

**AUTHOR: Dr. Iain MacRury**

**TITLE: Institutional Creativity and Pathologies of Potential Space: The Modern University**

**ABSTRACT for "Institutional creativity and pathologies of potential space"**

This paper proposes the applicability of object relations psychoanalytic conceptions of dialogue to thinking about relationships and relational structures (and their governance) in universities. It proposes that:

- the qualities of dialogic relations in creative institutions are the proper index of *creative productivity*; that is of, as examples, “thinking” (Evans 2004), “emotional learning” (Wittenburg et al 1983) or “criticality” (Barnett 1997)
- contemporary institutions' explicit preoccupation in assuring, monitoring and managing creative “dialogue” can (in practice) pervert creative processes and thoughtful symbolic productivity – inhibiting students' development and the quality of “thinking space” for teaching and research.

In this context the paper examines uncanny and perverse connections between Paulo Freire's (1972) account of educational empowerment and dialogics (from his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) to the rhetoric of student empowerment - as mediated by some strands of managerialism in contemporary higher education.

The paper grounds its critique of current models of dialogue – feedback loops, audit and other mechanisms of accountability (Power 1997; Strathern 2000) in a close analysis of how creative thinking emerges.

Through psychoanalytic conceptions from Thomas Ogden (1986), Donald Winnicott (1971), Milner (1979) Csikszentmihalyi (1997) to Coleridge's ideas about imagination as the movement of thought between subjective and objective modes (with intra-subjective relations and inter-subjective relations both modes of "dialogue" subject to pathology in the pathologically structured psychosocial environment) – the failure to maintain such dialogic space being a hindrance to general developmental and educational thinking processes – in humanities and social science areas in particular.

Current patterns of institutional governance (by micromanaging dialogic spaces) curtail the "natural" rhythms and temporalities of imagination - by giving an over emphasis to the moment of *outcome*, at the expense of holding the necessary vagaries of *process* in (the institutional) "mind". On the contrary, as this paper argues creative thinking lies in sporadic emergences at the conjunction of object/(ive) outcome and through (thought) process.

Keywords: creativity; dialogue; object-relations psychoanalysis; Higher education; thinking

Draft - author's pre-print pre-referee (not for citation)

## **Institutional Creativity and Pathologies of Potential Space: The Modern University**

### **Creativity and *Creativity***

“Creativity” is being systematically reconceived (Negus and Pickering 2004), at once de- and re-mythologized; as a “resource” for the creative industries (Law 1999; Nixon 2003; Tusa 2003; Hartley 2004); as a quasi- religious “lifestyle” aspiration for individuals (Tharp 2006; Csikszentmihalyi 2004) and as a regenerative force, allegedly (re)-making communities and even whole cities (Landry 2000; GLA Economics 2004).

Rivalling, cutting across, perhaps also refiguring “vocation” and criticality (Barnett 1997) within personal and organisational “scripts” - in working lives, in training, in education - “creativity” marks divergent educational and social “missions”<sup>1</sup>. In these varied and somewhat elusive guises “creativity” runs high on the contemporary policy agenda.

Speaking in 1999, Chris Smith then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pre-empted a number of more recent governmental pleas and initiatives for “creativity”<sup>2</sup> arguing that ‘we must change the concept of creativity from being something that is “added on” to education, skills, training and management and make sure it becomes intrinsic to all of these (Chris Smith/NACCCE 1999:5). Education, including Higher education, takes a prominent place in these debates, with innovation and creativity crucial to the (2003) Lambert Review recommendation universities

---

<sup>1</sup> Delanty (2002) and Barnett (1997) sketch useful accounts which serve to characterise the complex of institutional forms, priorities and missions that have characterised “the idea of a university” throughout its development. Delanty’s (2004) account charts four university “ideal types” locating these in a loose periodising schema: The “Humboltian” liberal/ humanistic university of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the civic/professional university, the mass/democratic university and (presently) the “virtual” university. Thinking in and about contemporary H.E institutions residually engages with priorities typified by each of these “ideals”.

<sup>2</sup> For instance:

Shaun Woodward, Minister for the Creative Industries:

“Our creative industries are internationally renowned and amongst the fastest growing sectors of our economy. But it is clear that all businesses will require a future work force with the ability to think creatively and this report is a significant step towards ensuring that our young people develop such skills.”

And Schools Minister Andrew Adonis:

"Creativity can help boost self-confidence and motivation and helps youngsters develop communication skills and self-discipline. It is important for pupils and students to gain the creative skills that will help them excel in their studies and their future working life." DfES press centre: [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2006\\_0109](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2006_0109) (accessed 19 July 2006)

work more closely with industry. See also (for example Jeffries et al 2005; NACCCE 1999<sup>3</sup>). The notion of governing, engendering or facilitating “intrinsic” creativity (in educational practice, in practitioners and in students) is an interesting one, and prompts some of the questions with which this paper is preoccupied.

Given this context it seems useful to bring a wide range of views to the ways in which “creativity” is thought about and instituted in universities. One area, psychoanalysis, has an elliptical relation to the core policy and management debates – but, as an area of thought and work, psychoanalysis has a good deal to say about “creativity”. Psychoanalytically informed accounts of creative processes; between individuals and within groups - provide a useful complementary strand to practically oriented discussions. This paper is based in part in a psychoanalytic discourse and aims to set out an argument: that a psychoanalytic account of interactional processes goes some way towards explaining why – at a time when “creativity” is “policy” – the measures put in place to foster creativity - and its correlates; thinking, imagination, developmental learning and criticality - seem to produce an environment where such aspiration is routinely not realised – so that external markers (outcomes) seem not to commune with the creative interiorities after which they appear (or pretend) to reach.

It is typically difficult for psychoanalysis to inform institutional policy and practice in any sustained way; nevertheless psychoanalysts have provided a powerful language for engaging (indirectly) with organisational processes – processes which invisibly and radically inflect the qualities of an organisation’s work (for example Menzies Lyth 1988) – including its capacities for creativity. Psychoanalytic concepts offer an opportunity to articulate difficulties immanent in the daily experience of institutions – difficulties that might escape both more casual and more direct modes of scrutiny.

Psychoanalysis has enriched thinking about creativity in the arts (for example Freud 1908/1985; Milner 1979; 1986; 1987) but it should be made clear from the outset that “creative” capacities, as understood by psychoanalysis, extend from the

---

<sup>3</sup> Thus a recent government report notes the centrality of creativity across education. “Creative Potential: Creativity is possible in all areas of human activity, including the arts, sciences, at work at play and in all other areas of daily life. All people have creative abilities and we all have them differently. When individuals find their creative strengths, it can have an enormous impact on self-esteem and on overall achievement” (NACCCE 1999:6)

specific tasks of aesthetic communications that is visual, verbal, sonic and literary artefacts – what Winnicott calls “acclaimed creation” (Winnicott 1971:65), into ordinary (healthy) experience<sup>4</sup>. Creativity (in this fundamental sense) is a prominent theme in object relations accounts<sup>5</sup>, perhaps especially in Winnicott’s work (Winnicott 1971; 1988) but also in a series of other significant works (for example Milner 1987; Ogden 1992). Such work offers experientially grounded theoretical and clinical accounts of relationships between developmental processes, personal transformation and a (re-)emergence of capacities for creative experiencing; transformation linked in turn to developed or restored capacities for thinking, reflective subjective experience and symbolic productivity.

Psychoanalysis reminds us of the narratives and interconnections crucial for ordinary developmental achievements – throughout infancy but also lifelong (Erickson 1968) The work of integrating action and reflection; the developmental work of managing emotional, affective, motor and other capacities with and within the more abstract intellectual processes of thinking, calculation and cognition – psychoanalytic conceptions are attuned to this domain.

Higher Education also covers a wide spectrum of “creativity”, linking the ordinary to the extraordinary (in terms of creative output, but also in terms of psychosocial development, see, for example Erickson (1968); also (Wittenberg et al 1983). Indeed one definition of creativity in a university is that its programmes and (the other experiences the environment affords) induct its students (and staff) in such a way as to extend and link ordinary and extraordinary elements of learning and experience<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Thus Winnicott writes “I am hoping that the reader will accept a general reference to creativity, not letting the word get lost in the successful or acclaimed creation but keeping it to the meaning that refers to a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality (Winnicott 1971:65)

<sup>5</sup> Object relations psychoanalysis is an influential development emerging from the work of Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott amongst others.

<sup>6</sup> I would propose further that (perhaps) alongside the very positive development of the universities as proto- “creative industries”, as sites for the teaching and research connected more directly to production of “acclaimed creation” (Winnicott 1971) in the arts (and various other missionary social programmes) there is a need to consider the extent to which they are creative organisations – not (just) in the sense implied in terms like “creative arts” and “creative industries” but (and especially) in the sense that they foster and support environments and relationships where thinking capacity, developmental experience and productive transformation can thrive. Indeed my conjecture would be that institutional investments in the missions of acclaimed “creativity” are in part compensatory gestures symptomatic of a felt (but unacknowledged) absence of creative capacity across the institution

Of course (and at the same time) educational transformation and therapeutic transformation are in many ways quite different concerns; however there is sufficient commonality (across these domains of psychosocial development) to warrant a degree of careful cross fertilisation in thinking about communications relationships across these areas – that is psychoanalysis and higher education (Brown and Price 1999; Yates 2001, Burman 2001)

Nuanced psychoanalytic theories of subject and environment (emerging from the object relations tradition) can and indeed *should* continue to inform critical thinking about the higher education institutions of today – this in line with the contribution object-relations conceptions are making to critical social theory more broadly - as suggested for instance by Eliot (2005); also Rustin (1991) and Richards (1994)<sup>7</sup>.

Object relations accounts permit an engagement with human relationship cognisant of the interplay of unconscious phantasy and conscious thought. As Ogden points out:

Object relations theory, often erroneously thought to be an exclusively interpersonal theory that diverts attention from the unconscious, [is] in fact fundamentally a theory of unconscious internal object relations in dynamic interplay with current interpersonal experience...(Ogden 1986:131)

Ogden goes on to clarify: ‘the term “internal” which ...refer[s]...

not to a geographic locale, but to an intrapersonal event (that is, an event involving a single personality system) as opposed to an interpersonal interaction involving two or more people (ibid 1986:131n)

---

– this because, as Milner (1979; 1987) for instance has made clear, the optimisation (at the level of the subject in his or her environment) of “ordinary” creative capacity – is necessary to, if not sufficient for, the pursuit of creativity in the “aesthetic” sense.

<sup>7</sup> Eliot (2005) writes of recent developments in psychoanalytic theorisation of “the subject”: “these far reaching investigations have raised afresh the question of human creation, the question of representation and fantasy, and the question of the imaginary constitution of the socio-symbolic world. In doing so, they offer alternative perspectives on the very nature of representation and repression in the structuration of social action and thus potentially contribute to a reconsideration of social theory more generally” (Eliot 2005:26)

With this in mind I propose a theoretical stance within this account<sup>8</sup> Ogden's (1986;1993) account of dialectical relating; this to help think about the "spaces" of subjectivity, symbolization/thinking and environment – this with a view to revisiting some of the shortcomings identified under the heading "audit culture" as applied to the university setting (Strathern 2000; Power 1997; Rustin 2004). "Creativity" is at the heart of this conjunction.<sup>9</sup>

Object relations helps theorise and apprehend an underlying interpersonal, intrapersonal and institutional "matrix" akin to the "matrix of the mind" described by Ogden (1986) in the following way:

"..it seems to me that matrix is a particularly apt word to describe the silently active containing space in which psychological and bodily experience occur"  
(Ogden 1986:180n)

It is the institutional correlate of such "space" that is theorised and considered here – and (in terms of facilitative governance) institutions' partial deficiency in supporting such a space<sup>10</sup>.

The processes underpinning responsiveness to "stakeholders" inside and outside the university; processes of feedback, adaptation and accountability *exist*; but, more or less, any productive communications across these various dimensions of interest and exchange take place in spite of and not because of and particularly not through systems as instituted (feedback, evaluations, reviews, RAE and so forth.) In this context it is worth setting down some observations of the organisational dynamics as embodied in the discourse of audit in order to set down an articulation of an unhealthy disjuncture between:

---

<sup>8</sup> This paper is not based on close observation of classroom transactions or on interviews with lecturers or students (see Brown and Price 1999; Burman 2001; Price 2001; Yates 2001; Wittenberg et al 1983) for some powerful and detailed qualitative accounts.

<sup>9</sup> As I shall go on to make clear, creativity is of course fundamental to thinking and communicating across all activities and across all communications – formal and informal. However it is perhaps yet more fundamental to a setting such as the university where improving our capacities for thinking is (arguably) *the* developmental task.

<sup>10</sup> For a more broadly sociological application of the notion of a "matrix" see Figlio and Richards on "The Containing Matrix of the Social".

- 1) forms and formats for relating implicit in the organisational processes concretised in and through the discourse of (higher) educational audit.
- 2) “good enough” (Winnicott 1971) pedagogic relating and academic creativity grounded in and consistent with an object relations based understanding of human experience as rooted optimally in (positive, dialogical) relationships.

In particular my contention is that the main “product” (and it is not a product as such – but perhaps a *productivity*) of the higher education “industry” is (creative) *thinking*<sup>11</sup>; its main work is to build capacity for thinking: in institutions, in staff and in students; and its main project is to extend and mediate such developed capacities, through disciplinary and interdisciplinary work, into a variety of places and spaces - cultures, projects and industries.

When product is measured in terms of “output/outcomes” the orientation of thinking too directly to activity operates as an “impingement” – in Winnicott’s (1971) sense<sup>12</sup>. Such impingement runs counter to what I will later describe as the *rhythm of thinking* – a rhythm that underpins creative experience and which is underpinned by the maintenance of good inter- and intra- subjective process.

## **Audit**

It is useful in this context, where academic teaching and/or research may not be a part of everyone’s everyday working life<sup>13</sup>, is to give a sense of the negative assessment which (largely) surrounds audits’ impingements on the work of academics and students. I have gathered up what might be considered the key features characterising “audit culture” in the universities.

---

<sup>11</sup> Evan’s recent (2004) book usefully names the problem in its title: “Killing Thinking”.

<sup>12</sup> Winnicott refers to the interruptions experienced by infants from over anxious parents, resulting in failed attunement in their (affective) dialogue and problematic development for the child.

<sup>13</sup> The pervasive nature of audit (as a central mechanism in the operation of NPM (New Public Management (Chandler et al 2002) means that some of the patterns of managerial intervention may be recognisable across industries.

- Modularity (cutting courses, narrative up into bits);
- Published “learning outcomes” (detailed outlines of what students will be able to do/know/demonstrate at the end of the course);
- Credit based accumulation, via modules, and towards the accredited completion of programmes;
- Intricate, formal and extensive systems of feedback and evaluation across and between staff, managers, students, programmes and the institution;
- Arduous external assessment systems geared to assuring the effectiveness of institutions’ internal managerial and assurance systems in demonstrating observance delivering compliance within the terms of quality paradigm.
- Outcome based assessment systems, for research productivity and for other indices (for example student employability, student retention, salary performance of students post university)
- The delivery of transferable skills – in isolation from disciplinary “content”.
- The publication of miscellaneous league tables to permit “informed” choice across the sector.
- Institutional management’s systematic assertions of students’ identities as fee paying customers purchasing higher education *services*.
- Outcome centred teaching
- Student centred learning

These comprise the bureaucratic architecture through which learning and teaching are managed – a structuring enabled (and assured) by a highly proactive and formalised system of surveillance and recording; as Power (1997) puts it “rituals of verification”. This can produce an environment privileging objectification of performance and (hyper-) activity. It is these institutional and governmental emphases (stabilised and enframed in the discourse of audit) that I’d suggest are subtly, but also spectacularly, damaging the university as a creative space. Alien and yet internalised, this institutional structuring comes to inhabit the array of daily interactions producing (for students) a “tight...envelope of ...formation, especially around the competency

framework” (Barnett 1997:52) and a “publish or perish” orientation in (staff) research –privileging (often) output production over processural engagement with research, development and thinking<sup>14</sup>. Institutionally and individually, this displaces the “matrix” (Ogden 1986) relations grounded in healthy dialectical relationships (inter and intra subjectively) – thus damaging creative “potential (space)” (Winnicott 1971).

The whole nomenclature of Higher education has been overturned, so that as well as the division of part from part within the university “enterprise”, taken as a whole, there is a new and pointed (*re-*) *naming* of parts; thus “courses” become “programmes” (composed of “modules”), students become “learners”, “passing” becomes “credit accumulation”, and so on (see Evans 2004: 49-74 for a detailed discussion of the language of educational audit<sup>15</sup>).

As a feature of a number of subtle shifts the university institution is quietly remade as a corporation and an organisation – one in which a new and disturbing *grammar*<sup>16</sup> (changing nomenclature aside) re-articulating the working and learning *relations* between colleagues, students and their respective arrays of tasks.

Academics are typically opposed to audit (and its attendant frameworks and regimens). An everyday presence, audit becomes constitutive of “work”, a powerful paradigm, shaping the ways in which we are asked to think, and to move through days, semesters and conversations. “Audit” imbricates, accentuates and stands for a series of interrelated and interdependent organisational transformations changing the face of “the university” as national policy vigorously encourages responsiveness and accountability instituting new arrangements whereby stakeholders’, parents’ and students’ choices and demands (however complex and contradictory in themselves)

---

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that research should not have outcomes, far from it. It is merely to question the “end gaining” (Alexander 1990) instrumentalism that comes to pervade research – in conception, design, practice, dissemination. To anticipate my argument later on, the focus on and stimulation of the objective moment of research tasks (the output) is bought at the expense of its proper dialogical engagement with processural moments of subjective and dynamic “gathering up”. It is the confluence and integration of both “subjective” and “objective” moments (conception *and* output) that is optimal – and more work should be done to institute university environments where such a mode of productivity can more readily be entertained. This is mainly, but not only, a question of resources.

<sup>15</sup> Evans (2004) describes the new nomenclature in terms of an Orwellian strategy of governance – akin to the introduction of Newspeak in *1984*’s Oceania.

<sup>16</sup> By using the term grammar I am not subscribing to any kind of language or signifying system oriented explanation. In the sense intended here “grammar” refers to a relational matrix – generative (and perhaps degenerative) and one which is as concrete and embodied as the people and things who inhabit it, and who, at times, engage, or are inhabited by its movements and articulations.

can be readily cast as “sovereign” – an extension into higher education of the 1980s ideology of consumerism<sup>17</sup> – an extension which includes the adoption of managerial paradigms which, in the private sector, reached their zenith in the 1980s i.e. as seen in discussions of New Public Management (Chandler et al 2002).

Audit provides new competences to perform – and untried means for the navigation new territories of higher education – for students and academics alike. Audit (in its various forms and contexts) is associated with openings; opening the books; opening access; transparency, process and mappings – “loops” and “hoops”.

But audit is also, arguably, about closure - ultimately obstructive to our job in the university. Certainly sustained reflections on and within the processes of our tasks appears to...disappear, as Evans (2004) puts it, audit is “killing thinking”. Intended to enhance performance, to make us more effective and to orient our personal and institutional resources, there is no doubt that audit equally confuses and depletes. The “spaces” being opened and closed are the space of dynamic dialogue.

The ongoing contradiction taking place finds communities of professionals (academics) attempting to operate (in and on) an emergent commodity-based service “system”. We witness (and deliver) a collapse of academic spaces and practices into administrative and managerial spaces and practices. Students oscillate between postures of neediness, then committed eagerness, and then customer sovereignty; either committed scholars; or failing truants - but always already commodity consumers.

## **Thinking**

Thinking is fundamental to making and maintaining spaces for learning and research – creative, imaginative thinking. Current patterns of institutional governance (by remote and prescriptive micromanagement of dialogic spaces<sup>18</sup>) risk curtailing the

---

<sup>17</sup> And the “consumerisms” of the (1980s and subsequently) have in many ways been shown to be more complexly dialogical than is evident in “New Public Management” conceptions of choice and the formats used to disseminate “relevant” information about student experience and institutional life.

<sup>18</sup> The following is indicative of the periodic “feel” of institutional relations:

“When managerial processes are... enacted face to face, co-operative and supportive relationships tended to emerge. When imposed at a distance social relations seem to become

"natural" rhythms and temporalities of thinking - by giving over emphasis on the moment of outcome and objectification; this at the expense of the necessary (and productive) vagaries and indirections of process.

Thinking has a rhythm; that thoughts have a temporality and a developmental curve which is at odds with the current and emergent institutional pattern. Csikszentmihalyi (1990:144-145) notes the importance of time in his concept of "creative flow" and, more directly thinking about universities, Readings (1997) puts it like this:

Pedagogy ... has a specific chronotope that is radically alien to the notion of accountable time upon which the excellence of capitalist-bureaucratic management and book keeping depend. (Readings 1997: 151)

It is as much a matter of "spaces" to think as it is about "time" to think<sup>19</sup> – the protection of an intimate narrative in the process of a thought, an idea, in a course (or "programme") or project<sup>20</sup>. I will briefly present some accounts of thinking process for "transliteration" into an object relations account of the processes of creative thinking. My contention is that thinking - of its essence – is both inter- and intra personally dialogic...requiring and properly enabling the productive movement between elements of subjective experience and objects. Coleridge – poet and philosopher of "imagination" - provides two arresting accounts of the imaginative thinking process.

Let us consider what we do when we leap. We first resist the gravitating power by a way purely voluntary, and then by another act, voluntary in part, we yield to it in order to light on the spot, which we had previously proposed to ourselves. Now let

---

impersonalised, seen at best as transactions between 'strangers' whose needs may be ignored...the relation is indeed a strange one, as sniper to victim" (Chandler et al 2002:10)

<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein writes: "Thinking too has a time for ploughing and a time for gathering the harvest (Wittgenstein 1980:28e)

<sup>20</sup> Sennet (2006) refers to the various temporalities of capitalistic production throughout the history of his surveys of working lives – noting that most recently both strict and life long regimentation and its opposites (always starting anew) bring their attendant and stifling forms of alienation – typically anti-creative.

a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous<sup>21</sup>. (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1817: Chapter 7)

The objective and purposive movement incorporates both a willed and integrative active intention (gathering up) and a passive moment of unintegration (a controlled falling). This dynamic image captures the necessary interpenetration of activity and passivity, integration and unintegration – an interpenetration and interdependence not affirmed in the privileging of either one pole of passive and active modalities.

An image more clear still is Coleridge's minute observation of the water boatman whose track through the river course encapsulates the dialectical rhythms of imaginative creativity.

Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed, how the little animal wins its way up against the stream, by alternative pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary fulcrum for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION... (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1817)

This captures, the psychic and rhythmic underpinning for dialogic thinking – in inter and intra personal relating - two processes at work, *meetings* in and of minds - a

---

<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein offers a not dissimilar account of “philosophising”. Like Coleridge's, the metaphor (in physical movement) accentuates the continuities between “mental” and bio-physical processes in the organism. Again the pattern is of a proto-dialectical engagement of opposites.

I find it important in philosophising to keep changing my posture, not to stand for too long on one leg, so as not to get stiff. Like someone on a long up-hill climb who walks backwards for a while so as to revive himself and stretch some different muscles (Wittgenstein 1980:27e)

creativity that can develop. Milner describes the importance of an attenuation of active modalities – to support creative thinking.

The skills of non-effort in relation to effort, how to push conscious effort as far as it would go and then ask the ‘other’ mind to take over and...wait for an answer...(Milner 1987)

This rhythm seems (formally) unavailable within the emergent terms of the modern university. This process, this oscillation of giving and asking, asking and giving, pushing *and* letting go has a rhythm and a temporality of its own. This creative rhythm of thinking helps to define, moderate and modulate the subtle exchanges of dialogic relating. Thinking creatively, like humour, is a matter of timing<sup>22</sup>,

It is the time/space of this oscillation that audit culture risks extracting. Within the framework structures assured by audit (and internalised by us all) the transactional accounts are formally settled before the exchange has been entered into. Instead of the dialogue of giving and asking there is “demand” which must be supplied to.

The audit paradigm institutes dialogue for sure, audit does little else but to try and ensure the free flow of such “loops”. But the dialogues which audits assure do not operate where they *really* matter, in the intimate and temporal spaces of the genuinely inter- and intra-personal. These feedback loops do not connect to, are not marking the space and rhythm of *thinking*. As Strathern (2000) puts it, emphasising temporality:

In teaching there must be a lapse of time – the process [of learning] is not one of consumption but one of absorption and reformulation. In research time must be set aside for all the wasteful and dead-end activities that precede the genuine findings. Both require otherwise non-productive periods. Yet there is almost no language in

---

<sup>22</sup> Thus Koestler (1989) has no problem in seeing that creative production and comic production follow the same pattern – of integrative “bisociation”. The timing of the perception of new congruencies is all important – and requires both concentration and a studied inattention.

the audit culture in which to talk about productive non-productivity. (Strathern 1997:318)

Creativity depends upon an intimate, flexible and dynamic time/space for thinking.

Audit constructs relations which are neither intimate nor flexible. In the drive towards the ends of output and outcome, the unverifiable and essentially creative means to such ends are often eradicated.

*Draft - author's pre-print pre-referee (not for citation)*

## Dialogue and Institution

What is the class but you and me? (Mamet, *Oleanna* 1992: 26)

The proper ordering of dialogue is the stuff of institutions – so that one definition of an institution is as an available typology of “conversations” (Zeldin 1998); what can and cannot be said, what can and cannot be (properly) thought. A “good enough” institution affords an optimisation of the ongoing engagement between the intimate subjective life (and symbolic activity) of individuals and the symbolic work of the community – conversation with(in) and between self and other.

Audit culture, with its perennial ethos of preparation and vigilance, provides no still spot to gather up: no obvious space to let go, no reliable diversion; perhaps especially from the auditor within. The audit problem has a diffuse location, lying within a narrow imagination – a new managerial ethos, and in its misconstruction of academics’ creative processes (in teaching and in research). This is amplified perhaps also in the intense ways academics hyper-cathect audit – whether in implementation (in the institution of audits’ priorities) or in fetishistic conscientiousness to rituals of verification (Power 1997) – governance which can over run rituals of thinking – living dialogue, pedagogy and scholarship.

Power (1997) argues that audits necessarily operate in a transformative way, changing the objects and transactions of work into the formats identifiable and measurable to audits. In H.E this is evidently the case – learning outcomes, (specified) research outputs, minutes, and so forth, a complex bureaucratic map of the yet more complex territories of organisational process, intellectual production and exchange. Inevitably, audit, as a system of representation, operates by logic of synecdoche - the part standing for the whole. The perversion, if we may call it that, of audit, and its

attendant modes of thinking and imagining, is to fetishise the indices of process, at the expense of proper apprehension of the process itself (gestation, digestion, mistaking – the very metabolism of thinking and imagining – all is suspended, then, diminished – if not entirely lost).

Audit becomes truly perverse when it not only reduces process to production of its indexical signs, but transforms the individual and organisational objectives of process more completely into the sign itself, re-producing academic practices as mere circumlocutions for actual tasks – e.g. student support *figures*, satisfaction *data*, research assessment strategy *documents and meetings* - indices becoming stumbling blocks within a process where they are ostensibly working simply to signify – that is the signs (records and traces) of outcome interrupt and indeed become constitutive of work and thought (academic experience, productivity, learning and meaningful action). It is here that quality is transformed to quantity, change into permanence, memory into matter and thought into thoughtlessness. This collapse of symbol and symbolised has its correlates in the failures of matrix and dialogue as understood by object relations psychoanalysis.

### **Student Centred Learning**

The celebration of dialogue in education has a long tradition. It needs to be insisted upon that audit managerialism *is an attempt to assure and to structure dialogue-* of sorts. Audit, in some of its aspects appears to be the child of good intentions. In purpose if not in its direct genealogy this managerial bureaucratic process takes its morality from a radical agenda. Certainly audit shares some of its dynamics with a very different kind of anti-authoritarianism – that of Brazilian Marxist pedagogue

Paulo Freire' (1967 ) classic *Pedagogies of the Oppressed* (published in English in 1972). It is clear that in many ways audit, as a means to assure the proper implementation of student-centredness – and calling academics to account more generally - harks back, if not directly to Freire, then to an anti authoritarian “feeling” whose roots lie in a 1960s ethos of liberalisation. This is perhaps anti intuitive – as it is not typical to observe conjunctions between radical liberal ethos and contemporary managerialism. However, and as Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (2006) have argued convincingly, contemporary management theory – and element of organisational practice and presentation – institute a (perverse) form of radical opposition to traditional and culturally conservative “establishment” institutional forms.

In Freire's analysis he offers the following characterisation indicating why the education system was an instrument of domination:

1. The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
2. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.
3. The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.
4. The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly.
5. The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
6. The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply.
7. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
8. The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it.
9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.
10. The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

(Freire 1972:46-7)

This is a critical description of “teacher centred” non-dialogue. Freire argues for a dialogic relation in which the poles are equalised –this as part of a revolutionary project of emancipation through education.

In apparently similar vein audit is delivering a systematic reversal of the terms of the binaries of pedagogic power. The following is an indicative and largely negative evaluation contrasting “teacher centred learning” versus “student centred learning” from a handbook advocating “student centred learning”.

#### Teacher Centred

- Teachers serve as the centre of epistemological knowledge, directing the learning process and controlling student's access to information.
- Students viewed as 'empty' vessels and learning is viewed as an additive process.
- Instruction is geared for the 'average' student and everyone is forced to progress at the same rate.

#### Student Centred

- Backed by research that students are not empty vessels. They come with their own perceptual frameworks (Erikson, 1984).
- Students learn in different ways (Briggs-Myers, 1980; Kolb, 1984).
- Learning is an active dynamic process in which connections are constantly changing and their structure is continually reformatted (Cross, 1991).
- Students construct their own meaning by talking, listening, writing, reading, and reflecting on content, ideas, issues and concerns (Meyers and Jones, 1993)

[http://www.bath.ac.uk/e-learning/student\\_centredness.htm](http://www.bath.ac.uk/e-learning/student_centredness.htm)

A recent news article reveals an incident illustrative of a shift in the relational matrix of university pedagogy<sup>23</sup>. In no sense is this paper a critique of such practices – save in one respect: that the notion of *centredness*, as organisational metaphor, in the framing of institutional priorities, and, especially, as taken up in audit – works to attack the dialogical matrix upon which learning, thinking and indeed most productive creativity must be based.

---

<sup>23</sup> Students allowed to set their own exam

A lecturer who wants to engender trust and respect in his students has let them set their own final-year exam. They were also allowed to take notes into the exam hall in case they could not answer their own questions. The move is part of a growing shift from "sudden death" exams to "assessment for learning" in which students play a part in judging their performance. *The Daily Telegraph*, via *The Times Higher Education Supplement* Online (June 30, 2006)

The notion of “centred-ness” is structurally and dynamically non-dialogic. As a conception then centred-ness underpins a misconstruction of dialectical relating and creative productivity. Creativity is never banished as such, but it *is* systemically misapprehended – and as such it is diminished.

<b>Fig 1: Indicative tabulation of (potential) pathologies of centred-ness</b>	
Teacher- <i>centred</i> learning	Non dialogic – creativity not optimal
Student- <i>centred</i> learning	Non dialogic -creativity not optimal
Stakeholder (e.g. client) <i>centred</i> research	Non dialogic - creativity not optimal
“pure” academic research	Risks becoming overly self referential within closed circuits of academia and audit’s “rituals of verification” (Power 1997) or confining itself to elaborated but disconnected autopoiesis - unengaged and un-engaging: “for its own sake”.
Academic research needs to find and maintain a balance between responsiveness and independence, relevance and refinement, purity and danger! Acknowledging dialogic thinking as the crux of creative institutional dynamics can better enable research to creatively engage with such tensions.	

The ethos of “student centred learning” echoes this dynamic – an ethos able to blunt any critique of new managerialism – and one which simultaneously sharpens the capacity of audits’ demands on time and conscience. Who, after all, can deny claims attaching to edicts working towards the “empowerment” of students - as delivered through student centred teaching stratagems and mechanisms of accountability? I would argue, nevertheless that Student-centred learning, most especially as conjoined to managerial authority via audit, produces a “liberalising” force which is, nevertheless, *anti-creative* - anti creative because anti-dialogical – a new mode of thoughtlessness.

The “Great Universal teacher”, invoked in Coleridge’s poem (*Frost at Midnight*) might stand as emblematic for an overly authoritarian pedagogy – a conservative academic culture. “He” finds a counterpart, an alter ego, when the discourse of audit meets consumer sovereignty– *the Great Universal Student* – and instead of teaching, and learning stretching out across the years in a series of moderated instances of attunement, connection, reiteration, failure and success – of trying, trying and trying again; through contact and process, the process of give and take is pre-arranged “out of court” , prior to and outside the times/spaces of thinking and learning, The learning “outcome” settled before the student meets the teacher and before the teacher meets the student – creative tension and engagement is attenuated. Audit culture delivers a dynamic – not higher education pedagogy as diffusion – as widening access intends – but pedagogy defused. The pragmatics of this are basic, and must be understood its contexts; of large classes, modular programmes, and so called McDonaldised universities. But hidden behind the logistics and resource problems is a mistake: a mistake about the nature of teaching – a mistake which is a

mistake about the nature of dialogue and finally of the processes underpinning thinking. By merely reversing the polarities of the “teacher centred” (oppressive) pedagogy and in its place, instituting “student centred learning” – one mistaken orientation is replaced by another.

Looked at psychoanalytically – this is the triumph of *demand*. The child who gets everything he or she *wants* gets, in the end, little or nothing he can use. The underlying psychic logic is one in which the student experiences the university in manner that repays a debt to the developmental period of the subjective object. Illusory control of the environment is corroborated by the absence of unmet need – but where the infant is not held in mind, not engaged with, not dialogically related to, or enriched by its environment – its outsides.

Object relations dialogues are a matter, primarily, of recognition, of the management of separation and dependence, of holding and interpretation, and of incremental moves towards the installation and assurance of capacities for “the individual infant, child, or adult, to develop his own capacity to generate potential space” (Ogden 1992:204) as well as the maintenance of capacities for symbolisation and reflective subjectivity in engagement with others and in engagement with “the world and its objects”. Indeed it might be useful to consider object relations dialects as matter of mediation – so that any “resolution” becomes a matter, not of exchange, mutuality or reciprocity, but of an ongoing capacity to “think”, engage and act creatively in and around the space of the “other” – so that the accent is not on identity or mastery (and non-identity) but on creativity (and its opposites)

## **Pathologies of potential space**

For Ogden “potential space” is a developmental achievement where creativity and symbolization becomes possible. It is based in the emergence of the subject from early (illusory) states of oneness with the maternal environment. As Ogden puts it:

This transformation of unity into threeness coincides with the transformation of the mother-infant unit into mother, infant, and observer of mother- and – infant as three distinct entities. Oneness (the invisible mother-infant) becomes threeness, since, at the moment of differentiation within the mother-infant unit, not only are the mother an infant created as objects, but also, the infant is created as subject. The infant as subject is the observer of mother and infant as (symbolic) objects; the infant is now the creator and interpreter of his symbols. (Ogden 1992:214)

I would argue that this basic and early achievement has its correlates at a higher level of mental function in the educational system – with the learning space and the learner developing in a mode analogous with Ogden’s “mother-infant”. By analogy the collapses of potential space identified by Ogden can provide a sense of some of the difficulties I have proposed regarding current higher education provision:

Notably above I have described the collapse of the dialectic implicit in the model of student centred learning as a correlative to reversion towards the psychic states of the “subjective-object”. Such pathology impairs capacities to think and to use symbols.

As Ogden writes:

The symbolic function is a direct consequence of the capacity to maintain psychological dialectics, and the psychopathology of symbolization is based on specific forms of failure to create or maintain these dialectics.(Ogden 2002:214)

Ogden identifies a number of pathologies of potential space – in each case there is a failure of attention and reciprocity – the grounds of trusting relating. It seems to me that these partial dialectical collapses can be considered as the analogical correlates of some of the deficiencies in thinking, productivity, creativity and imagination apparent in a modern university environment where the dialectical “envelope” within which developmental work is designed to proceed is variously restricted – not so much in terms of scope and aims – but in terms of underlying psychodynamic “tone”. This especially where the dialectical rhythms of thinking and imagination are not consistently facilitated – with a default to an end gaining (Alexander 1990) instrumentalism casting the dimensions of psychic , symbolic and imaginative space. To sum up: in a dialectically alive “space”:

The subject, through his act of interpretation, mediates between meanings and creates relationships among symbols. Each personal meaning influences the subject’s way of constructing and interrelating his symbols and consequently affects his subsequent acts of interpreting experience...

But:

When analytic space collapses, the patient becomes imprisoned in the confines of signs connected to one another by a sense of opaque inevitability (Ogden 1992:245)

My conjecture then is that Creative thinking lies in healthy emergence at the conjunction of (object/ive) outcome and (subjective-embodied phantasy elaboration) thought process / symbol formation – with inter and intra personal dialogics as the optimal pre-condition for the reliable. Current managerial (and economic) paradigms lead the emphasis overly towards the pole of "outcome" diminishing the qualities of inter and intra personal dialogics diminishing the creative of the institutions so arranged. The “transparent”, outcome orientation, the “end gaining” (Alexander 1990) narrative of organisational process in the modern university defines the parameters of the spaces for thinking and learning (and thus inflects the experience of the correlative psychic space). This organisational paradigm, apparently empowering “learners” does not support the dialogic relationships, the “rolling identifications” (Eliot 2005:35) which support the kind of transformative experience that can support creative, developmental thinking – processes intrinsic and fundamental to creativity in universities.

Words (minus abstract/footnotes  
and bibliography)

## **Bibliography**

- Alexander, F. M., (1990) *The Use of the Self*, London: Victor Gollancz
- Barnett, R. 1997. *Higher Education: A Critical Business*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (2006) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso
- Brown, J. and Price, H. 1999 "Teaching Psychoanalysis: An Impossible Art" in *Journal of Psychoanalytic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 March 1999.
- Burman, E. (2001) 'Emotions in the classroom: and the institutional politics of knowledge', *Psychoanalytic Studies*, Vol. 3, Nos 3-4 313-324.
- Chandler et al 2002
- Coleridge 1817, *Biographia Literaria* 1817
- Csikszentmihalyi 1997 *Creativity*, New York: Harper Perennial
- Delanty, G. (2002) "The University and Modernity: A History of the Present" in Robins, K. and Webster, F. 2002. *The Virtual University: Knowledge, Markets and Management*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, M. 2004. *Killing Thinking: The Death of the Universities*. London: Continuum.
- Eliot, A (2005) *The Constitution of the Subject: Primary Repression After Kristeva and Laplanche* in *European journal of social theory* 2005, vol. 8, no1, pp. 25-42
- Erikson, E.. 1987 (1968). *'The Human Life Cycle' A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 - 1980*. New York: Norton.
- Freire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Freud (1908) "Creative Writers and day Dreaming" p120-129 in Freud (1985) Vol 14 *Art and Literature*, Pelican Freud Library, London: Penguin
- GLA Economics (2004), *London's Creative Sector*, London: GLA
- Hobson, P. 2002. *The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking*. Oxford: MacMillan.
- Hartley, J. 2004 *Creative Industries*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Jeffery, G. 2005. *The Creative College: Building a Successful Learning Culture in the Arts*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

- Koestler, A. (1989) *The Act of Creation*, London, Penguin
- Landry (2000) *Creative City: A tool kit for urban innovators*, London: Earthscan
- Law, A. 1999 *Creative Company*
- Menzies Lyth, I (1988), *Containing Anxiety in Institutions: Selected Essays*, London: Free Association Books
- Mamet, D. 1992. *Oleanna*. Methuen: 1993.
- Milner, M. 1979. *On Not Being Able to Paint*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Milner, M. 1986 (1934). *A Life of One's Own*. London: Virago.
- Milner, M. 1987. *Eternity's Sunrise: A Way of Keeping a Diary*. London: Virago.
- Negus, K. and Pickering, M. (2004) *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value*, London: Sage
- Ogden, T. 1986. *The Matrix of The Mind*. London: Karnac.
- Ogden, T. 1993 "On Potential Space" in Goldman Ed. *In ones Bones: The Clinical Genius of Winnicott* , New jersey: Jason Aaronson
- Palfreyman, D. 2001. 'The Oxford Tutorial: "Thanks, you taught me how to think"'. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies.
- Power, M. 1997. *The Audit Society: Ritual's of Verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, B. (1994) *Disciplines of Delight*, London: Free Associations Books
- Readings, B. (1996) *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge MA: Harvard
- Robins, K. and Webster, F. 2002. 'The Virtual University: Knowledge, Markets and Management'. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rustin, M. (1991) *The good society and the inner world : psychoanalysis, politics, and culture*, London: Verso
- Salzberger-Wittenburg, I., Henry, G. & Osborne, E. (1983) *The Emotional Experience of Learning and Teaching*. London: Routledge
- Sennet, R. 2006 *The New culture of capitalism*
- Strathern, M. Ed. 2000. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*'. London: Routledge.

Tharp, T. 2006 *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life*, London: Simon and Schuster

Wittgenstein, L.(1980) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell

Yates, C. 2001 *Psychoanalytic Studies: Towards a New Culture of Learning in Higher Education in Psychoanalytic Studies Vol 3, Numbers 3-4 / September 1, 2001* 333 - 347

Zeldin, T. 1998. *Conversation*. London: The Harville Press.

### **Internet references**

[http://www.bath.ac.uk/e-learning/student\\_centredness.htm](http://www.bath.ac.uk/e-learning/student_centredness.htm)

[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2006\\_0109](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2006_0109) (accessed 19 July 2006)

*Draft - author's pre-print pre-referee (not for citation)*