

A Media Archeology of Education Innovation History and Pandemics

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ABSTRACT

How do we as researchers and educators discern how past institutions of higher education responded to pandemics and other social stresses, and what practices we can adopt from them? Combining Jussi Parikka's ideas of media archeology with the radical post-colonialism of Nonwestern Educational Traditions by Timothy Reagan, this research explores specific artifacts of western and nonwestern systems of education innovation at specific periods in history, how these institutions responded to crises and pandemics, and what this suggests to our contemporary post-literate networked system of higher education. The emerging field of Media Archeology suggests a literature review mash-up and remix to find under-represented historical ideas around pedagogy and higher education. The impacts of these education innovations are seen through the artifacts such as 'open plan' school architecture, educational broadcasting, and proto-internet distance learning classes. Each of these dyads of a western tradition of higher education contrasted with a non-western or resistance tradition of higher education has left artifacts and practices that have been able to escape intentional destruction or cultural appropriation into current western hegemonies. By standing outside the constraints and politics of corporate narratives, these artifacts can point the way toward reviving educational systems based on techniques and technologies that can address the systematic problems with higher education. This study of media, sociology, education, and history seeks to suggest workable practices for a post-COVID world, that resists hegemonic practices and corporatization of education, and addresses new challenges in the future.

Keywords: pandemics, educational practices

1 Introduction

Pandemics stress institutions of higher education in unexpected ways with disruptive outcomes. Both western traditions of higher education and non-western alternatives have responded, adapted, declined, or evolved based on them. As academics, we can learn from different pandemics, outbreaks, and plagues how to design and operate contemporary universities and emerging forms of higher education to be more resilient, sustainable, and innovative. However, any historical review of past struggles against crises will almost certainly contain errors, biases, and agendas of the cultural institutions of power and the social hegemony they seek to impose. How do we as researchers and educators discern how past institutions of higher education responded to pandemics and other social stresses, and what practices we can adopt from them?



We must create parallel studies of history that allow us to explore theories and practices without using the lens of the dominant cultural ideology. We must look for artifacts, enduring practices, rituals, and writings to assemble an anthropology of higher education—a ‘media archeology’—of specific times in the past, how institutions survived (or did not), and what practical applications they can provide contemporary higher education. Jussi Parrika explains “What is it that holds the approaches and interests of the media archaeologists together, justifying the term? Discontent with ‘canonized’ narratives of media culture and history may be the clearest common driving force. Media archaeologists have concluded that widely endorsed accounts of contemporary media culture and media histories alike often tell only selected parts of the story, and not necessarily correct and relevant parts. Much has been left by the roadside out of negligence or ideological bias,” (Parrika 2006, 2).

Combining Parikka’s ideas of media archeology with the radical post-colonialism of *Nonwestern Educational Traditions* by Timothy Reagan, this research explores specific artifacts of western and nonwestern systems of education innovation at specific periods in history, how these institutions responded to crises and pandemics, and what this suggests to our contemporary post-literate networked system of higher education. Reagan states that “This might be done in roughly the same way that an increasing number of educational researchers have challenged the traditional, essentially positivistic, paradigm in educational research, seeking to replace it with or, at the very least, supplement it with a naturalistic, interpretivist qualitative paradigm,” (Reagan 2010, 7). The emerging field of Media Archeology suggests a literature review mash-up and remix to find under-represented historical ideas around pedagogy and higher education. Writing during the plagues of the 14th century in Italy, Giovanni Boccaccio wrote about the importance of education during pandemics. “You must read, you must persevere, you must sit up nights, you must inquire, and exert the utmost power of your mind. If one way does not lead to the desired meaning, take another; if obstacles arise, then still another; until, if your strength holds out, you will find that clear which at first looked dark.”

2 Methodology

Contrasting philosophies and practices of education will be explored across time while resisting hegemonic history. The time periods selected are not based on traditional western historical narratives, but instead, follow the methodology set down in studies of Media Archeology. Wherever and whenever artifacts—physical (tools, media), processes (enduring organizations or praxes), and narrative (myths, folklore, rituals)—can be found in abundance and/or in contradiction to each other a researcher has found a time period that is valuable to study. Frequently these time periods are during upheavals, pandemics, “future shocks” and crises. At each of these flux points, there is a contrasting ‘western’ approach to higher education, and ‘non-western’ negotiation, resistance, or innovation. Each of these time periods is described as a dyad (and in one instance a triad) of a western and non-western institution:

1. Radical Utopian Education Theory in light of the Black Panther Schools
2. The Educational Reforms of Dewey in the light of the Anarchist *Escuela Moderna*
3. The Humboldtian System in the light of Jewish Yeshivas and Buddhist Monasteries

3 Results

3.1 Results: United States — 1965-1975

The CDC was reorganized and officially named in 1970. It was part of a scientific ethos of the United States at the time championing rationalism and intervention. This same ethos informed the nerdy/radical late 60s proto-Silicon Valley with a techno-utopianism that envisioned a new 'electronic environment' that would blend computerized learning with community outreach, practical research, and open classrooms and campuses. These ideas were expounded in *The Future of Education: the Class of 1989* in Look Magazine by Marshall McLuhan, *Education Automation* by Buckminster Fuller, and *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* by Neil Postman. Postman saw this electro-democratization of education as counter-Dewey by removing traditional oversight and subverting hegemonic culture in education. These radical education proposals of McLuhan, Fuller, and Postman in the early 1970s—continue to be relevant because they integrated computer networks into education. Buckminster Fuller considered "Our educational processes are the upcoming major world industry. This is it; this is the essence of today's educational facilities meeting. You are caught in that new educational upward draughting process. The cost of education will be funded regeneratively right out of earnings of the technology, the industrial equation because we can only afford to reinvest continually in humanity's ability to go back and turn out a better job," (Fuller 1962, 27-28).

The impacts of these education innovations are seen through the artifacts such as 'open plan' school architecture, educational broadcasting (e.g. PBS, NPR), and proto-internet distance learning classes. These early utopian futurists of the mid-20th century envisioned a world that moved away from the broadcasting models and centralized bureaucracies, to retrieve the model of early colleges with dense networks of scholar-to-scholar communication for higher education, and self-directed work-study in the model of Montessori and Waldorf for elementary education. Despite a desire to retrieve the 'academical village' of Jefferson or the 'global village' of McLuhan—their artifacts are largely suburban. From the 'plate glass' colleges of the UK to the commuter parking lots of community colleges in the US, there was an attempt to create a paradoxical blend of urban 'marketplace of ideas' and rural reflection and writing. Instead, it encouraged suburbanization and compartmentalization into a single-use system where both secondary and higher education was kept separate from other sections of culture and the economy.

This unfortunate suburbanization of higher education by the radical education utopianists contrasts sharply with the urban landscape and revolutionary zeal of the New School for Afro-American Thought by Huey Newton, Gaston Neal, and Stokely Carmichael who established Black Panther Schools with community activists to fill a void in the educational systems for Black Youth and Young Adults systematically excluded from higher education. Building a curriculum around Pan-African culture and ideas, these institutions remain important as a direct application of post-colonial theory openly stating that no dominant system has any immediate incentive to educate a population that it sees as a nonskilled labor force and a systematic exclusion of minority groups based on race. The 'Ten Point Program' of the Black Power Movement by Newton and Carmichael highlighted the philosophy for a black approach to education in resistance. It addressed this specifically in Point #5: "We Want Education For

Our People That Exposes The True Nature Of This Decadent American Society. We Want Education That Teaches Us Our True History And Our Role In The Present-Day Society. We believe in an educational system that will give our people a knowledge of themselves. “If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else,” (Canon 1970, 12).

Although short-lived, the impacts of these New Schools of Afro-American Thought can be seen through the artifacts they left behind. Current research has mapped the physical spaces of secondary and higher education in Washington, DC, and other urban areas¹⁷. Another artifact was the creation of Black Studies as a discipline that continues to affect the current post-colonial curriculum at both HBCUs and other colleges. There are a few remaining Free Schools, one in Baltimore, and several anarchist Infoshops and Black-Owned bookshops. If the internet and the world wide web are the physical hardware ‘platform’ that was created by the techno-utopianists, then the social movements are the content that the New School and Black Power School Movement created that endure today. Neither the utopian radicals nor the Black Power schools were directly tested by a pandemic (herpes and legionnaires disease in the 1970s had only a small impact) but both systems tried to integrate ideas from elementary, secondary, and higher education too closely—which could not secure funding or long-term support in the face of a cultural counter-revolution in the late 70s and early 80s.

3.2 Results: United States & Spain — 1890-1920

While the Spanish Flu dominated both research and the cultural turmoil immediately after the First World War, several earlier pandemics had a large influence, continuing Cholera outbreaks, a polio outbreak in New York City, and a Bubonic Plague in 1904 in San Francisco. Against these epidemics, many cultural institutions sought to blame immigrants and ethnic minorities – and by extension sought to exclude them from secondary and higher education in ‘temporary measures’ that frequently lasted well after the diseases were under control. The first educational institution that is relevant in this time period is the mainstream education reforms of John Dewey. The systematization that Dewey and other researchers at the University of Chicago brought to higher education influenced every aspect of higher education deployment and assessment. Not only did Dewey take a comprehensive view, but he and others worked to professionalize departments, and to create what we now think of as ‘quantifiable outcomes’ in higher education while pushing back against the reductionist Fordism that was applied to many similar institutions. In many ways, Dewey balanced professionalism with inquiry. It is no coincidence that the American approach to education reform coincided with the updates to the Encyclopedia – and that higher education was seen as an ‘encyclopedia’ beyond the liberal arts and sciences. Like Humboldt before – Dewey sought to balance research and instruction – but worked to create practices in several disciplines that allowed this to occur.

He famously wrote, “There is no such thing as educational value in the abstract. The notion that some subjects and methods and that acquaintance with certain facts and truths possess educational value in and of themselves is the reason why traditional education reduced the

¹⁷ For a visualization of geographic data of the Black Power Movement, see G.D. Musgrove’s online mapping project https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5e17e7d1c4a8406b9eaf26a4eae77103/page/page_5/

material of education so largely to a diet of predigested materials,” (Dewey 1985, 19). And he suggested reforms have enough organization to push back against over-structuring.

Once again, the impact can be seen through artifacts – the large lecture halls, the conceiving of the library as the center of the complex, and standardized mass-produced textbooks that were now required for each student to purchase. The rise of the ‘official campus bookstore’ and the evolution of the ‘Student Union’ into a particular building housing this marketplace and other leisure amenities are architectural artifacts of Dewey’s reforms. As for non-physical artifacts, this combination of book-focused, assessed curriculum and mass production reinforced the idea that education benefits society and the state and should be subsidized, which led to state and federal funding such as the Pell Grant Programs.

The second educational institution that is relevant in this time period is the anarchist *Escuela Moderna* of Francisco Ferrer in Spain. The importance of these ‘Modern Schools’ is that they recognized the openly political nature of schooling in the late 19th century and pushed back against the religious control of schools. Ferrer was a revolutionary anarchist thinker who believed in the theory of open access to information and knowledge (*libre*) and free access to education (*gratis*) as a right for all individuals regardless of their social status. During the last reign of a monarch in Spain, he worked with others to create a school that prepared all students for professional life and personal inquiry. He advocated for coeducation of genders, simultaneously shared education of children of all socioeconomic backgrounds, and the construction of a curriculum in distinction to the propaganda of the state in line with freethinker and anarchist traditions. Ferrer believed that “Truth is universal, and we owe it to everybody. To put a price on it, to reserve it as a monopoly of the powerful, to leave the lowly in systematic ignorance, and—what is worse—impose on them a dogmatic and official doctrine in contradiction with science so that they accept their low and deplorable state under a democratic political regime, is an intolerable indignity.” (Ferrer in Bray & Hayworth 2019, 52) Like Newton and Carmichael, Ferrer designed a system that could “endeavor to secure that the intellectual impressions that science conveys to the pupil be converted into the sap of sentiment and shall be intensely loved. When sentiment is strong it penetrates and diffuses itself through the deepest recesses of man’s being, pervading and giving a special color to his character,” (Ferrer in Bray & Hayworth 2019, 52).

During a counter-revolution, Ferrer was arrested, tried, and executed. However, the printing press that the school had run had published his curricula and lectures. These were used to establish Ferrer/Modern Schools in the United States, particularly in New Jersey and other parts of the East Coast. His ideas on breaking the connection between church and state in education spread quickly across Europe. Ferrer’s writing on radical education had a direct influence on the Black Power Movement in the 1960s. Like the ‘Spanish Flu’ that struck the world about five years after Ferrer’s death – the radical anarchist ideas were not initially Spanish but were shaped by the clash of the civilizational idea that was occurring on the Iberian Peninsula at the time. The anarchist tradition has roots across the world, but especially in the outsider philosophies of Eastern Europe (which maintained contact with non-western traditions) and in East Asia.

3.3 Results: Germany & Poland— 1780-1810

During the early industrial revolution, all Americans, but particularly Native Americans, experienced waves of smallpox epidemics; Asia endured periodic Cholera outbreaks, and Europe had a large plague that spread from East to West starting in Istanbul and moving as far North and West as Ukraine and Poland. It is against this tumultuous backdrop of war and plague that the system of a modern bureaucratic university emerged – not from the geographic locations that had established medieval universities, but from the rising state of Prussia. Building on the rationalist ideas of the enlightenment and the concept of a modern research university, Wilhelm v. Humboldt sought to combine the existing liberal arts education that had been reserved for the wealthy, with the scientific research that was needed for a modern technologically-driven industrial society. Humboldt believed that all education should create a *Weltbürgertum* or a ‘cosmopolitanism’ built on the idea of academic freedom and personal inquiry based on the demonstration of skills. His system sought a balance of power where faculty would form a Senate, students would form a Union, and administration would form a professionalized bureaucracy—and the negotiation between these would ensure a balance that would equitably distribute resources, money, and power. This university system stood in opposition to existing medieval universities because it allowed for *Lernfreiheit* or ‘academic freedom’ where students had equivalent freedom as the faculty to determine their selection of curriculum and mentors. Humboldt differentiated between the individual self-education and education of society – but also how they are interconnected. He differentiated between civilization and culture. “*Civilization* is the humanization of peoples in their outward institutions and customs, and the inner attitude pertaining thereto. *Culture* adds science and art to this refinement of the social order. But when we speak in our language of *cultivation* [*Bildung*], we mean by this something at the same time higher and more inward, namely the disposition that, from the knowledge and feeling of the entire mental and moral endeavor, pours out harmoniously upon temperament and character,” (Humboldt 1999, 33).

The impacts as seen through the artifacts and practices are still with us. The idea of a Faculty Senate can be linked to these reforms, as well as the literal bureaus of bureaucracy – rooms that were custom-built in a University for its administration by a growing cadre of trained professionals. Other artifacts include the idea of a *Forschungsmision* or ‘research mission’ of a university that mixed industrial research into liberal arts, a final break from the pseudo-sciences of alchemy and astrology replaced with quantifiable chemistry and astronomy, and lastly, the idea of a Research Journal where peer-reviewed results and data would be published and printed, and copies sent to dozens of universities.

The second educational institution that is relevant in this time period is the systematization of higher education during this time period learning in Jewish Yeshivas. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these non-western institutions also systematized and updated from medieval practices into early modern forms. The Jewish Yeshivas had existed to train young men (and occasionally women) in the Hebrew language, in the reading of Torah and *Midrashim*, or commentaries written on the ethical and philosophical claims regarding biblical passages. During the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, several of these institutions became very large and encouraged a movement similar to ‘the Enlightenment’ called the *Haskalah* or *Yuddishe Aufklärung* based not on western rational empiricism, but deep, close readings of

religious texts, numerology, and dialectical exegesis of *Midrashim*. One of the most compelling artifacts from this non-western approach to higher education is the *Chavrusa/chavrusa*, a small formalized debate society of 3-5 students that was built into the curriculum of these schools. Even more revolutionary, these debate groups allowed women, particularly older women, to form their groups and occasionally challenge the Chavrusa of both the students and the older faculty. One noteworthy academic practice from these Yeshivas was the testing of knowledge, structure, skills, and memorization through formalized debate and informal peer practice. This system always involved close work with a mentor, followed by ritualized disputations. In these classes, particularly in Lithuanian schools – the continued use of ‘Pilpul’ is a diegetic discussion often of ethical principles derived from sacred texts. It is almost certain that many of the ideas from the anarchist tradition that inspired both Ferrer in Spain and the New Schools in the 1970s had roots in the hermeneutic traditions found in these Yeshivas.

4 Conclusion

Each of these dyads of a western tradition of higher education contrasted with a non-western or resistance tradition of higher education has left artifacts and practices that have been able to escape intentional destruction or cultural appropriation into current western hegemonies. By standing outside the constraints and politics of corporate narratives, these artifacts can point the way toward reviving educational systems based on techniques and technologies that can address the systematic problems with higher education. Edward Said places this resistance or non-western tradition as ‘The Orient’ and the study of the phenomena as ‘orientalism’. He considers it to be, “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience, not merely imagination. These non-western, ‘oriental’ alternate forms of higher education each responded to pandemics and catastrophes leaving an instructive legacy.

Well-designed educational systems across history are by nature robust, dynamic, sustainable, and resilient. By exploring artifacts of western academia against those of non-western systems, we can determine how past educators and schools have responded to pandemics, and how they would direct us to use our current resources and expansive systems of communication to overcome the challenges they endured at their heights. The study of media, sociology, education, and history can reinforce each other and provide workable practices for today's COVID world, to resist hegemonic practices and corporatization of education, and face new challenges in the future.

5 Declarations

5.1 Competing Interests

The author certifies that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity

interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

5.2 Publisher's Note

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