THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH:
Knowledge production outside institutions

For many years, researchers have been producing knowledge in a tightly-controlled peer-review system from within institutions. Rapid global change and connectivity is changing the status quo. *Dr Hester du Plessis*, who is part of an international team working on a project to explore the academic tensions arising during the production of knowledge in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), presented on this.

A remnant of a protest decorates a pole in Chicago in the US. New social classes experience anxiety and anger as a result of job insecurity and a loss of faith in government and the politics. Photo: Kayle Kaupanger , Unsplash

Within the broader context, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze wrote about the move from a disciplinary society to a more invasive 'society of control'. We still have institutions that, by separation and segregation, control the behaviour of society and regulate the academic production of knowledge within the boundaries of religion, the monarchy and the state. But that authority is no longer confined to particular institutions. It is being integrated into every aspect of social life through increasingly interconnected networks.

New players include members of social classes that were previously excluded from formal knowledge production.

Beyond the three-class system

On a global social level, the British economist Guy Standing describes a new class structure replacing the concept of the traditional three-class system. A tiny *plutocracy* (0.0001 %) own most of the money and property on the planet. They are atop a much bigger elite, called the *salariat*, who are in relatively secure salaried jobs. The *proficians* are the freelance professionals who are still striving to be part of the economy, followed by a core and growing working class called the *precariat* and a *lumpen-precariat* (jobless and poverty stricken) at the bottom.

In the *precariat*, those who are unequal, poor and technologically insecure, experience a mix of rising anger, anomie (social detachment and moral degeneration), anxiety and alienation. Their anger relates to the impossibility of advancing towards, and, in most instances, living, a meaningful life. This is directly coupled with the frustration of not having any career and/or career prospects. If they work, it is for others only at their behest, with chronic workplace insecurity and feelings of passivity born of despair.

The *precariat's* experience of the world influences the way they think and write about society.

Political identity still emerging

We see growing evidence of Standing's ideas around the *precariat's* political identity that is emerging in

three ways. The *atavistic-populist* trend is displayed in the support for neofascist parties and populist demagogues in which populists play on the fears of the national precariat to depict government as alien and to see 'strangers' (migrants, Muslims, etc.) as the cause of their insecurity. The *anarchic detachment* mode is displayed in anomic, anti-social behaviour, the rise of violence, social illness and loss of faith in politics. Standing describes the *idealistic-progressives*, or utopian-progressives, as those who use social media as a communication and organisational tool for global uprisings and social movements of political and economic defiance. This explains the rise in recent resistances in the wake of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, the Indignados Movement in Spain and America's Occupy Wall Street movement. It also indicates the ability of social media to mobilise crowds.

Precarity and the production of knowledge

In the expanding control of our knowledge systems by science, technology and digital media, the opportunities in which the *precariat* create knowledge are unrestrained. This makes disagreement and even revelations of new findings and information possible outside the manipulative spaces of ideologies, politics, religions and the academic environment. The danger we encounter within these uncontrolled spaces is manifesting itself in the form of post-truths (appeals to

emotion instead of facts in debates) and excessive, often speculative, belief in information and big data, at the cost of experience. In addition, our imaginary, which includes the values, laws and symbols of specific social groups, is being shaped not by religion, art and philosophy, as it was in the past, but by the new technologies. We are losing the basic distance we need between external reality and our inner lives. This is because the digitised world has no respect for contemplation or reflection. It delivers instant stimulation and gratification, forcing and manipulating the brain to give most attention to short-term decisions and reactions.

Although this has certain advantages, the casualties are the literate mind and intellectual individuality.

The future of research

Against this background, researchers need to challenge the utopian notion that good men do good science and are incapable of disrupting, distorting, destroying and manipulating scientific research and findings.

The production of big data and algorithms, due to the variety and ease of technological capabilities, are becoming a dominant feature of research. It is competing with the geographical limitations of fieldwork and the often taxing actions required for deep reflection. However, big data is easily abused and manipulated to aid self-serving ideological and political agendas.

In the future, knowledge might be formed through socio-political dissent as well as through a technologically manipulative understanding of our world.

Members of the international project are focusing their work on the *precariatisation* of knowledge (epistemologically new ways of knowing), how this affects the process of knowledge production and how information is shared. Understanding the *precariatisation* of knowledge is crucial in our understanding of both socio-political and epistemological transformations in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Once we think about the difference between knowledge and information and wonder how much of that information is actually embedded in real knowledge and how much of that knowledge is being technologically manipulated, we could navigate our way to understanding this new world.

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A pink smoke bomb and tear gas fired as protesters, police and journalists scramble during a May Day protest in 2017 in Paris. Uprisings and social movements of political and economic defiance are often organised and communicated using social media tools. Photo: Damien Checoury, Unsplash