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THE VERY IDEA OF ACADEMIC CULTURE: WHAT ACADEMY? WHAT CULTURE?

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Abstract: In what senses can the academy be said to be a site of culture? Does that very idea bear much weight today? Perhaps the negative proposition has more substance, namely that the academy is no longer (if indeed it ever was) a place of culture. After all, we live in dark times—of unbridled power, tyranny, domination and manipulation. Some say that we have entered an age of the posthuman or even the *in*human. It just may be, however, that in such a world, the academic community is needed more than ever for it offers a culture of *justified revelation*. It is a culture that reveals the world to us in new ways, but in ways that are attested and contested; its judgements emerge out of a critical and unworldly pedantry. With some hesitancy, we can legitimately therefore speak of not just a culture of the academic community but, indeed, *the* culture of the academic community.

Keywords: academic culture; criticiality; culture; institutional culture; posthuman; reason; universality.

Introduction

The special issue of *Human Affairs* in which this paper appears is devoted to the theme of contemporary academic culture. At once, various hares are set running. In what senses can the academy be said to be a site of culture? Does that very idea—that the academy might be a site of culture—bear much weight today? Perhaps the negative proposition has more substance, namely that the academy is no longer (if indeed it ever was) a place of culture. Or at least, perhaps the presence of culture in the university has been thinning of late. But the inclusion of this special issue within a journal of human affairs prompts yet further issues. After all, some say (Lyotard, 1993; Herbrechter, 2013) that we have entered an age of the posthuman or even the *inhuman*. If that is the case, the problem of the idea of academic culture is thrown into even higher relief. Just what might be entailed by academic culture amidst the inhuman? Could that idea ever make any sense?

Our opening questions, however, are not yet exhausted, for the very idea of the academy poses problems too. What does it mean to speak of the academy? Is this not an outdated notion? Does it not conjure an image of cloisters or an ivory tower, insulated from society and living in its own space, whereas today the academy in the form of a university sector is now a significant part of the infrastructure of the modern state?

The idea of academic culture, accordingly, poses considerable problems (and several not yet identified). And yet the matter is of fundamental importance. Just what might be meant by 'culture' today and what role, if any, do universities have in contributing to it? Are universities to be a cultural force or a cultural good and in what ways might it be possible? These are very large questions and bear upon the kind of society we might wish to see develop and which values it might uphold and the possibilities for the university in the twenty-first century.

Internalist and externalist conceptions of academic culture

Culture is a matter of making distinctions. It is a way not only of signifying inclusion but also—by extension—of signifying exclusion. Culture connotes some kind of collective systems of meaning and it is on the nature of the collective that much attention has been focused. Less brought into view is the corollary that such meaning systems gain their traction from their excluding powers. Culture implies both insiders *and* outsiders. We shall want to bear in mind this aspect of culture in our ensuing discussion.

In relation to the academic world, culture comes into play in two fundamentally different senses. Culture comes into play as dimensions *within* the academy. This might be termed the *internalist* concept of culture. Here, we may inquire into the meaning structures within the academy: what are their significant fault lines? Through which meanings do those within the academy relate to each other and differentiate themselves from each other? How tight are those meanings? To what extent do the various groupings within the academy inter-connect and through what over-arching mutual interests (if any)? And to what extent are there substantial lines of cleavage, separating collectives from each other, even within the space of the academy?

Culture, too, comes into play in relation to the interconnections of the academy to the wider society. This might be termed an *externalist* concept of culture. Here, the academy comes into a relationship with the cultural forms of that wider society, whether in an endorsing way or perhaps an antagonistic way. The culture of the university might be said to support the wider cultures of society or even run against them. After all, perhaps the internalist culture of the academy is or might be pitted against those wider cultures in society more generally.

These alternatives possibilities—that the academy might be supportive of society's main cultural systems *and* might also be oppositional to those cultural forms—must lie at the heart of our inquiry here. In fact, we have glimpsed two axes which, when placed against each other, would yield four sets of relationships. The two axes are those of internalist-externalist cultures; and unitary-multiple cultures. (Is there (a) a dominant culture within the academy or, nowadays, (b) a set of proliferating cultures, both across disciplines and as characteristic of the university as such? Is there (c) a dominant wider culture in society or just (d) a multiplicity of cultures? How might the academic culture (if such there be) relate to the culture of the wider society (if such a phrasing has any meaning today)? And how might different sub-cultures of academe relate to the wider cultures of society?) It is an extraordinary juxtaposition of possibilities and yet, so far as I know, this complexity—really, this set of complexities, plural—has not been brought out anywhere in the literature.

One reason that this complexity of cultural relationships has not seriously been brought out hitherto is that scholars who concern themselves with culture and the academy tend to focus either on the internalist conception of culture or the externalist conception. For example, Tony Becher in his (1989) magnum opus, *Academic Tribes and Territories*, was preoccupied in giving a detailed description of the cultures within the academy. In Becher's analysis, the dominant cultural forms within the academy were founded on epistemological allegiances: the different disciplines (in their hardness/softness, and in their purity/applied character) bequeathed powerful ways of understanding the world, that generated forms of academic being (as we might put it).

A quite different but yet still internalist conception of academic culture is to be found in the work of Ian McNay (2012). McNay approaches the matter of culture in the academy as a species of *organizational* culture. From this angle, he makes two moves: firstly, that universities as institutions possess their own culture; secondly, that these institutional cultures fall into characteristic forms. The institutional cultures that McNay discerns are of four kinds, formed by two axes, according to the extent to which there is looser or tighter institutional control of (i) policy and (ii) practice. The four forms of institutional culture that these two axes bequeath McNay names Bureaucracy, Collegium, Corporation and Enterprise. These forms are far from static and various patterns of movement can be observed. A dominant movement can be observed, however, namely that the institutional culture of collegium is weakening, while the cultures of bureaucracy, corporation and enterprise may be seen to be more or less dominant in different institutions.

In contrast to such internalist conceptions of academic culture can be observed externalist conceptions. Just as with the internalist conceptions, fault lines can be spotted here too, among the externalist conceptions.

Perhaps the most prominent of externalist conceptions of academic culture is that of Pierre Bourdieu. While in some of his writings, Bourdieu has certainly illuminated the internal culture of the academy and the professoriate and its discourse, surely a greater attention has been paid to the way in which academic life is placed in relation to the culture of the wider society. There, the key term advanced by Bourdieu was that of 'reproduction' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), with the thesis that—far from offering an emancipatory, or oppositional or critical culture—a function of the academic world was that of *reproducing* the dominant culture of the wider society—so much so that 'the university remains [in France in the 1960s] the major vehicle of the most traditional culture' (Bourdieu &Passeron, 1979). Relays for such cultural reproduction were to be found, Bourdieu suggested, in repositories of linguistic, communication and social capital, so forming *cultural* capital.

Another variant of an externalist conception of academic culture is to found in the English literary critic, F. R. Leavis. The title of one of his most pertinent books for our present theme is itself much to the point here, namely "English Literature in our Time and the University" (Leavis, 1969). In other words, we understand the place and potential of English literature first in its role in society and only properly in the university within that context. And Leavis' conception of the understanding and role of English literature was much bound up with culture. For Leavis, the study and the advancement of English was a matter of establishing value in society: 'the establishing of the poem (or the novel) is the establishing of a value' (Leavis, 1969, p. 50). Such a study, in which the university can be central, such a concern

with language, 'is very largely the essential life of a culture'(1969, p. 49). This sense of the responsibility of the university was advanced by Leavis with a prose thick with terms such as 'judgement', 'standards' and 'intelligence', all understood as having their place in a dynamic community, embodying 'real critical engagement'.

Cultural distinctions

The distinction that I have just been making—between internalist and externalist conceptions of academic culture—can only amount to an initial skirmish. Several other distinctions have loomed into view in the examples that we have just glanced at. Firstly, there is the fundamental distinction to be made (in any understanding of 'culture') between culture as a sociological category and culture as a normative concept. It is, as it were, a distinction between a lower case 'culture' and an upper case 'Culture' (even if, as with Leavis, the upper case is absent). The sociological category lends itself naturally to the plural form—'cultures'—since cultures, in this sense, are multiple and ubiquitous. The normative concept of culture, on the other hand, contains a hidden sense of high culture, of serious culture, and even—sotto voce—of elite culture. The sociological concept of culture is *universal and inclusive*, there being a multitude of cultures even in a single society, while the normative idea of culture is *singular and exclusionary*. The sociological concept is a horizontal sense of culture whereas the normative concept of culture conveys very much a hierarchical and judgemental sense of culture. (An interesting feature of the Royal Commission Inquiry into British higher education in 1963—the so-called *Robbins Report*—was its explicit concern with *a common culture*. That this concern accompanied a highly elite form of higher education (despite the considerable expansion that it urged) is a paradox not, I think, much noticed in the UK, even amid the contemporary interest in that Report in the wake of its fiftieth anniversary).

A second distinction here refers to a shift in the academy (which we glimpsed earlier), a shift so major that the very term 'academy' has been disappearing. In this shift, the academy, composed of the invisible colleges of the (world-wide) disciplines, with their 'academic tribes and territories' and their separate epistemological cultures (as observed by Becher) vanishes, to be replaced by the university as an organization. Here, as noted (and as depicted by McNay), culture becomes a theme by which this corporatized university may be understood, with each university having its own institutional culture (coloured by the extent to which power and values are derived from the academics and their disciplines, the market, the state and the university as an organizational bureaucracy). At some risk of crudeness, let us term this an *epistemological/ organizational* axis. Via the influence of this axis, academic identity itself becomes less shaped by disciplinary cultures and more shaped by the university as an organization.

We have, now then, three axes through which academic culture can be understood: internalist/ externalist; descriptive/ normative; epistemological/ organizational. In addition to this complexity we should note—as already implied—that this is a dynamic picture, with criss-crossings and inter-leavings in all directions. For instance, the idea of institutional culture has to allow for at least some presence of disciplinary culture (as in McNay); the idea, in Bourdieu, of the university as supplying (external) cultural capital (a sociological

category) accommodates both (internal) disciplinary culture *and* a nod towards high elite culture (a matter nicely reflected in the way in which French philosophers—producers of abstract texts that take themselves very seriously—are often courted by French presidents and prime ministers); and the idea that universities might protect and advance culture with a capital C (as it were) gains its traction (in Leavis, at any rate) from the kind of discrimating, judgemental intelligence in question forming the heart of the pedagogical process in the university (captured in Leavis' pedagogical question 'This is so, isn't it?').

These three axes are accompanied, as noted, by a further dimension, namely that of the tendency in a global world for cultures to proliferate. And this tendency can be observed both in the academy *and* in the wider society. In turn arises the issue as to whether, such proliferation of cultures can still be said to keep company with larger over-arching and unifying cultures. It is that matter in relation to the academy that is in front of us here: whether and to what extent there can be said to be an overarching—or at least dominant and unifying—culture within the academy.

So what then of academic culture?

Against the background of this swift resumé, what if anything might be made of the very idea of academic culture? For all the complexity of our initial observations, can it not be said that the idea of academic culture has thinned and continues to thin further; and on several grounds? Firstly, the very idea provokes squeamishness, both on account of its own inner complexity and on account of its harbouring implications of associations with exclusive and question-begging high culture. In its more modern forms, in the ideas of cultural capital and social capital, it has been softened but it has also been intensified, for now the university is attached in this mode of reasoning to the idea of cultural reproduction and implicitly a kind of cultural ossification. The university is here an institution that merely endorses the dominant culture and otherwise leaves the wider cultures of society unchanged.

Secondly, as a matter of social fact, the power of the academy has been dented by the rise of universities as corporations, accompanied both by a strengthened managerialism (commonly termed 'new public management') and an infusion of bureaucratic and market-oriented tendencies (and these two latter tendencies are different, and each is powerful). There is an inevitable and visible weakening of the academic voice and academic identity but there is a more insidious movement at work too. The implication of the term 'academic culture' that there is a unified culture across the academic field is now highly problematic for academics are now obliged—in global knowledge flows and national audit regimes—to identify strongly with their own discipline on the one hand and are being expected to form a new identity with their own institution on the other hand. Any meaning structures that might have given substance to an academic culture as such are now in jeopardy.

Thirdly, the idea of culture has come to be analytically suspect. Two movements can be discerned. First, there has been the rise of 'multiculturalism' as a general social theme. There are ideological and political dimensions of this term that must elude us here but its implication of multiple cultures each deserving of equal space and consideration brings a hesitancy to any use of 'culture' in the singular. Secondly, the cultural sphere has been displaced—both in political discourse and in analyses of the university—by the

economic sphere. (Here, we see a symptom of the Habermassian thesis of the colonisation of the lifeworld by instrumental reason (Habermas, 1989.) Universities have come to view themselves as sites of multiculturalism *and* the academic world has come to be interrogated for its economic utility (or 'impact'). On either ground, culture as a category comes to be somewhat suspect.

Lastly, the very category of the 'academic' is itself problematic today, both within and beyond the academy. The idea of 'academic', whether as noun ('an academic') or adjective ('the academic *world*', 'the academic *community*'), conjures sentiments of remoteness and even aloofness. Both as value and as fact, such sentiments are repudiated. Many who are employed in academic positions would hesitate to use the term 'academic' as a form of self-identity (and would preferably reach for other terms, such as researcher, teacher, course director, coordinator, supervisor and so on). Such hesitancy is understandable for the academic sphere no longer enjoys a purity and an insulation that it may once have enjoyed; and in turn does not attract the authority and legitimacy that it once enjoyed. Both within universities and in relation to the wider society (the economic and the social spheres), the category of academic, accordingly, is for many now passé.

Pragmatically, socially, politically, theoretically, and empirically, then, the very idea of 'academic culture' seems to be dissolving, if it has not already dissolved. Is that then, the end of the matter? The idea of academic culture has lost its value as a general trope for academic life. It only lives if at all in tiny interstices of universities, perhaps as rearguard actions by some nostalgic souls, wishing to maintain—or even revive—some sense of community among academics on campus. But this seems a forlorn affair, marked only by the rather empty 'senior common room' after five o'clock, and the empty reading room. After all, which academic has time for reading now? And even the departmental rooms at the end of the corridor for convivial morning coffee or afternoon tea were long removed in an earlier building refurbishment. Now academic life is marked by its earnestness, its busy-ness, its solitude, its competitiveness and its sheer productivity.

Voices of culture

Is there a single voice that is speaking out positively for culture as a concept in understanding academic life? For the most part, the juxtaposition of culture and the academy has rarely been pursued in recent writings and, as implied, where it is so pursued, the juxtaposition is brought into view only to demolish the very idea (that that juxtaposition makes sense). Bill Readings (1997) explicitly picked up the theme of culture in his seminal work, *The University in Ruins*. Doubly, Readings dismisses the idea of culture in any kind of juxtaposition with the university. At one time, for Readings, the university was both a site of and a site for culture; it was indeed the *university of culture*. Without any nostalgia, Readings observed that that idea—as embodied in Leavis (to whom Readings refers)—is now passé. Indeed, for Readings, it harboured sentiments of a totalising ('organic') culture, and harboured distant links to the Reich. The problem for Readings is that no adequate replacement juxtaposition of culture and the university has been found. For Readings, this story, indeed, is part of the story of the university coming to its present ruined state.

The only positive voices are, it seems, to be found among those who latch onto the idea

of universities as organizations and believe that they have found a new home for 'culture', as institutional culture. But I am not aware of a single contemporary voice that is speaking up for culture in relation to the academic life as such. Perhaps the nearest such voice is that of Martha Nussbaum. For some time, Nussbaum has been not just defending the humanities but has been promoting the humanities (especially in response to their apparent weakening in higher education policies and institutional practices).

At least implicitly, Nussbaum's arguments have depended in part on a perceived alliance of the humanities with high culture (much weight is placed on an understanding of Greek culture and ideas). An education in the humanities, accordingly, is (Nussbaum, 2010) a way of 'cultivating humanity': such a 'cultural literacy' 'confers both strength and independence' (p. 35) and has had 'an intense connection with character and community' (p. 89). But this is special pleading (for the humanities) and contains many question-begging presuppositions, not least that it is the humanities that are specially privileged to advance culture in society. More to our point here, this is an argument that does not address the matters as to whether the academic sphere itself can be said to have a close interconnection with culture. It cannot help us here, therefore, and should be set aside.

There are, though, two voices to which an ear might be lent. We must come back to them a little more fully in due course but let us en passant them here so as to grasp their collective sweep. Firstly, there is the idea promoted a quarter of a century ago by Alvin Gouldner (1979), namely that of the academy as sustaining a *culture of critical discourse*. While pointing to strains and tensions in the academy in its new juxtaposition with the state and society, Gouldner also contended that the academy turned on a set of grammatical and linguistic rules concerned with *justification*. Secondly, and more recently, Gerard Delanty (2001) has poignantly fused the internal culture of the academy with the challenge of culture in the wider world. The university 'previously existed outside the multicultural society, for the university was allegedly based on only one culture, the common heritage of humankind … multiculturalism has destroyed this illusion'. Here, a new opportunity opens for the university, that of cultivating 'cultural citizenship'.

I pick out these two voices as representative, as it were, of two perspectives that we must surely bring together if we are in any way to find a way of giving weight to the idea of academic culture in the twenty-first century. The first, that of Gouldner's, is concerned to discern some pattern in the tacit rules of academic life that may have a wider social value, coupled with a belief that such rules are enduring (and not easily dislodged even by the massive shifts in the societal positioning of the academy). The second, that of Delanty, is wanting to identify spaces that may be opening for the university to play a cultural role in society, given the problematic character of culture contemporaneously. I want, in the rest of this essay, to try to bring these two perspectives together while critiquing them at the same time, and to press that story into a new narrative for academic culture.

Reason and society, and the academy

In 1992 was published *Reason and Culture* by Ernest Gellner. This book is rarely if ever cited in the higher education literature despite its evident relevance—both reason and culture being large themes in understanding both universities and their pedagogical processes.

The ground of Gellner's plot is that of reason *as* culture. For some hundred of years, Western society has not only prided itself on reason as core to its culture but has explicitly written up that story. Both philosophy and sociology have tackled it head-on, offering us accounts variously as to the judgemental basis of reason, its virtues, its pervasiveness and its functions. Many of the dominant thinkers have made this matter a central theme in their oeuvres, including Kant, Hume, Descartes, Weber and Durkheim. More recently, Jurgen Habermas, John Searle, Stephen Toulmin and, indeed, Pierre Bourdieu are indicative of the continuing resonance of this matter.

Their thinking has—it might be said—collectively amounted to a defence of reason *as* culture. Certainly, there has been a critical strain, picking up from Nietzsche and developing especially through modern continently European philosophy (both Critical Theory and deconstructuralism) in which reason has been mocked and even attacked for its pretensions. Variously, Western reason has been put in the dock for lacking the neutrality that it pretends, that it is actually a narrow form of reasoning (an instrumental form of reasoning that led in part to the gas chambers), that it is 'theory-laden' (Kuhn) and depressingly lacking in imagination and fecundity (Feyerabend).

There is much in these swipes at reason but yet there remains a point that Gellner was making a quarter of a century ago that may still be helpful to us here. This is precisely the point, as indicated, that in Western society, reason is a kind of culture in itself ('and far more potent than any earlier forms of knowledge' (Gellner, 1992, p. 19)). A problem with this particular culture (in which reason plays a—if not the—central part), Gellner observes, is that we are forever bound to lack 'a genuine vindication' of it; it cannot generate from within itself the resources to provide its own foundations. Being so 'obliged to shed the illusion that it can vindicate itself … it will not be comfortable and cannot ever recover comfort' (p. 19).

This reason, then, is a culture and a precarious culture at that. And yet it is just such a precarious culture—a *culture of reason*—that sits beneath and structures western universities. This is the fundamental claim being made here in this essay. This is a reason, after all, that makes possible the very critiques of reason that have been launched against it. This is culture of reason that permits assault on itself. And still it stands if somewhat precariously (being holed somewhat both sociologically and philosophically, as we have noted).

Crucially, here, this double precariousness is not a temporary situation: it is part of the condition of the academic domain in the modern world. The two assaults—sociological and philosophical—are not to be overturned. The genie is out of the bottle. The culture of reason—as a foundation for the academic world—is cracked, even if it still manages to support that very world. Universities are now inexorably integrated into national and global systems, especially economic systems; and radical critiques of reason have developed a stridency over the past forty years or so (with its sense of its objectivity undermined, even if—not least in the emergence of Critical Realism—there has been something of a return to realism and a sense of a world independent of our knowing efforts, of late). Sociologically and philosophically, then, *the academy has to live with inner doubts about itself*.

An extraordinary aspect of the academy is that it possesses this double capacity both to reason and to reason about reason. This is both a weakness (for some) and a strength. It appears to some to be a weakness—in fact, a set of weaknesses—because the academy does not and cannot speak with a single voice about its own culture of reason, because it

is not only an actor in the world but still harbours reflective (and self-reflective) moments. It is a strength, however, because this reflexive capacity produces a continuing and rolling *reasoning robustness*. The academy can move on and keep going. It would be wrong to term this a self-correcting capacity for that would imply that matters had gone awry and that the academy needs continually to bring itself back to the true path of discernment. Rather, *the academy's reasoning position displaces itself into new spaces*.

Academic culture, re-sighted

We are here perhaps on the edge of glimpsing a sense of academic culture in the contemporary world. It is a double re-sighting. We see it and in the perception of it, bring it into focus. We see it anew and reposition it at the same time. We both see it *and* sight it in a new place. At this point in our story, we may helpfully return to both Gouldner and Delanty.

Gouldner's key idea—in relation to culture and the academy—turned, it will be recalled, on the idea of a culture of critical discourse. Gouldner observes that the academy is fragmenting into technical elites, a feature that—we may note—has intensified over the past quarter of a century since Gouldner's book appeared (spurred on by opportunities in a marketized world, by demands from national agencies that the academy demonstrate its impact and by global evaluations, evident in world league tables of university performance). Nevertheless, captured in Gouldner's idea of a culture of critical discourse is the suggestion that there lies deep in the forms of reasoning that are characteristic of the academy particular forms of reasoning, with certain kinds of tacit rules and linguistic structures.

Echoing in a way this idea is the suggestion of Jurgen Habermas that Western rationality harbours an appeal to an 'ideal speech situation', with certain presupposed 'validity conditions'—of truthfulness, appropriateness and sincerity (Habermas, 1979, p. 65). The truthfulness condition is a particularly powerful condition (echoed in different ways by both Bernard Williams (2002) and Stephen Toulmin (2001, although both would want to hold to a generous view as to what might count as truthfulness in different domains, not least in practical domains): the point of a concern with truthfulness—we might even say the point of a *culture* of truthfulness—is that it not just allows for critical rejoinders but implicitly *invites* them. This is, as we might term it then, an *invitational discourse*. It is a discourse that allows for the other, that—as it were—embraces the other and invites the other into the discourse.

But this is a discourse with point, namely that of truthfulness. Whether in the sciences or the humanities (or the social sciences (Kagan, 2009)) or in more practical fields, propositions are oriented towards saying something about the world, however descriptive or imaginative they may be, and however concrete or abstract their content may be. This is a *referential* discourse, in that it is intent on referring to a world (even if it is referring to discourse itself) and saying things—forming and making propositions—about the world. It is oriented towards taking the world forward in some way, at least in knowledge and/or understanding.

At this juncture, we can bring back into view the ideas of Gerard Delanty. Delanty, it will be recalled, sees in the university a potential of cultural citizenship, by which Delanty means 'that the role of the university extends beyond knowledge to participation in and the creation of cultural production more broadly' (Delanty, 2001, p.156). To this function, Delanty couples a second function, that of technological citizenship. This is a citizenship build on rights amid

new technologies, so opening the possibility of 'the extension of knowledge … to the social world'. But, crucially, Delanty sees the university as a site in which these two functions are brought together through 'zones of interconnectivity between the opposing domains of technology and culture' so retaining 'a post-metaphysical principle of unity' (p. 157).

Tantalisingly, Delanty's book ends at that point, so key questions are left on the table. Just how is such a unity—between culture and technology to be sustained by the university? One hint lies in Delanty's reference to the potential of new technologies to help in diffusing knowledge across society, indeed across the globe. (Opening here is a path to what Michael Peters has termed 'socialist knowledge' (Peters, Gietzen, & Ondercin, 2012) and what Ruth Finnegan has termed 'knowledge beyond the walls' (Finnegan, 2005).) But for a further and crucial move here we need also to return to the thesis of Gouldner as to the linguistic and social rules that make for a 'culture of critical discourse'. The inner culture of the university has to be connected with its wider cultural role in society.

There lies here two options for the university, and they are by no means mutually exclusive. One option lies in the university being the supreme site in society for the formation—as we may put it—of *cognitive capital*. This is the capital that the university is especially charged with offering, namely the wherewithal to get on in a knowledge society. This is the capital through which individuals—and even nations—can invest in different forms of knowledge and can in turn put those investments to work amid 'cognitive capitalism' (Boutang, 2011). The other option lies in the university advancing *cognitive culture*. This is a particular form of culture, namely that of handling, of living in and with, cognitions *wisely* (cf. Maxwell, 2012). This is a culture that indeed recognises that knowledge as such is potentially dangerous, and that the possession of knowledge and a grasp of its uses calls for judgement and even imagination. On occasions, wisdom will suggest that knowledge should remain inert.

It is here that the idea of a culture of critical discourse comes into play. Bringing it into play can take a number of conceptual forms. We might, a la Habermas, peer into the socio-linguistic rules that could be said to be characteristic of this form of 'communicative discourse'. If Habermas' idea of communicative rationality might be felt to be unduly sanguine about the potential for discourse in the wider society—is it not chaotic rather than orderly? Is it not full of conflict rather than seeking a consensus? Is it not laden with power rather than according all would-be participants equal access to a conversation?—at least it has application to the idea of academic culture. Here, if nowhere else, the idea of an ideal speech situation surely has application (in which unconstrained participants are motivated by 'the better argument' in a consensually oriented critical dialogue).

A second way of filling out the idea of a culture of critical discourse would take up the approach, much vaunted these days, of a virtue ethics that lies within a truth-oriented discourse. Prompted especially by Alasdair MacIntyre (1985)—but initially proposed by Aristotle—the central claim here would be that engaging seriously in that kind of critical discourse requires and helps in turn to form certain kinds of virtues, concerned with truthfulness, wisdom, respect for others, a willingness to displace oneself in encountering other points of view and so forth. Such 'epistemic virtues' (Brady & Pritchard, 2003) are constitutive not only of academics as persons but of a culture of critical discourse as a social institution.

Universality

A third—and here a final—way of filling out the idea of a culture of critical discourse would be to attempt to discern 'universals' embedded within it. The general path here would be to start from the observation, that the culture of academic discourse rests on non-partial and thereby universal foundations: it is not simply your truth or my truth that is at stake—it is not an effort to impose particular perspectives—but a more impartial collaborative effort to form understandings of the world.

Amid postmodernism, universals have had a thin time of it but there is now to be seen something of a return to them. Perhaps the two leading contemporary exponents of universals are Laclau & Zizek. Laclau (2000; 2007) alights on the tension between particularity and universality, a theme that must require our attention in any working out of academic culture. Is the academic world a set of particularities, with academics encased in their disciplines, professional fields, individual institutions and separate national systems or might there be some unifying texture to it all? But do we have to make a choice between universality and particularity? For Laclau, to the contrary: 'the universal has no content of its own' but 'can only emerge out of the particular'. Is this not the case with academic culture, that it is grounded in its particular instances—the chance meeting in the corridor, the teaching event, the crafting of a paper for publication, a committee meeting—but that each of these situations have their place against a horizon of universals; of otherness, reciprocity, respect for persons, truthfulness, sincerity and so forth. Is this not a fruitful way of gaining insight into the complexity of academic culture?

A different offering comes from Slavoj Zizek (2000). 'Universality is unavoidable'. (p. 101). Even 'when we criticize the hidden bias and exclusion of universality, … we are already doing so within the terrain opened up by universality.' (Zizek, 2000, p.102) 'Universality becomes "actual" precisely and only by rendering thematic the exclusions on which it is grounded, by continuously questioning, renegotiating, displacing them … by conceiving itself as unaccomplished in its very notion' (p. 102). The antagonism (a further favourite theme of Zizek) inherent in academic life may seem on the surface to reflect a fissiparous community, fragmenting in so many ways. Its disputes, however, as with its medieval forebears (in their disputations), take place only through there being a sharedness over the fundamental rules of the academic game.

This is not a static culture. On the contrary. It is all the time on the move, stretching this way and that. More than that, the universals within which the academic community has its locale are all the time *widening*; and, perhaps in the process, some universals *are* weakening. 'Truth' is being replaced by 'truthfulness', 'debate' is displaced by 'communication'; while universals such as participation, access and equity join the party. Precisely as the academic world is enfolded evermore into the fabric of society, so claims on it expand, and its horizon of universals widens.

Conclusions

The categories of 'academic community' and 'culture' can no longer be put together without some elaboration and, indeed, hesitation. Their interconnections are no longer straightforward (if, indeed, they ever were). The idea of 'the academic culture' seems to

be a chimera; even the idea of '*an* academic culture' is in difficulty. The academic world has lost any unity that it once had that might have been said to provide the ground of a specifically academic culture. More disconcertingly, the academic world has been swept up into projects of the wider society. The separateness from the wider society that the academic world enjoyed that made possible it having its own culture no longer holds. If culture has any meaning in the world today, then perhaps the culture—or cultures—of the academic world are simply the culture—or cultures—or the wider world.

But this is an unnecessarily dismal reading of the situation. The institutions of the academic world—its journals, conferences, seminars, learned societies, its vivas and its examinations, not to mention its prizes and awards—indicate that the academic world is a particular form of life; and one that is needed and, indeed, valued in the contemporary world. The striving for well-founded insights into the world (whether in the natural sciences or in the humanities) and the drive towards 'evidence-based policy' are testimony to a culture of impartiality, of critical dialogue, of a proper disinterestedness, and indeed of a separateness from the world that still endures; and this separateness has (somewhat unnoticed) ever larger value in the modern world. Of course, all these features are continually and increasingly being dented, by marketization, power, vaunting ambition (now heightened), the need to demonstrate 'impact' and the emergence of a global digital economy. Yet there remains stubbornly an inner core to the academic world; Gouldner's phrasing of 'a culture of critical discourse' can barely be surpassed.

It is a strange culture, for it is counterfactual in some ways. It lives, as it must, in the here and now, amid the fluidity of academic life in the twenty-first century. But it lives also transcendently. It is situated in particular events in particular settings—in teaching, in scholarship, in research, in meetings, in the writing of proposals, in encounters with students—but it has universal horizons. And these horizons, as noted, far from narrowing, are all the time widening. Truthfulness, impartiality, disinterestedness, respect, openness, equity, participation—these are universal themes, even if there is all the time a falling short of their promise.

We live in dark times—of unbridled power, tyranny, domination and manipulation. In such a world, the academic community is needed more than ever for it offers, as we may put it, a culture of *justified revelation*. It is a culture that reveals the world to us in new ways, but in ways that are attested, and contested; its judgements emerge out of a critical and unworldly pedantry. Its judgements are doubly *justified*! With some hesitancy, we can legitimately therefore speak of not just a culture of the academic community but, indeed, *the* culture of the academic community.

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