

# Modernity's 'other' and the transformation of the university

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## **Abstract**

In a dehumanized world in which meanings derived from dominant liberal world views are tacitly assumed to exist objectively and to impose themselves on discourses and on minds quite independently of who expresses them, this paper endorses what Immanuel Wallerstein calls 'unthinking social science' and then rethinking social science in the light of modernity's 'other'. We understand social science to include not just the academic fields discussed by Wallerstein like economics and political science, but also applied fields that tend to be inscribed within a liberal world view such as management, law, accounting, business, and education. Historically and logically, central planning and mixed economies in some ways deepen democracy, but nevertheless essentially preserve the logic of modernity (characterized by Max Weber as *Zweckrationalität*), and this paper argues that they are *unequal to the task*. We must, to use some phrases from Tom Berry, work to achieve a culture shift at a deeper level, at the constitutive level. A green, frugal, and less socially unequal future (which is the only possible future) is only possible if we can find ways to violate with impunity the systemic imperatives imposed by modernity's regimes of accumulation, be they capitalist, socialist, or mixed. We need to go further back in history beyond the point where commerce replaced kinship, to find the premises of a viable future. This implies that non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems are entitled to respect. 'Standard science as it stands today has many useful practical applications, but it does not have a metaphysical monopoly on the right way to talk about what *is*' (Bhaskar, 1986).

**Keywords:** modernity, world-system, higher education, transformation, indigenous knowledge systems

## Introduction

As its title suggests, this article suggests that universities should be transformed, and that they should be transformed by learning from modernity's 'other'. Every single word in the title and in this first sentence requires elaboration to explain how we<sup>1</sup> use them and what we mean by them. It should be said at the outset that the decision to make 'other' singular instead of plural does not rest on a belief that modernity has only one other and that other is known. On the contrary, what is 'other' to modernity is varied, plural, and to a large extent unknown.

*The discursive strategy of this article will be to use successive presentations of the different perspectives covered in the article. The gap across which this paper seeks to communicate is best characterized, however, not as a matter of assigning different meanings to the same words, and not even as a matter of assuming different tacit contexts, but more fundamentally as a gap between different ways of 'seeing' or 'reading' the world.*

(Heidegger, 1986: 149)

For Heidegger all seeing is 'seeing as', that is to say, interpretation is already built into what is taken as 'data', as given. As we take up views of Immanuel Wallerstein and others in what follows, it is to be understood that in each case we deal with a *perspective*, with a 'way of seeing the world'.

This paper endorses what Immanuel Wallerstein calls 'unthinking social science' (Wallerstein, 1991) and then rethinking social science in the light of modernity's other. We understand social science to include not just academic fields discussed by Wallerstein, like economics and political science, but also applied fields that tend to be inscribed within a liberal world view such as management, law, accounting, business, and education. In most universities the numbers of students pursuing studies in the social sciences thus broadly conceived dwarfs the numbers seeking degrees in the natural sciences and in the humanities.

Its approach blends in with major traditions that, at least since Nietzsche, have stressed that there is no speech without speakers (Staten, 1990). It regards explaining what is meant – of what anybody means – as a step towards humanization. It is a step away from a dehumanized world in which meanings derived from dominant liberal world views are tacitly assumed to exist objectively and to impose themselves on discourses and on minds quite independently of who expresses them.<sup>2</sup> This paper argues that frames of reference are socially constructed and that humans do not automatically understand each other, but rather need to work to establish shared understandings, even though we do not expect initial understanding of the specific frame of reference within which this article calls for transforming the university.

One little caveat! We are aware that in discussing modernity and its other, we are entering discussions where many people already have solid convictions that are passionately held. Although in certain circles today's trend is towards ever greater admiration for indigenous ways of life, there are other circles where there is no such trend. Some cringe at the very idea of anything pre-modern or non-modern. They are prejudiced from the outset against whatever 'modernity's other' may mean. When they think of pre-modernity they think of patriarchy; they think of dying young from smallpox; they think of mud houses surrounded by mounds of faeces soaked in urine; they think of mindless superstition and ritual sacrifice of human victims. They cite studies showing that modernity has raised material living standards far above anything achieved by traditional societies, that humans have become more civilized and less violent, and that the tribal peoples idealized by romantics were the most violent of all (Elias, 1969; 1982).

We have colleagues who adore everything modern. When they think of modernity they think of legalizing marijuana, of gay rights, of a woman's right to choose, of windsurfing and flying in a jet to the South Seas on a Club Med vacation; they think of clean bathrooms that smell of antiseptic cleansers and of floral perfumes, of rational social science with full-body massages and lifelong learning for all. Convincing them that universities should transform themselves by learning from modernity's other will be a hard sell. Although they might concede that universities should learn more 'about' modernity's other, urging universities to learn 'from' modernity's other presses alarm buttons.

### **An ecologically pessimistic perspective**

As the first among several perspectives to be presented successively, let us outline a reply to categorical partisans of modernity: however sweet it may be, and however bitter everything non-modern may be, the indefinite continuation of modernity is not an option because modernity is not sustainable.

They might seek to nip our argument in the bud before it even gets started by assuring us that they, like almost all thinking people today, are already aware that human life is not now sustainable.<sup>3</sup> They know that as a species we cannot go on very much longer using the amounts of energy we use from the sources we take them from, or poisoning the environment, or killing off the worms and microorganisms in the soil and the bees in the air, or raising the proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. But solving these problems – they say – has nothing to do with reviving the customs of yesteryear. It has everything to do with more and better ecological science, with alternative energy sources, high-tech green technologies, more rational assessments of costs and benefits, and deepening democracy (regarding democracy as a quintessentially modern idea if ever there was one).

This paper, on the other hand, believes that important as quintessentially modern problem-solving is to solving humanity's number one problem, namely getting itself off the endangered species list, in the end humanity can survive only by allying itself with ancient institutions rooted in the primeval depths of human nature.

Here in brief is why. Modernity requires obedience to the systemic imperatives<sup>4</sup> that constitute it. Wherever and to the extent that the constitutive rules of modernity govern human life, the accumulation of profit is the mainspring that drives production. Historically and anthropologically, the great alternatives to that mainspring have been the culturally determined behaviours of reciprocity and redistribution that in Africa and elsewhere have made it possible to produce and distribute the necessities of life without undue reliance on investor confidence, and indeed for many centuries without any reliance on investor confidence at all (Polányi *et al.*, 1957; Sahlins, 1972; Mauss, 1967).

It is to greater emphasis on those ancient alternatives that we must turn. Historically and logically, central planning and mixed economies that in some ways deepen democracy but nevertheless essentially preserve the logic of modernity (classically characterized by Max Weber as *Zweckrationalität*) are unequal to the task.<sup>5</sup> We must – to use some phrases from Tom Berry dripping with allusions to Emile Durkheim – achieve a culture shift at the religious level because no other level is deep enough (Berry, 1988). A green, frugal, and less socially unequal future (which is the only possible future) is only possible if we can find ways to violate with impunity the systemic imperatives imposed by modernity's regimes of accumulation (Aglietta, 1979; Boyer, 1986; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991; Keynes, 1936), be they capitalist, socialist, or mixed (Richards and Swanger, 2006; Harvey, 1989).<sup>6</sup> We need to go farther back in history beyond the point where primitive accumulation separated people from land and thus created a modern proletariat, to the point where commerce replaced kinship, to find the premises of a viable future.

Still more briefly put: where the production of the necessities of life depends on profit-seeking, society is ungovernable. Wise government may call for lowering CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere, or for accelerating the replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy sources, or for doing any number of things that rationally and ethically should be done, but given the basic cultural structures of the modern world, wise governments will never have sufficient power to sufficiently enforce such decisions. Come what may – even if what may come is ecological catastrophe – investor confidence and favourable conditions for profit-making must take priority. If they go, then the wonderful bread machine that produces everybody's daily bread goes too (Dryzek, 1987). *Ergo*, the basic cultural structures of the modern world need revision. *Ergo*, we must take another look at what modernity is not, at modernity's other. *Ergo*, universities need to learn from, not just about, modernity's other.

## Roman law

While recognizing that most of the words this paper has used would be better understood if we took some space to explain what we mean by them, we will select now for some special attention the key phrase 'basic cultural structure.' Already in the first centuries BCE the basic cultural structure of Rome had become the germ from which would sprout and grow the basic cultural structure of today's global economy (Wallerstein, 1978).

Without denying important contributions from other traditions,<sup>7</sup> we suggest that Roman law, especially as it assumed the form of *jus gentium* or law of nations, is the single most important historical root of the legal framework of the modern world-system. It is the root of the basic structure of the global economy. It is the greater part of where that part of the law known as private law comes from.<sup>8</sup> Globalization can be defined as the predominance of private institutions organized by private law over public institutions organized by public law (Michaels and Jansen, 2006; Swanger, 2007). Specifically, we have in mind the historical roots of the constitutive rules of the market famously summarized by Karl Marx as 'freedom, equality, property and Bentham';<sup>9</sup> summarized in the three principles of Ulpian repeated in Justinian's *Institutes* (*honeste vivere, alterum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere*); complemented in the eighteenth century by Samuel Pufendorf's principle *pacta sunt servanda*; and reformulated in the twentieth century by Charles Taylor as the constitutive rules of a bargaining society (Taylor, 1971).

With this background we can gloss in provisional ways to be elaborated later the three terms that compose the phrase. The structure is 'basic' because it governs who has and who lacks the basic necessities of life. It is 'cultural' because it is made of rules also known as norms. It is a 'structure' because it functions as a whole in which the role of each part is intertwined with the role of each of the other parts.

Earlier we spoke of 'systemic imperatives.' Now we say that the legal framework of the modern world constitutes the system that imposes the imperatives in question. In constituting the system it constitutes its imperatives. For example, it constitutes the imperative that whatever else a government does it must create a favourable climate for investment (Richards and Swanger, 2006; Keynes, 1936; Kalecki, 1943). Where such a cultural structure prevails, investment is for the sake of capital accumulation, production depends on investment, while provisioning the population with the basic necessities of life depends on production.

We count ourselves among the pessimists who believe that there is no way to get off the road leading to the destruction of the biosphere without repealing the systemic imperative that creates conditions favourable to capital accumulation. On the perspective here proposed, doing so requires learning from traditional societies

(what followers of Károly Polányi call 're-embedding'). It requires thinking at the level of the basic cultural structures of modernity. When we think basic cultural structure we think Roman law.

### **Perspectives from Immanuel Wallerstein and Edgar Morin**

Immanuel Wallerstein coined the phrase 'modern world-system'. He makes an important point when he says that 'today there is only one social system, and therefore only one mode of production extant, the capitalist world-economy' (Wallerstein, 1978: 7). Everything from the fantasies of the subconscious mind to the physical realities of global warming has to a large extent been drawn into its vortex. Its dynamics – most importantly the dynamic (or logic) of the accumulation of capital – are made possible and inevitable by the neo-Roman commercial law created in ancient Rome, then received and elaborated in modern Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Let us here draw a moral for research methodology, and therefore for the university: we need a methodology that can study any limited topic as part of the global economy. We and others suggest that such a methodology focus on its constitutive rules, its basic norms.<sup>11</sup> The constitutive rules of the modern world-system are its market-constituting norms of property, person, and contract. The methodological point is that if we are going to understand human institutions, we must understand the rules (or norms) that organize them.

Edgar Morin has famously said that the university of the future must reorganize itself in the light of the information sciences, because we know today that everything from biology to linguistics, from chemistry to management, is about information; and because today we have learned from systems theory that besides linear causality, there is circular causality and recursive causality (Morin, 2001). Without disagreeing with Morin but rather transforming by enlargement, we insist that the university of the future must study basic norms and constitutive rules.<sup>12</sup> Basic norms are causes of the effects we observe.<sup>13</sup> Key norms that operate today were coded into world legal culture long ago in the Roman Empire, the successor states of which became Europe. Understanding the system in terms of its constitutive rules is a step towards what we need: a methodology that sees the local in the global and the global in the local; a methodology that contributes to transformation by *seeing* both how regimes of accumulation work and how to move beyond them to governable economies.

### **The culture concept**

It is perhaps clear enough what is meant by 'basic' in the phrase 'basic cultural structures'. A 'basic' rule is one that governs meeting the basic necessities of life. It governs, for example, who eats. This point has been dramatically illustrated by Amartya Sen in his study of famines. Sen shows empirically that in the major recent

famines food has been available. The people who starved were separated from food by the legal norms that establish private property and the necessity to have money in order to acquire food by a socially legitimate contractual exchange (Sen, 1982).

We already identified 'rules' or 'norms' as essential components of 'culture'. But what more can we do with the controversial, polysemic, and yet so indispensable words 'culture' and 'cultural'?

Here our *vade mecum* is a brilliant paper titled 'The culture concept as theory, in context' by James Boggs (2004). Echoing Max Weber's accounts of capitalism, bureaucracy, and *Zweckrationalität* (Weber, 1922), Boggs observes that modernity is constituted by what he calls 'the liberal order'. Echoing Immanuel Wallerstein (1991), he observes that modernity was reflected in a social scientific theory of human order based on European natural science. Echoing our references to the legal framework of modernity, he characterizes the modern state as a rights-based state premised fundamentally on individualism.<sup>14</sup> Liberalism as a political and economic doctrine depends on liberal theories of social order that were constructed at a time when the available models for theory construction were those of relatively simple physical systems.

The concept of culture as developed by the science of anthropology challenges and replaces still dominant – and indeed in recent decades more dominant than ever – liberal theories of social order. Culture replaces the existing Eurocentric theory of human order, inherited from the Enlightenment. Culture as an emerging theory reconfigures and replaces dominant ideas at a time when in practice the limitations of liberal institutions in the face of pervasive and (for liberalism) intractable social and ecological problems are all too evident.

## Critical realism

Having cited Boggs on the significance of culture as implying a new Copernican Revolution in social science and therefore in the university, and having noticed the centrality of norms in culture, let us postpone a capsule definition of the word 'culture' until after we add to our proposed frame of reference for understanding it a few ideas derived from critical realism.

Critical realism as a philosophy arose as a response to postmodern relativism (Bhaskar, 1979; Harré, 1970).<sup>15</sup> To playful deconstruction of the cognitive grounds for moral authority *à la* Jacques Derrida or *à la* Gilles Deleuze, critical realists reply, 'You must be kidding! Surely science must know something about objective reality. If it did not – if all science were social construction – science could not possibly have the successful practical applications that we take for granted every day.'

Let us articulate in a tentative form a few of the main insights that a critical realist can derive from science as it stands today (Whittle, 2008). We do this while simultaneously emphasizing a complementary critical realist point that science is about what *is*, not about anybody's definition of what *is*. This implies that non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems are entitled to respect. Standard science as it stands today has many useful practical applications, but it does not have a metaphysical monopoly on the right way to talk about what *is* (Bhaskar, 1986).<sup>16</sup>

From Joseph Schumpeter we have learned that the very instability and injustice of capitalism drive it to create ever higher levels of productivity, as do its classic advantages due to the accumulation of capital and increased specialization of labour stressed by Adam Smith and many others. Whether the institutionalization of science and technological innovation, which is constantly revolutionizing production, is an intrinsic feature unique to capitalism or is separable from it, is more debatable.

But there is more to the story of why modernity is, as Max Weber said, an 'iron cage' that traditional peoples can enter but cannot exit. As John Locke, Adam Smith, Bertrand Russell, and many others have noted, the accumulation of capital easily becomes the accumulation of military power, and therein lies the key to the conquest of the rest of the world by Europe. And let us repeat, because it cannot be repeated too often, our previous point about the homeostatic quality of capitalism: Where producing-for-sale-and-selling-for-profit is implicit in the constitutive rules, and is the principal source of the daily bread of the people, then a decline in investor confidence threatens that daily bread. Whatever it takes to establish or re-establish a regime of accumulation (a set of institutions favourable to profit-making) will be done because doing it is a systemic imperative.

### **Colonialism: the erasure of culture**

A principal significance of colonialism (and of European penetration prior to colonialism *per se*) is the erasure of culture. The globalization of European modernity has meant an enormous forgetting of collective learning.

Consider sub-Saharan Africa from the first European contact in 1488, and especially South Africa after the Dutch arrived in 1652. The continent began to be drawn into the whirlpool generated by markets. The markets themselves were in turn generated by the legal norms that constituted them.

The university curriculum has also been drawn into the same watery metaphor: 'the whirlpool' refers to patterns of social conduct organized by rules, namely the rules that constitute markets.

European-style education at university level, as well as at primary and secondary levels, came to Africa as part and parcel of a project of modernization, which in turn



was part of the global expansion of the European world-system. The founding of universities in Africa dedicated to erasing indigenous culture and teaching European forms of rationality was inseparable from the imposition of the juridical framework of European commerce and of the European bureaucratic state apparatus (Habermas, 1987: 2).<sup>17</sup>

Let us apply the concept of erasure of culture to property rights in land in South Africa. The San people, sometimes called Bushmen, inhabited what is now South Africa from very ancient times. Skeleton remains similar to those of San people have been dated as coming from the Upper Palaeolithic (Lee, 1976). The Khoi people came later and interrelated so much that one today often refers to the Khoisan as a general grouping that can be divided into several subgroups. Experts differ concerning when the numerous peoples speaking Bantu languages<sup>18</sup> arrived, some giving dates as early as 300 CE and others as late as 600 CE (Bakel, 1981).<sup>19</sup> It is in any event clear that both when the Bantu peoples were displacing the Bushmen and when Bantus were fighting other Bantus, Zulus against Tshwanas for example, there were any number of wars in which one Bantu or San people took land from another.<sup>20</sup> After the Dutch arrived, in addition to the fighting between Dutch and English, whites gradually over the next few centuries seized by violence the greater part of the land previously held by black people, in notable cases massacring defenceless blacks who had no modern weapons.<sup>21</sup>

The land-grabbing by violence of the Europeans erased culture in ways earlier forms of land-grabbing by violence did not. It was not simply a matter of a different tribal group speaking a different language seizing land by force of arms. This time there was a modernization project that brought Roman law principles to Africa. The land was measured. Paper deeds were recorded assigning ownership to individuals. Land became a commodity that could be bought and sold. Now it was not the Dutch as a tribe or the English as a tribe who owned the land, but individual Dutchmen or Englishmen. Land could also be owned by legal fictions, by partnerships, and by artificial persons called corporations. Conquest by Europeans meant that collective ownership and collective responsibility lost out to individualism – not just as a matter of change of attitude, but as a matter of normative principle enforced by law (Rodney, 1972).<sup>22</sup>

Material practices<sup>23</sup> (Braudel, 1981) that had served for thousands of years to provide the daily bread of the people without capital accumulation were forgotten. Today – and this is one good reason to transform today's educational institutions – it is quite possible for land reform in South Africa to be framed in the terms of a liberal world view lacking any memory of communal lands sacred to ancestors.

## **Reciprocity and redistribution**

Numerous anthropological and historical studies show that before European contact the dominant logics governing the livelihoods of the people of Africa were not capitalist. Before 1488, Africans were much more self-reliant, not in the sense of individuals being self-reliant but in the sense of extended families being self-reliant (Dalton, 1962, 1976; Sahlins, 1972; Polányi *et al.*, 1957). In Polányi's terminology, the prevailing logics governing exchange among clans were mostly logics of reciprocity and logics of redistribution.

An example of reciprocity would be the arrangement reported by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) whereby coastal clans traditionally provided ritual gifts of fish to inland clans, which traditionally provided ritual gifts of grains and vegetables to coastal clans. An example of redistribution would be the ancient Egyptian practice of gathering harvested grains into the Pharaoh's granaries, from where they were redistributed to the people during the long months before the next harvest (Wittfogel, 1957). We do not have space to make a detailed argument that these traditional logics need to be revived, but we will tell you one of our conclusions.

The conclusion is that although cooperatives, public sector enterprises, microcredit for micro-enterprises, family enterprises, and employee-owned enterprises are key parts of an inclusive plural economy, they alone will not include everybody. The reason is that they all depend on sales or taxes. As Paul Krugman has recently shown in detail, Keynes was right about sales (Krugman, 2009).<sup>24</sup> There really is a chronic weakness of effective demand; theoretically, it is a consequence of the liquidity preference; empirically, it is the verdict of history. We assert that it is a consequence of constitutive rules. Several authors have shown that while tax-and-spend is part of the answer, it is not the whole answer either (Richards and Swanger, 2006). Our conclusion is that we need to learn from modernity's other about societies organized more by kinship and community and less by markets and bureaucracy.

Cultural erasure happened too in the heartland of the European world-system that expanded to become today's global world-system. If one goes back far enough in the history of Rome – to 500 to 800 years BCE – one will find that property rights at the beginning of the Roman legal tradition were similar to those in Bantu Africa before the Europeans arrived. Land was held by tribes. This is still true in parts of Africa today; there are still places where land is held by kings or queens in trust for their people.<sup>25</sup> Tribes were (and are) organized by kinship. Everybody who was born was born into one clan or another. Since land was owned by groups, and everyone was in a group, everyone had access to land.<sup>26</sup>

## The university and the Bologna process

The Bologna process has become emblematic of the university reframed as a business at the service of other businesses. Thinking about it provides the perspective of thinking of a university in hyper-modern terms, which in turn helps us to think about what it might mean to transform the university learning from modernity's other.

The philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment, which at the dawn of modernity replaced the religious ideals of the older universities, are today cast aside in favour of no ideals. Universities train human resources for the labour market. They balance their budgets by selling research to businesses and governments. This is the trend Bologna epitomizes (Delanty, 2003; Etzkovitz, 2004).

The great traditional universities will continue to exist, but they are being transformed into research universities whose function is to produce marketable knowledge. Like any other business they have to sell to balance their books, and like any other business they hire marketing experts to sell their products, namely degrees and research. They are increasingly evaluated by their patents, by their publications in specialized peer-reviewed journals, and in the last analysis by their contributions to global competitiveness. In the words of Chris Lorenz:

*The ideology of the knowledge economy thus simply means that the domain of knowledge production is economized; homo academicus is modelled after homo economicus. Capitalist economy no longer finds its legitimization in scientific terms, as was the case in 'late capitalism' according to the influential diagnosis of Jürgen Habermas (1989) because science itself now needs to justify itself in economic terms.*

(Lorenz, 2006)

## Towards transformation

We have been suggesting in various ways intended to induce a Gestalt shift in what modernity is seen *as*, that to understand *why* modernity needs to be transformed we need to think about what modernity is *not*, modernity's other. But in order to actually *do* transformation we need something else. We need feasible next steps.

*Transformation needs to start from where universities are now.*

Here is one suggestion for next steps, starting from what for the most part now exists. Universities are already asking themselves the question, 'How can we ensure that our graduates will find employment?' The answers they are giving to that question are already diverse. Some universities, for example Harvard, promote an entrepreneurial spirit. Harvard students are told: 'Don't wait for someone to offer you a job; create your own job.' We would add, 'create your own mission', where mission means more than maximizing capital accumulation (Hurst, 2014). A Harvard student who took

that advice was Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook. At the famous graduate school of management founded by Peter Drucker in California, the admissions policy is that 40 per cent of the students should come from the public and non-profit sectors. At Buckingham University in the UK students learn to be social entrepreneurs, learning how to raise money for causes, how to make a living while changing the world. Many other examples could be cited. These are examples of livelihoods with transformative logics and dynamics (Richards, 2013). They project futures that learn from modernity's other while answering questions on today's agenda.

They project futures where sustainability can be achieved because systemic imperatives can be relaxed. They move us closer to the social ethic proposed by Amartya Sen, where the market is regarded as one institution among others that serves the cause of human development (Sen and Dreze, 1995). It is not the only one, and often it is not the best one. Today – for reasons that hopefully are clear by now – Sen's ideal is not realizable. Maintaining investor confidence at all costs is imperative because if the mainspring of the economy fails, the daily bread of the people is no longer forthcoming.

Transformation is about plurality. It is about undoing cultural erasure. It is about realism, imagination, and good will. It leads to a world that is governable, and therefore potentially sustainable, because other material practices become available to take up the slack when investor confidence flags. The 'slack' that needs to be taken up is the shortfall in livelihoods and production of goods and services that occurs whenever investors lack confidence that profits will be large enough and sure enough to justify a decision to invest – whether they are investing their own money or managing somebody else's.

In Michael Kalecki's terms, transformation takes away the monopoly of capitalists on starting production. Humanity escapes from a situation where first priority must always be given to maintaining the so-called state of confidence because when investor confidence wanes, everything else wanes with it (Kalecki, 1943). Transformation is about plurality, and therefore it is about governability.

One of our reasons for believing that our approach to university transformation is feasible is that universities are already interested in jobs for their graduates. Another is that universities already think of themselves as contributing to economic development – and therefore they should be able to take the next step of contributing to governable and sustainable economic development.

There are already dissenters in every faculty who lament the domination of the university by a neoliberal version of what an economy should be, and who are eager to do what they can to breathe some life into the Socratic and Enlightenment ideals that call on a university to be a centre of free and independent criticism and

inquiry. There are already not just professors but also students who want to keep alive the great conversations about truth and justice and ultimate reality. These are conversations that lend themselves to reconsidering modernity in the light of what I and my co-author Catherine Odora Hoppers in our book, *Rethinking Thinking* (Odora Hoppers and Richards, 2012) call its 'other'.

What we suggest taps into many existing documents in which universities declare their missions and visions. The trend may be towards converting the university into a business, but nevertheless most universities still express high-non-economic or generously-economic ideals in their official documents. Stated ideals commonly echo great traditions from the distant past rooted in ideals of kinship, community (*Gemeinschaft!*), and service to others.<sup>27</sup> In proposing that the university rethink itself by locating itself in a broader context, and by seeing the basic constitutive rules of modernity in a broad perspective – a perspective that includes the whole cultural evolution of humanity in ecological context – my co-author and I expect to find support in discourses already officially regarded as authoritative. Modernity's other already has its agents planted in the governing documents of modernity.

### **Concluding considerations**

This article assumed as a premise that many readers would not understand what is meant by transforming universities in ways that learn from modernity's other. It was not just a matter of the meanings of words or of the presuppositions of contexts. It was a matter of *seeing as*.

This paper presented a series of perspectives. It has sought to express a viewpoint. Its aims can be seen as lower than the aims of leading figures in the history of thought. In a Platonic dialogue, for example, the participants are called to follow the *logos*. They are supposed to accept the conclusions of the argument wherever it may lead. It may turn out that the argument is inconclusive, but nevertheless the participants are supposed to try to distinguish true from false in the light of the higher authority of reason.

We have accepted a traditional task of philosophy: that of weaving together a comprehensive world view.<sup>28</sup> We have not – at least not here – accepted another traditional task of philosophy: that of arguing for the superiority of its comprehensive world view over others.

At this point inevitable questions arise. Is the university defined as a place where knowledge is produced? Is the university a place (or should it be) where scholars communicate to each other the beliefs they have come to hold? Regarding these inevitable questions we find some comfort in the lectures delivered by John Henry Newman in 1852 when he was appointed first rector of what is today University

College Dublin, published as *The Idea of a University* (Newman, 1999). Newman was very aware of the danger of what we today call 'silos'. Researchers work in closed silos separated from each other without knowing what is going on in other silos. Their publications might be intelligible only to a half dozen specialists. Where the whole system is going and why it is going there nobody knows or seeks to find out.

For Newman a university is a solution to the problem of silos. The idea of a university is the idea of a place where scholars in different fields communicate with each other. The intellectual culture of the more-than-millennial great conversations about the great issues of human life is not abandoned to make way for specialized research. It is not abandoned to make way for training human resources in the competencies industry requires. Instead the great conversations are continued and enriched by the findings of specialists.

In Newman's university there must be room for the explanation we are attempting in this article. There must be room for trying to explain what one's views *are*, as a necessary preliminary to any judgement readers may make about whether they agree with them, and as a necessary preliminary to any attempt by the writer to marshal arguments to compel readers to agree whether they want to agree or not.

In a short space we have outlined a world view. Seeing the world through the lenses of the world view, this paper suggests that it becomes almost self-evident that universities should be valuing previously devalued cultural norms, learning from modernity's other, and making use of cultural resources wherever they can be found whenever they promise to transform society. Transformation means changing the basic form, which means enlarging our vision to see modern liberal culture as only one culture among others and as one that desperately needs to learn from others. It means enlarging our practice to include more reciprocity and more redistribution, and in general more material practices typical of archaic societies.

Although we have not given many examples regarding next steps in university transformation, we have suggested two criteria for selecting next steps: (1) They must respond to felt needs among universities and their students today; (2) They must lead to system transformation by strengthening alternative logics and dynamics; thus making today's systemic imperatives less imperative; thus providing society with more degrees of freedom when seeking solutions to its pervasive and intractable problems. We believe that these two criteria can best be understood and implemented in the light of the Gestalt shift towards what James Boggs calls a Copernican Revolution in the social sciences.

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## Notes

1 The frequent use of the first person plural in this article reflects the fact that its main ideas are derived from a co-authored work, Odora Hoppers and Richards (2012).

2 Paulo Freire famously begins his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* defining 'dehumanization' as the central problem of the times we live in and humanization as our central challenge (1970).

3 I am a pessimist because I believe with Joel Novek and Karen Kampen that '... the relationship between economic expansion and environmental protection remains fundamentally contradictory' (Novek and Kampen, 1992). This argument is further elaborated by many authors including Redclift (1987). Further I believe, as I will discuss below, that economic expansion is an imperative of the dominant capitalist system, and that consequently until that system is radically reformed, economic expansion will often trump environmental protection. See Magdoff and Foster (2011).

4 The concept of 'systemic imperative' is developed by Ellen Meiksins Wood (2005).

5 As Althusser and Balibar note in *Reading Capital*, Karl Marx deliberately simplified his account of capitalism by accepting the premises of apologists for it like Adam Smith and David Ricardo. This understandable move on Marx's part paved the way for John Maynard Keynes to remark that the future will learn more from those who repudiate the premises of classical economics than from those who, like Marx, accept them for the purpose of denouncing their contradictions (Keynes, 1936: 355). Richards and Swanger (2006) show why social democratic logic is unequal to the task. Although, historically, centrally planned economies have been among the worst offenders, one might argue that in principle a command economy – unlike a market economy – could command whatever the commanders decide to command, including a drastic reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. However, this argument can be regarded as moot if one accepts the premise that whatever economies with very high degrees of central planning might accomplish in principle, they will not accomplish in practice because in the future there will be no such economies. They have proven to be so inefficient that they have now been dismantled – mostly by the very elites that constructed them, but sometimes, as in the case of Boris Yeltsin, by counter-elites. There is no likelihood that in the future anybody – left, right, or centre – will attempt to build another one.

6 The failure of the Swedish Model and other attempts to build social democracy without changing the basic cultural structure of modernity is analysed in Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger (2006). The concept of

'regime of accumulation' has been developed by the Grenoble School in France and is discussed by David Harvey (1989).

7 Max Weber makes much of the fact that while the passion for systematizing law came from Rome, much of the detail of modern commercial law was invented in the European middle ages. Others make a great point (too great a point in my opinion) of the distinctiveness of Anglo-American common law. For the sake of brevity I refer to 'Roman law' as the largest single source of the legal framework of global capitalism without denying the importance of non-Roman sources. I stress the market-constituting principles of property, free juridical subject, and contract – this latter not assuming its modern form in the Roman tradition until the seventeenth century.

8 These synthetic assertions about private law and its Roman roots (and similar roots in the related common law tradition) are documented in chapters four and five of Odora Hoppers and Richards (2012) and also in the works of other authors, including Karl Renner (1976) and John R. Commons (1924). Commons does not talk about Roman law as such but about the general legal conditions that make capitalism possible, which turn out to be the same as the main principles of European commercial law. Max Weber (1992) devoted his doctoral dissertation to showing that the influence of Roman law on modern institutions has been generally exaggerated, and that actually the legal framework of modern commerce came to a large extent from non-Roman Italian and late medieval sources, but even he acknowledged that the Roman passion for system in law was constitutive of modernity. (See the parts of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* that treat of *Die Wirtschaft und die Ordnungen*.) Nothing essential to my argument depends on how much the basic cultural structure 'property-contract-juridical subject-no strict duty to aid' literally derives historically from Rome, and how much I am just using 'Roman law' as a convenient label for it.

9 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Band I, Erstes Buch, Kapitel 4, III (Marx, 1986: 136). Marx's point is that the normative principles of the market only conceal the fundamental fact of exploitation, which is to be discovered at a deeper level, at the level of production. My point (and that of Keynes) is that for all his wisdom, Marx underestimated the importance of the ethical and legal norms that constitute commerce.

10 The argument that those rules make that dynamic possible and inevitable is made in Odora Hoppers and Richards (2012).

11 Notice that the constitutive rules are the same at the interpersonal and global levels, namely those of buying and selling among autonomous persons. On their elaboration for social science research methodology, see my own works (1995, 2004; Richards and Swanger, 2006), Charles Taylor (1971), John Searle (1969, 1995), and also Rom Harré and Paul Secord (1973). I find that a rules approach dovetails with a critical realist approach, as happens for example with the use of the idea of 'security community' in Heikki Patomäki (2002). Although I do not usually agree with Friedrich von Hayek, I do agree with the methodological points he made in his speech accepting the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science, where he proposes 'pattern' explanations derived from knowledge of social rules (Hayek, 1974).

12 The idea of constitutive rules and the distinction between regulative and constitutive rules can be traced back to Kant. A recent seminal text is John Searle's *Speech Acts* (1969), followed by the same author's *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995). A contribution of Odora Hoppers and Richards (2012) is to specify what the constitutive rules of the modern world-system are, namely the main principles of Roman law. In my book *Understanding the Global Economy* (2004) I show that those rules are essential to explanations in economics.

13 That rules are causes is argued systematically by Rom Harré in several works including Harré and Secord (1973). That interpretation referring to constitutive rules is essential for causal explanation in the human sciences is argued by Charles Taylor in his seminal article, 'Interpretation and the sciences of man' (1971).

14 On this point, Boggs relies on a paper by John Gledhill (1997).

15 Critical realism was preceded by the critiques of 'Humean' empiricist and positivist science worked out by Bhaskar's (and my) tutor at Oxford, Rom Harré.

16 For Bhaskar, different cultures can be said to do different 'storytelling' and to have different 'metaphysics':



17 'The new structures of society were marked by the differentiation of the two functionally intermeshing systems that had taken shape around the organizational cores of the capitalist enterprise and the bureaucratic state apparatus. Weber understood this process as the institutionalization of purposive-rational economic and administrative action (Jürgen Habermas, 1987: 2).

18 The word 'Bantu' was coined by the German Wilhelm Bleek to name the languages of southern Africa that were not Khoisan (i.e. neither Bushman nor 'Hottentot').

19 These dates refer to a 'second Bantu expansion' (the first starting from an area in what is now the Nigerian plateau and not getting as far as most of what is now South Africa) at a time when the Bantu peoples were already iron-using agriculturalists.

20 See, for example, Bakel (1981: 689) and Jan Vansina: '... oral traditions recall wars between "pygmy" hunters and farmers, and a glance at the distribution of the pygmies shows they were driven out of large areas. ... The hunters either had to leave in search of ever fewer empty lands, or they had to ... accept dependency ... San hunters, hemmed in by cereal growers, moved away, sometimes fought them, often intermarried ...' (1984: 144).

21 In Freedom Park Museum in Pretoria there are exhibits detailing early massacres of blacks by whites.

22 For a more detailed review of anthropological and historical studies of African economic institutions prior to European contact see George Dalton (1962, 1976). I am siding with Polányi and the 'substantivists' in the 'substantivist/formalist' controversies. As Peter Breiner remarks, '... capitalist culture selects out and cultivates the very behaviour that marginal utility [i.e. capitalist economic theory] postulates as universal' (Breiner, 1995: 31), interpolation mine.

23 I borrow the phrase 'material practices' from Fernand Braudel.

24 That there really is a chronic deficiency of effective demand, and therefore an inability of sales-in-markets to provide everyone with the necessities of life, is shown in Krugman (2009).

25 One such place is the Erasmus Community near Pretoria.

26 These brief remarks on the history of Roman law summarize chapter four of Odora Hoppers and Richards (2012), which in turn relies on Ferdinand Tönnies (1957, first published as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887), and Iglesias (1976). The latter is a standard text book on Roman law used in the law schools of the Spanish-speaking world.

27 Robert Bellah *et al.* are among those who have shown that older ideals live on and co-exist with the business ideals of a society whose basic framework is economic. Studying the United States, they find empirically that most people are at home with four quite different sets of cultural norms, which the authors call 'languages'. The first and most prominent language is that of business. However, there are three others: that of psychotherapy, that of religion, and that of civic virtue.

28 That this task is crucial to ethics because ethics is about action and action always deals with reality as it is and not with a few variables that have been abstracted from it for ease of study, is one of the themes of my *Letters from Quebec: A philosophy for peace and justice* (1995).

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