

ACADEMIC DIARIES IN THE GLOBALIZATION ERA

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Abstract

As more people become more connected across larger distances in different ways, they are creating a new world society following more of the same norms and growing aware of what they share, “globalization” being one name for that process. Globalization occurs in many fields, in various dimensions of world society; world culture being part of world society and its making - still incomplete, still in the process.

The capacity of academics to pursue knowledge and truth in their research, writing and teaching is a fundamental principle of contemporary higher education. As the role of the university has changed, its academics began to change to a new model which resulted in a freedom and responsibility to push back the boundaries of knowledge and to transmit this to students.

One way of expression for academics is writing diaries which not only reveal much about the author’s character but illustrate the religious, political, and social life of his day. Sometimes diaries are not written with a literary aim; they become a daily occasion for self-criticism, and for reflection on the cultures of the academia.

In these diaries academics inevitably tell stories which are always enacted or retold in relation to the particular setting of the university campus. This setting is the context in which the discourse unfolds. The

effect of this is greatly to increase the cultural content and importance of the academic diary, and to offer documentary account of academic life.

Key words: *globalization, academics, diaries ,research, knowledge, reflection, setting, discourse, culture, life*

In these times of an expansive global capitalism and corporatization of culture, it is not only appropriate but also crucial to discuss and assess modes of participation and resistance in the field between the cultural field and the political sphere.

In European states the cultural field has traditionally been seen as ideally autonomous from the political sphere and this relative autonomy has led to a depolitization of cultural production and the configuration of culture as an elitist, exclusive club.

There has been a dramatic change of the context for contemporary public intellectuals since the time of Russell or Fromm, since globalization has created more space where ideas can be discussed, debated, and engaged with, outside of national political cultures and publics than was the case during the time of earlier intellectuals.

New technologies and cheaper travel have not only led to a globalization of research in universities but also created intellectual debate between academics across national borders. Some of these new intellectual products come into public debate and dialogue with academics playing the role of the global public intellectual And, as McLaughlin points out, the debate about the global public intellectual remains among one of the most provocative questions scholars face in the

early years of the twenty-first century because

everyone has views but not everyone can get those views into general discussion. Academics have an advantage there since they are articulate and informed. They are by profession, people who publish and teach. They are also more free to speak than most and academic freedom is not a static right, but an everchanging relationship between faculty and their disciplines, students, university administrations, communities and governmental bodies. Its development reflects the changing influences and interests of these elements.

Thus, it is the academics' job to speak at the frontiers of knowledge and in the face of resistance to change of options. As G.R.Evans noted in his book, *Academics and the Real World*, “this makes universities “free-speech” environments in which all kinds of talk can go on, and intellectual risks should be able paradoxically to be taken in safety”ⁱ

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One way of expression for academics is writing diaries which not only reveal much about the author's character but illustrate the religious, political, and social life of his day. Sometimes diaries are not written with a literary aim; they become a daily occasion for self-criticism, and for reflection on the cultures of the academia.

The author of academic diaries is dependent on the society through specific, historically contingent modes of address and reception. Generally speaking, the author is, in other words, a specific public figure that can naturally be conceived in different ways, but which is simultaneously always already placed or situated in a specific society, given a specific function. This was, of course, what Michel Foucault was implying when he wrote of the “author-function” in his essay “What is an Author?”

“What is an Author?” is an analysis of the figure of the author, which can be read as a problematization of both Walter Benjamin's politically motivated imagining of the author as producer, as well as Roland Barthes' equally polemic and instructive essay “The Death of the Author”.

Foucault doesn't eliminate the author, he suspends him or her as a specific function, invention and intervention within discourse:

“We should suspend the typical question how does a free subject (such as an author or artist, supposedly) penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning. How does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through which forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse, what position does it occupy, and what rules does it follow? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.”ⁱⁱⁱ This reconfiguration of the author's function was to take place through new modes of address, which in turn configure new modes of readership. If the author is understood as a public

intellectual, we should also understand how this figure is constructed and reconfigured through his historical and contingent placing or function.

We must therefore begin to think of intellectuals as not only engaged in the readership, but as producing specific readers. We are dealing here with a different notion of the “political” that is not only about movement, but also moment, the here and now, as in the words of another author-producer Stephen Greene:

“What a book is up to, according to my point of view (although this is not very consensual in the group) is to maintain a specific kind of “option” for “the political”, an option that is explicitly not utopian in any way. The option is based on the premise that the political does not mean to work for a defined political aim, that it has nothing to do with sacrificing one’s own (life), but rather investing in the “machine” that generates “one’s own life “ in a political process “ⁱⁱⁱ Academic diaries problematize the contradictions and sociological nuances of campus life, but critics of academic fiction ignore the underlying satire of the genre in scholarly monographs devoted to the study of the academic novel.

In Kenneth Womack’s view, expressed in his *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community*, the satirical vein of academic novels “finds its genesis in the disillusionment that marks the professional lives of academics in the twentieth century. Like their forebears in the academic fictions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who languished under the specter of “Oxbridge,” modern academic characters suffer from the whimsy of global economic slumps and university budget cuts, the fashionable nature of structuralist and

poststructuralist literary criticism, growing social and racial divisions on college campuses, and an increasingly hostile academic job market, among a host of other issues.”^{iv} Academic diaries confront their readers with figures, the author included who encounter dilemmas. Academic characters and institutional themes become a means for exploring, the ethical and philosophical questions of to the genre that impinge upon such issues as culture, morality, knowledge, and commitment.

This is why such a book is always a journey of discovery and all writing is fundamentally a form of storytelling. In David Canter and Gavin Fairbairn’s view there is always a narrative, whether it is shaped by the search to make sense of complex issues or by the need to find evidence for or against particular hypotheses.

In their diaries academics inevitably tell stories which are always enacted or retold in relation to the particular setting of the university campus. This setting is the context in which the discourse unfolds. As David Canter and Gavin Fairbairn further stated in his book entitled *Becoming an Author*, “there are central characters, often ideas or concepts that change and develop through their interactions with each other and the setting.”^v

These diaries reveal much about the author’s character, and illustrate the religious, political, and social life of his day. Sometimes diaries are not written with a literary aim. They become a daily occasion for self-criticism, and for reflection on the cultures of the academia.

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Nowadays the academic diarist may become what Neil McLaughlin calls “a global public intellectual”, this notion being conceptualized as “an individual who writes intellectual commentary, social criticism, or popular academic work for an audience outside both the boundaries of academic professions and the nation-state system.”

Such intellectuals as Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell and Erich Fromm suggest that global public intellectuals existed in the past. The names of contemporary intellectuals such as Salman Rushdie suggest that academics can contribute to public debate on important issues of the day exceeding boundaries of *both* narrow professional discourse and national political processes and structures.

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ⁱ G.R.Evans, *Academics and the Real World*, Open University Press, Philadelphia, 2002, p.2

ⁱⁱ Foucault, op.cit., p 137-138

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