The Tacit Influences on one's Ways of Teaching and Doing Research

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the mostly tacit, or unconscious, motives or influences driving and guiding one's way of teaching and doing research in the social sciences (although it would be valid for teaching and research in the natural sciences too). With the notions of discursive exclusion and hierarchical authority as points of departure, the argument moves to Habermas's distinction between two kinds of 'action', namely, strategic action and communicative action (which are really two ways of communicating, with ethical import), uncovering the teaching and research styles that correspond to these. This leads to Habermas's distinction of three groups of sciences and what he calls their corresponding 'interests' – the empirical-analytical sciences guided by the interest of technical control, the historical-hermeneutic sciences guided by the practical interest in mutual understanding, and the critical social sciences guided by the interest in emancipation. These different kinds of sciences and their corresponding interests point towards different ways of teaching and doing research. The more fundamental question, however, is why different people are attracted to different 'interests'. To answer this, Lacan's theory of the four discourses is invoked – those of the master, the university, the hysteric and the analyst – because they help one understand the different power-relations involved in each discursive position, to which different individuals are attracted. Lacan's theory is further refined and elucidated by means of Derrida's paradoxical distinction between the engineer and the *bricoleur*, as well as Rancière's distinction among three regimes of art, before the paper concludes with a consideration of Heidegger's 'fourfold' as a touchstone for orienting one's research ethically. Methodologically speaking, the different theoretical lenses

used in this paper are justified by the poststructuralist (specifically Lacanian) distinction between the 'symbolic' and the 'real', where the first register, under which theory is subsumed, can always only approach the latter asymptotically, without ever coinciding with it.

Keywords: teaching and research, communication, communicative action, Habermas, Lacan

Introduction

During a discussion at a staff seminar at the university where I teach, one of the participants, who teaches public administration, was explaining to the rest of us that in his research on, broadly speaking, the communication between government officials (including ministers) and ordinary citizens comprising various constituencies, he constantly comes across communicational gaps — between the documents released by officials, pertaining to specific constituencies or communities (such as audit reports) and the constituencies concerned, between the officials or ministers themselves and the communities involved when they occasionally meet face to face, and between the members of the constituencies and the officials, when the former try to 'get through' to officials or ministers. Our discussion explored various reasons for this, some of which centred on the concept of discourses or 'language games', which are very different where reports, governed by technical, bureaucratic rules of reporting, and ordinary language attempts to understand these, come up against each other. This points to one reason why communicational gaps exist: terminological exclusion through specialised discourse.

There is no reason why officials or ministers, assisted by someone who is linguistically adept in the language of the constituency concerned, could not approach the latter and use every available avenue to make technical reports or 'white papers' accessible to them. One should immediately be reminded, here, of Jacques Rancière, who believes that all people are 'equal' (Rancière 2010: Ten theses on politics, Thesis 5; Tanke 2011: 35-40) in an overdetermined sense of 'equal', including the sense of being capable of making sense of something when given the opportunity, no matter what class or educational differences separate them, so there is no conclusive reason for state officials to refuse communication with citizens on

exclusivist grounds. One of our members pointed out that what many individuals — and not only state officials or ministers — are not willing to do, is to go out of their way to make certain information accessible to others, because it would remove a (discursive) barrier behind which they feel protected, and which enables them to wield power over others. This is what Habermas (Brand 1990: 15-16) calls 'strategic action', namely that mode of communication where one's 'validity claims' are not openly advanced, in order to exercise power over one's interlocutors. In other words, it is disingenuous (or pseudo-) communication, which is not really communication at all. True communication is instantiated in what Habermas calls 'communicative action', where one's validity claims are openly shared with your interlocutors (as best one can; unconscious motives may subvert one's best efforts at sincerity and openness, of course, as psychoanalysis has taught us).

Does the scenario sketched above sound familiar? How many of us have been exposed to lecturers and teachers who have hidden behind a palisade of technical jargon to protect themselves from the possibility of being questioned with too much understanding on the part of students, or of members of a community who have a stake in the smooth running of a government department? In other words, the phenomenon of individuals throwing up a smokescreen for protection when they do not feel entirely confident in themselves regarding the field of their accountability, is not at all foreign to us.

Reinforcing this evasive behaviour born of lack of confidence there is the further scourge of hierarchical thinking — the appeal to (often unfounded) 'authority' — which functions as an almost insurmountable obstacle to, among other things, productive communication, or research, when senior researchers or people in research development adopt a condescending attitude to junior staff members or — in the case of postgraduate student-supervisors — to students. Prescriptive behaviour usually accompanies this hierarchical approach, which never frees postgraduate students to find their own way in their field. Even the most adequate supervision, understood as guidance of less experienced people, cannot afford to keep the 'apprentice' on a string forever.

To be able to 'free' students for discovering their own angle of incidence into a discipline, one has to have confidence and the willingness to learn from someone else, albeit a student, that your own approach is not the

only possible one. Again, anyone who lacks confidence in their own ability to confront the new, and to assimilate it into one's own frame of reference — or better, to modify and amplify your own frame of comprehension — would resist such openness and hide behind established edifices of supposed 'knowledge'. I say 'supposed' because it is not really knowledge unless it is put to the test in the face of something novel, which could easily come from students (something I have experienced on many occasions). Needless to say, one's approach to student guidance or to teaching is intimately related to one's own way of doing research — your own 'style' or approach to gaining insight into the disciplines that interest you.

A Methodological Consideration

On a methodological note, because many scholars or academics have not taken the poststructuralist 'turn', and insist on some kind of 'methodological purity', let me state at the outset that no one should be that innocent after Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Kristeva and other thinkers, who have introduced what one might call a both/and (alternatively: neither/nor) logic in the place of the traditional either/or logic inherited from Aristotle. This can be demonstrated from the work of any of these figures, but here it is particularly Lacan's work that may show what I mean in the most succinct manner. I am thinking of Lacan's distinction between three registers of meaning, or alternatively ontological registers from the complex intertwinement of which human subjectivity (or 'being' for that matter) can be understood – the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic. The 'real' surpasses symbolisation, and must be presupposed by the subject's entry, first, into the imaginary sphere through the recognition of her or his own specular image (Lacan 1977a), followed by the acquisition of language or discourse (the symbolic). Once the subject has entered the symbolic, they cannot return to the 'real' (to which they were confined before entering the other two registers), but it nevertheless always 'overlaps' them so that the subject can experience what Lacan (1981: 52-64) calls a 'missed encounter' with the real (as in the case of a traumatic experience) – 'missed', because one knows that you have been subjected to 'something', but no amount of talking or attempts at retrospectively grasping what it was that happened to you can really capture it fully.

It is not only in trauma that one is confronted by the 'real', however. Poets, artists and scientists also respond to their awareness of its ineffable 'appeal' to them when they confront something that eludes direct description or evocation, and they have to resort to depicting, evoking, saying or articulating as best they can (hence the need for innovativeness on their part) what it is that 'calls' for expression or 'being named'. In the sciences this typically happens when scientists reach the 'border' between existing theory, or knowledge, and that towards which the science is 'moving' (Fink 1997: 133-134). The theory concerned is symbolically structured, but the attempt to articulate it more and more 'accurately' is driven by the knowledge that there is always something 'more accurate' to be said or delineated about the phenomenon in question. One might say that the symbolic always approaches the 'real' asymptotically, that is, it strives to reach it, but never quite does. My use of different theoretical 'lenses' in this paper should be understood in the light of this realisation – no matter how 'consistently' one might follow one theoretical path (Habermas's, for instance), one will always reach the point where a different theoretical lens will allow one to get a better 'feel' for what it is one is attempting to bring under symbolic scrutiny, even if one accepts that no such 'lens' will quite allow one to come face to face with the 'real'. Hence my switching from one such theory to another when the argument requires a different symbolic approach or 'lens'.

Habermas, Strategic and Communicative Action

As already intimated above, Jürgen Habermas — the philosopher of communication — sheds light on this with his distinction between two types of communication, or what he calls 'strategic action' as opposed to 'communicative action', both of which have unmistakable ethical implications (Habermas 1987: 121, 113-157; Brand 1990: 15-16). To elaborate, the first kind covers, from a discourse-theoretical perspective, informational actions and exchanges which are disingenuous, in other words, which covertly advance the interests embedded in the discourse, or those of the speaker-subject of this discourse, at the cost of the receiver(s) or listener(s) in question. Where such 'strategic action' is concerned, there is therefore a tension, if not a contradiction, between what is stated at the overt level, and what is covered up by this — for example, when a company's

management informs employees that they are given the opportunity to be paid out for a certain category of leave that they have accumulated, which, if accepted, entails losing the leave in question, but receiving a corresponding amount in cash. On the face of it, it is the employees that benefit, but closer inspection reveals that it is a clever accounting move to save the company money in future, when retiring employees would have had to be paid out much more than at the time of the offer. In everyday relations between people, 'strategic action' happens all the time, of course: when a husband tells his wife and children that there is no money for a holiday this year, it may be the case, but unbeknown to them, the (withheld) reason may be that he is saving up the holiday money for that luxury sedan he wants, to be seen as successfully competing with his colleagues at work, or his wealthier brother.

In contrast to 'strategic action', its counterpart, 'communicative action', is all about being as sincere and open in acts of communication as one can possibly be. As briefly indicated earlier, Habermas characterizes it by saying that in such acts of 'communicative action', one puts all one's 'validity claims' on the table. This means that you should attempt, as best one can, to provide the reasons for adopting a specific position in one's communicational exchanges, with nothing intentionally hidden. For instance, when two lovers quarrel, instead of hiding the reasons for their dissatisfaction, lest the other take umbrage at these motives, ALL the motives for one's stance or actions should be revealed, in stark contrast with 'strategic action', where they are deliberately withheld.

Needless to say, it is not easy to practice 'communicative action' — firstly because most of us are subject to the unconscious desire to advance or secure our own interests most of the time, and therefore we tend to practice a species of 'strategic action' more often than not. And besides, in my judgement, Habermas underestimates the extent to which unconscious motives trip up even our best intentions to communicate openly and sincerely (Lacan 1977: 58). But 'communicative action' remains the normative ideal to be emulated, although it is a moot question whether complete openness and sincerity would actually be possible in a world which thrives on hidden agendas in most relations between people, as shown by what the WikiLeaks revelations have uncovered about inter-governmental communications (Olivier 2010). The governments that have expressed their displeasure in the face of these leaks have indicated as much: although they don't admit it

openly, their implicit belief is that the relations between countries would be far better ('managed') if the normal 'strategic action' would be left to occur unhindered.

Make no mistake, therefore. What this brief reflection on the difference between two types of 'communication' shows, not only pertains to the WikiLeaks phenomenon that has lifted the veil normally covering the 'true' face of diplomatic exchanges. The same tension that obtains between the 'strategic action' by which such diplomatic exchanges are usually governed, and the principle of 'communicative action' which governs those rare instances where individuals, parties, governments or partners of various stripes put all their 'validity claims' on the table (to the extent that it is possible), also exists in the everyday 'communications' between people.

This is the case between enemies, acquaintances, friends, lovers, husbands and wives — with hardly (if) any exceptions. More often than not the exchanges between people fall into the 'strategic action' category, not because people are irrevocably evil, but simply because, in our informational and communicational exchanges we are, first and foremost — under pressure of what Freud called 'survival instincts', no doubt — intent on serving our own best interests. Recall that Habermas characterises 'strategic action' as being disingenuous, that is, as advancing a hidden agenda: what is overtly said or otherwise indicated, should never be taken at face value. 'Strategic action' always advances the interests, and serves the purpose of increasing the power of, the one employing it[1].

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[1] From this perspective the phenomenon of gossip is interesting: gossip has the structure of WikiLeaks leaks, but hides its own, redoubled, covering up or 'strategic action': in gossip, the putative 'truth' about the actions, intentions or plans of others (usually supposed 'friends' into the bargain) is revealed to usually eager fellow gossips — information or opinions that would never feature in exchanges between the gossip (person) in question and the subjects of the gossip. But although the manner in which the information or opinion is phrased is usually such that it has the appearance of 'communicative action', it is nothing of the sort. Even if the information shared may be shown to be accurate, the intention or motivation behind it places it in the 'strategic action' category, namely as being motivated by the hidden agenda of promoting the interests of the gossiping person (for example in an attempt to

From this one may hypothesize that, assuming that there is a tendency to advance one's own interests, rather than those of others whose interests are not shared by yourself (there being another group of 'others' some of whose interests are indeed shared by yourself, like your family members), 'strategic action' comprises a large part, if not most, of one's communicational activity. It is highly unusual for a person to put the interests of others before her or his own as a matter of course – economic relations and activity being paradigmatic in this regard, as Adam Smith accurately indicated in *The wealth of nations* of 1776 (Baumer 1977: 178-179), which was the founding document of liberal economics, and the pessimistic anthropology of which is validated by the hegemony of neoliberal economics in the present era. Besides, even communicative action may be motivated by one's own interests, or, for that matter, one's own *as well as* the other's interests, as in communication between lovers where there is equality and mutuality, with no domination of one by the other (French 1986: 576).

Even teaching and research are not exempted from these modes of communication – it easily happens that, while both are supposedly predicated on the requirements for communicative action (such as sincerity and openness), a strong dose of strategic action underpins one's teaching and research. Think of the difference between a teacher (or researcher) whose 'style' of teaching (or conducting research) is accompanied by a certain humility, or an acceptance that she or he is not always 'right', but is just as subject to making mistakes as anyone else (no matter how hard one tries to consider every angle), on the one hand, and a teacher/researcher, on the other, whose style is dogmatic and authoritarian. It should be clear that the latter style corresponds to strategic action, and the former to communicative action.

Habermas on the Interests Guiding the Sciences

This does not mean that there are only these two kinds of discursive styles or 'interests' accompanying or guiding communication – 'strategic' and 'communicative'. It is probably the case that the most pervasive interests (including these) are not conscious at all, but before discussing those – as uncovered by psychoanalytical theorist, Jacques Lacan – some attention

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ingratiate him/herself with the listeners). Ironically, when found out, the interests of the gossip (person) are usually undermined.

should be given to another aspect of Habermas's (earlier) work, given its suggestiveness regarding one's guiding (sometimes unconscious) interests, this time less in an inter-personal than in a didactic and research context. As far as I can tell, research at most South African universities – and I would even include overseas universities in this – is conducted in such a way that it is guided principally by individual researchers' scientific or discipline-oriented interests, and/or these interests in so far as they overlap or dovetail with those of other researchers under the aegis of a common research theme – in other words, team-research.[2] In addition, universities are guided by what they envisage as 'focus areas' of research – those that are deemed especially important for the broadly 'developmental' needs of the country's economy, and are therefore promoted by universities (and by industries). However, if the inescapable interests underpinning on-going, actual research, as well as the way that disciplines are taught at university, were to be lost sight of, whatever the nationally identified 'focus areas' might be, any overarching research project would run out of its sustaining energy.*

A variety of starting points are available, and possible, for uncovering these interests, such as Foucault's (1972: 215-237) marvellously intricate grid of societal 'mechanisms' for the configuration and 'control' of discourse, which could be mapped on to particular teachers' and researchers' specific approaches to their work. For present purposes, however, I shall briefly focus on the methodological theoretical framework outlined by Jürgen Habermas (1971: 196-310; see also Bernstein 1976: 191-200) early in his career, where he articulates his theory of the 'three cognitive interests', corresponding to different groups of sciences, each of which is grounded in a particular area of social life. This comprises a theory within which researchers could situate their own work, and at the same time come to

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[2] Both of these kinds of research – individual and team-research – are usually encouraged, although the emphasis in South Africa has been more on the latter type lately, partly to encourage experienced researchers to impart their knowledge to younger researchers who have to step into the breach when they finally retire – 'finally', in light of Minister Dr Blade Nzimande's recent remark, that academics' retirement age should be lifted to the age of 80, instead of 60, where it currently stands in most cases. This was good sense on the part of the minister.

understand the differences as well as the interconnectedness between different kinds of science.

In more detail (but briefly), Habermas's early theory amounts to this. It articulates the correlation between what Habermas regards as three 'cognitive interests' (values) which guide and drive certain groups of sciences, and are rooted in three distinct fields of human existence. The three cognitive interests and the corresponding groups of sciences are as follows, keeping in mind that although these are predominantly methodological and epistemological considerations, they point towards a social theory that would accommodate and explain the need for such sciences to exist, and which Habermas was working towards at the time of publishing *Knowledge and human interests*.

First there is the *technical interest in control*, which underpins the *empirical-analytical sciences* (including engineering, physics, chemistry, computer science, accounting, but also sciences like psychology, in so far as they are practised with a view to exercising control through, for instance, psychometrics). Then there is the *practical* (i.e. ethical) *interest* in *mutual understanding*, underlying the historical-hermeneutic sciences (such as history, literary studies, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, art theory, the classics, philology, communication studies, and so on). Thirdly, the *emancipatory interest* supports and drives the *critical social sciences* (like sociology, social and critical psychology, political science, psychoanalysis, critical economics and philosophy; it will be noted that philosophy straddles the second and third group of sciences, because it incorporates both kinds of interests).

Less well known is Habermas's contention that each of these interests (and therefore each of the groups of sciences), is rooted or grounded in a distinct aspect of human social existence: the technical interest is grounded on *labour*[3] (necessary for survival), the practical interest on

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[3] It is interesting to note that Hannah Arendt (1958 :79-96), contrary to the majority of theorists, distinguishes between *labour* (which is engaged in for the sake of survival through consumption) and *work* (which, in contrast to labour, produces durable cultural objects such as artefacts). She further reminds one that the ancient world valued *labour* (and to some extent *work*, as associated with craftspeople or artisans) negatively – which partly explains

communicative interaction, and the emancipatory interest on *power* (from *and* to) as an inalienable aspect of human existence. One could put this the other way around as well, this time in developmental terms, by saying that the work or labour that has always been necessary for the reproduction of social life through the exercise of a measure of (broadly) technical control over one's environment, has given rise to those experiential sciences which lay the cognitive basis for securing social life in all its ramifications. Parallel to, and interwoven with this, the social practice of communicative interaction that has, from time immemorial, been required as a 'praxis' (ethical practice) for societies to exist, has led to the emergence of sciences of a broadly historical and hermeneutic (that is, interpretive) nature. Lastly, the ubiquitous existence of asymmetrical power relations (from within families to between economic, social and political groupings) has called into being the need for emancipation, or liberation, which, as a distinct interest or value, has resulted in the establishment of the critical social sciences.

The important thing to notice here is that each distinguishable group of sciences, while being rooted in the social practice concerned (labour, communicative interaction and the exercise of power), and being driven and directed by the values or interests concerned (technical, practical and emancipatory) has the important reciprocal function of serving to strengthen these social practices by reinforcing the different interests. And even more importantly, Habermas intimates that, just as work or labour is necessary for social or cultural communicative interaction to flourish, both of these are prerequisites for social and political emancipation to become a reality. Similarly, the corresponding empirical-analytical sciences and historical-hermeneutic sciences point towards, and in a sense promote the possibility of the critical social sciences, because 'freedom from' oppression, and 'freedom to' actualise one's potential in society is the highest value or interest of them all. Against this backdrop it should be clear why Habermas's theory ultimately leads to, or implies, an encompassing social theory.

Lacan's Four Discourses
The more fundamental question is, of course, why some people adopt hier-

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slavery, which freed citizens for *speech* and (political) *action* – while the modern world values it highly, as in Marx's labour theory.

archical positions towards others — in diverse contexts, from business to education to civil service — and others seem entirely at ease with a situation, even a very informal one, where they treat others as equals (regardless of whether such others are as 'knowledgeable' as they are in a discipline). The answer has to do, firstly, with confidence (as argued earlier), but secondly also with what the German philosopher Fichte once remarked, namely: 'The kind of philosophy one chooses depends on the kind of person you are.'

There are many theories of personality articulated by people such as Freud, Jung, and others, which is not what I want to go into here, given their terminological differences. 'What kind of person one is' nevertheless plays a decisive role in one's approach to virtually everything in life, and not only the situations referred to above. Jacques Lacan's (2007; see also Olivier 2012) theory of the 'four discourses' affords one a useful and insight-promoting heuristic as far as the connection between 'the kind of person you are' and the way one teaches and does research is concerned. Every one of the four discourses — the discourse of the master, of the university, of the hysteric and of the analyst — denotes a specific subject position. To put it simply: every discourse is a particular way of approaching the world, society, or other individuals. And different people behave under the sway or dominance of a different discourse, mostly, although one can also switch discursive positions (deliberately, or involuntarily) in different situations.

Individuals who tend to be hierarchical or authoritarian in their approach to teaching and research (whether one is at the giving or the receiving end) are invariably in thrall to the *master's discourse* in one of its embodiments, of which there are many. (Every one of the four discourses is a TYPE of discourse). Patriarchy is a widespread master's discourse — the discourse of the 'rule of the father' — which functions in government, in education, in business and in the churches (the Roman Catholic Church being an exemplar of a patriarchal, hierarchical organisation, although not the only one). Arguably, the discourse of neoliberal capitalism is *the* master's discourse of the present era (although it disguises itself as an instance of the hysteric's discourse; see Lacan 1978; Olivier 2012). Needless to say, individuals interpellated by the discourse of the master, would find evidence of it in the readiness with which they submit to 'authority' in their own lives, including in research.

The *discourse of the university* is the discourse of knowledge — ironically not of a critical, questioning conception of knowledge, but the kind

that supports the *status quo*, for example standard theories of economics that maintain present economic power relations. This discourse is predicated on a conception of knowledge as systematically unified, and in principle capable of being 'completed'. Those individuals who approach teaching and research in such a manner that they betray a belief in closed systems of knowledge, are indebted to this discourse. Needless to say, the university discourse is not compatible with the nature of science, or philosophy, for that matter. Science and philosophy are open systems of knowledge, which means that because they are not situated in a timeless vacuum, they are in principle self-critical and open or susceptible to historically new discoveries, theories and insights, which means that they are, like all human knowledge, revisable. This accords with what Jacques Derrida (1997: 16-24) calls the 'messianic structure of experience', which alludes to the unpredictability of future social experience, to the paradoxical idea of 'expecting the unexpected', of always being ready for the advent of a 'messianic' event which may happen when you expect it least. (Derrida is not here talking in terms of the religious idea of a Messiah, although the idea of a historically unspecified 'advent' is borrowed, metaphorically, from that discourse.)

The true representative of critical, questioning science is the *discourse of the hysteric*, and one can recognise oneself as acting under its aegis when one's style of communicating (including teaching) or of doing research is a *questioning* one. Moreover, it presupposes a conception of knowledge as being structurally indeterminate, meaning that knowledge is not simply empirically incomplete at any given stage, but is in principle subject to uncertainty, or the indeterminacy of what Lacan calls the unsymbolizable 'real'. This can be seen in Heisenberg's famous indeterminacy principle, according to which one cannot measure the speed and the location of an electron *at the same time* (Fink 1997**:** 133-134). The *discourse of the analyst* is recognisable in the actions of those who are not satisfied with either blind subjection to the master's discourse, or the incessant questioning (of the master's and the university discourses) by the hysteric, but find that a questioning alternation between different master's discourses (which are therefore relativised) yields the best communicational or research results and the most beneficial human or social relations. This means that it is a way of negotiating between what are referred to in philosophy as being (stability, permanence) and becoming (change, flux).

Poststructuralist theory is an example of such 'thinking together' of being and becoming, or of following the logic of both/and, instead of either/or.

Self-knowledge as far as one's own 'discursive dominant' is concerned can therefore be very productive. Whatever the case may be, knowing the weakness and the strengths of a discursive position can assist towards modifying one's communicational behaviour as well as one's teaching and research in the case of academics. It may be difficult to adapt from a personal tendency to lecture and engage in research in an authoritarian manner – either from such a perspective, as the mouthpiece of the master's discourse, or as the one who (as Adorno once put it regarding what he called 'the authoritarian personality') 'needs a master'. However, a sustained attempt to enter the discursive space of the hysteric's questioning discourse in relation to that of the mediating analyst, in this way producing successive, relativized master's signifiers, may yield rewarding results. The reason for this is simply that the latter negotiation accords with the open-ended, but unavoidably theory-oriented character of science, as well as with a justifiably humble, yet confident, approach to teaching – one not blindly committed to the systematic, supposed unity of the university discourse (which secretly serves that of the 'absolute' master, anyway).

It is not difficult to map Jacques Derrida's (1978) distinction between the *engineer* and the *bricoleur*, deconstructively borrowed from Lévi-Strauss, on to Lacan's four discourses, further clarifying the different inclinations and motives underlying teaching and research. The figure of the *engineer* suggests someone who is motivated by the thought of constructing artefacts, or cultural domains, with the aid of the most reliable and precise instruments, in this way putatively guaranteeing exactitude and durability to an optimal degree, by warding off the erosion of things that comes with time. The paradigmatic *engineer*, like those governed by Lacan's university discourse, therefore dreams of perfect systematicity, completeness and coherence, whether this is in (teaching or research pertaining to) the sciences of construction or in the human sciences. The *bricoleur*, on the other hand, represents the paradigm of a tinkerer or handyman/-woman, who approaches the task of constructing and fixing artefacts (or scientific disciplines) by means of any instrument that may be readily at hand, knowing that, whatever instruments are used, the products of her or his work are unavoidably subject to historical relativization or attrition. As a paradigm for teaching and research, the *bricoleur* may seem to correspond roughly with the hysteric's

discourse, in so far as 'questioning' the master (or the university) as overriding attribute is concerned, but taken together, the models of the *bricoleur* and the engineer tell us something important.

Although one's inclination as teacher or researcher would probably be to emulate the one or the other, Derrida reminds his readers that one is not in a position to choose between the engineer and the *bricoleur*, and that there is no reason *not* to try one's very best at being an 'engineer' in practice (that is, being as precise and thorough in one's pursuit of knowledge as is humanly possible), with the realization, though, that even one's best attempts are, in the end, subject to historical ruin, reconstituting them as *bricolage*. This is related to the mediation of the hysteric's discourse and that of a (new) master's discourse by the discourse of the analyst, with Derrida in the role of the latter. Put differently, therefore, he counsels one to accept that adopting new master's (engineer's) signifiers is unavoidable for constructive cultural endeavours (such as teaching and research), as long as these operate in a creative tension with those of the hysteric or the *bricoleur*, whose distinctive way of operating 'questions' that of the engineer or master. In practice, teachers and researchers could learn from Derrida that setting one's sights on 'results' that are comparatively stable is commendable, but that one should not be deluded into believing that these 'results' are unassailable or impervious to becoming. A model student could disappoint at a later stage, and one's research results could be falsified under different historical circumstances.

Rancière, Art and Equality

There are many other grids or models for understanding oneself, specifically in the context of teaching and research, of course. I shall focus on only two more, the first of which is articulated by a highly original thinker, Jacques Rancière, whose name is associated, above all, with the notions of 'dissensus' and the (discursive) 'partitioning of the sensible'. In addition to this, and although it is primarily meant to make the history and changing theories of the arts perspicuous, his theory of the three regimes of art serves just as well to promote self-understanding. These three 'regimes' are the *ethical regime of images*, the *representative regime of art*, and the *aesthetic regime of art* (Tanke 2011: 77-82). A 'regime' is similar to a Foucaultian *episteme*, which

refers to a tacit, mostly unconscious set of assumptions regarding the nature of reality and of knowledge that underpins the cultural practices, including science and art, of a distinct era (Tanke 2011: 76). In the case of a regime, however, it is not restricted to a certain era, and even if its dominance is apparent during a specific historical period, only to wane later, it may still exercise its influence later throughout history by intersecting with other regimes.

So, for example, the *ethical regime of images* originated from Plato's suspicion towards the arts, given their powerful capacity to generate seductive fictions – fictions that could undermine the 'good (but hierarchical) order' of the polis that Plato hoped to establish through his account of such a society in the *Republic*. The *representative regime of art* derives from Aristotle's insistence – against Plato – that not all art is subversive of the social order; in tragedy, by means of the cathartic identification of the audience with the tragic hero(ine), its members are ethically 'purged' through 'pity and fear', in this way reinforcing the ethically 'good' social order (which turns out to be just as hierarchical as Plato's). It is only with the advent of the *aesthetic regime of art* that art is liberated from hierarchy of any kind, in the sense that (in contrast to the other two regimes) any and all objects or events are legitimate material for art, and artists are free to interpret these as they see fit. Art belonging to the representative regime continues to exist alongside of the aesthetic kind, of course – recall the exhortation on the part of church leader, Koot Vorster (during apartheid), for the artists of the 'volk' to produce 'patriotic art' which would no doubt have configured social space along the lines of a hierarchical racial oligarchy. Nevertheless, art of the aesthetic regime is recognizable by its disruption of the hierarchical space of mainstream society, held in place by discourses of exclusion and gender as well as racial subordination.

How does this work? Degas's painting, *Interior*, in the Philadelphia Art Museum, illustrates well what Rancière means by the 'aesthetic regime of art'. It shows a man leaning against the wall of a lamplit bedroom and a woman sitting on a chair in what seems like a state of either despair or shock, or perhaps melancholy; and it speaks eloquently, albeit non-specifically, about what has occurred between these two people without losing the enigmatic dimension of art's multivocality, which here enters the domain of the sublime, or 'presenting the unpresentable' (Lyotard 1984: 80-81). The maudlin atmosphere created by the Victorian wallpaper in the room, echoed

by the lampshade, an open (suit)case of some kind – suggesting the man may be a doctor (although the expression of intransigence on his face seems to belie this possibility) – his coat on the bed, the vulnerability that emanates from the woman's rosy arms and neck, together with her hunched shoulders, suggests a lover's quarrel, or perhaps something more serious, like an unwanted pregnancy, or the presence of the Victorian counterpart of our era's 'disease of love' (as Foucault called AIDS), namely syphilis. The interpretive possibilities – responsible ones, however, responding to the presented image-configuration – are endless, hence the intimation of the sublime. After all, what is represented here is intelligible, but in the fullness of its possible meanings not adequately presentable. What transports the spectator into the domain of the sublime is its suggestion of the dimension of a complex human relationship which has suffered something not unlike trauma: it is there, almost tangibly, trailing its apparent, but opaque history like a comet's tail, refusing the spectator's attempt to grasp or decipher it once and for all.

But apart from the 'modern' sublime, which (according to Lyotard; 1984: 80-81) alludes to the unpresentable sublime by the omission of certain contents (as in this painting), the painting also enacts what Rancière (Tanke 2011: 74-75) calls the 'distribution of the sensible'. As in the case of all art, painting contributes to this 'distribution' in a complex discursive manner – although Rancière is careful to specify that it is in the space of reciprocity between theoretical works that articulate the conditions of possibility of a certain kind of art, on the one hand, and artworks (or texts), on the other, that such 'distribution' (or re-distribution) becomes possible. What does this mean? Recall that, for Rancière, art of the aesthetic regime contributes to this process through the disruptive insertion of a moment of 'dissensus' into the hierarchical conventional fabric of society, simultaneously subverting the hierarchical structuring of society by the art of the representative regime. The latter (deriving from Aristotle), is predicated on the normative distinction between genres of art according to the kind of objects that they represent – tragedy representing 'nobler' actions (as objects) than comedy, for instance, and paintings of kings occupying a higher position than those of commoners. Simultaneously, however, the latter kind of art perpetuates a certain social stratification through normative representation. Art of the aesthetic regime upsets the applecart, in so far as it takes anything and everything that human experience is privy to, as its legitimate object(s).

Hence Degas's *Interior*, referred to above, does not belong to the re-

presentative regime – not so much because the characters and furnishings comprising its social space clearly do not belong to the aristocracy, but because its '(re-)partitioning of the sensible' is carried out in such a way that it constitutes the relationship between the two characters (a man and a woman who do not display the characteristics or appearance of royalty or nobility) as being sufficiently significant to warrant the attention of an artist, even if the presence of patriarchal subordination still lingers in its aesthetic space. In other words, the painting disrupts the socially stratified terrain of classes endowed with different degrees of importance and hence, power, through its 'dissenting' act, introducing the percept of a radical human and social 'equality' into this space, in this way sowing the seeds of feminine revolt against patriarchy into the bargain. After all, artists of the aesthetic regime achieve two things at once. They enact a redistribution of the sensible which posits the fundamental axiological equality of every human being, but also of everything visible (and by implication sayable) in the world, and in so doing, they have inaugurated an eco-political art in the widest sense, which is visible in their works, even if they may not have intended it. (Not that this is surprising – all signifiers are multivocal, harbouring more meanings than anyone who uses them can ever intend.) And this articulation of the realm of the 'sensible' – the world of sense, and what makes sense – has discursive effects in social reality. The upshot of Rancière's notion of the aesthetic regime of art is nothing short of revolutionary, in so far as the freedom to select any subject matter, and to treat it in any possible (non-hierarchical) stylistic manner – visually, literarily, musically, cinematically – intimates a temporality that is open to an indeterminate future. This is a future where the possibility of a different society and a different natural domain beckons – where everything comprising the multicoloured spectrum of earth's inhabitants is endowed with equal value.

The significance of Rancière's novel philosophy of art for teaching and doing research should not be difficult to discern – it entails a radically *democratic* approach in these related practices, implying a receptivity for the *diversity* and axiological *equality* of those who teach and those who are taught, with one another. Following Rancière in this respect, one might speak of an 'aesthetic regime of teaching and research', which is predicated on the equal value of all individual students and all disciplines that contribute to knowledge of the variegated spectrum of social and natural reality. There is a *caveat* here, however, which pertains to the valorization of diversity: the

limits of diversity come into view there, where difference or the diverse assumes the terrifying guise of destructiveness regarding the community of fellow humans. Think of serial killers Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer – should their particular site of *jouissance* (serial murder) be tolerated in the name of diversity? In a postmodern era where difference, alterity and diversity are glorified, one should guard against throwing the baby of the ethical out with the bathwater of universalization.

Heidegger's *Fourfold* as Axiological Touchstone for Teaching and Research

The last set of conceptual markers I would like to consider here as a 'guide for the perplexed' with regard to their own teaching and research-orientation, is Heidegger's (1975) highly suggestive notion of the 'fourfold' – earth, sky, mortals, and divinities – in 'Building dwelling thinking'. This one comes with a difference, however, which is why I have alluded to it as a 'guide for the perplexed'. Instead of displaying different positions for the subject to identify with, whether singly, or in a specific configuration – like Habermas's three research interests, or Lacan's four discourses – Heidegger's 'fourfold' constitutes a touchstone for evaluating the interests or discourses which appeal to one most. In the process one is likely to learn a lot about one's own predispositions, and not necessarily in a reassuring manner.

As a first way of approaching Heidegger's 'fourfold' it is instructive to recall an earlier, comparable version of a 'fourfold' of sorts. I am thinking of Aristotle's well-known conception of causality (which may well be what Heidegger had in mind as a model). Aristotle's account (Melchert 1991: 154-156) of four different kinds of causes, namely the formal, the material, the efficient and final cause(s), respectively, affords one the means of orienting oneself in the cosmos (or cosmic order), which, for the ancient Greeks, was the antithesis of chaos. According to Aristotle every existing thing, as well as every relation, can be understood in terms of the combined functioning of this fourfold causality. In the case of a shrub, for example, the formal cause is the 'shrubness' of the shrub, that is, its botanical classifiability or its differentiating specificity in comparison with other, equally specific entities. Its material cause is the particular materiality without which it could not be individuated as a particular shrub, growing at this geographical location, at

this moment. The shrub's efficient cause is that within it which 'works' in order to make it grow and bear seeds, and its final cause is the 'telos' or end towards which its working (efficient) cause causes it to develop. It is not difficult to see how this fourfold causality applies to a person – one's 'humanness', which differentiates conceptually between one's species and others, is the formal cause, one's body is the particularizing material cause, one's capacity to change and develop constitutes the efficient cause, and that in one which impels one, or beckons one to work towards certain conceivable ends is one's final cause. In the case of non-living things – cell phones, buildings, motor cars and shoes – the difference is that the efficient cause is not internal to the thing, but external to it, in the shape of a tailor or cobbler, for example. As may readily be grasped, Aristotle's model serves to explain *how* both living and inanimate things function in the world, and, especially through the final cause, *why*. In fact, the final cause is also helpful to determine where one stands regarding one's teaching and research. Viktor Frankl's contention (1959), that anyone with a *why* to live, will find a *how* – which resonates with Aristotle's thinking – is a powerful reminder that when we teach, or do research, it is our own, distinctive 'final cause' (the ultimate goal or sense of our individual lives) which informs and guides or directs *how* we teach and *what* we ultimately teach, enlisting our own formal, material and efficient causes in order to do so. In this respect it anticipates Heidegger's even more powerfully orienting version of the 'fourfold'.

The 'fourfold' represents an elaboration on what Heidegger earlier proposed in 'The origin of the work of art' (1975a), that an artwork is always ineluctably characterized by a life-giving 'struggle' between two aspects inalienably bound up with all art, namely 'world' and 'earth'. There 'world' stood for what are broadly the conditions of interpretability of the artwork, or what Heidegger thought of as the realm of openness which gave viewers, readers or listeners access to the framework or horizon of meanings preserved in the work, and within which one's interpretation gains a foothold. Heidegger's analysis of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes is a fine instance of interpreting an artwork phenomenologically, with a view to drawing from it what is already there, preserved in the inter-relations between various aspects of its constitutive images. What the interpretation yields in this case is the 'world' of the peasant – a world of hardship and of working under difficult conditions to eke out a livelihood, all of which is etched into the artwork's constitutive set of image-relations. 'Earth', by contrast, indexes

'world's' inseparable counterpart, where (instead of the openness of 'world') *withdrawal* from view, from intellectual access, from all kinds of attempts to pry into the artwork's final 'meaning' happens. (As such it resonates with what Lacan [1981: 52-64] thinks of as the unsymbolizable, ineffable 'real' – referred to earlier – as distinct from the registers of the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic', an amalgam of which comprises the human world.) In the case of the Van Gogh painting, the sheer, impenetrable 'givenness' of the colour pigmentation – the brute fact that 'it is', and nothing more – represents what Heidegger calls 'earth'. The extent to which the colours contribute to the painting's meaning is a function of 'world', but the colours (pigments), in their intransigent 'thereness', belong to 'earth'.

In the later work Heidegger expands these two concepts into four – earth, sky, mortals and divinities[4] – in the process implying that, if one (or more) of them is absent as orienting compass coordinates to determine one's position or 'place' in the world, you have reason to believe that you are not living a truly human life. This explains why Heidegger claims that the four together comprise 'a simple oneness'. 'Earth' as member of the 'fourfold' retains the meaning it has in the earlier *Origin of the work of art*, but Heidegger enriches and amplifies it further. Here, apart from resisting humans' attempts to make it completely transparent and controllable through technology, it is the inscrutable condition of the possibility of all (earthly) life. In his words it is the (Heidegger 1975: 149): 'serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal'. 'Sky' denotes the matrix or 'vault' whence the beneficial gifts of the seasons come, but it also constitutes the 'limit' marking human finitude – a limit that nevertheless challenges humans to surpass it, inspiring cultural innovations in science, art and technology. 'Mortals' represents human beings in so far as their nature makes them 'capable of death' (Heidegger 1975: 151), and 'divinities' refers to the 'messengers of the godhead' whose advent is anticipated in hope by mortals, regardless of whether they reveal themselves or withdraw (1975: 150).

In what sense does this constellation of concepts, representing what can be understood as primordial values (Heidegger's 'fourfold') function as a touchstone for evaluating one's way of teaching and doing research? Recall

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[4] The American philosopher, Karsten Harries (1997:159-162), provides an insightful interpretation of Heidegger's 'fourfold'.

that, for Heidegger, the fourfold's unity is an indication that their togetherness cannot or should not be violated in human cultural practices, and if it is, it would detract from the humanity of such practices. In other words, they would alienate one from one's own humanity. For instance, architecture that does not embody the intertwined unity of earth, sky, mortals and divinities, would be a kind of inhuman architecture, such as when the materials used in a building are chosen deliberately for their qualities of resisting signs of time as ephemeral, as passing, which would remind onlookers of their own mortality. Stainless steel panels on buildings, combined with plate glass, tend to have the effect of negating time or historicity, while red brick, or painted surfaces which periodically, by showing signs of wear and tear, call for new coats of paint, project an affirmation of finitude and mortality by visibly displaying their groundedness in the earth. Similarly, the cultural practice or techno-science of robotics displays all the signs of being aimed at surpassing being-human, in so far as it is predicated on the development of a being which, while humanoid in appearance, would be 'immortal' (not subject to time's erosion), and not subject to the earth-bound desires of human beings. Instead, it would represent the attempt to transcend 'sky' as limit to human endeavour, fastening instead on its flip-side, by rising to the challenge of surpassing the limit. Raymond Kurzweil's notion of 'the singularity' instantiates one such meaning of sky: according to Kurzweil (Grossman 2011), within a few decades from now, artificial intelligence research will produce a level of intelligence that will surpass human intelligence to such an extent that a 'singular' new relationship between humans and 'robots' will be established – an event that holds the promise of humans merging with machines to attain a kind of immortality. Needless to stress, this does not accord with the axiological implications of the fourfold; in fact, it negates all of them, with the possible exception of the fourth one, namely 'divinities', to the extent that these anticipated beings may be seen as instantiating a 'messianism' (Derrida 1997) of sorts.

Teaching and doing research are also cultural practices that are subject to the axiological 'aura' of Heidegger's fourfold. Whether one teaches in a manner exemplifying Lacan's authoritative master's discourse, or the questioning discourse of the hysteric, unless it is done in accordance with the fourfold, it lacks credibility in human terms. Teaching and research that affirm the fourfold acknowledge the earth as sphere of human provenance, in

which our desires are rooted, sky as limit (which beckons us beyond it, without losing our earth-oriented bearings), our own mortality (including finitude and fallibility) and allude to 'divinities' as the multivocal source of meaning in human life (not necessarily in a conventional religious sense; even atheists have to 'live from' a source of some kind that imparts meaning to their lives). In this way Heidegger's 'fourfold' instantiates an axiological compass of sorts – one that helps one orient oneself in the world when engaging in the risky activities of teaching and research.

*Appendix: *On an Indirectly Related Topic: The Need for a Social Theory for Research-orientation*

The desired research project referred to here is always 'on-going', because knowledge is never final – any claim to finality is patently ideological. Instead, as the history of the sciences shows, it is always revisable, and a social theory within which an understanding of research and teaching directions or 'styles' is accommodated, is no exception. But why a social theory for the orientation of research and teaching? Simply because, unless one has a non-ideological, social-scientifically informed grasp of society, one is unable to assess, always in a provisional, revisable manner, how the wide variety of sciences and disciplines are related to one another in terms of supplementarity, contrast or imbrication – something that is indispensable for responsible, and holistically informed research and teaching. One could therefore work towards something, which, as far as I can tell, is sadly lacking in South Africa, namely the on-going project of formulating an encompassing social theory to orientate research and teaching, and/or the tacit, mostly unconscious interests that direct or guide one's way ('style') of doing research and teaching.

In other words, one needs a 'map' of sorts, of the social structures and dynamics that comprise society as a whole, both 'internally' (regarding social relations between and among individuals and groups of all kinds), and 'externally' (in relation to the natural environment, organic as well as inorganic). In the absence of such a social-scientific map – one reciprocally and systematically informed by the knowledge embodied in ALL the sciences, lest any detractor of the social sciences should see in this proposal an attempt to lord it over the natural sciences – one is unable to see the

proverbial wood for the trees: already such specialised knowledge of a large number of 'trees' exists, but where does one look for an encompassing map of the forest that would show its various regions and what one may encounter there?

An obvious objection to the attempt to formulate a social theory to orient research (and teaching) would be that I am clearly suffering from historical amnesia, and that I should remind myself that the era of encompassing (metaphysical) systems – of the kind that flourished from the 17th to the 19th centuries in the work of among others Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza and especially Hegel – is long gone. And besides, as the Hegel scholar W.T. Stace once observed about Hegel's all-encompassing philosophy of Spirit, it resembles a medieval castle – beautiful from the outside, with its moat, portcullis, turrets and battlements, but uninhabited. Would a social theory to orientate the sciences in their differences as well as their interrelationships not be similarly alien to extant 'reality'? It could easily degenerate into such a vacuous construction, but it need not, if scientists were to contribute to its construction and regular revision.

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