Charles R. Hale, Ed. 2008. *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, Berkeley, CA: GAIA Books, Global, Area, and International Archive, University of California Press. 390 pages.

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In 1990, in an attempt to shake up the academic establishment, Ernest Boyer, then President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, published *Scholarship Reconsidered* as a way of addressing the need to improve undergraduate education in the United States. Part of what he was attempting in his study, particularly in broadening notions of scholarship to include the scholarship of teaching, was to give greater status, within the existing hierarchies of the academy, to the value of teaching by allowing the study of teaching to become valued as scholarship. While the scholarship of teaching and learning (as it is now called) is commonplace on colleges and universities today, the impact of Boyer's work on changing the fundamental cultures of the academy has not been profound (Lazerson, Wagener, & Shumanis, 2000). Broadening notions of scholarship did not go to the core of higher education – the generation of knowledge – and it has not catalyzed institutional transformation.

Boyer was also attempting to expand notions of scholarship in order to raise the issue of the purpose of higher education and the importance of what he called its "civic mandate" (1990, p. 16) . Others, through efforts aimed at reconsidering pedagogy, looked to new instructional methods and design that would teach more effectively to a diversity of learners and embed a fundamental civic dimension into learning outcomes. For many, like myself, this innovation in pedagogy emerged in the 1990s in the work around service-learning. Much like the point above regarding scholarship, while there has been an remarkable proliferation of service-learning practice – and learner-centered, liberatory, engaged practices - across the country and the globe,

the impact on the core structures, policies, and cultures of colleges and universities has not been profound (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). Introducing innovative forms of teaching and learning does not fundamentally go to the core of the academy – the generation of knowledge – and it has not catalyzed institutional transformation.

That is why this book is critically important. It is not about reconsidering scholarship by opening up possibilities of what is considered scholarly work; nor is it about pedagogy reconsidered, extolling and interrogating innovative instructional methods. Instead, it is fundamentally about epistemology reconsidered. As such it offers a logic that leads straight to the core of the dominant systems of the academy and challenges them directly. The entire book – a wonderfully rich collection of thirteen essays – echoes the point Donald Schön made in the mid-1990s in response to Boyer – that the new forms of scholarship in fact required new forms of epistemology (Schön, 1995) . And new forms of epistemology would fundamentally challenge the existing systems of recognizing, legitimizing, and rewarding knowledge production, leading to a prolonged and difficult "epistemological battle" (Schön , p. 32) that would have deep and pervasive implications for higher education; across the curriculum, through teaching and learning practices, in research and scholarship, and determine the ultimate relevance of the university to the wider society. This book brilliantly surfaces those implications and bolsters the challenge to change higher education. It is an artifact of Schön's "epistemological battle" and tells us a great deal about what the college or university of the future could be. This book is as much about the contours of the "epistemological battle" and its implications for higher education and democracy as it is about "activist scholarship."

This collection of essays is the outcome of a project of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), an independent nonprofit organization devoted to the advancement of social science research and scholarship. The project was funded as part of the MacArthur Program on Global Security and Cooperation, a Committee of the SSRC, and it included a workshop in Los Angeles in April of 2003. The larger program funding was provided for work on the internationalization of peace and security studies that had a distinctly "collaborative" component – "understood as a research design to cross the distinct realms of knowledge production" (6) . This particular project explored the contributions of "activist scholarship" to the broader rubric of "collaborative research." The project, and this book, is aimed at exploring the next generation of knowledge production and the role of academics and institutions of higher education in the generation of new knowledge. Thus, it is largely written for the next generation of scholars in the academy - graduate scholars and early career faculty. It is largely aimed at "graduate students and junior faculty members [who] are regularly warned against putting scholarship in the service of struggles for social justice, on the grounds that, however worthy, such a combination deprives the work of complexity, compromises its methodological rigor, and for these reasons, puts career advancement at risk" (2) .

The authors of these essays - predominantly scholars of color, many of whom are associated with ethnic studies programs situated at the margins of their research intensive universities or elite, highly prestigious liberal arts colleges - explore not only the role of the social sciences in the way new knowledge is generated, but the role of the academy in providing a supportive environment for new ways of generating knowledge. As one author noted, "the work becomes even more powerful if also connected to a radical examination of academic

privilege and standards – including what kind of 'knowledge' is being valued and what is not" (257).

Because what the authors of this book call "activist scholarship" originates in a rich and complex intersection of feminist, postmodern, postcolonial, and critical race theories, there is no one term used for the kind of scholarship deemed "activist." "A broad and messy array of disciplinary approaches, schools of thought, and methodological practices" (139) leads to "an array of specific names (action research, participatory action research, collaborative research, grounded theory, public intellectual work, engaged research)" (3) as well as "participatory research," (63) "politically engaged research," (141) "critically engaged activist research," (213) and "publically engaged" research (239) – to which can be added community engaged research, community based research, and public scholarship (Ellison and Eatman, 2008) . The common element, regardless of terminology, is "research methods that underscore community production of knowledge to support community efforts in self representation and self advocacy" (238). It is research in which "people who are the subjects of research play a central role, not as 'informants' or 'data sources,' but as knowledgeable participants in the entire research process." Thus, the scholar works "in dialogue, collaboration, and alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives" and the scholarship produced "embodies a responsibility for the results" as they affect those in the community who collaborate in the research in a way that they "can recognize as their own, value in their own terms, and use as they see fit" (4).

As "a people-centered research methodology," (63) activist scholarship assigns "special importance to their agency and standpoint" and requires "a certain practice of qualitative research method…to ensure that these people's voices are heard" (4). It is activist in the sense of not avoiding the politics of knowledge, acknowledging that "knowledge is vital to social action"

(xiii) and that "scholar activism always begins with the politics of recognition" (55). It is scholarship in that it is grounded in the understanding that knowledge is generated "through direct engagement with practical problems and efforts to create a better world." (xv) And for the authors in this volume, it is better scholarship because "a) people, who ultimately are the sources of social science 'data,' tend to provide much more, and much higher quality, information when they feel they have an active stake in the research process…; [and] b) collective participation of these 'subjects' in data collection and interpretation inevitably enriches what we end up learning from the research." (184) Activist scholarship "produces results that are far more likely to be 'valid' precisely because" the researcher, in collaboration with non-academics "are 'engaged' directly in transformations of the phenomenon they study" (320). It is a method grounded in the principle that "the participants assume a special responsibility for the validity of the research outcome, knowing that it is apt to have direct applicability in their own lives" (xiii). Because the value of the research is dependent in large part on the impact is has on the lives of those with whom the researcher is in "dialogue, collaboration" and "alliance," activist scholarship "redefines, and arguably raises the stakes for, what counts as high-quality research outcomes; this, in turn, gives it the potential to yield knowledge, analysis, and theoretical understanding that would otherwise be impossible to acheive" (4).

The authors in this volume have collectively developed an argument about epistemology, which for all of them is far more than an intellectual exercise. The kind of scholarship they are doing and kind of knowledge it generates directly challenges the dominant institutional epistemology of higher education (driven largely by expert knowledge within the prestige culture of research universities) and positions the scholar in opposition to their discipline, department, and institution. Because of a collaborative, relational, contextual, and localized epistemological

framework, they are scholars who "pursue oppositional scholarship and politics" (342) within their institutions. Their understanding that "modern science (and modern epistemology more generally), has developed an ideal of knowledge based on detached, objective observation" (xiii) and leaves academic knowledge generation "contained within 'academic' agendas and career structures" (xiii) underscores their oppositional stance. There is a bitterness that surfaces periodically that comes from having to endlessly point out that the emperor has no clothes: "surely this process produces more reliable knowledge than can a group of hermetic professional social scientists who unilaterally engage in all phases of the process and judge the results, not by the degree to which problems have been solved, but by the degree of agreement among peers about the way they did the work" (331).

These activist scholars are fundamentally engaged in an epistemological battle that has on the one side the dominant positivist, technocratic epistemology of higher education, grounded in an institutional epistemology that privileges the expertise in the university and applies it externally. Knowledge produced by credentialed, detached experts is embedded in hierarchies of knowledge generation and knowledge use, creating a division between knowledge producers (in the university) and knowledge consumers (in the community). Academic knowledge is valued more than community-based knowledge, and knowledge flows in one direction, from inside the boundaries of the university outward to its place of need and application in the community (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009).

On the other side is "a way of doing social science, often in collaboration with non-social scientists" (xvii) that encourages "collaboration with nonacademics who are actively engaged in the development of new knowledge" (xv). Credentialed experts in the academy "are not the only ones carrying knowledge," yet they are able to contribute to knowledge generation by being

"able to analyze data in ways that reveal previously unseen or at least inadequately demonstrated patterns in the facts" (xx). What the activist scholars in this volume are arguing for is that epistemology be reconsidered, opening up space in the academy to encourage and embrace "different epistemological frameworks if real progress aimed at integrating all forms of knowledge was to take place" (74). Without the space for different epistemological frameworks these scholars are not at home in their institutions. They are left with the decision to either leave the academy or to stay and work to change it.

Thus, activist scholars face contradictions that cannot be avoided. "Inevitably, activist scholars confront patterns of academic organization and reproduction at odds with" (xv) collaborative, community-based scholarship. They "are left with an institutional puzzle. If action research is so clearly superior to the alternatives, why is it so poorly represented in academia generally" (333)? A concern echoing through the book is that, as one scholar noted, "there are contradictions within the academy that both halfheartedly makes space for me to do such work and at the same time constrains my ability to pursue it creatively and comprehensively" (290). There is also the contradiction that this tenuous space itself can become "disciplined," as it did for one of the authors, who arrived at "the inescapable conclusion that the dominant structure and culture of higher education have transformed the Asian American studies field far more than the field has transformed higher education" (305-306). The question that emerges is "how important is it for activists to have a home" (17) in the academy?

One response, and the most pervasive response among the scholars in this volume, is that they are "contemplating and exploring, if not actively creating, alternative homes where activist scholarship can be practiced under more hospitable conditions" (19). For some that will mean leaving the academy. For others it will mean being more intentional about finding academic

homes – even if within marginalized units of the institution - that will sustain them and where their research agendas can thrive. I am reminded of the young woman of color interviewing for a tenure-track position on my campus who, during the job interview, explained that she did "participatory action research" and asked if her research would be valued by the institution. She did not come to our campus. This for me is one of the most powerful contradictions to emerge from this work. Campuses across the country are welcoming a more diverse student body and make claims to the importance of valuing diversity and diversifying the faculty. Yet many campuses are academic homes in which precisely the scholars whom we profess to want would prefer not to enter the front door.

For some of the authors in this book, "part of the project of activist scholarship…is to effect institutional change, creating more supportive space for the particular kind of research that we do" (14). These scholars turn their activism inward toward their institutions and are trying "to change the criteria by which universities evaluate and reward their faculty." (19) Invoking Audre Lorde, one author claims that we cannot "rely solely on the Master's tools for the creation of alternatives to the dominant" paradigm (156). In this approach, "the practices and products of activist research projects should be treated as part of a larger political strategy, and collaborators must reflect on the dilemmas and contradictions embedded in projects as they construct them" (156). "This insight," she claims, "leads us to shift our attention to institutional changes that must occur within the academy to sustain activist research. Academics must push the boundaries of what is considered 'legitimate scholarship,' and the currency of peer-reviewed publications may need to be broadened or changed" (156). What she and other point out is that activist scholarship redefines what constitutes a "publication" and redefines who is a "peer" in the peer review process. (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997) In rethinking what is considered a "publication"

beyond articles in top-tier journals read by a handful of academics within particular disciplinary sub-specialties means establishing "forums for the presentation of research that will be accessible and of interest to other publics beyond the academy" (157). In rethinking who counts as a peer, one author asked, "can we imagine our work being 'peer' reviewed, not only by academic experts in the field, but also by members of local communities in which the study took place" (187)?

In the end, the authors do not resolve the question of whether to fight out the epistemological battle within the institution or to find a more hospitable home outside the academy. At best, there is the recognition that "such changes would involve rethinking the mission, purpose, and politics of the academy. These are lofty goals, but they correspond with valuable principles. Even if we are never able to achieve such transformations, it is in strategizing to reach such objectives that scholar activism can perhaps make its greatest contribution to social justice" (157).

The larger politics embedded in activist scholarship has to do with generating knowledge in ways that contribute to creating a wider public culture of democracy (Dzur, 2008; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009; Saltmarsh, 2009), or what one author calls creating "new public spheres" (157). The democratic implications of knowledge looms large throughout these essays, anchored in the position that "knowledge production and control is a right, not a privilege" (81). The distinction here between access to knowledge as a right versus knowledge production and control as a right is what gives "social science more public importance" by collaboratively "choosing important problems for research, not simply finding more effective means of communicating existing disciplinary knowledge" (xvii). It is when *access to knowledge* is considered a right that "institutions of higher education have a vested interest in keeping

scholarship 'objective' (mystifying), 'nonpolitical' (nonsubversive), and 'academic' (elitist) and in continuing to reserve the most advanced technical training for that small portion of the world's population who will manage the rest, as well as consume or control its resources and political economies" (368). When *knowledge production and control* is a right "a new kind of university [is] needed that would connect institutions of higher learning to the knowledge generated in communities as part of the process of making education available to all" (83). In this new university "emancipatory knowledge through participatory research" (81) is enacted though "a democratizing form of content-specific knowledge creation, theorization, analysis, and action design in which the goals are democratically set, learning capacity is shared, and success is collaboratively evaluated" (329). The democratic logic of activist research points to "a proactive agenda for social change in the academic realm: against the unearned privilege embedded in mainstream forms of knowledge production, and for a democratization of research, to go hand in hand with the much more commonly advocated (though still only sporadically practiced) democratization of pedagogy and education." The vision of a new university is a vision of the future of higher education.

In some ways that future is already here in the modes of inquiry and pedagogical practices being enacted by graduate students and early career scholars in the academy. The question is whether there is a sufficiently supportive academic home (Sandmann, Saltmarsh, & O'Meara, 2008) within colleges and universities to validate and encourage the next generation of scholars with new forms of epistemology. On my campus – a research university caught up in the striving that insidiously pervades the prestige hierarchy of higher education and which is the academic home of two of the authors in this volume – activist (engaged, public, community-based) scholarship is not formally acknowledged in the culture of the institution and hence,

activist research (and teaching and service) takes place, as it does for many of the authors in this volume, on the margins of the institution, in ethnic studies programs where it is associated with feminist , postmodern, postcolonial, and critical race theory more than with the disciplines in which the scholars were trained. As a college dean on my campus recently explained, "we are a research university and are seeking to increase our stature as a research university. We do both basic and applied research…There are superb peer refereed venues for applied scholarship as well as for basic." What is valued on our campus is research that counts if it is restricted into the narrow definitions of basic and applied research that come from the National Science Foundation. If it doesn't, it can't be counted as scholarship, so collaborative, engaged, community-based scholarship get relegated to being categorized as service, the bottom rung in the hierarchy of faculty roles (Driscoll,2008; Saltmarsh, Giles, Ward, & Buglione, 2009; Saltmarsh, Giles, O'Meara, Sandmann, Ward, & Buglione, 2009).

At the same time, one college at my university has petitioned the provost to have "engaged research" as a category of research equally valued along with basic and applied as part of annual faculty reports. Engaged research, as this college defines it, "is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a collaborative form of research that involves the participation of key community stakeholders (research users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners) with scholars in the co-production of knowledge to address complex social issues or phenomenon. Engagement is a relationship that involves negotiation and collaboration between researcher and practitioner, and it requires shared authority at all stages of the research process from defining the research problem, choosing theoretical and methodological approaches, conducting the research, developing the final

product(s), to participating in peer evaluation." And in a survey done on campus in the past year, when given the opportunity to classify their scholarship as basic, applied, or "public scholarship," 32% of the faculty identified their scholarship as public scholarship. I suspect that our campus is not unlike many across the country and the globe – and not unlike the academic homes of many of the authors in this volume. The battle over epistemology is underway even as the institution remains locked into the tyranny of outdated and counterproductive structures and systems.

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