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The Doctorate – a tale of three cities

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Outline

- 100 years of the modern history of the PhD
- It has moved from a small city to a much larger city
- And is now 'unfit for purpose'
- Question: can we evolve a PhD that is more fitting for the 21C?

The old city

- The old city – now pretty well abandoned
- Some stragglers hang on in – but largely deserted
- At one time – in its own way – a well-regarded city
- The city of scholarship

The city of scholarship

The dissertation:

- Was expected to say something of significance
- Opening the way to an academic trajectory
- And quickly to a major monograph
- & a professorial chair
- And an inaugural lecture
 - High risk – if one took a line contrary to that of the examiners
 - Not unknown for individuals to fail (in this way) only to become luminaries in their fields; even to establish a new field.

The city of performance

- The old city has been abandoned for a new city
- City of performance
- Fuelled and monied by knowledge capitalism (Boutang; Peters)
- Seeks to maximise the use value *and* the exchange value of knowledge
 - Knowledge has to *perform* and the knower too
- In a mass higher education system, the PhD is not immune from the lures of this new city
- Status, employment, networks, impact in the ‘real’ world – all await

The new PhD

- No longer a matter of argument
 - Of striking out boldly, of taking on the luminaries in the field
- The dissertation:
 - now a space in which to demonstrate one's 'research' skills
- The text – an assemblage
 - Firm structure: Lit review; methodology; fieldwork; data capture; data 'analysis'; some perfunctory closing remarks
 - No thesis as such – a thesis without a thesis!
- Heavy first-person element: it is a personal statement rather than an argument to take its place in a space of reason.

A profound shift

- This is a profound shift
- From the highest form of reasoning, argument, and argumentation
- To skills, devoid of insight and imagination
- The role of the PhD as a form of creativity, of new frames of interpretation of the world, now lost

No return - & the COVID crisis

- No return – the old PhD was a creature of another age, of academia enclosure
- A new world is presenting new demands, new spaces, new possibilities
- A world of utter interconnectivity
- ***This*** is the lesson of the COVID crisis
 - – but more especially climate change and ecological degradation
 - (The COVID crisis is only teaching us things we should have already learnt – interconnectivity and interdependency of human and natural worlds)

The (global) city of interconnections

- If the world is interconnected, then so too should be our knowing efforts
- Our epistemologies should match the way the world is – its ontology
- Talk of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity - with us for 50+ yrs
- (*TD is esp attracting attention – talk of TD ontologies (Gibbs etc)*)
- Not for now
- Simply that a PhD should demonstrate an awareness of *connections* with and interdependencies among entities (while having a particular focus)
- & so offer a definite thesis as such about the relations between the entities in sight (hierarchies, forces, influences, ideologies)
- A critical realism, in short.

Conclusions: The PhD is dead – long live the PhD!

- The PhD has undergone one revolution
- Now time for another
- (COVID crisis – a catalyst for changes already underway ..)
- The PhD was a space for understanding
- Now to recover it but to go much further
- The PhD as a site of wisdom
- Standing back, seeing the larger picture,
 - making connections and judgements and
 - having the courage to form a definite argument
- A thesis indeed.



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