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Credibility, applicability and context

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TIM MAY – CREDIBILITY, APPLICABILITY AND CONTEXT

There is no text to my talk, which I was asked to make a ‘little different’. My talk was based upon the following three parts: first, experiences of working in SURF for different clients, including universities, government agencies, the ESRC, NHS and central and local government and the private sector. This work has involved thinking about the future configuration of universities through asking staff about the type of organisation in which they would wish to work in 5, 10, 15 and 20 years time, as well as work for universities in London and Manchester concerning their socio-economic contribution to their localities. It also has involved comparative work on science and economic development (in Spain, Germany, France and the UK), as well as being a member of the Transatlantic Forum on the Future of Universities which is run from Cornell University. In addition, it includes being seconded to other organisations to assist them in their development and the production of final reports and inquiries to government submissions that contain clear messages for both strategic and operational issues around knowledge production, transmission and reception. As a unit that needs to survive in order to pay salaries, rent and overheads (we are based in Central Manchester), we have given a great deal of time to consideration of our values and modes of organisation in order to try and balance credibility with applicability.

For more information on this work and copies of reports, submissions and a list of publications, please see our web site at: www.surf.salford.ac.uk

Second, it was informed by my experiences of working in academia, as a second career, both as a PhD student who undertook action research in an organisation and engaged in extensive teaching (1986-1989), as well as my time as a full-time lecturer at Plymouth University (1989-1995), Durham University (1995-1999) and then Salford University as a Professor (1999-) and then a member of SURF (2001-) where I was Lead Director and am now a co-Director. I was asked about the changes needed to create better cultures of inquiry and these have been put into practice in the above projects, as well as the organisation of SURF and via the publications below.

Third, these ideas have also been clarified through a series of past and planned writings – excluding the substantive issues about which we write around regional and urban policy, science and economic development and knowledge transfer - and editing an international book series with a particular ethos (the book series is ‘Issues in Society’ {Open University Press/McGraw-Hill, whilst the books and articles have been on social research/ethnography and qualitative research/methodology/social theory and philosophy of social science). At present I am writing a book for Sage which is contracted on this topic, whilst Beth Perry and I also have a special edition of Regional Studies coming out on science and socio-economic development and of the Regions Newsletter on universities. For reference, these writings include the following:

- 2007 ‘Regulation, Engagement and Academic Production’. In
Harding, A., Scott, A., Laske, S. and Burtscher, C. (eds).
**Bright Satanic Mills: Universities and Territorial
Development in the Information Age.** Ashgate: Aldershot.

- 2007 Joint Editor, with Beth Perry, of special edition on 'Universities in the Knowledge Economy: Places of Expectation/Spaces for Reflection?'. **Social Epistemology**
- 2007 'Universities: Space, Governance and Transformation'. **Social Epistemology**.
- 2007 'Cities, Knowledge and Universities: Transformations in the Image of the Intangible'. With Beth Perry. **Social Epistemology**.
- 2006 'Universities, Regional Policy and the Knowledge Economy'. With Michael Peters. In Kinchloe, J., Hayes, K., Rose, K. and Anderson, P. M. (eds). **The Praeger Handbook of Urban Education**. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood.
- 2006 'The Missing Middle in Methodology: Occupation Cultures and Institutional Conditions'. **Methodological Innovations Online**. Vol 1 (1). www.methodologicalinnovations.org
N.B. – This is a new, open access journal – an important part of making work available to readers.
- 2005 'Reflexivity and Sociological Practice'. In Williams, M. (ed). **The Philosophical Foundations of Social Research, Volume 3: Social Reality and the Social Context of Social Research**. London: Sage.
- 2005 'Transformations in Academic Production: Context, Content and Consequences'. **European Journal of Social Theory**. Vol 8 (2). pp. 193-209.
- 2004 'Realism and Reflexivity: A Contradiction in Terms?' In Carter, B. and New, C. (eds). **Making Realism Work: Realist Social Theory and Empirical Research**. London: Routledge.
- 2004 'Reflexive Vigilance: Engagement, Illumination and Development'. In Harré, R. and Moghaddam, F. M. (eds). **The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Organizational, Political and Cultural Contexts**. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger/Greenwood.
- 2002 'Transformations in Principles and Practice'. In May, T. (ed). **Qualitative Research in Action**. London: Sage.
- 2002 'Auditing as the Eternal Present: The Depoliticising Implications of Organizational Transformation in British Higher Education'. With Gideon Baker. **European Political Science**. Vol 1 (3). pp. 12-22.

- 2002 'Commitment and Investigation in Knowing the Social World'.
With Malcolm Williams. **International Journal of Social
Research Methodology: Theory and Practice.** Vol 5 (1). pp.
3-9.
- 2000 'A Future for Critique? Positioning, Belonging and Reflexivity'.
European Journal of Social Theory. Vol 3 (2). pp. 157-173.
- 1998 'Reflexivity in the Age of Reconstructive Social Science'.
**International Journal of Social Research Methodology:
Theory and Practice.** Vol 1 (1). pp. 7-24.
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