Information Systems and Technology for Organizations in a Networked Society

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Chapter 6
Academic Community in Transition:
Critical Liberatory Praxis in the Network Society

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ABSTRACT

Based on critical transdisciplinary research methodology, this chapter develops a Freirean model of the role of academic community in the network society. The developed model consists of four steps: individual conscientization, building attitudes, interaction with people and broad approach which encompasses the whole society. Those steps are constantly repeated in a never-ending circle, where each iteration provides deeper understanding of people's current circumstances and background for active participation in the society. The model reflects the fact that the role of academic community in the network society is directly associated with the question what kind of world we would like to live in. On such basis, it calls for active personal development and wide social engagement. In this way, this chapter replaces pessimism contained in contemporary critiques of global education with moderately optimistic critical liberatory praxis.

INTRODUCTION

We live in the age of transition from the massive society into the network society (van Dijk, 1999; Castells, 2001). In order to inform practical action, this chapter focuses to the role of academic community in these processes. The social role of academic community consists of various dialec-

tically intertwined dimensions. Academics are teachers, scholars and philosophers. They produce theoretical concepts and practical applications. They are rebels and high government officials. In this chapter, however, we are not interested in all aspects of academic work. Instead, we shall focus to the social role of contemporary academics in the sense of Gramscian intellectuals: as commenta-

tors, critics and active creators of past, present and future social relationships. In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci describes this position as follows:

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor and organizer, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator... from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remain "specialized" and does not become "directive" (specialized and political) (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 10).

At medieval courts similar roles had been occupied by court fools or jesters. Protected by kings and tsars, jesters could comment all aspects of the society without repercussions. Situated at the very origins of political and military power, their critiques have often played significant roles in royal decisions (Southworth, 1998; Otto, 2001). In order to provide a fresh insight into the role of academic community in the network society, this chapter seeks inspiration in the parallel between contemporary academics and ancient jesters.

There are at least two main inspirations for such research approach. First, traditional science of education seems unable to produce viable long term solutions for the current educational crisis (Brighouse, 2004; McLaren, 2000; Novy, 2012). On such basis, it seems legitimate to explore new research frontiers. Second, recent authors have successfully used analogies with ancient jesters in diverse fields from medicine (Warren, 2011) and arts (Higgie, 2007) to history (Otto, 2001). On such basis, it would be interesting to see whether a similar research approach has the potential to make a contribution to the science of education.

The parallels between ancient jesters and contemporary academics can be justified in two main ways. First, historians have clearly showed

that the relationships between ancient rulers and jesters can be easily extended to various historical periods, occupations and contexts. Based on specific power relationships, they are metaphors for the universal dichotomy between authority and creativity (Southworth, 1998, pp. 3). At least to some extent, therefore, lessons from medieval courts can be applied to the context of the network society. Second, in the next section we shall show that the parallel between contemporary academics and ancient jesters is methodologically viable within the combination of the theoretical framework of critical theory and transdisciplinary research strategy.

The first part of the study analyses the role of academic community in transition from ancient jesters through the massive society to the network society and shows that, in this specific context, evolution is more efficient than revolution. Looking into the past for guidance, it recognizes the specific position of academics which lies somewhere between their ideals and the reality of their social position called *in and against the State*. Finally, it shows that the oppositional possibilities developed by London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (Mitchell et al., 1979) are conceptually inadequate for the contemporary context and seeks solution in bottom-up approach to modelling.

The second part of the study reinvents Freire's model of adult literacy in the context of the role of academic community in the network society. Firmly situated into the conceptual framework of critical theory, it calls for active personal development and wide social engagement in the quest for a more just society. It shows that the parallel between academics and jesters has an important advantage over more substantial comparisons, because its allegoric character opens space for contemplation which is by and large free from tacit knowledge about the current social reality. Finally, it analyzes various restrictions arising from the used critical transdisciplinary research methodology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The parallels with medieval jesters have been drawn in various fields. *In Reflections on the practices of modern clown-doctors and medieval fools*, Warren explores "the similarities between the attributes and practices of medieval fools and those of modern clown-doctors" (2011, 179). In *The Documents of Contemporary Art*, Higgie draws a similar analogy between the roles of ancient jesters and contemporary artists (2007, pp. 14). Otto is currently working on a new book *The Court Jester in Art, Architecture and Advertising* (Otto, 2001, pp. 298). This list is fairly incomplete, and serves only as a rough outline.

However, it is extensive enough to clearly indicate that each discipline approaches the social role of jesters from different angles. Warren's goal is to explore "the power of laughter as Medicine" (2011, pp. 191-192), Higgie tries to narrow the gap between art and life (2007, pp. 14), and Otto explores jesters in various occupations in order to provide them with "the attention they deserve" (2001, pp. 298). It is very hard to compare the diverse praxis of academics, doctors and artists, because they are situated in the very different intellectual traditions of enquiry. On such basis, the parallel between ancient jesters and contemporary academics should carefully use conclusions derived in the frameworks of other intellectual traditions and, vice versa, results of this study cannot be generalized to other occupations and intellectual traditions.

This research lies on the very fringes between positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. Positivist aspects of the research are mostly hidden in secondary sources: for instance, the assertion that contemporary education is increasingly McDonaldized is predominantly based on statistics (Ritzer, 1993). Interpretivist aspects of the research arise from using the parallels between jesters and academics in order to inform scientific work, i.e. from individual thinking out of the box rather than direct interpretation of empirical data. Following

the great tradition of leftist thinkers starting from Frankfurt School through Freire to McLaren, the used approach is firmly situated in the conceptual framework of critical theory. It simultaneously develops knowledge about the current social conditions and directs practical action. In this way, it aims against political, social, economic and other forms of oppression.

Such approach is interdisciplinary, because it simultaneously uses concepts and ideas developed in various research traditions. It is also transdisciplinary, because the "dialogue with other disciplines and theories is a source of theoretical and methodological development" (Fairclough, 2007, pp. 1). Based on previous research (Jandric & Boras, 2012), we shall briefly analyze two main problems associated with transdisciplinary research in the context of this study: the problem of correspondence between various research methodologies and the position of the researcher.

The problem of correspondence between various research methodologies is inherent to all transdisciplinary research. Let us briefly describe its main features using the common example of dichotomy between interpretivism and positivism. In short, interpretative research is capable to provide deep insights into individual behaviour and incapable to provide wide generalizations, while positivist research is capable to provide generalizations but incapable to include individual context. Within the framework of transdisciplinary research methodology one might be tempted to involve a bit of interpretivism into a positivist research, or to involve a bit of positivism into an interpretivist research. According to Howe, however, this cannot be done without applying restrictions arising from both theoretical frameworks (1988, pp. 12). Alternatively, one might use Nicolescu's logic of the included middle (2006) and raise the whole research to the abstract level of modelling. In this case, however, the final results will also be models and therefore in need for translation into the reality. This chapter uses the second approach and develops a Freirean model of the process aimed

at defining the role of academic community in the network society. Deeply rooted in praxis, this model equally contains theoretical and practical aspects. Like all models, however, it is fully abstract and requires appropriate translation into specific contexts of its applications.

Critical research is always political. This study, however, is also inherently personal. Being an academic, the author of this study is emotionally, rationally and financially imbued in the researched topic. Besides obvious issues arising from separating own experience from general principles, it may also be questioned whether the author, secretly, tacitly or even unconsciously, acts as perpetrator of own privileged social position. After all, science and education are amongst the most prominent mechanisms of social reproduction, and that makes most academics true oppressors (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 10-12).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire clearly shows that the oppressors, "as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves" (1972, pp. 32). On such basis, author's relationship with the research topic kicks off the vicious circle of acceptance and denial. By accepting author's position as the oppressor, one should immediately deny him the ability to improve the current social conditions. By denying or ignoring author's position as the oppressor, this research would obviously become artificial. Fortunately, this vicious circle has already been explored in detail by Freire.

Certain members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, thus moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other. (…) It happens, however, that as they cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations. (ibid: 36)

According to Freire, the solution lies in self-reflection. "Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (ibid). However, this change is much deeper and much more personal than standard academic research methodologies. "Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were" (ibid). In the best Freirean tradition, therefore, this study should be transformative for its author and readers.

ACADEMIC COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION

From Medieval Jesters to 20th Century Academics

At medieval courts, jesters had been the only people who could frankly speak their minds. Jesters understood history, politics, science and mathematics. They spoke languages, masterfully told stories and skillfully played music. Their sharp comments on social reality had been allowed to hit the nail in the head of the touchiest topics, including controversial matters of daily politics and dirty secrets about royal families. Such liberty came with a high price: jesters had been notorious for having many enemies, including some of the most important people of their times.

Jesters' only protection from revenge was their specific status and humbleness of their position. They had been paying for the freedom of thought and speech by giving up most material possessions. However, it should be admitted that their daily lives had been fairly comfortable. At royal courts food is plentiful, rooms are warm, and clothes are useful albeit somewhat funny. Under the circumstances, jesters had been able to afford plenty of time for reading, writing, studies and reflection (Otto, 2001).

Wise monarchs understood that they needed jesters in order to keep the real pictures about themselves. According to Southworth,

the more powerful men become, the more isolated they tend to be as their channels of communication with the real world outside the artificial ambience of the court are progressively impeded by the desire of their courtiers to please; to tell them what they like to hear rather than what they need to know. The king's need for truth, especially of the unpalatable kind, and the fool's ability to communicate it in a uniquely acceptable form as humour was a crucial factor in the relations between them from which the fool derived much of his raison d'etre (1998, pp. 7-8).

Such position of the fool, a common occurrence in "virtually every recorded culture in the history of civilization" (ibid), indicates that despite the lack of any formal political, economical or military power, jesters had often influenced royal decisions stronger than many politicians. For instance, one of the most famous Shakespearean fools, Fool from King Lear, "is a servant and subject to punishment (…) and yet Lear's relationship with his fool is one of friendship and dependency. The Fool acts as a commentator on events and is one of the characters (Kent being the other) who is fearless in speaking the truth" (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2012).

Historic fools are classified into series of carefully refined categories such as minstrels, players, jugglers and jesters (Otto, 2001; Southworth, 1998). Differences between those categories provide important insights into life in ancient times. As far as the analogy between jesters and academics is concerned, however, it is enough to follow Shakespeare and classify all jesters in two broad categories: the natural fools or innocents, and the licensed fools (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2012). In order to achieve a proper analogy between ancient jesters and contemporary academics, this study obviously looks into the sane, salaried jesters or the licensed fools. At early courts, the differences between the categories had often been

blurred. After seventeenth century Great Confinement, however, most innocents had been removed to specialized institutions (Foucault, 2007) and the licensed fools quickly became the vast majority.

Throughout the history, the relationships between jesters and rulers have taken a variety of forms. Despite cultural, historical and other differences, those relationships have always been based on the same ground principle. Rulers have almost absolute power over jesters' lives. However, this power must be restricted because jesters' social and intellectual role requires freedom and protection from revenge. Rulers and jesters are far from equal. Nevertheless, the relationships between them are mutually constitutive: one simply cannot exist without the other. For this reason, the basic prerequisites for successful relationships between rulers and jesters are the highest levels of mutual respect. According to Southworth,

the curious double-act of king and fool, master and servant, substance and shadow, may thus be seen as a universal, symbolic expression of the antithesis of structured authority and incipient anarchy, in which the conditional nature of the fool's license ('so far, but no further') gives reassurance that ultimately order will always prevail. (…) If the king, as the dominant partner, sets the tone of their exchanges and the fool has everything to gain from a willing acceptance of his subservient role, his participation can never be forced. If, for whatever reason, he should come to feel that his master has reneged on the unwritten contract between them (the rules of the game), it is always open to him to refuse to play, however costly to himself the refusal might prove to be. (1998, pp. 3)

Being universal, this relationship can easily be generalized to other historical periods, occupations and contexts. On such basis, we shall try and reinvent the relationship between ancient rulers and jesters in the context of 20th century academics.

In the massive society characterized by one-way mass media such as television and strong national governments (van Dijk, 1999), academics

have not had the power to decide about important political, economic and other matters. In one form or another, however, all societies had recognized the importance of academic freedoms and separation of science from daily matters. Despite its seemingly impractical nature, 'blue skies research' had been recognized as one of the main drivers of human development (Braben, 2002).

Academic salaries have always represented a rough equivalent of the medieval warm room, regular meals and clean clothes. During economic crisis academics had been the last people to lose safe government funded tenures; during economic booms they had been the last people to profit from increased income. Academics had traveled, taught, talked and published almost anything they wanted. Modern rulers have rarely followed their advice in daily matters: at the historic scale, however, scientific achievements have strongly influenced political decisions.

According to Althusser, "No class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the Ideological State Apparatuses" (2008, pp. 20). As one of the most important Ideological State Apparatuses, educational systems have always been controlled by the Church and the State (ibid). Church control over educational Ideological State Apparatuses had been the strongest during the Middle Ages. Its importance has started to decrease with the development of natural science during Renaissance, and then seriously deteriorated during the Enlightenment. In the 19th century, it suffered the final blow with the emergence of state and liberal educational schemes such as Mechanics' Institutes and Useful Knowledge Societies (Johnson, 1988). In the 20th century, educational Ideological State Apparatuses had been subjected predominantly to patronage of the State. However, the long history of church patronage has left important traces in many aspects of their functioning (ibid).

Examples of numerous dissident scholars, artists and politicians such as Galileo, Pasternak and Mandela have clearly showed that the power of superstructures is far from total. Moreover, great discoveries have always resulted from thinking 'out of the box', while attempts of controlling academic research have ended up (at their very best) with mediocre results. According to Williams,

a university must be a centre for the acquisition of knowledge and must provide a training in imaginative enquiry and logical criticism. (…) Its teachers must not only be knowledgeable but must be able to conduct enquiry critically, which will usually require some kind of research. It is then obvious that universities have to be autonomous in mind and spirit (1991).

Academics have always depended on superstructures, and human progress has always depended on scientific development. Therefore, the strongest power of academics lies in the very nature of their jobs. The relationships between academics and the State strongly resemble the relationships between medieval rulers and jesters: they can truly flourish only in the state of deep mutual respect. On such basis, it is relatively safe to conclude that academics had been true jesters of the 20th century. Up to very recently, their position had been deeply privileged: in the society based on economic principles, they made their living from the quest for knowledge.

Academic Community in the Network Society

Following the increased globalization powered by international trade treaties and cheap transport, in the second part of the 20th century the traditional academia has started to change. "The effect has been a move towards uniform requirements for professional certification, and consequently standardization of curriculum offerings" (McGinn, 1997, pp. 44). Education has increasingly been looked upon according to its market value. If education is going to produce an income to the

individual, it is natural for an individual to pay for education. When education becomes a commodity, a prospective student is able to choose. Looking to education as an investment, a student is the most likely to choose the option which provides the highest income perspectives. "Each training and research centre has to prove that education and training has its customers, that it is excellent or that it has an added value. In short, it is up to them to legitimate their existence" (Simons, 2006, pp. 535).

Blue skies research has slowly but surely lost its importance (Braben, 2002), fees have been constantly raised (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004) and corporate sector has increased investment in profitable science such as pharmacy, genetic engineering and computing (Bjarnason, Cheng, Fielden, Lemaitre, Levy, and Varghese, 2009). In the beginning, changes brought by globalization have been fairly slow. Following wide introduction of broadband internet into worldwide homes and offices, however, it became obvious that our society is profoundly changing at all levels. The concept of globalization has become too narrow to describe those changes. On such basis, the last few decades are often described as the transition from the massive society into the network society. In the network society,

the internet is the fabric of our lives. If information technology is the present-day equivalent of electricity in the industrial era, in our age the internet could be linked to both the electrical grid and the electric engine because of its ability to distribute the power of information throughout the entire realm of human activity. Furthermore, as new technologies of energy generation and distribution made possible the factory and the large corporation as the organizational foundation of industrial society, the internet is the technological basis for the organizational form of the Information Age: the network. (Castells, 2001, pp. 1)

Distributed throughout the network, decision making process is dehumanized and submerged to the logic of the system (Beck, 2005, pp. 33). In order to ensure daily existence, the values of traditional academia give way to corporate principles (Brighouse, 2004; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; McLaren, 2000). Wisdom of ancient monarchs, who understood that they needed jesters in order to maintain the real pictures about themselves, has been replaced by faceless, networked and commodified systems of production and management which are unable to recognize the eternal need for critical, independent thought that does not serve specific economic needs (de Oliveira, 2012).

Facts are clearly visible. According to ideological preferences, teams are gathering into three main camps. The dominating camp consists of various interest groups which withdraw personal benefit from the death of traditional academia. The opposing camp consists of genuine academic jesters devoted to their colourful clothes and academic freedoms. Both camps include more than few innocents who simply go with the flow. The largest camp contains the silent majority which does not publicly express its opinions. Some people are silent because they do not have an opinion; others are silent because they do not dare to develop an opinion. Following the fact that many academic positions have already lost their independence, it seems safe to conclude that many are silenced by the simple fear for survival.

For now, the transition from the massive society into the network society has been much shorter than human lifetime (Castells, 2001; van Dijk, 1999; Beck, 2005). For this reason, generational logic plays an important role in transformation of academia. Based on age, academics can be divided into three broad categories. The first category consists of academics who experienced this transformation near the end of their careers, and never fully accepted changes brought by the network society. The second category consists

of academics who started their careers in the traditional academia, and who have adapted to its commodification in order to maintain their positions. Academics from those categories have personally experienced the traditional and the commodified academia, and possess at least some understanding of their functioning.

The third category, however, consists of academics who have experienced only the commodified academia, and accept the current social conditions as natural. At the moment, their numbers are perhaps small: within the scope of single human lifetime, however, they might become the majority. In this way, centuries-old rule and custom of the traditional academia could expire following the natural replacement of generations. Slowly but surely, superstructures have created the dominant discourse which steadily builds own infrastructure. Time definitely works in favour of the commodified academia. There is no such thing as a neutral position: turning a blind eye to commodification is just another way of supporting it.

Contemporary struggle for academic freedoms is just one of the battles in the great war for a more just society. In another age, this war would probably step out of the fringes much faster. In the age of globalization, however,

corresponding to the highly differentiated division of labour, there is a general complicity, and the complicity is matched by a general lack of responsibility. Everyone is cause and effect, and thus non-cause. The causes dribble away into a general amalgam of agents and conditions, reactions and counter-reactions, which brings social certainty and popularity to the concept of the system. (Beck, 2005, pp. 33).

Institutions of the network society are simultaneously causes and effects of its problems (Castells, 2000; van Dijk, 1999). If we neglect primitivist theories which seek causes of all problems of the contemporary society in its complexity and advocate a return to pre-global society organized in small, organic communities (Zerzan, 2004), any revolution will simply have to develop the new institutions in order to compensate the need for the old ones. Conceived within the ubiquitous global context, however, the new institutions will be prone to the same problems as the old ones. In the current social climate, therefore, there is not much use of revolutions.

In and Against the State

If revolutions are unable to bring the desired changes, the only remaining direction for development is evolution. Therefore, true academic jesters should continue doing what they know best: they should accumulate discrepancies in the dominating discourse until it breaks under their weight and evolves into a more acceptable form (Foucault, 1972). Working within the current educational systems, however, each and every academic is an integral part of educational Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 2008) and contributes to increasing social inequality. This brings most academics directly into the personal struggle between their ideals and forces that govern their daily existence.

Fortunately, this uncomfortable position has already been fairly well researched. In 1979, London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group issued the pamphlet *In and Against the State* (Mitchell et al., 1979) which polemicizes the contradictory position of teachers, community workers and other professionals who simultaneously receive money from the State and struggle against it. The London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group identified oppositional possibilities for critical action from the position in and against the State. In order to resolve the struggle between academic ideals and commodified reality of the network society, let us examine whether it is possible to reconceptualize those oppositional possibilities in the contemporary context.

Since *In and Against the State*, the academia and the State have undergone drastic changes. Firstly,

the State is still the largest employer in tertiary education. However, following significant political changes such as the fall of Berlin Wall and the rise of China, private capital constantly increases investments in science and education (Bjarnason et al., 2009). Secondly, commodification of science and education is not driven exclusively by the State. On the contrary, agile private sector marches at the forefront of commodification while inert state-funded institutions lag behind and actually seem to be the last oasis of the independent academia (ibid). In general, the network society slowly but surely diminishes importance of the State (Castells, 2000; van Dijk, 1999). However inspiring, *In and Against the State* cannot provide appropriate guidance for the context of the network society (Jandric, 2012). In order to struggle against forces which stand between their ideals and daily existence, academics should first identify their current sources.

Depending on various positions, world-views and conceptual frameworks, the quest for those sources has a wide range of answers. On the left side of the political spectrum, academics such as McLaren (2000) and Wilkins (2012) see the main problem in commodification of education. On the right side of the political spectrum, neoliberal academics such as the British New Labour see the main problem in the fact that education is not fully commodified (Mulderigg, 2003). Between those extremes, there are countless theories and opinions. In an amalgam of diverse worldwide academic traditions, where probably the only common element is independence of thought, it is impossible to clearly define the problem in a common way. For this reason, answers should be sought for in a less prescriptive manner. At one hand, the answer should be flexible enough to accommodate a wide spectrum of approaches and contexts. At the other hand, the answer should contain at least some common elements in order to provide infrastructure for global academic collaboration. Instead of providing one-size-fits-all answers, therefore, we shall develop a model for

defining the role of academic community in the network society.

There are two main approaches to modelling: top-down approach and bottom-up approach. In matters of own organization, worldwide academic community has always deeply despised top-down approach. Such disdain is not accidental. Probably the only conclusion that worldwide academics would accept without hesitation is that proper academic work requires freedom, while scientific truths and facts can be constructed only by consensus of the whole academic community (Williams, 1991). In order to respect the very nature of academia, therefore, it is necessary to build understanding of its role in the network society using bottom-up approach. On such basis, it is only natural to seek inspiration for our model in the praxis of one of the founding fathers of critical education Paulo Freire.

A FREIREAN MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

During 1960s in rural Brazil, Freire developed his famous method of teaching adult literacy based on the dichotomy between 'reading the word' and 'reading the world.' According to Freire, "reading is not exhausted merely by decoding the written word or written language, but rather anticipated by and extending into knowledge of the world (…) The understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context" (1983, pp. 1). Based on this general principle, Freire and his successors have developed a wide range of different applications in diverse contexts from California (Giroux, 2003, pp. 81-109) through Scotland (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989), Nigeria (Osuji, 2006) and United States (Rodriguez & Smith, 2011). In this short chapter, it is impossible to explore those applications deeper. However, their scope and diversity are truly fascinating.

Freire's method has reached worldwide success because of its unique balance between the general and the particular (Giroux, 2003; Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989; McLaren, 2000). Although Freire's method does not consist of firm logical structures typical for natural sciences, it is often called 'Freire's *model* of literacy' (Smith, 2002). Considering earlier conclusions, however, it is reasonable to ask: how far can we push the parallel between Freire's model of literacy and our model of the role of academic community in the network society?

Faced with a similar problem, McLaren asserts that educational problems of the network society "demand not only a vigorous and ongoing engagement with Freire's work, but also a reinvention of Freire in the context of current debates over information technologies and learning, global economic restructuring, and the effort to develop new modes of revolutionary struggle" (2000, pp. 15). Following McLaren's assertion, in order to avoid logical traps which may result from combining incommensurable conceptual frameworks and still maintain historical guidance, we shall not follow each and every step in Freire's model of literacy. Instead, we shall try and reinvent his ideas in the context of the network society.

According to Freire, the first step towards achieving more just social conditions is *conscientização* (1972). This is a broad concept that starts from individual, almost intimate conscientization of one's social conditions and reaches towards the highest conceptual planes such as social justice and freedom. In the context of rural Brazil, Freire develops *conscientização* as follows:

Before giving a written form to the popular spoken world, however, we customarily challenge the learners with a group of codified situations, so they will apprehend the word rather than mechanically memorize it. Decodifying or reading the situations pictured leads them to a critical perception of the meaning of culture by leading them to understand how human practice or work

transforms the world. (…) This more critical reading of the prior less critical reading of the world enables them to understand their indigence differently from the fatalistic way they sometimes view injustice.
In this way, a critical reading of reality, whether it takes place in the literacy process or not, and associated above with the clearly political practices of mobilizing and organizing, constitutes an instrument of what Gramsci calls counter-hegemony. (1983, pp. 7)

The context of illiterate South American farmers is obviously very different from the context of the contemporary academia. However, Freire's *conscientização* is a general principle that can confidently be applied to various contexts (Giroux, 2003; Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989; McLaren, 2000). In order to explore the role of academic community in the network society, therefore, academics should first develop *conscientização* of their current social conditions and understanding how their own practices transform the world.

This kind of political self-reflection is directly linked with ideology. In Althusser's words, Freire's model of literacy is an educational Ideological State Apparatus which "may be not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle" (2008, pp. 21). However, Freire's model of literacy and Althusser's educational Ideological State Apparatuses are not fully equivalent. In the context of adult literacy, *conscientização* is developed predominantly through teaching, group work and self-discovery of illicit social relationships. Althusser's concept of educational Ideological State Apparatus is much more extensive: in the context of the contemporary academia, teaching is dialectically intertwined with scientific research (Williams, 1991).

At the level of epistemology, however, this difference seems to disappear. According to Bernard-Donals, "the problem of transformation in Freire is like that encountered by Althusser" (1998, pp. 181). In his famous epistemological

break, Althusser asserts that one of the main consequences of Marx's dialectical materialism is that the concept of knowledge as vision should be balanced with the concept of knowledge as production. If we neglect contextual differences, this idea roughly corresponds to Freire's 'reading of the word' and 'reading of the world.' On such basis, Bernard-Donals shows that for both Althusser and Freire "social relations have both an ideological and a material component, and in the same way that ideology interpolates human subjects within the constraints of the materiality of those subjects' surroundings, praxis also requires not just social transformation at the ideological level but also at the material level" (ibid, pp. 181).

Such correspondence between Althusser and Freire strengthens the argument in favour of developing academic *conscientização* and opens new research opportunities in theories of ideology. However, it does not resolve issues associated with practical implementation of the model.

"Autonomous in mind and spirit" (Williams, 1991), contemporary academia would certainly reject large-scale educational efforts similar to Freire's adult literacy projects. Furthermore, the existing superstructures would probably act against any large scale counter-hegemonic praxis. As far as development of *conscientização* is concerned, therefore, academics are mostly left to themselves. However, that is not an excuse for inactivity. Compared to the rest of society, academics are still fairly privileged: they have access to various knowledge sources and the ability to interpret them properly. In order to develop *conscientização*, therefore, academics should first develop genuine interest for social issues associated with own praxis.

By definition, such research interest is expected from academics who work in fields such as education and sociology. However, it is not less important for those who work in seemingly unrelated fields such as chemistry or engineering. All academics are involved in some kind of education – teaching, mentoring younger colleagues etc. – and all forms of education have profound social impacts.

Nowadays, it is simply irresponsible to say: "I am a scientist who happens to teach few hours per week." Refusing to accept one's responsibility for own actions does not annihilate that responsibility: instead, it simply shifts power towards the existing superstructures (Freire, 1972; McLaren, 2000).

Grasping relevant aspects of professional activities, academics should build political attitudes. Those attitudes should evolve together with one's social and personal conditions. By definition, the only element which should remain intact is "the disposition to act truly and rightly" or Aristotle's *phronesis* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 34). It would be personally irresponsible and methodologically wrong to try and predict the kinds of attitudes people might arrive to. In this aspect, it is necessary to follow Freire's faith that all people are able to correctly interpret own social conditions (1972) and accept Aristotle's belief that most people will put *phronesis* above own petty interest (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 34).

Interaction with people is an essential part of academic job. However, this interaction should not be narrowed down to the field of professional interest: an academic who publishes and talks about chemistry should also say a word or two at least about science education, if not education in general. Furthermore, hidden attitudes cannot change anything: academics should step out of the closet and loudly speak their minds about all aspects of their professional practice. The obvious first step in this direction is engagement with colleagues and students. However, academia should not be an ivory tower isolated from the rest of the society. For this reason, it is very important to communicate with people outside of the world of academia who, for the most part, do not have the privilege to discuss such issues at their homes and workplaces.

This kind of engagement may reach far into political struggle and activism. However, radical social engagement inevitably comes with a price. During 1960s Paulo Freire served time in Brazilian jail because of political implications of his

literacy model (Freire, 1972), while contemporary radical academic activists such as Dave Hill and Peter McLaren constantly face job insecurity, lack of funding and strong political pressure (Moraes, 2003). The position in and against superstructures is always uncomfortable, regardless minor differences in their nature and character.

However, radical political struggle is not for everyone. Scope and extent of political engagement for proper definition and social recognition of the role of academic community is a balancing act between ideals and reality, and strongly depends on personal context and choice. Every little helps; there is no such thing as a 'too small' contribution. People like Freire and Mandela have changed the world from jails. However, their suffering would be futile without collective efforts by millions of people who followed their examples. For this reason, a steady flow of small steps in the right direction is as important as famous radical outbursts.

For centuries, the academia has played the roles of social commentator and critic. However, it does not own any special rights to these roles: they simply resulted from objective historic conditions. On such basis, it is important to recognize that the struggle for academic freedoms represents only a fraction of the great war for power and meaning. This struggle reaches much further than preserving historic rights and privileges. It starts with the question what kind of the world we would like to live in, and results in the world we co-create on daily basis. Therefore, the discussion about the role of academic community should not remain confined to the academic community: instead, its scope should be the whole society.

Since Heraclitus it is well known that "you could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you" (in Hoyt, 2002). In order to keep an eye on the subject, we might add that you could not step twice into the same river also because the second time you would not be the same person as the first time. In order to

keep up with personal developments and current social reality, these four steps – individual conscientization, building attitudes, interaction with people, and broad approach which encompasses the whole society – should be repeated in reasonable temporal intervals.

In this way, the developed model works according to the same principles as Freire's never-ending circle of codifications and decodifications situated behind 'reading the word' and 'reading the world.' According to Freire,

Existential experience is a whole. In illuminating one of its angles and perceiving the inter-relation of that angle with others, the learners tend to replace a fragmented vision of reality with a total vision. From the point of view of a theory of knowledge, this means that the dynamic between codification of existential situations and decodification involves the learners in a constant re-construction of their former "ad-miration" of reality (1970, pp. 10).

Each circle of codifications and decodifications of the current reality brings new, deeper understanding of the role of academic community, and each practical activity derived from this understanding creates future realities. On such basis, the developed model of the role of academic community in the network society simultaneously retains eternal principles such as *phronesis* and allows endless adaption to various historic contexts. Inspired by Freire's model of literacy, it keeps both the general and the particular.

The position of contemporary academics still bears certain resemblance with the position of ancient jesters: transition towards the network society is much smoother at university halls than within shopping malls. Despite obvious continuity between past and present, however, it should not be forgotten that the discourse of the network society is incommensurable with the discourse of its pre-global predecessors such as the massive society (Castells, 2003; van Dijk, 1999).

There is no need to cry over traditional academic freedoms: in the network society, they make less and less sense anyway. There is no need to cry over traditional concepts of value: in the network society, as can be easily shown using the example of copyright (Ayres, 1999; Stallman, 2002), many of them have become obsolete. The struggle for ancient freedoms cannot be won: instead, the role of academic community should be constantly redefined and linked to the general struggle for a more just society.

DISCUSSION

This research is based on four important pillars: the parallel between contemporary academics and ancient jesters, the belief that evolution is more efficient than revolution in the context of the network society, transdisciplinary research methodology and specific views to human nature. To an extent, each of those pillars can be contested.

In medieval times, the majority of European courts supported jesters. However, their numbers had always been extremely small (Otto, 2001; Southworth, 1998), while the number of worldwide academics rises constantly (Bjarnason et al., 2009). For this reason, the positions of ancient jesters bear more similarity with the positions of presidential advisers or small, high level advisory boards than the positions of contemporary academics. Moreover, levels of jesters' influence had varied anywhere from low-level entertainers to high political advisers (Otto, 2001; Southworth, 1998). Finally, contemporary academia is separate from the government, while the position of jesters had always been directly linked to monarchs (ibid).

Therefore, the parallel between contemporary academics and ancient jesters should be interpreted like an allegory, an informative hyperbole, an illustration with the same level of accuracy as models of atom from high school textbooks. It helps us grasp depth and extent of the problem, but does not provide theoretical ground for drawing proper analogies. The parallel between contemporary academics and ancient jesters cannot provide verifiable scientific data: its main purpose is to inform scientific research and provide inspiration.

Using a radically shortened argument, it is shown that evolution of the role of academic community is more efficient than revolution in the context of the network society. The complete argument in favour of this conclusion can be found in the recent book co-written by one of the authors (Jandrić & Boras, 2012). However, equally sound argument can be found in favour of the opposite idea. In the fields of social and cultural anthropology, the dichotomy between revolution and evolution is a never ending struggle which still awaits a universally accepted conclusion (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012).

Even upon accepting superiority of evolution in the context of the research question, the methodological problem still remains. According to Turner and Maryanski, although "the revival of evolutionary thinking in sociology holds out real promise for understanding social change in human societies (…) there are limits as to how far models from evolutionary theorizing in biology can be taken in the analysis of sociocultural evolution" (2008, pp. 1). Deeper analyses of those limits exceed the scope of this study. However, it is obvious that the conclusions based on evolutionism do not represent definite answers to problems of academia in the network society. Instead, it is much safer to say that they represent fictional developments based on one of the possible scenarios.

This study reinvents Freire's ideas in the context of the network society. However, what does it exactly mean to reinvent someone's ideas? Reinvention can be conducted in numerous ways, and there is no way of telling which one is better than the other. Furthermore, despite meticulous self-reflection, it is difficult to determine whether the researcher has fully managed to escape the confines of his oppressive social position and

achieve the profound personal transformation required to conduct relevant critical research (Freire, 1972, pp. 36).

In order to avoid logical traps which may result from combining incommensurable conceptual frameworks and still maintain historical guidance, the used critical transdisciplinary research methodology requires sound ability to distinguish universal truths such as phronesis (Carr &Kemmis, 1986, pp. 34) from non-universal, context-dependent truths such as the global role of nation states. This brings us to the general question: how can one exactly recognize 'universal truths' from 'context-dependent truths'?

Universality of Freire's conscientization and/or Aristotle's *phronesis* has been determined using common sense and a wide selection of valid academic sources. In this context, the derived conclusions seem fairly reasonable. However, such methodological approach allows plenty of room for researcher's interpretation. For instance, the researcher could have relatively easily 'forgotten' that the role of the State has changed since *In and Against the State*. In such case, this research would inevitably end up at a completely different conclusion. The general problem of universality lies far beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it is important to note that researcher's choices between the general and the particular make a significant impact on its results.

As can easily be seen from this discussion, the used transdisciplinary research methodology is burdened with various theoretical and practical problems. However, it provides this study with a unique opportunity to situate academic praxis into various historical contexts while maintaining a certain level of universality. Albeit extremely useful, transdisciplinary research methodology is still in its infancy. For this reason, future advances in theory and practice of transdisciplinarity might significantly impact scope and validity of this study.

Last but not least, the derived conclusions are directly related to specific views to human nature

such as Freire's faith that all people are able to correctly interpret own social conditions (1972) and Aristotle's belief that people will put phronesis above own petty interest (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 34). However, Chomsky clearly shows that such attitudes cannot be rationally confirmed or rejected: for this reason, they will forever remain in the sphere of belief (Chomsky, 1996, pp. 107).

CONCLUSION

Situated within the conceptual framework of critical transdisciplinary research, this chapter analyses the role of academic community in the network society and shows that, in the studied context, small evolutionary steps are more efficient than revolution. Based on responsibility of each person for own actions, it develops the Freirean model of the role of academic community in the network society. The developed model consists of four steps: individual conscientization, building attitudes, interaction with people and broad approach which encompasses the whole society. Those steps are constantly repeated in a never-ending circle, where each iteration provides deeper understanding of people's current circumstances and background for active participation in the society. Strongly resembling Freire's codifications and decodifications (1972 & 1983), such praxis maintains balance between the general and the particular thus representing constant historical (re)construction of our reality.

This research is subject to important methodological restrictions. The parallel between contemporary academics and ancient jesters is a hyperbole without proper scientific validity. However, it provides excellent illustration and inspires fresh ideas. The belief that evolution is more efficient than revolution represents fictional development of one of the possible scenarios for the development of the network society. The belief that Freire's thought can be successfully adapted to the contemporary context is probably the least

problematic of the above. Nevertheless, it is hard to be certain whether this study correctly interprets Freire's and even harder to assess the influence of possible misinterpretations to the derived conclusions. Researchers' choices between the general and the particular significantly impact research results. His personal relationship with the researched topic compromises the potential of this research for improving the current social conditions. Finally, some questions about human nature cannot be rationally proved and will forever remain in the sphere of belief.

Transdisciplinary research methodology raises the role of academic community in the network society to the abstract level of modelling. All academic work is praxis, and models are abstract descriptions of the reality. For this reason, they require translation into specific contexts of each application. Furthermore, this research is deeply rooted within the conceptual framework of critical theory. Descriptions of reality obtained from the model are therefore always in flux, and require constant dialogue with between object and subject, theory and practice, aspirations and objective circumstances.

On such basis, the used methodology provides an additional benefit. Primarily designed in order to describe the role of academic community in the network society, the main outline of the model is independent of context and can be confidently applied to any kind of society. Following the same way of reasoning which allowed this study to draw from Freire's conclusions developed within the context of massive society, success of future applications will depend on researcher's ability to separate the general from the particular.

At any time and place, the role of academic community simultaneously reflects its historic background, present circumstances, and the desired direction for further development. It describes and acts, works and hopes, dreams about a better society and provides guidelines for liberatory action here and now. According to Boyd, such praxis "requires one to maintain a clear balance between the imagined and hoped-for future, and the critical analysis and concrete action that [is] needed to achieve that future" (Boyd, 2007, pp. 7). On such basis, it unmistakably avoids accusations for idealism and replaces pessimism contained in contemporary critiques of global education with moderately optimistic academic direct action. Consequently, each and every description of the role of academic community in the network society derived from the developed model is ultimately political.

At one hand, the incomplete elements such as the need to theoretically and practically elaborate opportunities and restrictions offered by critical transdisciplinary research methodology are important restrictions to validity of this study. At the other hand, however, those elements have the very important purpose to indicate possible directions for future research. In the best critical tradition, this chapter does not develop a definite set of recommendations: instead, it invites academics to reinvent own praxis in the context of the network society.

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