean that Prospero should view him as ‘the Aristotelian slave by nature, [...] a man so one-dimensional that he’s easy to rule because he is so dull-witted that he can do nothing but serve.’<sup>27</sup> Prospero forgets that no human being loves the yoke and that the vertical hierarchy of master/slave and superior/inferior breeds envy-truths of human nature that Aristotle himself does not consider sufficiently: that political rule over people, ‘even though not unjust, is a great impediment to a man’s individual well-being,’ and that therefore civil restraints in the tradition of social contract should be enacted only for clear and substantial benefits.<sup>28</sup> If tyranny, as Aristotle explains, has in view self-interest rather than the common good, Prospero’s reaction to Caliban’s attempted rape, as the initiation to his rejection of him, was an impulsive one, influenced by his view of Miranda as a feminine extension of his honour, which has been assailed. This possessive attitude, in turn, makes him retaliate by restricting Caliban even further as a slave.

It is only later ironically through the sprite Ariel’s advice that Prospero becomes humanised and enlightened enough of his tyrannous rule to accept Caliban back as a human. Caliban’s response, ‘What a thrice-double ass / Was I to take this drunkard [Stefano] for a god, / And worship this dull fool,’ substantially belies Prospero’s early opinion of Caliban’s dull-witted incorrigibility in that he shows himself to be more intelligent and ethically discerning than his human co-conspirators, Stefano and Trinculo, by ‘being able to recognise trash as trash.’<sup>29</sup> As it turns out, Caliban ‘longs less for pure freedom than obedience to one who is lovable and loves in return.’<sup>30</sup> By the end of the play, Prospero has arrived at a more humane and enlightened stance towards freedom: ‘the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature, and that the distinction between slave and freeman exists by law only, and not by nature; and being an interference with nature is therefore unjust.’<sup>31</sup> Recognizing his rule for what it is - ‘a misanthropic dream of perfect justice’ demanding ‘an unrealistic denial of the liberty of most human beings,’ Prospero ‘withdraws his magic and returns them to their real, natural human existence as free and troubled selves.’<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the freedom and constraints of the subject-citizens of a state, Prospero’s action of releasing the men to their own actions entails grave perils in the overarching issue of political governance, or how best to rule. While Caliban represents those whom education can rehabilitate and improve, Antonio and Sebastian represent a more intractable problem of what to do with those who reveal themselves to be deficient in managing the excesses of human nature, letting their actions be rule by ruthless ambition, greed, and a vicious disregard for the life of others. Apparently, there is no choice but to deal with the messes - as they unfold in all their complexity and difficulty - confined by the means available to civilised nations - diplomacy, economic sanctions, and military action, as a last resort.

Given the flaws of human existence as we know it, quality universal education still remains the single most important strategy or preventative munition against the social, political, and moral ills of society. As basic as it sounds, however, universal education is, at the same time, a radical solution not only because it addresses these problems at their root but also because we, as a world and as individual nations, have yet far to go in providing quality public education. All the more reason - even through these times of budget shortfalls - that we must persist in our endeavours as academic mentors and public intellectuals: not only to purvey knowledge to students in our disciplines but also to instil in them habits of philosophical contemplation of the good life and of civic responsibility and participation through sound ethical judgment and effective action. In this sense, I espouse the Humboldtian view of education as *Bildung* - not just knowledge and skills but rather 'values, ethos, personality, authenticity and humanity,' in other words, the ancient notion of the good life as personal and societal flourishing.<sup>33</sup> The apparent tension between contemplative life and active life come together in the deft balancing act of juggling scholarship and teaching by finding interactions between them and, better yet, in the ways that we might incorporate service learning into the curriculum to promote awareness, critical thinking, and social responsibility simultaneously.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> W Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', *The Norton Shakespeare*, S. Greenblatt, W. Cohen, J. Howard & K. Maus (eds), Norton, New York, 1997, 1.2.75-77.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics', *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, J. Barnes (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, X.14.1154b26.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, 'Politics', *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, J. Barnes (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, VII.9.1328b33-a2.

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, op. cit., 1.2.146.

<sup>5</sup> P Cantor, 'Prospero's Republic: The Politics of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, J. Alvis & T. West (eds), Carolina Academic Press, Durham, NC, 1981, p. 240.

<sup>6</sup> N Schlueter, 'Prospero's Second Sailing: Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and the Politics of *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare's Last Plays: Essays in Literature and Politics*, S. Smith (ed.), Lexington, Lanham, MD, 2002, p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, op. cit., VI.7.1141a21.

- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, II.6.1106b20-22.
- <sup>12</sup> R Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 1993, p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> P A Lawler, 'Shakespeare's Realism in *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare's Last Plays: Essays in Literature and Politics*, S. Smith (ed.), Lexington, Lanham, MD, 2002, p. 93.
- <sup>14</sup> T Dalrymple, 'Why Shakespeare is for All Time', viewed on 21 January 2010, [http://www.city-journal.org/html/13\\_1\\_oh\\_to\\_be.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/13_1_oh_to_be.html).
- <sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, op. cit., I.5.1254a18-19.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, I.5.1254a19-21.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, I.5.1255a1-2.
- <sup>18</sup> Lawler, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>19</sup> Shakespeare, op. cit., 2.1.338-39.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 1.2.347-51.
- <sup>21</sup> Lawler, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>22</sup> M Garber, 'Descanting on Deformity: Richard III and the Shape of History', *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays in Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, H. Dubrow & R. Strier (eds), Chicago UP, Chicago, 1987, p. 91.
- <sup>23</sup> Shakespeare, op. cit., 2.1.314-16.
- <sup>24</sup> Lawler, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>25</sup> Shakespeare, op. cit., 1.2.346.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 1.2.361; Lawler, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>27</sup> Lawler, op. cit., p. 100.
- <sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, op. cit., IV.11.1295b22; VII.2.1324a37.
- <sup>29</sup> Shakespeare, op. cit., 5.1.299-301; Lawler, op. cit., p. 102.
- <sup>30</sup> Lawler, op. cit., 102.
- <sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, op. cit., I.3.1253b21-24.
- <sup>32</sup> Lawler, op. cit., p. 97.
- <sup>33</sup> J von Andel, *From Academic to Customer: The Paradox of Post-Modern Higher Education*, viewed on 3 May 2010, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/andelpaper.pdf>. p. 8.

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## Three Centuries before the Cultural Turn: The Critic on the Print Market in Early Eighteenth-Century England

*Michelle Syba*

### **Abstract**

One consequence of the cultural turn has been a destabilization of the distinction between high and low cultures. Some contemporary scholars (such as Noel Carroll) have lamented a corollary development - namely, the fact that the intellectual known as the critic has lost interest in making aesthetic judgments. I offer a wider context for this lament, looking at a formative period for aesthetic judgment - specifically, for literary criticism: the 1670s to 1714 in London. This period witnesses the emergence of a mass print culture and of critical debates about aesthetic value. One might expect that critics would be most urgently in demand during this period. But specific cases show that the critic has a history of precarious authority, in large part because of his participation in a chaotic print market. During this formative, experimental period for criticism, critics such as Thomas Rymer and Joseph Addison test out different models of aesthetic judgment. Performing publicly authoritative acts of aesthetic judgment is not a self-evident activity during this period. As early critics experiment, they simultaneously imagine early incarnations for the public intellectual - a figure by turns respectable and satirized, whose early history offers us a wider context for reflecting on its contemporary predicament.

**Key Words:** Critic, print, the market, aesthetic judgment, authority, satire, impartiality, orality.

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I will focus on one species of public intellectual: the literary critic. According to established scholarly lore, the critic emerges as a new kind of public figure in eighteenth-century England.<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that literary critics somehow didn't exist before this period. Aristotle and Horace wrote important critical works. Moreover, in the early seventeenth century, criticism appeared publicly in works such as plays and privately in letters circulated within aristocratic coterie.<sup>2</sup>

But in the 1670s in London a new kind of public figure emerges - a person whose public identity is primarily as a critic. This figure is variously called 'our English critick' or just 'the Critick.'<sup>3</sup> 'Our English Critick' was made possible by transformations in the cultural marketplace. First, thanks to the reopening of the theatres in 1660. And second, thanks to an increasingly

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active print marketplace. In light of these transformations, one question I want to consider is this: how did the literary critic's defining act - the act of aesthetic judgment - play out in print and, moreover, in the increasingly hyperactive print market of the early eighteenth century?

During this period, there's an intimate relationship between the print market and the intellectual known as the critic. The print market makes possible newer genres of criticism, such as extended prose criticism for a non-scholarly audience. However, it also creates anxieties about that criticism. Thus the relationship between the print market and the critic is productive; but for critics it is also ambivalent and in some cases anxious, as critics exploit that market and also worry about its dangers.

If anything, the early eighteenth century context rewards attention, because it resonates with our own moment (and recent past). Much like today's cultural marketplace, that of the eighteenth century undergoes a major transformation, as there is an explosion of print that triggers laments about information overload and about the diminishing quality of English culture.

Which brings me to a second resonance between our own recent history and that of the early eighteenth century: while there is a sense that the burgeoning print market is introducing lots of bad new writing into England, there are also deep ambiguities of aesthetic value. Shakespeare and Milton are not self-evidently great in the early eighteenth century in the way that they are now. So what we have during the period is something analogous to one consequence of the cultural turn: namely, what Frederic Jameson describes as 'the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture [...] to the point where the line between high-art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw.'<sup>4</sup> Now Jameson is describing the loss of a distinction between high and low culture that comes *after* those distinctions had been established once upon a time. By contrast, I'll be looking at a period *before* those distinctions were established, when critics dissed Shakespeare and weren't sure if *Paradise Lost* was all that good. So I'll look at the prequel not only to the cultural turn, but also to the 'Great Tradition,' which the Cultural Turn eroded. At both moments, aesthetic value is comparably indeterminate, albeit for different reasons.

And so enter the critic, to tidy up the messy cultural marketplace - except that the critic is anything but tidy himself, being still an emerging figure. Looking at the early eighteenth-century English context, I find it hard not to be struck by what a precarious business it was to establish aesthetic value credibly and authoritatively - to determine what counts as 'the Great Tradition.' Unlike France, early English critics had no *academie* to legitimise their work. There was a singular lack of institutional structure for English critics. So English critics were self-proclaimed arbiters of culture, and criticism was a highly experimental business. Experimenting within the

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medium of print, critics had to find ways to appeal to a growing reading public. And they did. But they also sometimes worried about the impact of print on the quality and effectiveness of their aesthetic judgments. Sometimes they were nostalgic for non-print forms.

Two propositions of my paper are this: first, early eighteenth-century criticism is intimately tied to the print market, to a degree that makes critics anxious and even nostalgic for earlier non-print forms. Second, early eighteenth-century criticism is a precarious exercise in performing judgment credibly and authoritatively on this unregulated market. If anything, the early eighteenth-century English context shows us what a scrappy business it was to be an intellectual, at one formative moment in the intellectual's history.

The period from 1660 onward witnesses the rise of a 'media saturated culture.' It witnesses the rise of a news culture. It also witnesses the rise of the Culture Industry.<sup>5</sup> Mass cultural phenomena such as the blockbuster novel and merchandising for the blockbuster novel, as well as sequels and remakes all take off in the eighteenth century.

In fact, one blockbuster novelist, Daniel Defoe, benefited from the print boom that began in 1695. What happened in 1695 was that the print market suddenly deregulated, following the lapse of the Licensing Act. Until 1695, the Licensing Act had ensured that a London guild known as the Stationer's Company had a monopoly on the print market. But in 1695, when the Act was up again for renewal, it was allowed to lapse.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, after 1695 anybody who had the money to buy a printing press and set up shop as a printer could do so.

What followed was a steep increase in the quantity of print on the market. Jonathan Swift parodied this development in *A Tale of a Tub*, which purports to be written by a Grub Street hack - by someone who tries to benefit from the burgeoning print market and make a living by his pen. The first page of *A Tale of a Tub* is a series of advertisements for projected works by the same author: works such as 'A General History of Ears' or 'A Panegyric Essay upon the Number Three' - anything weird and novel to catch the restless eye of the popular reader, that is anything that might sell. For the hack, the profit motive predominates (as it does for the Culture Industry). As a whole, *A Tale of a Tub* embodies and parodies the phenomenon of proliferating bad art, which a deregulated print market stokes.

In such a climate of bad, proliferating print, one would expect the literary critic to be more necessary than ever. Ideally, the critic would serve as an invaluable guide to the common reader trying to navigate a chaotic print market. But Swift's *Tale* also parodies the very genre of criticism. There is an entire section devoted to criticism, which variously characterizes 'the True Modern Critick' as a braying donkey and a vomiting serpent.<sup>7</sup> In Swift's work of criticism, criticism itself becomes a paramount instance of modern,

bad writing. In other words, criticism becomes embroiled in the same chaotic marketplace that it tries to organize.

Swift's *Tale* is one instance of criticism's uneasiness with itself as a print genre. In fact, early eighteenth century critics rarely have nice things to say about each other. Thomas Rymer, the man who became known as 'our English Critick,' launched his career as a critic by complaining that 'critics are aptest to bark at every thing that comes in their way.'<sup>8</sup>

Thomas Rymer is not a name that has had the staying power of Samuel Johnson. But he was well known and influential in his time, beginning in the 1670s when he began to publish criticism. By the end of the decade, the dramatist John Dryden had dubbed Rymer 'Our English Critick,' an unprecedented christening of a critic.<sup>9</sup>

The portrait of 'Our English Critick'<sup>10</sup> in action is a telling image with respect to how the early critic was imagined. When I first saw this portrait, I had two questions. First, what is this critic doing? Second, why is he holding a dog? I think that the answers to these two questions are actually related. To answer the first question: the critic appears to be speaking - assertively, possibly with concern and even alarm. This is not a reserved man. He also appears to be pointing at something. This is tricky to establish for sure, but the alternatives are not persuasive: he could be holding out an object for inspection, or perhaps shaking hands. But pointing seems more likely, in part because of his status as a critic. Critics in this period describe themselves as 'pointers out' or 'discover(ers)' of a literary work's errors and merits.

Second question: why is this man holding a dog? This might be a realistic detail. Maybe Rymer really loved dogs. However, there is a more telling answer for the purposes of my examination of early critics. This concerns how Rymer described critics in the prefatory treatise that launched his career. Remember the comment about how critics are aptest to bark at every thing that comes in their way? The figure of the dog hearkens back to the figure of the aggressive, bad critic bent on finding errors in what he reads.

Interestingly, the dog in this portrait is calm, whereas the human is not. This is a portrait not of a dog apt to bark but of a critic apt to bark. The portrait conveys the style of Rymer's criticism, which does a lot of barking, despite his early complaint about critics. Rymer is now best known for his no-holds-barred criticism of Shakespeare's play, *Othello*. He charged *Othello* with psychological implausibility and an impious lack of an edifying moral. He also detested its difficult language, asserting 'in the *growling* of a Mastiff [...] there is as lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity, than many times in the Tragical flights of *Shakespeare*.'<sup>11</sup> Given Rymer's apparent love of dogs, we might argue that this is not such a bad thing to say about literature. But on the whole it is the kind of 'diss' that characterizes much of Rymer's examination of *Othello*, which is peppered with snide asides (about



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the flaky Desdemona) and insults (about the gullible Othello). If anything, Rymer's critical manner harkens back to an oral form - to the kinds of comments that an amateur spectator in the theatre's pit might make, exercising his wit at the expense of the play.

Rymer's criticism was very popular. It made a name for him and is among the 'other popular works' that the frontispiece cites. But I would further add that in this portrait - which came out during the height of Rymer's popularity - there is a satiric edge. This is a portrait of a barking critic. If anything, the image summons Rymer's early diss against bad critics who bark, bringing it on Rymer's own head. In this image, Rymer's credibility as an aesthetic judge is precarious.<sup>12</sup> Just as Swift's work of criticism satirizes critics, so does Rymer's portrait likewise.

In fact, shortly before Rymer's death in 1713, an alternative model of the critic was emerging, one embodied by *The Spectator* papers. Beginning in 1711, *The Spectator* was a series of essays published six times per week. These essays sought to influence contemporary manners and morality; they also sought to model tasteful acts of aesthetic judgment.<sup>13</sup>

In the second image<sup>14</sup>, Mr Spectator's model of aesthetic judgment differs noticeably from Rymer's. Here, the scene is of smiling conversation among gentlemen in a tastefully decorated space. In the portrait of Rymer, there is an implicit auditor outside the frame, but it seems unlikely that Rymer's auditor would be smiling. By contrast, for Mr Spectator and his coterie of friends aesthetic judgment is a genial activity. The manner depicted in this portrait picks up on Mr. Spectator's language, which is generally amused rather than indignant, moderate rather than heated. Mr. Spectator describes himself as a quiet observer who has 'more than ordinary penetration in Seeing' and is unprejudiced in his 'Judgment.'<sup>15</sup> Basically, Mr. Spectator offers an early model of critical impartiality - a model which eschews the passionate, indignant judgments of a Rymer.

Contemporary readers seem to have found Mr. Spectator a credible and authoritative aesthetic judge. The series was hugely popular, and was reprinted numerous times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But it is also striking how Mr. Spectator worries about the way that the series plays out among the reading public. Imagining his readership, Mr. Spectator brings up a species of reader that he calls the 'Blanks.' 'Blanks' are readers who have nothing on their minds until they read the day's news, which they passively absorb and parrot in public.<sup>16</sup> Mr Spectator confesses himself 'much disquieted by the incapacity' of such readers. We would identify these readers as the opposite of 'critical thinkers' (a figure much invoked in colleges and universities). If anything, the passivity of 'Blanks' makes them sound like mass cultural consumers.

I would argue that what Mr. Spectator is doing in this case is expressing an ambivalence about the medium of print. He recognizes that

while he can bring a model of aesthetic judgment to the public in print, he cannot induce aesthetic judgment in his readers through the medium of print. Print colludes in the culture of consumption that he is trying to organize and reform as a critic.

Indeed, Mr Spectator often likens good reading to an engagement not with print but with people. When he writes about reading *Paradise Lost*, he conjures up a coterie of authors in conversation - a coterie that includes Milton, who takes a 'hint' from Virgil and passes it on to Mr. Spectator. At its best, reading is untrammelled by print, an unmediated transhistorical conversation that transcends print.<sup>17</sup> Thus Mr. Spectator's essays express a nostalgia for oral forms (much as Rymer's work borrows some of the language of violent speech uttered in the theatre's pit). This nostalgia is all the more striking in Mr. Spectator's case, because Mr. Spectator is a fictional critic who exists only in print. He is a creature of print. And yet he is deeply ambivalent about the resources of print and his own function on the print market, even as he would go on to become one of its exemplars.

The contrast between Thomas Rymer and Mr. Spectator also represents a shift in critical norms. As the eighteenth century proceeded, criticism became more polite, with Mr Spectator's genial, moderate criticism supplanting Rymer's shock jock approach to criticism.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, Mr. Spectator is the critic who gains the most credibility.

It will be interesting to see how literary criticism develops in the twenty-first century, as we experience our own media transformation. On one hand, the Internet has made possible the amazon review (the review that might complain that *Madame Bovary* sucks because Emma is annoying and not 'relatable'). On the other hand, the Internet has also enabled new conversations around print criticism. For example, the literary blog *The Elegant Variation* might link to a review in *The New Yorker*, further disseminating a print review of literary fiction. Clearly the consequences of our own media transformations are mixed, at once undermining and shoring up high culture. If there is one generalisable consequence of the Internet, it is that the public is being reconstituted as panoply of coterie - around a given blog or a fan fiction website. If anything, the idea of a single critic (English or otherwise) who guides the judgments of a homogenous public has become obsolete.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, MIT University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1962, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of coterie criticism, see P Trolander & Z Tenger, 'Katherine Philips and Coterie Critical Practices'. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 37, 2004, pp. 367-387.

<sup>3</sup> J Dryden, 'The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy', *The Works of John Dryden*, A. Roper & V.A. Dearing (eds), vol. 13, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> F Jameson, 'Postmodernism and the Consumer Society', *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*, Verso, London, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> T Adorno, 'How to Look at Television', *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, J.M. Bernstein (ed.), Routledge, London, 1991, p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> For more on this, see M Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> RA Greenberg & W Bowman Piper (eds), *The Writings of Jonathan Swift: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism*, Norton, New York, 1973, pp. 314, 315.

<sup>8</sup> R Rapin & T Rymer, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie... Made English by Mr Rymer, by whom is added some Reflections on English Poets*. London, 1694, p. A3.

<sup>9</sup> J Dryden, 'The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy', *The Works of John Dryden*, A. Roper & V. A. Dearing (eds), vol. 13, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987, p. 234.

<sup>10</sup> Frontispiece to *The tragedies of the last age consider'd and examin'd by the practice of the ancients and by the common sense of all ages [...] by Thomas Rymer, Esq.* London, 1678. For copyright reasons, this image could not be reproduced. Please contact the author at the following email: [syba@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:syba@fas.harvard.edu) to request a copy of the image.

<sup>11</sup> T Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, London, 1693, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> In fact it was reproduced in the early nineteenth-century, with its satiric force heightened. In the nineteenth-century version, Rymer is grimacing. This is the period when Macaulay would call Rymer 'the worst critic who ever lived.'

<sup>13</sup> Mr Spectator famously described his mandate as follows: to bring "Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-Houses." J Addison, *Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator*, Penguin Classics, London, 1988, p. 210.

<sup>14</sup> Frontispiece to *The Spectator*, London, 1788. For copyright reasons, this image could not be reproduced. Please contact the author at the following email: [syba@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:syba@fas.harvard.edu) to request a copy of the image.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 206, 207.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>17</sup> J Addison et.al., *The Spectator*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1965, vol. 3, p. 387.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Klein has documented this shift in *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

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## The Last Epic Storyteller and Fictional Rewriting in the People's Republic of China

*Kenny K. K. Ng*

### **Abstract**

My paper deals with the multiple roles of Li Jieren born in 1891 and died in 1962 as a novelist, public servant, and cultural elite in Sichuan-Chengdu during the intense political turmoil in 1950s Communist China. It explores the dilemma in the author's literary and political life when both the writer and his historical works were under political stress. Li wrote his massive fictional trilogy to serve as testimonies to the monumental historical transformations of native Sichuan societies China's Republican Revolution in 1911. Under political changes in 1950s Communist China, Li had to drastically rewrite his trilogy. I seek to draw a broader picture of Li's private and public lives to examine the author's tactics of alignment with the changing institutions and frustrated attempts in maintaining creative security in the process of rewriting. How did Li's public persona (as Chengdu's Vice-Mayor) intervene into his creative horizons in fiction writing when he devoted himself to administering his beloved city and inscribing cultural memories of the native city in novel writing? The paper highlights the phenomenon of 'rewriting,' when the writer reworked on his own texts under changing historical circumstances, as an important 'cultural practice' in the early PRC period.

**Key Words:** Li Jieren, historical fiction, revolutionary fiction, epic, *roman fleuve*.

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Much of the intellectual history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has documented intellectuals' anguish and oppression under Maoism.<sup>1</sup> What I am going to present is the untold story of Li Jieren born in 1891 and died in 1962, who weathered the political storms in the locality of his Chengdu hometown in the late 1950s. His literary career underwent toil and tribulation in rewriting his massive fictional trilogy on the Republican revolution in 1911. My study aims to probe the interdependence of a writer's biographical life and creative oeuvres, and look into the predicament of a historical novelist enmeshed in the human and political interrelationships in the concrete historical world. This essay studies the conflicting intellectual identities of a socially - and politically-engaged writer, the cultural politics of rewriting and re-figuring history in the service of nationhood, and the

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cognitive and artistic imperatives of the act of historical-cum-fictional writing that could enhance the writer to speak against the odds of the time.

Li played multiple and important roles as a writer, public official, and local cultural elite in post-1949 Chengdu society, and his public and political activities were intertwined with his creative fiction rewriting. From July 1950 to December 1962 he was holding leading official position as Chengdu's Vice-Mayor in charge of culture, education, and urban building. The double commitments of being a government official or spokesman and an engage writer constituted Li's double life, an 'old-fashioned' intellectual who was anxious to reorient himself to the 'New Society.' A liberal intellectual and famous local elite with widespread social networks and influence in the Sichuan-Chengdu communities, Li (who remained a non-CCP member) was persuaded by the CCP to take up the position of Vice-Mayor. In the early 1950s he committed himself to practical municipal affairs, participating in rebuilding the city of Chengdu. A significant writer of 'native soil' (*xiangtu*) literature, Li would surely want to turn his literary energies devoted to his home city to concrete social transformation and urban renovation under the socialist scheme.

Since the anti-Rightist movement, unfortunately, Li ran into deep trouble by getting himself in the controversies on Liushahe's poems with reference to literary expressions and the control of cultural bureaucracy. It was after the political event that one finds the writer withdrawn from public life and recommitting himself to rewriting the third massive novel, *The Great Wave*, which he could not finish until his death in 1962. On June 1, 1957, a journalist of Chengdu Daily came to interview Li at his residence, and asked for his view on Liushahe's 'Pieces on Plants.' Li pointed out the poet's 'singing of objects' (*yong wu*) was nothing short of Chinese poetic practice, and Liushahe's poems should be put in such a tradition. Saying that Liushahe's poetic work was still immature, Li commented that the young generation of poets was talented but lacking social experience and artistic training. One should nurture and protect the young talents, but not pass a harsh judgment on them. Yet Li cautioned the young writers that they must consider seriously the social 'effect' of their writing once it was published.

In the interview, Li was opposed to any indictments of Liushahe that seemed to exaggerate the social impact of his poems. He was bold to say that the political campaigns against such a minor literary piece by a young writer verged on 'making too much fuss over trifle' (*xiaoti dazuo*). Li situated the poems within the longstanding tradition of political commentary of Chinese poetry, and citing in particular the famous first song *Guan ju* in the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*). As is well known, the exegetical tradition has invested the first classical poem with moralizing and politicising meanings in response to the social and political realms. Li's poetic remark can be seen as playing a risky double-entendre, meaning that, one should grant autonomy to creative

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expressions and do away with crude allegorisation to instruct literary activity; and more importantly, he might want to make oblique critique of the cultural bureaucrats who set up the political turmoil by imbuing the poetic utterance with ideological meaning.

Li would not know that the rectification campaign had rather fuelled his discontent on party bureaucracy and the stringent control on literary expressions. To be detached from the hullabaloo as much as he attempted, he was dragged into the event unawares as an involuntary but important participant. In a speech in a Party meeting, as reported in *Sichuan Daily* on June 4, 1957, Li called on the members to end the current 'violent' (*cubao*) attacks on Liushahe, and instead to aim at the growing bureaucratisation problem of the literary institution. The outspoken remarks he delivered in the next official meeting really got him into hot water. On August 29, Li thus had to make a speech of self-criticism before top party officials in the People's Congress meeting in Chengdu. Li obliquely referred to the unpleasant situation in which he was just one step away from falling into the camp of 'rightists.' In the speech reported in *Chengdu Daily* on August 30, 1957, he criticized himself as an intellectual from the 'old society,' bearing the mentalities of capitalist and bourgeois ideology, Confucian thought, and eighteenth-century European liberalism. He found fault in his deep-seated arrogance and social detachment from the rapidly changing 'new society,' which stemmed from nothing but the 'inferiority complex' of an old-style intellectual and the unconventionality and indifference of a pompous 'scholar' (*mingshi*) who stood aloof from the 'progressive' society. Li was attributing his acrimonious relationships with the cultural cadres and dissatisfaction with authoritarian party literary policy to the 'backwardness' of his feelings and thought of a declining-class intellectual. He wished he could have thrown away the knapsack of old mentalities, but he confessed that the invisible old bag still weighted upon him. In the coming year, Li would continue to vilify his former liberal views and bourgeois background in the press until the spring of 1958.

The oppressive nitty-gritty of literary politics lays the ground for us to look into Li's literary creativity, in particular the writer's endeavours to rework on the trilogy of the Republican revolution. Li embarked on the rewrite against the changing and uncertain political circumstances from the early phase of cultural liberalizations to vehement ideological restrictions on literature. Why had the writer to take on the daunting task of rewriting the revolutionary fiction? Mainland scholars have claimed that the writer was pressured to reformulate the narratives to conform to the Marxist-Leninist teleology and the tenets of class struggle and revolutionary rhetoric. Had the author painfully undergone his 'intellectual conversion' to remodel his work in alliance with Party doctrines? Or, in view of an anti-Communist perspective, writers like Li had been 'deluded' by Communist promises and

yet they 'did not awaken from their dogmatic slumber'<sup>2</sup> after going through the trial of the political campaigns? Was he a frustrated writer, defeated by a bitter sense of remorse, and so had to resort to the new creative venture to upgrade his status quo in the eyes of the Party? These views would only emphasize the overpowering state apparatus exerting ideological control over the creative mind, or strip the will and self-assertion of writers, rendering them as the 'cog and screw' of the revolutionary machinery steered by the Party.<sup>3</sup> No question writers in this context were not autonomous agents capable of writing out the paradoxes of textuality. Nor should we regard them as passive receivers to reproduce the codes of national building and history making sanctioned by communist theoreticians. It is only by fleshing out the precarious relationship between literature and politics, writing and action, can we ponder the representational crisis in historical fiction as Li's case has powerfully demonstrated.

By considering politics and the predicament of authorship within the realm of novelistic representation, I hope to stress the extraordinary commitment of the author to writing with a political hegemony in mind. It is therefore productive to turn away from ideological reductionism to look into the formal questions concerning the expressive capacities and constraints of the historical novel in changing political contexts. I wish to point out Li's continual fascination with a format of 'epical' narration in the fashion of the *roman-fleuve* (literally, the grand 'river-novel'), a loosely-defined genre featuring sprawling, slow narratives, wayward plots, and a sweeping canvas against which the development of a society in transitional crisis are chronicled, and a gallery of ordinary, fictive characters portrayed alongside real and historical figures. Earlier in 1937, Guo Moruo commented on the early trilogy:

The scope of the work is surprisingly monumental, and the flavour of different periods and their relationship to one another, of local customs, the social life of people of different social strata, their psychology and language is presented in a thoughtful and natural way.<sup>4</sup>

In his 1930s correspondences to his editor friend, the writer had already expressed his goal to model after the panoramic novels of the French masters Balzac, Zola, or Dumas. He intended his novels to be composed and read individually or in series. His plan sounded much more ambitious than he had achieved. He would commit himself to writing multi-volume novels in the same vein to document Chengdu's 'changes in social life and institutions, as well as the evolution of social mentalities' from the late nineteenth century up to the present time in which he lived (that is, the author's life span). Toward the end of his life, the writer indicated similar aspirations to compose



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historical novels in expansive and ever-going sequence (while eliminating the bourgeois French elements in his discourse).

It is also noted that Li's role model in this period changed from the French masters to the Soviet author, Mikhail Sholokhov. Sholokhov's lengthy epic *And Quiet Flows the Don* (published in four parts between 1928 and 1940, and later would earn the author the Nobel Prize in 1965) was about the civil war in the Don Cossack region. The Soviet historical novels are said to be under the influence of Tolstoy.<sup>5</sup> Li must have found himself sharing similar temperaments and experiences with the Soviet writer as a regional writer, a partisan intellectual, and an author ignoring the demands of the ideologues, and dreaming of writing a monumental narrative ever since his youth. *The Quiet Don* has been praised as a work that 'present(s) a wider river of (life) as it flows, and it's up to the reader to draw his own influences about the complexities of human existence.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1959 the eminent leftist writer Zhang Tianyi, allegedly representing the Writers' Association, talked to Li about the 'deficiencies' of the revision of *The Great Wave*. In a roundabout way, Zhang pointed out the novel's indulgence in detailed descriptions of social mores and native customs, and its obliteration of class distinctions and the lack of concrete analyses of the social characters in the course of the revolutionary. In other words, the main characters in the renewed narrative still failed to conform to the standard leftist stereotypes of intellectuals, the ruling class, and working people. The denigration of Li's fiction for an overabundance of detail or an excessive number of secondary characters, no doubt, overlooked the epistemological implications of the narrative by setting ordinary characters in a naturalistic, prosaic world. When the rewrite of *The Great Wave* came out in the late 1950s, critics and reviewers contended that the novel failed to satisfy their usual reading practice or experience. Innumerable incidents, characters, and details in the novel's complex scheme simply stunned the readers. The scheme of panoramic fiction with multiple personages and interlaced plots inevitably digressed from the state-sanctioned format of Communist novels, which underscored the centrality of larger-than-life characters and heroic plots, and the aesthetic norms of prevalent Communist fiction.

Besides the aesthetic-ideological conflicts in narrative formats, Li's endeavours run into the formal dilemma of the historical novel, that is, the troubled relationships between truth and fiction. How should history be presented faithfully as well as imaginatively and artistically in fiction so as to include innumerable incidents, contingencies, and chance occurrences that are largely left out of official historical accounts? As early as in 1937, shortly after he completed the trilogy in one go, Li expressed his intention to rewrite the whole series. *The Great Wave*, in particular, was not yet completed and 'full of flaws.' It was the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War that had

impeded his plan of revising and expanding the novels. The main reason, one can speculate, is the writer's incessant drive to uncover historical 'truths.' As a novelist, Li would surely recognize the heterogeneity of historical novels, setting one foot in fact and the other in fiction. In revising *The Great Wave*, Li was drawn to meticulous research and erudite learning of Chengdu's local history (to the extent that his materials would be used by historians). For him, the writing of the historical genre humanizes as well as authenticates history itself. His novels are invested with descriptive passages documenting the actualities of Chengdu life in a near reportage tone. The historical novelist functions not only to preserve local memories, but also to generate dialogue with the community to shed light on the past. Li's longing for completed factuality in conjunction with fictional narrativity may mean a world of difference in a social-political context in which official history has been actively shaped by the ideological imaginary. In practice, the socialist realist writers of the PRC took 'reality' to mean success stories of the revolution or the economic and social engineering of the 1950s. On the other hand, by creating unresolved tensions between fiction and the reader's knowledge of the past, Li's ongoing and growing narratives illuminate the fundamental problematic of the historical novel (and elude the ideological critical lens) as what Alessandro Manzoni has pondered in *On the Historical Novel* (1850), in which the popular Italian novelist and critic questioned the form as a hybrid genre. Manzoni heightens the novel's limitations in reconciling *histoire* and *discours*, its empirical and fictional tendencies. Nonetheless, Li's concern with historical writing had strong ethical and philosophical dimensions; namely, how the novel strives to communicate truthfully and imaginatively in order to effect social, perhaps even political, change.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, DW Fokkema, *Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence, 1956-1960*, Mouton, The Netherlands, 1965; M Goldman, et. al. (eds), *China's Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1987; K Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> CT Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999, p. 348.

<sup>3</sup> RG Wagner, 'The Cog and the Scout: Functional Concepts of Literature in Socialist Political Culture: the Chinese Debate in the Mid-Fifties', in *Essays in Modern Chinese Literature and Literary Criticism: Papers of the Berlin Conference 1978*, W. Kubin & R.G. Wagner (eds), Studienverlag Brockmeyer, Bochum, 1982, p. 336.

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<sup>4</sup> M Guo, 'Zhongguo Zuo-la zhi daiwan (In anticipation of China's Zola)'. *Zhongguo wenyi*, vol. 1 (2), June 1937.

<sup>5</sup> M Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977, pp. 188-197.

<sup>6</sup> H Ermolaev, *Mikhail Sholokhov and His Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, p. 90.

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## **Imagining the Unimaginable: The Importance of Storytelling for J.M. Coetzee's Intellectual Practice**

*Claire Heaney*

### **Abstract**

Despite Coetzee's well-documented reluctance to adopt the role of interpreter of his own work and his determined eschewal of the role of public intellectual, his oeuvre nonetheless represents a sustained meditation on the role of the intellectual in contemporary society. In nearly all of his novels Coetzee takes as central protagonist a scholar, often retired or at the fringes of mainstream academia. In addition, Coetzee himself has worked for over four decades as an academic and has published extensively in the fields of linguistics and literary and cultural criticism. My paper traces Coetzee's simultaneous invocation and rejection of the role of public intellectual in both his critical and his fictional works, arguing that Coetzee's demonstrable discomfort with the role of the public intellectual does not signify a rejection of the intellectual *per se*, but instead suggests a need to modify our conception of the intellectual in order to allow for a recognition of the limits of rational argument. This recognition would in turn create the potential to rehabilitate the role of the artist and the storyteller, not as a rebuke to the public intellectual but rather as an attempt to reconfigure what constitutes knowledge in the public sphere.

**Key Words:** Intellectuals, J. M. Coetzee, knowledge, storytelling, narrative, Practical Wisdom, Martha Nussbaum, academia, reason, emotion.

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In a 1992 interview with David Attwell, J. M. Coetzee reflects upon Milan Kundera's Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech of 1985, which took the form of a tribute to Cervantes:<sup>1</sup>

Reading that address, I believe I knew as well as anyone else what it meant that a Czech should choose to speak about Cervantes in Jerusalem in 1985, namely, a certain defiance of the role imposed on him by history (if you look at it one way) or by fashion (if you look at it in another). (A decade earlier Kundera had remarked, even more provocatively: 'Today, when politics have become a religion, I see the novel as one of the last forms of atheism.').

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There is part of me too that longs to be an atheist *à la* Kundera. I too would like to be able to go to Jerusalem and talk about Cervantes. Not because I see Kundera or indeed Cervantes as a socially irresponsible person. On the contrary, I would like to be able to say that proof of their deep social and historical responsibility lies in the penetration with which, in their different ways and to their different degrees, they reflect on the crisis of fiction, of fictionalising, in their respective ages. But [...] I *can't* do what Kundera does (or, to be fair to him, what he says he is doing). Cowardice on my part? Perhaps. History may be, as you call it, a process for representation, but to me it feels more like a *force* for representation, and in that sense, yes, it is unrepresentable.<sup>2</sup>

What is interesting about this passage is the way that it reveals Coetzee's ambivalence about his own role as public intellectual. It reveals Coetzee's yearning to be able to speak freely, to frustrate the critical reflex that transforms every word written by South African writers (or uttered by Czech intellectuals) into a commentary on the state of the nation. But at the same time, Coetzee's reluctance to follow Kundera's example amounts to an expression of political commitment, a recognition that the writer *is* inevitably constrained, and rightly so, by the weight of history.

In South Africa, Coetzee explained, the brute reality of history impedes the play of free expression, undermining any straightforward humanistic faith in writing. History 'short-circuits' the imagination, drawing the writer forcibly back to the real in a movement which limits creative expression: '*Therefore,*' he concludes, 'the task becomes imagining this unimaginable, imagining a form of address that permits the play of *writing* to start taking place.'<sup>3</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that in recent years Coetzee has made some headway in his quest to discover such a form of address. From the mid-nineties onwards, Coetzee has developed a specifically fictional mode of public speaking.<sup>4</sup> I want to begin by tracing the reasons (pragmatic, philosophical, and ethical) that inform Coetzee's attempt to refigure the dominant terms of intellectual discourse; before going on to look at the question from a reverse angle, by asking to what extent Coetzee's fiction is itself motivated and constrained by intellectualism. My thesis suggests that Coetzee's approach is motivated less by a straightforward rejection of intellectualism than by a desire to positively refigure our understandings of the intellectual in a way that is more responsive to the specifically literary concerns of writers, and which would allow for emotions and the imagination to be recognized as legitimate sources of public knowledge.

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What does it mean to be a writer who is induced to speak in the public domain? Stefan Collini identifies a basic structural tension underlying the concept of the public intellectual:

[E]ach individual intellectual is inevitably caught in some version of the following tension: the source of the initial standing or claim to attention will always include distinction in at least one relatively specialized activity, but effective speaking out will always entail going beyond this attested level of achievement or expertise. In other words, the intellectual must, by definition, build out from a relatively secure basis in one specialized activity and simultaneously cultivate the necessarily more contestable perspective of a 'non-specialist.'<sup>5</sup>

The tension that Collini identifies is compounded in Coetzee's case by his status as a South African writer, a condition which means that not only is Coetzee put under pressure to express himself in a medium that is not his preferred one (that is, he is induced to speak, rather than to write), but he is further compelled to speak on issues that are presumed to be of importance to South African writers - namely, history and politics. Coetzee's resistance to this compulsion goes back at least as far as 1987, when, in a speech to the *Weekly Mail* Book Week, the writer complained: 'I do not even speak my own language [but a] fragile metalanguage with very little body, one that is liable, at any moment, to find itself flattened and translated back and down into the discourse of politics, a sub-discourse of the discourse of history.'<sup>6</sup> Coetzee's defence in this speech of storytelling as 'another, an other mode of thinking' is intended not as a denial of historical or political responsibility, but instead reveals a keen sensitivity to matters of form, to the ways in which the shape of a narrative necessarily determines its content. His defense of storytelling represents a plea for complexity in public discourse, a preference for dialogic engagement over abstract modes of thought, and a recognition of the limits of rational argument.

This last feature of Coetzee's thought represents a significant departure from dominant constructions of the intellectual. The OED fails to record the diversity of current usage, defining the intellectual as simply 'An intellectual being; a person possessing or supposed to possess superior powers of intellect.'<sup>7</sup> A more nuanced definition can be found in Merriam-Webster, who characterize the intellectual as '*developed or chiefly guided by the intellect rather than by emotion or experience.*'<sup>8</sup> This definition reveals the close affinity that exists between popular conceptions of intellectualism and rationality. Coetzee, however, has reservations about the social privileging of

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rational modes of thought, perceiving in this tendency a latent sublimation of the emotional and imaginative dimensions of cognition.

In *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee writes: [B]oth reason and seven decades of life experience tell me that reason is neither the being of the universe nor the being of God. On the contrary, reason looks to me suspiciously like the being of human thought; worse than that, like the being of one tendency in human thought. Reason is the being of a certain spectrum of human thinking. And if this is so, if that is what I believe, then why should I bow to reason this afternoon and content myself with embroidering on the discourse of the old philosophers?<sup>9</sup>

Costello's careful characterization of reason as 'the being of one tendency of human thought' does not represent an outright rejection of rational discourse. In fact, she accepts reason as a 'vast tautology:' 'If there was a position from which reason could attack and dethrone itself, reason would already have occupied that position; otherwise it would not be total.'<sup>10</sup> The literary mode of her speech nevertheless allows Costello to frame her argument using a form of address which, however, is not as tightly bound by the standards of abstract reason as traditional critical or analytical discourse. Rather than objecting to reason *per se*, Coetzee here appears to caution against a particular brand of rationality which has become - in our culture at least - reified as reason in general. By contrast, literature embodies Costello's concept of the sympathetic imagination, relying for its meaning upon the reader's participation in imaginatively inhabiting the being of others, and, at its best, satisfying Costello's desire for a form of discourse which is 'cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical, that will bring enlightenment rather than seeking to divide us into the righteous and the sinners.'<sup>11</sup>

By stressing the ways in which literature works by engaging the emotional faculties, Coetzee can be seen to participate in a wider critical movement which seeks to challenge dualistic accounts of emotion and reason and instead assert the cognitive value of emotions.<sup>12</sup> Martha Nussbaum has led the way in proposing a specifically literary model of ethical engagement that is based upon the intelligence of emotional perception and literature's formal sophistication in comparison with traditional philosophical or analytical discourse.<sup>13</sup> Nussbaum endorses an approach to reading and ethics that views novels as examples of 'practical wisdom;' or imaginative responses to the fundamental ethical question of how one should live. This is what Nussbaum terms 'reading for life' - the practice of looking to works of literature for models of how to live, bringing our own concerns and values to the search for ethical meaning within texts.



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In *Love's Knowledge* (1990), Nussbaum argues that 'certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist.'<sup>14</sup> Her words echo Coetzee's own understanding of truth as a *process* that is undertaken in the effort of writing, rather than a destination that can be known outside of that process. In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee explains his (in)famous reticence in interviews by drawing attention to two converging traditions that underlie the conventions of the journalistic interview. The first of these conventions is legalistic, an interrogation performed by the interviewer upon the interviewee. The second tradition is that of the (religious and psychoanalytic) confession, the idea that 'in the transports of unrehearsed speech, the subject utters truths unknown to his waking self. The journalist takes the place of the priest or *iatros*, drawing out this truth-speech.'<sup>15</sup> Coetzee's objection to this state of affairs is that 'To me, on the other hand, truth is related to silence, to reflection, to the practice of *writing*. Speech is not a fount of truth but a pale and provisional version of writing.'<sup>16</sup>

A further source of Coetzee's unease with his role as public intellectual lies in his awareness of the social privilege that such status represents.<sup>17</sup> Collini defines the intellectual as someone who possesses 'cultural authority,' a value which is constructed across four dimensions. An intellectual must a) have attained a level of achievement in creative or intellectual activity, b) have access to media or other means whereby a wider public may be reached, c) talk about general things that engage those publics and d) have a reputation for saying interesting things about those topics.<sup>18</sup> Although, according to this definition, Coetzee is undoubtedly an intellectual, he remains deeply ambivalent about both what the role implies, and his suitability for it. In *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) Coetzee writes:

During his later years, Tolstoy was treated not only as a great author but as an authority on life, a wise man, a sage. His contemporary Walt Whitman endured a similar fate. But neither had much wisdom to offer: wisdom was not what they dealt in. They were poets above all; otherwise they were ordinary men with ordinary, fallible opinions. The disciples who swarmed to them in quest of enlightenment look sadly foolish in retrospect. What the great authors are masters of is authority. What is the source of authority, or of what the formalists call the authority-effect? If authority could be achieved simply by tricks of rhetoric, then Plato was surely justified in expelling the poets from his ideal republic. But what if authority can be attained only by opening the poet-self to some higher force, by ceasing to be oneself and beginning to speak vatically?<sup>19</sup>

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For Coetzee, paradoxically, the basis of writerly authority lies in how successfully the writer is capable of losing herself in the writing, in how far she is prepared to allow voices other than her own to speak through the work. This is the dialogic method exemplified by Dostoyevsky, a devout Christian who nevertheless constructed some of the most damning critiques of Christianity ever recorded. For Coetzee, 'it is some measure of a writer's seriousness whether he does evoke/invoke these counter voices in himself, that is, step down from the position of what Lacan calls 'the subject supposed to know.'<sup>20</sup> Only by thus relinquishing his own voice can the writer hope to achieve a measure of authority. But mainstream intellectual discourse works in precisely the opposite direction, by privileging the voice of the intellectual as authoritative. Coetzee's reluctance to adopt the authoritative voice of 'the subject supposed to know' can thus be seen as an ethical acknowledgement of his own fallibility as a human thinker.

Given his reservations about his role as public intellectual, the reader might be forgiven for underestimating the extent to which questions of intellectualism remain at the heart of Coetzee's literary project. Conversely, as his public performances have become more overtly fictional, Coetzee's fiction has increasingly focused on the question of what it means to be an intellectual. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee explicitly dramatizes the tensions that exist between different kinds of discourse that are available to writers. The work is divided horizontally into three sections which run concurrently throughout the novel. Along the top of each page are the 'Strong Opinions' of Señor C, an aging South African writer who shares Coetzee's initials and, like him, has recently emigrated to Australia. These strong opinions take the form of 31 short essays on a range of topics including democracy, terrorism and paedophilia. Beneath these run the story of how they came to be written, a narrative following Señor C's relationships with Anya, an attractive young neighbour whom he enlists as his typist, and her fiancée Alan. This narrative section punctures the pomposity of the strong opinions, revealing the omnipotent author-god of the essays to be a lascivious, lonely old man. As the book progresses, the voices of Anya and Alan begin to interrupt this narrative, contesting the authority of the famous writer. The narrative serves too to uncover the mechanics of artistic production, foregrounding the role that Anya, as typist, plays in the construction of the strong opinions.

Halfway through the book Señor C's strong opinions give way to a series of softer meditations, contained in a 'Second Diary.' These more personal essays strike a delicate balance between the other two narrative strands, avoiding the polemic tone of the strong opinions by retaining an element of the personal, but also rising above the unforgiving bathos of the narrative depictions of Señor C. The Diary exists as a kind of compromise between the two poles of intellectual, academic criticism (represented by the

strong opinions) and a purely private fictionalising in which lofty public personas are exposed as base and self-serving. By contrast, the diary represents a negotiated form of discourse, one that is outward-looking in its public concerns, yet remains close enough to private speech that it might retain a degree of humility about the probable limitations of its own authorial perspective.

Coetzee's preference for a specifically literary form of intellectual engagement can thus be seen to stem from a) a pragmatic reluctance to engage in non-specialized cultural activity; b) a philosophical objection to instrumental rationality; c) a preference for writing over speech as a more truthful form of discourse; and d) ethical concerns about the relationship between cultural authority and socio-economic privilege. Coetzee's use of narrative is both an expression and mitigation of his scepticism about the public intellectual. Telling stories allows Coetzee to explore the limitations of his own perspective without becoming paralysed, to respond to his own particular conception of truth without claiming an unwarrantable authority, and, crucially, to speak in a way that allows for the perspectives of others to also be heard.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> M Kundera, 'Jerusalem Address: The Novel and Europe' in *The Art of the Novel*, Grove Press, New York, 2000, pp. 157-165.

<sup>2</sup> JM Coetzee & D Attwell, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, Harvard University Press, London, 1992, pp. 66-67.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> In 1997, invited to talk on the subject of animal rights at the prestigious Tanner lectures at Princeton University, Coetzee instead delivered a short story (later published as *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and subsequently forming part of the novel *Elizabeth Costello* in 2003) about an Australian novelist named Elizabeth Costello, who herself delivers a lecture on literary realism that is in turn drawn from an earlier essay of Coetzee's. Costello has cropped up subsequently in both Coetzee's public addresses as well as in his novels, and she appears to function as a device which allows Coetzee to explore issues that are of importance to him (animal rights, vegetarianism, the writing life and the ethics of authorship) while simultaneously creating a distancing effect that complicates any straightforward identification between Costello's views and those of her author. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2003, eleven years after his interview with David Attwell, Coetzee gave his own literary prize acceptance speech, this time in recognition of his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in Stockholm. Once again, the speech that Coetzee gave on this occasion was not a speech at all but rather a short story entitled

'He and his Man', an elliptical tale narrated by Daniel Defoe's eighteenth century hero Robinson Crusoe. See J M Coetzee, 'What Is Realism?'. *Salmagundi*, vol. 114 (15), 1997, pp. 60-81; J M Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, Princeton UP, Princeton, 1999; J M Coetzee, *The Nobel Lecture in Literature*, 2003, Penguin, London, 2004; J M Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, Vintage, London, 2004; and J M Coetzee, *Slow Man*, Vintage, London, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> S Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, OUP, Oxford, 2006, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> J M Coetzee, 'The Novel Today', *Upstream*, Summer 1988, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, viewed on 28 March 2010,

<[dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50118606?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=intellectual&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50118606?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=intellectual&first=1&max_to_show=10)>.

<sup>8</sup> Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, Springfield, MA, viewed on 30 March 2010, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual).

<sup>9</sup> J M Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Noel Carroll and Murray Smith are among the writers who have sought to identify the ways in which narrative fictions work by engaging the emotional responses of audiences. Elsewhere, Neokantian philosopher Richard Eldridge has attempted to reconcile the tension between Kantian ethics and cognitive theories of the emotions by proposing a 'Hegelianized Kantianism' that views literary and philosophical engagement as a means of developing a form of self-understanding that is based upon the 'lived acknowledgement' of our contradictory status as both individual, autonomous agents, and embedded social beings. See N Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*, CUP, Cambridge, 2001; M Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995; and R Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood: Philosophy, Literature, Criticism, and Self-Understanding*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> See M Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, OUP, Oxford, 1990; M Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995; M Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions*, CUP, Cambridge, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, op. cit., p. 5. I am aware (as indeed is Nussbaum) that there is a residual irony in staging a defence of literature and a critique of analytic discourse that nonetheless takes the form of the latter. In defence of this approach, I need only state, along with Nussbaum, that 'the acceptance of an Aristotelian conception should lead to the recognition that the humanities are the core of our public culture, and that other techniques of

reasoning are tools whose place is to assist them in their task of revealing and enacting a full and rich sense of human life and its public requirements.' Ibid., p.104.

<sup>15</sup> J M Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, op. cit., p.65.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>17</sup> In an interview with David Barsamian, Noam Chomsky writes: 'People are called intellectuals because they're privileged. It's not because they're smart or they know a lot. There are plenty of people who know more and are smarter but aren't intellectuals because they don't have the privilege.' N Chomsky, *What We Say Goes*, Penguin, London, 2007, p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> Collini, *Absent Minds*, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> J M Coetzee, *Diary of A Bad Year*, Vintage, London, 2007, p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> J M Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, op. cit., p. 65.

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## Intellectual in the Field of Contemporary Art

*Oleksandra Nenko*

### Abstract

The following article deals with the discursive order of the contemporary art which is constituted by the self-representations of intellectuals engaged into it. The number of positions, tension of choice between roles, forms of intellectual practice as justified by the intellectuals themselves in the space of the specialized art magazine are presented.

**Key Words:** Intellectual self-representation, discourse, contemporary art, intellectual position, intellectual practice.

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History of art is not a number of artists and their biographies, but a system of social networks which establishes a discourse order of art. The history of art is written by intellectuals - those in power and ability to make salient, to silence, to compare and to combine, in other words, to establish meanings. The discourses they produce or use for *justification* and *affirmation* depend on 'material cells' through which intellectuals build in art field, which we regard as positions in complex network of art creation and/or production, distribution and consumption. This network includes material and nonmaterial links - artists, artworks, galleries and museums, auctions, public, politicians, sellers, consumers, etc, with an outstanding figure of the one who *speaks* of art, or represents it to the society as a narrative.

In the discourses on art the *self-representations* of intellectuals reflect the distribution of power in the art field; form an image of art space as environment of positions and ties. We would like to give one historical example to support such view. During Soviet Union there was no *individual* representation in art, the highlighted experience of the 'communal body' led to absence of any representation. The grand narrative of art in Soviet Union was without doubt Marxism which constituted a great ideological project for the 'new' society. From the late 70th to the 90th there emerged a fruitful underground art movement - 'conceptual art' and its varieties - which meant to be a powerful alternative to the ideological social realism.<sup>1</sup> The underground representation found its ideological place and constituted its opposition to the Big Brother through *other* theories (most obvious - post-structuralism, which afforded tool for deconstruction). After the collapse of the Soviet Union and opening of its borders from ideological to economic ones the so-called 'contemporary' art began to flow in. The leading figures of the 'conceptual art' did not share the principles of 'contemporary art' because

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it was constituted in the logics of market and society of consumption. Nowadays one of the meaningful factors shaping art discursive order in post-Soviet countries is the argument between conceptualists (as an autochthonic, highly reflexive, and innovative in its time project) and contemporaries (who emerged as a Western project, are implicitly mostly commercial and represent western topics). One of the current images of an intellectual is one who represents the tradition of the Soviet underground art, is aware of his missionary role in developing art field and is eager to create complex, interdisciplinary, educative projects, i.e., 'Institute for Development of a Man' organized by Russian artist Sergey Bugayev-Afrika.

To gain a view on the intellectual in the field of contemporary art we turn to recent literature on art, but specifically to some of the articles in an influential and quite popular art magazine 'Moscow Art Magazine,' which is being published in Moscow since 1993 and is edited by well-known Russian art critics and curators (the chief editor is V. Misiano).<sup>2</sup> Though the authors of the articles are related to the art field in various ways, we can regard their reflexive practice of writing and speaking on art as form of intellectual practice, in which they in a certain way make self-representations of their positions, tensions of the roles they take and forms of their intellectual practice in the art field.

### 1. Variety of Intellectuals' Positions

The first position we mark out is an intellectual as an *art critic*, who transcribes arts into the discourse: from language of ideological legitimacy to establishing of new meanings. One of the authors famous art critic B. Groys writes that the main goal and practice of an art critic is to provide new social hypothesis and it is not a matter of fact what works of art he uses for that.<sup>3</sup> But together with this art critic plays a trick with an artist: even if the critics is negative, it can't be regarded as totally incorrect. While an artist is oriented on nude plasticity in his work, on expressing his personal emotional experience, the intellectual critic is able to give discursive interpretation of the work, and also to posit an artist against a system of aesthetic, social, even ideological values. Some of the authors (especially curators) are very sensitive of this: they argue that an art critic should stay back and yield the palm of interpretation to the artist and his curator, who carry out the art event. Others insist that the art critic should be a guide for the artist but the contemporary conditions of art production leave him only reacting on the events that have already occurred. Thus some authors claim that today the art critic loses his autonomy.

The second position is an intellectual as a *medium*, who engages into the field of mediated dialogue, transmits meanings about art into the public discourse. The mediating function of the intellectual is proposed by few authors. An intellectual has to start open discussions on the problems of art

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together with representatives of art and also civil society and power.<sup>4</sup> Thus they can achieve resonance and find perspectives of activity fruitful for all of them. In contemporary conditions in post-Soviet countries this trajectory is limited due to the lack of civil conscience, self-engaged public initiatives and platforms for free communication. The intellectuals themselves lack resources for this and are dependent on the offered possibilities to speak up, which are mainly politically committed. Authors also tend to explain this poor state of affairs by market ideology and system of establishment newly adopted in the Russian art field that make intellectual take a position in a system of art management between constructed public demand and ideology.<sup>5</sup>

The third position is an intellectual as a *curator* for the artists, conducting policy of representation, taking responsibility from an artist for forming art ideology. Curator's role is a big debate. Advocates of curating show it as a fashionable, progressive practice, a proved western scheme of making 'art business.' Curator ensures an artist with freedom to create. Other curators see their social function in helping the artists to overcome endless difficulties in mis-representing: avoid 'dead' curators who exhibit together art 'pieces' by different artists instead of presenting artist as an integral figure; curators-officials who deprive art of sense hanging up one label on strategically different artists to make the art typification 'easier.' The curator should choose a strategy of cooperating with artist-run initiatives and provide artists with reflection of their work. The third point of view on curating is enabling artists to define not 'what' to do, but 'what for' and 'for whom;' in other words curator helps the art work find its audience and does not usurp artists' glory, manipulate with artists' ideas and public conscience.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Tensions of Choice in Practicing Positions

The first tension to outline is a choice between building art critics into the language of acknowledged and somewhat show off concepts or interpreting arts in a weighed theoretical method. In chase after recognisability and sensation the fashionable theoretic terms are used by 'theoreticians' without even digging into the depth of the theories what leads to profaning of the intellectual's language. At the same time art intellectuals could form a meaningful transformative or even radical project alternative to market ideology by developing a well thought-out profound language.<sup>7</sup> Finding a weighed method for theoretising art or culture in whole faces intellectual biases. The so-called sociologisation of art thinking, spread of anti-aesthetical projects, claims of crisis of aesthetics (J. Rancierre) are connected with the major turning of art intellectuals to the comprehensive sociological projects of art and culture such as cultural studies (S. Hall), or art system (N. Luhmann) or art field (P. Bourdieu). This takes off the focus on art as *Weltanschauung* (M. Heidegger).<sup>8</sup> Moreover the intellectual's language is always late in comparison to the primary 'natural' language of

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art; it is the language of the second order, symbolic and reflexive. Besides lots of contemporary art critics write on the request of mass media and thus have no chance to make a new pass in art field, i.e. to 'invent' an artist.

The second tension to dwell upon is a choice to work with mass media or not what, from one side, can lead to venality, profanation of the art expertise, but, from another side, ensures resonance of the intellectual activity in public, making its passes a component of social experience of art. According to the rules of art field functioning the art production works effectively via interaction with other fields. Nowadays the maintenance of the media which creates communicative flows is a must for delivering art into the public sphere. Without taking share in public discourse the intellectual can't make an act that would be recognized as such. According to P. Bourdieu the 'institutional' capital in the art field (participation in exhibitions, competitions, jury) prevails over art capital as such (creation of art works).<sup>9</sup> Authors of the magazine underline the importance of publicity and communication within the art system to provide its autopoiesis and self-description, referring here to N. Luhmann and his work 'Art as a Social System.'<sup>10</sup> To make free intellectual actions an intellectual can't avoid a step of becoming significant in the art field - constitute the lobby communication nets between art managers. Only when having his institutional capital established, having integrated into existing or constituted his own communication nets can intellectual speak up in public with some new, profound, non-commercial ideas. Another point is that the help of the financial capital to the art institutions, such as galleries in conditions of post-Soviet countries with their lack of governmental funding, is also a realized necessity. In return capital groups demand dividends in sense of their public acknowledgement as meaningful art figures.

The third tension is ambivalence of curating practice. Curating can be fulfilled as reinterpreting of an artist's idea to make it sound in concrete social frames or only accompanying his idea saving its reticence. This is connected with the discrepancy of the curator's position, as we saw earlier, which takes place between his representational functions and the need to save 'the message' of the artist. The art work needs the help of the curator to be exhibited - seen and perceived. Today curators (and critics as well) form an infrastructure for cultural disposition of the capital in art field.<sup>11</sup> A curator, an interpreter has resources to create a ground to 'honour the icon.' But curating can't avoid the fact that it ruins artist's autonomy, his/her individual artistic message (i.e. via collective exhibitions).<sup>12</sup> To save the autonomy of the author while recognition depends on public taste and mass culture, curator should as if not curate at all ('zero-curating' in terms of V. Misiano).<sup>13</sup>

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### 3. Ways to Do Intellectual Practice

One of the ways that can be picked out is saving solitude as an individualized practice of observation and detached reflexivity. The way of solitude has its contradictions as a social practice and a process of cognition of an art work. Solitude as social practice is inclined by some of the authors towards the art critics that in their opinion should be separated from the art process. 'Externalising' the intellectual is necessary: the curator should be a first outside figure for the artist, the art critic - a second one to avoid doubling of the roles and shift of the accents.<sup>14</sup> In the process of cognition while according to T. W. Adorno radicalisation of one's 'non-identity inside the identity' is the prerogative of the critical thinking, Terry Eagleton claims quite the contrary - 'subject of the critical discourse can't avoid merging into its object, thus constituting the temporary identity between it and oneself.'<sup>15</sup>

The second way lies in forming '*Gemeinschaft*' of reflexive intellectuals, who keep social ties with the outer world, but run intellectual practices in a closed group. From the underground art past of Soviet Union intellectuals have experience of forming autonomous communities to withstand the mainstream. The numerous artistic groups which really possessed the spirit of conceptuality involved artists who were at the same time theoreticians of their own work. Together with the intellectuals they formed a close circle and formed a *Fremdsprache* that allowed them to say the things which couldn't be said in the ideologically correct language. For now D. Prigov metaphorically calls the places of such intimacy 'spaces of survival' and sees them as opposing to spaces of totalising capitalistic projects in contemporary art.<sup>16</sup>

The third way can be regarded as inserting of an individualized intellectual with his/her 'unique' stance (language, image etc.) in a comprehensive network of different actors of art production. The political dialogue or discussion is a mean for an intellectual today to be in the centre of the public attention. V. Misiano claims that attending a political discussion representatives of art receive a chance to seek and find new social political and anthropological perspectives. Through such discussion (which is not concretely defined by the author) art could involve in the cognitive industry and production not of bare objects but ideas, methodologies - 'non-material' products and thus compete with cognitive industry of power.<sup>17</sup> But in post-Soviet space such public discussion is impossible because of absence of its participants - the civil society. Art and its practitioners are not oriented on public discussion, but on manufacture of objects. Hence the tendency of declining intellectual - curator, critic - to the manager, administrator, fundraiser remains.

#### 4. End Points

One of the hot issues in the post-Soviet art field is the on-going discussion of the value as well as practical portrait of the art intellectual, which resides in the phenomena of autonomy, responsibility, critical thought and modes of affirmative practices. The intellectual is defined in a number of roles - critic, curator, mediator, which is in fact an open list. The intersection of such roles becomes evident in the description of intellectuals' practices, though sometimes the clear distinctions are articulated. Two currencies (that should be detailed, of course) can be defined in the intellectuals' discourses. (1) Traditional idealistic project of an intellectual who is critically rethinking existing reality and is occupied with an idea to establish a unified culture theory. But the discrepancies of independence of such critical thinking is evident. Also experts really try to speak of right and needed ways of doing things or playing roles, but with that blame conditions and resources as unsatisfactory; intellectuals acknowledge cultural capitalism and its market logic as the main enemy of art independence and at the same time state that post-Soviet art field is dependent on the Western patterns, i.e. orient post-Soviet contemporary art on the Western theories and topics. (2) Intellectuals are functionally regarding their positions and resources, their possibilities. Intellectual in material environment of offer and demand in contemporary art field is referred to as a mediator and manager between public and creator to ensure commercial effectiveness of art, conversation of money capital into symbolic capital; a referent of art expertise in the process of constituting consumers' aesthetical tastes.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For grounded analysis of Soviet underground art one can see works by V Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia, 1950s-2000s*, Cambridge, MA & London, 2009; В Тупицын, 'Другое' искусства. Беседы с художниками, критиками, философами: 1980-1995 гг., Москва, AdMarginem, 1997; B Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, London, Verso, 2009; B Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*, Hanser, München and Wien, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The magazine has a personal web-site, <http://www.xz.gif.ru>.

<sup>3</sup> B Groys, 'On Contemporary Position of an Art Commentator', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 41, 2001, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/41/groys/>.

<sup>4</sup> 'Curator between Culture Industry and Creative Class', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73/74, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/r-t/>.

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<sup>5</sup> D Golynko-Wolfson, 'On Biopolitical Censorship, Collapse of Communities and Practices of Affirmation', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 71/72, 2009, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/71-72/biopolit-censure/>.

<sup>6</sup> 'Curator between Culture Industry and Creative Class', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73/74, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/r-t/>.

<sup>7</sup> S Zizek, 'One Should Be a Pessimist Waiting for a Miracle', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 69, 2008, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/67-68/zizek-interview/>.

<sup>8</sup> K Bishop, 'Social Turn in Contemporary Art', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 58/59, 2005, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/58-59/povorot/>.

<sup>9</sup> See: P Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> A Zhilyaev, 'Notes on the Problem of Autocommunication in Contemporary Art', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73/74, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <<http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/zhilyaev/>>.

<sup>11</sup> I Budraytskis & A Galkina, 'Five Theses about Art and Capital' in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 71/72, 2009, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/71-72/five-theses/>.

<sup>12</sup> B Groys, 'Curator as an Iconoclast' in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/kurator-ikonoborec/>.

<sup>13</sup> 'Curator between Culture Industry and Creative Class', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73/74, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/r-t/>.

<sup>14</sup> 'Curator between Culture Industry and Creative Class', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73/74, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/r-t/>.

<sup>15</sup> T Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, London/New York, Verso, 1981, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> D Prigov, 'Spaces (of Survival and Utterance)' in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 58/59, 2005, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/58-59/prostranstva/>.

<sup>17</sup> 'Curator between Culture Industry and Creative Class', in *Moscow Art Magazine*, № 73/74, 2010, viewed on 20 May 2010, <http://www.xz.gif.ru/numbers/73-74/r-t/>.

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