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The Coming of the Ecological University

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My basic orientation

- Philosophy - as conceptual construction and conceptual imagining
- A realism – independent of human thought – systems (national and global), digital era, physical institutions
- But while bound in to the ‘real world’ not entirely incorporated into it.
- Also, here, I shall focus on ‘the university’ – and so distinguish ‘university’ from ‘higher education’.

The beginnings of the problem

A falling away:

- The passing of the liberal idea of the university
- Global forces - rankings
- State agendas
- Corporatisation (NPM, surveillance, measurement ...)
- Postmodernism; philosophy of incoherence
- End of critical reason
 - *A double undermining* – sociologically and philosophically
- Q – how now understand the university?
 - Negativities
 - Unremitting bleakness
 - The great tradition is over?
 - Possibilities/ new spaces/ new imaginings?

Endorsement

Superficial/Endorsement

Depth/Endorsement

(‘the world-class university’,
‘excellence’)

eg ‘the entrepreneurial
university’

A

C

B

D

Superficial

Depth

Superficial/Critical

Deep/Critical

eg ‘the edgeless
university’

(feasible utopias
- Projects of hopefulness)
eg, ‘the ecological
university’

Criticality

The idea of 'feasible utopias'

- Utopia – desirable but out of reach
 - Yet feasible – it could be reached
- The unlikelihood of its being reached reflects the dominance of the structures and interests at work
 - So the idea of a utopia is somewhat pessimistic
- But the idea of a 'feasible utopia' is a little optimistic – there is a space for realizing a utopia
 - Perhaps embryonic instances can be glimpsed.

A critical project of the imagination

- Large role for the imagination
- Concept of 'the imaginary'
 - (Taylor) – building on traditions, collective sediments
 - (Sartre) – looking to the future; of willing the future
- A critical project – identified shortcomings in the present
- Belief that matters could go better

Some imaginings of the university

- The authentic university
 - The therapeutic university
 - The liquid university [Bauman]
 - The translucent university
 - The perverse university
 - The university as fool (Kavanagh)
 - The wise university [Maxwell]
 - The virtuous university (Nixon)
 - The theatrical university (Parker)
 - The utopian university
 - The metaphysical university
- *It follows that we need not just more ideas of the university but **good** ideas. So what is to count as a good idea?*

Tests of adequacy

- Range (theory/ ideas/ practice/ policy)
- Depth (structures/ experience/ ideas)
- Feasibility (power/ organization)
- Ethics (flourishing – human/ organizational/ societal/ global)
- Continuing possibilities/ emergent properties

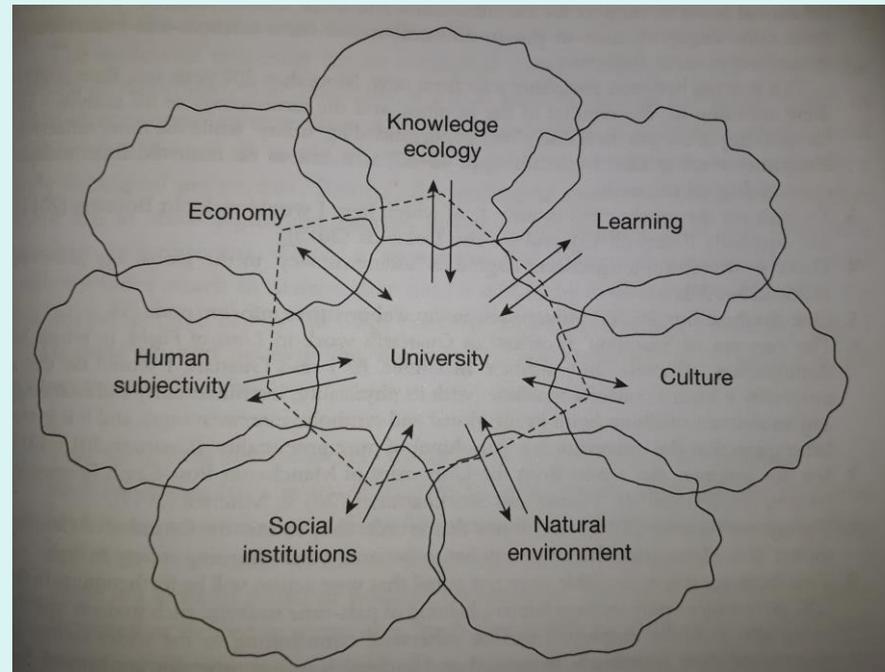
Severe tests, but they will extend imaginative ideas

- and help to provide legitimacy to the imagination
- and potency to the imagination

The idea of the ecological

- From the Greek 'oikos' – house;
- Felix Guattari – *The Three Ecologies*: 3 'ecological registers': environment; social relations; human subjectivity
- *However*, the university is implicated in no less than 7 ecosystems:
 - Knowledge
 - Social institutions (including the political sphere)
 - Natural environment
 - Economy
 - Culture
 - Learning (including societal learning)
 - Human subjectivity

The university – 7 ecosystems



Characteristics and implications

- Ecosystem: a system that has an internal coherence but also fragility
- - and possibly impaired
 - eg, its diversity may be constrained (the drawing in of the public sphere)
- And (1) human embeddedness and (2) a human responsibility in ‘sustaining’ any such ecology
- But ‘sustainability’ is too limited an idea
- Rather we should speak of *improvement and of strengthening* any ecosystem
- To speak of the ecological brings to view the interconnectness of all things
- But this ‘ecological perspective’ precisely allows for difference, diversity. (ie, no blue print idea of the university)

Metaphors of the university

- Complexity – spaghetti: Far too static!
- Rather, metaphors of the liquid, the fluid
- The university as a ‘squid’
- Or perhaps meteorological metaphors of clouds, haziness, winds
- The ecosystems of the university themselves overlap and have invaded the university
- Flow into and across themselves – and into the university
- ie the 7 ecosystems are ‘flows of spaces’ (Castells)

- Deep ecology – but also a fluid ecosophy.

The ecological university

- The ecological university (EU) is fact and value intertwined – a ‘thick concept’ (Williams)
- It takes its embeddedness – actual/ potential – seriously
- The EU has a care towards its interconnectedness with the world
- For the EU has a care towards its environment – namely, the whole world
- (All universities are – to some extent – global; they are or would like to be participants in global conversations.)
- So the EU acts in collective interests – ‘that, in the short term, don’t profit anyone, but in the long term are the [channels for] a processual enrichment for the whole of humanity. It is the whole future of fundamental research and artistic production that is in question here.’ (Guattari, p65)
- Universities are all implicated in the global conversations of academe
- They reach out to the world, if only in their aspirations

The coming of the ecological university

Global

- The ecological challenge – of global warming
- Global terrorism and crime
- Energy crises
- Global diseases and hunger
- Inter-dependency

National

- Social disorder
- Poverty and alienation
- Generational conflict
- The other claims us, whether we like it or not
- We are compelled to take account of 'strangers' and offer 'hospitality'

NB: This is not to claim that the ecological university only (a) attends to issues in the public domain (b) attempts to 'solve' the world's problems. But this is to intimate that spaces may open for the ecological university.

Valuing the ecological university

- The Ec Univ has a care towards the world
- Acknowledges its interconnectedness with the world
 - Both human and physical
- And its possibilities with/ for the world
- Promoting human understanding
- Improving situations in communities
- Has a concern with human flourishing (not just its students)

The ecological university has a concern towards itself

- The ec univ is concerned with itself – the flows across disciplines, the univ as a space for argument, the full flourishing of its students.
- It has a concern towards its own capacities for thinking.
- And thereby its capacities for aiding the thinking of/ in society – and so widening the public sphere.
- The humanities are important.

Possibilities for the EU

- Developing a strategy of 'public engagement'
- Putting its academic work on-line;
- Holding public lectures – and putting podcasts on-line
- The Public Philosopher
- Working with local/ regional communities in addressing social issues
- Links between North-South universities
- Working with groups/ communities in the developing world
- Offer advice to members of the public
- Producing materials for public consumption
- Its research tackling issues of wide concern
- Its academics becoming public intellectuals – communicating to publics ; enhancing the public sphere
- Teaching: putting each class in contact with a like class in another country and develop a trans-national/ trans-cultural learning space – students as 'global citizens'
- Promoting inter-connectedness in its staff members & wellbeing
- A university of wisdom
- Revivifying the humanities
- Addressing the United Nations' Development Goals.

NB: If it is said that some universities do much of this, then (a) that is a demonstration that the Ec Univ has already come amongst us without us recognizing it and (b) that the entrepreneurial university may be already passé.

The knowledge ecology

- Advancing the public sphere
- Epistemologies for understanding – **public understanding**
- Academics playing public roles
- **Advancing the ‘critical conscience of society’ (NZ)**
- Epistemological interconnectiveness – transdisciplinarity
- Knowledges in all their variety – experiential/ intuitive/ tacit (not merely 2 ‘modes’)
- **Humanities (including languages) accorded proper value**
- The imaginative level of knowing enhanced
- Has an ecological ‘knowledge constitutive interest’ – does this knowing promote societal/ global wellbeing?
- Open, transparent and accessible knowledges
- **University without walls**
- **Citizen scientists/ citizen scholars**
- Active in the world
- Academics as ‘writers’

No blue-print philosophy

- No one way of being an ecological university; no blue-print philosophy
- What it is to be an ecological university has to be discerned and imagined
- For each university.
- So bringing to bear an imagination that is positive, realist, creative, and critical all at once.
- Discerning and imagining possibilities that just might be brought off in the best of all possible worlds
 - – and then attempting to bring off such ideas, throughout a university.

Testing the idea of the ecological U (against 5 criteria of adequacy)

- **Range (theory/ ideas/ practice/ policy)**
 - *EU has extensive range*
- **Depth (structures/ experience/ ideas)**
 - *EU is sensitive to the deep structures of the world, and to complexity in experience and ideas; it is not a trivial idea. It can live among the antagonisms of the university.*
- **Feasibility (power/ organization)**
 - *EU is open to imaginative practical realisation, even with and even through existing power structures*
- **Ethics (flourishing – human/ organizational/ societal/ global)**
 - *EU has a strong ethical component, being concerned with ‘the other’, individual/ social, local/ global, organic/ inorganic*
- **Continuing possibilities/ emergent properties**
 - *EU can go on being revisited, reimagined, developed. It can unfold in time and space; indeed, it can open new spaces.*

Conclusion

- The university IS beset with powerful forces
- But all is not lost
- Partly we are limited by our imaginations
- If we are to gain regain the university, it will require imaginative effort
- Different feasible utopias can be imagined and brought forth
- ‘The ecological university’ is necessary, and feasible and desirable
- And it is just in our reach.



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