Economy and Society Volume 33 Number 4 November 2004: 430–447

On mediators: intellectuals and the ideas trade in the knowledge society

Thomas Osborne

Abstract

This paper aims to provide some broad outlines of a model of intellectual practice that is arguably gaining increasing salience today: the model of the intellectual as *mediator*. The paper begins by drawing briefly upon some empirical data from a recent study in order to suggest that, although institutions such as universities and think tanks do seem to be embracing practices of intellectual production that are at some remove from 'traditional' models of knowledge, the shift is not absolute – not least because the idea of the 'traditional' intellectual as a basic norm is itself no doubt somewhat problematic. In seeking to address precisely this question as to how to think about norms of intellectual practice, the main body of the paper is more theoretical in its orientation. It seeks to adapt and extend some features of the work of Michel Foucault and Zygmunt Bauman in attempting to theorize a fourfold typology of intellectual style on the basis of the concepts of *legislation*, *expertise*, *interpretation* and finally *mediation* itself. Lastly, the paper considers the status of the intellectual as mediator in today's 'knowledge society', considering whether the so-called 'end of ideology' has led to the demise of the intellectual who generates 'big ideas'.

Keywords: intellectuals; think tanks; the university; knowledge society.

Have we entered a new era in what the philosopher A. N. Whitehead (1950 [1932]) termed the 'organisation of knowledge'? Such a transformation would entail more than just a shift from one educational ideology to another but a shift in our very conceptions as to what knowledge is and as to what knowledge is for. Researchers such as Michael Gibbons and his colleagues believe that

Thomas Osborne, Department of Sociology, University of Bristol, 12 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UQ, UK. E-mail: thomas.osborne@bristol.ac.uk

Copyright © 2004 Taylor & Francis Ltd
ISSN 0308-5147 print/1469-5766 online
DOI: 10.1080/0308514042000285224

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

such a transformation has indeed occurred. They have outlined a shift from what they call Mode 1 to Mode 2 forms of knowledge production (Gibbons *et al*. 1994). The traditional kind of knowledge characteristic of Mode 1 is linear and typically academic in orientation, whereas Mode 2 is non-linear and reflexive. Gibbons *et al*. summarize the differences in this way:

> [I]n Mode 1 problems are set and solved in a context governed by the, largely academic, interests of a specific community. By contrast, Mode 2 knowledge is transdisciplinary. Mode 1 is characterised by homogeneity, Mode 2 by heterogeneity. Organisationally, Mode 1 is hierarchical and tends to preserve its form, while Mode 2 is more heterarchical and transient. Each employs a different type of quality control. In comparison with Mode 1, Mode 2 is more socially accountable and reflexive. It includes a wider, more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners, collaborating on a problem defined in a specific and localised context.
>
> (Gibbons *et al*. 1994: 3)

This paper is intended, in part, as a contribution to an assessment as to whether there has been such a transformation. The argument overall will be somewhat deflationary; that is to say, the paper takes a sceptical view as to whether we are indeed witnessing an entirely novel 'organisation of knowledge'. Rather, in developing a heuristic typology of different types of intellectual function, the paper will argue only that there is an increasing salience of a certain kind of intellectual attitude; that of what will be called the *mediator*. The argument is not that everyone is now a mediator – we are not, for instance, in the 'mediator society' or anything of that sort – but that there is an increasing 'availability' for intellectuals and knowledge workers to situate themselves in such terms.

Much of the argument of this paper is situated at a discursive, indeed typological, level. There is a reason for this. In attempting to isolate the specificity of the mediation model of intellectual practice a comparative approach is economical and useful, not least for the clarity it provides for those who would contest the argument. But, as an initial way of sketching, in an empirical fashion, something of the deflationary approach that is adopted here with regard to the distinction between mode 1 and mode 2 forms of knowledge, we begin by addressing a specific case – the relations between university culture and think tank culture specifically at the London School of Economics and at the think tank Demos.[1] This discussion will also serve to introduce the notion of the intellectual as mediator.

Think tanks and universities

At least as compared to the received (very much mode 1) image of the – traditional – university, the think tank might be regarded as being nicely

emblematic of Gibbons's Mode 2 knowledge. The think tank typically works closer to the cutting edges of policy than is the case with most academic research in universities.[2] Typically the self-described role of think tanks is to develop innovative ideas rather than to produce scholarly works for ivory towers. But before we are tempted to argue that universities have become like think tanks, we need to note that the direction of the relationship could be regarded in some ways as working the other way around. In fact, institutions such as think tanks and political parties are largely dependent upon the university system to do their research for them. As one prominent figure from the founding years at Demos observes:

> There was an argument in the middle nineties (by people like Douglas Hague) that think tanks. . .were going to replace universities. . . .These new fleet-of-foot organisations would replace them. It was a bit of a threadbare argument, even at the time. For a start, these places are highly parasitic on universities for people; they don't train; and a lot of external writers are academics. So it's somewhere between parasitism and symbiosis.

Think tanks, then, clearly rely upon academic research to operate and certainly an institution such as Demos would be unthinkable without the academics who, for the most part, write its pamphlets. On the other hand, although think tanks rely upon the academic sector, there are indeed *limited* senses in which universities themselves can be said to be becoming increasingly like think tanks.

At LSE – just as at other academic institutions – there has been a proliferation of research centres that seem to occupy a half-way house between the university proper and think tanks themselves; research institutes such as the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), the Greater London Group, Centre for Economic Performance (CEP), all of which seek to work closely with government, influencing policy wherever possible. The activities of such centres can seem to parallel those typical of some think tanks. But in so far as universities are becoming like think tanks to any extent this is largely because others are coming to *them* in order to have them act out such a role. Research centres at institutions like LSE are increasingly enrolled as think-tank-like institutions by political parties, research councils, the Government, businesses and by think tanks themselves. So rather than being a colonization of the university by think tank principles it is more akin to a two-way process whereby the university becomes, so to speak, more 'worldly' and the world becomes more like a university.[3]

One factor, however, that is manifestly of increasing importance in both think tanks and universities is the media. In both universities and think tanks the aim of research is not just to influence policy directly, but to affect the *context* of policy. The media are crucial in this. LSE runs a media index to monitor the extent to which its 'LSE experts' are gaining media exposure. Moreover, LSE accepts that it is a *brand* which needs to be marketed. As one senior academic at LSE comments:

> You can't deny the fact that there's a brand, and you might not be able to market it as directly as a business might, but you're certainly in that kind of ball park somewhere. . . .LSE's in this book *Super Brands*, the only university in the book!

This is significant because, although LSE has always been atypical of universities in its concentration on the social sciences and in its social policy orientation, the previous LSE incarnation of the public policy expert was arguably a rather different animal from today's 'LSE experts'. The distinction is described by one long-standing academic at LSE:

> I remember when I first came here it was very Fabian. It was key professors who were gurus who were linked to key politicians, almost exclusively in the Labour Party. They went in as senior advisors; instead of the young characters that Blair has around him, these were international figures. For example in the 1960s Brian Abel-Smith was Crossman's advisor – largely responsible, working with civil servants, for producing State Earnings Related Pensions, and various other things. Then he worked for Barbara Castle. Four days a week during the period of government. And otherwise they were producing Fabian pamphlets and serving on Labour Party committees. Now that elite, classically Fabian approach has given way to a much more diverse approach in which you are trying to affect the climate of debate more generally, rather than just winkle ideas in at the top. . . .So it's a real change of strategy.

This 'Fabian' version could be described as being an *advisory* model of specialist expertise in contrast to a *networked* one. This opposition is not absolute, of course.[4] In any case, the advisory intellectual – those such as Abel-Smith himself, for instance – also needs to be well networked. The difference is rather one of emphasis. Abel-Smith, or at least the Abel-Smith that is projected in our quotation, was something like a policy guru feeding ideas in from the top down. The network model emphasizes, rather, the extent to which ideas are seeded idea by idea from, so to speak, the bottom up, that is, not 'above' the networks through which they are then seeded but immanent to them in a process that is held typically to be interactive, catalytic and processual. So, instead of being a question of having particular ideas and networking them through the system, people like Abel-Smith rather 'embodied' ideas and were true 'specialists', experts bringing their academic knowledge directly into the services of government on the basis not of this or that idea but of their general – personal – credentials *as* experts.

Again, we should not go in for absolute distinctions here. It is not, of course, that the element of expertise or specialism has disappeared from the university. It is still generally the case, naturally enough, that most university academics are specialists within a particular field – something, incidentally, which is by no means typically the case with those who work in think tanks. But, if in contrast to this there are still experts in the university, nevertheless the self-understanding of such expertise is that it is networked idea by idea rather than through the persona of the specialist guru. Policy gurus, as in the Abel-Smith

model invoked here, no doubt possessed a kind of personal authority that is less inapplicable to today's more 'network'-conscious public policy intellectuals than it may once have been. Instead, such intellectuals have to be not just able to push through a 'network strategy' but, in the words of one interviewee, capable themselves of generating their own networks 'at a rate of knots'.

The distinction between advisory and network functions is clearly relative and exists, if anything, on a continuum.[5] In the case of the think tank culture of an institution such as Demos – always an institution that has emphasized the values of networks in any case – we might invoke a parallel kind of distinction between what might be described as leverage models and brokerage models.[6] The leverage model entails attempting to gain a hearing and construct a sphere of influence for one's ideas. The leverage model can, to take a celebrated example, amount to something approaching pure media theatre. At Demos, Mark Leonard's notion of 'rebranding Britain', for instance, became the paradigmatic case of a successful intervention precisely because it made such a big media impact. But, in a sense, such leverage still seems to owe something to a top-down model of influence. It can also be self-defeating. Demos veterans often complain that publications such as that of Leonard's made at best only a short-term media splash but on the whole failed to deliver any more concrete innovation (Leonard 1997). The comments of one former Demos figure are representative:

> Like in a musical, if you've got a palpable hit as a first-half closer, you can carry a lot of other stuff which might be musically much more interesting. How do you have a palpable hit? Well, to be frank, you say something silly! . . .In terms of solid policy design there was nothing to it. But it sold like hot cakes, it got lots of media coverage. One of the dilemmas of think tankery is that you can either say something sensible, practical and useful and have six civil servants and their dog read it, or you can say something spectacularly silly and have the media cover it.

Partly as a response to the problems of media-oriented – and media-dependent – leverage (above all, its short-termism), Demos has become increasingly concerned in recent years to develop something more like a 'brokerage' rather than a leverage model of influence. In brokerage as opposed to leverage models the focus is not so much on media-friendly sound bites such as that of rebranding Britain but on something like 'vehicular' ideas; that is, with typically small-scale innovations, brokered between parties, designed to enhance particular kinds of outcome. Brokerage models of influence are worked in collaboration with a variety of constituencies in civil society; with unions, charities, local education authorities. What is at issue here is a model whereby a think tank such as Demos contracts out its specialist expertise, brokering alignments of interest and concern among differing constituencies. Demos has carried out such brokerage services with institutions as varied as the Dutch government and the National College for School Leadership. What is at stake here is not really autonomous 'research' or, conversely, 'flashy' sloganeering, but a situated – one might say, immanent – process of

consultation with divergent interests in order to strike up new ideas, as it were, from the ground up, and symbiotically. In this vein, ideas do not have a specific 'ownership'; they are the emergent product of negotiations with current actualities rather than being derived from principles that are external to the work of brokerage itself. In other words, the nature of the institution itself has changed its orientation from being one based in practical research to something more like a consultancy, taking on the colours of its clients as it works for and with them.[7]

It could be argued that the network emphasis and the model of brokerage are just examples of a more widely perceivable 'turn' in the organization of knowledge in Britain today. Increasingly, it seems, intellectuals and knowledge workers find themselves being called upon to be something like 'mediators', bringing ideas quickly and decisively into public focus, brokering their ideas in the context of different spheres of influence. The mediator is not simply a 'media' intellectual, but also someone for whom ideas are more like instruments than principles; a motivator of syntheses that 'work', and have purchase, rather than ideals that dimly reverberate; an expert as much in the contexts and fields in which ideas operate as in the intellectual content of ideas themselves.

Why insist on this category of the mediator? Certainly not everyone working in the field of knowledge today is *exclusively* a mediator. Moreover, the mediation 'effect' has very different manifestations depending on the context and the institution at stake, as indeed we have already seen from our brief examples from LSE and Demos, institutions which, in any case, have very particular characteristics. If there is something important to this category of 'mediator', signalling more than just a temporary turn in the manner and presentation of ideas, we need to differentiate it from alternative incarnations and conceptions of the intellectual role. This entails taking a rather different perspective from the one adopted hitherto in this paper. We turn to a more formal approach, entailing a kind of comparative sociology of intellectual functions.

Sociologists and intellectuals

It is curious that, given today's rubric of 'the knowledge society', there seems to be a relative paucity of models on offer today from the sociology of intellectuals to describe such a transformation as that towards the model of mediation (see Boggs (2000) for a recent overview). Perhaps this is because the sociology of intellectuals seems fixated not so much by knowledge workers generally but by the 'high intelligentsia', the world of the so-called 'public intellectual', the oracular figure of 'great speech' (Small 2002). As Régis Debray pointed out, the problem with this perspective is that it tends to ignore the array of intellectual workers, researchers and others who are not plausibly part of the high intelligentsia; those, for instance, who are members of the

'intellectual professions' (doctors, lawyers, engineers) or the 'professions of the intellect' (the more pedestrian ranks of scientists, academics, not to mention the myriad research and knowledge workers of various kinds in industry and business) (Debray 1981; cf. Gouldner 1979).

The university should not be the exclusive focus for any sociology of knowledge production, at least not in the modern so-called knowledge society. Nowadays, after all, many people work within fields of knowledge that are at some remove from academic life, whether it is in the research laboratories of major companies, in think tanks, in independent research organizations, in government or in the media. These are the workers described by Nico Stehr according to the typology of experts, counsellors and advisors, for whom knowledge is an 'immediately productive force' (Stehr 1994: 185). These are the technicians and 'knowledge-based workers' in industry and government for whom knowledge is not just a *means* of work but an *end* of work, the 'professional and related service' sectors that, according to Stehr, make up between 20 and 25 per cent of the workforce in most Western industrialized countries; and these are the varied ranks of media and 'new media' workers spawned by the 'informational revolution' of recent decades, as well as all those engaged in the 'creative' activities associated with marketing, consultancy and modern business (Axford and Huggins 2001; Castells 1996; Thrift 2002).

Such knowledge workers are hardly universal intellectuals and are generally not even associated with university life, but nor are they the narrow, strategic intellectuals associated with, for instance, Foucault's model of the 'specific intellectual'. In fact, the notion of mediating intellectuals is designed not least to capture the fact that, like the universal intellectuals, the role of such knowledge workers is *creative* in the sense of being about the production of ideas (as opposed to narrow expertise). Yet these ideas are themselves local, strategic, sagittal and fleeting. In today's highly mediated societies there is a huge demand for ideas; ideas which are mobile and 'vehicular' rather than oracular. Perhaps this has to do with something like the 'democratization' of ideas-work; ideas no longer being the property of the few, such that it becomes almost everyone's responsibility to create ideas. Ideas-work, in other words, is no longer confined to an elite of great intellectuals, if it ever was. Indeed, now it can seem – especially if we listen to futurologists and business gurus – that more or less everyone not engaged in desultory manual work is engaged in the business of creating ideas in some manner or other (Howkins 2001; Osborne 2003).

Legislators, experts, interpreters, mediators

How is this variegated stratum of ideas-work to be addressed by the sociology of intellectuals? Much of the work in this tradition has been focused on the assumption that intellectual work is a particular kind of social 'role'.

Although there are agreed merits to such an approach, there are difficulties with assimilating individuals to roles in this way. After all, not all of those classifiable as intellectuals will comfortably fill any single role in the typology.

Not everyone, for instance, is – to adopt the dichotomy given currency by Zygmunt Bauman (1987) – either an 'interpreter' or a 'legislator'. Bauman's argument, which was situated, necessarily, in descriptive rather than explanatory or causal terms, was that the 'modern' model of the intellectual as legislative overseer of reason and rationalization had given way to the – humbler – 'postmodern' model of the intellectual as interpreter of otherwise divergent cultural traditions and language games. Bauman took care to insist in the opening pages of his book that the dichotomy between legislators and interpreters was not meant to be an empirical framework so much as an abstract diagram of intellectual potentialities. This seems right. Instead of assuming that all of those engaged in knowledge work inhabit one or the other as a role, we should say that legislation and interpretation are rather *epistemic forms* that are drawn upon by different individuals or even by the same individual at different times and in different contexts to legitimate or even just make sense of particular kinds of intellectual conduct.

Such forms of epistemic conduct entail certain ways of framing (intellectual) subjectivity in relation to particular kinds of problematization of the world and the role of things called ideas or knowledges in that world. They are not unrelated, in that sense, to the 'ethical technologies' described by Foucault and others. Indeed, we could say that each form embodies a composite of four dimensions: issues of *substance*, issues of *rationale*, issues of *stylization* and issues of *strategy* (cf. for this kind of quasi-Aristotelian schema, Foucault (1986: 26–8), drawing no doubt upon Heidegger (1977 [1954]: 6–12)). So we have:

1. The 'substance': a sense of the *what* of intellectual work; that is, a conception of intellectual work as the production of scientific truths or of interpretations of the world or of big ideas or whatever.
2. The 'rationale': a sense of the *why* of the intellectual work as a particular kind of obligation; for instance, the pursuit of scientific truth as the only kind of truth, the pursuit of ideas in order to innovate, and so on.
3. The ethos or 'stylization': a sense of the *how* of the intellectual work, that is, the particular kind of ethos that the form will embody, the intellectual as a 'man of truth', as a revolutionary activist and so on.
4. 'Strategy': a sense of the desired impacts of the intellectual work; the ways in which the intellectual work is supposed to impact upon the outside world, on the present and on the future; science as the domination of nature, critical intellectual work as the pursuit of enlightenment, and so on.

We might, then, envisage a sort of elaboration of Bauman's material by way of Foucault's thinking about the historicity of ethics. Let us look at legislators and interpreters in this context.

Legislators

Legislation 'consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding' (Bauman 1987: 4). For Bauman what the legislator does is to overcode the diversity of opinions with the rationale of intellectual ordering as part of a more general aspiration to cultural and political order. For Bauman, the epitome of the legislator is embodied in the French *philosophes*. '*Les philosophes* spoke to the power holders; what they spoke to them about, were "the people". The act of speaking meant the dissemination of rational ideas. The subject-matter of that speech was the methodology of rationalizing the reproduction of social order' (Bauman 1987: 75).

In our terminology derived from Foucault, then, perhaps we could say that the *substance* with which the legislator works consists not so much of knowledge but of politico-cultural 'programmes' designed to synthesize various aspects of the empirical world into a foreseeable and manipulable future. The *rationale* for producing such programmes is to bring about intellectual and thus cultural order. In terms of the *stylization* of intellectual self-recognition, the legislator is one who cultivates a rational discipline, since his – and rather less likely *her* – function is to 'master' reality through the application of severe abstractions. Hence, no doubt, Bentham would qualify as the quintessential legislator on Bauman's account (Bauman 1987: 45–6). Finally, the *strategy* behind legislation seems to be to bring about, on the basis of cultural order, a wider social and political order.

Interpreters

Bauman argues that the activity of the interpreter 'consists of translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition' (1987: 5). In fact, perhaps somewhat contrary to Bauman's emphasis here, we should not oppose absolutely the idea of the interpreter to that of the legislator. Some interpreters – for instance, those in the legal sphere – can take on legislative functions by virtue of the fact that they are interpreters (one thinks of intellectuals such as Carl Schmitt in this connection). But, in any case, thinking in ideal-typical rather than empirically realist terms, we might want to say that the *substance* of the interpreter's activities is paradigmatically the

text, not just in the sense of the literary text but in the sense in which all forms of cultural productions – at least within the human sciences – can be regarded as texts available for interpretation (see Bakhtin 1986 for a classic statement of this position). The *rationale* for the work of the interpreter is to translate between different speech communities or cultural frames, and the *stylization* of intellectual activity consists of the cultivation of 'conversational' disciplines of judgement and discernment. Or, as Bauman puts it:

> the proposed specialism boils down to the art of civilised conversation. This is, naturally, a kind of reaction to the permanent conflict of values for which the intellectuals, thanks to their discursive skills, are best prepared. To talk to people rather than fight them; to understand them rather than dismiss or annihilate them as mutants. . . .Converse or perish.
>
> (Bauman 1987: 143)

Finally, then, the *strategy* behind intellectual work is to bring about understanding – or, being more contemporary, perhaps we should say mutual 'recognition' – amidst the clash of cultures and values (see Ricoeur 1998: 60).

Bauman's analysis was directed to certain quite particular ends. The duality of legislators and interpreters needs to be understood for what it is, a strategic couplet aimed at giving expression to the status of the intellectual specifically in what Bauman sees as the 'postmodern' era. If we extend Bauman's typology here, it is less to criticize his position on intellectuals than to adjust his problematic to our own, specifically in the light of our considerations above concerning the relative status of advisory as against networked intellectuals. Advisory intellectuals are not quite 'legislators' in Bauman's sense, just as the brokerage knowledge-workers associated with Demos can hardly be described straightforwardly as being interpeters. Rather, we need to add two further kinds of category to Bauman's treatment if we are to take account of such stylizations of intellectual work. These we label 'experts' and 'mediators'. As with Bauman's own treatment, our intentions here are descriptive rather than causal or explanatory.

Experts

Since Bauman insists on assimilating the model of legislation to his notion of a rational modernity, it seems likely that included in the category of the legislator would be all those narrower experts and bureaucrats who produced not big programmes in the manner of the *philosophes* or Bentham but who were really under-labourers for other authorities. Yet there is a good case for saying that the activity of specialist expertise is something separable from the grander designs of the intellectual legislator. In the nineteenth century in countries such as Britain there arose forms of expertise – embodied in the work of statisticians, political economists, sanitary experts and others – oriented to the

service of a kind of autonomous knowledge which was to be at once ancillary yet ultimately autonomous from government.[8] These knowledges were autonomous in so far as such experts dealt with elements of the social population that were subject to independent laws and regularities: in the case of statisticians, the laws of large numbers; in the case of political economists, the regularities of the economy; in the case of the sanitary experts, the natural histories of diseases and fevers. Yet such knowledges were also ancillary because knowledge of these regularities and processes was deemed essential for the judicious disposition of government (Foucault 1997; cf. Osborne 1996).

In terms of our epistemic forms, perhaps we can say of the specialist expert that he or she works with various kinds of factual statement from particular factual 'domains' as the *substance* of his or her inquiries; that the *rationale* for intellectual endeavour on the model of expertise is to provide true knowledge that will be both autonomous from contamination by yet useful to the forces of power. In terms of the *stylization* of intellectual work, the expert is a virtuoso of detail first of all and only secondarily an advisor, while the *strategy* that lies behind expertise is the production of something like 'information' – forms of knowledge that will be at the disposal of the wise government of those charged with the exercise of rule. This means that the expert does not legislate but is very often – at the level of strategy at least – an instrument of reform, since the vast array of facts that he gathers come to serve, as if by slow, laborious accrual, in modifying the methods, needs and ends of government itself. Perhaps the epitome of such specialist expertise in Britain would be figures such as the great sanitary experts and reformers, William Farr and John Simon (Buerr 1926; Lambert 1963; Briggs 1985).

Using this typology, we can begin to depict what might be specific to the model of the mediator.

Mediators

This is the intellectual worker as enabler, fixer, catalyst and broker of ideas.[9] Perhaps the salient feature, though, is the association of mediators with movement. The mediator is simply the one who *gets things moving*. This would mean that the sense of 'mediation' does not lie in the fact that the mediator is someone who mediates in a 'spatial' sense, that is, who stands between two (or more) sets of interests, simply as a passive 'intermediary'. It lies, rather, in the fact that for the mediator an idea is seized or appropriated as much as it is created out of nothing (in Deleuze's language, the mediator is a bit like an empiricist – always 'in the middle of things'). Arguably, creation essentially consists of such mediation. It is not creation *ex nihilo*; rather, creativity is emergent, the product of interactions and processes rather than inspiration. Thus for the mediator to invent is already – and perhaps only – to mediate. Furthermore, the sense of 'mediation' is meant here to draw attention to the fact that ideas are of no premium unless they are capable of being

'mediatized' – not just run out in the mass media but in the sense of being performative, capable of arousing attention and making a communicative difference. On this model, ideas mediate in time rather than space; the mediator's ideas are not meant for eternity. They are meant to get us from one place to another, to move things along; they are propellants – modest or immodest – associated with the very buzz of innovation and enterprise.

The mediator is interested above all in *ideas*; not the 'big ideas' of the epoch of 'grand narratives' but ideas which are going to make a difference, and especially ideas which are 'vehicular' rather than 'oracular'. Ideas, in this sense, are little points of mediation between one moment and another. Perhaps the best way to think of an idea on this model is to assimilate it to Gregory Bateson's well-known definition of information: 'any difference which makes a difference in some later event' (Bateson 1972: 381). Hence the relevance of the notion of an 'informational' idea in this context (see Arnoldi forthcoming; Lash 2002).

If the *substance* of the mediator's aims are to produce ideas or at least to aid in the fomentation of certain kinds of – vehicular, practical, usable, marketable – ideas, the *rationale* of mediation is that of innovation itself or at least to bring about associations with the culture of innovation; to bring about something new by means of this juxtaposition of people and ideas. Contiguous with this rationale, the form of *stylization* embodied by mediation would be something like an aesthetic attitude towards ideas in the sense of a will to create something new in the realm of ideas, a sense of seeing ideas as themselves aesthetic – discrete, contingent, particular – kinds of object and to juxtapose different ideas and different persons together. The *strategy*, finally, would be to bring about a constantly mobile, creative culture where ideas matter but not dogmatically or 'ideologically' so, to bring about, in short, a spirit of enterprise in the realm of ideas.

Against epochalism

It should be reiterated that the aim of this typology is not particularly to correct Bauman's emphases, but rather to provide a basis for isolating the idea of the mediator. This means that it is more than likely that other, perhaps wider, typologies could be produced. One advantage of this model, however, is that it is not historically expressive of particular epochs. It is not that each type of intellectual style necessarily fits some or other era. Bauman's categories could themselves be criticized as seeming to be perhaps rather 'epochalist' in this sense. Bauman's example of legislation could be said to have an epochal 'essence' with the *philosophes* and the Enlightenment thinkers, for instance, although Bauman gives this conventional reference-point a twist in claiming that, far from being the apotheosis of a will to freedom, the true aim of Enlightenment thought was control over popular culture (Bauman 1987).

But surely it is better to say that each epoch, rather, has constellations of different intellectual forms. We might even envisage a sort of epistemic 'parlour game' on this basis. During the Scientific Revolution, for instance, we could say that Robert Boyle fits the model of an intellectual expert (though cf. Shapin 1996: 103). Likewise, we could say that Francis Bacon or Thomas Hobbes were legislative intellectuals (see Gaukroger 2001). We could say that Thomas Browne was an interpretative intellectual (above all in *Religio Medici*) and that Robert Hooke was even something like a mediator intellectual (see Hunter and Schaffer, 1989).

Equally, in the post-Enlightenment context, one can find instances easily enough of each type of intellectual model. We could say that, whereas Bentham was a legislative intellectual, John Simon, the great sanitary administrator, was an expert, and historians such as T. B. Macaulay were interpretative intellectuals. And in the nineteenth century Edwin Chadwick was surely a very good example of something like a mediator intellectual (Osborne 1996).

The point is simply to stress that the model of the intellectual as mediator has a credibility only as long as we do not fall into the error of outright 'epochalism'. Nor must we assume that typologies of intellectuals are straightforwardly exemplified in individual persons, theories or ideas. Many intellectuals would no doubt derive their styles of intellectual engagement from a mixture of forms; so, to take only one instance, Leibniz could quite plausibly be described as both a mediator and a legislator. In this sense, the typology represents a *repertoire* of epistemic forms out of which intellectual resources are generated. These forms are like 'sources' in Charles Taylor's terminology, not in a causal sense but as sources that are beyond the self, that 'one does not master' (see Ricoeur 1988: 150). On the other hand, this said, we can still venture to suggest that the figure of the mediator is becoming more prevalent – or at least more *visible* or, any case, discursively hegemonic – and even that there is an elective affinity between the mediation model and various transformations in our political rationalities today.

Perhaps we could say that such a model suits a political culture in which deliberation and participation are at least putatively at a premium. In broadly neo-liberal political cultures, knowledge tends to be conceived in terms of being target-specific, action-sensitive and tied into the very objectives of politics (Osborne 1997: 184–5). As such, the cultures of knowledge that have been cultivated by scholars in universities may come to seem increasingly outdated (Gibbons *et al*. 1994: 151–2). Universities and academic cultures tend to be organized in fairly static confines of disciplinary closure; as Bourdieu observes, academic culture not uncharacteristically tends to be resistant towards 'innovation and to intellectual creativity', tending to a propensity to 'an aversion to ideas and to a free and critical spirit' (Bourdieu 1988: 95). More traditionally minded academics, at least, often tend to favour narrow or at least carefully focused expertise as an intellectual ethos; and the preference is for research that is, if not exactly irrelevant, then not sullied too much by the contamination of the political world. In Bourdieu's (1988)

opinion, the very anchorage of the university is in fact the literary field. Perhaps we could say, rather, that the anchorage of the modern university is moving swiftly towards not any particular intellectual *discipline* but towards a post-disciplinary – multi-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary – model derived ultimately from specific ways of understanding the logic of business (Readings 1996; Smith and Webster 1997; Delanty 2001).

Back to big ideas?

It is especially the much-trumpeted demise of grand ideologies that has opened up a space for the renewed salience of discrete, vehicular kinds of *idea* on which the mediator, certainly, could be said to thrive (see, most famously, Bell 1973; also Lyotard 1984). No doubt there is a demand today for alternatives to the models of grand, oracular, 'ideological' thinking, but also to the ivory-tower mentalities of scholarly interpretative inquiry and to the disinterested, positivistic model of the neutral, scholarly expert. The figure of the mediator appears typically at the point of rejection of these three models, even if it bears elements of each of them. If the legislator has ideas these are universal not discrete; if the expert has ideas these are tied rigorously to the state of things (the specialist's ideas mirror the world as it is); if the interpreter has ideas, then these are the ideas of others; but the mediator's very ontology of intellectual production is to facilitate an idea. Finally, the legislator can legislate on his own; the expert needs a field; the interpreter needs a study full of texts; but the mediator needs others and produces in relation to others – hence mediation is integrally public, collective and interactive.

If the signs of the times favour the mediation model, does this really herald the eclipse of grand ideas? It may be that rather than vanishing altogether the big ideas are themselves akin to devices of mediation. Instead of being 'legislators', so-called public intellectuals increasingly find themselves in the role of mediators. This can be seen if we look at the kind of concepts they espouse. Perhaps such ideas form part of a 'new vulgate', not to be confused with the old big concepts to do with Liberty, Modernization, Capitalism, Revolution, Socialism, etc. (Bourdieu 2000: 1). What is at stake is a shift from the predictive and normative frameworks of the legislator to the more provisional and *diagnostic* concepts of the mediator.

The legislative frame designates movements: socialism, liberalism, modernization. These are typically predictive; or, at least, legislative concepts serve to close the space between prediction and desire. The notion of socialism in Marx, for example, ties the diagnosis of a certain fate to the desire to struggle towards that fate itself. Marxism both diagnoses and legislates for socialism. Mediating concepts seek less to legislate than simply to differentiate, diagnose or mark out the space of this or that hope or predicament. However minimally legislative it is as a concept, the Third Way is more a means of marking out a space in which people can argue, a space of diagnosis (*inter alia* Giddens 2000,

2001; Callinicos 2001). There is a Third Way, it appears, because we need one; and we need one because there is one. There is not much of a 'movement' for a Third Way. Rather, the Third Way is a diagnosis, a marker, a predicament.

The same could be said for the concept of globalization, so ably promoted by Anthony Giddens when at LSE. As another formerly senior figure from LSE comments of the fortunes of that concept there:

> People are pro or con, but it is a paradigm which does either illuminate the world or if you think it doesn't, in either case it has inspired real intellectual debate. It is probably one of the few ideas that would unify most of the school, whether you're pro or con. Our economists tend to be against it, but it is a convenient platform for them to be able to look at international trade flows and the movement of capitalism, to try and disprove the soft sociologists who say everything's changed. It affects our anthropologists, our political scientists, our international relations, our sociologists, our economists, Development Studies Institute, and even little bits in management, particularly the Department of Industrial Relations.

Part of this diagnostic logic is to say where the future lies, as this future and no other; not as utopia, but as the new, the fresh, the interestingly better or at any rate the inevitable – the 'run-away world', the world 'beyond left or right' – and if not already fully formed then not too far off because already seeded in the present. As such, it may be that one of the costs of such a model is that such concepts may be short lived. Indeed, as one figure from LSE, both prominent in the institution and in the Third Way debate itself, observes: 'Concepts have careers like people, I think. Terms do, anyway. A concept to me is just a way you lock in all the stuff you're talking about – social changes in the world – to politics.' Of course, this is not just a way of seeing ideas; it is a particular way of seeing politics itself. It is a model that emphasizes the processual aspect of politics. Sometimes the model can seem, even to its own proponents, as being perhaps lacking in a certain academic 'seriousness', yet necessarily so given that the purpose of ideas is not to set the world in stone but to move things along. As a former figure of some prominence at Demos observes of his time at the think tank: 'We learned to brand ideas as sometimes rather bigger than they were. If I'd talked about [research] in the way sociologists in the sociometric tradition do, it would have got nowhere.'

None of this means that we should necessarily be too dismissive of the model of mediation in intellectual life. It does not function as a wholly novel irruption into the intellectual landscape, as might be understood from dichotomous models such as that of the putative transition from mode 1 to mode 2 knowledge. Moreover, the mediation model should not be restricted to the production of knowledge as such, for of course it has a wider remit – the embedding of knowledge in a wider media culture. So the increasing salience of the mediator could be to do not with the advent of the knowledge society as opposed to anything else but just, as one former LSE figure has it, 'something to do with what it's like to live in this media saturated universe'. Ideas have to

be taken up in some media context or other in order to flourish; and, in a sense, in a mediatized world such as our own it would, indeed, be something like 'bad faith' not just to admit this. But this also means that ultimately it may be that the society of mediators just amounts to the media society itself. The media want not the prediction of certainties, or prophecy, but *diagnoses*. Hence, instead of the oracularities of the legislator, we have today the variegated diagnoses of the current state, all, in fact, images of a world which has been 'mediated' in a particular way and which thereby requires the diagnostic expertise of the mediator to diagnose it. Perhaps, then, there is a degree of circularity at stake here. Perhaps such images of 'where we're at' or 'the state we're in' are just the necessary correlates of the fact that all of us have to orientate ourselves in a mediatized society; one which is traversed by mediations and mediators of a multitude of kinds. It is not simply that we are all necessarily mediators now but that the world itself is imaged through various media, and not least by mediator intellectuals, *as* a mediated one.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Jakob Arnoldi, Tom Bentley, Judith Squires, Nigel Thrift, Charlie Turner, Janet Vaux and especially Gregor McLennan for their help with – and contributions to – the argument of this paper.

Notes

1 The empirical research referred to here is extracted from a wider, on-going study, funded by the ESRC (project R000239504) devoted to 'The Dynamics of Transformative Ideas in Contemporary Public Discourse'. This project focuses on public policy intellectuals in two institutions, the London School of Economics and the London think tank *Demos*, with the aim, as part of a kind of 'ethnography of ideas', of elucidating some of the rationalities of knowledge production at work in these institutions. This research has used various methods of investigation; in this paper, the material used is restricted to data from interviews with academics and others in these institutions. These data serve largely illustrative rather than explanatory purposes. It should also be noted that these two institutions were chosen as sites for interrogating the supposed transition to mode 2 knowledge precisely *because* of the fact that in some ways they are rather exceptional (not to say also in some ways very *British*) institutions; thus it was felt that any forces tending towards mode 2 would be observable here in their most pointed rather than most diluted dimensions. In other words, there should be no implication that these are somehow *representative* institutions. Obviously, there are also limitations attendant upon such a selective approach. For further discussion of issues arising from this project see Arnoldi (forthcoming) and Squires (forthcoming).

2 Think tanks are not of course a new phenomenon. In Britain, the history of think tanks begins in the 1930s with the foundation of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research. This history went through something of an anti-collectivist phase in the 1950s with the emergence of organizations such as the Institute of Economic

Affairs, a trend which was consolidated in the 1970s with the foundation of the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute. A further phase began in the 1980s and 1990s with the foundation of institutions such as the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Social Market Foundation and – in a rather different vein – Demos (Denham and Garnett 1998; Stone *et al*. 1998).

3 As one interviewee from LSE notes: 'I, and I can speak for one of my closest colleagues, spend a great deal of time at the usual round of conferences, seminars, one-to-one meetings. Oddly enough, the academic means of discourse, which has always involved conferences and interviews. . .is what the rest of the world has been developing into.'

4 It should also be emphasized that the fact that what is at stake here is a retrospective judgement from the point of view – presumably – of the network model possibly makes the distinction more stark than it might otherwise be. What is being documented here is not so much a 'real' distinction, then, as a latter-day construction, and whether or not someone such as Brian Abel-Smith really can be said to have fitted this description would be a matter for a different sort of empirical investigation.

5 It should be emphasized also that the distinction is heuristic and indicative rather than explanatory. More reference should in this context obviously be made to the literature on networks more generally. See especially Thompson (2003).

6 This distinction derives from an interview with Tom Bentley, director of Demos, that took place in January 2002.

7 The details in this paragraph derive from interview data from Demos; see also Arnoldi (forthcoming).

8 Referring back to our previous discussion, it could be said of course that intellectuals such as Abel-Smith could be situated nicely in this tradition of expertise.

9 The category of the mediator derives ultimately from Deleuze (1995). It should be said, however, that the conceptions differ at least in so far as for Deleuze the mediator – or intercessor – is a creative catalyst of ideas, whereas in the present paper the notion is being used in a rather broader, more value-neutral sense.

References

Arnoldi, J. (forthcoming) 'Informational ideas'.

Axford, B. and **Huggins, R.** (1991) *New Media and Politics*, London: Sage.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986) 'The problem of the text in linguistics, philology and the human sciences', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bateson, G. (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, London: Paladin.

Bauman, Z. (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals*, Cambridge: Polity.

Bell, D. (1973) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York: Basic Books.

Boggs, C. (2000) 'The intellectuals', in G. Browning, A. Halcli and F. Webster (eds) *Understanding Contemporary Society*, London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*, trans. P. Collier, Cambridge: Polity.

—— (2000) 'La nouvelle vulgate planetaire', *Le Monde Diplomatique* May: 1–7.

Briggs, A. (1985) 'Cholera and society in the nineteenth century', in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, Brighton: Harvester Press.

Buerr, M. (1926) *Health, Wealth and Population in the Early Industrial Revolution*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Callinicos, A. (2001) *Against the Third Way*, Cambridge: Polity.

Castells, M. (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Debray, R. (1981) *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France*, London: Verso.

Delanty, G. (2001) *Challenging Knowledge: The University in the Knowledge Society*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
Deleuze, G. (1995) *Negotiations*, New York: Columbia University Press.
Denham, A. and **Garnett, M.** (1998) *British Think Tanks and the Climate of Opinion*, London: UCL.
Foucault, M. (1986) *The Use of Pleasure*, Harmondsworth: Viking.
—— (1997) 'The birth of biopolitics', in *Ethics: Essential Works*, Vol. 1, ed. P. Rabinow, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Gaukroger, S. (2001) *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gibbons, M., **Limoges, C.**, **Nowotny, H.**, **Schwatzerman, S.**, **Scott, P.** and **Trow, M.** (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge*, London: Sage.
Giddens, A. (2000) *The Third Way and its Critics*, Cambridge: Polity.
—— (ed.) (2001 *The Global Third Way Debate*, Cambridge: Polity.
Gouldner, A. (1979) *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, London: Macmillan.
Heidegger, M. (1977 [1954]) 'The question concerning technology', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row.
Howkins, J. (2001) *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Hunter, M. and **Schaffer, S.** (eds) 1989 *Robert Hooke*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press.
Lambert, R. (1963) *Sir John Simon 1816–1904 and English Social Administration*, London: MacGibbon & Kee.
Lash, S. (2002) *Critique of Information*, London: Sage.
Leonard, M. (1997) *Britain TM: Renewing Our Identity*, London: Demos.
Lyotard, J-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Osborne, T. (1996) 'Security and vitality', in A. Barry, T. Osborne and N. Rose (eds) *Foucault and Political Reason*, London: UCL Press
—— (1997) 'Of health and statecraft', in A. Petersen and R. Bunton (eds) *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, London: Routledge.
—— (2003) 'Against creativity: a philistine rant', *Economy and Society* 32(4).
Readings, B. (1996) *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Ricoeur, P. (1998) *Critique and Conviction*, Cambridge: Polity.
Shapin, S. (1996) *The Scientific Revolution*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Small, H. (2002) *The Public Intellectual*, Oxford: Blackwell.
Smith, A. and **Webster, F.** (eds) (1997) *The Postmodern University?* Buckingham: Open University Press.
Squires, J. (2003) Paper presented at The European Consortium of Political Research, Edinburgh, April 2003.
Stehr, N. (1994) *Knowledge Societies*, London: Sage.
Stone, D., **Denham, A.** and **Garnett, M.** (eds) (1998) *Think Tanks across Nations*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Thompson, G. (2003) *Between Hierarchies and Markets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Thrift, N. (2002) '"Think and act like revolutionaries" episodes from the global triumph of management discourse', *Critical Quarterly* 44: 19–26.
Whitehead, A. N. (1950 [1932]) *The Aims of Education*, London: Lowe & Brydone.

Thomas Osborne is Reader in Social Theory at the University of Bristol and author of *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth* (London: UCL Press, 1998). Among other topics, he is currently working on issues to do with the aesthetics of suicide.