Jane Austen and the Belly of the Beast Part 2: Language and Power

Commodification, Technology and the Open Agenda in Higher Education

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Introduction

- Ideology, technology, power, & economics: Universities and the crisis in neoliberalism
- Tensions between the concepts and cultural forms of the university and economics
- Culture and money in Jane Austen – Higher Education as a *comedy of manners*?
- ‘Belly of the Beast’ – to be trapped in a bad place
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} in a series of ‘working sketches’
Contentions

• Knowledge as economic product
• Mass production/education – the factory model
• Technological Solutionism and the illusion of mass-produced personalisation
• (Economic) viability against search for wisdom
• Transferring cost to the people, corporate business models, reduced labour costs
Pressure points

Political pressures on universities to abandon their culture:

• Austerity cuts
• Competition (funding, ranking, privatisation, internet)
• Commodification of individual (teachers/learners)
• Widening access, participation goals
• More bureaucracy as control mechanism
• = More for less!
Language: A Monoculture?

- Technology, education, open education
  - Narrow, controlled, self-censoring
  - Social media: an amplifier and multiplier

- Education and Technology
  - An endless TED talk?
  - Language of Fear – of being left behind
  - Technological Solutionism
  - Youthful deliriums...
The Open Agenda

- Open education: rapid, diverse and massive
  - Technology, venture capital, markets, competition
  - Opportunities and contradictions
  - Outsourcing learning to cut even more costs
  - Shift from service provider to certification body

- ‘Open’ as a contested space...

- Brand equity projection*

- New markets... - data as new currency
The Open Agenda and the Developing World:

- Colonisation via knowledge economy: transporting Western values, language and branding – using ‘openwash’

- Cf. television expansion in the 1990s: cheapest tv productions as fillers between ad spaces

- Cf. genetically modified seeds sold to developing world to capture markets and ‘greenwash’
Language

Neo-liberal language now used by public sector:

- Business model, efficiency, market, customers, brand, ranking, sustainability, economies of scale, etc.

- Shift from teaching, student support services, and delivery to focus on outcomes and accreditation (code name “personalisation”)
“Digital Natives & Immigrants”

“Higher education in 50 years will be provided by no more than 10 institutions worldwide”

“Education is broken”… a meme for selling tech

"The next big killer application for the Internet is going to be education.”

“The [UK] government aims to ‘drive competition and innovation’, through a more market-based approach to higher education, allowing students to choose between a range of providers.”
Power
“An avalanche is coming”
To develop alternatives we should know from where we are starting.

There is a role for public institutions and government... rolling back privatisation.

Democratising HE – lessons from the 19th century?

The radicals of the early 19th century held that education should be ‘accessible to the public and transparent to the public gaze’