
THE WHITE HANDS*

Academic social scientists and forms of popular knowledge production

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The Russian-Polish radical Jan Makhaisky was exiled to Siberia in the 1890s. Reading *Capital*, he concluded that the greatest future threat to the proletariat would come from the new class of educated, unpropertied intellectuals. He called them the class of "White Hands".

(Quoted by Adam Westoby in 'Conceptions of Communist States' ed D Held *et al States and Societies*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1983, p234)

*"Study is the patrimony of no one and the place of study where you carry out your work is the patrimony of no one - it belongs to all the people . . . and it must be extended to the people or the people will seize it"*¹.

Ché Guevara

Introduction : Mental versus Manual

The most dramatic feature of the labour market in late capitalism is the vast and widening gulf between intellectual and manual labour². It is therefore all the more surprising that there is no clear, generally accepted account of the division. Has it always existed? Is it completely dispensible? Above all, what are its mechanisms?

Kant articulated the bourgeois orthodoxy that the division was a transcendental necessity for the pursuit of truth and the evolution of natural science³. Gramsci's socialist assertion that all men are intellectuals but that only some have the function of being intellectuals makes a similar point⁴. Sohn-Rethel gives the split

an historical gloss by placing it at the moment of the establishment of generalised commodity exchange. In order for a commodity to be exchanged for money, says Sohn-Rethel, its exchange-value has to be effectively abstracted from its use-value. The division between the two values and the process of abstraction that mediates them depends upon a distinction between abstract (or theoretical) knowledge and practical outcomes. The intellectual-manual division was the result.⁵

The accounts of Kant, Gramsci and Sohn-Rethel persuade us that some functional division of labour between intellectual and manual work is probably both necessary and inevitable. But this does not account for the extreme antagonistic cleavage we see in late capitalist society, what Sohn-Rethel with obvious distaste calls the "fetishism of intellectual labour"⁶. How did *this* come about?

For Braverman and the labour-process theorists, the intellectual division was a casualty of the accumulation requirements of an expanding capitalist economy. At a certain point, argues this account, the sheer scale of efficient production dictates that the work process be re-ordered. This capital accomplishes by 'sucking' conception (or knowledge control) out of many forms of labour and depositing it in a new form — that of management. As a consequence, many forms of labour, including white collar work, become impoverished, structurally precluding the fulfilment obtained in pre-division craft work⁷.

Although this "immiseration thesis"⁸ undoubtedly advances our understanding, it tends to suggest that the division is largely an economic phenomenon, that it was structurally imposed by capital (or by naughty capitalists) and that it was somehow unfair or unnecessary. Braverman's concern with productive labour makes him miss the market dynamic between productive and unproductive labour groups. He sees primarily the dynamic between productive labour and capital. Unproductive labour is for him simply a byproduct of that dynamic. Since a particular kind of unproductive labour — 'educated' or intellectual labour — is the subject of this paper, we need a perspective that focuses on this kind of labour more closely. Such a focus is provided by Marx's concept of the socialisation of unproductive labour.⁹ Looking at the problem from this point of view means focusing on the way unproductive labour became collectively organised, socialised, as an outcome of a network of forces of which its own struggle was a not inconsiderable part.

Some of the crucial forces constituting the crucible within which this took place in Europe and the USA include the following: the decline of certain forms of manual production following mechanisation; the increased scale of the planning function as urban conurbations began to flourish and capital began to expand; and the consequent growth of non-productive services such as clerical work.

These all helped to inaugurate the process of the socialisation (or collectivisation) of unproductive labour. An important part of this process of transformation consisted of what we might call the emergence of mass 'educated labour', which immediately introduced new forms of labour struggles and which in turn soon began to restructure the form of class struggle in general.¹⁰

Educated labour quickly began to professionalise itself, to develop knowledge as its marketable form of capital in the shape of educational credentials, and this in turn boosted the expansion and transformation of the role and function of mass education. Quite quickly and quite dramatically, this newly collectivised educated labour began to organise themselves against other forms of labour, capital and the State in order to establish control first over their own practices and production, and later over that of other forms of credentialled labour. A major strategy of organisation was to authorise one form of knowledge (their own) and to de-authorise others. In this way, for instance, the medical profession attacked 'non-academic' forms of medical practice like homeopathy. Similarly, the academics and their 'enlightenment ideal' waged a campaign of discreditation against all forms of 'non-scientific' knowledge including religious, mystical and of course common-sense (that is, manual-related) knowledge. This struggle around knowledge arose precisely because unproductive labour does not have the direct power that productive labour has — to influence capital accumulation and hence the social relations of production directly through the withholding of their labour.

It would be wrong to conceive of the transforming social domain simply in terms of a set of antagonistic interest groups all vying for relative power. This is the sort of scenario that Weberian theorists like Gouldner tend to paint. He would go so far as to see the intellectuals as forming a distinctive 'new class' with a good chance of becoming the next dominant class where they haven't already done so — as in socialist Eastern Europe.¹¹

Poulantzas on the other hand points out that a much ignored feature of late capitalism is the authoritarian interventionist character of the State which intervenes not only to keep this fractious babel of interest groups in some kind of colloidal suspension (the ideal tactic of the liberal democracy of middle capitalism) but intervenes directly in the accumulation process and the class struggle itself.¹²

For our purposes, it means that the State is actively present in the restructured social relations that prefigure the second and more extreme stage of the intellectual labour — manual labour gulf: "it is in the (late) capitalist State that the organic relationship between intellectual labour and political domination,



knowledge and power, is realised in the most consummated manner".¹³ For instance, the rise of academic labour as an interest category striving to put as much distance between itself and other class groupings by controlling access to a vast array of crafts and professions through the instrument of credentialling is not the product of an inter-class struggle only. State control over the education system attempts to ensure that the direction of credentialling is consonant with the interests of both disciplinary control and accumulation. The strategy of establishing academic autonomy is thus a counterweight to the State as well as to capital, to the church and to other forms of labour. The outcome is the result of at least a four-way struggle between the academics, the State, capital and other labour groups.

With respect to the State, the academics go onto the offensive by actively de-legitimising other grounds for State decision making (like moral, religious or pragmatic knowledge, for instance) and pressing the claim for the 'scientific' knowledge produced by them and their practices as the most authoritative basis for State policy.¹⁴ By buying this claim, the State accedes to the 'experts' and also to their bid for power.

In South Africa, the human scientific expert has only recently come to the fore in the wake of re-alignments that took place in the dominant bloc in the late 1970s.¹⁵ The proliferation since then of the discourse of 'scientific legitimation' can be seen in practically every sphere of state legislation and reform: education, labour, influx control, economic deregulation (privatisation), and constitutional matters to name only a few. In South Africa's particular conjunction, it is quite clear that the human science experts have not simply been gullibly coopted. The State/academic alliance suits both parties, especially in the context of a labour movement beginning to flex its muscles.

Against the fortification of knowledge/power and credentialling, the ordinary worker is all but powerless. This is not to say that there is no resistance. Willis' working class kids in Britain, for example, considered all mental work as sissy and contemptible, and responded by simply ignoring it, by 'doing nothin'.¹⁶ This sort of resistance is differently articulated in South Africa. In the first place, popular resistance in the townships is not against 'sissy' (mental) knowledge so much as against 'white' knowledge, a knowledge seen much more unambiguously as dominant and dominating. In the second place, resistance in South Africa is not localised, and neither is it 'culturalised' as it is in the United Kingdom. In the black communities it is far more collective, organised, and dovetailed with the national struggle for 'liberation'. Nevertheless, however self or group — affirming such cultural resistance might be, it does not provide an alternative route to a decent job, at least not in the short term. Indeed, the dilemma of Willis' kids is the dilemma of the working and popular classes in general; "challenging

power requires (credentialled) knowledge, yet the acquisition of that knowledge is organised so that it reinforces the very credentially-based system of power that is in part the original object of contestation".¹⁷

Herein lies the dual power of academics : they both control the credentialling system, and they hold a monopoly over the definition of what counts as 'real' knowledge. Which means in turn that "labour cannot avoid seeking allies within the educated classes" as Przeworski has shown.¹⁸ In South Africa, the academic is as delicately poised as a bride between two suitors : she is needed by a growing labour movement just at the moment that she is being entrenched as an indispensable feature of the State's reform policy.

We have discussed the relations of educated labour to other forms of labour and to the State. We need to say something briefly about the church and capital. The development of the capitalist State in Western Europe was as much a reaction to the cultural hegemony of the church as it was to the sovereignty of the King and to feudal relations of production.¹⁹ Liberal democracy consequently entails that the concept of the individual juridical subject supersede that of the church's divinely appointed subject. The power of the church at the capitalist centre has never recovered from the transition to liberal bourgeois rule and the eclipse of its interpellative primacy. The colonial peripheries on the other hand have not evenly followed this route, and the power of the church has not been broken here in as decisive a fashion.

In South Africa, for example, the Dutch Reform Churches have occupied a position of power in alignment to the State that is a result of their authority never being seriously challenged by an effective liberal constituency. Their form of authorisation has often been directly linked to forms of State power. This can be seen in various authorisations of apartheid (divinely appointed white trusteeship for instance) but also in certain doctrines of the social science academics, like Christian National Education.

The ascendancy of the social scientific 'expert' that we are currently seeing signifies a move to de-authorise church authority and to re-authorise academic knowledge. The De Lange Report on education denotes a subtle disengagement with the church as the disputes at the subsequent Bloemfontein Volkskongres showed.²⁰

The case of capital is different. Capital has always been on the side of science by its very nature (though the converse is not necessarily true). Business schools by definition teach management not worker science. This is not a simple conspiracy. Capital has always had privileged access to academia; it has always been a good employer of its products, it funds academic research and so



consequently much of the knowledge that gets generated tends to serve its interests. Academic expertise often comes to mean expertise for capital — the entire field of industrial relations in South Africa is a case in point.²¹ Paradoxically, the only way academia can win autonomy from capital is by emphasising science, that is, by affirming its control over the authorisation of what goes for knowledge. It is not surprising then that the very nature of social science is an 'essentially contested' notion.

This paper will not address the epistemological nature of the production of knowledge in late capitalism (see Carchedi and Lyotard for two interesting though divergent recent attempts to theorise this issue).²² What seems to us indisputable is that the logical outcome of the process set in train by the socialisation of unproductive labour has resulted in both the "mercantilisation of knowledge"²³ and its complete politicisation: "we (the intellectuals) are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth".²⁴

What we are thus seeing with the rise of the human scientific expert in South Africa is the simultaneous disengagement of academia from the church and the re-establishment of alignments with both the State and capital and to a far lesser extent with labour on terms at least partially dictated by academia because they have control over what goes for knowledge and credentials.

Highlighting the issues of interest group struggles and the role of capital, labour and the State brings to the fore the different *forms* in which knowledge is produced and organised. Knowledge itself is contested terrain, and understanding the establishment of a certain form of knowledge as an "order of discourse"²⁵ is simply another way of understanding the class struggle, since certain forms of knowledge provide the very conditions under which classes may exist and develop.²⁶ The politics of knowledge therefore requires that we pay particular attention to forms of knowledge which can empower rather than exploit the working class. It is the forms of popular knowledge production which we mean to explore in the rest of the paper.

The generation and accreditation of knowledge

In 1824 Thompson had already described how knowledge is used as a weapon:

The man of knowledge and the productive labourer came to be widely divided from each other, and knowledge, instead of remaining the handmaid of labour in the hand of the labourer . . . has almost everywhere arranged itself against labour, systematically deflecting and leading them astray in order to render their muscular power entirely mechanical and obedient.²⁷

Thompson's scenario is that knowledge is a substance much like a material resource, which has been extracted from certain forms of labour to their detriment. The implied solution seems to be that the resource should, like some straying wife, be brought back to re-serve the needs of labour. The practical issue then becomes how to re-institute knowledge as a handmaid of labour and of other subordinated groups. For Thompson, the academic is obliged to 'hand back' the knowledge, or at least to make it directly accessible to the people.

In the forceful words of Lenin : "You intellectuals must give us political knowledge. You can acquire this knowledge and it is your duty to bring it to us ..."²⁸ For Lenin and for aspirant handmaidens the problem is a technical one: you've got the knowledge, we need it, so hand it over or popularise it. There is something austere and attractive about this position and, without any doubt, a certain amount of handmaidenly activity is going to be both necessary and desirable. Indeed, it is currently the model favoured by most left academics in South Africa, and has made a considerable contribution, as Luli Callinicos shows elsewhere in this issue. There are however problems with resting the case with handmaidenhood.

The first is that the autonomy of knowledge is left unquestioned and the division of labour into specialisms affirmed. The issue is not that the academic is not a legitimate expert in a particular skill domain, namely academic work. The problem, and exploitation, arises when the technical division of labour becomes married to social relations of domination and subordination, to privilege and status, in other words to power. Then it ceases to be functional for the common weal and functions for an elite at the expense of the mass. The 'handing over' suggested by Lenin tacitly acknowledges the academic as the sole authoriser of knowledge and therefore reproduces the relation of dependency between academics and other client groups in society.

A second problem with the handmaidenly model is that it treats knowledge through the distorted lens of capital accumulation and consequently treats it as an accumulatable commodity. Indeed, this notion bears further fruit in a particularly influential school of educational policy planning, 'human capital' theory, which assumes that the accumulation of certificates guarantees the accumulation of wealth, with interest.²⁹

Thirdly, and most importantly, the handmaidenly conception leaves untouched two crucial components of knowledge production, namely the process of its *generation* and the process of its *validation*. It can hardly be argued that academics have 'stolen' a body of knowledge from the masses, although Thompson comes close to implying this. What has been taken away is control



over the process of knowledge generation and accreditation. What has happened is that non-academics have been structurally denied access to the mysteries of knowledge generation (problem-setting, methodology, information gathering) and denied participation in the authorisation of information into accredited knowledge by the mystification of verification procedures.

To take knowledge generation first.

Conceptualising knowledge is generally regarded as a mixture of expertise and individual creativity. The latter, in particular, has been responsible for justifying an elite activity for those with special 'human capital'. People without this form of capital are by definition without creativity, and also without individuality, an undifferentiated person-in-the-mass in more ways than one. Those positioned along the conveyor belt do not understand where the product comes from and are not expected to want to understand. Similarly, people who are simply the subjects of knowledge never get to see a picture of the production process of knowledge and remain subjected to it. The De Lange Report into education is a case in point. All the ordinary person is shown is the authoritative 'results'.³⁰

It is interesting to note that throughout school and even undergraduate education, knowledge is handled as a commodity to be acquired with virtually no attempt to enlighten students about the production process. The argument that only certain selected and certified individuals at postgraduate levels of education can understand the process is one of the great ideologies of our time.

We turn now to accreditation.

Accreditation of knowledge is an arbitrational process entirely controlled by academics, a power shared by very few professional guilds. An index of the social power of a profession is the degree of control the professionals exercise over the validation of their practices. For example, when we hire an electrician, the exercise of his or her skill is under a number of constraints. First, he must satisfy the client who will not pay if the lights do not come on, or perhaps if the job is not aesthetically pleasing. The job also has to satisfy civic regulations, in the form of an inspector, who has technical criteria to be satisfied before switch-on. The skill group of electricians is thus subordinate to considerable social control exercised from outside their jurisdiction.

The medics by contrast jealously guard the production and validation of medical practice. There is no civic inspector to check the diagnosis and prescription before pethidine extinguishes the theatre lights. In cases of gross dissatisfaction on the part of the client (if she is around to express it) there is an appeal body, but it is controlled by arbitrators internal to the profession (though this is not uninfluenced by the State, as we saw in the Biko case). It is fair to say that the profession finally polices itself. The appeal procedure also operates after the disaster — a weak form of constraint: imagine electricians by contrast being checked after the house has burned down.

There are also other indicators of the power of the medics, such as considerable determining power over their own fees, and legislation to protect them from competition. They are arguably the most powerful closed shop in the country.

Academics, and we speak mainly of those in the human and social sciences, developed validity claims for intellectual activity (and knowledge) different from the divine guarantees of the church and different too from the pragmatic or utilitarian legitimations of political and economic practices, as we have shown. These claims were *epistemological*: not power nor god, but 'truth' validated academic practice. This enabled academics (and other intellectual professions) to free themselves on the one hand from the hegemony of the church (by breaking with Latin for instance)³¹ and on the other hand to develop at least a discursive distance between themselves and the old line bureaucrats and the monied bourgeoisie. It was out of these struggles that academic work as we know it today developed and that set the shape and stake for struggles around 'autonomy' and 'academic freedom'.³²

Part of the power acquired by this freedom is that academics firmly monopolise the procedures for validating their knowledge practices. There is of course a network of peer review procedures which judge the adequacy of research proposals, journal articles and the like. But no outside group — especially not the individual or group that is the subject matter of human social research — has any say over the adequacy of the knowledge certified by esoteric validation procedures, and certainly not over their criteria.

For instance, a black worker who picks up a book over his ancestral lineage has no means to evaluate the accuracy or adequacy of the information. If it conflicts with his knowledge of it, there is very little that he and the community can effectively say about it. The book is not likely to be withdrawn, for example. He certainly did not have a voice in deciding what should have been studied, even if in retrospect he is pleased that it has.³³

Analogous to the position of the researched subject is the position of the student. Like the subject, she has very little say over her selection. Likewise she has little or no say over content supplied, and to contest the validity or relevance of content, even in the controversial social sciences, is risky and unwise. In contrast to the electrician's client, the student does not have much option about paying for the goods received or to be received. Apart from losing her money, the student may also be certified dumb or dotty.

With regard to research funding, which is more relevant to our general argument, very few knowledge producers have been required to refund an unsuccessful or incompleting project. While misdirected efforts could be excused as preliminary forays into exploring the unknown, there is very little come-back about squandered resources and even plain incompetence.

In short, academics, in complete control over the generation, validation and reproduction of their practice, are a far more powerful group in society than they are commonly willing to admit.

An objection to the above view of the power of academics can be made on the grounds that it assumes too great an homogeneity of academic interests. Surely, the objection might run, with truth claims being contestable, the essence of academic work is that it is open to critique and debate which argues against a monopoly of interests and therefore knowledge. This point is illustrated by Timothy Ash when, commenting on the respective accountability of film makers and historians, he writes . . .

that (at least in a free society) the terms of the historian's trade make them responsible and open to mutual attack, like politicians in a democracy, whereas the film director is always, by the very nature of his medium, a great dictator.³⁴

When critique works well, then different interests will act as an effective countercheck on each other. But it is only in a 'free-market of ideas' type of situation that the political — democratic public safeguards that Ash claims for history can operate — although we know that the free societies are not as free as he pictures them. Some of the western countries he speaks about do however have developed public spheres capable of mobilising well-informed lobbies and watchdog groups to scrutinise and moderate the influence of experts.

In South Africa we have an historically produced democratic vacuum, a completely underdeveloped sphere of public participation and very little if any public debate on academic matters. But, it might be argued, dissension is alive and well in the ranks of South African social scientists: one needs only to look at the list of credible social scientists who did not join Human Sciences Research Council special projects and who are clearly aligned to progressive civic and labour organisations.³⁵

We want to argue that the obvious disagreement over theories, methodologies and even political alignment obscures the fundamental agreement over academic practice. What is not contested between left and right is control over credentialling, or over the generation and accreditation of social scientific knowledge — the power base of academia.

To sum up, by not addressing the power base of academia, the handmaiden model radically underestimates the politics of knowledge.

Democratising knowledge

Democratising knowledge, in contrast to popularising it, attempts to get more members of the community to participate in the generation and accreditation of knowledge. Apart from broadening the production base (bearing in mind that it is unrealistic to expect everybody to participate in specialist knowledge production) a more interesting aim of democratisation is to empower a community to start contesting knowledge, to enter the arena of the politics of knowledge. Two methods of sociological knowledge production that explicitly set out to democratise the process of knowledge generation and accreditation are participatory action research, or PR, and Touraine's intervention sociology.

Kassam and Mustafa describe PR as an approach to social investigation that consists of the full and active participation of a community in an educational and research process that is a means for development and mobilisation. The key elements of the approach include a rejection of 'value-neutrality', a focus on community problems, an educational process for researchers and participants alike, and a respect for the potential of communities to produce knowledge and 'liberate' themselves.³⁶

Whilst this approach seems to have all the main ingredients of democratic participation, certain methodological pitfalls are detected by seasoned practitioner Borda.³⁷ Reviewing a number of projects in South America, Borda acknowledges that the intellectuals managed to establish considerable rapport with the communities. However, research time and the different rhythms of community time could not be coordinated. Consequently

with characteristic impatience, it was the action researchers and their intellectual allies who were forced to define 'popular science' . . . The result was a special application of the notion of insertion into the social process in order to 'place knowledge at the service of popular interests', but such knowledge did not derive from the objective conditions of the proletariat as would have been theoretically more correct . . . as historical materialism was almost an exclusive heritage of action researchers and committed intellectuals, they consequently had to diffuse it among the grassroots as an ideology . . . that is to say that the group fall victim to the worst historical form of dogmatism . . .³⁸

Although Borda's critique is telling, one interpretation of the implication is that all that is required is that academics be more patient — or more ruthless. We would want to say that Borda's pitfall is not only methodological, but lies at the root of academic-community engagement. For the PR researcher, as for the critical theorists before them, the community as well as the problem investigated



is chosen by the academic or at least at his or her behest. This places the community in an ineluctably client role. For communities to request, never mind to control, research initiatives is not on the agenda here. Touraine, on the other hand, proposes to engage with already existing social movements who have their own defined problems and strategies.³⁴ The academic's role then becomes to help the process of movement and strategy formation, not to initiate or control it.

The first phase of encounter of Touraine's method is to constitute a forum that consists of two academics (or interlocutors — an 'agitator' and a 'secretary') and movement participants who are representative of trends in the movement.

The first phase starts with what is called an 'image group', where the academics record the common sense experiences of the specific problems that the activists are grappling with.

The second phase consists of moving from 'image' to 'analysis', where the commonsense knowledge of the activists is confronted with the theoretical knowledge of the academics. During the conversion from 'image' to 'analysis' group the researcher must distance herself from the group and resist its group language and its strategic pressures towards solidarity.

Certain tensions are inevitable as the researcher . . . "speaks the language of analysis and of history to which the experience of the group and each of the members offers resistance".⁴⁰ This resistance grows out of the activist's natural disinclination to consider the general parameters surrounding his specific strategic concerns.

For Touraine, as for the psychoanalyst, it is crucial not to give in to this resistance. To do so, as many engaged sociologists invariably do, is to amputate the cycle of intervention and to do the movement a greater disservice than they realise. Strategically directed knowledge is one form of knowledge: theoretically directed knowledge is another. For Touraine, both are incomplete. The purpose of the intervention is precisely to create a forum for their mutual enrichment. In this sense research becomes educative for both movement activist and academic. The resulting form of 'integrated knowledge' or 'good sense' is the real aim of this research.

The third and final phase is an evaluation phase. In the first stage, the report constructed from the analysis phase is presented and discussed with 'militants' of the movement who have not participated in the first two phases. This group acts as an 'outside' evaluation group who compares their own experiences to those described in the research. In the final series of meetings the original contact

group responds to the 'results' of the evaluation. Both groups participate in these meetings during which a new programme for action is developed.⁴¹

PR and Touraine's intervention sociology are two of the most impressive approaches available to intellectuals concerned with democratising knowledge in South Africa.⁴² In both, the community either takes part in deciding the problem to be addressed, or the sociologist joins an already established problem or conflict. Enlarged criteria for knowledge validation include the necessity of social change in PR, while in Touraine's model there is evaluation by the participants and other representatives of the movement before the intervention is complete.⁴³ While both approaches have made major methodological advances, it is an open question whether they have solved the democratisation of knowledge issue. We want to suggest that these admirable methodologies need to be supplemented by a fundamentally different conception of what is happening in the process of intervention. We will make a start in this direction in the final section of this paper.

Towards the 'political economy' of truth or, "the margins are at the centre".⁴⁴

Paulo Freire, critical theorists, participation researchers and Touraine all share a set of metaphysical assumptions about the nature of consciousness and knowledge. This set of assumptions views the issue of knowledge and consciousness in terms of *hierarchical binary opposites*, with one term of the opposition always privileged over the other: truth over error or illusion; science over ideology; true consciousness over false consciousness; and so on. In each case, a sociological intervention involves trying to get the privileged term to supersede the secondary one and in each case the academic has control over the privileged term while the community is pre-defined as having access only to the secondary one. For Derrida and the deconstructionists, it is this "hierarchical axiology"⁴⁵ which lies at the heart of all unequal systems of control and domination and which invisibly maintains them. For Foucault, the implication is clear. If we are to understand the politics of power/knowledge, we have to ditch these assumptions: "the political question . . . is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself."⁴⁶

Actually there's not much choice about the matter as far as Foucault is concerned. Round about the 1960s in Europe, the social sciences began seriously to question the idea of a 'Mathesis Universalis' for human and social conduct. Whether this had to do mainly with the legacy of Wittgenstein, or with post-Saussurean social science or whether it arose in the aftermath of the student movement does not matter here. For Foucault this irrevocable insight into the



"...tyranny of globalising discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges ...⁴⁷ brought a number of other issues into focus. The first was that any establishment of truth, any accreditation of knowledge, is achieved always at the expense of other knowledges, other forms of understanding which are then simultaneously disqualified.

Furthermore, this process of disqualification or repression can never be permanent. What we saw in the sixties therefore was the beginning of an "insurrection"⁴⁸ of some of these 'naive', 'popular', 'disqualified', 'local' knowledges. Again, that this insurrection paralleled a shift from global to local forms of power in advanced capitalism is important, but need not concern us here. That insurrectionary knowledges have a rich and complex history in South Africa can also not detain us here (see Luli Callinicos in this issue). Be that as it may, we can no longer avoid the fact that knowledge is primarily a political not primarily an epistemological deployment — hence Foucault's indissoluble couple of power/knowledge. The coupling is not simply an equation of "erudite" knowledge with local knowledges. Indeed, Foucault often affirms the obligation for erudite knowledge to be "meticulous". But buried or 'subjugated' in *both* kinds of knowledge, in different ways, is the "historical knowledge of struggles".⁴⁹

The engagement of intellectuals with social groups should therefore not be viewed in terms of the 'handmaidenly' model of social engagement. Neither should academics see themselves engaging in order to "conscientise" the masses in some or other 'midwifely' way. The legacy of avoidance that characterises the attitude of the popular classes to intellectuals is undoubtedly a result of such patronisation. The act of engagement should rather be seen as accomplishing two things. The first is that the articulation of the academic's erudite knowledge with the local knowledge of the community provides a forum for the release of the subjugated memories of what Foucault calls "the positive unconscious of knowledge".⁵⁰ This release is predicated on the "union of erudite knowledge and local memories".⁵¹ It is not simply conditional upon the knowledge of the academic or upon his or her initiative. This is one implication of the anti-hierarchical view of knowledge: it is not so much that the academic coverts 'commonsense' into 'good sense'. It is rather the act of engagement which brings the counter memories "into play".⁵²

The second aim of the act of engagement is to set in train a process of empowerment. Asking people for their views implicitly affirms that local knowledge is important. It can provide a way not only of allowing previously silenced voices to be heard, but implicitly accords them a value which they had previously explicitly been deprived of. In other words, the act of engagement

reverses the direction of micropower by simultaneously suspending the academic's monopoly over authorisation, while it re-authorises a previously de-authorised voice or knowledge.

We would like briefly to mention two caveats to the deployment of the motion of "community participation". The first involves what Weiler calls "*legitimation by participation*".⁵³ Weiler contends that, as 'expert' legitimation comes increasingly under attack, so the State will increasingly entertain procedures of consultation and participation, if only in order to be seen to go through the motions of a very cooptable form of democracy. The problem Weiler is alluding to here concerns the vagueness of the notion of 'community participation'. Edelman comments in this regard: "political participation symbolises influence for the powerless, but it is also a key device for social control. In consequence, liberals, radicals and authoritarians all favour participation, a tribute to the term's symbolic potency and semantic hollowness".⁵⁴ Perhaps this also overstates the case. Nevertheless it alerts us to the fact that the procedures of community engagement have to be very carefully defined if they are not simply to be incorporated into a legitimation strategy under the rubric of participation.

The second issue relates to the first. Salisbury has shown that a citizen participation project for educational policy in the USA yielded an extremely *conservative* bias.⁵⁵ Indeed, community engagement will prompt into articulation a form of popular voice, but there is no prior guarantee that it will be a progressive one. Hall reminds us that populism has been more frequently and successfully articulated to a reactionary discourse than to a radical one.⁵⁶

The challenge for any community engagement program then is not simply to awaken a conservative commonsense. We think that this eventually is most likely in "hit and run" engagements which only sample community opinion and which don't work through the phases of engagement that the democratisation process prescribes. A progressive popular voice is one that has been *forged*. Critical sociologists will have to disabuse themselves of the still prevalent assumption that authenticity and radicalism will be achieved by simply opening the tap of the popular voice. We think that the framework of democratisation that we have outlined here is a radical alternative to this assumption.

One upshot of the conclusion we reach here is that the suspension of the monopoly over knowledge entails a loss of power for the academics, if only because they lose control over both the power to set the research agenda and to accredit the resultant knowledge on the basis of truth claims alone. Above all, academics by this manoeuvre radically forsake all pretensions to 'lead the struggle' in one or other vanguardist way. They become part of the struggle in terms of their usefulness for the struggle and partially subordinated to it. We say



partially, because in the end academics will remain a separate skill domain, a separate functional grouping and therefore a separate interest group with at least some interests particular to them, their location and their social position. We return here to our starting point. Because academics are incompletely socialised or collectivised — that is, because they have not in this country organised themselves in any formal way — their own workplace interests on the one hand and broader socio-political issues on the other become radically confused. In the event, South Africa academics seem to slide between the two and to do very little about either. Whatever does get done on the local community front is on an individual self-initiated level.⁵⁷

While admirable in itself, this kind of initiative is all too easily blotted out (like the FOSATU courses at Wits) or academically discredited (defined by SAPSE as 'applied' research — and therefore explicitly of less value — getting fewer points for the individual and less money for the university than 'pure' research does).

In our view there is no alternative to some form of academic organisation or union. An organised union of academics could do some of the following. In the first place, it could clarify the terrain and stake of the academic workplace, the interests and the relations of implication with capital, State and labour. For instance academics currently grumble about the SAPSE directed bureaucratisation (or "taylorisation")⁵⁸ of academic work, but in the absence of an organisational base, have not clearly defined how these activities are implemented, in whose interests they are formulated, and how they can be contested. In the second place, it could clarify the relation of a democratic union, (albeit very white collared), to the larger union movement and its national politics. Thirdly, it could also clarify the relation of the struggle for democracy within the university with larger democratic struggles outside the university. Above all, the terms of engagement — the interests at stake, the political gains and losses of alignment or non-alignment and so on — will be demystified and could, with discipline, be translated onto a level of practical political strategy.

All of this will help to cut away the disabling undergrowth attached to the commonsense self-image of academic work as a special, different, more elevated non-labour-related kind of activity. Academics may then in time come to see themselves as ordinary people with definable interests. Only then will community folk come to see them and their precious university as a useful resource for struggle and social progress.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Quoted by Retamar, R F 1971: 'Caliban: Notes towards a discussion of culture in our America', *Massachusetts Review*, vol 15, no 1 and 2, p71.

- 2 Poulantzas for example writes : "unquestionably the most important aspect of the social division of labour is the division between manual and intellectual labour". Poulantzas, N. 1978 : *State, Power, Socialism*, Verso, p55.
- 3 See Sohn-Rethel A. 1978. *Intellectual and Manual Labour*. Macmillan, London.
- 4 "All men (sic) are intellectuals, one could therefore say but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals". Gramsci, A. 1971 : 'The intellectuals' in *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, p9 *passim*.
- 5 Sohn-Rethel : *op cit*, p25.
- 6 Sohn-Rethel : *ibid*, pp13-16.
- 7 Braverman, H. 1974 : *Labour and Monopoly Capital*. Monthly Review Press, New York.
- 8 Haug, F. 1984 : 'Marx and Work : the immiserization discourse or the logic of ruptures and contradictions' in eds. S. Hanninen and L. Paldan. *Rethinking Marx*, International General/IMMRC, New York.
- 9 See Marx, K. 1976 : *Capital, Vol 1*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, p1024 for the notion of socialised labour.
- 10 Abercrombie, N and Urry J. 1983 : *Capital, Labour and the Middle Classes*. George Allen and Unwin, London, pp97-103.
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- 12 Poulantzas, N. 1978, *op cit*.
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- 19 Gramsci, A. 1984 : 'Notes on Language'. *Telos* 29, p134.
- 20 Muller, J. 1986 : 'Cacophony of consent — the press in the struggle for educational reform' in eds K Tomaselli, R Tomaselli and J Muller. *Narrating the Crisis : Hegemony and the South African Press*. Lyon, Durban.
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- 22 Carchedi, G. 1983. *Problems in class analysis : production, knowledge and the function of capital*. Routledge, London. Lyotard, J-L. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition : a Report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- 23 Lyotard, *ibid*. p5.
- 24 Foucault, M. 1980 : *Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Pantheon Books, New York p93.
- 25 Foucault, M. 1980: 'The order of discourse' in ed. R. Young. *Untying the Text*, Routledge, London.
- 26 Abercrombie and Urry. *op cit*, p92.
- 27 Quoted by N Abercrombie and J Urry, *ibid*, p99. We apologise for the sexist connotation of 'handmaiden'. The term is also used by H Wolpe in 'The liberation struggle and research, *ROAPE*, 33, 1985, p74.
- 28 Lenin, V I. : *What is to be done?* Quoted by P Wexler 'Ideology and education : from critique to class action', *Interchange* 13, 3, 1982.



- 29 Muller, J. 1982 : 'Some assumptions underlying the provision of educators in SA', in eds D Freer and P Randall, *Educating the Educators*, Department of Education, University of Witwatersrand, pp5-19.
- 30 Buckland, P. 1982 : 'Technicism and De Lange : reflections on the process of the HSRC investigation'. *Perspectives in Education*, special issue, May.
- 31 Gramsci, A. 1984 : *ibid*, p139-150.
- 32 Freidson, E. 1977 : 'The future of professionalization' in eds M Stacey et al *Health and the Division of Labour*, London, p32-33. Gouldner, A W. 1979 : *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*. Macmillan, London, p34.
- 33 Many progressive academics produce such histories in a context much more dialectically negotiated than the process outlined here. Our point is simply that the system is overwhelmingly predisposed against this.
- 34 Ash, T G. 1985 : *New York Review of Books*, XXXII, No. 20, p38.
- 35 Our claim here concerns the category of academics in a particular conjunction. It does not deal with individual consenting or non-consenting academics. Indeed, there will always be a distribution across the continuum of what Aronowitz and Giroux call "hegemonic, accommodating, critical and transformative" intellectuals. See Aronowitz A and Giroux, H A. 1985, *Education under Siege*, Bergin and Garvey, Mass, pp36-40.
- 36 Kassam, Y and Mustafa, K. 1980 : 'Participatory Research : an emerging alternative methodology in social science research.' Society for Participatory Research in Asia, New Delhi. Another useful review of participatory research can be found in *Convergence*, vol 14, no 3 p6-80.
- 37 Borda, F. 1979 : 'Investigating reality in order to transform it'. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 4, 1, pp33-56.
- 38 *Ibid*, p49.
- 39 Touraine, A. 1981 : *The Voice and the Eye*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- 40 *Ibid*, p179.
- 41 The richness of Touraine's method has not been conveyed here. Suffice to say that his approach has political and theoretical affinities with both Gramsci and the critical theorists (see Fay, B. 1975 : *Social Theory and Political Practice*. George Allen and Unwin, London).
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- 43 Kassam and Mustafa, *op cit*, p88.
- 44 The phrase "political economy of knowledge" comes from Gouldner. *op cit*, p21. Foucault's favourite term, the "politics of truth" is also not a new one. See C Wright Mills, 1978 (first published 1959) : *The Sociological Imagination*. Penguin, Harmondsworth, p178. The "margins are at the centre" is Derrida's phrase which has been adopted as a slogan by the Italian Autonomy Movement (see M Ryan, 1982 : *Marxism and Deconstruction*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p197).
- 45 *Ibid*, p10.
- 46 Foucault, 1980, *op cit*, p133.
- 47 Foucault, 1980, *op cit*, p83.
- 48 *Ibid*, p84.
- 49 *Ibid*, p83.
- 50 Foucault, M. 1970 : *The Order of Things : an Archeology of the Human Sciences*, Tavistock, London, pxi.
- 51 Foucault, 1980, *op cit*, p83.
- 52 *Ibid*, p85. The affinities that Foucault's project has with that of the anarchists has often been remarked upon : "what I preach then is, to a certain extent, the revolt of life against science, or rather against the government of science, not to destroy science — that would be high treason to humanity — but to remand it to its place so that it can never leave it again". M Bakunin, 1973 : 'On science and authority' in *Selected Writings*, Jonathan Cape, London, pp162-163.

- 53 Weiler, H. 1983 . 'Legislation, expertise and participation : strategies of compensatory
legitimation in education policy'. *Comparative Education Review*, 27, 2 p272-275.
- 54 Edelman, M. 1977 : *Political Language : Words that Succeed and Politics that Fail*. Academic
Press, New York, p120.
- 55 Salisbury, R. 1980 : *Citizen Participation in Public Schools*. Heath, Lexington, Mass.
- 56 Hall, S. 1980 : 'Popular-democratic vs authoritarian populism' in ed A Hunt *Marxism and
Democracy*, London.
- 57 See Muller and Cloete, 1985 *op cit*, pp8-11. Indeed, it is self-initiation that leaves many
academics vulnerable to the charge of 'tourists of the revolution'. Touraine, after all, wrote
his pathbreaking study on *Solidarity* in France while the union was being systematically
suppressed back in Poland. (see A Touraine, et al : *Solidarity : the analysis of a social
movement, Poland 1980-1981*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.)
- 58 For the use of this term applied to white collar work see Levidow, L and Young B (eds) 1981 :
Science, Technology and the Labour Process. (CSE Books, London. Eddie Webster has
applied this term to SA academics in an unpublished paper delivered to the Wits Academic
Freedom Committee, 1984.

