

RE- FRAMING THE DEMOCRATIC INTELLECT

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a major site where struggles between different conceptions of culture are most evident and most influential. Since the Reformation and the keen sense of the importance of learning it imparted, education has been regarded in Scotland as a matter of great importance. Twentieth century philosophers of education like John Anderson and A. D. Lindsay have stressed the *intellectual* nature of education, defining its prime task as the formation of critical intelligence. George Elder Davie, in **The Democratic Intellect** (1961) charts the gradual extinction in the Scottish universities of a type of higher education which encouraged breadth of study and, through the compulsory study of philosophy, a concern with theory and ideas. For these thinkers, the *critical* role of education can only properly be fulfilled through engagement with the wider community; and, indeed, part of the meaning of Davie's ideal of 'critical intellectualism' is the need for dialogue between the learned and unlearned (see Beveridge and Turnbull 1989 1997).

However, a cautionary note is needed at the outset. On turning to Davie's 'Epilogue' to **The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect** one reads that the central core of the idea of democratic intellect means the many – in his own

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Scottish Affairs

words, 'the ignorant many' – sharing control with 'the few' (the experts) and through discussion arriving at a 'lay consensus' capable of revealing gaps in the expert's point of view (Davie 1986, p.262). There is more than a hint here of the relationship between the Scottish minister and his flock, each keeping the other up to scratch by mutual criticism, just as the minister's suspicion of the congregation was checked and balanced by the congregation's common sense scrutiny of the minister.

In 1985 Alasdair MacIntyre, an expatriate Scot, and one of the world's most acclaimed living philosophers, delivered a lecture titled 'The Idea of an Educated Public' in which he acknowledged his debt to George Elder Davie (see MacIntyre 1987). Indeed, MacIntyre recommends that all new university teachers should read Davie's work. MacIntyre's narrative is set in early eighteenth century Scotland where he claims a truly educated public came into existence. In common with George Davie, he argues that the Scottish universities of the eighteenth century were fundamental in creating a new kind of education based on Enlightenment precepts and that the primary achievement of the Scottish Enlightenment was to create an 'educated public' rather than a coterie of academic specialists.

This educated public was united through a shared, broadly based, general, philosophical education. The particular educated public which emerged was small and select – male, centred on the kirk and including minor gentry, lawyers, schoolmasters and merchants – centrally, the emerging male professional classes. Now, unlike then, according to MacIntyre, we possess in our culture too many different and incompatible modes of justification and too many different conceptions of the good for there to be any foundation for such an educated public. Accordingly, he proclaims the notion and possibility of an 'educated public' well and truly dead, although it remains a 'ghost' haunting the educational system. Nevertheless, the 'tradition' of democratic intellect depicted by Davie, and the idea of an educated public, have stuck, being invoked by adult educators in recent years as a basis for a reinvigorated civil society.

Another note of caution is in order. Hannah Arendt pointed out that tradition can be a threat to voices in the past, 'denying them the power to shake us' (Gaita 1998, p.xxxiv). And feminist educators have insisted on the need for educational and pedagogical approaches which enable the articulation of 'views from below', a project which is not simply a matter of 'giving expression to' the experience of currently marginalised identities but is also about 'opening up perspectives from which these may be renegotiated,

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

transcended, even directly disowned' (Ryle and Soper 2002, p.85). Characteristically, social movements such as those from which feminism has sprung (as a theory and practice of women's liberation) *have* no traditions. They are 'thrown up' by the historical moment (as is the present movement for a global democratic revolution against poverty which is taking shape worldwide; see Mayo 2005). Often, their object is emancipation *from* various kinds of repressive traditions from the past, as well as from prevailing orthodoxies. Often, their greatest struggle is to avoid being absorbed into the status quo (see Wain 1995, Barr 1999).

My project (and that of my book in preparation) is to re-examine the Scottish tradition of democratic intellect in light of recent debates, specifically, from within feminism and in the light of debates around 'globalisation'. Since many 'traditions' have been formed through various kinds of domination, in turning to 'our' tradition of democratic intellectualism, we need to apply to it what has been called a 'hermeneutic of critical suspicion' so as to assess its capacity to include those not included when its terms were set and to assess whether it *worth* preserving.

I should clarify. This paper is less a critique of Davie and his followers (although this is implied) than it is an effort to begin to shift the focus of attention about democracy in education away from the well-trodden paths signposted by Davie. In terms of the central metaphor of the paper, this is to insist that 'frames' and images hold us captive in even more powerful ways than arguments.

RE-FRAMING OLD MASTERS

George Lakoff has written about the importance of what he call 'framing'. Lakoff teaches framing in his Cognitive Science course. He starts with an exercise. He gives students a directive: 'Don't think of an elephant'. Of course it can't be done and that's the point of the exercise. In order not to think of an elephant you have to think of an elephant. The word elephant evokes an image and a frame and if you negate the image you still activate the frame. Richard Nixon did not take his course, observes Lakoff. When Nixon said 'I am not a crook', he made everyone think he was a crook. Lakoff concludes, ' If you have been framed, the only response is to re-frame' (Lakoff 2003, p.32).

Scottish Affairs

In **Frame Analysis**, Erving Goffman analyses the basic frameworks of understanding which are available in society for making sense of the world. His claim is that the primary frameworks of a particular group constitute a central element of its culture (Goffman 1974, p.27). We project our frames of reference into the world without noticing: 'In countless ways and ceaselessly social life takes up and freezes into itself the understandings we have of it' (p.563). Relationship rather than substance is sovereign for Goffman. He illustrates with an example: a valuable watercolour stored for safekeeping in a portfolio of reproduced masters is, in that context, a false reproduction (p.561).

A major theme of this essay (and my forthcoming book) is that certain stories/narratives, metaphors and 'myths' get fixed through repetition and that they come to 'frame' our perceptions of the world. This is very much the case with the so-called 'democratic intellect'. The dominant interpretation of nineteenth century controversies over the Scottish university curriculum – the way it is framed – remains Davie's. He argued that anglicisation was the motive force of change, identifying rival patriotic and anglicising parties among the reformers and stressing the shift, as he sees it, from a broad, generalised curriculum rooted in native Scottish philosophical traditions to a narrower specialised curriculum closer to Oxford and Cambridge.

I do not intend discussing in detail the merits or demerits of his argument or the historical accuracy of his book. More important for my purposes here is how through repetition (arguments for and against) this book has set the terms of a major area of debate around curriculum in Scotland, framing debate in a way which screens out other, and in my view more productive and interesting, areas of inquiry. In this respect the concept of the democratic intellect is analogous to that currently ubiquitous topic of discussion, 'social capital', a concept which as currently employed is remarkably anodyne and neutral, especially regarding issues of power and conflict; unlike investigative categories (currently unfashionable) such as patriarchy and racism it does little to direct attention to deep structures of inequality and disadvantage. It imagines itself to be participatory and democratic but is 'primarily participation from below imposed from above' (Fine 2001, p.199).

I venture into the debate as a kind of case study to illustrate issues of wider significance and which relate to a contemporary context of widespread public concern about the 'democratic deficit'.

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

Some of the blindspots of Davie's central text are fairly well marked. R. D. Anderson has documented those in relation to access and equal opportunity (see Anderson 1997). Others have critiqued its structure of heroic past versus failed present (for example, Craig 1996). Some, too, have questioned the central role allocated to Scotland's Presbyterianism heritage within it (see especially Brown 1997). And there has even been the occasional side-swipe made by feminists, because Davie, and the whole literature on the democratic intellect which followed his book, is silent on women (see Anderson and Norquist 1984). On this last point, it is notable that notions of community and relationship, as well as common sense and democracy and, indeed, 'sympathy', have been central to 'the' Scottish philosophical tradition. Why, then, have women (even, gender) played so little part in the whole debate? After all, women have been allotted responsibility for sympathetic understanding, 'community' and relationships by our culture.¹ I explore this crucial blindspot (and silence) in a separate article. For now, I want to look inside the frame.

¹ This almost total silence in mainstream Scottish intellectual debate was critiqued in 1984 in an article in *Cencrastus*, by Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquist, in which they claim that the potential contribution of women to Scottish culture is stunted by the domination of Scottish culture by a number of masculine attitudes which help to effectively exclude women. The 'cultural Scot', they claim, is attached to an idea of 'Philosophy', a term which promotes ideals of Reason, Rationality and the centrality of theorizing and a broad analytical intellectuality – all values traditionally attributed to the male domain, say the authors. The 'educated Scot' obsessively displays his intellectualism but confines this to only certain concerns, relegating other intellectual and artistic interests to the non-masculine periphery.

Co-existing with this 'Enlightenment ideal' is that of the 'Hard Man', the valorization of the Scottish industrial, especially shipyard, worker, who is celebrated in novels such as Alan Bold's *A Pint of Bitter*. Anderson and Norquist criticize nationalists like Beveridge and Turnbull who have applied Fanon's notion of 'inferiorism' to describe the relationship of Scotland to England. Feminism is seen by such professional Scots as a dangerous distraction from the cause of Nationalism. 'Women may either be incorporated, in a passive role, within the male ideology, or be denied their validity as Scots' (Anderson and Norquist 1984, p.10).

WITHIN THE FRAME

The Democratic Intellect has been heralded as the ‘single most important volume written in the twentieth century about Scottish intellectual history’ (Turnbull 2003). The claim is that the book did two things:

Firstly, it presented a certain *idea* of Scotland and its cultural inheritance. This idea was that the traditional arrangements of the Scottish Universities where philosophy had a ‘commanding position’ reflected ‘a national culture that attached overriding importance to theory or philosophy – not “theoretical theoreticism”, but thinking concerned with “the common sense of subjects”, a style of theory which, to quote the last page of the book, is not “divorced from life”. And in this – discussion about the fundamental things – everyone has a voice and there is no place for the distinction between expert and non-expert (a point in Davie’s thought which impresses James Kelman and Noam Chomsky)’ (Turnbull 2003). Secondly, according to the **Edinburgh Review**, the book elaborated a distinctive *philosophy of education* through its discussion of nineteenth century Scottish educationalists, as, that is, an *introduction to culture and criticism*, ‘thus going against the grain of current fashion where the universities have adopted a managerialist and practicalist ethos and discourse’ (Turnbull 2003).

The Democratic Intellect is (perhaps less than its title suggests) a kind of lament for Scotland’s lost, native, intellectual tradition as enshrined in its universities. Briefly, the book’s main contention is as follows: The legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, combined with the country’s *distinctive Presbyterian culture*, was a bent towards a peculiarly *critical intelligence* which dominated its universities until near the end of the nineteenth century when it was suppressed as the result of a process of anglicisation which had begun more than half a century before. The book charts the *decline* of the ‘democratic intellect’ in the Scottish universities and sets out to rescue its ‘lost’ intellectual/academic history. In Davie’s view, ‘the Scots’ had an ‘almost religious attachment’ to the ‘inherited ideal of a culture in which the general should take precedence over the particular and the whole over the parts’ (Davie 1961, p.4).

Lindsay Paterson, Scotland’s high profile commentator on education, disagrees with Davie’s thesis of decline but not with his basic philosophical argument, stressing the continuing salience of such an attachment. Indeed, the main story told in his 2003 book is of the persisting popular preference in Scotland for formally established educational institutions and of the popular

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

inclination to understand educational democracy as access to them. Democracy in education has been interpreted as access to ‘real education, real education has meant what happens in mainstream schools, colleges and universities, and the main kind of learning that happens there has been understood to be *general, academic and therefore liberal*’ (Paterson 2003, p. 3).

It is important to appreciate that Davie’s case for the democratic intellect focuses on the analysis of the *university curriculum*, stressing the nature of *elite education* and the centrality of philosophy, rather than on the structure of educational institutions or on empirical data about the social origins and mobility of students. It is not about ‘Access’ in other words. It therefore ignores those features of Scottish Universities’ development in the eighteenth century on which Withrington, for example, focuses: their openness to all ages, their flexibility, their outreach classes and the opportunity for ‘occasional’ students to select their courses as and when needed – features which are recommended by those who believe universities today should be modelled on continuing education lines (see Withrington 2000; Taylor, Barr and Steele 2002).

Davie’s argument concerning the democracy of the democratic intellect is that the generalism of the Scottish philosophical tradition was a barrier to atomistic individualism *and* a means of bridging the gap between the expert few and lay majority, thus ‘building a sort of intellectual bridge between all classes’: the Scottish intelligentsia remained in touch with its popular roots, retaining a strong sense of social responsibility (Anderson 1997, p 17). Thus Davie’s account stresses the curriculum of full-time ‘gowned’ students, exclusively male, who followed a four year Arts curriculum, prior to further professional study towards the ministry or law, for example.

OUTSIDE THE FRAME: RE-TAKING THE REGISTER

I believe that this notion of democratic intellectualism, with its emphasis on full time students, has skewed scholarship away from a rich seam of ‘popular enlightenment’ activity in Scotland, both inside *and outside* the traditional universities, and involving women as well as men (see especially Anderson 1997; Smith 2000). Most Scottish universities’ urban setting made them part of a thriving public culture, says R. D. Anderson (1997, p.15). By the mid-eighteenth century full-time, ‘gowned’ students represented only a tiny minority of those accessing higher education in Scotland and from the mid-

Scottish Affairs

eighteenth century the vast bulk of students could choose ‘cafeteria style’ more or less as they pleased from a list of professorial lecture-classes (see Withrington 2000).

In an important article, Sarah Smith queries feminist and other historiography regarding women’s access to higher education, arguing that for women, particularly in Scotland, the benchmark should not be access to graduation but access to lectures, since in the eighteenth century few men graduated either. Sarah Smith’s central contention is that the period which is often identified as a *starting point* in women’s access to higher education (the late nineteenth century), when legislation enabled universities to confer degrees on women, actually marked the *end of a century* of significant trends through which women gained a place in universities. This was especially important in Scotland because in the eighteenth century higher education there was especially progressive and influential. Histories of women’s higher education should therefore move their time frame back, look beyond the ancient universities (or at least, beyond their full time courses for ‘gowned’ students) and re-assess the role of popular education in the expansion and democratization of British higher education, especially, she believes, from the 1770s until the 1830s (Smith 2000).

R. D. Anderson has suggested that ‘if their [universities’] social and institutional history were to be studied as intensively as their curricula, the popular as well as the elite side of enlightenment Scotland, and its roots in widely diffused literacy, might come into sharper focus’ (Anderson 1997, p.19). This neglect and overwhelming emphasis on formal ‘schooling’ in most historiography in the field of education in Scotland has been partially remedied by a recent book by Tony Cooke (2006). This tells the story of *adult* education in Scotland – one which has been masked by histories of adult education in Britain which take English developments as the norm and see adult education in Scotland – measured against this norm – as ‘underdeveloped’.

Cooke argues that, in fact, adult education in Scotland simply took different forms than in England and Wales. The concept of ‘popular enlightenment’, for example, had resonance in Scotland and Scandinavia but not in England. Jonathan Rose, too, has recently documented how, in the eighteenth century, autodidact culture flourished particularly in Scotland, especially amongst weavers. In his **The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes**, he makes the point that ‘unsurprisingly, mutual improvement was Scottish in origin’ (Rose 2002, p.59). Cooke argues that one of the main reasons the

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

Workers' Educational Association initially failed to take root in Scotland was the strength of independent working class education in the West of Scotland and in Fife and because of working class mistrust of collaboration between working class organizations and the educational establishment.

Adult education has an important history internationally in relation to social movements, as a number of recent commentaries point out (see Brookfield 2004, Foley 1999). Adult education (as a field of study and practice) draws on many traditions, as Tom Steele informs us (Steele 2004):

At least two strands stand in some degree of contradiction to each other and in some respects a very persuasive story of adult education is how these two strands have confronted each other and, through the agency of teachers and activists from both sides, produced interesting outcomes. (Steele 2004, no pagination).

Histories of adult education in the UK usually mention this duality but most histories stress the role of universities, colleges and leading liberal intellectuals in extending (access to) educational opportunities to working people (portrayed as 'in deficit'), especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The other (often neglected) half of the story is that of popular educational movements that were often self-help in style and radically political in motivation. Most of the key events in (official) adult education's history in Britain need to be seen as much in terms of upward pressure 'from below' for education as in terms of provision 'from above'.

And *Scottish* traditions often fall below the radar of awareness (Cooke 2006). I think that this history has been screened out at least in part by the dominance of Davie's narrative of the democratic intellect, with its exclusive focus on the 'philosophical' education of fully 'gowned' university students and by the historiographical emphasis on academic education. And, indeed, it is Davie's narrative which has been taken up by radical adult educators in Scotland, who believe that it denotes a tradition which provides the basis for a distinctive vision of a rich and humane *civic culture* that is worth working for (see Alexander and Martin 1995).

Thus, arguing against narrow technicism, technical rationality and competence-based assessment taking over the curriculum, David Alexander and Ian Martin invoke it in terms of two themes. The first theme relates to the *curriculum* and argues the case for a 'common sense', that is, a shared, 'critical', inter-disciplinary understanding based on reflective analysis and

Scottish Affairs

public debate; by means of this, blindspots of any one specialism or area of knowledge can be illuminated by *other* domains of the intellect (Alexander and Martin 1995). The second theme relates to the link between democracy and the social conditions conducive to public or collective debate: specialisation is always partial and incomplete and requires comment from educated lay people in a language of commonly understood first principles. Davie believes that the alternative to such a *common intellectual culture* is 'a society split between over-specialised boffins on the one hand and unthinking proles on the other' (Davie 1991).

Alexander and Martin see their purpose as democratic adult educators in terms of contributing to the realization of a 'common critical culture'; and they believe that the challenge for adult and community education is to revive the idea and ideal of an educated public which MacIntyre fears has become a 'ghost haunting our educational system' (Alexander and Martin 1995, p.90). Other supporters of Davie similarly believe that the core of Davie's ideas is that 'the expert's knowledge is inherently incomplete', that the specialist's narrow focus creates blindspots and that 'the point about a generalist approach such as democratic intellectualism is not that non-experts have a right to scrutinize the work of the expert, but that the work of the expert is only complete in the light of such scrutiny. ... Thus, others in the community, by virtue of their lack of expertise (which gives them a different perspective from that of the expert), have a responsibility to comment on these blindspots' (Murdoch 1999, p.85, quoted by Crowther and Tett 2001, p.114).

This is curious – *lack* of something gives a perspective? This is like seeing women as not-men or blacks as not-whites – the 'other' of expertise. What is being argued for here by Crowther and Tett is that a vital part of a healthy society is that non-specialists are encouraged to interrogate specialists; and that an educated community of specialists is unfit to *govern* without such scrutiny – becoming, in effect, intellects without democracy. Yet this is an odd position for radical adult educators to take up. The kind of 'knowledge from below' encouraged here is a flimsy thing, caught on the back foot as it were, becoming operative only in the face of expertise already formulated elsewhere.

I take up this notion later in the article, when I suggest that the kind of intellectual history undertaken by the historian, Eileen Yeo, utilises a more useful notion of 'knowledge from below' for adult educators, in her analysis of the role of groups and social movements as *independent* sources of popular knowledge. Before doing so, however, I want to suggest that the reason that

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

Davie is so popular amongst nationally minded educationalists in Scotland is that his work resonates with Scotland's strong tradition of professionals as custodians of the public good which is described by Lindsay Paterson in articles and in his recent book on the history of Scottish education (2003). This tradition of civic virtue, a variant of Platonic guardians, has roots before the Enlightenment, was continued *and* countered within it and gained strength in the nineteenth century. And it has a strong paternalist and patrician aspect which tends to remain invisible in current talk of the need for civic renewal, somewhat complacently backed up by 'common sense'

WITHIN THE FRAME: CUSTODIANS OF THE PUBLIC GOOD

According to Paterson, the Scottish Enlightenment left a dual legacy: on the one hand there was a thoroughly moral public sphere in the institutions of an autonomous civil society; on the other there was a deep suspicion of the state. The removal of the central institutions of the Scottish state to London in 1707, the year of Union, sparked off a searching discussion of an 'idea', settled by the term 'common sense' by the early nineteenth century. The central core of the idea, says Paterson, was based on the belief that society depends on people's mutual dependence and that public spirit can be actively created. Thomas Reid, founder of the so-called Common-Sense School of philosophy, believed 'there is a certain degree of [common sense] which is necessary to our being subjects of law and government, capable of managing our own affairs, and answerable for our conduct towards others'; it is about the bonds of trust and obligation which subsist among citizens, 'common to all men with whom we can transact business, or call to account for their conduct' (quoted in Paterson 2000, p.42).

The Scottish philosophers' attachment to mutual obligation and the creation and maintaining of a common culture 'laid the basis for a highly distinctive form of civil government in the nineteenth century', asserts Paterson, 'with a further legacy that persisted well into the twentieth'. It was at the same time 'anti-statist and yet public, private and yet moral, depoliticised – in one sense of politics – and yet civic' (p.43). The key to understanding the 1707 Union with England was that it did not interfere with the institutional autonomy of Scottish *civil* society. Indeed, claims Paterson, the main intellectual legacy which the Scottish philosophers gave to European thought was a highly moral public sphere, influencing Hegel and Marx as well as Durkheim (see, too, Seligman 1992). In Scotland itself, says Paterson, the notion of a public

Scottish Affairs

sphere of mutual obligation paid little attention to the state; it was founded on voluntarism, ‘emphatically not the state’ (p.44). The belief was that public morality could only be maintained by the vigilance of active citizens.

Public boards and professional associations proliferated from the 1840s onwards, ‘committees of bourgeois notables who administered public legislation and even public money in the same spirit as the voluntary organizations’, networks which structured civil society by creating a space of public communication, strengthened by the popularity of literary luminaries such as Burns who had read Adam Smith and the common sense philosophers, and embodied their notions of natural sympathy in his poems (p.45). In this ‘aberrant style of politics’ the state was on sufferance, says Paterson; the public and the national were equated with the civic, and the essence of the nation lay in the individual acting locally through civic institutions. It was a genuine politics, asserts Paterson. Thus, ‘long before late-twentieth century feminism, Scots bourgeois men and women had discovered that power was open to negotiation in public and private spaces far removed from the state’ (p.45).

It is probably true that something like this story is part of the self-perception of Scotland’s contemporary ‘great and good’ (Paterson himself adopts a nuanced and fairly quizzical approach to this heritage). Clearly, people on the street are not civil society, only the organised are; nor is civil society completely separate from the state or necessarily any less politically partisan. And civil society does not necessarily promote democracy, such that the more civil society there is the more democracy there is: civil society (and civil societies) pursue political and often partisan objectives and can promote socially exclusive behaviour. For these and other reasons, current calls for a renewal of civil society and ‘cultural capital’ need to be viewed with caution (see for example, Mayo 2004). Below, I apply to Paterson’s highly moral public sphere a ‘hermeneutic of critical suspicion’, as heralded in my introduction – from the point of view of sex.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE: PRACTISING CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society certainly looks different examined through the lens of sex – a viewpoint not practised much in Scottish debates. Like all fundamental re-organisations of society, the one that created civil society was concerned with re-allocating power between classes and between men and women. But first and foremost the ‘practitioners of the Enlightenment’ sought primarily to

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

recast relations among *men*, maintains Isabel Hull, in a study of Enlightenment luminaries and treatises, entitled **Sexuality, State and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815**. Mutual regard and enlightened engagement were very much the business of men since their goal was to wrest a new social position in the public away from the Church and Court.

A highly bureaucratized intelligentsia dominated in Germany in the Enlightenment. They were ‘men of the nation’, shapers of public opinion *by virtue of their education* (as well as their wealth and leisure). They saw themselves as trustees of the less fortunate, holding civil society in trust for the future, until they too through education could become active citizens. Although Hull’s book concentrates on Germany, much of it bears on the Scottish case. Indeed, if we take a historiographical approach which views the European Enlightenment as an *inter-cultural* rather than a flatly *cosmopolitan* movement, a persuasive case can be made for a significant passage of political ideas between these two eighteenth century cultures, the Scottish and German versions of the Enlightenment. The passage of ideas is far from smooth, of course. A recent study has demonstrated the ‘misreception’ of some Scottish ideas in Germany in the late eighteenth century, notably, in an unintentional shift of Scottish *civic* concepts (of virtuous active citizenship) into a German vocabulary of inner *spiritual* perfection (see Oz-Salzberger 1995).

Historians of the Scottish Enlightenment have been chastised recently for paying little attention to the ‘widespread identification of the Enlightenment elsewhere with the emergence of a new “public sphere” in eighteenth century societies’, a notion which in its original formulation was developed by Jürgen Habermas with reference to eighteenth century England, but which is especially applicable to the Scottish case, according to the historian John Robertson (Robertson 2000, p.45).² Habermas speaks of the formation of the bourgeois public sphere as the sphere of private people coming together as a

² Robertson explains: ‘Excluded from parliamentary politics by the narrowness of the franchise [as a result of the Union with England in 1707] ... Scottish men of letters could contribute to Scottish debate at the center without directly involving themselves in party politics or the formulation of government policy. Conversely, the distance of central government from Scotland enabled the men of letters to generate public debate within Scotland without immediate reference to government’ – an example being agitation for a Scottish militia from the 1760-1780s (see Robertson 2000, p.45).

Scottish Affairs

public separate from the state. However, this notion can mislead, says Hull. Many of the Enlightenment ‘practitioners of civil society’ in Germany were state officials: whether university professors or court administrators, they were first and foremost government officials. And although the Scots were not members of the state apparatus in any significant way they had strong ties with the Scottish administration and its system of patronage: they were, as Sher has argued, ‘establishmentarians’, seeking to defend the existing order against a dying Jacobite ‘right’ and incipient radical ‘left’ (see Sher 1985, pp.327ff).

More importantly perhaps, both sets of Enlighteners, despite significant differences, saw the Enlightenment as primarily a form of *education*. The differences are significant: the Germans distinguished between education for *active* members of society (such as upper and middle class men) and passive subjects (women and the lower orders), whilst the Scottish thinkers wrote mainly for the next generation of gentlemen participants in British political and intellectual debates – educated laity as well as holders of office. Germans often felt the only scope for human association was private and family life, comments Oz-Salzberger, unlike the Scots who were not alienated from political life despite loss of their specifically political institutions in 1707 as a result of union with England (Oz-Salzberger 1995). Nevertheless, argues Hull, *public* usefulness was the criterion forming their opinions, and the necessity to reform the social order as a whole: the German practitioners were engaged in creating and legitimating a well-defined private sphere *from* foundations set in the state and community.

Habermas believes that the patriarchal family – the ‘intimate sphere’ – founded the ‘public sphere’, made *it* possible. But, says Hull, his use of the term ‘intimate sphere’ obscures a number of things: *First*, that women’s exclusion from the public was not peripheral but a *consciously pursued goal*: in their public writings Enlightenment thinkers explicitly reserved family based, ‘private’ experiences, leading to emancipated subjectivity and ultimately to political participation, to married males. *Second*, the main argument that practitioners of civil society gave to justify the shape they gave to the *public* was that this shape benefited the *private*: ‘The intimate sphere tailored to the presumed needs of the new male citizen was one of the most successful ideological creations of late Enlightenment discourse. It was a product not a cause of the larger project to re-draft the “public” according to the requirements of civil society’ (p.207). *Third*, none of this argument and

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

struggle would have been conceivable or necessary if the public sphere had not been run overwhelmingly by men.

Civil society in Hull's narrative is therefore both the goal of Enlightenment reformers and the actual ever-widening new form of life of the literate, educated strata, especially males, both bourgeois and noble, in towns and administrative centres and including many reading groups, voluntary organisations, clubs, journals and so on, where new *national* careers and a national consensus were forged. The public sphere was very definitely not an abstract market of ideas, as it appears in Habermas's writing. The active shapers of the 'public sphere' were involved in organised reading, publication, discussion in clubs and societies in which people came together voluntarily as individuals: 'domination-free communication' (to use Habermas' term) was the goal, but to achieve this, members had to discipline themselves corporeally and mentally. A sober dispassionate atmosphere was achieved by self-censorship: many topics were taboo, such as matters of state, religion and family (p.210).

Moral virtue defined the new social elite, a quality potentially accessible to everyone, yet a code consonant with only certain social groups. As the focus of associations and clubs shifted to mobilize broader social strata such as artisans and peasants, even Jews and Catholics, women were expressly shut out of early political associations, despite the fact that the first public discussion about the emancipation of women was taking place *in* Masonic Lodges and reading clubs. And the clergy in Germany (and Scotland) joined the Enlightenment in large numbers, thus stamping Enlightenment discourse (and practices) with something of its old outlines (and habits) even as it was being changed. Guardians of knowledge and understanding wield tremendous social power, Hull comments.

Speculation about women (and there was much at the time, especially in the late period of Enlightenment) was a function (and part and parcel) of the more fundamental task of defining men – because, to repeat, practitioners of Enlightenment sought *primarily* to re-cast relations among men (Hull, p.225). The anthropologist, Mary Douglas, has claimed that bodily symbols, including sexual ones, are especially salient in times of socio-political re-organisation. Sexual arguments and metaphors have been useful to those engaged in redrawing social lines, by, for example, disqualifying women or poor people from expanding political participation on sexual-biological grounds. Crucially, structured *debate* was taken to be the motor of social

Scottish Affairs

change by the practitioners of civil society and their contemporaries. They saw their task as *moral reform* rather than setting up political clubs.

Pedagogues and writers of the late enlightenment, understanding themselves as leaders of civil society, viewed this project in terms of *shaping desire*. The education of women should occur entirely in relation to themselves, as future wives of the practitioners of civil society. In such teachings, marriage was universally normative. Women had to *actively* achieve self-effacement, like Rousseau's *Sophie* and even Wollstonecraft's woman whose moral perfection would redeem civil society if released from domestic bondage. The figure of the redemptive woman was to go on to have a long history in the next century; and as society swelled in importance so too did gender differentiation.

Eighteenth century Scottish writers such as John Gregory and James Fordyce wrote conduct books which, though not usually read as Enlightenment texts, acted as a crucial conduit for new moral-philosophical discourses to reach a more general audience. High philosophical prose was re-worked, often by ministers, into didactic recipes for feminine morals and manners. Criticised in the *Rights of Woman* (1792), these 'enlightened gallants' were not aristocratic sexual dinosaurs peddling chivalric reverence for women. They were not simply reinforcing a patriarchal structure already in existence, insists Barbara Taylor in a recent essay (Taylor 2005). On the contrary, they were 'literary New Men' seeking *fresh* grounds for masculine authority, helping lay a *new* foundation for male superiority – gallantry. Taylor sees in this a rearguard effort to stave off the equalizing pressures of commercial society.³ And as the age of Enlightenment came to a close, 'a ragbag of anti-feminist ideas ... attached themselves to the remnants of enlightened gallantry to generate that

³ *Until recently historians depicted the eighteenth century as a time of hardening gender divisions. But, says Taylor, recent examination of the evidence suggests that far from becoming more entrenched, by the second half of the eighteenth century the boundaries separating men and women were unstable and becoming more so: 'The gender panic expressed by moralists during the period signalled an unprecedented cultural convergence between the sexes'. It was among literary professionals that sexual barriers were weakest and where women novel writers threatened to eclipse men. Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft's friend and fellow feminist, insisted that it was fear of having women declared their equals which prompted men's endless panegyrics to women: 'that in women's weakness consists her strength, and in her dependence her power ... romantic ravings that have not a leg to stand on' (quoted in Taylor 2005, p.42).*

unwholesome blend of myth and prejudice that was to become Victorian sexual ideology'. Dogmas of Women's Place took centre stage, 'pushing the women's rights banner into the dust'. And, Taylor comments, western women *still* need an equal rights Enlightenment (2005, p.48).

RE-FRAMING KNOWLEDGE: VIEWS OF KNOWLEDGE FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

Having suggested that 'civil society' looks different viewed through the lens of sex I now take up the other main argument of this paper, signposted earlier – a notion of 'knowledge from below' which, far from being the 'other' of expertise, refers to those independent sources of popular knowledge, groups and social movements, which have been traditionally so important in the history and practice of adult education. Here, I am viewing adult education as itself a social movement or body of social movements.

Tom Steele reminds us that this tradition of adult education, rooted primarily in independent working class education, and reaching back to the Chartists, Owenites and Correspondence Societies of the nineteenth century (bodies which were motors of social change, contesting and sometimes gaining concessions from governments, before creating their own political formations) preceded the idea of adult education as an *institutional* form (Steele 2005). This was long before adult educators became professional servants of the state and agents of 'lifelong learning', burdened with reproducing the social order. In Tom Steele's view, it is this tradition that we need to revalue for our own times. He points out that the rise of new popular movements in the second half of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first has indicated the many new forms popular education can take, from the consciousness-raising of the women's and black movements to the carnivalism of the anti-capitalist, ecological and anti-globalisation movements. And the growing Peace Movement is throwing up its own needs for self-education to which adult educators might respond. The self-help, mutual aid and voluntarism of nineteenth century reform movements contain many examples which might be drawn on (see for example Rose 2001; also Foley 1999).

It will be recalled that Davie's case for democratic intellect is based on an analysis of the university curriculum alone, stressing the nature of elite education and the centrality to it of philosophy. I want to take a wider view.

Scottish Affairs

Today's 'common sense' narrows knowledge and education to the classroom – whether school, college or university. For this reason we need a great leap of the imagination to appreciate how the 'production of knowledge' became a battleground in Britain in the early to mid nineteenth century. I believe that we are going through a comparable period at present – globally, not just locally – and that we need to train ourselves to see this. This current struggle around ideas is occurring primarily around what has been called the Global Justice Movement. The only struggle depicted by Davie is between a handful of university men and bureaucrats.

In contrast, Eileen Yeo's book, **The Contest for Social Science**, sets out to depict this wider struggle, whose participants were not just individuals, but groups and social movements. Her book overlaps with the time period covered by Davie's book. Yeo shares Davie's interest in disciplinary history, in his case, philosophy, in her case, social science – a 'lost' tradition which was 'a strangely hodgepodge discipline of the nineteenth century' which hung around for a time in 'oddly called departments of social science'. Her book starts in the 'period of revolution', 1789-1850 (thus overlapping with the period normally specified in 'Enlightenment Studies'). It seeks to shed light on the process by which various sorts of action-oriented social science took up a place on the 'feminized margins of an academic map of learning' and as a 'pre-academic tradition' developed as an aid to action which emphasized the condition of the working class as an index to social improvement/happiness. Her concern is to highlight how some working class people and women from the middle class 'became active producers of knowledge'.

Yeo explicitly contrasts her standpoint and way of doing (intellectual) history with the usual histories (of social science) which 'parade great male thinkers whose discoveries anticipate the concepts of present day disciplines, and whose notion of contextualisation consists in depicting the discussions and quarrels among formally educated men' (Yeo 1996, pp.10-11). This is precisely what George Davie does in **The Democratic Intellect**. Thus a typical sentence in his book, offered here to provide a flavour of it, reads: 'Ferrier, Forbes and Blackie had in fact more in common with older men like Hamilton, Brewster and Melvin ... than with younger men like Lyon Playfair and Principal Shairp and Edward Caird whose views found expression in the Froude-Huxley Commission of 1876 and the 1892 Act' (Davie 1961, p.277).

Eileen Yeo's challenge to this sort of intellectual history is summed up when she says:

Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

If scholars do not seek subaltern groups they do not find them. Without a more spacious idea of context which makes room for less privileged persons, scholars will go on constructing models of a scientific world and of the production of knowledge which allow no room for activity from below in the past or in the future. (Yeo 1996, p.xi).

Yeo emphasizes that nineteenth century Radicals felt that all life is a learning activity, open to all; the co-operative and socialist movement, inspired by Owen but with an overwhelmingly working class membership used social science to challenge the vanguard of middle class intellect – all ‘education from above’ – urging working people to ‘think for themselves’ and seeing mutual improvement as vital to teaching and learning, even calling its analyses and strategies ‘social science’. Experience, and importantly women’s experience, had a key and valued place in the language of the emerging social science, thus, logically, opening the way to a very accessible form of producing social knowledge – a more ‘democratic epistemology’, to borrow Logie Barrow’s evocative phrase (Yeo 1996, p.25; and see Barrow 1986).

In fact Eileen Yeo’s account of the emergence of social science as a field of study and practice tells a story of a massive *takeover bid* by professional men and women *from* working people who had developed knowledge and ideas for their *own* emancipation, in order to establish their own, that is, professional, indispensability, based on ‘a foundation of science and service’ (p.xii). In her story gender plays a part as well as class. She asserts, ‘gender divisions attended at the conceptual birth of social science from above’. The British middle class, especially, represented reality around a deep gender divide, a mental framework which men as well as women inhabited. The book concentrates on groups working in different sites of intellectual production, from social movements to educational establishments, and it focuses on just how accessible any of these were to less powerful people and how much subject to their control once there.

Yeo’s book explores representations as well as relations of power in social science. And it keeps the activity of less powerful groups in focus, as producers of knowledge, objects of scrutiny, clients of policy, and as parties to negotiated outcomes. She adopts this writing strategy so as to render visible different ‘patterns of contest’, including what Volosinov suggested, in 1929, involved a competition for the same ‘legitimizing language’, for example, that of ‘motherhood’. Again, this is very different from Davie’s strategy, and it is an especially important one at a time when the question of

Scottish Affairs

politics and language is particularly pressing and when, at least in America, the Right has been successful in turning the word 'liberal' into a term of abuse.

My interest in Yeo's work stems primarily from the way in which she *frames* the question of knowledge and how her own writing strategy is aimed at *re-framing* intellectual history from the usual parading of a few great thinkers towards a wider and, in her own terms, more 'generous' notion of contextualisation. This brings into focus the context of social and political struggle in the development of ideas, including, crucially, notions of representation, legitimation and authority (as well as power). This seems to have become deeply unfashionable. Yeo's book seeks to show how the intellectual confidence of less powerful people became gradually undermined by professional men and women and by the state taking over fields like education where the production of knowledge took place. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see the vast expansion of *academic* institutions and state agencies with new professionals 'policing the gateways' and marginalising older collective styles of producing knowledge in learned societies and social movements. She points out in the concluding sections of the book that the foundation of our own material positions as professional academics rests on *excluding* rather than including others in the active pursuit of our intellectual work (p.307).

All of this is a long way from the notion of 'knowledge from below' caught on the back foot encountered earlier in this paper. There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between George Davie's and Eileen Yeo's respective interventions. Both are concerned with the place and development of an area of intellectual endeavour and both concern the nineteenth century. One takes place in a claustrophobic world of talking heads and makes assertions about communication between the vulgar and the learned and 'democratic intellect'; the other deals with class, gender as well as social groups, historical struggle and 'democratic epistemology'. Yeo highlights the role of adult learning in liberating knowledge, whilst Davie ignores independent sources of learning and knowledge outside the universities. There is no point at which they meet. Davie's is a peculiarly disembodied kind of endeavour more akin to philosophical analysis than historical inquiry, and more to do with what should be than what is.

PHILOSOPHICAL TRUTH?

Some commentators, including the distinguished American historian of higher education, Sheldon Rothblatt, forgive Davie, the philosopher, for getting some *historical* facts wrong in striving for the truth of some *argument* (Rothblatt,1992). This may account for why Beveridge and Turnbull deem *empirical* argument against Davie ‘irrelevant’: far more important for them is its ‘philosophical’ truth (Beveridge and Turnbull 1997). Lindsay Paterson sums up a fairly widespread view that Davie is rather better at philosophy than history, and that he articulates successfully what university education *ought* to be like, even if this is not achieved in reality (Paterson 2003). In Paterson’s view Davie was wrong empirically about *access* but was more interesting on matters of the *curriculum*. I shall take up this point and explore this claim more fully in a separate article; this will pursue the notion of an alternative ‘democratic epistemology’ which was flagged in the preceding paragraph and which involves deriving a curriculum ‘from below’, in social movement activity and popular education. My purpose in this paper has been to begin the process of re-framing which is, I believe, overdue.

Davie’s sort of ‘philosophical’ history may appeal to those interested in tracing the development of their *disciplines*. Davie, indeed, tells us that he began writing **The Democratic Intellect** in the course of preparing a doctoral thesis on ‘the Scottish school of common sense philosophy’ (Davie 1961, foreword). It is a type of enquiry which can produce some peculiar blindspots. Thus the total absence of women is simply not noticed; and in all the books spawned since on the democratic intellect, women do not sully any of their pages. In fact, the terms of much of Davie’s script had already been set in the nineteenth century by the philosopher, Dugald Stewart, described by Yeo as the ‘self-appointed custodian of the Scottish Enlightenment tradition’ (Yeo 1996). It has been argued that Davie can be seen as the Dugald Stewart of our day in that he ‘has assumed Stewart’s mantle as the public guardian and expositor of Scotland’s national philosophical tradition’ (Wood 2000, p.24).

In my view, George Elder Davie, by taking on Stewart’s mantle (and being taken up by others who have used his ‘imaginary’ of the Democratic Intellect) has perpetuated a way of thinking, set the terms of an educational debate, and framed an area of discussion in a way which has been difficult to escape. To repeat, as Lakoff maintains, ‘ If you have been framed, the only response is to re-frame’ (Lakoff 2003, p.32).

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Re- Framing the Democratic Intellect

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