



“Who’s Going to Man the Factories and be the Sexual Slaves if we all get PhDs?” Democratizing Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute

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Abstract

Identifying a policy/activism dichotomy in critical geography debates about political engagement, this paper uses the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI) as a way to think about teaching as an alternative response for left geographers. By focusing on the DGEI’s commitment to expanding access to knowledge production, not simply the dissemination of knowledge, the paper highlights the radical potential of a key form of academic work, teaching, but reconceived as a radically democratic project aimed at breaking the cycle of expert knowledge production. This potential has largely been marginalized in the development of radical geography, but it has been carried forward, latently, in much of the best thinking about the democratic possibilities of knowledge production, namely feminist discussions of situated knowledges. The paper argues that revisiting the DGEI helps to push those discussions further and restore teaching as a central concern of radical geography’s project of promoting social justice.

Introduction

The story is familiar: in the 1960s many geographers began to feel a disparity between the concerns of academic geography and the profound social and political struggles of the day, around civil rights, poverty, and opposition to the war in Vietnam. This realization forced a break with quantitative geography and led to the rise of a “radical” geography that, according to one of its foremost promoters and historians, Richard Peet, “focused on diffusing a new set of academic values in the form of a different system of disciplinary topics, such as poverty, social justice, and underdevelopment, rather than the grave consequences of the gravity model, like central place theory and the discovery of profit-optimal locations” (Peet 2000:951; see also Peet 1977:15, 1998:67–111). This move towards a more “relevant” and radical geography gained disciplinary legitimacy through the 1970s and 1980s and formed the “intellectual

leadership for a new generation of scholars” (Peet 2000:952) who wanted to develop a geography explicitly concerned with progressive politics, on the one hand, and a critique of the positivist assumptions of quantitative geography,¹ on the other.

Yet, while the rise of radical geography created a “different system of disciplinary topics” that was politically charged, questions about bridging the gap between “theory” and “praxis” continue to trouble many critical geographers, as can be seen in the recent parallel debates in geography about “activism and the academy” and “geographers and policy” (eg Blomley 1994, 1995; Castree 1999, 2000; Lees 1999; Maxey 1999; Peck 1999; Pollard et al 2000; Tickell 1995, 1998). These debates describe the two standard ways that radical geographers have come to understand the relationship between academic work and politics: on the one hand, up the power structure towards policymakers and, on the other hand, towards political activism, a dichotomy “often framed as ‘top-down’ policy research versus ‘bottom-up’ grassroots activist research” (Pain 2003:651). A widely cited editorial exchange between Nicolas Blomley and Adam Tickell in *Society and Space* delineates the contours of the situation. Blomley lays out the dilemma: “we tell ourselves and our students that everything is simultaneously political and theoretical, yet we seem to have a hard time connecting the two outside the university . . . There is an assumption that what we do as academics will ‘make a difference’, although how and where are left unclear” (1994:383). Blomley’s answer is to advocate for a model of the “academic activist” that “navigates between the opposed perils of academic elitism and political disengagement” (1994:385; see also Routledge’s (1996) concept of activism as a “third space” of critical engagement). Tickell agrees that “we have a responsibility to contribute to the wider society of which we are a part” (1995:235), but his reply is to advocate an “activism” *within the state*. In a follow-up article he argues, “For many [geographers], (continuing) engagement with extra-parliamentary pressure groups is a constructive contribution. But it is worth remembering that these groups rarely effect change without themselves lobbying politicians and putting their arguments into the public arena. Others may find it easier to engage directly with policymakers” (Tickell 1998:765).

In these debates, political action is either confined to policymaking or cast apart from academic work altogether as “activism”, a dichotomy that tends to reproduce traditional notions of the role between social scientific knowledge production and social change. On the one hand, activism, while related to and informed by academic concerns, is apart from academic work itself and remains in the “private” sphere of an individual’s activities, essentially no different from political involvement of any kind by any individual. On the other hand, the orientation towards policy work relies on a standard model of professional social scientific expertise.

While there has been a recent, and growing, interest in participatory action research (PAR), which joins activism and research (Pain 2003, 2004, 2006; Pain and Francis 2003; Cahill 2004; Kindon 2005), what is still missing from the debate and the narrative history of radical geography is an oft-forgotten aspect of the “movement” of the late 1960s and early 1970s: a critique of higher education and traditional notions of social scientific knowledge production. The critique of positivist knowledge production that developed in the wake of the quantitative revolution in geography was not only a theoretical “paradigm shift”; it also contained a political critique of the entire mode of social scientific knowledge production and the professional expertise that promised social scientists privileged access to power. However, that critique has been marginalized in the development of radical or critical geography since the mid 1970s. Instead, on the one hand, much critical geography retains a traditional mode of expert knowledge production that places the professional, expert knower at the center of a system that funnels power, knowledge, and agency upwards to political and policy elites.² On the other hand, discussions of activism tend to dismiss or downplay the political potential of work inside academia itself. In contrast, a group of early radical geographers developed an alternative model of academic work that was not merely a different set of disciplinary topics but a sustained critique of professional expertise. This alternative model of knowledge production was developed by geographers at the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI). It questioned the accepted role of social science—and knowledge—in social and political change, and it challenged the antidemocratic patterns of technobureaucratic expertise, while at the same time providing for a new role for academics, that of disseminating *knowledge production*, not merely knowledge itself. Geographers associated with the DGEI saw that the traditional mode of social science approached solving social problems through the adjudication of knowledge claims by experts, an approach that reduced social problems to technical questions that are the exclusive province of professional experts. Challenging this view, DGEI geographers saw knowledge as fundamentally a political, not a technical, problem: solutions to social problems demanded not simply *more* knowledge, but wider access to the means of knowledge production. The DGEI was founded not simply to refocus the topics of research towards poverty and ghettoization, but towards breaking the cycle of expert knowledge production as a central goal of radical geography. Such a goal was fundamentally a *pedagogical* project, one that has been largely ignored as radical geography grew in prominence.

In what follows, I want to propose this under-examined aspect of the DGEI (and early radical geography in general) as an alternative and supplement to the policy/activism dichotomy that has dominated left geography in recent years. By focusing on the DGEI’s commitment to

expanding access to knowledge production, not simply the dissemination of knowledge, I want to highlight the radical potential of a key form of academic work, teaching, but reconceived as a radically democratic project aimed at breaking the cycle of expert knowledge production and creating more just social relations. This potential in critical geography has been carried forward, latently, in much of the best thinking about the democratic possibilities of knowledge production, namely feminist discussions of situated knowledges. Revisiting the DGEI helps push those discussions further and restore teaching as a central concern of radical geography, while a critical reading of those feminist discussions helps locate such a project inside the classroom.

Radical Pedagogy and the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute

While the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute is rarely mentioned in standard histories of the discipline (ie absent from Livingstone (1992) and James (1972); but see Peet (1998:73)), it formed a significant component in the early years of radical geography, having a considerable presence in the first few volumes of *Antipode*, and it is alluded to frequently by geographers on the left as an important historical development within geography. Noel Castree is representative when he claims that “radical geography, so the story goes, was born at the AAG meeting in Ann Arbor in 1969, when several constituencies—including the early *Antipode* group based at Clark University and those involved in the Detroit Geographical Expedition—converged, collaborated, and synergized” (2000:955). Not only is the DGEI remembered fondly as an historical development, but it is often harkened back to as a model of politically engaged scholarship. Andy Merrifield, for instance, claims that “there is much to learn from the legacy of practical expeditions into the world of the exploited and oppressed outside the academy” (1995:65), while Iain Hay argues that geographers ought to “promote change through community-based research such as that of Bill Bunge” (2001:141), and Pawson and Teather (2002) see it as a model for “engaged” student field work.

However, most commentators, like Castree, refer to it as the “Detroit Geographical Expedition”, not the “Detroit Geographical Expedition *and Institute*”, which was what its participants called it. This elision, importantly, signals the way in which the expressed pedagogical goals, central to the enterprise, have been marginalized in hindsight, while its more “action” oriented “expedition” aspect is highlighted. This move is consistent with the general trend identified above, in which the development of radical geography sidelined a nascent radical pedagogical discussion in favor of notions of the role of the geographer that were in line with traditional social scientific knowledge production. However,

a rereading of the documents of the DGEI and its heirs (such as the Toronto and Vancouver Geographical Expeditions) points to the way in which the enterprise represented a wholesale critique and rethinking of the social role of geographers and geographical knowledge production. Rather than conceiving of the geographer primarily as an expert knower who had privileged access to elites, the DGEI cast the geographer as disseminator of knowledge production, thereby broadening the meaning of social action.

While Bill Bunge is considered the central figure of the expedition movement, a full picture of the enterprise is only gained by complementing Bunge's writings with accounts written by other participants. This is partly true because Bunge's accounts (eg Bunge 1971, 1974a, 1977, 1979) tend to focus less on the details and particulars of how the enterprise was carried out and more on the social and political context that formed the impetus and justification for the DGEI. They focus more on the abstract and theoretical, on the one hand, and his personal experiences, on the other, rather than on describing the program. They are important, of course, to any understanding of the DGEI, but to gain a full history of the enterprise, we must look to other accounts, especially Ronald Horvath's "The 'Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute' Experience" (Horvath 1971). In it Horvath lays out the principles of the DGEI, how they developed, and charts a history of the enterprise through its *de facto* dissolution in 1970, after Michigan State University severed its ties.

As Horvath's account makes clear, the DGEI was always conceived of in relation to higher *education*, not merely in the context of theoretical development in geographical research as such, nor simply a different set of research topics. He frames his entire article in terms of "educational reform":

One of the remarkable aspects of higher education in the 1960's was that never before had such forceful demands for educational reform been confronted by such resistance to change . . . Institutions of higher learning have neither provided access to educational services nor have they provided the community-level research and technical assistance needed by the poor to begin to attack their own problems . . . The major purpose of the D.G.E.I. was to find a way in which geographers could make available education and planning services to inner city Blacks; it represents an attempt by the black community and some professional geographers to build an institution that would link the university to the needs of the disadvantaged Blacks in the city of Detroit. The activities of this institution included both community-related research and university-level education. (1971:73-74)

The sense that the *educational* aspect of the enterprise was central is emphasized by the way Horvath documents that beginning in the winter

of 1970 “the educational arm of the program continued to expand exponentially while the research activities involving black students all but ceased” (1971:79). Here it is clear that in the minds of its participants, the pedagogical goals of the “Institute” were at least equal to the research aims of the “Expedition”. The two were conceived together. Horvath states that they “constantly talked” about the relationship between the research and educational goals of the enterprise (1971:74).

Horvath explains how Bunge saw the relation between the two: “Bunge wanted to do research for the black community; he believed also that Blacks must be trained to do their own research. Miss Warren [Gwendolyn Warren, who became the Director of the DGEI] and other Blacks wanted an education, but they wanted it to be useful to their community and not merely a means of escaping Detroit” (1971:74). Several key points become clear here. First, Bunge realized that his zeal to perform research “for” the black community must be tempered by an understanding that the perspective of the members of the community had to be prioritized by putting the means of knowledge production into their hands and acknowledging them as the primary agents of change in the community—Horvath’s insistence that “the poor begin to attack their own problems” (see above). Secondly, the type of education provided was not conceived in traditional terms as career-oriented or training students up into a profession of expert knowledge producers, nor was it the transfer of an academic view of the world to the students. Rather, “the real dynamic of the D.G.E.I. came from the commerce between these two very different kinds of people” (Horvath 1971:74). The goal was neither to gather information to pass up the chain of power, nor to assist students in assimilating to such a hierarchical power structure; rather, the primary objective was to widen access to knowledge production, which represented a “bold reversal of the usual academic priorities and methods” (Peet 1977:14).

The reciprocal nature of the encounter between professional geographers and community members—the “commerce” Horvath refers to—is nicely captured in one of Bunge’s favorite formulations: “People in the university have a sense of scale but no sense, while the members of the communities have sense but no sense of scale” (Horvath 1971:74). Bunge learned this lesson by working with “two young black women”, Gwen Warren and Rene Spears, who were “furiously interpreting the world all around me that I could not see because my life had been spent buried in books, [and who] caused me to reverse my scale” (Bunge 1979:170). Bunge saw his job as “bring[ing] global problems down to earth, to the scale of people’s normal lives” (1979:170). The pedagogical implications of such a view is that, as Derek Stephenson, another chronicler of the movement, explains, the emphasis was not only on “a direct and indirect transfer of skills to the community”, but “beyond learning the technical skills of the academics, these folk geographers

learn to generalize their experiences to a larger world” (Stephenson 1974:99).

This approach acknowledged the importance of the “folk geographer” students’ own interpretations of the world—their role as active knowledge producers—while joining those interpretations with academic theories. The upshot was to bring geographic theory down from the abstract space of the public sphere and ground it in everyday experiences of students’ lives, to jump scales downward in a sense. Stephenson explains that Bunge’s role as “theoretician” was to “raise the scope of the problem to the Metropolitan, and even global scale. Without a theoretical thrust the Expedition would probably have degenerated into a series of interesting studies of urban social space. With a theoretician and a set of theoretical underpinnings, the goals of each individual piece of empirical work were brought into focus and the meaning of the work could be broadly perceived” (1974:100). In other words, Bunge’s job was to help facilitate the connection between geographical theory and student-driven research projects, to help students frame their research in ways that drew connections to larger social and spatial processes. However, and importantly, this was a *reciprocal* process whereby theory itself was reworked (Bunge 1971, 1979).

Thus the DGEI was not about simply changing the focus of research, to study a poor community and render “helpful” social scientific knowledge—as Stephenson reminds us they had already been “studied to death” (1974:99). David Campbell, whose article focuses on the role of the professional geographer—what he calls “advocate geographers”—in the enterprise, argues that the pedagogical goal of the DGEI, and other programs, was to “allow those living with the problems to become problematizers of their situations and to become active creators of their environment” (1974:103). Drawing on Paulo Freire’s radical pedagogical theories (for more on Freire, see Freire 1970; Heyman 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Merrett 2000), Campbell argues that radicalizing geography “is dependent not only upon the availability of a new paradigm but also upon the ability of advocates and academics to create humanizing relationships with those with whom they work” (1974:104). These “reciprocal” relationships are essentially *pedagogical*, but in a reconceived way based on a radically democratic view of knowledge production that does not rely on professional expertise: “a genuinely reciprocal encounter should result in a community acquiring the confidence and skills necessary for it to work for and by itself with regard to its own needs, and to act as a helper to other areas in need if called upon to do so” (Campbell 1974:104). The widening of access to knowledge production, not the protection and reproduction of professional expertise, is the goal of the enterprise. As Kenneth Corey puts it (1972:49), “a kind of experimental college in the community was born from the Expedition’s education component”. Thus, the DGEI enterprise was conceived of not as a mode

of research focused on the professional geographer, but *specifically* as a theoretical and pedagogical critique of professional expertise and traditional social scientific notions of knowledge production:

The capitalist system, through its educational, social, and industrial structures, persuades us that skills should be used to solve problems defined *for* us, not *by* us . . . The educated outsider who brings with him an array of theories and models of the city system may fail to identify the problems in the context of the lived experience of those facing the difficulties. The solution to this “problem” may alleviate it to the satisfaction of the advocate but it may exacerbate the real issue . . . In such situations advocates function as experts. They *provide* problems; they play the role of teacher while the residents of the area exercise their creativity and ingenuity *in response to* the advocate. They have not been involved in problematizing the situation. They have been brought into a condition of dependence upon others for the definition of problems—a situation which, as we have seen, perpetuates the role relationships fundamental to the maintenance of the “expertise hierarchy” of the capitalist system. To avoid this, the AG [advocate geographer] must create genuinely reciprocal situations. (Campbell 1974:103–104)

The importance of this critique of expertise is reinforced by Horvath’s claim that the question haunting the participants was one expressed by Gwen Warren at the final public meeting of the DGEI on 9 October 1970: “The question is whether or not this capitalistic system can deal with thousands of educated black people . . . Who’s going to man the factories and be the sexual slaves if we all get Ph.D.’s?” (quoted in Horvath 1971:84). Horvath’s—and Warren’s—point is that the DGEI was never primarily about reshaping the theoretical “paradigm” of geography (though, of course, that would be a necessary outcome of the reciprocity relations); instead, by reconceiving the *educational* institutions of the discipline, it sought to widen access to the means of knowledge production, the hitherto exclusive realm of the “PhDs” and, in so doing, change social conditions in such realms as production and gender relations. Bunge insists that “to change geography toward humanism was going to take an organization not a book or series of articles” (1971:11). Corey maintains that “this form of advocacy in planning has *learning* as its primary purpose” (1972:56). Bunge explains that “a major portion of the effort will be to provide scholarship money to train folk geographers in the professional aspects of geography and through increasing their skills also enrich our own profession” (1971:39).³

The long-term political goals of the DGEI, therefore, lay well beyond addressing specific questions raised in the research projects—such as the plan for the decentralization of schools in Detroit (DGEI 1970). The DGEI represented a wholesale reconceptualization of the social role of geographical knowledge production, and the role of the geographer in

social change. Through gaining access to the means of knowledge production, and through the reciprocal interaction between theory and local knowledge, “people begin to realize their relative position in society, which may in turn lead to more active agitation for change” (Stephenson 1974:101). The direction of the flow of knowledge and power is outward into civil society, not oriented upwards to an abstract public sphere or towards policy elites.

As Cindi Katz points out, however, the DGEI was not without blemishes: “The Expeditions tended to naturalize and essentialize social differences and experience. Their language and actions were often tainted with traces of racism, sexism, and nationalism . . . They were often macho, even militaristic, and simultaneously self-aggrandizing . . . And the heterosexism of the Expeditions was completely unquestioned” (Katz 1996:181). Despite these drawbacks, Katz finds much to admire in the DGEI, particularly because “much of its emphasis was on education, especially sharing the skills of academic geography with community members and students of all ages who could use them to design strategies for change. They seem to have enacted an inspiring form of praxis that encompasses teaching, learning, researching, and work towards change” (Katz 1996:180).

This radical pedagogical model, however, was not developed or elaborated as radical geography unfolded. Instead, “radical geography” came primarily to denote a post-positivist critique of research that maintained central tenets of traditional social scientific knowledge production and, as a result, ignored teaching altogether as a form of radical political action. Derek Gregory’s treatment of the DGEI in his important second-wave critical work, *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* is telling in this regard. In his attempt to consolidate a decade of theoretical critique of positivist science in geography, Gregory (1978:160–167) uses the DGEI as an example of “committed explanation” that overcomes the “detachment” characteristic of positivist geography. Gregory reads Campbell’s references to Freire as evidence, not of a potential radical pedagogy for geography, but of how Habermas’ theory of “communicative competence” can be put into action through the process of “theory reformulation”. Gregory ignores the implications for teaching altogether; references to Freire are used to draw parallels to Habermas and are assimilated into the project of “*transcend[ing]* the categories of existing theoretical structures” (1978:161; emphasis original). Freire’s theory of “dialogical action” is prised apart from the classroom and used to validate a Habermasian vision of “committed” research. Gregory’s critique of positivism remains important; however, this passage draws attention to the way in which a nascent debate about radical geographical pedagogy that was based in a critique of social scientific knowledge production existed during the emergent period of radical geography but has been consistently marginalized.⁴

In general, the DGEI has been seen and discussed in reference to theoretical debates about research in the discipline rather than about the challenge it presented to a wider understanding of social scientific knowledge production and social change. Ignoring the pedagogical goal of the enterprise, Peet claims that “the problem with the advocacy idea was that its relationship with a deeper and more all-embracing revolutionary movement was always tenuous at best, while at worst advocacy might be considered a liberal diversion of political effort”, and he even maintains that “the expeditionary and advocacy movements were still not *radical* geography” (1977:15; emphasis original) because its *research* program could not yet fully benefit from a Marxist geographical theory that hadn’t had time to adequately develop.

Even Andy Merrifield, whose more recent attempted recovery of “Bunge’s Geographical Expeditions” explicitly promises to address the “undeveloped *pedagogic* component” of the DGEI (1995:50; emphasis original) focuses almost exclusively on what *researchers* can learn from the enterprise, not on how geographers can act as educators. For instance, under the section titled “Towards a situated pedagogy and praxis?” he argues that:

Learning “to see faithfully” from the subjugated standpoint of the oppressed is maybe the most challenging insight to regain from the expedition program. By confronting the dialectical relationship between a researcher subject (geographer) and a researched other, the expedition concept seemingly strives for a genuine “pedagogy of the oppressed” of the sort that radical Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1972) steadfastly invokes. The geographer herein gains a platform to look faithfully at the world through a *dialogical encounter* with others. (Merrifield 1995:62)

What is important to notice in this passage is the way in which Merrifield shifts the focus of the pedagogical encounter from the ostensible members of the community in which the research is carried out to the geographer conducting the research. The important outcome for Merrifield is the vision the geographer “herein gains”. He turns Freire on his head, making the “learning” gained by the researcher the focus of the pedagogical encounter and completely ignoring Freire’s primary concern with acknowledging the “oppressed” as legitimate knowers and actors. In other words, the “pedagogical” encounter that Merrifield is talking about is primarily the knowledge that the researcher gains through his/her research, the degree to which the geographer is able to “look faithfully at the world” through intimate contact with research subjects, who remain for Merrifield “researched others”.⁵ This view is not essentially different from classical ideas about ethnographic research methods.

The degree to which Merrifield's view of the DGEI remains fully within traditional notions of social scientific knowledge production can be seen clearly in the following paragraph:

Via this activist route, academic geographers can articulate the "collective will of a people" (Gramsci's phrase) by gaining access and speaking to power elites, or by giving evidence at public inquiries and the like. Here, geographers participating in the expedition can use their research skills and written pamphlets as vital weapons of resistance for oppressed groups. Stephenson . . . notes that when "[a]rmed with a comprehensive research report, political lobbying is much more effective, but even failure to implement proposals has some value. People begin to realise their position in society, which may in turn lead to more active agitation for change". The authenticity of the geographer, then, simply lies in the ability to do committed and accountable urban geography. (Merrifield 1995:62–63)

Here, Merrifield ascribes all agency to the social scientist geographer who acts on behalf of others through his/her professional expertise and access to "power elites". Instead of arguing for a widening of access to knowledge production, Merrifield recapitulates traditional patronizing and paternalistic notions of the active, professional researcher and the passive research subject. The geographer, not the community members, is the author of the all-important "research report". Significantly, Merrifield alters the context of the quotation from Stephenson so that it appears that the *geographer* is the one doing the "political lobbying" "armed" with a research report, not—as it is in the original—the community members who conduct the research, write the reports, and participate in political action. Merrifield reverses the entire thrust of the DGEI so that it becomes a formula for "critical scholarship" (1995:65) or a model for creating a professional identity stamped with "authenticity".

The DGEI was more than a research program; it was an attempt to build an institution that could transform notions of who had legitimate access to knowledge production and what it means to "know" through a reconceptualization of the role of the geographer and geographical knowledge in social change. It was not "simply" "the ability to do committed and accountable urban geography", as Merrifield would have it (1995:63). For Merrifield, the community in which the research is carried out is reduced to a "platform" (1995:62) for the exercise of expertise and the production of a more "authentically critical" and "committed" identity as a researcher. Claims such as "geographical expeditions were implemented precisely to acquire . . . a subjugated standpoint" (1995:52) ignore the educational aspect of the DGEI, and reduce it to a technique for a geographer/social scientist to "acquire" a better "vision of urban society" (1995:52).

Merrifield's claim that the DGEI was "a search for a situated knowledge" (1995:52) enacts a kind of theoretical disconnect in which he

reverses the direction of flow, transferring knowledge upwards into an abstract public sphere.⁶ The effect is a disembedding of the very “situatedness” that he argues represents the political value of the DGEI model. While the participants of the DGEI were mostly concerned with directing action downward, bringing theory to ground in civil society by widening access to the means of knowledge production, Merrifield operates under dominant notions of knowledge production that circumvent theoretical discussions of teaching and retain knowledge production as the exclusive province of professional experts.

Yet, Merrifield is right to turn to feminist epistemology, because, in geography, feminists have taken the lead in thinking about how epistemological challenges to positivism raise questions about traditional notions of authority and the grounds of legitimate knowledge claims. As Staeheli and Lawson remind us, “feminists challenge us to democratize knowledge—in other words, to acknowledge the validity and importance of the partial knowledges we all produce—and to consider its potential for adding to geographic strategies for effecting social change” (1995:334). And yet, by and large, feminists too have fallen into the policy/activism dichotomy. Looking at feminist theories of situated knowledges through the lens of the DGEI’s pedagogical model helps us to see more clearly the latent potential of teaching as a central concern of radical geography, one that challenges, in the name of democracy, the pedagogy and professional expertise that has traditionally characterized higher education and social scientific thinking about knowledge production.

Feminist Geography, Situated Knowledges, and Pedagogy

At the heart of epistemological debate is the question of what constitutes legitimate knowledge—on what basis are knowledge claims recognized as rational. If knowledge claims are not neutral or value free, but arise from and are legitimated or de-legitimated by specific historically contingent sets of social relations and practices, then who is socially authorized to speak in the name of truth is, to a certain extent, a function of social power.⁷ This was the thrust of much post-positivist critique: to create space for different speaking positions, to form the grounds on which other claims to knowledge could be seen as legitimate. In her introduction to *Feminism and Geography* Rose makes clear how the epistemological exclusion of social scientific geography directed her to feminist theory:

My own desire as a student to be part of the academy was intense. I was first introduced to the powers and the pleasures of theory by tutors, lecturers and supervisors—almost all men—and listening to their arguments and conversation I desperately wanted to be able to join in, to be part of the debates among knowledgeable men, to *speak*

... But somehow it isn't like I'd imagined—I still do not feel part of it. I think this is a shared experience: many women participate uneasily in the academy. I didn't find a voice of my own when I was a student, and at university I felt a fraud much of the time, never quite as good as the confident bourgeois men (and often women) I studied with. Yet this didn't always bother me. A small voice always insisted (and still does) that the academy wasn't all it thought it was ... Perhaps much of my motivation to write this book comes from the refusal of the university to deliver what it so seductively promised. (Rose 1993:15–16; emphasis original)

What interests me in this passage is the way Rose grounds the motivation for her theoretical critique of research in a scene of learning that points to the false promises of universal knowledge that traditional pedagogy makes to students. Rose here recounts how she came to understand that in order to “speak” and participate in academic conversation she had to repress her “own” voice; this realization and the unease she felt in the academy caused her to attempt to write herself into geography. She specifically challenges geographical knowledge on the point of who is recognized as making legitimate knowledge claims, that is, who can speak in the name of geography—and the paradigmatic scene of this conflict for Rose is the pedagogical encounter of the classroom.

Likewise, Katz recounts how, as a student, she also desired to be part of the academic conversation: “I viewed education as a ‘decoder ring,’ not only would it make clear the babble of the boys but it would teach me to ‘talk the talk’” (1992:507). But, through “feminist and other non-dominant epistemologies”, she realized that “we all need decoder rings now”: that instead of knowledge necessitating a unidirectional move upwards towards a false universalization, it requires multiple subjects moving back and forth and meeting to create “spaces of betweenness”. Katz’s multiple “decoder rings” echoes Donna Haraway’s call for “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (1996:121).

What I find compelling about these two accounts is the way that both Rose and Katz write so powerfully about the failures of traditional pedagogy—and the way that their rethinking of knowledge production suggests ways of reconceiving the scene of learning—even though neither of them extends their theoretical discussions to teaching. Both show that epistemological questions raised by post-positivist critique about valid speaking positions apply not just to the rarified realms of research—to the grounds for legitimate professional knowledge—but to the classroom as well. While Rose and Katz show that Haraway’s claim that “rational knowledge is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among ‘fields’ of interpreters and decoders” (1996:122) applies to the way geographers conceive of their research and scholarship, their

portrayals of personal scenes of learning suggest it as a description of the classroom encounter as well—and that the two are bound together. Together with a critical rereading of the DGEI's pedagogical project, the theory of situated knowledges suggests a model of teaching that is a form of radical activism.

However, discussion of situated knowledges in geography is brought to bear almost exclusively on the research process. In a progress report on feminist geography, Rose sums up current thinking on the subject:

Situating the production of geographical knowledges is a central theme of many recent discussions of feminist research methodologies in the discipline. The need to situate knowledge is based on the argument that the sort of knowledge made depends on who its makers are. In order to elaborate this need, feminist geographers most often cite the work of Donna Haraway (1991 [1996]) and Sandra Harding (1991). Haraway and Harding are taken to argue that all knowledge is marked by its origins, and to insist that to deny this marking is to make false claims to universally applicable knowledge which subjugate other knowledges and their producers. Instead, both prefer knowledges that are limited, specific and partial. (Rose 1997:307)

Kim England represents the common way that this perspective is translated into practical considerations: “We need to locate ourselves in our work and to reflect on how our location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research, and how we write our research . . . The positionality and biography of the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in the field as well as in the final text” (England 1994:87). Likewise, Gilbert (1994:94) insists on being self-reflexive about “the fact that I have the final power of interpretation” over her research because she is the author of the written text that comes out of it. Rose, England, Gilbert, and other feminist geographers have made important contributions to critiques of geographical knowledge, but the exclusive focus on their roles as *researchers* marginalizes larger questions about the social role of geographical knowledge, replicates important aspects of traditional understandings of expertise in social scientific knowledge production, and sidelines a theoretically sophisticated consideration of pedagogy.

Rose represents Haraway and Harding as claiming that “all knowledge is marked by its origins”. While this latter comment may, in a strict sense, be true, a close reading of Haraway and Harding suggests that their work supports the broader claim that knowledge is marked not only by its origins—that is, by the site of its “production”—but also at the site of its *reproduction*, its “reception”. Harding says, “all scientific knowledge is always, *in every respect*, socially situated” (1991:11; emphasis added), and Haraway claims that knowledge is “situated conversation *at every level of its articulation*” (1996 [1991]:126; emphasis

added). Knowledge does not cease to exhibit its dynamic, relational character at the end of the research process, but discussions in feminist geography have tended, like England's and Gilbert's, to bring post-positivist critique to closure with the "final" written research text. This narrows the critique of feminist epistemology from a radically open project of democratizing knowledge production to a debate over proper research paradigms and methodologies. Pedagogy as a central aspect of critical geography is sidelined.⁸

Haraway, however, implicitly cautions against this move: "We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible" (1996 [1991]:123). Acknowledging the situated and relational nature of all knowledge means that we must resist treating knowledge as a fixed and "known" object to be transferred or offered to passive, receptive audiences. Knowledge is not something that is "finally" produced because "rational knowledge is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among 'fields' of interpreters and decoders" (Haraway 1996 [1991]:122). Knowledge is always a "constitutive negotiation" whether we are talking about the relationship between researcher and researched in the field or between text and reader, or teacher and student. The "makers" of knowledge, as Rose calls them, do indeed shape knowledge, but those makers must be understood as not only the researchers, but the "audiences" as well. Knowledge production is not solely in the hands of the researcher, which is why Haraway emphasizes the unexpected openings created by knowledge production: "Feminist objectivity makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world. We just live here and try to strike up non-innocent conversations" (1996 [1991]:125). This formulation mirrors Bunge's claim that "geography does not belong to geographers alone" (1974b:482). Rereading the literature on situated knowledges together with that of the DGEI highlights the central role that pedagogy can potentially occupy in radical geography. Both the DGEI project and theories of situated knowledges call for a fundamental reconceptualization of knowledge production as a radically open and democratic project that subverts traditional notions of social scientific expertise. Such a reconceptualization also suggests a pedagogical model that redefines social action to include classroom teaching in the pursuit of social justice.

One alternative model of knowledge production that a number of geographers have turned to recently is participatory action research (PAR). This movement emphasizes working with community groups outside the university on research projects intended to benefit those groups directly, thereby transforming academic work into social action. Caitlin Cahill explains that "PAR is a social justice and feminist project that is concerned with shifting power and about bringing new voices into the

academy. It is also about challenging the voices within the academy and exclusionary practices that reproduce and maintain structural inequalities” (2004:283). While PAR is an exciting and important development in critical geography, one that has great potential for integrating activism with academic work, many advocates of PAR celebrate and emphasize the way that the PAR moves “beyond the academy” (Fuller and Kitchin 2004:5; see also Cahill 2004; Kindon 2005; Pain 2003, 2004, 2006; Pain and Francis 2003). While these models draw on critical pedagogy, they focus on making *research* more relevant and locate political action *outside* the classroom. Drawing explicitly on the DGEI project, Fuller and Kitchin (2004:6), for example, maintain that critical geography “has largely failed to move out of the classroom”, while Gilbert and Masucci (2004:148) advocate service learning and university–community partnerships as a form of “social action” based on the premise that “teaching about social change is a necessary part of, yet differs from, doing social change”; and Pain (2006:250) “place[s] value on engagement and the impacts which social geographers’ research has outside the academy”. This emphasis on moving “beyond” the academy treats the classroom as an irrelevant space outside of social relations, one where “social action” is not possible.

However, as I have argued elsewhere (Heyman 2000, 2001a 2001b, 2004a), teaching, *by its very nature*, is a type of social action: this was one of the central insights of Freire’s work (Freire 1970; see also Giroux 1983, 1988; hooks 1989, 1994; McLaren 1998).⁹ As theorists of critical pedagogy have shown (Giroux 1983, 1988, 1997; McLaren and Giroux 1997; hooks 1989, 1994; McLaren 1998), the crucial question is what *form* that social action takes, whether classroom teaching reproduces dominant social relations of inequality and oppression, or whether it seeks more radically democratic and socially just forms. It is in this arena that the DGEI’s critique of higher education and expert knowledge production dovetails with the theory of situated knowledges to offer a model of pedagogical praxis which recognizes the radical possibilities of the *inherently* social (and, therefore, political) nature of classroom teaching. The rise of PAR offers important new models for radical geographers, but it should not come at the expense of the classroom. To marginalize debate about the classroom and pedagogy in discussions of political praxis is a critical mistake.

Caitlin Cahill’s own work with young women of color in the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York, which draws on Freirian theory, is an excellent example of how a reconceived idea of knowledge production can create a reciprocal pedagogical encounter that is simultaneously a form of critical social action. Cahill worked with six young women of color to develop a research project on the gentrification of the Lower East Side, in which the young women themselves were the researchers and where this research led them towards self-motivated

activism, in the form of a campaign to counter stereotypes of women of color, which they saw as important in the struggle over neighborhood gentrification (Cahill 2004; Cahill et al 2004). As Cahill reports, the two features which were critical to the success of the project were viewing the young women as knowledge producers in their own right and creating the opportunity for them to take action: “it is, as one researcher said, about following through—something she didn’t have the opportunity to do often enough. And it was very different from other experiences of knowledge production (school) that young people are involved in which too often exclude their perspectives” (2004:283). Cahill’s work—framed as PAR—provides a model that can be used in the classroom, one where students are treated as knowledge producers and given room for action. PAR, which continues the spirit of the DGEI’s concern about partnering with community groups, can inform classroom practice—but it shouldn’t turn away from it. The critical space of the classroom cannot be ignored or marginalized by radical geographers.

Conclusion

Rose and Katz argued that our disciplinary debates about theory and knowledge production in research ought to be characterized by the kinds of “non-innocent conversations” that Haraway describes; likewise, the term can be applied to a more theoretically critical pedagogy. Instead of grounding pedagogic authority in the “god-trick” of disembodied knowledge (see Haraway 1996 [1991]), we ought to take seriously Haraway’s argument that “partial, locatable critical knowledges sustain the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (1996 [1991]:117). If “partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims”, then we ought to view teaching as the process of striking up “non-innocent conversations” with students whose subjectivity we take seriously and acknowledge, not as “correct” in a universal sense, but as partial and situated. Likewise, we have to admit the partiality of our own knowledge, not “for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible” (Haraway 1996 [1991]:123). Traditional pedagogy leaves no room for unexpected openings and sees them as threats to the authority of the instructor (see Heyman 2001a, 2001b). The point of acknowledging the situatedness of our own pedagogic positions is not primarily to secure our own speaking positions—the important thing is not that we can “talk the talk” (to use Katz’s terms)—but that in striking up non-innocent conversations among others, we expand access to knowledge production and, in so doing, meet others in spaces of “betweenness” and enable them to find their own voices in relation to our discourses—to “talk the talk” *their own way*—and be seen as knowledge producers in

their own right. Teaching should not be thought of as an exercise in monologue, where the instructor is the only valid speaker and where the knowledge produced is reducible to information presented in a textbook or the words that issue forth from the instructor; rather it is a dialogic process in which knowledge is produced in the interaction—the dialectical exchange—between instructor and student. The point of such a pedagogy is not to move students to a disembodied speaking position—to have them “jump scales” upward to meet preexisting knowledge in an abstract public sphere—but to allow them to make concrete disciplinary knowledge by grounding it in their own experiences and, thereby re-working it; to widen access to knowledge production and direct power towards transforming social relations in civil society.

No doubt, many feminist geographers *do* teach in ways that are informed by critiques of knowledge production (eg Bondi 2004; Gibson-Graham 1999; Oberhauser 2002); however, *discussion* of teaching as a central component of a radical or critical geography (and as an important and legitimate framework for social and political action) continues to be marginalized, even by those geographers most concerned with thinking through the political implications of post-positivist theory (see note 4). Revisiting the DGEI through the lens of situated knowledges helps us recognize a key forgotten element of early radical geography, a radically democratic critique of what Campbell called the “expertise hierarchy” of knowledge production under capitalism. By recalling the alternative model of knowledge production represented by the DGEI, we can push the feminist critique of epistemology further—into the classroom.¹⁰

The critique of positivism mounted by the early radical geographers involved with the DGEI was not just a critique of research paradigms, but a radically democratic challenge to the pedagogy and professional expertise that has traditionally characterized higher education and academic knowledge production. It challenged the place of the social scientist as expert knower and posited a new kind of teaching based on widening access to the means of knowledge production in a reflexive and dialogical way, not merely the transfer of knowledge. Such a pedagogy—itself a form of social action—can bridge the policy/activism dichotomy, break the cycle of expert knowledge production, and help fulfill the aims of radical geography in promoting social justice and radical democracy.

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Endnotes

¹ As Livingstone (1992:316–328) and Barnes (2001:554) point out, quantification in geography had a loose relationship with positivist philosophy, which was not a singular entity itself. I use the terms “positivism” and “post-positivism” as shorthand, acknowledging that they are, strictly speaking, inaccurate and somewhat misleading.

² Rachel Pain observes that “an interest in policy research is inevitably an interest in power and politics” (2006:254). While Pain is right that policy work can have progressive outcomes, her formulation also highlights the danger: that a policy-focused geography can come to mean that researchers have a *vested interest* in policy, in power, and in politics, thereby reproducing important unequal social relations.

³ I would argue that Bunge is using the term “profession” and “professional aspects” in the sense of practices and methods specific to geographers, not professionalism in the social sense.

⁴ Castree (2003: 283) maintains that “geography is marked by a conspicuous non-debate over pedagogy”, and Bondi (2004:175) observes that “issues to do with teaching and learning . . . are rarely mentioned in conferences and seminars outside ‘specialist’ sessions”.

⁵ To be sure, Freire does argue that an important component of radical teaching is the belief that teachers have as much to learn from their students as the students do from the teacher. The crucial point of Freire’s work, however, is to open the access of knowledge production to students.

⁶ On the abstract nature of the public sphere, see Mitchell (1995:117), Stephenson (1998:190), and Heyman (2004b:chs 1 and 3).

⁷ I do not mean to imply that the legitimacy of knowledge is *totally* or completely a function of power; some knowledge claims, of course, can be shown to be false, erroneous, or simply wrong.

⁸ Several readers of this article suggested that my critique here is unfair, because I am criticizing these authors for not talking about *teaching* in articles that are about *research methodology*. One reviewer objected that “most journals are looking for research ‘results’ rather than pedagogy”. I certainly acknowledge this (and the institutional and professional pressures that privilege research over teaching; see Bondi 2004), but that is precisely the situation that I am trying to challenge in this article, especially regarding journals that have an explicit agenda of social change. I am trying to open more space where discussion and debate about teaching and pedagogy are seen as legitimate forms of academic pursuit and as explicitly political, beyond the “specialist” realms that Bondi (2004:175) mentions. Furthermore, my point in this section is not that feminist geographers ignore teaching, but that many writings by feminist geographers characterize the research enterprise and the theory of situated knowledges in ways that *foreclose* discussion of teaching as political praxis.

⁹ As so many feminist geographers have shown, everyday practices are bound up with the reproduction of unjust and unequal social relations, an important insight that applies to the classroom as well.

¹⁰ I want to be absolutely clear that I heartily support the development of PAR and other kinds of activist geographies and that I am not arguing against them. By advocating classroom teaching as a critical site for political action, I am trying to *extend*, not limit, liberatory and socially just practices and politics. What I am arguing against is the tendency in much radical/critical geography to discount teaching as a legitimate form of political engagement and as an important topic for disciplinary debate. Teaching is, itself, part of the real world, and not separate from it. There are real questions, however, about *whom* we are teaching (see Bondi 2004): this only makes debate about teaching and about higher education policies *more* crucial to critical geography.

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