



The Academic as Public Intellectual: Examining Public Engagement in the Professionalised Academy

Sociology

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DOI: 10.1177/0038038515586681

soc.sagepub.com



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Abstract

In this article we critically consider the widely held conception that the public intellectual is in decline. We present a more sanguine fate of this figure, arguing that today we observe a flourishing of intellectuals. One such figure is the academic intellectual who has often been looked at with suspicion as a technical specialist. This conception suggests that university intellectuals are diluted versions of the historical conception of the 'true' public intellectual – that is, an 'independent spirit' that fearlessly challenges unjust power. In this article, we contest this view, arguing that this historical conception, idealised as it may be, nevertheless can inform scholastic activities. By resituating the public intellectual as a kind of temperament rather than a title, we examine its pressing – but at the same time uneasy – relevance to contemporary academic life. Counterposing this with contemporary instrumental conceptions of research impact, we suggest that where possible the intellectual academic should aspire to go beyond academic institutional norms and requirements. Hence, the academic public intellectual refers to a temperament, which is *in* but not *of* the academic profession.

Keywords

academy, decline thesis, non-conformist, peer review, professionalisation, public intellectual, universities

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Introduction

There is no doubt that the modern university, especially the British version, has undergone a remarkable makeover in the course of the last three decades, making it increasingly professional and bureaucratic (Evans, 2004). These changes have had far reaching consequences for those working in universities. Those previously involved in long-term research projects have faced increasing pressures to compartmentalise and capitalise on their research findings. Meanwhile, a new generation of young scholars, committed to publishing their work in a narrow range of specialised academic journals at the expense of other scholarly activities, have found themselves catapulted up the ranks with unprecedented speed (Collini, 2012). The rise of these new institutional processes, we argue in this article, has to be critically examined. How do they influence academia? What notions of the academic do they endorse? And what are the prospects, in such professionalised academic context, for public intellectual figures to emerge and persist?

The professionalised university, with its narrow and clearly formulated demands, may, at first glance, appear to be an inhospitable terrain for the public intellectual. Yet, we suggest that this figure may still subsist, at least in an abstract sense, as a particular temperament, orientation or sensibility; one that is based around a standpoint that the academic public intellectual seeks to articulate. Within the social sciences and humanities, this might be expressed in an enduring commitment to engage with broader publics both inside and outside the academy. In this article we identify a *spectrum* of two types of academic public intellectual within the modern university system. The first of these is the integrated intellectual – a senior academic figure who uses his or her professional status to develop a distinctly public profile. The second is what we call the non-conformist academic – a type of academic intellectual who seeks to engage with the public while at the same time cultivating a critical ethos vis-à-vis the professionalised academy. No doubt, the advance of managerialism and privatisation has shaped the context in which both these types of public intellectuals work in the British academic system, to a certain extent limiting their opportunities for expression. The auditing of research performance in particular has intensified such developments. Our wager is that a range of mounting pressures, especially the demand to publish in ‘elite’ journals, inevitably shapes the contemporary academic.

However, research auditing is far from being a stable and fixed entity. Recent measures to acknowledge ‘impact’ have opened up alternative avenues for evaluating and assessing research. While these changes may have made public intellectual endeavours more acceptable, it is unlikely that the impact agenda, with its emphasis on measuring actual effects, will become the harbinger of new forms and varieties of intellectual engagement. Even so, we argue that a public intellectual temperament can exist, and has historically persevered, under conditions that are not particularly favourable. This temperament, we argue, is one that exists *in* and around the requirements of professional metrics and academic auditing rather than because *of* them. To make this case we wish to resituate the academic as a public intellectual and think of this figure, not as someone who possesses a privileged position beyond the confines of the academic profession, but as someone who has adopted a particular temperament, orientation and sensibility. This necessitates broader engagements through activities that the professionalised academic community is generally

indifferent towards. Such a figure would operate *in* yet at the same time retain a sense of integrity by refusing to become reduced, or completely subordinated, to the professional dictates and requirements *of* the modern university system.

The Decline of the Public Intellectual Thesis

In placing the decline of the public intellectual argument in historical context the American critic and academic Russell Jacoby (2000) is a key figure. For Jacoby, writing with a particular focus on developments in the USA, the university has become defined by a rampant and unabashed anti-public intellectualism. In this sense, the university and those complicit with its professionalisation have failed society. Jacoby points to one particular culprit: the generation of utopian activists who came of age during the 1950s and 1960s and later took up positions in the academy. As they became assimilated into the academy, they no longer worked towards unsettling the dominant order, and their revolutionary zeal had dissipated from their work. As Jacoby (2000: 147) puts it, 'professionalization leads to privatization or depoliticization, a withdrawal of intellectual energy from a larger domain to a narrower discipline'. Speaking publically became less attractive, and seen as an ill-advised career choice.

It is difficult not to share Jacoby's concern, especially if one takes a closer look at what was being published in one of the most prestigious and influential journals in the social sciences, the *American Sociological Review*, during the second half of the 20th century. In a content analysis, Patricia Wilner (1985) looked at the subjects covered by this journal between 1936 and 1982. She found that key social and political events were neglected in the course of its first 46 years. For instance, throughout the 1940s and up to the mid-1950s only a paucity of articles (around 1%) addressed the Cold War and the McCarthy witch-hunts. A more recent survey, looking at the top 20 journals in the field of business and management, revealed similar results. As the authors commented, this shows a 'general state of myopia on the part of business and management scholars towards a variety of political issues, even making a virtue out of ignorance' (Dunne et al., 2008: 271).

This anti-intellectualism, Jacoby argues, is the flipside of professionalisation. As he remarks, in the professionalised university, there is only one thing that counts: journal publications of a suitably high ranking. Indeed, writing a peer-reviewed publication is a labour intensive and highly laborious activity, not just because research and writing are time-consuming, but because publishing is embedded in a complex power relation between author, peer-reviewer and editors, where the former is required constantly to second-guess the expectations and opinions of the latter two groups. This obsession with journal publication has had significant effects on the nature of writing, where texts are not so much written with a particular audience in mind as devised for a specialised and limited set of reviewers, whose blessing is integral to the process.

Senior academics in the social sciences have also been critical of the public retreat of university scholars. For instance, a number of presidential incumbents of the American Sociological Association have used their platform to call for a more publically engaged academic sociology. In his 1976 presidential address at the annual ASA conference, Alfred McClung Lee advocated clearer lines of communication between professional

sociologists and the mass media to enhance the public image of sociology (Lee, 1976: 934). Similar remarks have been made in a British context too. At the flagship annual conference of the British Sociological Association in 2007, the senior British-based sociologist, Barbara Misztal, lamented the withering presence of academics in public life (Attwood, 2007).

The alleged decline of the public intellectual is often blamed on individual academics and their willingness to sacrifice broader public intellectual endeavours for career success. For example Robert Giacalone (2009) castigates academics for a skewed mind-set that prioritises the pursuit of professional rewards, promotion and material acquisition. This mind-set, Giacalone continues, has brought about a collective amnesia when it comes to the 'true' vocational calling of university educators – that of advancing social understanding and humanistic values.

Jacoby's 'decline thesis' outlines a series of important issues that have compromised the position of the contemporary academic. However, the castigation of individual academics for their failure to engage sufficiently with extra-academic audiences, which Giacalone and others make, is itself too narrow and insular. The danger in this position is that the focus on individuals and their mind-sets becomes so great that we fail to consider seriously the coercive pressures that shape these individuals within the modern, financialised university. The pressures of precarious academic labour and the general spread of a competitive ethos throughout the university sector, which has come with the trebling of fees for UK undergraduates (McGettigan, 2013), has obviously had a major role in shaping the context in which academics think and work. The case we make in the remainder of this article is that even within these confines we see a variety of ways in which public intellectual activity and engagement may be expressed.

While it is hard to deny the institutional and economic pressures that have compelled academics to focus on their peers rather than the public, there are important reasons to contest the decline of the public intellectual thesis. First, public intellectuals have, in historical terms, existed within and without universities. Lewis Coser in *Men of Ideas* (1965) presents a range of different types of intellectuals: academic intellectuals; mass cultural intellectuals; scientific intellectuals; unattached intellectuals; intellectuals in power. It could be argued that as academia has become increasingly professionalised – and, as such, largely detached from a general audience – there has also been a proliferation of new types of intellectuals beyond the academy. The American sociologist C Wright Mills (2000: 19) was well aware of this when he acknowledged that the 'sociological imagination' is not the sole preserve of professional academics but also journalists, novelists and historians.

Second, despite the institutional and professional demands that squeeze academics into a cul-de-sac of peer-induced conformity, there are still a number of notable public intellectuals operating in the modern university. Posner (2003) listed 564 of the most important public intellectuals operating today. He whittles this down to a list of 100 top intellectuals; both the long and short lists contain several university-based academics (see Herman, 2005). Admittedly, many of the public intellectuals that appear in these charts are not the household names in the mould of great thinkers such as Freud, Marx, Voltaire or Sartre. Even so, a number of the academic intellectuals that appear in these lists are associated with significant and influential ideas and perspectives. These charts

show that there is still a significant number of public intellectuals in the contemporary university who have a degree of broader recognition. Yet in rethinking the public intellectual as a pressing and important issue that is relevant to academic life in the present, we need to shift the perception of the public intellectual away from it being solely a position of distinction – a position that can only be held by an exclusive set of elite academics who have risen above the conventional requirements of their profession. Such a conception yields an overly narrow view of the potentially diverse nature of intellectual activity, and also diverts us from the pressing question of how a public intellectual temperament might serve as a call to reorient or reshape existing academic practices.

The Public Intellectual – the Integrated and the Nonconformist

Even though the professionalisation of the modern university deters many academics from engaging with broader publics, there are nevertheless some calls from within academia to reconsider a peer-focused academic mind-set in favour of a more outward-looking and publicly engaged orientation. In his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Michael Burawoy recognises the institutional impediments, but points to the possibility of advancing a public sociology based on less professional insularity. While he acknowledges potential institutional solutions to promote a public sociology, he then quickly dismisses them:

Important though these institutional changes are, the success of public sociology will not come from above but from below. It will come when public sociology captures the imagination of sociologists, when sociologists recognize public sociology as important in its own right with its own rewards. (Burawoy, 2005: 25)

What Burawoy seems to be calling for is a permanent revolution of the imagination in academia. Achieving this more personal reorientation towards the public in the minds of academic social scientists is a moot point. After all, the increasing institutional requirements and the pressures of academic life cannot simply be pushed to one side.

Perhaps a more useful way to make sense of the present fate of public intellectuals, especially within universities, is to adopt the position set out by Michel Foucault. In an interview published under the title of 'Truth and power', Foucault (1980) distinguishes between universal intellectuals (which seems to refer to figures like Marx or Sartre) and specific intellectuals (who are characteristic of the present, and more concerned with specificities and non-universalisable concerns). For Foucault, universal intellectuals are usually from a left leaning, radical tradition. Their struggles are connected to those who find themselves under political or economic oppression. Perhaps it is unrealistic and too burdensome for public intellectuals to embrace the grand transformative aspirations of universal intellectuals. This would be asking too much. Sartre (1989) himself wrote in the 1948 play, *Dirty Hands*: 'Intellectuals cannot be good revolutionaries; they are just good enough to be assassins.'

In lieu of grander aspirations, academic intellectuals can assume a specialist interest. This is what Foucault called specific intellectuals, who are concerned primarily with

specific, non-universal issues and problems. This mode, he asserts, has replaced the universal thinker (Foucault, 1980: 126–128). Public intellectual engagement in the modern academy today largely corresponds to that of the specific intellectual or, to use Posner's (2003) term, the safe specialist. Whether by necessity or not, intellectual ambitions within academia are often reduced to institutional expectations. Rather than speaking to a broader public, these specific intellectuals communicate exclusively to specialist or specific audiences, such as the business community or other professional practitioners.

We regard the concept of the specific intellectual as only partially helpful. The concept does capture the institutional compromises that the professional academic is often forced to make. But the idea of the specific intellectual dilutes the niche or most distinctive function of the intellectual as a critical and independent commentator: the philosophical gadfly, the conscience of the public, the person who stands outside the crowd and tells them to wake up or die, the professional irritant against established interests. Of course this critical or political role is not the only function performed by intellectuals but it is, if you like, their calling. In that sense, the figure of the specific intellectual proves to be something of a conceptual and cultural disappointment, as it fails to entertain the real possibilities for extending the intellectual ambitions and activities of the modern professional academic. Our contention is that within the current academic system there exist different ways of retaining a public intellectual temperament. While inhabiting the compromised position of a specific intellectual, such temperament nevertheless evokes the spirit of the universal intellectual.

To unpack this temperament in greater detail we will now situate it in relation to two broad types of academic intellectuals along a continuum: the integrated, and the non-conformist intellectual. Below we historically delineate two professional academics whose respective career paths conform to these ideal types of the intellectual academic. The first is Anthony Giddens, who is indicative of the integrated intellectual; and the second is Georg Simmel, who may be described as a non-conformist intellectual.

The Integrated Intellectual

Integrated academic intellectuals are essentially established academic professionals, who have emerged from the cut and thrust of career-long peer scrutiny with august reputations and impregnable professional standings. In addition, they are known for a collection of key texts, which fellow academics will discuss at great length and cite extensively. Their names will be recognised brands in particular disciplinary fields.

Anthony Giddens is perhaps the strongest example of a contemporary academic in the social sciences who can be considered an integrated intellectual. In dividing his career into two periods in a 2011 lecture, he notes that a relatively small academic audience received his earlier theoretical contributions to sociology. Giddens' academic oeuvre was characterised by a certain exclusivity of audience, due to complexity, which tends to be a defining characteristic of respected academic work. Integrated intellectuals – and Giddens is no exception – are formally recognised within their university institutions, having attained the highest levels of career progression available. Giddens was a founder of the sociology department at Cambridge University, the Director of the LSE between 1997 and 2003 and is currently a peer in the House of Lords.

His later career was marked by a distinct shift away from the esotericism of social theory towards a form of political engagement. The 1998 publication of *The Third Way* was indicative of this new public phase of the Giddens project. Giddens became closely associated with the 'New' Labour government. Clearly some of the ideas propounded in that work of 'no rights without responsibilities', of individualism combined with social justice, and the politically controversial suggestion that we need to reconfigure an 'out-moded' welfare state that is apparently rendering citizens passive recipients rather than active autonomous agents (Giddens, 1998), provided an apposite ideological message and a collection of timely sound bites. This gave intellectual gravitas and philosophical justification to the New Labour project and its various policy shifts. Herein lies a clue as to one of the key publics that the integrated intellectuals seek to cultivate. The integrated intellectual tends to engage first and foremost with recognised and often powerful institutions, such as the policy and political establishment. Giddens here serves as a classic case of the integrated intellectual. Indeed, as Lewis Coser (1965: 286) notes: 'When recognition is bestowed by extra-academic men whose problems the academician has helped solve, a tendency may arise for the academician to seek recognition less from his peers than from decision-makers who are able to reward him.'

In a public lecture a few years later, Giddens (2011) points to certain problems with the shift in social democratic ideas he helped to spawn. The thirst for electoral victory had overshadowed a real engagement with ideas and a neglect of wider 'structural problems'. This reveals a danger for integrated public intellectuals such as Giddens, who seek impact through influencing policy. Irrespective of their original intentions, policymakers often end up dealing with practicalities, hence employing popular sound bites rather than considering wider structural problems. Furthermore, as Weiss (1979: 428) notes, 'it probably takes an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances for research to influence policy decisions directly'. And even then it is questionable whether research has actually made a difference, or rather been exploited as a legitimating device for already decided policy (Boswell, 2009). Perhaps this is an inevitable price to be paid if a public intellectual seeks influence by attempting to help shape policy.

Of course, Giddens is not alone in exploiting his professional status to launch a public career. In the field of economics, for example, we find a wide array of integrated intellectuals, including Jeffrey Sachs, Joseph Stiglitz, Milton Friedman, Paul Krugman and Daniel Kahneman.

The Non-Conformist Intellectual

Public intellectual engagement does not have to begin with policy impact. It can also start with a continuing attempt to make engagements with broader publics in different fora. One such avenue is presented by what we refer to as the non-conformist intellectual. A notable example of the non-conformist public intellectual is found in the German thinker and sociologist Georg Simmel. In his essay, 'The stranger' Simmel (1961) defines a stranger as a person who is a member of a system, but who is not strongly attached to that system. It is tempting to think he based this idea on his own experiences within the German academy of the early 20th century. Despite his highly original writings, Simmel remained planted in the lower ranks of German academia. A combination

of anti-Semitism and intellectual myopia on the part of his senior peers was partly to blame for his lack of career progress. But Lewis Coser (1958) also suggests that Simmel's non-conformism vis-à-vis academic expectations contributed to his status as a stranger within the academic system.

This refusal to conform manifested itself most clearly in his attempts to engage with audiences beyond the academy. For instance, he wrote a considerable number of articles for non-scholarly publications and was keen to traverse disciplinary boundaries. According to Coser, Simmel emphasised in his writing style those features that garnered applause, which meant an onus on novel ideas and an ability to fascinate rather than the methodical gathering of evidence. Simmel's reputation as a popular lecturer only served to accentuate his endeavours to engage with the public. For example, in his publication record prior to 1900, 50 per cent of his writings ended up in scholarly journals, the other half in non-scholarly publications. After 1900, 28 per cent of his publications ended up in scholarly publications, while 72 per cent were published in non-academic outlets. Simmel's few friends in the academy included Max Weber, who similarly attempted to challenge existing academic conventions, once complaining to a colleague that 'I don't have a field because I am not a donkey' (Sica, 2004: 94). Simmel also went against the professional academic grain of the day by giving considerable emphasis to his teaching and lecturing duties. While German academics were expected to teach, much of their energies, according to Coser, were devoted to scholarship. But Simmel's academic colleagues 'were often rather ambivalent with respect to members of the faculty who spent what they considered excessive time lecturing' (Coser, 1958: 637).

The non-conformist style of academic intellectual also lies at the heart of Edward Said's 1993 Reith Lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*. Said notes that public intellectuals are always vulnerable in their position, constantly exposed to institutional pressures. Thus, for him, 'the principal intellectual duty is the search for relative independence from such pressures' (1996: xvi). But how can academics achieve such independence today? Even though institutional pressures have always shaped academic life, these pressures have intensified in the British university system over the last decade. For example, we are seeing an increasing number of cases in which contracts are being rewritten according to research performance measures (Jump, 2014). In the following section, the prospects for a public intellectual temperament are explored with this context in mind.

Research Auditing from REF to Impact – Constraints and Contradictions for the Academic Public Intellectual

Our central proposition is that public intellectual endeavours operate *in* and around the professionalisation of the contemporary university rather than because of it. By professionalisation we are referring to what Said (1996: 74) describes as a mind-set, which seeks to avoid conflict: 'not rocking the boat, not straying outside accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable'. Professional insularity, where the peer group and narrow specialism become the main or even the only point of reference, has been reinforced by the encroachment of markets and competition in the university – the end result being ever-greater peer-to-peer type managerial scrutiny.

The 1980s marked the beginning of an audit culture, which, according to Mary Evans, heralded the drive towards the ‘heart of bench marking darkness’ – greater surveillance and policing of academics by other more learned and august academics (Evans, 2004: 29–47).

In this context, Bourdieu’s analysis of the French university remains remarkably prescient in relation to the UK university today. His chief interest is in how the university reproduces itself and its institutional ordering – what he calls the principles of ‘legitimate hierarchization’ (Bourdieu, 1988: 77). In identifying how different forms of capital are operating within the university and shaping the professional lives of individuals, Bourdieu makes a crucial distinction between ‘academic capital’ and ‘symbolic capital’. The former is understood as the control of the instruments of reproduction of the professional body (Bourdieu, 1988: 78), which includes things such as membership of important committees, particularly the Universities Consultative Committee that was responsible for appointing tenured professors in France. As such, academic capital is closely associated with the professionalisation of the university system. ‘Symbolic capital’, on the other hand, refers to wider renown and reputation, which is more intellectual in focus – including achievements like membership of an editorial board of a cultural journal, conducting reviews, or connections with the popular media (Bourdieu, 1988: 79). Bourdieu (1988: xviii) notes that many of the figures that are now regarded as intellectual icons in Anglo-American thought ‘like Althusser, Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault’ held marginal positions and were not in a position to officially direct research in the early 1980s French university system. This suggests that academic capital and the institutional reproduction of the university have often worked against symbolic capital. At the very least it shows that the university has been slow to reward or recognise academics with a broader, more unconventional intellectual approach in recent history.

When considering Bourdieu’s analysis in relation to UK academics in the humanities and social sciences, it must be noted that, increasingly within the contemporary university, journal ranking induced conformity is *coercively* enforced. For younger generations of academics journal-ranking metrics have become an enforced measure of academic capital, which clearly limits possibilities for broader intellectual engagements, such as publication in alternative outlets. The current incarnation of research audit processes is the REF (Research Excellence Framework) – the periodic research metric previously known as the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise). The main purpose of the REF is to distribute government research funding – in this case the quality-related (QR) block grant to university departments. The REF process is increasingly regarded as the central arbiter of academic esteem and excellence – with the REF verdict reverentially elevated to an eschatological final judgement on research (the most recent judgement took place at the end of 2014). As part of all this, the REF process relies on the subjective evaluations of senior figures who make up specialist subject panels.

The upshot is a tendency for social scientists to produce research which may be professionally competent but which loses out in other fundamental ways: in terms of heterodoxy and political relevance. Frederic Lee and his co-authors recently made such a claim. In their exploration of how the discipline of economics fared under successive research audits (the RAE), they found that it has generally conformed to mainstream dictates and theoretical predilections of an elite cluster of academic departments (containing those

academics that hit the expected audit targets), turning economics into ‘a purely quaint academic subject with no connection to the real world’. The RAE-induced detachment of economics has induced a scholastic myopia in which ‘significant economic events that do not conform to the mindset are missed – such as the 2008 economic crisis’ (Lee et al., 2013: 715).

The research audit is not the sole performance regime metric making demands on the senior common room’s clientele. As well as getting their research into a prescribed set of elite peer-reviewed journals, there is a growing expectation for academics to generate income. Austerity has meant a real decline in government support for the university sector, particularly in the social sciences and humanities – a development that has forced universities and academic departments to explore alternative sources of finance. Today institutions are seeking to mix public and private sources of research funding and as a result increasingly academics are expected to obtain research grants (see Andaló, 2011). In her qualitative study of how departments and academics are forced to play games under the RAE regime Linda Lucas (2006) found that academics in the field of sociology were under pressure to raise external research funding even when their research did not demand financial support. As a result, members of staff began to evaluate research, not on the basis of its intellectual merits, but on its potential to attract external funding.

This analysis presents a bleak future for the academic public intellectual. From this, one could argue that no one entering or currently working in the professional academy should pursue intellectual aspirations with an outward looking public agenda. Such pursuit would inevitably be regarded as a distraction from professional scholarship – whether the production of audit-friendly 4* publications or drafting grant applications. Even academic citizenship – including administrative tasks that keep university departments running – is being threatened by the one-track careerist academy (Morgan and Havergal, 2015).

But there are reasons to be more sanguine about the future prospects for a more publicly oriented academy. While problematic for reasons outlined above, the audit culture has opened up alternative avenues for social science disciplines. Because the research audit is a mechanism for distributing funds, Brewer (2011) notes, the terms of engagement and the rules of the game have been subject to continual refinement and redefinition. A key example of this came with the rebranding by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) of the RAE into the REF, which included an additional metric based on *impact* constituting 20 per cent of the final judgement on research excellence. According to Power (2014), the 2006 Worry Report was a key driver towards what he terms *impactisation*, the creation of research impact as a unit of performance accountability for UK universities. The new measure of quality destabilises the normal order of things in the world of research auditing: ‘impact disturbed the comfortable rules of the game by which research reputations and resources were established’ (Brewer, 2011: 10).

How to measure impact is a contentious point. Should the focus be primarily on economic outcomes, or should it encompass other outcomes, such as how academic work might help advance progressive social change, benefiting a range of stakeholders not just businesses (see Holmwood, 2011: 14). It is to Brewer’s relief that social science disciplines came to a progressive accommodation with the impact agenda. This happened because the academic profession did not ignore or become indifferent to what is

effectively another audit measure. According to Brewer, social scientists actively engaged in shaping the impact agenda. As such, ideas about research impact were not reduced to the crudest and most instrumental common denominator: that of economic growth (2011: 10–11). Rather in the academic social sciences, impact has managed to retain a strong public ethos, principally by including an emphasis on the way research benefits society, culture and civic life.

This ‘wider and more respectable lineage for the idea of impact’ (Brewer, 2011: 10) has, in theory, made the idea of the publicly engaged academic, whether of the integrated or the non-conformist variety, more acceptable. For instance, Brewer shows how there is a growing expectation and collective endeavour to democratise how academics conduct and disseminate research. Democratising academic research is about engaging with ‘strangers’ – the lay non-professional public, the non-specialised generalists, and the non-peer audience without any interests to defend (Brewer, 2011: 10). There is some evidence to suggest that the impact agenda within the REF has, in part, helped to encourage the idea and practice of public engagement in the higher education sector. A recent web survey of 181 people by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (hereafter, NCCPE) found that 65 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement that the REF had helped embed strategic support for public engagement in their institution (NCCPE, 2014).

Brewer may have championed the progressive potential of assessing impact, and the need for academics to engage positively with these nascent criteria in scholastic auditing, but he has misgivings (see Brewer, 2011: 11–12). His reservations relate to the political context, which, in recent times, have been dominated by austerity measures that have sullied the whole notion of socially engaged academic research. In the age of austerity, research councils have promoted such instrumental objectives as economic performance and sustainable growth, issues that reflect governmental rather than disciplinary priorities. John Holmwood (2011) argues that, in order to protect their research budgets, academic institutions have largely accepted and complied with the demands to steer research towards short-term, instrumental objectives. He expresses the problems with this kind of audited impact in strong terms, ‘the Government interest is no longer in evidence-based policy. What it seeks is evidence that will help facilitate the policies it seeks to enact’ (Holmwood, 2011: 16).

What place is there then for an alternative public intellectual temperament within these confines? Indeed, there are reasons to remain sceptical of the impact agenda. It is unlikely to promote a public ethos, democratise research and free academia from narrow, peer-induced specialisation. In the absence of such ideal spaces, it is necessary to devise alternative routes for the academic as public intellectual.

Prospects for the Academic Public Intellectual – a Case of Being *in* But Not of the Academy

In this article we have sought to move away from the conception of the academic public intellectual as a televisual persona or media celebrity. Following Said’s (1996: 73) claims that ‘the intellectual does not represent a statue like icon, but an individual vocation, an energy, a stubborn force engaging as a committed and recognizable voice’, we have

argued that the intellectual is not an elevated figure descended from some mythical land, but a temperament that could be adopted by potentially anyone – whether a renowned academic ‘name’ or somebody without celebrity status.

In this sense, the modern university – despite it dancing to the tunes of markets and competition – remains a site in which intellectual engagements are made possible, albeit in a fragmentary, possibly clandestine fashion (Docherty, 2014). In making this allusion to subterranean intellectual activity, the claim is not that the modern university has effectively destroyed any space for reaching broader publics; it is rather that this alternative intellectual temperament is one that can only exist in and around the requirements of professional metrics and academic auditing rather than because of them.

In recasting the public intellectual as a temperament we are making a call to devise such spaces in academic life and to fashion them where possible. One such space is pedagogical – through our teaching. Of course, teaching has been subject to audit scrutiny through the formation of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), an independent agency promoting quality and consistency in university teaching. However, the QAA, having been undermined by research-intensive institutions, has become seen as an ineffectual watchdog with MPs calling for it to be put down (Attwood, 2009). Ironically, at least the content of what is communicated in the lecture hall and the seminar room in universities is less subject to the myriad audit controls that characterise research, where the REA/REF is alive and thriving. Teaching offers something of a last bastion for the intellectual. Take the example of Georg Simmel, whose career points to the distinct intellectual possibilities of teaching. For Simmel, teaching formed a crucial part of his academic life, for which he gained an outstanding reputation. Logan Wilson (1964: 192) suggests that teaching formed an alternative source of professional status and reward for Simmel: ‘The chief acclaim of the teacher comes from below, which is not important as a means of raising one’s status.’ Indeed, as Jacoby (2000: 234) notes: ‘Younger intellectuals, if they mainly teach and write for each other, have little immediate impact; but they have students who pass through and on to other things.’

But Georg Simmel was teaching in the German university system during the early 20th century. Does the teaching in the university of today afford opportunities and spaces of relative autonomy for intellectual work? It would be naïve to overlook how the two most fundamental developments in higher education have affected pedagogy in universities, namely: massification through increasing student numbers and privatisation through higher fees. Massification and privatisation have arguably been inimical to higher education. The fee-paying student is increasingly a client, shifting the relationship between student and educators to one between service user and provider, with pedagogical practice being increasingly subject to consumer scrutiny and control. Yet if anything, the marketisation of higher education has in part brought a growing awareness in the university sector, particularly in research-intensive universities, that fee-paying students are entitled to a worthwhile learning experience. Thus, as well as presenting increasing challenges, this development offers opportunities for more publically oriented and engaged forms of teaching. Publically oriented in the sense that students can be seen as an academic’s principal public (Burawoy, 2005; Graff, 2003), certainly the one that they have the most direct influence on.

Teaching, in fact, remains the only potential outlet for public intellectual activity within the modern corporate university for Jacoby. Rather pessimistically he envisages no other gaps or opportunities in the scholastic market place for the academic as public intellectual. But as Garafola – a Professor of Dance at Barnard College – argues, Jacoby’s claim that a younger generation of intellectuals have gone missing is deeply flawed, informed by a conservative and narrow view of what an intellectual is (a professional writer), how they look (white and male), and where they live (bohemian corners of New York). Garafola (1988: 126) suggests that ‘the reason Jacoby can’t find young radical intellectuals is that he looks for them in the wrong places’, and these places, increasingly, can be found in the digital sphere.

The academic public intellectual temperament has been aided and abetted by the development and accessibility of digital media, which have introduced alternative outlets and methods for communicating ideas and research findings. In the professionalised academy, these alternative outlets tend to be considered, at best, as lesser diversions to the more serious task of publishing in restricted access peer-reviewed journals. But for the would-be public intellectual in academia, they can provide vital outlets for their work and become central to their professional *modus operandi*. In an interview, Rachel Rosenfelt, one of the co-creators of the web-based magazine, *The New Inquiry*, mentions Garafola’s review of Jacoby’s book as a vital source of inspiration, precisely because it helped broaden the meaning of how they could think the intellectual, as a particular temperament, open to anyone (Hoby, 2013). Present intellectual and cultural journals are numerous, even if unrecognised by academic capital, especially outlets that tend to be run by a younger generation of intellectuals, such as *Mute Magazine*, *Triple Canopy*, *n+1*, *The American Reader*, *Jacobin Magazine*, *3:AM Magazine* – and that list can be extended. Similar trends can be observed also in the publishing industry, with outlets such as Zero Books, which publishes an array of books by bloggers, journalists and academics with the aim of being ‘intellectual without being academic’. There are clear indications here then that an intellectual culture currently thrives beyond the academy.

While the narrations of the public intellectual – be they positive or negative – tend to be focused on the individual, and in part our account has worked from this tradition, public intellectual spaces and networks are collective endeavours rather than individual ones – even if it is the individual that in trying to communicate with broader publics takes up these opportunities. This is as true for a collective academic blog as it is for a reading group with a diverse membership based on Marx’s *Capital*. The web clearly offers real opportunities for broader public intellectual engagements, which many academics are taking up and working with through blogs, online videos and by uploading articles without going through the arduous peer review process. One interesting example among many here is the UK-based website, *The Conversation* (2014), that invites comment and opinion pieces on current issues or research topics of public relevance written by academics. Articles regularly receive thousands of visits and the website is reported to have two million monthly hits.

This provides a brief illustration of how academics have the capacity to write engagingly for broader publics and that there are audiences and spaces for discussion that welcome them. Admittedly, these arenas may lack professional prestige and status but

this is part of why they are important. Indeed, universities should be pushed to take more experimental risks to connect with wider publics, but the driving force for this can only be an academic public intellectual temperament that is *in* but not *of* the university.

Acknowledgements

The authors (Carl, Mike and Sam) would like to thank the anonymous referees for their insightful and helpful comments and, most importantly, for taking the time and effort – *pro bono* – to review this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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Date submitted September 2014

Date accepted March 2015