

Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, Ideas

Draft paper

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Out of the ivory tower, into the public sphere? Academics as intellectuals

1.) An obvious but seldom discussed difference between academic and other intellectuals is that academics are employed by higher education institutions, most usually by universities and other intellectuals are not. This involves a particular set of freedoms and constraints on the kind of intellectual work they do and what they consider to be intellectual work in the first place. The university, as an institution, has been remarkably successful. Over the centuries it has succeeded in retaining an organisational identity despite the changes demanded of it especially during the last two centuries. This success may partly be due to a process Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe as creating durable myths of organisations at the same time as organisations adapt to their environment. Myths are described as

rationalized and impersonal prescriptions that identify various social purposes as technical ones and specify in a rulelike way the appropriate means to pursue these technical purposes rationally (...). Second, they are highly institutionalized and thus in some measure beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization. They must, therefore, be taken for granted as legitimate, apart from evaluations of their impact on work outcomes. (343-344)

In other words, myths are narratives about the role of the organisation in the wider world and the roles, procedures, policies etc. within the organisation. They go beyond specific people or organisations, although some people or specific examples may be perceived as being more 'typical' than others. Thus, King's College, London, may be regarded as a more typical example of a university than, say, the Open University, the Motorola University or the ill-fated NHS University. These narratives are generally applied in a normative way, for example when it comes to enculturating new staff into 'what it is that we do and how we do it', and they are regarded as rational, although some of them derive their authoritativeness from tradition rather than their intrinsic rationality. Rowan and Meyer stress that these

myths are not necessarily descriptions of day-to-day working practice but that they work like blueprints by which organisations and their employees orient themselves. They are what gives organisations their identity, what sets them apart from other organisations. Rowan and Meyer also stress the importance of language in this respect: “Just as jealousy, anger, altruism, and love are myths that interpret and explain the actions of individuals, the myths of doctors, of accountants, or of the assembly line explain organizational activities” (349).

The reason why some organisations fail and why some succeed is described as a measure of how well they adapt to their environments while retaining their central myths. The university, as mentioned above, is a success story in this respect. It goes back to Plato’s Academy, founded in 385 BC. The world’s oldest continuously operating, degree-granting university is the University of Al-Karaouine in Morocco, which was founded in 859. In Europe, the oldest continuously operating university is Bologna, founded in 1088. The precise date of the foundation of Oxford University is uncertain but has been placed around the mid-12th century. For an organisation to be successful globally and for this sustained a period, it was very successful at adapting to whatever local, political demands were made on it while retaining crucial myths of their identity. That does not mean that myths don’t change over time, but that they are responsible for giving narratives, a sense of tradition and historical identity to an organisation like Oxford University, which, on some level still identifies with its medieval foundation.

Academics are shaped by the myths that sustain the idea of a university as well as by the social, political, economical etc. environments of the particular university they find themselves in. They are part of creating and updating myths, and their roles as academics are subject to myths. According to the literature on academic work, academic roles and academic’s role in the public sphere, negotiating the space between myth and environment (whose organisations are, of course, subject to their own myths and ceremonies), has become more difficult in recent years, even though it may be argued that the ‘crisis of the academy’ may be a sustaining narrative in itself by which academics and commentators make sense of the continued adaptation of the university to its environment.

2.) A significant amount has been written on academic roles especially about the necessity for academic work to change in response to the challenges of the massified university system. One such book is Peter G. Taylor's *Making Sense of Academic Life: Academics, Universities and Change*. Written out of the context of Australian academe but more generally applicable, Taylor charts recent developments in the academic sphere mentioned above and suggests changes in academic roles. However, his suggestions about innovation and change only relate to teaching and not to other elements of academic roles. In this he is not alone: especially when it comes to research, academic roles are curiously underspecified. This may be a factor relating to academic freedom, i.e. the freedom to research and teach which may not be subject to state censorship, which makes it more difficult to come up with a meaningful closer specification. The myth of what an academic is and does, thus, remains somewhat hazy: teaching, research and administration are the most readily quoted elements. Delanty (2001) goes further by differentiating between research, teaching, professional training and intellectual work. He implicitly defines research in terms of developing expert knowledge and sets off intellectual work in the following terms:

The academic as a professional – as expert, professional trainer or teacher – operates within the relatively closed world of scientific specialization. Yet the pursuit of knowledge has a public role other than the servicing of socially useful knowledge tasks. It contributes to citizenship and to the transmission of cultural values in the wider society (Delanty, 2001, 74).

The inclusion of intellectual work in the myth of an academic in Delanty's definition is intended to be normative, to say out loud what many people think anyway and thus to lend credence to academic involvement in the public sphere because to be a 'professor' means to 'profess in public'. The inclusion of intellectual work within the academic myth is implicit in the identity of academics as shall be shown below. It is an extraordinarily durable myth because the realities of the academic sphere described below do not allow much room for involvement in the public sphere unless it is on top of academics' existing workload or unless their status in their field allows them to act as experts in the public or political sphere. In fact, academics will tenaciously hold on to this idea of the academic as intellectual and consider this to be the 'real' work of academics (as well as teaching), while other duties, such as administration, are often viewed as regrettable distractions. [XXX]

3.) What are the changes the university system has faced as seen from the point of view of the academic employee during the last 20-30 years? Recurring themes in the literature about the UK, European, US and systems that are similar to the European/American model (such as Australian universities) are:

- a. The changes that followed the expansion of the university system from an elite system towards one with nearly 50% participation in the US and over 40% in the UK changed the academic community in terms of the number of students, the socio-economic make-up of the students and their educational backgrounds etc. Furthermore, staff numbers increased, even though increases have not kept pace with student enrolment numbers. As a consequence, the socio-economic profile, the educational backgrounds of staff have also changed. Altbach, writing in 1980 in what we today would call a still highly elitist UK Higher Education system, points out that the changes in the staff mean that “members of the academic community were less and less likely to share a common understanding of the university and the way it traditionally related to the wider world” (2). Whereas this change was for the better is a moot point, but it certainly challenged the traditional academic myth of a relatively closed community of scholars and students with a shared background and outlook.
- b. Other changes contributed to the perception of increased fragmentation amongst academic staff: as the system expanded, more and more staff were appointed part-time and/or on fixed-term contracts and tenure was abolished in the UK during the Thatcher years. “Abolishing tenure was supposed to make British universities more likely to give people permanent jobs because it would be easier to make staff redundant in hard times. It did not work out that way. Casualisation has increased by leaps and bounds Higher Education is now second only to catering in the proportion of non-permanent staff employed” (“Missing Jam for Doughnut-Style University World”, 2001). The more recently introduced differential pay-scales at different universities serve only to highlight that the myth of the common academic community is now confronting a reality in which the inequality between universities and staff have been externally confirmed.
- c. Public funding decreased substantially per student and per research unit. Universities have also become less able to spend their grants according to

their perceived needs because a significant amount of funding is earmarked for certain (politically important) purposes, e.g. funding for widening access. At the same time, demands for accountability for public funding have increased. Universities have to engage in cumbersome administrative processes, as compete with other institutions in 'league tables' and comply with externally imposed 'quality' measures. This means that, paradoxically, financial autonomy has decreased while less funding comes from the public purse. This leads to a further increase in the inequality between institutions as rich universities, especially if they are successful in attracting external research funding, can evade government control because they do not have to claim funding earmarked for purposes which do not serve their interests (widening access is a case in point). Furthermore, competition between institutions rises as they compete for limited research resources at funding councils, research councils, charities and other external funders.

- d. The demands for accountability go hand in hand with an increase in managerialism. This is not to say that universities were not managed previously: however, from government by senior academic committee, which had made the university inherently conservative, slow-moving and resistant to change, the system has now moved to a mixture of government by top-down management by senior academics and non-academics and more or less enfeebled academic committees, whose functions are reduced to small-scale decisions or administration. This militates against the academic myth of a common group of essentially equal academics with a common purpose as the 'university vision and mission' statements are often quite openly opposed by staff, who are more likely to share in the traditional myth of the academic.
- e. Staff often feel that managerialism and bureaucratisation have invaded academic schools and departments through externally imposed measures such as institutional audits/reviews and half-external measures such as the Research Assessment exercise (in the UK). Internal administrative tools such as Workload allocation plans (Barrett & Barrett, 2007) and Time Allocation Surveys are also employed to help senior staff regulate workloads. This often leads to the perception that the work of academics is more closely monitored than it used to be (Altbach, 1980, 3), which goes against the myth of relative academic autonomy and freedom.

- f. More and more research is funded externally because Funding Councils have reduced the block grant for research, which is now meant to cover core costs. Additional funding has to be competitively bid for at Funding Councils, Research Councils, charities and other bodies. Moreover, more universities now focus on increasing their research activity in order to retain their 'market position' in a now highly stratified higher education landscape. This landscape is characterised by multiple fragmentation between research-led and teaching-led universities. Staff are categorised as research-active and not research-active, staff with access to external research funding and those without etc. A possibly unintended side-effect is that teaching and research are no longer necessarily related, which contrasts with the traditional academic myth of a community of scholars engaged in the common pursuit of learning, teaching and research (Altbach, 1980, 4).
- g. The increase in research activity but also a drive towards 'professionalisation' have led to diversification of research and a high degree of specialisation, so that even colleagues in the same discipline may know little about each other's working methods or research goals. Preoccupation with theory, methodology and creating new symbolic languages led to a perceived retreat of the academy from public life as well as an erecting of disciplinary boundaries, which was designed to, firstly, support a discipline's claim for professionalism and therefore right to exist (in the face of government cuts) and, secondly, kept scientists and scholars who were not affiliated with a university firmly at a distance in the now increasingly competitive knowledge market (e.g. Craig Venter or James Lovelock). The myth of the academic as public intellectual who openly shares in his/her knowledge and invites discussion is clearly at odds with the university politics of intellectual property management.
- h. The competition between universities for funding and growth of their research output echoed a more general movement towards commodification of knowledge production. Two points are important here: in the world beyond the academy, the purpose of research is generally considered to be to "fill 'gaps in knowledge' (...), rather than offer new interpretations; to discover how to do things, rather than question why such things should be done; to find out how to execute policy, rather than develop critiques of it"

(Rowlands, 2002, 60). In other words, knowledge production is privileged over intellectual critique, and expert knowledge is valued over intellectual contribution. Since research funding often depends on fitting in within proscribed key areas, universities may lean towards privileging expert knowledge production. However, within the academy, research that is considered 'applied', i.e. without theoretical implications, is also often subject to derision and some snobbery.

- i. Furthermore, commodification of knowledge goes hand in hand with a privileging of expert knowledge over intellectual critique. Public intellectual critique is not readily translatable into immediate rewards for a university or even, in the near term, for an academic's career advancement. Combined with the increased specialisation and the closing down of the public sphere as a platform for academics discussed below, "opportunities for critical debate informed by their scholarly work [decrease]. As experts in their own fields, academics are rarely challenged to use that expertise to critically engage with the wider purposes of their work. The scientist working in one of 8,500 specialities is unlikely to ask questions about the purpose of science as a whole" (Rowland, 2002, 61). This has implications for the communication of academic work and, consequently, of its public perception. Specialised expert knowledge is rarely communicated in the public sphere because the level of prior knowledge required make it impracticable. Conversely, media discussions of expert knowledge are often riddled with simplifications and falsifications, and academic experts often shy away from attempting such communication because they are aware of the pitfalls.
- j. A further identity crisis of academics especially in the US was provoked through the combined forces of postmodernism, identity-politics and neo-conservative politics, which simultaneously denied academics a special status in society while affirming their important role as knowledge producers in the knowledge economy. Various critics write that this has lead to a retreat of academics into the ivory tower.
- k. The resulting pressures on academic workloads in the UK find expression in a comparative international survey of the academic profession conducted in the mid-1990s: "English senior academics consider themselves more strongly a profession under pressure than their colleagues in the other countries under

observation" (Enders, 1999); "English university professors are considerably less satisfied than their European colleagues with various aspects of their jobs. Many of them are not satisfied with their salary, and there is a higher proportion than in any other country analysed, who would not opt again for the academic profession. As regards the conditions of their work, English academics report the highest proportion of their time spent on administration. They rate the resources for their work more negatively than their European colleagues (...), and the proportion of those receiving external research grants is lower (though not lower than among US professors at research universities). Other findings . . . show that English university professors seldom believe that academics are influential opinion leaders, and they more often state that the respect for academics is declining in society – this seems to reflect the deterioration in English working conditions. However, as far as job security, promotion prospects and overall job satisfaction are concerned, English university professors do not consider their situation worse than their colleagues in other countries" (Enders & Teichler, 1997, 367). An argument can be made that the uneasiness expressed in this survey stems partly from a mismatch between myth and institutional environment.

4.) In the following part of this paper, I want to provide two related analyses. Firstly, I look at 20 responses of well-known academics/intellectuals who had been asked by the journal *American Literary History* to respond to 6 questions relating to their career, the reception of their work in American culture and their motivation to do (public) intellectual work. The 20 academics who contributed have all made significant contributions in their academic sphere and were well-known outside their academic discipline. A casual (and not fool-proof) measure of their popularity can be gauged by the fact that 15 out of the 20 individuals have their own Wikipedia page. Only two out of the 20 respondents was not employed by a university at the time of writing their response. The responses were published without introduction or analysis as "Thinking in Public: A Forum" in 1998. Secondly, I analyse the data gathered in my own qualitative research on academics and intellectuals according to the same themes that emerge from the American context. My sample is made up of 12

academics in various stages of their career, who are all employed at British universities (mostly located in South Wales). Thus, overall my sample includes 24 responses. I identified a few themes relating to intellectual work, academic careers and the public sphere, which I will look at in turn and relate them to the previous discussion of the myth of the academic as intellectual and the institutional realities of UK/US and related universities.

In the “Forum”, several key ideas were discussed around of the role of the academic intellectual. He/she was likely to be in the minority (one), independent of mind (two), needed to be able to be critical (three), a ‘gadfly’ who is not afraid to speak out (two). One respondent gave voice to an ultimately romantic idea of the intellectual who was not affiliated with any group and solely in pursuit of the truth. But independence was stressed by others, who spoke about an independence of mind in terms of “writ[ing] for several audiences . . . without committing myself to the center of any”, saying that “[p]arochialism is at odds with the role of intellectual” (Thomas Bender, 4, 5). This undoubtedly includes academic parochialism. At the heart of intellectual activity was thinking and writing, as well as communicating to an audience beyond their discipline and provoking debate (two) without, however, merely being provocative (or, in the following quotation, a hostage to academic fads):

As to provocativeness: it’s the dirty little temptation of all intellectuals, no matter where they live. A provocation can draw attention to a social or cultural ill, but it can also draw attention to the provoker. On the Right, that kind of personal flag-waving appears in writers like Charles Murray; on the Left, I’ve come to be very suspicious of writers specializing in transgression, rupture, and fragmentation, particularly when they are tenured professors. (Richard Sennett, 73)

In my own research, these categories were broadly replicated. Six respondents said that intellectuals demonstrate the ability for deep and original thinking and is, in the case of academic intellectuals, engaged in research – usually in theoretical research that breaks new ground, opens up new fields and establishes new parameters of thought (eight). Furthermore, the intellectual is described as being concerned with ideas for their own sake (four) but also with communicating those to a general public (seven) and either as being able to communicate outside their specialism (three) and engaged in public debates of the moment (three) or as a generalist in approach (six). In fact, this description was said to fit the role of an academic – especially that of a

professor – to the extent that the majority of participants did identify ‘academic work’ with ‘intellectual work’ (ten) – although three suggested that part of the role of the academic, namely communicating well with a broader audience, does not necessarily have to be the role of every academic.

The characterisation of the intellectual thus involves qualities like independence of spirit, an enquiring mind and being able to stand back and see the bigger picture. It is a central part of the myth of ‘being an academic’, so central in fact that all participants in my study except one saw intellectual work as academic work. It is questionable, though, whether intellectual work of the kind described in both surveys is the same as that expected in academic roles in real-world universities in the UK, the US and similar systems today. Smyth and Hattam (2000), writing in the context of Australian academe, for example, feel it necessary to make a case “for universities as sites that need to nurture critical discourses for enlivening debate in the public sphere about the kind of society we want to live in” (157-158). They accuse the previous Howard government of “an increasingly intensified ideological onslaught” (158) on universities to move towards a marketisation of higher education. A “decline of the public sphere – a rampant loss of public voice through a demise of spaces for debate and a ‘decline of discourse’ (...)” (158) goes hand in hand with this development in their view, and they deplore the perhaps inevitable “retreat of academics into writing almost exclusively for specialist journals” (158) in a highly specialised language unintelligible to the uninitiated. They, thus, blame the retreat of academics into the ivory tower partly on the drive towards ‘professionalisation’ in the new, marketised and massified university and on the loss of public platforms in society more generally. However, this does not mean that the myth of the academic as public intellectual is given up. Instead, Smyth and Hattam come up with the image of the ‘intellectual as hustler’,

a fertile metaphor against which to read off our struggles with the marketising of universities. The notion of a hustler has enough playful ambiguity in it to carry a practice of competing in the market whilst simultaneously researching against the grain of marketisation. (162)

The approach of ‘sneaking in’ socially relevant research in the guise of ‘playing the game’ may be questionable as an approach in terms of the levels of double-think and the likely scale of success involved. However, the suggestion is that, rather than give up on the myth of academic as intellectual with a certain responsibility for

influencing the public sphere, academics should work around the new structures and subvert them.

The respondents to the “Forum” expressed a sense of responsibility to use their relatively safe positions as (generally tenured) academics to engage in public debate. They referred both to communicating outside the discipline (which may involve an audience that is still an academic audience but located in another discipline) and/or intervening in the political public sphere. Intervention in the public sphere was thought of more broadly in contrast to an academic inwardness and preoccupation with obscure theoretical problems couched in an impenetrable prose, which was identified with the postmodern theoretical turn in the US academy (three). Richard Rorty seemed to speak for many when he wrote: “I think it would help if academics who think of themselves as leftist would worry less about the postmodern condition and more about what laws Congress is and is not passing” (64). The reference to ‘leftist’ academics is revealing in many ways. It is to be suspected that many of the respondents were so vociferous in denouncing the theoretical obfuscations of postmodernism, the fragmentation caused by identity politics and the general move to the right because most of them were born between 1940 and 1950 and experienced the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s as students and young academics, a time of revolutionary movements when the political fault-lines were perhaps more clearly drawn and when political struggles was generally conducted in the spirit of the enlightenment before they became mired in the political non-negotiables of community and identity. Identity politics was mentioned several times as deleterious to the community of academics, since it fragmented the community and allowed an essentialism which was essentially conservative in nature take hold. This concern did not come up in my study of British academics, which may point to the fact that identity politics did not intrude into the academy as much as it did in the US.

The academy was generally perceived to be in retreat from any engagement with the public while, at the same time, being a refuge from the obsession with populism displayed, in the view of the respondents, by the media. Thus, this ‘refuge’ was both worth saving, but had to return from its self-imposed irrelevance. In the words of Thomas Bender: “The academy is not the world, and its difference must be treasured, even as we must insist the academy be worldly” (4). Respondents agreed that

specialisation and a jargon-ridden academic discourse limited any potential intellectual impact (six) and that the academy had become too inward-looking (five) and self-regarding (one). Charles Johnson expressed this in the following way:

Universities can be a crucial base of opposition to the construction of ignorance, but not if they view their role as merely ameliorative. Indeed, the production of ignorance is aided by the passivity of the scholarly community in accepting narrow definitions of disciplinarity and specialisation that enforce irrational constraints on the nature of research and writing, supposedly in the name of professionalization but actually in the service of containment and control. (11)

The overarching theme here seems to be the depoliticisation of the academy, which is now fragmented and scarcely constitutes an 'academic community', another myth of the university, any longer. Being part of a community requires, amongst other things, independence of mind as well as the time to engage in thought without immediate reward in terms of another article published, another paper given. This atmosphere which is generally couched in terms of collegiality seems to be at odds with the rather more competitive spirit embraced by the marketised university. Schuller detects a narrowing of the professional agenda coupled with a sense of competitiveness between colleagues which may in the long term lead to a loss of 'the bigger picture'. He describes the intrusion of the market principle into academic relations and diagnoses a fragmentation of the academic community as

an approach which calculates everything in terms of the resource implications. The implications may be directly financial; or, more commonly, of time, with consequences for output. At the most basic and yet very revealing level, this is illustrated in the reluctance of academics to attend meetings or seminars which are not directly relevant to their own field. . . . There can be few more telling signs of the break-up of a community than when participants so calculate the worth of an exchange that it must bring them the promise of visible return before they enter into it. If the hour in the seminar will not help them in their next article to be published – if it is only to hear someone else expound their views and to offer a response – why bother to attend? (8-9)

Market principles of assessing market value and being competitive may not ultimately be beneficial for the university or for the kind of high-powered research that governments are generally so pleased in supporting: "The free flow of ideas, inherent in the notion of an academic community, is threatened by a climate which encourages the jealous guarding of original thoughts and researchable propositions" (9). Schuller concludes that

the notion of the university as a community depends to an extent on corridor, if not common room, conversations, which occur on an unscheduled basis. That requires a degree of 'free' time. If academics become, as it were, employed on

an internal consultancy basis, recruited to do a specified amount of teaching or research, there will be no space or time for the casual interchange which glues the academic enterprise together. (12)

Arguably, the myth of 'academic community' can be seen as a throwback to the old elitist system with its overtones of privileged discussions in the common room.

However, the academic endeavour – both in terms of truly groundbreaking research as well as, on a smaller scale, a particular university's sense of itself as a unit, rests to no small part on the myth of the 'academic community'. If individual academics opt out of this sense of loyalty towards the local community of their department/university or the more global community of academic peers, the whole venture might be threatened, especially as research-led universities come to increasingly depend on research funding attracted by individuals or small research groups. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some individuals or research groups already operate in a semi-autonomous way, a behaviour which some managers implicitly support.

The "Forum" respondents suggested that there were only a few areas of the public sphere left for intellectual engagement because it was mostly dominated by anti-intellectual popularist media. Garrett Hongo expressed a typical view when he wrote: "I still think ideas and perspectives have to come from *somewhere* and from *somebody*. I'd prefer they come from an intellectual as opposed to a TV anchor, from a writer as opposed to a talk show host. Bankruptcy cannot become currency for me" (33). The respondents tended to agree that the public sphere for intellectual work was shrinking and that they were living in a "'Dark Age' of intellectual activity" (Vide Deloria, 25). Five respondents noted that the intellectual public sphere was shrinking, especially in the media, rather than the audiences receptive for intellectual thought. The media were castigated by four respondents, who thought that the lack of sustained thought and argument in the public sphere was due to 'dumbing down'. Martha Nussbaum put it in the following way:

I think the popular culture can be devastating for the thought of an intellectual, since it is so given to sound bites and puts pressure on one both to overdramatize and to oversimplify. So I want to remain academic, too interested in arguments, and too complex to be really popular in the US. (59)

Some other respondents were certain that the public sphere itself was fragmenting (five), that anti-intellectualism was on the rise more generally (two), even that American culture has always been anti-intellectual (one). Two suggested that their

audience was likely to be small. Respondents did not generally know who read them and some (two) were not overly concerned by this. However, it was noted that it was difficult to get a conversation going with 'the public' (two) and one respondent thought it was unlikely that academic books written for a broader audience ever reach the (mythical) general reader but were likely to cross disciplinary boundaries. Thus the impact of their own work and that of other academic intellectuals was considered to be limited.

The participants in my survey expressed the likelihood of a limitation in impact in a slightly different way: when asked how academic intellectuals should intervene in the public sphere, participants generally mentioned public extensions of the work they normally do in their day-to-day work: public lectures (four), writing (four), writing for the media (six), addressing public forums (three) and through popularising one's work (two) and communicating it to a wider audience (two). Activities of this kind probably do not have a large impact in the public sphere, although the impact of individuals may be large. Media appearances were also mentioned (five) as well as seemingly non-public interventions such as thinking on a profound level (two) and discussing current events in a private circle (two). When asked about their likely impact, seven thought that potentially everyone could be interested but, in practice tended to narrow it down to people who take an active interest in deeper questions (five), academics (four) and educated people (seven) – an audience which, although not necessarily academics can be expected to be broadly similar in outlook than the academic participants in my survey themselves.

This may have been modesty or a consciousness about the sales figures of their books when compared to, say, 'autobiographies' of celebrities. It is by no means clear, though, that academics are not considered to have any impact as intellectuals by the more general public. One such public, the readers of *Prospect* magazine, took part in an online poll to vote "for their top [five] names from our original longlist of 100" (*Prospect* website). Out of the 100 names, 59 are academics, 33 of whom appear in the top 50 names (66%). In the top 10, 7 are academics and, together, gathered 15,953 votes. The magazine conducted a "bonus" poll. Respondents in the poll could name one additional name which had been left out of the list. Here, too, academics dominate the list, although not as decisively: out of 20 names, 9 are academics (45%),

4 are writers, 2 are politicians and the rest had various other occupations. This poll is clearly self-selecting as the magazine is aimed at a limited readership, namely at “a mature, educated, affluent and discerning readership, many of whom [at] the top of their profession” (Prospect website), names were pre-selected by the magazine and, despite the large number of responses, the global reach of the poll would have been compromised by the fact that the language was English (Herman). Moreover, votes were skewed by the intellectuals themselves, who, in the case of Noam Chomsky, Christopher Hitchens and Abdolkarim Soroush, linked the poll website to their own website and invited people to vote. Unsurprisingly, they benefited most (Herman). But despite all these caveats, Herman concludes that the list runs counter to the popular belief that the oppositional intellectual is no more: “The overwhelming victory for Noam Chomsky suggests that we still yearn for such figures – we just don’t seem to find them under the age of 70.”

In the case of academic intellectuals this may be an outcome of the typical career structure of academics in the new academic world. In common with other professions such as law or medicine, young academics go through a long apprenticeship which now is increasingly fraught with job insecurity, casualisation of academic employment and by having to function on many levels at once. Thus, PhD students today would be extremely ill advised to spend all their time working on their theses: a certain amount of teaching experience, research experience (conference papers as well as peer-reviewed publications) and some experience of administrative processes, e.g. those relating to bidding for research funding, are nearly always part of the job descriptions on university vacancy boards for first lecturing posts. Since writing for highly specialised audiences is both ‘easier’ for someone steeped in thesis-related research as well as being more highly rewarded, it is no surprise that typical academic careers involve addressing the community of fellow researchers almost exclusively for a number of years. Academic career progression may be hampered by extending one’s scope and leaving the boundaries of specialisation: the participants in my research note that intellectual work can destroy one’s career (three) or academic reputation (two), that the pressure to produce ‘RAE-able’ research militates against intellectual work (two), that specialisation makes the ‘big picture’-view of intellectuals difficult to achieve (four) and that, unless one is a specialist, one is not respected in the research community

(four). The institution encourages specialisation (two) and the business model of the university does not encourage intellectual enquiry (two). The participants who considered themselves to be at the beginning of their careers (two) were understandably more worried about these constraints than their counterparts who had reached the peak of their careers (three). The academics at the peak of their career did not generally worry about these constraints for themselves but did so on behalf of their younger colleagues. This pattern is reproduced in the "Forum": a significant number of respondents (six) said that they used to write for a narrow, academic audience within their own discipline but have more recently turned to writing for a broader audience. This move was often experienced as liberating but also as fraught with new anxieties, as this type of writing involved learning new skills. Martha Nussbaum, for example, recalls struggling with writing reviews for the *New York Review of Books* for a while (54). Public intellectual engagement is thus a relatively recent development for a number of these respondents and often correlates with being granted tenure (four) and thus having the freedom not to have to conform to internally or externally imposed academic goals any longer.

The myth of the academic intellectual is powerful, however, and influences even those who are still at the beginning of their academic careers. It is undisputed that, in order to have a meaningful public intellectual voice, an individual must first have made a mark in their chosen field. Mere celebrity is not enough (Collini, 2007). Thus, given the multiple roles that academics now have to satisfy early in their careers and in order to secure promotion, it is not surprising that academics are only able to branch out into broader spheres of influence with a degree of job security and a sense of having achieved something important. Nevertheless, those academics who are at the beginning of their careers or whose day-to-day working practice leaves little time for intellectual reflection (because, e.g. in the case of one participant, her teaching load takes up about 90% of her time during term time) appear to feel guilty because they are not fulfilling this part of the myth.

6. In conclusion I would like to stress the astonishing durability of central academic myths around the academic community and the professor, whose role is to 'profess' his/her knowledge and learning in public, a public which is not only the rather narrow public of the academic community but goes beyond it. Universities have always had to adapt to local institutional environments and the current environment

in the UK is characterised by confused and conflicting ideas about what the university's roles are. Universities are meant to have a global impact but also a local one, deliver an education based on the principles of the elite institution but in a massified environment – in short, “do more with less” (see Welch, 1997, 299). In a time when the university has lost the monopoly on knowledge production it is still meant to be a prime producer of knowledge, particularly of commodified knowledge. Given this context, it is remarkable how most academics, young as well as older ones, still view their career development and eventual entrance into the public sphere according to the traditional myth of the academic or the academic community. Conferences like this, for example, are often sought out to reaffirm these myths and academics appreciate the opportunity ‘to remember why they are doing this job’. The reality of fixed-term contracts, less than ideal working environments, pressure to take on extra teaching and administrative duties as well as to produce high-level research are accepted and worked around as stages within the academic career that do not displace the central myth. This does not mean that academics are necessarily over-compliant in the face of overwhelming external pressures but that the idea of what it means to be an academic might be more durable than the current institutional environment.

An article by the lecturer, administrator, author and Welsh public intellectual Thomas Jones about the purpose of the University of Wales published in 1914 shows that the preoccupations of academia today are not new. The confidence in the ability of academics to ‘claim new provinces’ of thought and knowledge seems a trifle strident and laden with imperialist overtones today. However, it can be argued that the belief in the myth of the academic as intellectual worker was present then as much as it is now – as well as the confidence that intellectual work conducted in academia will ultimately benefit society as a whole:

The main business of a university is to be constantly vigilant on the frontiers of knowledge, to be pushing forward the boundaries and claiming new provinces. To forget this ‘athletic and exacting business,’ and to merge into the university institutions whose motto is the tradesman’s “small profits and quick returns,” is ultimately to doom Welsh education of *all grades* to the realm of the second rate. (T.J., 201)

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