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# Introduction

## Cultural and communications policy and the stateless nation<sup>1</sup>

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It is indeed an honour and a great pleasure to be asked to write the introductory words for the *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*. My relationship with Catalonia dates from the late 1980s when together with my then colleagues at the University of Stirling, I engaged in two years of *acciones integradas* with colleagues at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. From Scotland, the obvious point of comparison with Catalonia was the common condition of the 'stateless nation', a term that while it suggests a teleological lack also entails the recognition of a special status, a distinctive socio-cultural space and often a specific institutional complex. Two decades ago, we were interested in exploring the highways and by-ways of media and culture in two national societies each of which enjoyed considerable autonomy within a larger state. We raised many questions in the course of some intensive and probing discussions. Perhaps one that we did not consider explicitly enough was our own role as academic analysts and in some cases, protagonists, intervening (or attempting to intervene) in questions of policy and public debate.

In these introductory remarks to *CJCS*, therefore, I wish to make good an omission and raise some questions about the roles of academics as intellectuals sometimes involved in the fields of cultural and communications policy formation. I hope that in various ways this is a theme that the journal will stimulate and air. The policy that concerns *CJCS*'s readership is made at the intersection between culture and politics. It brings into relation diverse ways of life and models of cultural production with the institutionalised form of the state. That is because in most practical respects, the politics of cultural policy still plays itself out within the political systems and the national public spheres of *states*.

While the state can be a useful analytical framework, it has its limitations. It is limited not only because the idea of cultural and communications sovereignty is challenged by global flows and transnational systems of governance but also because so-called nation-states commonly contain multiethnic and multicultural societies. States – as all students and citizens of stateless nations know – do not necessarily coincide with their component nations. And multilevel government coupled with multinationality, multiethnicity and multicultures adds to the complexity of how we must conceive of the shaping of cultural and communications policy.

1. This introduction draws on 'The Politics of Cultural Policy', my inaugural lecture at the University of Glasgow, delivered on 25 March 2009.

If states orientate themselves to the extra-territorial demands that shape their policies today, they also cannot avoid addressing their own internal cultural diversity – unless they seek to ignore or repress it. Cultural policy broadly understood is moulded by the tensions between profit and aesthetic value, by the shifting boundaries between the private and the public, by the vagaries of social and cultural inclusion and exclusion, and so forth. It is consequently – and properly – a key playground for intellectuals amongst whom we should and do include academics.

In this connection, Zygmunt Bauman (1992) has argued that modern intellectuals arose with the emergence of culture itself, culture being conceived as an autonomous space for action. Bauman has described intellectuals as a key expert stratum that developed with the Enlightenment. Their initial role, he argues, was that of ‘legislator’. They articulated the ideology of a new order impatient of diversity and backwardness and were in the vanguard of centralising polities and cultures. In post-modernity, where epistemological certainties have collapsed, Bauman suggests, the role of intellectuals has shifted from legislator to ‘interpreter’, to a more modest role of making sense of cultures. They are largely disconnected from power.

For his part, Edward Said (1994) has also tried to describe ‘a specific public role in society’ for the intellectual. Where Bauman’s argument is sociological Said’s is normative. The choice for Said is either one of working inside the power structure or of being powerless. He urges public intellectuals to side with the weak and the dispossessed. His conception of the intellectual is one of ‘speaking truth to power’. For Said, to speak within a *national* discourse is to occupy a kind of prison house that limits our discursive independence and our horizons. He therefore celebrates the role of the intellectual as an outsider. To stand outside, he suggests, gives you both epistemological and moral advantages. Consequently, exile – both actual and metaphorical – is the only state that fits true intellectual endeavour. Said, of course, was an exile; and so too is Bauman, although he has not argued that this condition confers special advantages everywhere and always.

Both Bauman’s and Said’s positions are highly questionable. Bauman’s valuable insight is that the breakdown of traditional orders turns culture into a distinct sphere of action. Culture suddenly becomes something to be managed and it is therefore central to intellectuals’ self-conceptions, because culture is their living space. But contemporary intellectuals are not all simply interpreters. There is good empirical evidence that the desire to legislate for how culture should be shaped and turned to profit remains very powerful in our times. Some intellectuals do indeed find ways of acting as legislators, even if that often means shaping legislation through interpretation. So the ideological struggle over visions of the cultural order is not at all innocent but has major consequences. That is particularly so where those who articulate ideological visions are close to the centres of power.

Said has written eloquently on the consolations of outsider-ness. However, this limiting conception polarises intellectuals into the co-opted v the free, the clean v the corrupt, the principled opponent v the compliant bootlicker, the saint v the sinner. Although it is neat, this schema distorts the actual complexity of how contemporary intellectuals (academics included) address the world of policy and politics.

We may look to yet another exile, the critical theorist Theodor Adorno (1991: 89) for a more grounded view on the role of expertise in cultural policy. Analysing what he disparagingly called 'the culture industry', Adorno thought that intellectuals were mostly 'servile'. He loathed the idea of an administered culture. And cultural policy is nothing if not administered by public authorities. Adorno saw culture as the source of the 'critical impulse'. It was the counterpoint to an administered society that had lost its spontaneity (1991: 100). However, despite the icy grip of administration, Adorno believed that a critically self-aware cultural policy was feasible and that expertise could be used 'for the protection of cultural matters from the realm of control by the market' (1991: 112). In short, Adorno thought experts working within institutions to pursue culturally progressive ends could – in Bauman's terms – be legislators rather than just interpreters. That is precisely what my own research into the formation of creative economy policy suggests (Schlesinger 2007, 2009). Whether the ends pursued are necessarily 'progressive' or not is quite another matter.

What might entitle intellectuals to intervene in policy debate? Policy-relevant expertise is established in numerous ways. In academia, it is built upon research and scholarship, as well as upon the practical experience of advising and engaging in both public and private arenas. It is a truism that we need resources to undertake research. So we have to decide where our funds are going to come from and what are the costs and benefits that attach to particular sources. In our complex research economy, we may and do take on a variety of roles simultaneously. What we decide to do at any time is shaped by the constraints and opportunities we face.

It is a fundamental value for academics to seek the maximum independence of thought in order to produce high quality research. But it is not always possible. The underlying relationship to funding often affects the independence, framing, pace and scope of what is done. To oversimplify: receiving a research council award generally gives you more autonomy than working as a consultant with a defined brief and an importunate client who is a mere mouse's click away.

In reality, virtually *no* source of funding is utterly neutral in its impact on how we think about policy questions. National research councils, foundations, government departments, public bodies, charities and the European Commission all have their own agendas. How they articulate their 'strategic priorities' will always have effects on what we do and how we think. So too do universities' own research strategies.

As academics, we also have to think what it is to be a *citizen*-researcher. If we are working in areas of public policy interest, we simply *cannot* avoid addressing how we engage as experts in the public sphere, in nations, states and internationally. We have obligations to disseminate our work widely. These derive purely from the fact of our having in-depth and wide-ranging knowledge and the need to communicate this. We have been socially privileged to accumulate our expertise over time and in an open society there is a general interest in sharing it as widely as possible.

There are various ways in which we can do this. According to Edward Said's exilic ideal we should contribute to the public debate as outsiders. This view derives from a classic image of the public intellectual as engaged that dates from the Dreyfus *affaire* of the 1890s. Of course, public intellectuals

aren't always outsiders – far from it, in fact. And outsiders' careers may differ enormously over their lifetimes. Some become licensed commentators with their own slots and spots and are garlanded with honours. Others are condemned to obscurity, and if they're really lucky, a posthumous revival.

Even in the mainstream, very few public intellectuals achieve really significant and sustained access to the airwaves and the newspaper columns, or enjoy the status of a blogger with influence. As Régis Debray (1979) pointed out some thirty years ago, the post World War II rise of celebrity media intellectuals created a star system for the few. The overall significance of the university as a widespread source of legitimate knowledge consequently diminished. The growing centrality of popular media has changed the rules of access to the public sphere and transformed the nature of a successful performance.

There have been repeated attempts to characterise the changing nature of expertise and intellectual life in our times. In the late nineteen-seventies, the sociologist Alvin Gouldner (1979) wrote about the emergence of new powerful class of symbol-manipulating intellectuals immersed in the 'culture of critical discourse'. In very similar vein, at the start of the noughties, the celebrity public policy guru Richard Florida (2002; 2005) hailed the rise and flight of the creative class, this time to admiring gasps of official credulity. Here, at last, was a sellable vision.

Such arguments relate to structural changes in capitalism since World War II and the emergence of a so-called 'knowledge economy'. Economic restructuring has changed how we think about and value expertise. Gouldner and Florida – like Daniel Bell (1973) before them – have been part of a tradition of trying to paint new pictures of class and power as industrial society is left increasingly behind.

While we academics might be flattered to be thought members of a wider knowledge or creative class let us take pause for thought. If class power has come our way, I can only observe that – as elsewhere – it is unevenly distributed. With very few exceptions, it is hard to be heard in the world of cultural and communications policy formation and harder still to have effects. That is because the shaping of policy has become both more competitive and more complex. The multiplication of cultural and communication management consultancies, the expansion of special advisers in government, the growth of in-house research teams inside communications regulators, the development of specialist media and communications business journalism – all of these have recast the space available to the academy to make its views known and be taken seriously. They have reshaped the public sphere. And in truth, we academics have often not helped ourselves by making policy-relevant research into a minority pursuit.

That said, a range of pertinent interventions is possible. These depend on your taking a normative view of the academic as a member of a class of experts with a public role to play in influencing and shaping debates on matters of public policy. But this is not simply about opposing established orders everywhere, *à la* Said. It is more complex. It is engagement generated by our own cultural practices that lead us, as a matter of course, to contribute to discussion and deliberation through various forms of public involvement. Oppositional critique is only *one* of the available options.

On rare occasions, the professor might become a minister of culture (or equivalent), as has happened at a Catalan level with Joan Manuel Tresserras, the current Conseller de Cultura i Mitjans de Comunicació. His eventual reflections on his time in politics will make interesting reading. But the majority of openings to influence are much more modest. Public engagement may and does involve the production and publication of research. But it can also entail academics joining boards and commissions, supplying expert advice to governments and agencies, advising parliamentary committees, making submissions to public inquiries, contributing commentaries to the media and blogs and so forth. Because, in practice, the social organisation of policy expertise is heavily concentrated in elite circles, there is an additional democratic role in working with, and advising, civil society groups of all kinds. This extends the limited scope of the so-called policy community and expands activity in the public sphere.

Such engagement is complex because we each have values and beliefs and we may be linked to political projects of various kinds. It is a matter of choice and principle whether we avoid institutional capture by the policy world of government departments, state agencies and commercial interests. Because universities give them space, academics are well placed to make a *disinterested* contribution to public policy. Disinterest does not imply a lack of commitment to values and ideals. It concerns whether or not we seek benefits from our advice and whether or not that is a prime motivating force.

Nations without states typically have a complex public sphere, and this has direct implications for the nature of our engagement. Indeed, rather than a single public sphere, the stateless nation is more likely to be situated in a dual sphere of publics. Ideal-typically, the nation has its own cultural institutions and media, and often a language that differs from the lingua franca of the state. Under non-repressive conditions, if there is not a separate indigenous system of representative politics, there is likely to be a distinct administrative apparatus, bound into that of the wider state. Nationals of stateless nations are therefore routinely exposed to their own national public sphere, the local, intimate and proximate, and also that of the wider state itself. This simple dual sphere model suffices to make the point that although there is space for convergence between the operations of the national and state public spheres, there is also space for dislocation, divergence, contradiction and dispute about boundaries, competencies and resources. All of the latter, of course, acting as generators of policy shifts while being meat and drink to the academic analyst.

In stateless nations, to intervene in the domains of culture and communication is therefore potentially doubly complex. Much depends on the nature of the autonomy afforded the stateless nation, which is in any case likely to be chronically renegotiated. There is an obligation to understand both levels of the polity, to know the lines of domination and subordination and to understand the scope and limits of intervention by word and deed. These are necessary preliminaries for the researcher-citizen to be involved in shaping a social world that is also his or her object of analysis.

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