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Masturbatory Dreams of Education for Ameliorating "X": Power and Privilege to Professional Educators Increased

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Abstract: The greatest radical thinker of the 20th century, Ivan Illich, wrote the archaeology of all the modern professions. This began with his exegesis of the educational enterprise in *Deschooling Society* which few understood and most dismissed. To understand Illich's 21st century relevance, "Masturbatory Dreams" is one piercing entry into his reflections post-*Deschooling Society*.

Keywords: Ivan Illich; radical social thought; philosophy/sociology of education; professions; professional hegemony

Özet: 20. yüzyılın en büyük düşünürü Ivan Illich, tüm modern mesleklerin arkeolojisini kaleme almıştır. Bu çaba, onun en az anlaşılan ve çoğunlukla da göz ardı edilen eseri *Okulsuz Toplum*'daki eğitim kuruluşları yorumunda başlamıştır. Illich'in 21. Yüzyıl için güncelliğini anlamak adına "Kendini Tatmin Edici Hayaller", *Okulsuz Toplum*-sonrası yorumlarına sert bir giriştir.

Keywords: Ivan Illich; radikal sosyal düşünce; eğitim felsefesi/sosyolojisi; meslekler; Meslekî hegemony.

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Introduction

It's time, past time, we believe, to begin again the conversation about dreams. About the dreams for a world—in the words of the Zapatistas, “the many worlds”—our hearts know to be possible. Dreams, not delusions, not utopias, but visions toward which our lives could strive. It's our dreams we owe ourselves. Our dreams we owe our children.

We, with many, are well aware of our own propensity to give attention to the horrors ... the nightmares of human-enacted wretchedness. We, with many, recognize the utility in naming the nightmares, in pondering their origins, in being conversant in them. We are not interested in placing our head in sand. In following, as we have, the nightmares, the apocalyptic scenarios ... in observing the impulses these catalyze in ourselves, in sitting with the physiologic responses I feel in our own bodies to the nightmare news, we recognize the psychologic and psychic toll these exact on our minds and spirits. These nightmares, after all, morph, shape shift ... becoming a seemingly infinite variety. So, too, the handwringing and heart wrenching—the fear and anxiety—these evoke.

Masturbatory Dreams of Education for Ameliorating “X”

Forgive us, for the moment, if we recount something of our prior thinking. Our professional studies were catalyzed by an interest in pursuing questions related to education, social justice, and environmental education. Where our questions were imprecise, we at least were aware that our puzzlements centered upon inequitable access to “resources” (educational, ecological, et al.); the proliferating waste and destruction of the natural world; and the role that education might play in abetting the decimation that we regularly confronted (and taught about) as teachers. We had then adopted the “language of critique and possibility” common among radical thinkers, although we were far from fluent.

It had never occurred to us, therefore, to consider schooling as complicit in the very problems we then believed it uniquely positioned to positively impact. Yes, we were aware of theories of reproduction of the Bowles and Gintis (and later, Apple, etc.) variety. Yes, we were reading about ideology and hegemony within the “new sociology” of education. We were influenced by a “resistance” theorist. Analysis regarding cultural imperialism (Thomlinson) and epistemological issues (of the Bowers variety) were helpful. Yet, no matter from what angle we considered schooling (and the education it delivered), our “best” characterization of it—from radical reformers' perspectives—was that the “fight” over schooling was about providing more people, more and better access to a “pie” (understood as infinitely expanding). Regardless if schooling

and its curriculum were “an ideological terrain over which people constantly struggled,” school remained a credentialing institution—a gateway for entering a collectivity (a democracy, adulthood, the “workplace” take your pick)—where the credentialed would live (if all went well) the middle-class “dream.” Said differently, if schooling was made better, then more people would be able to participate in the destruction and decimation of the natural world.

More people getting more or better education/schooling *yields* more people possessing the expectation of a “middle class” lifestyle *resulting in* greater consumption of finite “resources” and more waste (landfills, pollution, etc.). Viewed from a different angle, we “the educated” were arguably the origin of much (if not all) of the contemporary horrors. The world, we concluded, did not need, could not sustain more “educated.”

We didn’t then think in terms of “ecological footprinting,” of “earth’s fair share,” in the terms of the growing field of “sustainability.” We hadn’t read Club of Rome reports, never heard of Donella Meadows or Schumacher or Stewart Brand. Nor of Ivan Illich. We at least knew, though, that the “fight,” characterized as more and better schooling for a more just and equitable world, had unintended consequences (or so we believed)—as well unacknowledged assumptions. The unintended consequences were more waste, more depletion, more pollution. While the unacknowledged assumption was of a world able to sustain these.

To summarize: we saw a world necessarily finite. We saw educational reformers (of those we most aligned with) overlooking this given. Their fight for justice and equity—via school—would render the world uninhabitable for all.

And, so arriving at Illich’s analysis of school as the “ritualization of progress,” the very progress that is so evidently consuming earth, his ideas of “benign totalitarianism” and the “masturbatory dreams” of the “disabling professions” were difficult to comprehend, let alone accept.

Many people are just awakening to the inexorable destruction which present production trends imply for the environment, but individuals have only very limited power to change these trends. The manipulation of men and women begun in school has also reached a point of no return, and most people are still unaware of it. They still encourage school reform, as Henry Ford III proposes less poisonous automobiles. DS, p. 50.

Are people “awakening to the inexorable destruction”—of souls, of minds, of bodies, of communities, of natural world—of which the school contributes? Few among the “schooled,” we suspect. Rather, belief in school and its promises for eliminating “x” (where “x” is poverty or injustice or inequality or

ignorance or unhealthfulness or bullying or unsustainable living or ?) appears to be growing, becoming more and more entrenched—its Promethean *ethos* engendering a global Promethean *ethnos*.

“Masturbatory dreams” is one among a panoply of metaphors Illich crafted in his own inimitable style—combining profound seriousness and his wild humor to “suffer” the pain of the violence, the carefully crafted professional deception hidden under the mask of “caring.” Piercing through all the facades of political correctness and self-congratulatory professional do-gooding, Illich’s metaphor rips open the modern heart of darkness that lives in consumptive comfort with the wretchedness of the injustice most awful of our times. This injustice legitimizes professional rape, plunder and soul shredding, while nourishing fantasies and dreams of a Just World Order.

“Masturbatory dreams” is just one reflection of Illich’s deft skillfulness in word-smithing – better yet, metaphor-smithing. Challenging all the assumptions and certainties about education [as well as other institutional enterprises of professionals promising Modern Times cleansed of poverty through one or the other Modern “isms” [transmogrified into “wasms”], Ivan Illich’s now classic investigations into progress and development shatter the Promethean mythmakers’ promises offering a Technological Age free of the Hard Times of pre-modernity and underdevelopment.

Disrobing the professional emperors, Illich renders them naked—jerking off the public with dreams that seem to echo Martin Luther King Jr.’s while engineering a world of sorting machines that need “slaves” forever – black, white, brown, yellow and all the other beautiful colors of the rainbow coalition.

Illich – the Catholic priest—has nothing against condoms or masturbation. In fact, he juxtaposes with revolutionary sarcasm his Church’s stance against condoms to their complete indifference to the “rubber” of automobiles and other enhancers/enhancements of speed in the global economy. He is clear in revealing how speed, needed for keeping the global economy resuscitated, kills more than condoms.

In lieu of nourishing real relationships rooted in soil, professional promises benefit the corporations of standardization: testing and evaluation, curricula and pedagogies that can be dispensed on assembly lines that distinguish and define all our modern institutions; setting the reign of experts apart from the self-governance of common sense that knows no scarcity; only abundance.

“Masturbatory dreams” of schooling globalized remain, for Ivan Illich, the horror of being awake and aware of professionals’ false promises, similar to the one’s made about winning the war on cancer or drugs or poverty or terrorism or __X__.

Professional protocols insist on the making of promises, promises that the educational system has proved itself for a century totally incapable of fulfilling: cleansing society of its sins of poverty and inequality.

Schooling—both as ritual (masking the incongruency between what it says it does and what it actually does) and as tool (or technology, neither morally neutral nor apolitical) (Stuchul, 1999)—cannot be delinked from its function of establishing who in the world can claim the “right” to plunder and pillage the natural world. Only the “schooled”—rendered “worthy” by a professional priesthood, faithful to the “myth of unending progress,” and following the consumption patterns of the worldwide elite sanctioned by the school, flunk in recognizing the part played by school in the nightmarish peril we all are facing today! The contemporary prophecy: the meek will inherit an earth that the schooled have trashed.

Benign Totalitarianism and the Disabling Professions

The Age of Professions will be remembered as the time when politics withered, when voters, guided by professors, entrusted to technocrats the power to legislate needs, renounced the authority to decide who needs what and suffered monopolistic oligarchies to determine the means by which these needs shall be met. It will be remembered as the age of schooling, when people for one-third of their lives had their learning needs prescribed and were trained how to accumulate further needs, and for the other two-thirds who became clients of prestigious pushers who managed their habits. ... It would be pretentious to predict if this age ... will be remembered with a smile or with a curse. I do, of course, hope that it will be remembered as the night when father went on a binge, dissipated the family fortune, and obligated the children to start anew. Sadly ... it will be remembered as the age when a whole generation's frenzied pursuit of impoverishing wealth rendered all freedoms alienable and, after first turning politics into the organized gripes of welfare recipients, extinguished itself in a benign totalitarianism ... technofascism....” (Illich 1977, pp 12-14).

In texts and lectures that include; *The Right to Useful Unemployment (and its professional enemies)* (1978); *Disabling Professions* (1977); *Deschooling Society* (1971), *Tools for Conviviality* (1973); “In Lieu of Education” (1978); “Needs” (1992); and “The Educational Enterprise in the Light of the Gospel.” (1988) and including lectures (recently brought to light within the Penn State University Libraries archives and from which we take “masturbatory dreams”) we recognize 3 decades of Illich thought ripe for analysis. Illich, focusing on the role played by the professions (even the “soft” profession that is education)

in establishing a “benign totalitarianism,” elaborated upon “3 strategies” by which “professionals”—extending their professional “reach” for the “good of others”—would usher in the “biocracy” (in health), the “thanocracy” (in death and dying), the “gnosocracy” (in education).

The first strategy Illich labeled as “self-serving criticism”—a stance and message saying effectively, “Come to us. We’ll protect you from our colleagues.” Doctors warning client-patients of the false claims and interventions peddled by the providers of alternative “health” products. Educators warning client-consumers of the false claims and interventions of alternative paths for becoming certified; warnings about alternative schools (regardless if these be magnets or charters or virtual or home or un or ? schools). In each criticism, the supremacy of the professions goes unquestioned. Only the path to achieving professional goals is debated. Such is the self-serving nature of this first strategy.

The second strategy Illich identified as the growth in the powers claimed by these various “alternative hucksters.” Where as in the first strategy the established “professionals” criticize alternative providers and thereby reassert their own legitimacy, in this second strategy alternative professionals simply claim powers distinct from the entrenched professionals—saying, in effect, “You doctors stick to repairs, we’ll focus on environmental and social controls of people so that we avoid their breakdowns.” In this way, near infinite possible therapies and interventions—growth industries all—pave the way for an expansion of biocracy ... or of gnosocracy! We see today, in the advent of social media and all manner of internet expansion—the inexorable expansion of the market for education as product.

The third strategy and from where Illich’s “masturbatory dreams” derives, he names the “professionalization of the client.” What does this mean? In this third strategy by which the professions extend their hold on people, Illich posits the ability of the professions to certify those who wish to “do unto themselves,” thereby becoming experts in self-help. Advanced self-help clients. Effectively the professions say, “If you’re certified by us to use products which we prescribe, you’ll be allowed to become a self examiner and a self medicator ... a self educator.”

For Illich, such self-determined power to prescribe/define/certify others at helping themselves was a “deeply masturbatory dream”—by which professional dominance, power, and monopoly reigned.

These three strategies 1) self-serving criticism, 2) growth in powers claimed, and 3) professionalization of the client extend the monopoly of the professions in determining:

- a) the professional definition of what constitutes deviance (disease, stupidity, etc.)
- b) the professional determination of who belongs in a deviance category through the development of tests ... for learning ... for putting yourself in the sick or stupid/untrained/uncertified role ... and,
- c) the professional control or hold on “tools” (schools, medicine, etc.)

Illich, again,

[P]rofessional power exists only in societies in which elite membership itself is legitimized or acquired by professional status. Professional power is a specialized form of the privilege to prescribe. It is this power of prescription that gives control within the industrial state. The profession's power over the work its members do is therefore distinct and new both in scope and in origin (Illich 1977 p. 17).

For Illich, the fallout from the expansion and monopolization of professional power is where humans are not only manipulated, but unrecognizably altered,

“incapable of saying we want a world simple and clear enough and participatory enough to learn in it ... until we learn techniques... for teaching we see that we don't have enough resources as we make the world obscure.... No amount of teaching can teach people into being satisfied with an inhuman environment ... so let's make everyone into a self-educator.” (Illich recording, PSU Libraries archive)

This inevitable view of human beings and of the world—the “pedagogical hubris” in which humans believe themselves capable of doing for others what God cannot, namely to “manipulate them for their own salvation” (DS, p. 50) is the leitmotif of the “disabling professions.”

Listen for a moment ... to some of the language of Illich writing in the chapter “The Ritualization of Progress” (in *Deschooling Society*):

“Sinister pseudo schools,” “totalitarian managers of information,” “pedagogical therapists who drug their pupils more in order to teach them better,” “students who drug themselves more to gain relief from the pressures of teachers and the race for certificates. “The language of school people coopted by admen.” The general and policeman dignifying their profession by masquerading as educators.” “Warmaking and civil repression finding an educational rationale.” “Pedagogical warfare in the style of Vietnam will be increasingly justified as the only way of teaching people the superior value of unending progress.” The totally destructive and constantly progressive nature of obligatory instruction will fulfill its ultimate logic unless we begin to liberate ourselves right now from our own pedagogical hubris”

The Post-School Project: Promoting Liberation From Pedagogical Hubris

To the extent that Illich was engaged in a “project” it was to explore those concepts that impeded and those that promoted the advent of a post-industrial society—a convivial society. Illich wrote,

I will show that the institutionalization of values leads inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization, and psychological impotence: three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery. I will explain how this process of degradation is accelerated when nonmaterial needs are transformed into demands for commodities; when health, education, personal mobility, welfare, or psychological healing are defined as the result of services or “treatments.” I do this because I believe that most of the research now going on about the future tends to advocate further increases in the institutionalization of values and that we must define the conditions which would permit precisely the contrary to happen. We need research on the possible use of technology to create institutions which serve personal, creative, and autonomous interaction and the emergence of values which cannot be substantially controlled by technocrats. We need counterfoil research to current futurology.

I want to raise the general question of the mutual definition of man’s nature and the nature of modern institutions which characterizes our world view and language. To do so, I have chosen the school as my paradigm, and I therefore deal only indirectly with other bureaucratic agencies of the corporate state: the consumer-family, the party, the army, the church, the media. My analysis of the hidden curriculum of school should make it evident that public education would profit from the deschooling of society, just as family life, politics, security, faith, and communication would profit from an analogous process. DS, pp.1-2.

In the past, we have within this gathering discussed our idea for a “Commonist Manifesto” ... an invitation to contribute to a declaration for a viable life in academe drawing upon commonist thinking and doing within commons. A work-in-progress, this manifesto, we extend as a way for academics to consider from within the “beast,” its “institutional inverse” in ways that counter the effects of the “disabling professions” and their “benign totalitarianism.” Such a manifesto, we believe to be the “keystone” of a larger effort we now name, the “Post-School Project.”

The call for participation in the “Post-School Project” begins with Illich’s revolutionary sarcasm and extends to consider the many new worlds our hearts know are possible (those beyond the current horrors).

The work of the Post-School Project will include:

- An elaboration of those axioms upon which school (and the education it supposedly offers) are built AND identification of those illusions in need of
- purification
- Analysis of the economic, environmental and social costs (“externalities”) of
- schooling among the hyper-schooled countries
- An elaboration of those liberties (vs. “rights”) necessary for modes of autonomous
- production in a post-school society
- The creation of a “clearing house” of exemplars of “structures” (groups, initiatives, etc.) now serving the construction of a post-school society

In calling for collaborators in this “Post School Project,” we seek to follow Illich’s example when he writes, “I would like to help people smile ... smile the social system apart. Here at CIDOC we smile violence apart Real revolutionaries are men who look for the deep sense of humor with sarcasm upon their institutions Sarcasm is adult playfulness, cynicism is its opposite Instead of freedom and independence ... cynicism produces not real revolution but a regressive attachment to slogans and self worship For deadly serious revolutionaries, no. But sarcasm is essential to purify us of our illusions.”

In extending this invitation, we hope to join with others in clarifying both our shared, “No, Thank yous” but also that to which we say, “Yes!” The worlds which mitigate the horrors so evident today, while rooting a living hope. We seek to make a contribution to a cultural revolution, beginning with the requisite institutional revolutions (a challenge given that most if not all of us belong to that modern species, “homo institutionalis.”)

Writing in 1973, Illich said,

“I do not want to contribute to an engineering manual for the design of convivial institutions or tools, nor do I want to engage in a sales campaign for what would be obviously a better technology. My purpose is to lay down criteria by which the manipulation of people for the sake of their tools can be immediately recognized, and thus to exclude those artifacts and institutions which inevitably extinguish a convivial life style.”

Illich, the archeologist of the modern era's self-destruction never ceases to cultivate hope: in friendship; in surprise; in the commoning that grows common sense of the "uneducated" masses and drop outs. Commoning commoners teach and learn in the freedom that lies beyond the industrial educational complex: with its manufacture of curricula, pedagogies and testing all designed to expand the power of incumbents; while the masses are buried under the lifelong burden of school debt or the unemployability of the uncredentialed.

Recognizing how our tools have made the world more "known" although becoming less transparent; enabling the world to be more "close" although less accessible; while possessing previously undreamed power, although rendering their human users less able to act within it --- we seek an Epimethean reflection upon our tools, following Illich, and the associated dreams and nightmares of them. Might such reflections, the stories of our lives, our own confrontations with the Promethean ethos ... our tiny steps away from pedagogical hubris yield new possibilities, new hopes.

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