

## My Intellectual Ecology

My scholarly work draws in all of these strands:

- history of ideas, intellectual history, epistemology, philosophy of education, philosophy of higher education, ideas of the university, history of universities, comparative higher education, philosophy as such, philosophy of organisations, ontology, ecology studies, sociology of modernity, 'post'-studies (post-humanism; postmodernism), cultural studies, ideology studies, learning theory, theology, philosophy of writing, communication studies, political theory, social theory, realism, critical realism, critical theory.

Is this undue fragmentation? Is this indulgence? Is it evidence of a lack of intellectual discipline on my part?

I call this marking out of my own intellectual territory an 'intellectual ecology'. Why 'ecology'? 'Ecology' speaks of interconnectedness but also possible impairments.

One is caught in a bind: the more one includes in one's intellectual journeys, the more one is open to the charge 'Why didn't you visit this port?', 'Why didn't you venture in these directions?' or, to switch the metaphor, 'And which are your silences?'

Perhaps some PhD student will one day, using modern computing tools, conduct analyses of my texts and discern the tropes, the themes, in them; but, more too, the concepts at play and their locations. And the links between all of these terms, concepts, and ideas in my oeuvre would be revealed as they show themselves in my texts. And an epistemic map of my work would emerge.

My intellectual ecology will be revealed! And with it, my intellectual profile would become apparent.

The identification of the entities – the theoretical frames and the pools of empirical inquiry - in this personal intellectual ecology pinpoints me, as an intellectual. It situates me as being at the conjunction – some might say 'intersection'- of all of its entities. It is a unique location, given the frames and conversations and other thinkers on whom I have drawn. There is no-one else in the world with this precise intellectual location.

To term this pattern an 'ecology' is to speak not only of interconnections and gaps and even impairments but also hint at a project. It is to imply that this pattern has value and has been sustained, even though it has inner tensions and even conflicts. It is not a

neutral pattern. It has an internal energy – and energies wax and wane, but yet continue over time.

My intellectual ecology – and so my epistemic ecology - is of this form. It has been pursued with a practical intent (to use a phrase of Habermas' about his own work). I have sought nothing less than to show that the university and higher education (two concepts and sets of practices that I have distinguished) are of considerable value to the world but have been falling far short of their potential and responsibilities in and for the world. And I have sought to create principles, ideas and concepts that might help to take both the university and their pedagogical practices forward. I have never been simply interested in concepts and ideas. Such a framing of one's efforts in relation to social institutions and practices – such as higher education and universities – would amount to an abnegation of one's intellectual responsibilities.

Ecologies overlap. There are questions here, therefore, as to the other ecologies which overlap with mine. 'No man [sic] is an island' – as John Dunne observed. I could not have produced my oeuvre by myself. Even my sole-authored text draw on much else and many others, and their communities. And they furnish resources, give one intellectual energies. One has so much for which to be thankful. (And my acknowledgements at the start of each of my books are testimony to this thankfulness on my part.)

In this note, I have used the terms 'epistemic ecology' and 'intellectual ecology' but I could also have used the term 'learning ecology' (which my friend Norman Jackson used first in my presence, I think). After all, all of my work has been a matter of learning and even self-learning. Always, I have pulled the words out from within myself. I have discerned patterns within me hidden from my view.

In the act of writing, I have learnt both about the world and about myself, even if I was not consulting other works in the literature. Good writing, honest writing, writing of integrity is always a learning process, and a double learning process at that. Simultaneously, we see into the world and we see into ourselves. These are not two separate acts.

Writing has, therefore, been crucial to me in the formation of my intellectual ecology.

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