

The Crows' Nest and the Thwart;
Being Sundry Thoughts of a Valedictory Nature
on Abiding Change in Higher Education
pursued though a Maritime Metaphor.

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The Ritual.

This is an occasion heavy with ritual. And one of the most ancient of these *rites de passage* is that the Departing – the Departed is far too premature – sings for his supper. And yours. It is also part of the ritual that, for their part, friends and colleagues put themselves at severe risk. They do so by granting their departing colleague a vast indulgence. That is, to speak on any topic that tickles his fancy. Here is generosity of a very high order since there is nothing on this Earth to guarantee that what tickles his fancy, tickles yours. *A chacun son goût et à chacun ses proclivités!* By such witting generosity, good friends show they are excellent colleagues. They demonstrate a professional resistance to tedium, which is one of the gifts academia inevitably bestows upon each and every one of us.

There is, however, reason in this ritual, which makes the occasion a thing of mutual responsibility. It involves both the speaker and the spoken to. The speaker is supposed to come up with insightful and rare points of such immeasurable sagacity that his – or her - colleagues can mull them over in the years to come. They can mull them over from two points of view. The constructive view: How may these rare pearls be taken into the collective tribal wisdom? There is also “The View Justificatory.” This latter has a slightly different function. It furnishes proof definitive that the time is indeed come for each to go their separate ways. In this latter dimension, much is determined by that criterion mentioned earlier, namely, the depth of tedium the speaker manages to plumb. In short, the deeper the tedium the more justified the separating of paths, for the good of the speaker and for the continued sanity of those spoken to!

The Subject.

The subject I want to use to test your powers of resistance is greatly self-indulgent. I shall put out a few thoughts on what – here and there across the years – I have called “Abiding Change”. Perhaps, as a renegade historian, it is natural for me to return to this aspect of our field, not least because change is one of the great banalities of our Age. It is part of the received beliefs and constructs with which we work. Indeed, I defy you to find an official document dealing with Higher Education Policy today so wanting in fashionability that it does NOT mention somewhere the “need

for change”. Severally and singly, all of us have, in our various ways, contributed to underpinning the credo that change is now continual, on going, and incessant.

On this presumption, Managers justify setting up new systems of evaluation and performance. Leaders justify limiting patterns of consultation, cutting short discussion and devising more formalistic procedures, which effectively cut them off from their erstwhile colleagues. This is called reasserting leadership (Meek & Wood, 1997) And on this presumption too, Academia groans under the unceasing round of ‘revenue generation’, which is not always the same thing as the transmission of knowledge to the rising generation.

Incessant change is the heart of an economic *tarantelle*¹ by which Neo Liberalism – and, *en passant* I think we are going to have to find another term for what today is emerging from this ideology – takes over the one curious feature, which in an earlier Age identified that particular strand of radical Communism associated with Lev Bronstein aka Trotsky in Russia and Mao Zhe Dong in the Peoples’ Republic of China. There are of course subtle and minor differences. Whilst Trotsky and Chairman Mao saw permanent revolution as a permanent renewal of political elites, the neo Liberal version of the same interprets permanent change as a form of social control over the proletariat and those who have newly joined it, the better on world scale to preserve corporate elites and their global interests.

Still, we take for granted that the challenge, (other beliefs might call it Fate, Destiny or Divine Will) for higher education is to be like Monsieur de Talleyrand Périgord, Napoléon’s Foreign Minister and professional turncoat, supremely flexible, adaptable, efficient and effective. (Neave, 2006) These are the operational values of the hour. And we are told, they are the price of higher education as we know it, surviving, perhaps even flourishing.

The Banality of the Decade.

That change is ‘on going’ and unceasing, is, I would suggest, undeniably the banality of the decade. Yet and all, it serves as the central presumption, sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit, behind most of what we do as students of higher education – whether what we do is to propose

¹ The *tarantelle* was a collective dance, probably of Sicilian origin, which followed when individuals were bitten by the dreaded Tarantula spider, or so legend would have it. This term, one must readily admit, if obscure, is rather less shocking than the other version of this same image which in a plague-smitten Northern Europe of Medieval times, was called “The Dance of Death”. Whether Sicilian or Northern European, the result was still the same. The only difference was that the North European version included a skeletal Death amongst the dancers, whereas the Sicilian did not.

new models, devise new procedures, construct new techniques and modes of judgment or to ascertain how those already in place are functioning – or not - as the case may be. All these tasks have change as their essential purpose . That is, to enable the university, faculty, subject, department or research unit to remain abreast of change. In the horrid gibberish of contemporary neo corporatism, “ to maintain a competitive advantage”. Or, last but not least, encourages them to latch on to pre-processed “solutions” that consultants unfailingly guarantee will transform the laggardly from the trailing edge to the cutting edge. Change incessant in our current doxology – that is, an authoritative and sacred text that states what must be believed – is without a smidgeon of doubt, the greatest of all contemporary takens for granted.

That said, one of the duties of free scholarship – and I underline the adjective advisedly – is precisely **NOT** to take for granted the takens for granted. To the sociologist, this is elementary. Demystification is one of Sociology’s prime duties. And mystification begins at the very moment when an assertion – change is unceasing – is no longer put to the question, but accepted *telle quelle*.

The Metaphor.

However, as I mentioned earlier, if Abiding Change tickles my fancy – and it has for a long time – I have to admit to the possibility that you may not be sensitive to the same stimulation. So, to avoid tedium and to be sure that a little creative confusion is present in the amphitheatre, I shall introduce a metaphor to give further significance to the place of Abiding Change in our affairs. Since a little part of my time these days is taken up with the construction of large radio controlled model warships, my metaphor, dear friends, cannot but be maritime.

The title of this presentation – “The Crow’s Nest and the Thwart” – are not just metaphors for the two predominant perspectives present in higher education policy. They are also capable of application to the question of Abiding Change itself. This is not the first time CHEPS has had to put up with nautical analogies. In the previous century, which some of us still remember, many here this afternoon contributed unstintingly to “The Eye of the Storm”, the nautical title to our 1998 Lustrum Book. And given the history of the Netherlands, as the heirs to the two bold van Tromps, Maarten and Cornelis, as fellow countrymen to the daring Michiel de Ruyter and – nearer to our day – as the grandchildren of Rear Admiral Karel Doorman, hero of the Battle of the Java Sea in 1942, you cannot easily plead ignorance of matters maritime.

Obscure Explanations.

Still, it is possible there are a few of us whose ancestry and terms of reference are more ‘*terre à terre*’, a little ‘land-girt’. Let me then explain where these two fittings – a Crow’s Nest and a Thwart - figure in life on

the ocean wave. The Crow's Nest is a look out point, rather more than half way up the foremast. From it, a sharp lookout was kept for such things as reefs, rocks, whales, flotsam, the dreaded lee shore and other ships. In the pre electronic Navy, it was sometimes used to navigate the ship in difficult or uncharted waters.

A thwart (wonderful word straight from the pure Saxon) as anyone who has rowed knows, is - well – literally fundamental. It goes from one side of the boat to the other. In the sailor's jargon 'it runs a-thwartships.' It is a fixture, usually a narrow plank of quite excruciating discomfort on which the rower rests his rump as he rows. Unless that is, he is a Maltese bumboatman or a Venetian *gondoliere* and then he stands up to row. In the old Navy, neither the Crow's Nest nor the Thwart were occupied by the Skipper. They were manned by the ordinary Jack Tar.

Obscure Clues.

So what in the name of all that's sacred has this to do with Higher Education Policy and Abiding Change? The clue lies, dear colleagues, neither in the location nor the function of the Crow's Nest or the Thwart so much as in the direction they allow those occupying them to face. The lookout faces for'ard in the direction the barky is sailing. The oarsman faces aft. He knows where the longboat has come from. For those of you for whom precision, detail and scholarly accuracy are indispensable – that is to say, all of you – I exclude the Maltese and the Venetians from this metaphor.

Let me suggest that the study of Higher Education Policy bears considerable similarity with the Crow's Nest. For the most part, it is taken up with examining current issues that have become problematic with a view to suggesting alternatives. Indeed, if you think back to the origins of CHEPS, the role as look out in the Crow's Nest of Her Majesty's Ministry of Education and Science was clear and unambiguous. It was to analyze and pass on to the Ministry those current developments of significance in higher education that were then taking place outside the Netherlands. And also, no little task as it is no little honour, to bring to the notice of others progress achieved in the Netherlands – and how. Indeed, with the Monitor this function has been strengthened, extended, expanded and placed on permanent footing. As an aside, the vision of the Kaiser in the Crow's Nest is so deliriously surreal that I doubt even Salvador Dali could have dreamt it up! Still, to mix metaphor and reality, CHEPS purpose which it has in common with our partners from Norway to South Africa via Portugal, from Wittenburg Halle to North Carolina has been to help those navigating the national vessel to plot their course through largely uncharted seas and amidst the policy equivalent of shifting shoals.

Rather rarer are those studies which are called upon to trace the origins of a problematic to ascertain how, why and whether its current state is in keeping - or has developed in such a way that it is no longer compatible - with the purpose and the goals originally attributed to it, whether

nationally, regionally or at the institutional level. This latter perspective moves our scholarship from the mast-head to the thwart. And to put no finer point on things, studies of evaluation and assessment, impact and take up fall largely into that part of our analogy. And that makes oarsmen of us all.

Paradox.

Yet, whether we gather around the foremost or take our place on the thwarts of the longboat from the good ship Higher Education Policy, we find ourselves in a slightly paradoxical situation. The paradox arises from the fact that our instruments of navigation – the disciplines contributing to higher education – have developed immensely over the past decade and a half. (Becher, 1998) And so have the forms of working together, despite all that territoriality can often do to undermine such ambition. In my capacity as one time stroke oar, I would merely point out how rare it was to work across physical frontiers in the 80s. And how unusual it would be today if we did not. Multi-national, multi disciplinary and multi institution teams, task forces - what ever it pleases you to call them - today cause not the batting of an eyelid. Such liveliness is naturally infectious. It embraces the disciplines that contribute to the study of higher education. What is equally evident is the immensely stimulating cross-fertilization between them, that process the American historian Walter Metzger called “subject parturition”. (Metzger, 1987) We see this in such domains that emerged during the last decade of the last century Quality Research, Evaluation Studies, Inter system collaboration and exchange sometimes called “International Relations”. All of these domains have caused many specialist journals to bloom.

If our instruments of navigation are more sensitive, sophisticated and responsive to the meeting of outside interests – which is one of the more significant changes the rise of the Stakeholder Society has brought in its wake – it remains nevertheless that our navigating instruments are very certainly focused on the short term – whether the perspective involved is that of the lookout at the masthead or the matelot tugging on his oar. In short, if in the short term we see clearer than previously we did, the long-term perspective sees us surrounded by fog banks fore and aft. This does not mean we should not seek to navigate in the fog bank. On the contrary there is much of advantage to be had from entertaining long-term scenarios, as CHEPS did two years ago to mark its 20th anniversary. (Enders, Jongbloed & File, 2005)

Navigating in a Fog and Monsieur de Beaumarchais.

Long-term forward projections are absolutely vital. They allow us to break clear of the present, to consider alternative outcomes that current thinking or orthodoxy are not prepared to entertain. Or, which is more likely, have never even thought about them for, like the innocent and vice, few even know what is possible, let alone performable! In undertaking work such as this, we re-assert our intellectual freedom. Navigating in

this fog allows us to exercise a calculated, controlled and scholarly imagination. Here indeed is a more daring challenge; far different from the service we perform on behalf of others when both problem and context are already determined and when what we are called upon to investigate is guided by the interests and concerns of others. And especially so, when the framework in which priorities are already laid down, is likewise set by others.

Navigating in futures that might be is not, however, in opposition to what we do at present. It is neither idle self-indulgence. Still less is it to be dismissed as useless speculation. It is, on the contrary, a complementary activity to those undertakings we perform for others. It restores, be it ever so slightly, a sense of vision. It gives us a purchase – which is a sailor’s expression for grip or grasp – over where what at we are doing now may lead. (Neave, 2006) In short, it gives our community a sense of direction and achievement. All of which is important, above all at a time when increasingly, the function of the university is held to ‘service’ society. (Tjeldvoll, 1998). The desire and the ability to go beyond current orthodoxy are nothing less than the essential qualities, collective as much as individual, that prevent us from falling into that condition so well summed up in the aphorism, coined by Pierre Augustin de Beaumarchais, the 18th century French playwright, financial speculator, general gad-fly and fellow traveller to the Revolution of 1789, to wit “*la liberté ne s’use que quand on s’en sert pas.*”

Deconstructing the Long-Term Perspective.

Let us think a little further on what creating long-term scenarios and alternatives really does. In effect, what it does is to assume that certain developments in the present are building blocks on which the future rests. In selecting these particular features – be they administrative procedures, methods of funding, conditions of access, ways by which knowledge is transmitted etc - we also make the explicit assumption that their present consequence, role and condition will make them the factors that shape the future. In short, we assign to them an ‘abiding’ quality. We make the assumption that their influence will endure beyond the time and the very particular circumstances which brought them into being. Implicitly and by the nature of the developments we select and to which we assign an ‘abiding status’, we also assign the status of “ephemeral” to those not selected.

Such a way of going about navigating in the fog of the future is fascinating. It is fascinating because, when you come to think about it, what you are doing is the equivalent of creating a future history. You are setting down points of reference, which serve two very different purposes. The first of these, as I have suggested, shapes what might be. The second performs another function. It provides a species of benchmark, the cartographic equivalent of a datum point, that not only allows one to plot the conditions of feasibility for the various alternatives that lead on to the outcome within a stipulated time frame. Such benchmarks, set in the

present, also allow you to judge how far you will have to go and what needs to be achieved to get there. In short, like Monsieur Jourdain and prose, you are engaged in an historical exercise whether you like it - or not, whether you are aware of it – or not.

Future History justifying the Historical Perspective.

Now, you may argue that anyone is at liberty to construct his or her version of ‘future history’ and that as an exercise in nicely calculated scholarship, solidly and intimately grounded in many years spent analyzing the contemporary world of higher education, this is far from being simply the stuff of pipe-dreams or whatever your personal stimulant might be. I would be the last to disagree with you. But as a counter to that observation, I would merely bring to your attention that the use of a quasi historical perspective in a heuristic capacity goes far in supporting the general ‘pertinence’ – a ghastly Gallicism much caressed in UNESCO circles – of an historical perspective. Furthermore, let me suggest that the historical perspective becomes doubly important when the materials we have at our disposal and often of our own making – sources, documentation, records, and God wot, colleagues as living archives – are more solid by far than even the most gifted and sensitive of futurological imaginings.

Strenuous Denials – individual and collective.

Lest anyone here should think I am following in the footsteps of Henry Cardinal Newman and making an “*Apologia pro vita sua*”, let me disabuse you. I cannot wholly prove that, on a Freudian level, such motivation is utterly absent. That would be ingenuous. But my motives lie elsewhere and very especially with the development of that commitment to the Republic of Higher Education Studies, which has bound and bonded us together officially for a decade and in reality, more like two – most times in the Crow’s Nest, sometimes seated companionably together on the Thwart.

Earlier, I made a little play on the paradox, which I see in today’s dynamism in Higher Education. To this, let me throw in an irony for good measure. And whilst the irony is not made as an apologia, it is very certainly a reflection on those times those of my generation have lived through. Incidentally, and as a pure aside, one knows full well when a generation of scholars is passing. “*L’âge*, as the French poet and songster Georges Brassens, once claimed, *n’a rien à l’affaire*.”² One knows a

² Brassens was not concerned either with retirement, or with Festschriften, though the cynical will point out that he *was* concerned with a very particular human quality from which academia cannot claim total immunity. For those interested, the refrain to his ditty was “*Quand on est con, on est con*.”

cont’:

generation is passing when most of one's activities – and those of one's friends and colleagues - are increasingly spent writing articles for Festschriften – for one's colleagues and friends! *Passons...*

The Changing Face of Change.

No one in this lecture theatre will deny for a moment that, over the past half century, Higher Education has altered out of all recognition. There is no field - domain, institution or practice, constituency or administration, numbers of establishments and students, not to mention their variety and differentiation - that has NOT been subject to change. Yet, the number of works, which seek to set this change in a synthetic long-term perspective that embraces Western Europe and does so over those fifty years past, are rare to the point of invisibility. Of course, having made that statement, I can come up with at least one. (Ruegg & de Ritter Simoens, 1994 onwards) But, it is so slow in emerging that decades pass before scholarship will be able to take advantage of the volume planned to cover the period I have in mind - namely 1957 to 2007. I know. Two years ago, the editors approached me for an update of a chapter, first drafted when my twins were still in kindergarten! The twins are now both at University and though revised, the wretched Chapter has yet to thunder off the press. This is an editorial strategy sometimes known as 'letting scholarship mature'. Others might describe the technique as part of the "viticultural approach to learned publishing"! It leaves the script, like wine, to mature for years in the silent darkness of the Editorial desk-drawer *en espérant qu'il se bonifie*, no doubt!

Despite all I have said about change being the Banality of our epoch, meeting change has not always been seen as the central task of the university. From this it follows that we are to grasp the full significance of this transformation and the shifts that came in its wake, it is as well to pay a little attention to what changed and to when change became the central credo of higher education policy. And why.

Here, I must confess, I have been a singularly lucky cove. Some years back, as the 20th century drew to its close, I had the opportunity of wading through all the speeches made during the Presidential Meetings of the International Association of Universities, which took place every five years. My purpose – apart from setting down the feats of arms of the International Association of Universities and to mark its fifty years of existence – was to see how things had changed over that half century. Four dimensions were of particular interest: University Values, Role and Mission, University Government and University and Society. (Neave, 2000, pp. 9- 36.)

There could be many translations of this assertion, depending on the level of language and the dialect of Anglo Saxon tongue – American, English, Scottish Caribbean, Indian or Australian - the interpreter chooses. None of them will be complimentary, however.

Sources, Rectors and Vice Chancellors as god-objects.

As a source – and to historians sources are the god object – Presidents should not be scorned. True, with very few exceptions, it is a rare thing indeed for them to be long-term and recognized scholars in higher education. Both UT and CHEPS – along with the Universities of California and Harvard³ - have been singularly fortunate in having furnished most notable exceptions to this general rule.

Still, there is the inestimable advantage precisely in the fact that very often Presidents' views are NOT at the cutting edge in our field. Yet, they are the accumulation of accepted wisdom, the expression of views widely held in Faculty Club, Senior Committee Room, High Table and Rectors' Conferences. For this very reason, they command a ring of authenticity and on this very account, may be seen as spokesmen – or spokeswomen – who express the mainstream views of the hour. And this, I would plead, justifies their value as sources to the history of the university. In fine, that they echo their times is one of the most powerful ways of penetrating and reconstructing the values, assumptions and often unspoken beliefs, which permeated the world they once occupied as *primus inter pares* rather than Chief Executive Officers. Let me draw on that delicious vignette in Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* – perhaps the first post war university novel in English. Presidents and VCs resemble Jim's Head of the History Department. As the phone rang in the Professorial office, this Master of Pomposity invariably answered, "History speaking." I hasten to add that I am not suggesting that Vice Chancellors, Presidents and Rectors of yesteryear were owners of inflated egos. I am suggesting their speeches make History speak. And for that reason, I used them as a species of personal line, to tap into the common or garden views of an earlier time.

Definitions Various.

Before getting into the detail as to why and when change changed, let me draw a few distinctions and definitions, central to the account I want to present and to the perspective that follows. First, there is the periodicity, the chronological framework that marks crucial points in the evolving notions that attended change. Second, there is a distinction, which is equally essential. It draws the line between change, adjustment and accommodation.

The dynamics of "the change in change" are very similar to those of bankruptcy. They start very slowly and they end very quickly. The first signs of Presidential awareness of the general problématique can be traced to around 1970 and continued throughout that decade. (Neave, 2000) The second period, I would suggest begins with the start of the current policy cycle of the 1980s – reforms pioneered by the Netherlands and Britain. In the 1980s, change is embedded into, and a feature central and salient of, the current policy cycle. (Neave, submitted) By the 1990's, under the

³ Clark Kerr for the former and Derek Bok for the latter.

thrust of a spreading Neo – Liberalism, change took on all the weight and trappings of a doxology, an authoritative and largely non-negotiable statement about purpose in higher education and the actions that should follow from it.

Nowadays, there is a tendency to lump together under the general rubric of “change” numbers of activities, which have very different aims and purposes, status and functions. It is not difficult to understand why. Demonstrating change is today key to the approval of the Prince and to his largesse. The repute for being adaptable and efficient shapes the ‘marketable image’. Both approval and image have much bearing on an establishment’s rating. In short, there is much advantage to be had by boosting even the most marginal undertaking and noising it abroad under the general head of change achieved. By bolstering the notion of change as a general and demonstrable symbol of institutional initiative and enterprise, what tends to be forgotten is that change is a generic term. It contains a number of sub components. These sub components are very far from being uniform, either in pace or in purpose. Change therefore may be seen like Caesar’s Gaul ‘*in tres partes divisa*’. In effect, change also embraces accommodation and adjustment.

Accommodation and Adjustment

Accommodation and adjustment are important concepts and sensitive boundary markers to what Martin Trow, in a classical article of three decades back, alluded to as the “public and private lives of academia”. (Trow, 1976) They form part of academia’s ‘private life’, they form the interior anatomy of change, interior that is, in two senses; first, they are part of that continual organic evolution in knowledge and its organisation, which have always been the heart of the university’s self-husbandry. (Clark, 1993) Second, their take up, pace and scope were a function not simply of the inevitable progress of disciplines. They were also largely influenced by the prevalent notion of the university’s place and role in society. I would also like to distinguish between accommodation and adjustment. Accommodation has the university ‘responding’ *on its own initiative* to external pressures and demands. Adjustment is that autonomous process, which involves updating, overhaul – whether in administrative, curricular or evaluation procedures - that the individual university has detected *on its own initiative* and acted to remedy also on *its own initiative*.

Issues that Abide: a quick dash into History

Now that I have got that off my mind – and hopefully into yours – let us together consult Presidential wisdom and presidential perception about how change changed. The first thing we have to bear in mind is that the elite university was less concerned with change than with that basic mission which accompanied it from the earliest days – the preservation

and handing down of knowledge, together with the preservation of social stability. Only later with the advent of verifiable, testable and replicable knowledge – the work of the late 17th and 18th Enlightenment. (Ben David, 1976) - was a new strand of ‘scientific’ knowledge added to this abiding mission. To these abiding tasks of the university, the Enlightenment, the construction of the Nation State and its aftermath added others, as Sheldon Rothblatt with the customary verve and incisiveness that marks all his works, has recently and so delicately dissected. (Rothblatt, 2007) Amongst those other abiding issues figured the valuation of knowledge, merit and worth, the social model the university upheld and last but not least sustaining – and where possible, advancing – those achievements – intellectual, linguistic, historic, literary and scientific by which the Nation laid claim to its very specific self-proclaimed identity.

Valuation and the Abiding Quality of Knowledge.

This is not to say that in default of change European universities were static. (674) But the notion of advance was largely conceived within a Humanist perspective. The basic intellectual mission of the university was, in the words of that most revealing of all clichés, ‘To preserve the best of the old along with the best of the new’. This is not to say that the elite university preserved the lessons, knowledge and values of the past because they were of the past. Rather change operated slowly, almost imperceptibly as an organic system of *triage*. What survived from the past was, by that very reason, proof of its enduring validity.

Appropriateness and the value of knowledge did not necessarily lie in usefulness so much as in its abiding nature. It had withstood the test of time. Its abiding nature largely determined its status as “pure knowledge”, as opposed to knowledge which because professional, vocational, applied was relevant to the moment – ephemeral precisely because untested by time. This mental construct – elsewhere, I have called it ‘the Voices of Constancy’ (Neave, 2000, p. 15) - owed much to the religious origins of the university. The University was held to be transcendental – it too transcended the passing of time.⁴ From which it equally followed that

⁴ An echo of this earlier construct of the university, wholly based on the valuation of the Universal in terms of Humanism, which had driven the University from the mid 16th century, is to be found in a Presidential speech at the 1960 IAU Mexican Conference. For Marcel Bouchard, Rector of the University of Dijon (France) “...the true Humanities demand that journey through space and time that teaches us to recognize in men of another century, another country, another tongue, the eternal basis of human nature and to feel an identity of condition, a spiritual kinship and brotherhood of the soul which unites us to them across the boundaries of States and beyond the tomb.” Marcel Bouchard (1960) “The Interplay of Scientific and Cultural Values in higher education today” in Neave, 2000, pp.157 – 169.

change was organic, internally mediated by the University and infiltrated over the long term.

Valuation of Knowledge as an Abiding Task.

Now, several important aspects lie within the construct of knowledge as that which has abiding value, the value of which has endured across time. The first of these is that not all knowledge fits this criterion. The second is that what knowledge is to be given this status was wholly a matter for the scholarly. Third, that there was no obligation on the university to take account of the 'wishes of society' in the domain of scholarship, for by definition, this was the domain of the Initiated, not the Profane. Indeed, if you remember the writings of both Newman (Rothblatt, 1998) and von Humboldt (Nybom, 2006) it was the very detachment from the things of this world that these two giants of our *métier* saw as the prime condition for the university – to use an anachronistic phrase – to generate and uphold, advance and sustain creativity. Thus, behind modernizing the European university that proceeded throughout the 19th century, a certain continuity with the religious origins of that institution persisted. In persisting, continuity also set down the terms on which change could be admitted. Key to this - and again it is powerful evidence of the hidden continuity of the religious and monastic model that had governed learning for centuries - was intellectual isolation (the university was *in* the world but not *of* it). But important above all, only the initiate had sufficient grasp over the corpus of the knowledge they commanded to determine what indeed was worth taking on board and by the same token, discarding.

President Agonistes.

What concerned the Presidents of the world's universities – and very especially so as mayhem and uproar leapt from Berkeley to Paris, to Berlin (a little later in the Netherlands⁵) and beyond was less the change that mass higher education brought in its wake. What worried them to the point of distraction was not change externally imposed by students, or by governments anxious to placate a riotous Student Estate. Rather they conceived the real threat as change penetrating to the 'private life' of higher education and setting at nought those internal and largely

Clark Kerr made a similar point in his famous Godkin Lecture of 1964 "The Uses of the University". But whilst Bouchard's argument worked in Cont'd:

favour of reinforcing the power of the university to determine what was transmissible knowledge, Kerr's reference to the three institutions of the Western world which had endured in recognizable form from Medieval Times to the present – the Tynewald of the Isle of Man, the Catholic Church and the University – had another purpose. That purpose was to use the previous vision as a measure of precisely how urgent change was.

⁵ 1974 according to Shils and Daalder (1982)

autonomous functions of accommodation and adjustment which determined the nature of change itself. Once these two procedures were no longer discretionary but compulsory and externally guided, who determined change was no longer a university matter, but a question of public policy.

Between 1970 and 1980, Presidents fought a desperate rear guard action to preserve the Humanist paradigm. The Humanist paradigm – to revert to the metaphors I introduced at the start of this presentation is the oarsman’s vision of the university. However, it also served as a code for far more than simply an obdurate defence of the classical languages, literature and History. It also engaged issues just as vital for the universities and their place in society. Prime amongst the issues at stake was the de facto internal control universities exercised over the valuation of knowledge and over the pace of change. The issue at stake, from the standpoint of the elite university was the control over the key functions of accommodation and adjustment. To put no finer point on matters, those functions were crucial to its ‘private life’. They were, to borrow a happy term from the English sociologist A.H. Halsey, the heart of ‘Donnish Dominion’. (Halsey, 1995) The debate which university Presidents sought to answer focused on a crucial issue – one that, over the ensuing decades, was itself to take on an abiding quality. It was this: could the university acting on its own, without external intervention, meet the pressure of external demand. Could the university on its own uphold order over innovation and creativity. Could it show there was sufficient will and capacity to accommodate external demands without external intervention?⁶

The Expiry of the Oarsman’s view of the University.

These are self-evidently strategically important questions. But before pushing the narrative forward, let us pause a little to set these events on a rather broader stage. For whilst they are very certainly part of that account which has to do with the changing concept of change, they also mark the closing of another abiding construct and an equally abiding view of both the university and of the perception of the knowledge it conveyed. We now know because we have lived beyond those times, that the

⁶ The dilemma was nicely expressed by the then President of the International Association of Universities, Constantine Zurayk at the Montreal Conference of 1970. Between the wish to retain control over the conditions of teaching, learning, scholarship and research on the one hand and to need to show that universities were also part of ‘tomorrow’s world, Zurayk summed up the issue as follows:
“The fulfillment of these two requirements means the combination of what is most authentic in the past with a discerning and commanding view of the future. It would make the university not so much as a product of *what has been* (our italics) as the creator of what ought to be.” (quoted in Neave, 2000, p.23)

Seventies marked the consolidation of the mass university. But this is only the more obvious aspect – the tenth part of the iceberg visible from the Crow’s Nest. Most canny seafarers know the danger, however, comes from the hidden nine tenths. Or to revert to the more sober language of scholarship, that other changes, more subtle, less evident but no less telling for all that, also rode on the same agenda. The oarsman’s view of the university as an historical institution - ‘the product of the past’ - that vision the Forces of Constancy fought might and main to sustain, yielded place to a counter vision that put a very a different interpretation on the university’s responsibility to society. And so too other symbiotes of that historical construct also went the way of all flesh. Prime amongst them was that covert ‘hold over’ that had survived well beyond the first modernization of the European University, namely, the quasi religious status of knowledge, of knowledge as a “mystery”, to use a very old term indeed.⁷ And with it also the notion of knowledge as ‘sacred’, God given and for that reason to be dispensed as far as was possible *gratis et pro Deo*, finally expired (Neave, 2006)

Change and Triumph.

Before such a company as this there is no need for me to go into the details that brought about the collapse of the oarsman’s view of the university and its shared values. The externalization of adjustment and accommodation that have now taken up residence as part of the Evaluative State in the shape of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies, is one pointer to the distance we have travelled since then. The commodification of knowledge and the attendant rise of what an earlier age would have termed ‘venality’ – that is knowledge for sale – are others.⁸

The shift in the basic criteria and values on which knowledge is now valued – its employability, its necessary applicability, its immediate appropriateness and relevance to the productive process show as clear as the day is long how far the instant and the immediate, externally defined and scrutinized – the Voices of Change – sit firmly in the Crow’s Nest. The triumph of the Crow’s Nest as a symbol of the various forms of what it is fashionable to call the university’s ‘engagement’ with society, that too I will take for granted – dangerous though such faith so often is. I take it for granted because, as I said earlier, we have all served our time in

⁷ The word ‘mystery’ nowadays denotes puzzlement, impenetrability. Its earlier meaning carried a very different significance; that of mastery – *maesteria* – of the techniques and arcana of a particular occupation – *métier* in French. Hence, knowledge of such a nature was accessible only to few and mastered by even fewer ~ those who had finally penetrated and thus mastered thoroughly what we now call ‘the mystery’.

⁸ I have dealt with the the concept of venality in a forthcoming book that takes a closer look at the Bologna Process, edited by Alberto Amaral, Peter Maassen and Christine Musselin.

the Crow's Nest and some of us so like these lofty heights and the view they allow us to develop, that we are loathe indeed to quit the barky. I know I am.

New Paradigms and their prospect.

Paradigms in the university have changed beyond imagining, though it is by no means clear what is likely to emerge. Or even for that matter, that it is a desirable thing at all, let alone possible, to have one single paradigm triumphant – though certain International Organizations are doing their best – or their worst. (Samoff & Carroll, 2006) Of one thing we may be sure, the Economic and Corporative paradigms of the university as enterprise (Clark, 1998, 2004) have very quickly snuffed out their earlier cultural and historic ancestor. Whether they will endure or, as is more likely, continue to mutate at a pace as furious as it is unpredictable, it is unlikely indeed that they will retain a hold over the way the university, academic work and academia's perception of self, which will last for as long as their cultural and historic predecessor did. Which is a most desirable state of affairs. It means for the community of scholars researching into higher education that

“There will still be work for the working man to do.”

What Kind of Work.

But what kind of work? That's the question. Now I pose this question not because I am a nostalgic, hankering after an idealized world we have lost. And even less because I think we are on the wrong trail. What worries me is the inability to set in any historic frame that is at all acceptable to historians the major forces which many of us see as shaping higher education now and in the immediate future.⁹ Prime amongst these are, of course, the Communications' Revolution and that most ambivalent of all contemporary developments – Globalization. I worry about our community because it appears to be moving in what to me seems a Nihilistic direction. By this, I do not mean the forwarding of social progress by bombs or strife so a new and better world can be founded on the reeking ruins. That was the view of the Russian Narodnik of the 1880s. Apart from blowing the legs off the Tsar Alexander III, they achieved nothing.

⁹ In this connection, Simon Marginson is trying his hand at precisely this. He sees the roots of globalisation in the 16th century and draws heavily on Fernand Braudel's classic work, *La Méditerranée à l'époque de Philippe II*. Which is as good an example as one might wish of the argument I am pursuing, namely, the advantages of history in re-analyzing long-term trends or, alternatively, that even the most unprecedented developments have roots somewhere and it is as well to know what they were. (Marginson, 2004)

No, the nihilism that saddens me has impeccable sources. It is the belief that because the nature of the shaping forces in society – and in higher education by extension - are so radically different that there is no prior experience we can draw upon to grope our way forward. One way or another, Globalization and ICT lead on, it is claimed, to the End of History. (Fukuyama, 1992) It is no less nihilistic if one considers that for the most part what we focus on are means – output, funding, receptivity of reform, changes in the way change is handled at international, national and institutional level. We focus on the consequences of competition, on changes in the condition, status and prospects of the Three Estates, Academic, Student, Administrative. The means have become our end. Or perhaps other people's ends who do not wish us to deal with the vexed question of how ends, purpose or values relate directly to the means developed. This, you will say, is all very well. History on the other hand, concentrates overmuch on such nebulous and operationally difficult concepts as equality, justice, the notion of the common good and how these notions have evolved. Interesting, but contributes little to 'solving' current problems.

Objection, objection.

A number of objections can of course be made. And the first of these is that the End of History can indeed be entertained so long as one's perspective is wholly and exclusively that of the look out in the Crow's Nest. As the pace of change accelerates so, to continue with our maritime metaphor, the fog gets closer and thicker as the barky speeds up. But because our expertise allows us to continually to surf at the curl of the wave, that does not mean we are not in our own particular way part of history which is what remains behind after the wave roars on. Yet, in a way, there is a field which, limited though the period covered is, nevertheless performs a semi historical function – namely, the evaluation of institutional performance. Such material accumulated over the years is certainly one basis for the writing of one species of history, though it would indeed require genial word-smiths to make it at all digestible. To be savoury is perhaps to ask too much. But the quality of our work is not judged only by those commissioning it, though such judgments are all too often the difference between repute, mere survival or sinking into the depths without trace. There is another judgment and that is what is remembered, what remains as the present

'like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons – and daughters – away'.

In a tight ship, it is not only the Crow's Nest that is manned. The oarsmen have their part too. Each is complementary to the other. In a good crew either is dispensable.

Beste Collegas. Haartelijk Dank voor Uwe aandacht soeven voor Uwe vriendschap, verblijvend door de jaaren. Vous allez me manquer.

Ik heb gesezt.

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