



Nemesis of C. Wright Mills' Promise **Sociology, Education and the Changing Context and Meaning of Teaching and Learning**

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that education is in many ways a site for the perennial exercise of power. I posit that education is also a register of the struggles integral to the establishment of dominant systems of thought that mirrors the broader power/knowledge nexus. Through a critical analysis of the penetration of corporate and commercial values into the sphere of higher education, I aim to demonstrate the link between the larger historical scene and the varied appearances of the “designs for instrumental action” that ultimately set the conditions for their own propagation. The reduction of “science” to “technique” as a means of narrowing the uncertainties in cause-effect correlation binds the geometric progression imaginaries of “Neo-liberalism” to Jacques Ellul’s “Technological Society” (1964). In this sense, the “nemesis” of C. Wright Mills’ promise is the same modern alter ego that evoked “enemies of progress” as an immanent discourse of derision in the early modern period. My thesis is underscored by a documentary analysis of the EUA Bologna Handbook and the UCD president’s reports and speeches using the works of Michel Foucault.

“The logic of Cartesianism drives all thoughts... toward fabricating a world in accordance with our own mathematical ideas of it.” —Piero Mini

“Everyone has been taught that technique is an application of science.... This traditional view is radically false. It takes into account only a single category of science and only a short period of time.” —Jacques Ellul

“Here a kind of fundamentalist religion morphs into cynical sophistry, as happens so often in American marketplace where the preacher and the snake-oil merchant share the same platform, even the same body.” —Lindsay Waters

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed the gradual proliferation of economic terms, phrases and reasoning across the whole planet. In spite of this promulgation, most people in many instances can only make vague sense of words like Dow Jones or NASDAQ averages, S&P 500, FTSE 100, DAX and NIKKEI etc. Interestingly, this new wave of economic language was enthroned alongside the “rediscovery” of “affect,” “community,” the “environment,” the “uncanny,” “third

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way” and “compassionate conservatives.” These polar trends infused the emergent corporate-speak with a strange sugar-coating that made its there-is-no-alternative (TINA) “reforms” easier to “swallow.” The gradual spread of corporate suit-speak however lends some credence to the familiar allegation that society is subsumed in the ill-conceived jargons of the business field¹. To paraphrase the famous American aphorism, the business of human societies (not just America) now seems to be “business.” The buccaneering entrepreneur is no longer an American folk hero or oddity but a model for the likes of rapper 50 Cents, the young African refugee in Malta or the brand-conscious academic version of the “X Factor” and the “Apprentice.”

Many critics of “neoliberalism” blame Friedrich von Hayek inspired “think tanks” and “policy institute” for transforming a marginal idea at the University of Chicago into the “neoliberal utopia” that “*embod[ies] itself in the reality of a kind of infernal machine*” (Bourdieu 1998: 36). But are Hayek’s “self-directing automatic system” or John Nash and the Rand Corporation’s “Game Theory” really new in the larger scheme of things? The basic elements of Hayek’s free market “body/machine complex” and the corresponding idea of the “Prisoner’s Dilemma” dates back to the origin of modern mechanistic thought. The carceral metaphor is nonetheless revealing—especially in the field of teaching and learning. In her book, *University Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*, Jennifer Washburn (2005: ix) reminds us that:

Since 1980...especially over the past decade, a foul wind has blown over the campuses of our nation’s universities. Its source is not the

¹ By “business” I am referring to the impersonal big corporations that mainly operate at the transnational level, not “small businesses” that actually constitute the majority of the so-called “private” sector.

stifling atmosphere of political correctness that has received so much attention from pundits and journalists, but a phenomenon that has gone comparatively ignored: the growing role that commercial values have assumed in academic life

In this article, I want to discuss the underpinning issues surrounding the emergence of this “planetary vulgate,” not simply as a “neoliberal” ploy, but as a logical and integral part of the program of modernisation. I was a witness to the same “rationalise or die” privatization slogans employed by the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programme activists in the early and late 1980s in Africa that practically destroyed the Nigerian public education system. Lindsay Waters (2004) and many others² have raised the same issues and questions concerning the corporate corruption of education, publication, critical pedagogy and the changing context and meaning of teaching and learning³.

Additionally, I want to also look at what these concerns tell us about the original problematic of sociology—the questions of epistemology, social order, power/knowledge and their link to the transformation of physical and mental spaces. I will discuss these themes by analysing some of the ex-post rationales dutifully employed by those supposedly in the “know”—those “activists” who enthusiastically urge us to assimilate to power/knowledge for our own “good.” I will do this by looking at the principle drivers of that process in Europe dubbed the “Bologna Process.” While my focus will be mainly the Bologna documents and speeches from the presidents of

² See, for example, Freire 1970, 1996, 2002. Also see Canaan 2002, 2005, 2006; Ball 2003, Lev-idow 2002.

³ These issues are not by any means new. Ernest Gellner’s (1983) “Diploma disease” or universal “clerks” and Heidegger’s idea that technique usually start where thinking ends are mainly different takes on the same issue.

the National University of Ireland in particular and Europe in general, the issues that I am addressing shares many “family resemblances” with those issues Lindsay Waters, Jennifer Washburn, Kieran Allen and others have raised both in the United States and Europe.

Given that the hawks of Washington “confusion,”⁴ “market fundamentalism” and the CEO model like Lawrence Summers⁵ now whimper in the face of recent changes in the political and social mood, this seems to me to be the proper time to address this pressing issue. Education and learning as social and socialising activities, processes and institutions have always occupied a central place in sociological theories mainly due to the key role they play in knowledge generation and transmission. Debates on the contents and forms of teaching and learning largely mirror larger struggles and politics in the domains of epistemology, power and ideology. Accordingly, the “corporate” takeover or makeover of education is part of the process of privatization, “enclosure” or the “revolution of the rich against poor” that began in Tudor England and laid the foundation of the modern world (Rifkin 2001). The latter constitutes an integral part of the evolution and pattern maintenance of the established paradigms of the Cartesian-Newtonian science and its spin-offs we know as the “cognate disciplines” (Kuhn 1962).

⁴ See Dani Rodrik's “Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion? A Review of the World Bank's Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform.” *Journal of Economic Literature*, Volume 44, 4 December 2006, pp: 973-987.

⁵ See “The Education of Larry Summers” by Michael Hirsh and Evan Thomas, *Newsweek Magazine*, March 2, 2009.

TWEED SUITS, ELBOW LEATHER PATCHES AND THE CORPORATE “PRISONER’S DILEMMA”

A few years ago, a headline in the *Irish Independent*⁶ news daily boldly paraphrased a famous line from a beauty and hair product advertisement in relation to pay rises demanded by the presidents of the top Universities in Ireland. “*Because we're worth it: Profs want €135,000 rise for ‘mental horse-power,’*” says the headline. In the words of the Irish Independent:

THE country's seven university presidents are seeking a pay rise of up to €135,000 each. They believe the 55pc pay rise would reward their unique ‘mental horse power’, ‘emotional intelligence’ and ‘street smart, problem-solving skills’. Details of their major pay claim are revealed in a confidential submission to the Review Body for Higher Remuneration in the Public Service. The presidents, who are currently paid between €186,000 and €205,000, want a salary of at least €320,000 a year. They say their role has moved from that of being an educator. ‘It is now more akin to that of the corporate chief executive who must develop and drive strategically and position their businesses to grow and be ethnically and effectively managed and led.’ The ‘reward philosophy’ for the post must be ‘robust’ enough to continue to attract candidates of the calibre required, the submission says... It was prepared with the assistance of an outside HR consultant. The document is laced with management speak such as ‘win-win partnerships’, ‘extending

⁶ Friday January 5th 2007.

people's line of sight', 'step-change' and 'rewarding individual's on-going value' with base pay, variable pay or bonus pay.⁷

On October 28, 2007, merely eight months after the above Irish Independent article, the *Irish Tribune* newspaper reported that:

The presidents of University College Dublin and University College Galway have received unauthorised allowances on top of their approved salary levels, the Sunday Tribune has learned. The allowances, which flout national pay policy, came to light in last week's review body report on top public sector pay, which was highly critical of the arrangements. It ordered a pay freeze for the presidents involved until the allowances are withdrawn... UCD confirmed its president, Hugh Brady, has received an unauthorised annual allowance of 12,000. Several universities, and the Higher Education Authority, now face scrutiny about who authorised the payments. 'We fail to understand how this situation can occur since payments of this sort require the approval of the minister for education and the minister for finance,' the body stated.⁸

The above "variable pay" furore in the Irish media happened roughly two years before Bernard Madoff's "unrivalled leadership," "innovation" and "win-win partnerships" was revealed as nothing more

⁷ <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/because-were-worth-it-profs-want-135000-rise-for-mental-horsepower-57835.html> (accessed 24/03/09).

⁸ <https://www.tribune.ie/archive/article/2007/oct/28/pay-freeze-for-university-heads-over-illegal-salar/> (accessed 24/03/09).

than good old fashion fraud. Keen observers of the corporate world have maintained that Enron and Madoff are just the tip of the iceberg. Words like "greed" and "regulation" are now back from the cold and the CEO tag tarnished beyond repair. The CEO model it seems always produces "high flyers" that, as former President Bush put it, "cook the books." Naïve University "CEOs" seduced by the pervasive language of technocratic managerialism failed to realise that busts are inherent to "bubbles" with regards to "individual's on-going value." Many of these presidents were running Bauman's (2000) "managerial equivalent of liposuction" in terms of Universities using underpaid postgraduate teaching labour while demanding golden parachutes for themselves. Billionaires with dodgy hair-cuts or "geek-streaks" lecture us on "innovation management" and "enterprise" even when it is clear they are unable to "manage" one wife and two kids while "cooking the books." World Bank, IMF and Western NGO "technical assistants" travel to Africa to teach astute "managers" of complicated polygamous family relations about "capacity building" when most of the same lecturing "experts" require "life coaches" and psychoanalysts in their countries of origin. The "I am worth it" "entitlement issues" is, however, a small part of a larger trend that can be encapsulated by the rise of what Bourdieu and Wacquant describes as neoliberal "planetary vulgate." According to Bourdieu and Wacquant:

In a matter of a few years, in all the advanced societies, employers, international officials, high-ranking civil servants, media intellectuals and high-flying journalists have all started to speak a strange Newspeak. Its vocabulary, which seems to have sprung out of nowhere, is now on everyone's lips: 'globalization' and 'flexibility', 'governance' and 'employability', 'underclass'

and 'exclusion', 'new economy' and 'zero tolerance', 'communitarianism' and 'multiculturalism', not to mention their so-called post-modern cousins...The diffusion of this new planetary vulgate...is the result of a new type of imperialism...empirical analysis of the trajectory of the advanced economies over the *longue durée* suggests, in contrast, that 'globalisation' is not a new phase of capitalism, but a 'rhetoric' invoked by governments in order to justify their voluntary surrender to the financial markets and their conversion to a fiduciary conception of the firm.⁹

Modern society is now replete and in the grip of the planetary vulgate and its hangovers. Business, economic or managerial rationalities, acronyms, slangs and phrases like "globalisation" or "globaloney,"¹⁰ "competitive advantage," "knowledge" or "smart economy," "networks," "neo-liberalism," "recession," "deep recession," "stock markets," CEO, GDP, GNP, "consumer confidence index" and many other such phrases pervade the landscape like ants. Many of us pay lip service to these buzz terms since the "sink or swim" crude threat that always accompany the buzz words subliminally urge us to take them for granted. These pervasive technical terms spew out of the mouths of politicians, "experts," academics, and the mass media like flood water on sand bags so it is no wonder many of us just hop on the band wagon without really knowing where it is taking us.

Despite the fact that Karl Polanyi clearly demonstrated to us that the commodification of human labour power was an illusion, we still routinely referred to

⁹ http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/wacquant/wacquant_pdf/neoliberal.pdf (Accessed 14/02/09).

¹⁰ As Michael Mann (2001) put it.

people as standardized "economic units" with no need for any justification. Economic rationalisations infuse the plethora of "public" institutions from social "welfare," health "care" to even such things as individualised "feel good factor." The "audit culture" image of the person as a "self directing" strategic calculator or the image of peoplehood as a "phantom public" took centre stage alongside these transformations and entrenchment of the economic world view. It was however, a democrat, the former U.S. president, Bill Clinton, who allegedly said "*it is the economy, stupid*" not the "neo-cons" or Karl Marx. "Marxists" and "Liberals" alike have always presented the "economy" as the structure around which all else orbits. In recent times, countries are no longer seen as political or even as martial projects but as competitive "economies."

However, this shallow mechanistic and atomistic definition was not derived from the "economics" of "big picture" thinkers like Bernard Mandeville, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, Joseph Schumpeter and many others. On the contrary, it is a very narrow definition of economics; a notion of economics that assumes all the "command" attributes of what Robert Brenner (1991) and Aero Loone (1992) describes as the "bureaucratic mode of production." That is, the tunnel vision "economics" of technicians, demographers and bureaucrats who evoke the usual Spencian teleological "darwinism" when it suits their purpose. While future oriented words like "innovation" and "creativity" are banded around, they are ultimately defined in such a way that makes them utterly meaningless. Karl Marx reminded us in the *Grundrisse* (1973: 84) that the maximizing "isolated individual" so crucial to the rational choice model was not a universal truth or a general notion of the person but a specific narrative of self linked to a specific modern historical condition and cultural environment of early capitalism. Karl Marx

argued over a century ago that:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilisation... It compels all nations, on the pain of extinction to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image (Marx and Engels 1967:84)

In other words, the point of departure for many economists is simply a bourgeois subject-form masked by the compartmentalised tunnel vision of technicians and their quasi consequentiality. The interesting thing for us here, however, is what these trends and processes tell us about Stanley Milgram's (1974) "obedience rate" and of course the thorny issue of power/ knowledge. Equally important is the underpinnings of what Bourdieu and Wacquant describe as the "planetary vulgate" linked to the cunning of imperialist reason and the universalisation of the local histories of those with power.

Bourdieu and Wacquant for example argue that globalisation is an empty phrase invoked to rationalise the surrender of the state to the forces of the financial "markets" and also the universalisation of "the business of America is business" ethos. Americans, (and by this one is referring to the so called "wasps") have always defined themselves as entrepreneurs and merchants; therefore, in that respect what is described as "Reaganomics" can be seen as integral not only to the American collective "psyche" but the model of power that emerged alongside the "discovery" of America. The idea of big business as the

"tools and tyrants" of the administrative state is an idea Americans share from Madison to the most starry-eyed conspiracy theorists. The issue of "special interests," big business lobbyists, transnational corporations, Wall Street bankers, "Mob" gangsters and their influence in the corridors of political power have long been big issues at the fore front of political debates in the United States. In the media, CEOs and top officials of banks and world corporations are presented as models and leaders worthy of emulation even in areas like "conservation" or education. In other words, the re-making of the world in the image of business was all pervasive until very recently.

LINDSAY WATERS AND THE ENEMIES OF PROMISE

I once had the opportunity to attend a talk by Lindsay Waters of Harvard University at the Geary Institute, University College Dublin (UCD).

In his presentation, Waters passionately made the familiar case of the corporate takeover or "corruption" of higher education. Waters spoke for the better part of an hour summarising the arguments he made in his book entitled *Enemies of Promise: Publishing, Perishing and the Eclipse of Scholarship* (2004). In the book Waters declared that his whole project is an attempt to urge academics to begin taking concrete steps to preserve and protect the honoured values of their profession. According to Waters, scholars must adopt a bunker mentality towards pedagogical practices, the writing of books or articles in order to safeguard those time-honoured values under siege from corporate discourses of derision. This for Waters is an adroit imperative since the alternative is that the market becomes "our prison." Waters convincingly argues that he speaks from a vantage point of one of the elite universities in the world

and he also speaks from the point of view of a scholar and a publisher. In his own words:

I think that we scholars and publishers have allowed money changers to enter the temple, we need to restrict their activities, because we cannot kick them out the way Jesus did. Of course, many universities are in insignificant part, financial operations. Don't be shocked. So are many churches! Still, the universities have money that must be husbanded well, lest we squander our talents. But we have other talents—spiritual, not financial that needs cultivation. My second concern after the corporate makeover of the university is my conviction that, in letting the temple be turned over to the money-changers, we have allowed those who want to hollow out and thereby desecrate our books and publications become dominant in a number of fields. (Waters 2004: 5)

The idea that now pervades the academy is to avoid ideas. The most devastating put-down we have is that someone is a 'Big Picture Thinker'. Big ideas and grand narratives of liberation—those are all passé now. Andrew Abbott writes 'theory and method have very little to do with each other in the discipline (of sociology) today'. And this is the field of Marx Weber, Theodor Adorno and Talcott Parsons! (ibid: 70). Waters further made a point which is directly relevant to my central concern in this piece. For Waters, the penetration of the money changers into the academy, the hollowing out of the intellectual and the anti-theory positions of the corporatespeak are all

connected. In fact, Waters believes that the "funeral rather than birth" anti-theory stance prevalent in the academy encapsulates this trend more than anything else. As he so well put it:

Waters cites satirist Fredrick Crews who jokes that the job of humanists is to keep "cranking out insignificant publication" so that the presses can keep humming and we can all make the usual conference rounds and keep our jobs. Lindsay's "death of the intellectual" diatribe resonated deeply with my own experiences given my initial naïve view of the academia before becoming an "occasional insider-outsider." As somebody with some practical experience of the so-called "private" sector, I joined the academia believing that the ethos of business should be confined to the business sphere. Business, for most people in the business "world" is something they do for a living, not a philosophy of existence. It was quite strange then for me to observe people living off "public funds" adopting the Reagan/Thatcherite business nomenclature.

My interest in teaching was cultivated by my mother who saw teaching as an "honest line of work" compared to business, law or politics. I was also inspired by people like Lewis Mumford and his defining idea of "professor of things in general" thus narrow specialism was something I associated with bureaucrats and suits in the corridor of parastatals and corporations. Like Mumford, Gabriel Tarde embodied the intellectual spirit of the early sociology before its institutional "cementing" that became progressively intolerant of "infidels":

I would naively say: Hypotheses fingo. What is dangerous in the sciences, are not close-knit conjectures which are logically followed to their ultimate depths and their ultimate risks; it is those ghosts of

ideas floating in the mind. The point of view of universal sociology is one of those ghosts that is haunting the mind of present day thinkers. Let's see first where it can lead us. Let's us be outrageous even to the risk of passing for raving mad. In those matters, the fear of ridicule would be the most antiphilosophical sentiment. (Latour 2002: 118)

Elias for example, was trained in both medicine and philosophy and his work represents his attempt to reconcile the philosophical and physiological discrepancy the two fields tend to overemphasize (van Krieken 1998).

In addition, the binaries of an ahistorical default of "private" and "public" spheres was something I found difficult to understand since anyone with any business experience knows that the "market" or even "capital" is fundamentally public and social in character. Perhaps some people need to be reminded that the business Edward Barneys invented is still called "public relations" and that formal and informal "networks" are the best assets in the business world. So, one can only imagine the shock I experienced when I was attacked and disparaged for "big picture" thinking by people claiming Foucault, Derrida and Nietzsche as their source of inspiration. And this is the Foucault of "Bio-politics" and the amorphous "modern mechanism of power"; the Derrida of "logocentrism" and the Nietzsche of the "genealogy of morals." In response to those criticisms, I always say that I am doing the sociology of the "French who think in British" like Comte and Durkheim; the sociology of the "Germans who think in French" like Karl Marx, Norbert Elias, Jürgen Habermas, Ulrich Beck, etc; and the "French who think in German," Gabriel Tarde, Derrida, Foucault, Latour; and finally the sociology of the "Americans who think in French and Ger-

man"—W.E. Burghardt Du bois, W.I Thomas, C Wright Mills, Robert Nisbet, Immanuel Wallerstein and many others.

The sociological imagination is fundamentally anchored on "big picture" thinking, I argue; therefore, as a "sociologist,"¹¹ my big picture thinking is even bigger because as Heidegger put it, it just "is." The usual response from my critics is to threaten me with "irrelevance," "joblessness," or a stunted academic "career" if I continue with "radicalism." "Unemployment," interestingly, is the same framework C Wright Mills used to link "private" troubles to "public" issues, or, history and biography; but such "big picture" thinking was considered irrelevant until "Obamanomics." Obamanomics promises at least a rethinking of the core tenets of "market fundamentalism" and offers a new opportunity to reevaluate the business takeover of the "context of learning," pedagogy and the culture of scholarship. Such reevaluation should enable debates about what should constitute the crux of the sociologist's subject area.

For the "sociologist," the focus remains the same: knowledge and power, history and biography and the link between them. C. Wright Mills stated in his famous piece that the sociological imagination enables us to understand the larger historical crucible in terms of its meaning for both the inner and external life of the variety of human beings that live out their lives within the frameworks of that larger historical scene. What Mills is getting at

¹¹ Following the Brazilian "anthropologist" Darcy Ribeiro. According to Walter Dignolo (2000): "By 'subalternization of knowledge' I intend...to do justice and expand on an early insight by the Brazilian 'anthropologist' (as he calls himself, instead of 'anthropologist') Darcy Ribeiro. 'Anthropologist' was indeed a marker of subalternization of knowledge: an anthropologist in the 'Third World' is not the same as an anthropologist in the First World, since the former is in the location of the object of study, not in the location of the studying subject."

here is the fact that we can only understand biography by locating it within the larger historical scene and circumstances that also involves other biographies. To C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the link between the two. In other words, grasping what Anthony Giddens describes as the “double involvement” between history, biography and the relations between the two is the central task and promise of sociology. Following Mills, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the central question of sociology is the question of the interdependence between people, in the sense of the fact that humans will always live in the company of, in communication with, in cooperation or in conflict with other human beings. For Bauman, it is such overarching questions that constitute the nucleus of sociological imagination and mode of enquiry.

Given the historical conditions within which sociology was established, it is not surprising that sociology, as a specialist academic discipline takes such a broad framework as “modern society” as its basic unit of analysis. All the classical sociological thinkers (including philosophers adopted by sociologists) were all concerned with history, biography and the relationship between the two. From Comte and the Saint-Simonians, to Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, Karl Marx and Max Weber, the basic focus was the entire historical period we call modernity. These same themes animate the works of Karl Jaspers, Sigmund Freud, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Lewis Mumford, Shmuel Eisenstadt to Eric Voegelin and Karen Armstrong. While sociologists like Simmel and others sympathetic to the “German School” have long rehashed this Hegelian theme of progressive disenchantment with the natural world, leading to increased rationalisation, many sociologists still seem to be taken by surprise by the actual implications of that process of rationalisation.

For example, the same Norbert Elias that brought the regimentation of space and subjectivities to our attention seems to be surprised at the practical implication of that process of regimentation in the “discipline” of sociology. He wrote in *State Formation and Nation Building* (1970: 274) that:

One of the strangest aspects of the development of sociology during its first century and a half or so as a relatively autonomous discipline is the change from a long-term perspective to a short-term perspective, a kind of narrowing of the sociologists' interest to contemporary societies—and above all to their own societies—as they are here and now, and a withdrawal of interest from the problem how and why societies over the centuries have become what they are. The narrowing of the focus has found its most striking expression in the change in the dominant type of sociological theory.

Why is compartmentalisation, withdrawal into the “present” or rationalisation a strange aspect of the “development” of sociology when sociology is entangled in the “civilizing process”? Elias, of all people, should know that preoccupation with the present is a core feature of the paradox of “modo” or *modernus*. That preoccupation with the present is equally linked to the basic character of the cultural environment of a modern world where, as Ellul lamented:

The interval which traditionally separates a scientific discovery and its application in everyday life has been progressively shortened... The discovery enters the public domain before anyone has had a chance to recognize all the consequences or to recognize its full impact... There is no longer respite

for reflecting or choosing or adapting oneself, or for acting or wishing or pulling oneself together. The rule of life is: No sooner said than done. Life has become a race-course...a succession of objective events which drag us along and lead us astray without anything affording us the possibility of standing apart, taking stock, and ceasing to act.¹²

Nevertheless, given my own background in historical sociology, it is hardly surprising that my initial concern is discussing the incisive “systemic forces” driving the changing context of teaching and learning. Education is increasingly seen as the dominant institution and discourse of primary and secondary socialisation and cultural production and reproduction; thus, education often becomes a perennial site for both the exercise of power and the ideological struggles integral to the mechanisms, registers and effects of power. A clear illustration of the latter point is the case of the Innu in Canada. Colin Samson demonstrated this quite convincingly in his book, *A Way of Life that Does Not Exist: Canada and the Extinguishment of the Innu*—despite flaky criticisms of “essentialism”¹³ directed at him. Referring to the Canadian education system, a member of the Innu community discovered that:

¹² See Ellul 1964: 10-330.

¹³ Another one of those “cultural turn” vulgate carelessly bandied around in the corporate academia with no reference to its previous uses in Western philosophy or even non-Western thought. The anti-essentialism police (an oxymoron) derive their intellectual impetus from their use of those precise tools of corporate discourse of derision on “soft targets,” albeit garnished with Derrida’s “essential lapse between significations.” In many ways, the “essentialism” debate reminds me of Bruno Latour’s observation that “deconstruction” has been appropriated by the “National Security Agency.”

It made me ‘think English’ and gave me ‘white thoughts’...I lost part of my life...The only thing that kids are able to learn in school is to be embarrassed by our culture...I am ashamed to say that I went to school at all...I wasted my years in school...Kids now talk back to their parents. That comes from school. They don’t pay attention at all. They don’t listen to parents because in school they get a lot of English. They are gradually losing their language...starting to talk to each other in English. (Samson, 2003:199-201)

The knowledge ideological struggles are not by any means new. As Foucault and many others have shown, such struggles are an integral part of the establishment of any dominant system of thought. In their classic, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, written many decades ago, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner remind us that:

School, after all, is the one institution in our society that is inflicted on everybody, and what happens in school makes a difference—for good or ill. We use the word ‘inflicted’ because we believe that the way schools are currently conducted does very little, and quite probably nothing, to enhance our chances of mutual survival; that is, to help us solve any or even some of the problems we have mentioned. One way of representing the present condition of our education system is as follows: It is as if we are driving a multimillion dollar sports car, screaming, ‘faster! Faster!’ while peering fixedly into the rearview mirror... We have paid almost exclusive attention to the car, equipping it with all sorts of fantastic gadgets and an engine

that will propel it at ever increasing speed, but we seem to have forgotten where we wanted to go in it. (Postman and Weingartner 1969: xiii)

Invariably, my main line of argument in this article reflects the debates and concerns that surround not only the usual extolling of Francis Bacon's mantra of "knowledge is power," but also Michel Foucault's inverting of the Baconian mantra in his power/knowledge couplet. Foucault notes the way the exercise of power is embedded in knowledge production and how the usual distinction between the domain of power and the domain of knowledge in modern society is illusory. For Michel Foucault, power is not simply reducible to its effects or merely negative; power produces knowledge, objects, subjects and "rituals of truth." Knowledge and power imply one another because as Foucault puts it, "no power relations [exist] without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge" (Foucault 1979: 27). For instance, Foucault's concepts of the 'Panopticon', disciplinary and bio-power not only illuminate the macro-physics, architectural and geometric mechanisms of power, it also gives us good insight into how subjects are constituted and enlisted as key components in the process of their own subjectification and the correlative transformation of the broader organisational model and cultural milieu (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Could this also help to explain why those that enthusiastically embrace dominant systems of thought see those thought systems as everlasting or immanent despite their loud proclamations of "change" and dynamism?

The original designer of the "Panopticon," Jeremy Bentham (the reformer and philosopher) was clear on the manifold nature of his "architectural apparatus" when he declared in relation to the larger social "outcomes" of his new prison design in

these words:

Morals reformed—health preserved—industry invigorated instruction diffused—public burthens lightened—Economy seated, as it were, upon a rock—the gordian knot of the Poor-Laws are not cut, but untied—all by a simple idea in Architecture!—Thus much I ventured to say on laying down the pen—and thus much I should perhaps have said on taking it up, if at that early period I had seen the whole of the way before me. A new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example: and that, to a degree equally without example, secured by whoever chooses to have it so, against abuse.—Such is the engine: such the work that may be done with it. How far the expectations thus held out have been fulfilled, the reader will decide.¹⁴

As Bentham's architectural apparatus model of society shows, social planning, and engineering were integral to the vision of society organised around the problem of "obtaining power" and thus knowledge over both the physical spaces the "population" inhabits and the mental spaces of the population itself. This bid to control the "social" or "society" was linked to the evolution of both sociology and the specific trends in the technologies of governance that sees the "population" through the prism of "reason of state" and "theory of police" (Foucault 2000).

But can we really grasp the manifold workings of the Panopticon through compartmentalized lenses when the very word

¹⁴ See Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon - <http://cartome.org/panopticon2.htm> (accessed 22-01-09). See also Jeremy Bentham, Panopticon. In Miran Bozovic (ed.), *The Panopticon Writings*, London: Verso, 1995, 29-95.

“panopticon” implies an “all” seeing disciplinary apparatus? Is the proper sociological question not a question that sees the compartmentalised lens as part of the “cell” view that hides the “all” view or totality from the individuated designs of each cell unit? The power of the Panopticon lies in the fact that it denies each cell the “big picture” or even the view of the rows or arrangement of the cells as a total design. Interestingly, Foucault’s model of disciplinary power and bio-politics can help explain not only what Neil Postman (1992) describes as “the surrender of culture to technology,” but also the recent preoccupation in higher education with pharmaceutical driven “research” into population and “life sciences.” Bio-power for Foucault brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge an agent of the transformations that derive their impetus from disciplinary and bio-power (Rabinow 1984:17). It is important to bear in mind that the “population and life science” discourse accompanied the “corporate” makeover of higher education, the enclosure of the “genetic commons” and the larger “bio-piracy” inflicted on the “nature” rich southern hemisphere.

Therefore, rather than merely looking for ways to adapt education or learning to the context of learning, perhaps, we should follow Immanuel Wallerstein (1997) and ask: adapt or assimilate into what? What exactly is this often cited ever “changing” context of learning that we need to adapt to? Since the target is forever moving, is it even possible to adapt to this ever receding horizon? What are the drivers of that movement? In other words, instead of exploring ways to adapt learning to a “changing world,” our questions should now be geared towards the costs or implications of these serial adaptations and what they tell us about knowledge and power. Since teaching and learning cannot exist in a vacuum, it is important to also look at the total cultural environment within which the ac-

tivities we call “teaching” and “learning” derive their meaning and social relevance from.

EDUCATION, POWER/KNOWLEDGE AND THE “ADAPTIVE MODEL”

Education by and large is not a neutral concept or institution since it is grounded in a specific cultural milieu. The etymology of the word “education,” *educatus, educare*, tells us quite clearly that education is about the cultivation of specific values, knowledge, skills and world views. This close relationship between institutions of teaching and learning and the cultural environment makes it somewhat difficult to investigate the relationship between the two. This is why the theories and methods introduced by Michel Foucault are useful because Foucault recognised the close affinity between knowledge production/reproduction, power relations and cultural context. Universities for example, are no longer just seen as “institutions of higher learning” but also “research-intensive” domains and engines of the “knowledge-based economy.” These redefinitions are not simply generated from “pro-business” or “neo-liberal” university presidents as some critics claim, but mirror trans-national forces which the governing structures of universities themselves experience as immanent remote forces.

It is important to point out, however, that the method I am using in this article is not “discourse analysis” but rather what Foucault describes as methodological “archaeology” and “genealogy.” By archaeology and genealogy, Foucault is referring to the “excavating” of the conditions of possibility of an event, discursive formation, situation or condition (Foucault 1970; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:104-5). In the *Order of Things* (1994), Foucault posits that the “archaeological level” is the level of what underpins or makes an event or situation

possible. However, Foucault usually alternates between archaeology and what he describes as the genealogical method. For Foucault (1994: 42), genealogy is simply "...the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today."

Therefore, rather than present an event or situation in the stable and coherent way both the defenders and critics of that event or situation often like to present it, we should unmask what has been silenced because of the institutionalization of knowledge by those in power and their critics. Furthermore, whereas archaeology focuses on what Ludwig Wittgenstein described as "language games," genealogy unveils the creation of objects through institutional practices (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:104). Against the claims to write from a neutral or "free-floating" perspective, the Nietzschean or Foucaultian genealogist embraces the political and polemical interests motivating the writing of the history (Hoy 1986: 6-7).

Not only do you need knowledge in order to exert power, but you also need *dispositif* to set up and produce both society and knowledge... In that sense, the dissemination of laboratories, their ability to reverse scale, to completely reverse micro and macro order, is very much a confirmation of Foucault's tradition. But of course, there are many more *dispositifs* than the panopticon... There is a very productive line of inquiry coming from Foucault which has led to field studies—hospitals, accountants, bureaucrats, etc. This is not a metaphysical model but rather a model on which you can actually do empirical studies about the technologies of society and knowl-

edge production. But you will notice that this blending of Foucault, history, Marxism, and cultural studies is occurring in English, not in French.¹⁵ Consequently my aim is not simply to analyse the constituting discourses of relevant actors and "stakeholders" like the UCD president, the 'Bologna process' documents and its specific spin-offs like 'modularisation'. My primary focus is the underpinnings of the institutionalised discourses and the corresponding *dispositif* and what they tell us about power and knowledge. Even though what is usually described as "discourse analysis" is allegedly inspired by Foucault's archaeological method, Foucault's archaeology is fundamentally structuralist and is mainly devoid of the mixing of Jacques Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard that is the dominant current of discourse analysis in the English speaking world. In an interview with T. Hugh Crawford, Bruno Latour observes in regard to the methods of Foucault that:

In order to understand the relationship between Education and the larger cultural environment we have to consider the following questions:

- What is education?
- What are the links between education, structures and dynamics of power, politics, culture, technology and economy?
- What drives cultural and social change?
- Why did schooling become wide-

¹⁵ See An Interview with Bruno Latour, *Configurations* - Volume 1, Number 2, Spring 1993, pp. 247-268.

spread after the industrial revolution and the emergence of the global economy?

- How are the forms and contents of education connected to these transformations?
- What role does this changing world play in structuring education in the service of modernisation?

Exploring the above questions will serve as a background to understanding the implications of adapting education to the changing context of learning. It will equally clarify the question of what exactly education is supposed to adapt to. It would also provide a good framework to engage with the debates that are happening within education in general and higher education in particular. Finally, it will provide the basis on which the changes happening in UCD in particular and the Bologna process in general can be understood against the backdrop of the larger social changes. For example, the UCD General Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Graduate Programmes, 4th October 2007 version, clearly states that:

The general objective of UCD initiative on modularisation and semesterisation is to...enable full participation in the European Higher Education Area in alignment with the Bologna process.

What is the “Bologna process”? In the European University Association Bologna Handbook entitled *Making Bologna Work*, the editors stated that:

...the Bologna process has emerged as the most significant pan-European undertaking in the field of higher education over the last thirty years. Aimed at creating a common European higher education area, ‘Bologna’ has had an im-

portant impact on higher education systems, individually and collectively, as well as on program structures and development in a large majority of higher education institutions across Europe. This reform influence will extend well beyond 2010, as institutions adapt, respond and use the process strategically to shape their own future. Although ‘Bologna’ has been highlighted in all its political aspects and through its demand on programme reform for a number of years, numerous actors in Europe—and indeed beyond—are still wondering what it really stands for, what it means in concrete terms, how it should be implemented effectively and where its taking us. (Froment et al 2006:2)

While the ‘Bologna’ process obviously has wide and far-reaching consequences, not many people within the EU have heard of Bologna or as Froment admitted above, where it is taking us. Nevertheless, the underpinning of the Bologna process is the even more mysterious “Lisbon strategy” where the 15 core EU countries set out:

...to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.¹⁶

Both the Bologna and the Lisbon strategy emphasise three key things:

- Competitiveness
- The link between knowledge-base and

¹⁶ See Haug, Guy article A3.1.1 in the first supplement to the Handbook in the EUA Handbook for further discussion on the links between Bologna and the Lisbon strategy. Also see Eric Froment et al 2006 page 6.

- economy
- Social cohesion

The aims of the “Bologna” is clear but as yet, we still do not know what the “Bologna process” really is given the huge implications of its set goals. As Eric Froment argues in the article, *The evolving vision and focus of the Bologna process*:

...therefore...Bologna is about the system of higher education in Europe or, in other words, about the system responsible for training Europe's future professionals, leaders and researchers, and for ensuring access to this training, a close link with the Lisbon strategy is inevitable. Bologna is no longer just a simple reform seeking to achieve more broadly compatible higher education systems, disassociated from social change as a whole. It is now much more strategic than that, and not without serious consequences for European society.¹⁷

Eric Froment's views, in many ways, touched on something that is at the root of education and also the bedrock of the word culture. Froment also alluded to the way that education as a social institution guides knowledge, skill and cultural reproduction and transmission in society. Many of the articles in the Bologna Handbook equally shows how education is diffused in the cultural environment and values that give it purpose. Thus, it also reflects the dominant power structure of society and what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described as cultural capital, habitus and its inter-generational transmission. Paulo Freire in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), has also shown the undersides of the elite use of formal education as an instrument of cultural, symbolic domination and assimilation.

¹⁷ EUA Bologna Handbook A1.1-1, page 6.

Many Marxists from Louis Althusser to Gramsci have also argued that education is used to cultivate the “habits of industry” and for producing workers for the dominant economic order. This is of course the basis for the “hidden curriculum” and Karl Marx's often recycled theory of “ruling class, ruling ideas.”

Education is equally influenced by trends and structures of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. It is equally shaped by the organising models or ideologies behind those structures. We can see this clearly in the distinctions in the forms and contents of education systems of countries that claim to be democratic, capitalist, socialist or communist. What this means in practical terms is that education is shaped by discourses of private or public ownership, personal/profit and collective goals, market/corporate or state controlled. Just as the patterns and dynamics of the economy triggers changes in the forms and contents of education, technological and cultural changes also trigger changes in the economy and also in education. Modern schools and education systems are fundamentally shaped by technological and cultural changes like notions of “private property,” permanent settlements, state formation, specialisation, the division of labour, urbanisation and industrialisation. For instance, Neil Postman (1998) argues that the “school” is a product of the industrial revolution and the invention of printing which is actually the first information revolution.

New technologies increase productivity in some areas and cause intense disruptions in others as the fallout of the industrial revolution clearly shows. New technologies bring about radical changes in work ethics, personal habits and social aspirations. The industrial revolution made mass production of manufactured goods, mass wage labour, and even the idea of “going to work” in the modern sense possible. The emphasis on literal and mechanical

skills is also linked to that whole transformation. The advent of computers in many ways reflects that great transformation spirit that is linked to the industrial revolution. What is then described as “globalisation” (or more accurately, “globalisations”), which involve the movement of people, goods, ideas and capital, is a logical outcome of the historical process that began in the “long” 16th century. The introduction of flexible labour market, the expansion of the service sector, massification and the re-branding of education as a corporate activity are reflections of that whole socio-economic transformation. Once again Eric Froment seems to understand this very well:

...the technical and economic developments of recent decades have only served to point to the inevitable reality of universities as players in the world stage. Yet the traditional atmosphere of corporation and exchange between them have been affected by a new competitive pressure. Indeed, this increased competition between universities is related to the increasingly important role played by knowledge and a generation of new knowledge in global economic competition. It is against this background that Bologna is now situated, so to speak, at cross roads. (ibid: 10)

In the article entitled *University Governance, Leadership and Management in a Rapidly Changing Environment*, Luc E. Weber points out that:

Organisations—private, public and voluntary not for profit—have been challenged all over the world by an increasingly rapidly changing environment. This is also true for schools, tertiary education institutions and universities. The

consequences are serious, even threatening: those institutions which do not adapt fast enough—or better, lead this change—risk losing their importance and eventually disappearing. If this is recognised in companies, non-profit organisations and even in public entities, why shouldn't it be also true for universities? The reasons have been widely recognised, they are due to two phenomenal: globalisation, as well as scientific and technological progress.¹⁸

Weber's deference to what he opaquely describes as “globalisation” and “technological progress” in many ways encapsulates the core issues in the dynamics of technology and culture. In his book, *Technopoly* (1992), Neil Postman argues that cultures may be classified into three categories: tool using cultures, technocracies and technopolies. According to Postman, in tool using cultures, technologies are used to solve specific and urgent problems but not intended to denigrate the cultural environment in which they are introduced. In a technocracy, tools play a key role in the world-view of the cultural environment in which they are introduced and thus tend to displace the cultural arrangements or simply appropriate them for its own purposes. Technocracies can be distinguished from tool using culture due to the fact that in technocracies tools become the master over culture and become enlisted as a resource for the development of tools. However tools do not completely dominate the domain of culture. In a technopoly, tools become not only central to cultural production by eliminating every and any alternative, technology becomes so reified that it subsumes culture to the extent of making alternatives not simply ille-

¹⁸ See the EUA Handbook on the Bologna process A2.2-1.

gal or immoral, it just makes them irrelevant and invisible forcing them into a state of permanent silence. Technology does this by redefining every single component of culture from belonging to family, self image, history, politics, truth and intelligence. And it does this by narrowing the field of options so that social actions and relations fit into its requirements.

It is against this technopoly backdrop that Luc Weber's Spencerian fatalistic analogies of "swim or sink" can be understood. It is, however, necessary to point out that an analysis of the UCD president's speeches, which echoes the Bologna Handbook, equally shows the same fatalistic tendency to mystify 'globalisation' and 'technological development' on the one hand and the relentless demands to assimilate to those mysterious forces on the other. What is left out of the whole debate as Neil Postman (1998) indicated is the question not of what those mysterious and sacred forces will do, but what they will undo.

FINAL THOUGHTS: EDUCATION, PEDAGOGY AND THE VICISSITUDES OF THE TECHNOLOGIES OF POWER

In a paper entitled, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*, presented at The New Technologies and the Human Person conference, Denver, Colorado, March 27, 1998, Neil Postman posed some questions that are relevant to the issue in hand.

In a nutshell, Postman argues that technological change is a "Faustian bargain"—that technology "giveth and technology taketh away" as well. However, the crucial factor for Postman is not simply the cost and benefit analysis but the fact that the focus is overwhelmingly on the side of the "benefits." The costs are either dismissed as necessary sacrifices or glossed over as "challenges" and resistance to overcome en route to the benefits.

...for every advantage a new technology offers, there is always a corresponding disadvantage. The disadvantage may exceed in importance the advantage, or the advantage may well be worth the cost. Now, this may seem to be a rather obvious idea, but you would be surprised at how many people believe that new technologies are unmixed blessings. You need only think of the enthusiasms with which most people approach their understanding of computers. Ask anyone who knows something about computers to talk about them, and you will find that they will, unabashedly and relentlessly, extol the wonders of computers. You will also find that in most cases they will completely neglect to mention any of the liabilities of computers. This is a dangerous imbalance, since the greater the wonders of a technology, the greater will be its negative consequences.¹⁹

Postman's thesis is relevant to the concerns and debates generated by the changing context, content, form and meaning of education. These questions are crucial because many of the ritualised phrases and words used to justify the dynamics of those changes are at best not well defined.

For example, many of the words and phrases used to legitimise and justify the demands for "reform" and "adaptation" in higher education are at best murky and in many cases empty signifiers. Kieran Allen (2004:127) points out that vague references and ideal-types like "fluid networks," or in this case, "world class university," "knowledge economy," "globalisation" or

¹⁹ <http://www.owl.net.rice.edu/~comp300/documents/FiveThingsaboutChange.pdf> (accessed 14/05/07)

“choices” carelessly bandied around today do nothing to illuminate or clarify the phenomenon in question. They only function as references to what “we are all supposed to know.” Philip G. Altbach, a professor of higher education and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College argues that:

Everyone wants a world-class university. No country feels it can do without one. The problem is that no one knows what a world-class university is, and no one has figured out how to get one. Everyone, however, refers to the concept. A Google search, for example, produces thousands of references, and many institutions call themselves “world class”—from relatively modest academic universities in central Canada to a new college in the Persian Gulf. This is an age of academic hype, with universities of different kinds and in diverse countries claiming the exalted status of world class—generally with little justification. Those seeking to certify “world classness” generally do not know what they are talking about. For example, Asiaweek, a respected Hong Kong-based magazine produced a ranking of Asian universities for several years until their efforts were so widely criticized that they stopped. This article tries the impossible—to define a world class university, and then to argue that it is just as important for academic institutions to be “national” or “regional class” rather than to seek to emulate the wealthiest and in many ways most elitist universities.²⁰

²⁰ Philip G. Altbach *The Costs and Benefits of World-Class Universities*, International Higher Education, Number 33, Summer 2003, page 5-6

In the welcome address of the European Conference on Educational Research in 2005, Dr Hugh Brady, President, UCD Dublin, told his audience that:

These changes are to enable the university to achieve its strategic objectives to make UCD one of the top European universities, recognised for its excellence in teaching and learning; research-intensive; socially inclusive; agenda-shaping nationally, and with an international reputation... The year 2005 also marks the mid-point in the time-line set down by the European Union for the achievement of the ambitious targets of the Lisbon Strategy to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.²¹

However, in a report published in 2006 the UCD president touched on the underpinnings of this drive for “excellence” and achievement of the “ambitious targets.”

“The vision I articulated was underpinned by an awareness of UCD's position in Ireland and the wider world. The harsh reality is that we face greater competition than ever before for the best students and staff in a global market.²²

The language of global markets and competitive pressures emanating from a “resurgent” Asia or Latin America is as old as the 1980s and 90s when Japan, and then,

²¹ http://www.ucd.ie/president/speeches_060806_eceer_opening.htm (accessed 21/03/08).

²² <http://www.ucd.ie/president/report/2006/section%201%20english.pdf> (ibid).

the Asian “Tiger economies” were seen as a threat to Western economic “dominance.” Prolonged economic downturn and financial “crisis” seem to have erased such threats but the language simply shifted to the new boys on the block—China, India and Brazil. Dani Rodrick’s cheerleaders of “globalisation” cannot be “falsified” because the goal post is constantly shifting in accord with the short attention span of Robert Lifton’s “protean” humans. The institutionalisation of the technologies of calculation “at a distance” in enterprise, hospitals, schools and many other spheres is indissociable from the invention of “double-entry” bookkeeping (Miller and Rose 2008). Accounting techniques such as “discounted cash flow analyses” both by “private” businesses and governments produce:

...new ways of rendering economic activity into thought, conferring new visibilities upon components of profit and loss, embedding new methods of calculation and hence linking private decisions and public objectives in a new way—through the medium of knowledge (ibid: 67)

The linking of “private” decisions and public objective is however not new but was confined to the activities of the old colonial multinationals referred to then as “trading companies,” “pirates” and “explorers” with royal charters. And curiously, those early modern buccaneers who braved the unknown seas equally engaged in “win-win partnerships” with sovereigns, extended “people’s line of sight,” engendered “step-changes,” and demanded their own “individual’s on-going value” albeit in gold bullions.

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