Strength of Knowledge, Precarity of Conditions

Researching Together [1]

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Résumé : Constantly bearing in mind the connection between knowledge and precarity has numerous consequences, in particular on the sociabilities of knowledge that are structured on the basis of a constant awareness of a double series of divergences that it is impossible to "deal with" theoretically : on the one hand, the divergences between the dramatically different conditions in which some people and others are enquiring, writing, studying, and on the other the gaps between different epistemologies and different kind of knowledge.The proposition of the collective, which is at once theoretical and political, consists precisely in not making any claims to cover up these divergences, in above all not rushing into recreating zones of invisibility or wide perspectives, but instead in trying to find a way to reclaim, to reappropriate other ways of exercising our responsibilities in a context of a necessary and very profound transformation of the way in which we imagine a more liveable world, which would be less violent for so many of us, more egalitarian, more just, more open.

Mots-clés : Vulnerability, inquiry, public, care, sociability

In November 2017, ten academics from all over the world descended on a small room in the Sorbonne and in the CELSA premises to prepare together for an international three-day conference to be held in the following spring, in March 2018, on the subject of the Knowledge of Precarity and Mobility.

Since these two events, we have carried out research, developed theoretical formulations, and produced poetic and scientific texts – resulting in this, our first collective work.

To introduce this common work and in particular this book, which constitutes one of its stages, I would like to begin by talking about the group that was created in

1. La traduction de l'article du français à l'anglais a été effectuée par Kate Mcnaughton

this way, by trying to problematize this description in order to rise above the register of our institutional identities. It has become untenable to present any research and its results without doing the groundwork that immediately allows us to point to its located and heterogeneous nature, even if of course, for the purpose of coherence, such a gaze can itself only ever be partial : this here is my perspective only, that of one of the members of the group. It draws strength from our joint decision to all be attentive to the nature of a scientific and political, and friendly, exchange, which acknowledges the impossibility of experiencing one another's situations. This sharing of impossibilities is the very condition for the possibility of a collectively-constructed openness, an openness that is not sidestepped from the start by a discourse that might have been constructed too quickly so as to order, bring out the value of, and thus enclose this rich heterogeneity around conventional *categories*. Let us make this point right away : we do not wish to constrain the questions raised by the connection between knowledge and precarity as they have been experienced and observed in surveys and discussed within a theoretical framework that was integrative *a priori*. Our wish is to simultaneously create the conditions for empirical and theoretical research and a practice of densification of what we can experience together and with others. All of this takes time.

For example, the heterogeneity of our group is neither described nor regulated by a ritual outlining of the various disciplines and institutional and national affiliations of each of its members. This kind of description feeds into the bureaucratic and communicational management of what one or the other member *stands for* within a research group, calling upon unsatisfactory models of contemporary collective research, which usually reduce it to mere discourse and not to the experience of those involved. The composition of teams responding to calls for research projects often corresponds to more or less explicit standards of diversity, complementarity, internationalism, but also of course to the convenient upholding of the implicit norms of statutory, subject-based, and academic legitimacy, occasionally enriched with a smattering of markers of subversion (through the integration of a handful of representatives of a necessary otherness, for example).

In the case of our collective (of twelve stable members), we do indeed represent a variety of continents and countries, of disciplines and occupations, of statuses and stages in our careers, which would indeed fit quite conveniently with some functional ideal of international research as it is ritually promoted and presented on the Websites of various organisations. We come from France, from South Africa, from India, from Turkey, from Chile, from the United States. We are academics working in information and communication sciences, in philosophy, in science studies, in the political sciences. To tell the truth, I would be hard-pressed to draw up an exhaustive list, because our respective disciplines played only a very minor role in our coming together. And we also include teachers, journalists, a documentary maker, poets, activists. Some of us are students, others have had career breaks, have been forced into exile with the status of a post-doc, while others have executive titles or responsibilities within institutions that are stable – for now.

We have the option of choosing between several narratives of collective academic collaboration, or questioning them. Institutions are most often held responsible for what is in fact dependent on research sociabilities that are equally scientific and inter-individual. These are sometimes actually upheld by the institutions that they keep alive and that keep them alive. Scientific friendships are nourished by concerns about knowledge or by the defence of such concerns (enquiry, teaching). Some of us met during regular international events during which we forged bonds (for example, the conferences held by the International Public Communication of Science and Technology network) or during solidarity actions within our universities (actions within the Université Paris-Diderot in response to the repression of Turkish academics who had signed a petition calling for peace) or during daily doctoral, research and teaching supervision in connection with the issues covered by our enquiry.

Our collective came together to carry out a necessary reflection on academic knowledge and its connections to precarity. The connection between knowledge and precarity seems to all of us to be a major scientific and epistemological issue, for reasons that are not expressed in the same way for each individual, but which we endeavour to clarify and to integrate into a common framework during our work.

1 The Collective and its Relationship to the Issue of Precarity

Our seminar is a funded research project bringing together colleagues, some of whom have permanent positions (and whom, for the purpose of concision, we will refer to as "tenured" academics in the rest of this introduction, even though they do not all come from countries which have a tenure system as such), some of whom did have a permanent position but lost it for political reasons, and yet others who are in intermediary situations and have very diverse experiences of economic or political precarity, either through having been subjected to it themselves, or through having observed it, in various countries – finally, some of them are in the precarious situation of young academics, which has come to be viewed as almost *normal*. Youth, a time of challenges and of a transitory passage through poverty, is currently one of the façades that conceals the worrying and massive nature of precarious conditions in France (Beaud, Confavreux, Lindgaard, 2006). In addition, some of us work in the field of science studies, and thus investigate modes of knowledge production. However, science studies have rarely explored the issue of precarity and knowledge on the theoretical level, even if work carried out on non-hegemonic countries has considerably transformed the perspectives of the research world (Losego, Arvanitis, 2008). Finally, others among us have made journalism the object of their research or practice : economic and political precarity is then either experienced as a condition that affects many journalists, or treated as a phenomenon that is documented by journalists. It is rarely directly connected to the actual nature of the knowledge produced.

We start by taking a step back from conventional views of precarity, according to which this phenomenon is immediately connected to social or economic problems affecting individuals or populations. We are thus taking a step back from... positions which themselves take a step back from precarity. And indeed, the academics and

journalists who have access to the resources, publishers and forums for expressing their views in the media in order to deal with the issue of precarity rarely experience it themselves.

Those individuals who do experience precarity are listened to as witnesses or victims, and very rarely in terms of what this situation allows them to conceptualise in a specific manner.

In our group, funding is awarded to projects led by tenured academics who are not in positions of political and economic precarity [2]. The group also includes members of academic institutions who are witnesses of and players in situations of political and/or economic precarity in addition to being academics working on this topic. In particular, it includes non-tenured colleagues who do not have permanent positions or who have lost their jobs for political reasons, and who are thus directly experiencing a situation of precarity (such as our colleagues from Turkey).

We might be tempted to interpret this configuration by setting aside the institutional terms referred to above (disciplines, countries etc.) and instead using such categories as "people most affected" and their "allies", categories which have been drawn up during activist struggles to analyse the positions of those who experience oppression and those who do not (Rousseau 2018). But this is not necessarily germane. We have come together above all as academics interested in reflecting on the production of knowledge from a position of precarity, without giving priority to a prior qualification of precarity as being something, a problem, that supposedly only affects certain individuals (those who are subjected to various forms of domination, who are hindered and threatened in terms of the conditions within which they conduct their enquiries or express themselves critically, teach, do research, or those whose daily life is directly under threat) while for tenured others it remains an object of study that is detached from their own condition.

In fact, the situations of risk or exile in which some individuals find themselves should not reduce them to the status of witnesses of subjection to precarity within a programme relating to the study of precarity. Reducing them in this way to the precarity they have experienced and been subjected to may mask a requirement for equality that is fundamental to us as investigators and intellectuals. We do not want, within this collective, to make a distinction between those who would be mainly bearing witness to an experience, and others who would only be concerned as academics who happen to be interested in a question or topic [3] and who would therefore be speaking in the name of a value of universality of scientific knowledge, based on the raw material provided by the experience of those directly affected by the issue.

We thus wish to avoid any reduction of the academics we have invited to precarity experienced as a social or political condition, since this would risk suggesting that the conclusions drawn from their research are not universally applicable.

2. No research funding, practically, can be applied for by individuals who are not affiliated to an institution

3. There is something unbearable at times about research seminars about migrants : the accumulation of a certitude that one is taking action for a good cause and of a riskless politico-scientific virtuosity recreates a confident position that is in complete contradiction with the one experienced by the people such seminars are constantly discussing.

Furthermore, this refusal allows us not to treat our colleagues, who sometimes pay an extremely heavy price for their courage, as "symbolic guarantors" that might allow established institutions to acquire an activist hue without having to pay a very high price for it.

Having direct experiences of social struggles or positions that involve major risks for those who are engaged in them can indeed generate another type of dissymmetry : their engagement supposedly acts as a form of collective engagement – when in reality this is not the case. The example of courage and tenacity commits us – as does solidarity with the precariat. But the academic world encourages managing the symbolic benefits of other people's suffering and struggles, but struggles to renounce the conservatism inherent to institutions with such highly hierarchical structures. These structures, although they contradict the egalitarian scientific ideal that is supposed to be at the heart of academic foundations, never cease to survive themselves, at the cost of the incessant work of refining and recycling the most marginal work and analyses, reclaimed by the most prestigious academics. The latter thus reconstitute, at little cost to themselves or their institutions, academic avant-gardes that are politically inoffensive by extracting from all the political engagements that are fed on by fascinating forms of knowledge (the most contemporary branches of *studies* in particular) [4]. David Graeber – whose political engagement cost him his job at Yale University – tries to understand the inability of universities to make space for what academics learn from their field work, in particular in the field of anthropology, in stateless societies that are very close to what is covered by anarchism in a European context (Graeber 2004). He thus describes the practically structural impossibility of learning from these findings and, in particular, to take into account their politically transformative potential within the university itself.

Georges Orwell has also denounced the way in which intellectuals have used emancipatory struggles (Orwell 2000). Their taste for duplicity, and their love for the authority conferred upon them by the management of standards of truth production from places of power inspired the figure of O'Brien in *1984* (Orwell 1949) : the intellectual appears in this novel as not being engaged by what he produces – he can philosophise together with his victim and see things from his point of view without letting himself be affected by it. He can, quite to the contrary, use his power to bring this victim to renounce truth : the duplicity of the intellectual is, in *1984*, at the very heart of the totalitarian system. In Orwell's novel, the story being told is that of the triumph of a mastery of argumentation and discourses which, when they are not connected to power, have all the appearances of emancipatory critical thought, but which those in power can perfectly well accommodate themselves, to the point that they can hold these opinions without actually being affected by their own arguments. In Orwell, the hatred of intellectuals in whom authority is vested is fed by the knowledge he acquired through a direct, lived experience of contact with invisible people – ordinary, decent people "down and out" in London and Paris, or in the trenches of Catalonia in 1936 (Orwell 1938). In his view, those who are obscure, anonymous, dominated, would do what is necessary, but are constantly being betrayed by the representa-

4. See the special edition of the Revue d'Anthropologie des Connaissances, "les studies à l'étude", vol. 11 no. 3, 2017.

tions of the people produced by intellectuals. These masks, abstract categories and representations, make them invisible. They allow on the one hand for a daily public management of the masses, of irrational and dangerous crowds, and on the other for the recuperation to the benefit of intellectuals of the political and cultural treasure that is created in resistance and precarity. The sacrifices made by numerous people in the name of decency, of jointly-exercised solidarity – these sacrifices are immense, but they themselves are denied or regularly forgotten by intellectuals in positions of authority. Vasily Grossman, in his novel "Life and Fate" (1980), and then Svetlana Alexievich in her investigation "The Unwomanly Face of War"(1985) have thus shared what they learned by coming into contact with people at risk and precarity, men and women who lived and took action during the Battle of Stalingrad. These works, in two different genres, and written at different times (a novel and a collection of interviews) convey what the authors felt and learned by coming into contact with people who transformed them.

Symetrically, we do not wish either to detract from the lived experiences of tenured academics (for example, the forms of oppression that they might experience, or those that they might feel themselves inflicting on others even unintentionally), nor to give more weight implicitly to the universal applicability of the work they are producing. Viewing the Other as the victim of a scandal that must be denounced or dealt with from positions of comfort that are implicitly viewed as being the desirable norm would be to cut ourselves off from our collective decision : to think and take action together in terms of our desire for knowledge, since, for each and all of us, knowledge only draws its value from is ability to describe a world that we live in and know together, and from its emancipatory potential.

The basis of our collective thus resides in what we feel and share as a major issue, in our capacity as teachers and/or researchers, but also always audience members and studiers. Our relationships to knowledge, and the ways in which they change, can be problematized, their plasticity, their relevance, their resistance explored – this is what we can contribute to : this is our common object. What can precarity teach us about our own disciplines and their collective relevance ? How can we organise forms of intersubjectivity which at once define the significance of what each one of us can say and do, but also use the possibilities of thinking and knowing together in a different way, by avoiding the immediate ease of precarity viewed as a scandal that supposedly affects some people more than others ?

Along similar lines, Guillaume Leblanc examines not knowledge about precarity, but rather a form of vital precarity : in his view, our reflection on vital precarity risks being sidelined by conventional forms of reflection on the social and political precarity that people are subjected to, which would then constitute an "ultimate act of violence against those who, deprived of material and/or symbolic means of subsistence, are denied the experience of the very precarity of their life" (Le Blanc 2007 p. 52). We might borrow his own terms : our reflection on what precarity teaches us about knowledge could also be sidelined by focussing exclusively on the denunciation and treatment of the economic precarity people are subjected to. This would constitute an act of violence towards the students, academics, investigators and those who are hindered

and deprived of security, who would then be denied the objectivity of the research they are conducting and the knowledge they are producing, since they are supposedly influenced by that which affects them [5] : a form of double penalty, you might say, which would give scientific validation to the exclusion of those who are already excluded.

2 Making Space for Taking into Account a Vital Precarity : the Proposition of Being "Public" from Other People's Perspectives

During a screening for students of a film made by Raoul Peck about a text by James Baldwin, "I Am Not Your Negro" [6], the students, who have been very moved by the film, wonder : what should they do with this film, what should they do after watching this film, how to repair the suffering inflicted, the injustice ? Once we are past this immediate reaction (how can we deal with this problem, because it is unbearable), we discuss what James Baldwin, a teacher and intellectual, is offering us : a perspective on America – but which we appropriate as having relevance for Europe too – that views itself and is determined to be white, and which in order to achieve this must designate and eliminate blackness. During the televised interviews shown in Raoul Peck's film, a Yale professor suggests to James Baldwin that they join forces in a kind of alliance between intellectuals based on their both belonging to an elite and therefore based on a certain kind of relationship to knowledge that brings them closer and distinguishes them from other people. In essence, he is saying this to him : we are closer, you and I, as lovers of literature, than we are to those uneducated people who do not take an interest in it, be they black or white. James Baldwin does not agree : no, we are not close, because I can die because I am black, which is not the case for you ; I was forced to flee into exile because my life was threatened, you cannot write under the pressure of this fear of death. Suddenly, the offer of an alliance in the name of the knowledge of cultivated elites no longer has any meaning as long as this knowledge appears not as being universal but rather extremely situated, and insufficient to create the conditions for a genuine exchange. It depends on conditions that are not self-evident and of which people completely forget that they can be refused to others. Baldwin suddenly reminds us that it is the very possibility of being alive that intervenes in his own relationship to knowledge [7].

5. Tenured academics who work comfortably in prestigious institutions are of course just as potentially influenced by the situation they experience : they may very well not be inclined to denounce a system that oppresses them, but inclined to defend a system that protects them. On the topic of a feminist review of the criteria of objectivity in science, by really taking into account the situations in which science is practised, see Sandra Harding, "Women, Science, and Society", *in Science*, vol. 281, Issue 5383, September 1998, and of course Donna Haraway, *Des singes, des cyborgs et des femmes. La réinvention de la nature*, Paris, Jacqueline Chambon, 2009.

6. "I Am Not Your Negro", movie from Raoul Peck, 2016.

7. During the debate between the French President Emmanuel Macron and 63 intellectuals in the Elysée Palace on 18 March 2019, right in the middle of a social crisis and the *gilets jaunes* movement, the president adopted this argument himself : he claimed, in essence, that one should not place the same value on what might be said by intellectuals such as those he had gathered together and whom he considered himself to be part of, "who read books", and what might be said elsewhere. This remark echoes the numerous assemblies, enquiries and debates conducted by the *gilets jaunes* since the month of October 2019. These debates do not count. This is not, however, the view of Bruno Latour, who expressed his opinion in the media on the numerous enquiries which the movement might give rise to, taking a pragmatic view of enquiry close to

A very widespread view of constructivism is destroyed with these words : the idea that common reality is accessible *via* statements produced in and by language, and that these statements produce our common reality – this idea does not hold. It is a view that is characteristic of dominant positions, and which excludes a very large part of what is known, what is felt, what is often hindered from being shared.

A comfortable practice of research carried out on texts borrowing from a pragmatism devoid of physical engagements then appears to be painfully limited. David Graeber, when he ponders what is included in the notion of the "Western tradition", suggests that after examining a certain number of authors, the idea arises out of a systematic blurring of the distinction "between textual traditions and forms of everyday practice". The "Western individual," he writes, "is... that featureless, rational observer, a disembodied eye, carefully scrubbed of any individual or social content, that we are supposed to pretend to be when writing in certain genres of prose. It has little relation to any human being who has ever existed, grown up, had loves and hatreds and commitments. It's a pure abstraction" (Graeber, 2014, p. 42). "Western culture" then appears as being extraordinarily reduced to a philosophical and literary tradition : certain books, certain authors, certain ways of referring to them. At admittedly quite another level, Raoul Peck in his film has tried to confront the viewer with the absurdly limited nature of the cultural references that are supposed to be common to us all, by showing what an American cinema and media corpus becomes when it is viewed from the perspective of someone whose real existence is denied to the benefit of fictional figures (Westerns, romantic comedies). Baldwin's perspective on these media and cultural objects indeed makes them appear terribly white, mutilated, grotesque. Constructivism's pretensions to giving an account of culturally constructed general realities collapses when we take the perspective that Baldwin invites us to share with him.

But this is not all. His own text reveals a thousand attachments, feelings, attentions for his friends, his dead comrades, their wives, their children, whose presences are never concealed when he talks about what matters (his return to the USA, the murders of his friends). This way of thinking with the Other and of giving an account of one's own movements, attachments, grief, worries, anger – it all gives a special depth to the astonishment he feels before the principle of separation between private life and social life in white America. According to him, this separation leads to a stupefying atrophy. In return, this question sparks an awareness of the numerous operators of separation that are naturalised and even desirable to a particularly strong degree in the practice of research and teaching. It is opportune not to *mix everything up* and to keep separate, as much as possible, one's activities and familial, friendly and professional engagements (research being a specialised practice). Students and academics are trained to strictly separate their desire for knowledge from their own emotional attachments [8]. Furthermore, university lecturers and researchers get used to making a

that of Dewey. Bruno Latour "Faisons revivre les cahiers de doléances", Tribune dans "Le Monde » daté du 9/01/2019.

8. In his book Retour à Reims (Returning to Reims), Didier Eribon carries out a self-analysis of the connection between his scientific choices and his visceral rejection of the working class his career as an intellectual has distanced him from. Didier Eribon *Returning to Reims,* London, Allen Lane, 2009. He examines the nature of a refusal that nevertheless remains a connection, hidden underneath the separation

distinction between what is at stake in their research and what is at stake in their teaching the following generations (to the point that the criteria of employability within the productive system takes precedence over that of transmission and of upholding a common world).

Of course all of this requires organisations and resources that allow for these separations between spaces, networks, and types of cognitive, physical, political and psychic engagements. Dominated intellectuals, and women in particular, have generally not been given any choice in terms of spaces, and the activities which they might specifically carry out in their own spaces [9]. This limitation, this constraint, which deprived dominated intellectuals from their own spaces had positive aspects, since it allowed them – although we might ask at what price – to uphold practices of knowledge and sharing that were rooted in real situations, and which now prove to be invaluable. The present context of major environmental crisis, that of the struggle against gender and racial discrimination, emphasise the value of knowledge that is not separated from *in situ* practices and engagements : indigenous knowledge and feminist thought now appear as possibilities for escaping from the deadly rut of thought developed with the aim of making oneself master of the objects of one's knowledge and indifferent to them.

This thus allows us to read or reread feminist and ecofeminist productions (Hache, 2016), we find in them a defence of a now fully embraced continuity between private life and social (professional, political) life. This continuity, forced upon women by the impossibility for them of being able to separate their spaces for action and their living spaces, turns out to guarantee the upholding of ecofeminist thought, a thought from the centre with the centre. This now promises huge political and ontological potentialities in the face of the dead-ends of a universalism and objectivity that maintain a strange insensitivity to living things, a universalism and objectivity that are revealed to be lethal.

This continuity is also laid claim to in care theory, which arises precisely out of an analysis of the gendered nature of our relationship to the political sphere : the discontinuity between the attention and care we devote to others in our daily intimacy and the political principles that guide the actions of elected representatives does not need to be maintained to define the political space (Gilligan 1982 ; Paperman, Laugier, 2011). This is clearly not currently the case. Politics is inspired by the radical dissociation between, on the one hand, the management of populations, which is supposed to require a high vantage point and the mobilisation of abstract principles, and on the other hand ways of acting and thinking together at the level of daily life in collectives that are necessarily restricted and diversified. From this perspective, care theory is in direct accordance with a mode of anarchist theorisation rooted in a doing-together rather than in conceptual bodies of work produced independently of experience.

between his working class origins and the objects of his research – a separation that seems at first glance to be banal and justified

9. See Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own", written in 1929, on the impossibility for young women to develop an autonomous literary practice.

The same year in which I screened the film "I Am Not Your Negro" during a seminar on the subject of situations of confrontation between different types of knowledge, a young academic described the way in which the representatives of indigenous peoples have succeeded in having references to local knowledge be included in the documents produced for an international climate summit (Aykut, Foyer, Morena 2017). In this analysis, he highlights the strategic vision and cunning that ultimately allow the discourse of indigenous peoples to be circulated from the international arenas of biodiversity, where their knowledge is already recognised, towards the international arenas where climate change is being discussed. This analysis suggests that the presence of these indigenous representatives at such summits finds its culmination and its success in texts and speeches that embody positions, actions and knowledge at an international level. These texts and speeches become, in this analysis, a dense and coherent reality of positions, knowledge and action.

But in the face of this analysis, which views speeches as objects representing the destiny of local knowledge in international institutions, I feel a something is missing : we are missing the perspective of indigenous representatives on what has happened during these international summits. What could they tell us about these summits and these texts, from their own perspective ? How did they organise their trips, and with whom ? How did this trip take a place in their daily sociabilities and engagements ? Do they themselves hold speeches about what these summits and the texts arising out of them represent for the "representatives" of industrialised nations ? And on white "forms of knowledge" ? I am reminded here of Timothy Tackett's work (Tackett,1997) : his analysis of the French revolution, nourished by his reading of the private diaries and the correspondence of the *Tiers-État* deputies sent to the *États généraux* in 1789, conveys the situations experienced and the changes that affected them. They were far from home, launched into an uncertain adventure whose duration was unclear, constantly surrounded by other deputies, all occupied for months on end with thinking, listening, and debating. Tackett's analysis takes into account physical and psychological situations, and reveals in contrast the deficiency of paying attention only to the arguments and positions of the deputies. A traditional objectifying approach views as insignificant differences and dynamics that are in fact absolutely essential [10].

Viewing words and engagements as materials implies a form of power over other people's knowledge that is no longer self-evident. And removing from our analyses the attachments, friendships, and physical movements that are connected to them is equivalent to naturalising and projecting on someone else a very particular position, which goes hand in hand with the possibility of enjoying a professional site of knowledge production, removed from friendships and movement. For many people, there is no

10. Regarding the integration of physical undertakings in discourse, see Igor Babou "Le déplacement : une dimension d'analyse et une modalité pour comprendre les relations entre nature, science et société", *Questions de communication*, 19 \2011, 215-234. Igor Babou, in his studies of whales and men in the Peninsula Valdes in Argentina, and then in the circuses of Réunion Island, has outlined the deficiencies of a constructivist approach in describing actions on an environment. Gestures of path and access maintenance by the inhabitants of the circus do not enter into, are not seen in, have no place in the description of the procedures for classification of such landscapes in world heritage. This discretionary nature of something that is experienced on a day-to-day basis immediately invalidates, or at least puts back in its place – a limited one, in spite of its pretensions – an analysis within the framework of the way in which international organisations work.

time or space reserved for a stable, salaried occupation that is detached from the totality of other practices in their life [11].

The whole range of theoretical and empirical partitions – which dissociate the languages of attachments and experienced states in the operation of constructing and disseminating knowledge – are revealed for what they are : artifices, which do not have a strictly cognitive character, because they are based on social and political conditions. These allow themselves to be forgotten, which allows people to keep the illusion that the construction of distance is a cognitive operation.

But these artifices, which benefit a minute number of individuals who are supposed in return to produce knowledge that will benefit everybody, do not keep the scientific promise that justifies them. This promise consists of a mediation that is in the public interest : the construction of a commons. These artifices are constructed and upheld by cognitive and professional organisations (the theoretical frameworks, the disciplines, the strict hierarchies and their innumerable blind spots). These have a considerable cost for millions of beings who do not enjoy the comfort involved in inventing a place for oneself from which one can make statements regarding the bodies and affects of other people without putting one's own body or affects on the line. The exorbitant cost of this place that is specially awarded to specialists sometimes has substantial psychological and physical consequences for those who pay for it : they must have faith in the validity of a knowledge that is good for everybody but whose production is delegated to just a few people, they must overcome disappointments, give to the academics their words and their statements, trusting that said academics will respect what they witness in the field, believe in spite of it all, in spite of the violence of a social organisation they are excluded from and from which the tenured academics benefit, and sometimes have to put up with the injury of being dispossessed of the meaning of their participation, of their contribution, of their trust [12].

Constructivism thus appears as one of the most recent productions born from the autonomisation of discourses and a euphemisation of states and physical and psychological engagements. Joanna Macy's *environmental despair* [13] the terror and suffering for oneself and for others which she tries to describe are, for her, the operators of a lively and clear awareness of interdependence and a systemic social conscience. These are, in her view, like a "shadow limb", a sense, a knowledge about "a larger body than we thought we had". This type of position makes no sense if we are only interested in discourses and in the symbolic dimension of what can be observed. The interdependence we are dealing with here does not reflect a network of agents connected to each other to negotiate and produce. It includes holes, losses, and a conscience

11. For a type of analysis that entirely involves the academic, their movements, and their physical reactions in an analysis of the production of meanings that avoids ascribing everything to the symbolic dimension of signs, see Eduardo Kohn, *Comment pensent les forêts*, Zones-Sensibles, 2017

12. It is not rare for the mystery of giving, without which no enquiry would be possible, to be eluded or perverted by explanations that are demeaning for the people being surveyed. Supposedly, they derive a feeling of self-importance from the interest bestowed upon them by the academic, or are trying to build up a flattering image of themselves, or yet again are looking for a friendly ear or allies etc. It is rare for anyone to really take seriously the significance of giving in a process of enquiry.

13. Joanna Macy « Agir avec le désespoir environnemental », p. 161-181, dans Emilie Hache (éd.) *Reclaim, recueil de textes écoféministes*, Cambourakis, 2016 : and http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/macy.pdf,

informed by suffering or by joy, all things which cannot find their semiotic equivalent in arrangements and discourses. In addition, laying claim to this despair allows us to call into question the issue, which is genuinely obsessive in the promotion of sciences and of the scientific spirit, of the irrational fears of the general public (which throws it back to something infantile, feminine, on the side of a relationship to nature that has not yet been mastered) [14].

This preoccupation allows us to place all the more value on the defence of scientific knowledge when this implies vital risks, and not just relations of legitimacy. I am thinking here of *Scientific Temper*, an Indian science and society journal. My first reaction, when I started communicating with Gauhar Raza (member of our scientific group about knowledge from precarity and author of a chapter in this book) was rather critical, because it seemed to me that the journal was upholding the idea of the supremacy of standards of scientific rationality. But our direct exchanges, our discussion when we were preparing a conference, made me aware of the highly localised character of my own relationship to the sciences, and to the type of criticism that it fosters. Defending the scientific approach is a risky cause in India, and is something one does not from an accepted position that is favourable to those in power, but quite on the contrary, from a position of vital precarity, and of great scientific courage, since one can lose one's life for defending this critical approach [15]. To put it differently, the feminist and subordinate positions, in the United States and in France, do no constitute a new set of axioms and independent standards that should automatically be substituted for the traditional scientific positions.

In a recent book, Françoise Vergès highlights the specificities of contexts and warns us against the temptation to universalise the vision of white, what we might call "civilizational" feminism (Vergès 2019). The same applies to our group : there is a way of working starting from our disagreements and distances, starting from the difficulties we feel, in order to understand each other. If we start with the principle that any disagreements are not necessarily best treated as controversies, as a confrontation between logical and argumentative positions, then these disagreements allow us to become aware of the existence of positions that are irreducibly and above all necessarily different, reminding us that there is no such thing as superior positions, but rather a space of theoretical exploration as a condition for exchange.

Let us return to our cinema screening with the students, to watch "I Am Not Your Negro". What James Baldwin is suggesting is thus in no way an appeal to the dominant people to use their power and their room for action to transform racist society : he shows us how the living intellectual that he is, under physical threat, at once lives

14. During a seminar entitled "Chercheurs en publics" ("Academics in Public(s)") organised at the Cité des Sciences in 1998, one speaker ritually denounced the irrational fears that abounded in the middle of the Mad Cow crisis, since, according to him, people understood nothing about what a prion was and were ceasing to eat meat without knowing anything about the mechanisms of how the disease was transmitted to human beings. Bernard Maitte, a physicist and the director of the Forum des sciences in Lille, then spoke up. What seems irrational to me, he said, is not at all the fear felt by the general public – it's the fact that we got to the point, in the name of technical and economic rationality, of feeding cows with flour made from animal cadavers, and the fact that some academics seem, for their part, to be indifferent to this irrationality.

15. Gauhar Raza, an academic, editor and documentary filmmaker, has been subjected several times to attacks in the media by nationalists. He played a part in denouncing the murders of scientific journalists in India.

through and thinks about what is happening. This knowledge makes tangible and manifest the contingency of his own position, but also the deficiency and contingency of the dominant white perspectives. This is his first effect : to reflect something of the mode of knowledge of the dominant class. They organise their lives so as to no longer have to think about vital precarity, and to be able to forget about it. How to react to this ? It is *enough* for us, for now, together with the students, to listen to Baldwin, to see what he sees from the position that he occupies with his black brothers and sisters, this position that confers upon him the cognitive and epistemological advantage of the weak and defeated [16]. Furthermore, Baldwin tells us what he sees of what we think we know. The film shows him in a wide range of teaching situations : conferences, texts, classes, interviews. It is far from the least of its effects that it *forces* the viewer into this extraordinary sharing, which relies on an irreducible faith, in spite of it all, in the capacity of knowledge to structure forms, to open up new perspectives from new shared situations. Thus, he says, it is the memory of a white schoolteacher that allowed him not to hate white people, and which sustained his intellectual vocation. The teaching scenes extend and open up this scene of transmission which he recalls and transmits to us.

Faced with Baldwin's texts, the role of an audience that feels white (as is my case) is then *to be an audience* : to let itself be taught, with no aim of construction, of production, of action, but quite on the contrary, to make room at last, and allow for a transformation and possible composition of perspectives and different types of knowledge.

3 Taking Seriously the Hypothesis of a Weakness of Knowledge Outside Precarity, and a Strength of Knowledge from Precarity

Our group does therefore not make a distinction between "most affected" people, who must be given the initiative and room to speak, and others who are "allies" (their interest being to build a more hospitable world including for themselves, even if this means giving up on some of their privilege). Nor are we naïve as to the risks that this non-radical position involves : the danger of recreating, again and again, the blind spots and positions acquired in the development of knowledge and in the transformation they enable.

Some of our Turkish colleagues are in exile, but this does not in any way take away from them their condition of academics and teachers. This condition resists precarity, and this is an extremely valuable lesson. Some of our colleagues and office mates in France turn out to be on limited contracts with no guarantee that they will one day be awarded permanent contracts. Others, who are absent from the group but took part in its investigations, are unemployed. In addition, our tenured colleagues are seeing the legitimacy of research be continually undermined in Chile and in France. Finally, in India, those who promote science are in a position of political risk.

16. For the epistemological advantage of the subaltern position, see for example Patricia Hill Collins' text "learning from the outsider within, the sociological significance of black feminist thought", Social Problems, vol. 33 no. 6, 1986, p. S14-S32

The relationships between the strength or weakness of professional situations or the strength or weakness of different types of knowledge are problematic and constitute an area for formulating questions for the whole group and well beyond it.

To put it differently, as soon as knowledge is involved, there is a dissociation between the precarity of people's social and political situations and the strength of their knowledge.

Privileged institutional situations can go hand in hand with a worrying fragility of knowledge produced.

Symmetrically, precarious and fragile conditions do not in any way preclude a strength of knowledge, knowledge which has a collective, non-utilitarian impact, independently of the play between competing interests and power relations among social stakeholders.

Tenured academics in the humanities and social sciences are made aware every day of the weakness and precarity of the knowledge they produce. This knowledge is not taken seriously, it is held in contempt by the holders of political and economic power, but it is also strangely downplayed by the academics themselves when they come to organising their own work environments. This knowledge does not structure teaching and research institutions [17]. Such institutions are transformed by limited and brutal views of the world that are indifferent to the questions and knowledge of the social sciences, and are instead obsessed with control and productivity. The visions of management and communication that inspire university reform, for example, resemble the beliefs that science claimed to be combatting several centuries ago. They are mechanistic models of influence and efficiency that are completely outdated in theoretical terms and that nevertheless inspire decisions that affect millions of people. These decisions are taken and implemented by political, administrative and economic agents who seemed driven by certainties that cannot be shaken by the trial of actual facts. Simplistic and mistaken views now structure scientific policy and the way in which universities and research institutions are organised : an obsession with productivity and visibility, a scientist faith in numbers and rankings (Bouchard 2013), an extreme weakness in their view of the international level (Cordonnier 2017), etc. Academics and university lecturers put up very little resistance to what is imposed upon them and which they know to be wrong. This is a genuine enigma, which we must confront : knowledge in the humanities and social sciences is strangely weak, and is neither defended nor promoted by academics.

We find it difficult to understand why.

We might formulate the hypothesis, as does Baudouin Jurdant (1999), that the standards of scientificity inspired by the so-called formal sciences put us in a paradoxical situation. The scientificity of our knowledge in the natural sciences supposedly tends towards their disincorporation : in order for scientific knowledge to be validated as such, it must be possible to consider it independently of its conditions of production, and for it to support itself purely on the basis of its own formulation. This knowledge must be able to circulate without needing to be referred to those people who produ-

17. Libraries are, for now, structured in such a way as to facilitate study.

ced it, other than as "authors", meaning figures who have very little to do with living persons who once worked, lived, and wrote.

An imaginary world made up of *true* statements thus structures *false dialogues* that throw together or oppose authors who have never actually spoken to each other. This life, which is independent of the symbolic languages about the world, constitutes the dense framework of a life of knowledge that is detached from the life of the men and women who produced it. But the lack of scientificity that is held against the humanities and social sciences resides precisely in the fact that it is nevertheless impossible to practise them under the illusion that one can completely dissociate knowledge from the conditions of its production and formulation at a precise moment by specific people in specific places.

The epistemology of the humanities and social sciences is defended by numerous authors as being different from that which orders the natural sciences. The lack of scientificity felt from the perspective of the formal sciences is precisely a condition of the specific scientificity of these sciences, which have no position of exteriority to what they are studying (Passeron, 1991). Scientificity is not connected to the logical operations and formal languages within which our knowledge about what is exists, but to the ability of academics to give an account of the conditions within which it has been possible to formulate questions and interpretations whose collective (or even universal) validity can only be ensured through continual discussion.

This discussion and this collective validation do not just involve one's peers, but also any members of the general public who are interested by and involved in the challenges connected to our knowledge of societies [18].

Knowledge in the humanities and social sciences thus has specific characteristics that make it necessarily vulnerable.

Firstly, it is subject to constant controversy regarding how it can be claimed to have a scientific nature. This is a necessary controversy. But it draws upon specific beliefs or convictions, some of which completely exclude the cohabitation of other ideas of scientificity.

The most "scientist" individuals, convinced that the social sciences must come as close as possible to the way in which the natural sciences function, view their absence of axiomatic statements or predictive models as a lack of scientificity : if such questions and interpretations do not have the force of law, then they have no more value than that of an opinion [19]. Part of the humanities and social sciences community then attempts to move closer to the so-called natural sciences through the mediation of forms of language and technical mediations that artificially constrain their exchanges and force ways of acquiring knowledge and the expression of knowledge into a formalism that is tailored for certain tools, and is therefore standardised. Machines and symbolic

18. See Mélodie Faury et Joëlle Le Marec (éds.) « *Tisser avec Baudouin Jurdant, le métier à penser* », Paris : éditions des archives contemporaines, 2020.

19. This conviction plays a part in the mistrust inspired by works written in the field of certain iconoclastic types of "Studies" (e.g. gender or postcolonial studies), viewed as too political, too involved by many journals.

languages recreate an artificial exteriority (IT software in particular) and a form of universalism that arises out of their obligatory character.

In addition, there is a serious temptation to entirely fabricate social realities that fit with prior theoretical models, in order to prove this social reality by actually creating it : if things happen in this way, it must mean this is true [20].

It is therefore not only extremely difficult to convince people who *expect* a kind of exclusive scientificity in which they believe, of the validity of knowledge produced by the social sciences, but in addition this belief can lead us to put faith in models, typologies, categories, gradients, and mathematized formulations that have all the appearances of statements that have the rigour of scientific operations, but that are very good at evading questions that in principle should underlie our attempts to acquire knowledge ("what is going on here ?"). And these types of production are legion in the discourse of expert assessments and recommendations in the administrative and management sciences. Aude Seurrat (2018) has shown that professional organisations within universities themselves have created a contrast between a ridiculed academic "style" (jargon, complex questions, etc.) and the proposals that were supposedly inspired by the experimental and formal sciences. Communication training thus draws some of its materials and statements not from the sciences of communication or even from the social sciences, but from the... cognitive sciences, although these lay no claim to be saying anything whatsoever about society and culture. The weakness of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences is thus a structural fragility, one that is necessary but that prohibits them from occupying any assured position : the accepted heterogeneity, the openness, the reflexivity, the rootedness in enquiry and the dialogue between different perspectives that are all constitutive of the value and relevance of the social sciences can barely allow us to defend them against the scientist standards that are mobilised within the bodies that manage and administer research and higher education.

While the humanities and social sciences are not life sciences, they are living sciences [21], and as such they are affected by a vital precarity : it is conceivable today that the humanities and social sciences could disappear.

There is a second phenomenon weakening the humanities and social sciences : at the very heart of the communities that are the most open, the most sensitive to contexts, the most concerned with specifying again and again the conditions within which knowledge is produced, academics sometimes try to protect themselves by hardening, if not the criteria of a normative epistemology, at least the rules for debate and publication. Institutional tests to gain access to the central spaces of institutional legitimacy (that conferred by the historic laboratories of the EHESS, the CNRS

20. From this perspective, engineering and information sciences can be tempted to see the proof of a social relevance of certain types of logics for which specific structures have been set up, in the commercial existence of these very structures. Society is replaced by the market.

21. As for the life sciences, we might wonder about the type of knowledge they produce given the extraordinary failure of man/nature relations, as if there were something about the living world that completely escapes the type of sensibility created by the knowledge about nature that these sciences produce and disseminate.

or the ENS for example) also apply to academics in exile [22]. The mechanisms for excluding those at the margins intensify during periods of budget cuts : decrease in scientific employment, multiple pressures to develop the production of data, intensification of evaluation, etc. Exploratory approaches, epistemological openings located at the boundaries between the biological sciences and cultural social sciences (environmental studies, anthropologies that go beyond the divisions between nature and culture), in subalternised interdisciplines (information and communication sciences) and in activist academic communities (gender studies, subaltern studies, decolonial studies) do indeed contribute to renewing our approaches and even giving space to a reflection on the historically localised nature of the ontologies underpinning the European sciences. But they quickly split into on the one hand an academic avant-garde that is highly localised within the most institutionally legitimate centres (Oxford and Cambridge, the EHESS, the Ecole Normale Supérieure) and on the other hand academic and university "*banlieues*" that are deprived of access to publication or to centres of excellence despite the fact they are buzzing with experience and thinking rooted in daily contact with sensitive situations.

Academic openness towards a new anthropology beyond nature and culture turn not towards ordinary enquiries and precarious colleagues, but rather towards art and aesthetics [23].

Another kind of sharing is gaining strength, between disciplines that themselves have the most legitimacy (philosophy, anthropology) and a highly intense production of works and initiatives based on direct experience of the context of the university crisis, but which are relatively ignored by the centres or the legitimate representatives of this academic avant-garde [24]. Connections are often far more comfortably acknowledged between academics working in prestigious disciplines and institutions and interlocutors who are socially extremely far removed from them, than are connections between these same academics and invisible individuals who are very close to them within the academic space itself.

This is why the acknowledged precarity of knowledge in the social sciences does not prevent – and may indeed even reinforce – the obstinate upholding of standards and principles of academic rigour, and of scrupulous hierarchies between disciplines that are exercised within restricted spaces, compartmentalised and splintered spaces in which scientific pretention remains in a residual state. An insensitivity to lived precarity is perpetuated within these spaces, despite the fact that the dynamism of the humanities and social sciences is supported by this very precarity.

This phenomenon has a role to play in the weakening of the social sciences : there is a sometimes astounding dissociation between the preservation of the standards and si-

22. The programme for academics in exile, PAUSE, thus involves criteria of project selection based on excellence which are surprising given the conditions faced by our colleagues who are fleeing from war or repression.

23. See Tim Ingold *Making : Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Routledge, London, 2013, Baptiste Morizot also undertakes numerous collaborations with artists. After his work *Sur la piste animale*, published by Actes Sud in 2018, he too opted for a dialogue with contemporary art in his new work, co-written with Estelle Zhong Mengual : *Esthétique de la Rencontre*, Paris, Seuil, 2019.

24. I am thinking here of the fascinating theses written by Sarah Cordonnier and Aude Seurrat in information and communication sciences, 2018

gns of academic excellence or of the legitimate intellectual and aesthetic avant-garde, and the emancipatory and political dimension of the knowledge produced by the humanities and social sciences. One and the same academic may very well publish a vigorous and convincing critical analysis in the morning, and in the afternoon sign up for benefits or agreements that actively produce exactly the thing that he is denouncing in his work. Various works document, with a high level of precision, the situation of students who are forced into exile, but ministerial decrees are issued to limit access to universities for foreign students [25] Tenured academics have the greatest difficulty with confronting this situation head-on. And yet it is very reminiscent of that which, in 1970, justified calls for an auto-critique in the sciences (Jaubert, Levy-Leblond, 1973) [26], under the pressure of a fraction of academics working in the natural sciences who called for their fellow academics to disengage, institutionally and physically, from a science that was turning its back on the general interest to the benefit of private or military interests.

In the current situation, how does the weakness of the knowledge produced by tenured, comfortably-installed academics, make itself felt (or not) ?

4 Reviewing Our Image of Scholarly Work

The choice made by many countries to fund public research in the general interest, by providing salaries for academics who have fulfilled the conditions of entry to enjoy the possibility of devoting themselves fully to academic research is strongly upheld by the way in which we imagine what scholarly work involves. Scholarly work, and studying in particular, require conditions of liberty and concentration, and require specific times and spaces. In the 4$^{\text{th}}$ century, with the creation of the Museon and of the Library of Alexandria, a community of scholars saw itself freed from any material concerns so that it could devote itself exclusively to study. The library potentially concentrated the means of production of knowledge about the world (astronomy, geography, philology, mathematics, etc.) : the Princes' ambition was to support the conditions of production of a universal knowledge in a centre where all resources and books converged, and from which knowledge radiated out (Jacob, 1996). The Library of Alexandria has disappeared, but not the dreams of the princes and scholars. In the *New Atlantis*, which was published in 1624, Francis Bacon imagines an island, inhabited by a highly hierarchical society of scholars, which is busy with studying the laws of nature and establishing truths. The scholars, who are physically cut off from the rest of the world, nevertheless have at their disposal some agents who are sent out into the world. Enquiry is subordinated to the authority of a centre. The Baconian utopia supposedly inspired the creation in 1660 of the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge. Its members tried to establish truth through method, in a complete break with mediaeval scholastic thought. While they rejected the reference to a higher authority in the process of determining the truth, the Royal Society is a central location that is imbued with authority, just as

25. Regarding the increase in registration fees for foreign students from outside the EU, which was decided upon in April 2019 against the opinion of the universities themselves, see the following special report : http://test.resome.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ANATOMIE-DUN-FOUTAGE-DE-GUEULE.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2u_arktV4pi6gzPu8TAZtkOGm7lxxiXYTJJJlnNI7KX6br0D16xc4z9C4.

26. See Alain Jaubert and Jean-Marc Levy-Leblond (Auto) critique de la science, Paris, Seuil, 1973.

scientific institutions would be, right through to the creation of the CNRS (Babou et Le Marec, 2001).

Christian Jacob and the team of academics gathered together for the study of the "Lieux du savoir" (Jacob, 2007) have developed a comparative history of the practices, tools, places, sociabilities of scholars, within the general perspective of the anthropology of knowledge, by paying attention to bodies and places. Scholarly work, whatever the period or the continent, seems to call for attention to be paid to the specific conditions within which it can thrive. Fettered or strongly constrained scholarly work is an anomaly.

The french salaried status of lecturer-researcher is in principle a condition that allows on the one hand for the conditions of liberty to be guaranteed, and the benefit of the places, time, means, and sociabilities of scholarly work aimed at producing and sharing a knowledge that has a claim to universal value, or at the very least a set of knowledge that is collectively validated – knowledge about the world, to the benefit of all, aimed at being shared and upheld or at transforming a shared world. Certain institutions like the Centre d'Etudes Arctiques (Centre for Artic Studies) founded in 1958 by Jean Malaurie, were developed to the benefit of an anthropo-geography that located the interests of the living world beyond strictly political or strictly biological frameworks. But, as has been shown in works carried out in history and in the sociology of sciences since the post-war period, and as numerous academics and non-academics experience every day, the status of university lecturer is no longer much associated with benefiting from conditions that imply serving the general interest in return. The compensation of the salary is often that of an obedience to "social demands" reduced to the demands of political and economic stakeholders. Academics go along with this fiction of "social demands" emanating from political and economic stakeholders. They produce tools, procedures, and entities that serve economic interests and that increase inequalities and injustices, including within their own environments. They do not rebel against the constant attack being made on the connections between different kinds of knowledge, the general interest, and the principle of equality, despite this being ritually reaffirmed and being at the root of the vocations of numerous young academics [27].

From where does this strange weakness of knowledge come from, and this worrying insensitivity of university lecturers to their own enquiries and findings ? Is there not something missing in the relationships to knowledge of academics who are in positions at once of material comfort (until when, though ?) and of a still-unacknowledged cultural and political subalternity ?

The "calculation centres" (Latour, 1996) and institutions where resources and networks are concentrated are also potentially the places where power is exercised over, or against, the conditions of production of knowledge, which are constantly at the mercy either of being deprived of these resources, or of the political and administrative mediations that organise and manage how they function (consensus, modes of

27. Let us note – among so many things that could be mentioned here – the direct connection between research policy and economic growth targets in the case of the creation of a European research policy, or the French political desire to discriminate between European and non-European students and to make the latter pay extremely high registration fees (decree dated 19 April 2019, which was invalidated by the Conseil d'Etat (French Council of State) in October 2019).

management, etc.). In the USSR, it was the same utopic imagination that inspired, in this totalitarian regime, the way in which the Soviet scientific camps were run – camps where scholars, and in particular Tupolev and his team of engineers, were held. Solshenitsyn, in his novel *The First Circle* (1955-1968), describes a sharashka, one of the scientific laboratories belonging to the gulag, and describes the troubling ambiguity of a captivity that was conducive to concentration, which allowed its prisoners to hope to be able to rise to scientific challenges to the glory of the Soviet regime. The novel includes the character of a young female physicist, outside the camp in which her husband has been locked up, and whose daily life and sociabilities seem in many ways less serene than those of her captive husband, who chooses to remain inside the camp when he is given the opportunity to regain his freedom.

The strength of knowledge seems paradoxically to be more assured in people who do not have the means of working under the conditions prescribed by the ideal of scholarly work we have just referred to. Deprived of any access to all of the resources of the centres, deprived of the time and spaces necessary to being able to concentrate on working and writing, they work tirelessly on questions that do not necessarily pertain to their own private interest.

5 Vulnerability as a Condition of Scientificity : Enquiries, Study Practices

As a counterpoint to the image of scholarly work as equipped, and exercised in specific places, in centres (offices, laboratories, libraries, academies, utopian territories, all separate and closed), there is another image of approaches to knowledge that does not occupy a central place on the political and academic levels, because it is precisely not exclusively connected to the necessity of an elite or a professional body of scholars identified as such. This is enquiry itself.

Enquiry is, in the Baconian utopia and later on in a certain number of hierarchical practices of knowledge production in scientific centres, a technical practice of collecting materials that can be gathered together by people other than scholars but who often acquire their – scientific – value through the use that is made of them by a scholar.

Ethnographic knowledge has thus been constituted based on the narratives of travellers, missionaries, and colonial agents, and Marcel Mauss has worked on the basis of such narratives and produced guides and texts that allow travellers to enter into the framework of a data collection that can serve a professional science.

Enquiry, which is sometimes reduced, in research training programmes, to the whole range of technical operations for the gathering of artefacts destined to be processed at a later stage within laboratories, is, in particular in the fields of the humanities and social sciences and in the natural sciences, the time and place of the transformation of the researcher, a living body, which might be immobile or moving, and sensitive to the contact of that which he is trying to acquire knowledge of. It is also the time and place of sharing the issues at hand with all of the living beings who are enquiring into their environment in order to understand it and live within it (for example, Khon 2017). Enquiry is what seamlessly connects the specialised practice of the production

of knowledge by academics and the vast set of knowledge practices of a huge number of other people with whom these academics come into contact over the course of their work. This phenomenon plays a role in the intense reflection that has been devoted to the place and criticism of the making invisible of those who have been referred to as "informers" in the practices of ethnologists and, more widely, of all the fieldwork-based sciences [28]. The production of knowledge, in an epistemology of the anthropo-social sciences that has been formulated and defended by Jean-Claude Passeron, is essentially connected not to the ability to organise the autonomy of the operations of production (of facts, or representations etc.) but to a reflexive ability to explain and put up for debate all of the situations that participate in the symbolic construction of a space of enquiry. This type of approach enables, in many ways, a joining up of the emphasis placed on the enquiry on the one hand, and of the feminist criticism of scientific normativity on the other, since this latter turns out to be socially localised, but in a position of domination that is blind to itself most of the time. Enquiries require an openness to transformation, and therefore a kind of vulnerability from the vantage point of which it is possible to move close to multiple forms of precarity, and to share, if not situations, then at least the issues connected to knowledge that are specific to these forms of precarity. The constant pursuit of a clarification regarding the situations of any enquiry open up living continuities between the positions of trained academic researchers, be they students or professionals, and the positions of those who are carrying out enquiries in order to produce knowledge in the general interest, in particular when they are doing so because this knowledge appears to be essential in spite of the challenges posed by a situation of extreme precarity [29].

Enquiry is not the only practice in which the connection between vulnerability and the construction of knowledge can be felt, albeit too briefly and episodically. It implies letting go (generally only very temporarily) of controlled spaces and times to the benefit of movement, of intensification and attention paid to others, of opening up, of sharing issues – but returning to the "laboratory", or at least to a professional location for processing the raw material unfortunately most often implies a form of betrayal of what was really learned during the enquiry, and reclaiming the power to do as one pleases with what one has witnessed.

Research and teaching also imply periods of learning which constantly return university lecturers to their condition of ignorance, which they share with all those who are trying to learn. This condition of ignorance is institutionally protected and legitimised by certain cultural institutions (libraries, museums), and it coincides with the condition of the general public, which consists in making oneself available, not to defend something or assert one's position, but quite on the contrary, to hand oneself over to someone else, and become a beneficiary of this process. But under the injunction issued to teachers and academics to perform well and be efficient in the exercise of their profession, the legitimacy and necessity of this condition of ignorance are no longer upheld. Study practices, which require so much modesty and effort, are

28. See, for example, on enunciative authority in ethnographic writing, James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture : Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art,* Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1988

29. See the extraordinary example of the historian Ringelblum and of a group of investigative archivists Oneg Shabbat that was constituted in the Warsaw ghetto to produce knowledge.

practised at some unspecified time. While we can imagine that professional pianists can legitimately take time to practise and study, it is significant to observe that study times must be defended tooth and nail by teachers, who are suspected of not working hard enough on what they are supposed to be doing.

The connection between study practices and precarity may seem indirect, but we have observed it on numerous occasions during our enquiries and in our own exchanges.

Firstly, our inquiries have enabled us to witness the intensity of study practices among a certain number of intellectuals or studiers who are experiencing more or less intense situations of social or political precarity. During enquiries conducted in the main great libraries in Paris, Bibliothèque du Centre Georges Pompidou and Bibiothèque Nationale de France (Dehail et Le Marec, 2018) and on the ordinary practices of intellectual workers (academics, project directors, filmmakers, teachers) (Le Marec, Mairesse, Le Tirant, 2017). Libraries play an essential part in the shared public consciousness of the multiple study practices and approaches to acquiring knowledge that develop there individually, but within the framework of a perfectly egalitarian cohabitation of bodies at work and books on the shelves, in the collective upholding of atmospheres that foster concentration. In the great research libraries, it turns out that some of the people most exposed to political and social precarity are the ones for whom the practices of acquiring knowledge are the most intense, for whom the issues connected to the acquisition of knowledge are felt most strongly : approaches to knowledge are superimposed onto life plans for students who are preparing to obtain degrees and undergoing examinations, or who are starting to exercise an activity in the shelter of a benevolent institution, for people who are changing careers or unemployed, of which there are many in these libraries, for people in exile, who use them to start projects of totally transforming their existence. Some of them have experienced political and social precarity because they were intellectuals. They are direct players in and witnesses of the value of knowledge. In libraries, it is sometimes those people who are most exposed to precarity who give study practices and the issues related to them their greatest reach and intensity, for the benefit of all, including of those whose existence does not depend directly on learning, but who live off the knowledge.

6 An Exploratory Collective

Constantly bearing in mind the connection between knowledge and precarity has numerous consequences, in particular on the sociabilities of knowledge that are structured on the basis of a constant awareness of a double series of divergences that it is impossible to "deal with" theoretically : on the one hand, the divergences between the dramatically different conditions in which some people and others are enquiring, writing, studying, and on the other the gaps between the relationships to knowledge from the humanities and social sciences, which are more or less taken seriously and defended depending on people's experience and engagements, and depending on the bodies that direct or hinder their production and expression.

The proposition of the collective, which is at once theoretical and political, consists precisely in not making any claims to cover up these divergences, in above all not rushing into recreating zones of invisibility or dominant perspectives, but instead

in trying to find a way to reclaim, to reappropriate other ways of exercising our responsibilities in a context of a necessary and very profound transformation of the way in which we imagine a more liveable world, which would be less violent for so many of us, more egalitarian, more just, more open.

Despite the very powerful advances made by feminist epistemologies, tenured academics do not fully accept the collectively necessary character of knowledge that has been produced in conditions of discomfort and risk. As for them, they are, in relative secrecy, experiencing the increasing precarisation of a large number of academics who work on the margins of institutions, of a progressive subalternisation that is widely denied and placed at a remove from the humanities and social sciences, and a worrying weakness of knowledge that is not "useful" or may even be a nuisance from the perspective of a fraction of the population that holds all the power.

In addition, we wish to contribute to a wider reflection on the acknowledgement of the current precarity that affects all living beings as a condition that is not exceptional, but on the contrary common and widespread [30]. The obsession with progress, the belief in the possibilities of man acquiring mastery over everything he comes into contact with, a kind of scientist optimism connected to the ideology of development, have atrophied this awareness among academics in rich countries (whether they work in the natural or cultural sciences). Academics have been able to uphold the belief that knowledge transforms the world by substituting for ignorance. During the "Science et société en mutation" ("Science and Society in Transformation") conference on 12 February 2007 at the CNRS in Paris, a physicist was making fun of the presentation of an enquiry by Daniel Boy which he had carried out among academics on the subject of the aspiration of colleagues working in the social sciences to change the world, by underlining the fact that in reality, it was the hard sciences and innovation that transformed nature and societies. And indeed, these transformations have ultimately led to a situation that leaves us no choice but to ready ourselves to living in the ruins of a spoiled world. Considerably inequalities in our respective situations may to some extent shield us from this common condition, but it is not reasonable to make claims to produce knowledge about a common world if we are part of those who create masks to protect certain positions, and not of those who create knowledge because they want to live together.

To conclude this text, which is an individual perspective on a collective process, I must mention here, give space to those who will not appear in this collection but who have enabled this reflection on the relationship between knowledge and precarity to develop without directly benefiting from it, so unfavourable to them are the effects of borders. I am thinking for example of Dominique Le Tirant and Pierre Lamarque, with whom I conducted enquiries into the ordinary practices of intellectual workers, and through whom I took the measure of the institutional violence inflicted on my equals. One of the very concrete aims of a proposal for collective reflection on the relationships between knowledge and precarity consists precisely in imagining a type

30. The anthropology of ruined worlds is sparking many works on the ends of the world that have already been experienced in the past, or are currently being experienced by a great number of living beings. See in particular issue 76 of the journal *Multitudes* "Est-il trop tard pour l'effondrement", 2019 – See also Ernesto De Martino, "*La Fin du monde. Essai sur les apocalypses culturelles*", Paris : éditions de l'EHESS

of space within which the rules of production and expression of knowledge would be transformed in order to do justice to those who are currently marginalised, those who cannot claim any official institutional affiliation, those who are therefore this excluded from calls for projects and calls for papers other than to contribute to such things without this changing their situation, those who see themselves turned down by institutions from the very things that these same institutions offer without batting an eyelid to the companies and agencies that suck off funds from public research funding. On 21 October 2019, during the general assembly of teachers, students and administrators that was held at the University of Santiago three days after the start of a historic mobilisation against the neoliberal Chilean system, the "hourly professors", the equivalent of French substitute teachers without whom universities would not be able to function, were demanding and being awarded the status of members of the university community, with a vote and representation in academic bodies. That day, it appeared to me clearly that the community of teaching and research that we must invent for the future must necessarily be transnational.

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