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Brave New Reductionism:
TQM as Ethnocentrism

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Abstract:

At century's end, practices at institutions of higher education are regularly subjected to a numbing array of stresses. Under the umbrella of fiscal austerity, intensified regimes of surveillance, in the form of corporatist management philosophies such as Total Quality Management (TQM), have been widely imposed. TQM proponents now advocate the total managementof human thought and identity. In a blatantly econometric and ethnocentric discourse where human variability is a "virus" to be "eliminated" under a war metaphor, nothing less than the future of independent intellectual work is at stake. This essay primarily explores how the theoretical roots and contemporary tropes of TQM shape a range of TQM-effects.

INTRODUCTION

The results are still unfolding and contestable but the trend has become increasingly clear. Total Quality Management (TQM) and its siblings, such as Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), have become the means by which public institutions of higher education have been reinscribed within a late 20th Century version of market logics. Facing a troubling nexus of rising costs, reduced federal and state funding, stagnant enrollment pools, a generalized sense that graduates of public institutions are only marginally competent and the popular political sentiment that the descendants of New-Deal era governmental agencies and programs are "part of the problem (of economic decline), not the solution," administrators have been susceptible to the

sizable financial and public relations inducements offered by transnational corporations (TNCs). That is, administrators and some teachers unions, such the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), are responding to the fiercely contested politics of education. They are tactically responding to recurrent proposals that call for placing schools in the marketplace, via tax credits or vouchers. With cause, administrators and union officials believe that implementing voucher systems will reduce, fundamentally reshape or permanently dismantle public sector education forever (Mandel, Melcher, Yang & McNamee, 1995). Seen in this light, the energetic adoption of corporatist public relations and administrative practices is a defensive tactic meant to counter a perceived threat. It is a tactic in a strategy designed to retain a much modified modicum of control of resources by retrenching educational bureaucracies. By adopting the "walk and talk" of TNC practices and ideologies, administrators hope to reduce pressures to formally privatize schools. That is, if the public schools look and sound like a corporation and if they produce graduates that conform to TNC expectations (skilled, mobile, docile and interchangeable), then political and market pressures to dismantle these bureaucracies will be eased. In sum, this paper assumes that the adoption of TQM is a near-term defensive, even survivalist, counterstrategy intended to preserve public sector education. But the institutional effects of TQM-like regimes probably signal a long- term period of institutional austerity (Mandel et al., 1995). This period is already marked by intensified regimes of security, predominantly implemented to support the proprietary short-term interests of the many applied R&D programs of the TNCs. The often unhappy results of these shifts are already palpable. That is, many administrative and academic environments have become increasingly hostile to independent intellectual thought. Under the new corporatism, expressions of responsive and responsible dissent are increasingly stigmatized. And for an economy and society that is often described as knowledge or information- driven, such anxious neo-Darwinian atmospherics may well contribute to a precipitous decline in the formation of new knowledges and discourses (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994).

Taken as symptom, TQM in education is but part of a chain of contemporary global events where the diversity of human culture, history, identity and morality are rigorously reinscribed as but mere subsets of a timeless, universalizing market logic. In its specific nexus of rhetoric and practice, TQM is often overcoded with the crudest forms of crypto-positivism embodied by the uncritical use of histograms, flow diagrams and Pareto charts. Mix these tendencies with a ritualistic fetish for linear, cookbook-like formulas and the result is a classic case of technocratic performativity. For TQM typifies the corporatist (and bureaucratic) turn that takes what are essentially political or moral issues and reinscribes them as technical, administrative or practical concerns (Jackall, 1988).

In a larger sense, TQM embodies a series of tactical moves meant to effectively discipline a population engaged in a permanent economic state of war (Tribus, 1989). The very call for "totalizing management" is most fully consistent with the imperatives of war. TQM, then, is a war analogue - war economic, war cultural, war political and war transcorporate (. In sum, TQM is an aggregate of techniques that normalize, modulate, model and work to totalize and render transparent fields of language, identity, perception and human relations. It is deployed, as all totalizing discourses are, to absorb and homogenize dissent and difference. [TQM acoytles call this "acknowledging resistance" or "driving out fear" (Dennis, 1993).] With an increasing frequency across public institutions of education, one must speak in the pseudo-language of "global competitiveness" and chatter on about Pareto charts and the evils of "variability" while describing all human identities in terms of "internal or external customers." And if you do not speak this language, often you will not be heard at all. As such, TQM signals the birth of a new ethnocentrism -- the ethnocentrism of an emerging transnational managerial class.

Fortunately for those of us who study TQM, there has been a burgeoning river of TQM-inspired bureaucratic propaganda over the last six years (1989-1995). What follows below are textual analyses that draw out some of the governing assumptions of TQM. These

taken-for-granted axiomatics, coded into TQM discourse, exceed mere facial readings of often facile TQM texts. That is, what follows are analyses of how organizing tropes and theoretical assumptions within TQM representational formats produce the realms of the sayable and unsayable, the seeable and unseeable and the thinkable and unthinkable. To recognize how a stable of tropes and motifs produce such zones is the first step in evaluating how these ensembles are reshaping academe. It becomes possible to weigh not merely what is spoken, seen or thought, but how these zones of representation have been fashioned. And this allows us also to assess the range of actual or potential dangers presented by regimes of TQM. The sections below delineate some of the key organizing rhetorical tropes and technocratic motifs.

PERFORMATIVITY

The term performativity refers to management modalities that regard continuous refinement of maximal input/output flows as a terminal end in itself. Absent from performative analyses are critiques of whether a particular process or end is even desirable. This fetishization of abstract technique, divorced from social and political reality, is a common theme on the LISTSERV TQM-L. For example, consider the following post (which has been edited for presentation in this essay):
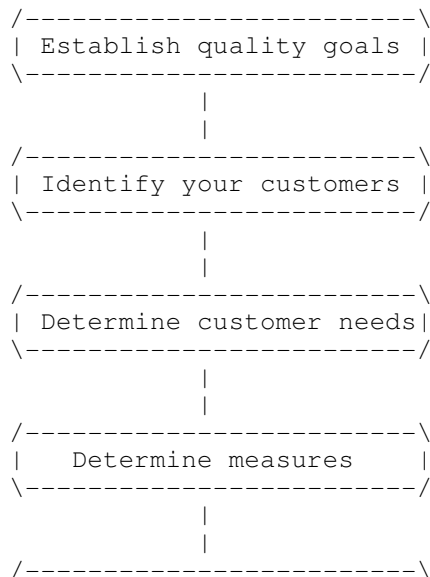
```
Date: Fri, 8 Oct 1993 08:31:57 -0400
Reply-To:  Total Quality Management In Higher Education

Sender:    Total Quality Management In Higher Education

From:      Walter Olson
Subject:   Re: Juran #9
To:        Multiple recipients of list TQM-L


In my original outline, I had entitled this section "Evaluate the
systems." Now that we have reached this section, I don't know
what I meant when I wrote the outline. At this point, Juran tends
to repeat previous lessons. Evaluation should be a continuous
process but certainly, now is a good time to do it. Since
measures have been developed, the porcesses (sic) operating, do
it. If there is any point that is made . . . it is that the drive
for quality requires training . .

In summary, The Juran flow for quality can be expressed as

        /------------------------\
        | Establish quality goals |
        \------------------------/
                    |
                    |
        /------------------------\
        | Identify your customers |
        \------------------------/
                    |
                    |
        /------------------------\
        | Determine customer needs|
        \------------------------/
                    |
                    |
        /------------------------\
        |    Determine measures   |
        \------------------------/
                    |
                    |
        /------------------------\
```
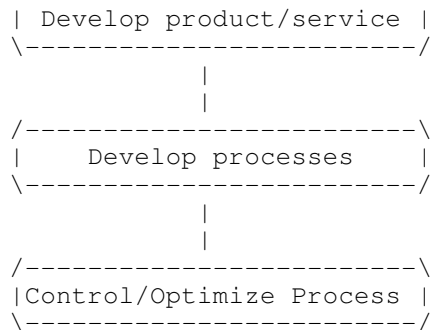
```
                   | Develop product/service |
                   \-------------------------/
                               |
                               |
                   /-------------------------\
                   |     Develop processes    |
                   \-------------------------/
                               |
                               |
                   /-------------------------\
                   |Control/Optimize Process |
                   \-------------------------/

   While this does not show any feedback, this is a continuous
   process repeat ad infinitum.
```
_____

Or consider this second post to TQM-L, a week earlier (10/1/93):

_____

```
   From:      ricordat@alpha.acast.nova.edu (Timothy H.Ricordati)
   Subject:   TQM principles used to plan and teach a class.

   David, we at Keller Graduate School of Management use the TQM
   principle of continuous improvement process to improve teaching
   and learning in individual classes serving adult, graduate-level
   students. We apply the Shewhart Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) to our
   instructional process by:  1) establishing very specific course
   objectives (plan), 2) having our instructors teach to those
   objectives (do), 3) assess the learning of the students and the
   effectiveness of the instruction (sic) (check), and 4) use the
   data on the outcomes assessment to improve the process (act).

   The field of education (sic) is similar to the field of business.
   We in education supply a service (education), start with a raw
   material (students), apply a process (teaching), and turn-out a
   finished product (graduates).  Schools must become more
   customer-driven, as business is.

   Timothy Ricordati
   Keller Graduate School of Management
   Chicago, IL
```
_____

These two posts illustrate a prominent strand of TQM discourse. Whether it is Olson's passion for the "Juran flow of Quality" or Ricordati's reduction of pedagogy and academic freedom to the Shewhart Cycle (plan-do-check-act aka PDCA), the means by which information and authority flow are the object for detailed cybernetic regimes. And the evocation of a cryptic signifier, "Quality," is the rationale used to legitimate the imposition of these regimes of detail (See Note One) (Dobyns, 1994). According to Lyotard, the diffusion of digital technology and expertise that began early in the post-WWII period has made the optimal technical means of exercising power more important than the ends. Whether something is worth doing becomes less important than doing something (almost anything) well:

Technical devices . . . follow the principle of optimal performance: maximizing output (the information modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process . . . Technology is not a game pertaining to the true, the just or the beautiful . . . but to efficiency: a technical "move" is "good" when it does better and/or expends less energy than another (Lyotard, 1984).

Lyotard goes on to say that the aim in such a system is not truth but performativity, which is the best possible input/output equation. Within such systems, there is only one possible goal - power. Simply put, power is good performativity (Lyotard, 1984).

Defining "the good" exercise of power as efficiency tends to remove the practice and administration of education from moral and political debate. Under the sign of TQM, education increasingly becomes a zone dominated by management expertise. These "experts" are a bevy of recycled consultants who enthusiastically wield Pareto diagrams, flow charts and histograms. For them, the key propaganda tactic is to convincingly display the processes by which "winning" activity continuously unfolds (such as in Olson's Juran cycle). Both the form and tone of these presentations closely mimic contemporary depictions of war. Susan Jeffords, in her critiques of Vietnam- era accounts, says that "the emphasis in Vietnam narrative is placed less on what will take place than on how it will take place" (Jeffords, 1989). In such a world, morality is defined as maximal efficiency or performativity. That is, in such a moral universe, any job well done is inherently good and "we" must be good if we do it well.

WAR

Given this emphasis on technical performativity, it follows that the deployment of the war metaphor is a major feature of TQM discourse (See Note 2). For TQM is seeable as yet one more of a series of generalizable, technologically-imbued prescriptions of how to "win" in a neo-Hobbesian transglobal economic order and still feel, well, "moral" about it. As a governmentality, the imposition of TQM is but one answer to some nagging contemporary problematics of governance: That is, how does one discipline a post-national socio-economic order around poles of obedience and techno-efficiency, independent of a specific set of ends to be served? Or, in the midst of domestic economic decline and class polarization, where general indices of performative skills have plummeted while indicators of dangerousness increase, how does one reconstitute efficient and docile or at least docile subjects? One tactic is to weld newer forms of totalization, such as TQM, to older totalizing tactics of governance, such as frequent symbolic declarations of de facto "states of emergency" (Taussig, 1992). In fact, this is what often happens.

On the Internet, there are gophers (institutional or commercial menus of electronic resources arranged by topic, author or organization) and academic LISTSERV's that house numerous e-texts and archived discussions. On one such gopher, CAUSE, there are several e-texts of papers delivered at the December, 1993 CAUSE convention. One etext, "Guerrilla TQM or How To Infiltrate TQM Into Your Institution," and a second text (not part of the CAUSE meetings), "The Germ Theory of Management" illustrate how these vectors of war, morality and economic performativity are woven together (Teeter and Weller, 1993; Tribus, 1989).

In "Guerrilla TQM," Tetter and Weller offer only the most cursory substantive argument for the adoption of TQM within educational bureaucracies. Ostensibly, they are preaching to the converted. That being the case, the focus of the paper quickly moves to surveying "covert" strategies for infiltrating TQM into indifferent or hostile educational bureaucracies. First, Totter and Weller survey three general models for implementing TQM, one of which is the "infection model." (An infection metaphor imposes the idea of the social as biological organism. This axiom is the common basis for sociological structural-functionalism and varieties of racialism). Then, they unveil their approach, which they term "the guerilla model." Teeter and Weller claim that this "guerilla model" incorporates elements of the "infection model" (Teeter & Weller, 1993). At times, their prose is reminiscent of CIA manuals on psychological warfare. That is, Teeter and Weller totter away from the merely technocratic and toward an overtly political discourse. For example, consider the following:

The guerrilla movement advanced with the formation of six teams in 1992 to improve administrative processes. This signaled that the movement was beginning to realize the goals that brought the members together (Teeter & Weller, 1993).

They go on to describe five phases of guerrilla tactics: Movement forming, movement recruiting, movement educating, movement activated/embraced and movement realized. This last movement is the apogee of a dystopian regime of detail.

Movement Realized - Integrate these concepts, principles and values into the daily lives of faculty and staff. The objectives of the five-phase strategy is to transform the university . . . in all aspects (Teeter & Weller, 1993).

WAR AND THE ORGANIC METAPHOR

In a different key, a similar discourse unfolds in Myron Tribus' "The Germ Theory of Management." Tribus, who is listed as the director of Exergy, Inc. and the American Quality and Productivity Institute, explicitly compares the mode and scale of his work, and TQM in general, to that of Pasteur's discovery of bacilli. Using the seductions that come from any argument from authority, he dourly warns managers that they must follow his prescriptions or else. These prescriptions are dispensed near the end of his presentation in a nebulous, one- size-fits-all TQMish format. According to Tribus, the choice is to follow him, just as doctors and farmers were compelled to follow Pasteur, or risk professional death. In a revealing passage he says:

This is not 1879 -- it is 1989. You are not doctors. You are all respected professionals . . . This is not some new fad which you shall be free to follow or not . . . What I am talking about is your survival (Tribus, 1989).

For Tribus, "the key idea is the elimination of the virus of variability." In fact, all of Tribus' pro-TQM arguments are framed by an organicist trope of the social. For example, consider the following text:

These infections of variability . . . spread from machine to machine . . . to the personnel.

Processes can have an Immune System Deficiency, too . . .

The fact is the process itself is infected with the virus of variability. If you don't set about sterilizing the process, that is, reducing its variability, it will certainly infect the workers . . . it will infect your judgment (Tribus, 1989).

Tribus' use of biological metaphors for the social (society seen as if a body) is a frequent and repetitive feature of TQM discourse. Lost in the appraisals of TQM and its discursive founder, W. Edwards Deming (1900-1993), are those affinities that he shared with the father of sociological structural-functionalism, Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). Ivy-league contemporaries, both men manifested a will-to-totalize that took the shape of life- long romances with organicist, teleological systems theory. Parsons' goal was prescriptive. That is, it was to produce the grand theoretical paradigm for the human sciences. Such a paradigm would have successfully categorized all other disciplines, assigning each its place under the taxonomic truth- gaze undeniably embodied by the tenets of Parsonian sociology.

Deming had his own "system of profound knowledge" (the title of a chapter from, "The New Economics for Industry, government and Education") (Deming, 1993). Deming prescribed his TQM paradigm as the appropriate guide for the meta-ordering of management theory and

practice across all governmental and corporatist bureaucracies (Dobyns, 1994). Not content with shaping academic disciplines, Deming advocated his methodology for totally optimizing the administration of human life under the ambiguous signs of "quality" and system "aims." Leon Wieseltier, writing in The New Republic, trenchantly critiqued some of the often unexamined premises in Deming's work:

> "Manage the whole company as a system," Deming writes. "The function of every component . . . under good management,contributes toward optimization of the system . . . Enlarge judiciously the boundaries of the system. The system must include the future . . . Study the theory of a system." But what is a system? . . . [According to Deming] A system is a network of interdependent components that work together to try and accomplish the aim of a system. A system must have an aim. Without an aim, there is no system. It must be clear to everyone in the system." And what is that aim? Deming's definition is purely formal: "The aim must include plans for the future. [It] is a value-judgement" (Wieseltier, 1993).

Wieseltier goes on to discuss some of the unpleasant ramifications of Deming's system-veneration. But there is a notable point that Wieseltier's critique omits. When Deming claims that the aim of a system is its future-orientation, Deming is saying that the chief aim of any (generic) system is the propagation of its own security. Therefore, security is the pivotal issue and object of TQM. Consider this excerpt on security from Jeremy Bentham, the father of the Panopticon:

> Among the objects of the law, security is the only one which embraces the future; subsistence, abundance, equality may be regarded for a moment only; but security implies extension in point of time with respect to all the benefits to which it is applied. Security is therefore the principal object (Bentham, cited by Gordon, 1991).

In some key respects, Deming's narrative of social reality and prescriptions for the installation of an order of Security are but a 20th Century corporatist variations on a theme, first offered up by the 17th Century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, in his classic work of political theory, Leviathan (1651).

LEVIATHAN REDUX:

Penning his magnum opus, Leviathan, in the midst of the English civil war and Interregnum, (1640-1660), Hobbes was horrified at the carnage and intercine strife that characterized that unhappy period. As a prescriptive antidote to the wars, Hobbes argued for a permanent surrender of rights, in the name of Security, to "an artificial man," "a Leviathan." Like Deming, Hobbes spiritualizes governance, in the form of a "mortal god, to which we owe under the immortal god, our peace and defense (Hobbes, 1970). In the sections below, consider the striking similarities between Hobbes and Deming on the negative effects of internal strife and competition.

> where every man is enemy to every man . . . wherein men live without security . . . In such condition, there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently, no culture, navigation . . .; no arts, no letters; no society; and that which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger . . .; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty and brutish and short (Hobbes, 1970).

> We cannot afford the destructive effects of competition . . . We must throw

overboard the idea that competition is a necessary way of life . . . [I am opposed] to the evils of the merit system . . . because it sets individuals against each other and motivates them wrongly, selfishly (Deming, 1986).

The prescriptions for terminating the "war of all against all" are much the same:

The only way to erect a common power . . . to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and secure them . . . the fruits of the earth is to confer all their power and strength upon one man,or upon an assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment . . . I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man . . . on this condition that thou give up they right to him and authorize all his actions in like man (Hobbes, 1970).

the transformation will release the power of human resource . . . In place of competition [and the evils of the merit system that sets people selfishly apart] there will be cooperation . . . there will be joy in work . . . Everyone will win . . . (Deming, 1993).

transformation in any organization will take place under a leader. it will not be spontaneous . . . The job of a leader is to accomplish transformation of his organization. He possesses knowledge, personality and persuasive power . . . Quality is determined by the top management. It cannot be delegated (Deming, 1993).

But whereas the Hobbesian proposition authorizes a state-centered communtarianism under the divine right of a king, TQM and its variants authorize a corporatist communtarianism under the divine sign of "quality" (which serves as a de facto metonym for "the market"). In either formulation, the logic is ultimately the same: "Morality is what the boss wants" (Jackall, 1988). Either formulation would assent to the prescription offered up by a recent TQM tome: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality" (Sashkin & Kiser, 1993). So if a Chancellor, President or Provost within a university system defines reality as a committment to total "quality" and quality has no universally accepted public definition, and "everybody gets to use the definition they want," then quality is the ultimate protean signifier. It is available for flexible, tactical recodings by whomever or whatever has the most influence in defining social reality at any given moment (Dobyns, 1994). However, the prolix of multiple meanings is usually temporary. It is soon disciplined by actors at the "top" who denote, often in highly discretionary ways, the range of appropriate meanings. In the semiotics of power, prevailing definitions of "quality" mark how well actors define and delimit representations of institutional reality (Foucault, 1984; Dennis, 1993). Make no mistake about it. When Deming says that quality-reality is determined by top management and cannot be delegated, he is privileges the executive production of meaning as a morally unimpeachable event. In this aspect, TQM is a philosophy of due obedience whose effects, if implemented, would be devastating to the practice of critical thought and the expression of responsible dissent. As Wieseltier correctly notes, TQM is clearly about more than quality management. TQM is about the politics of meaning and the meaning of politics in an emerging transcorporate order (Wieseltier, 1993). And much of the unstated theoretical framework for TQM can be found in the work of the late 19th and early 20th Century Italian economist and sociologist Vilfredo Pareto.

PARETOISM REDUX

Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) was an Italian economist and sociologist who developed a theory of elites within a sweeping theoretical paradigm. For our purposes, Pareto is significant because he differentiated the disciplines of economics and sociology by placing the pair within a classic logocentric (Derridean) binarism. For Pareto, economics was the rational (Apollonian) pursuit of knowledge. That is, Pareto defined the rational pursuit of knowledge as that which takes the acquisition and distribution of scarce resources as its appropriate object. On the other hand, Pareto's sociology took as its object the irrational and arational (Dionysian) elements of non-economic social and political life. This distinction between "rational" economists and "nonrational" social actors was the key tenet that shaped the social science of the Human Relations School of Industrial Management (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1988). Prominent in the post-WWI period, it was part of the intellectual backdrop of Ivy League schools of that time, such as Yale (where Deming received his Ph.D. in 1924). The key ideological tenets of the Human Relations School were:

1. Management and its policies were rational economic decisions while the judgment of workers was shaped by irrational considerations;

2. Human Relations Practitioners could shape the behavior of employees, who were defined as group oriented (i.e., irrational) and desirous of social rewards, in the direction of putting management defined group interests above individual interests (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1988).

So put, sociology was a means to an end. (It was charged with the shaping of lower-order nonrationalities toward higher- order rational ends). Defined this way, the goal of these new managerial logics was to manipulate mass attitudes in ways that furthered managerially defined outcomes. Such an aim might be an increase in short-term profit statements. Or, given the rise of public relations and new technologies of persuasion in the post-WWI period, the goal might have been to sway patterns of mass commodity consumption. The U.S. Human Relations School, which emerged at the end of the great migration of (largely Catholic and collectivist) Central and Eastern Europeans between 1880-1920, took up a century-old European problematic: How to shape the everyday attitudes and behaviors of those unruly masses of immigrant labor needed to work and/or consume in harsh industrializing urban landscapes (Foucault, 1978).

Faced with the collectivist cultures that the immigrants brought with them, older WASP managerial rationalities that embodied an atomistic conception of humans, such as Taylorism, were supplemented with Paretosque-inspired (collectivist) sociological techniques. Exemplified by the famous General Electric Hawthorne experiments, the methods of Edward Bernays and Shewhart's PDCA cycle, the Human Relations school developed techniques that became part of the sub-field of industrial psychology. Through group-level analyses, standardized techniques were designed, by these HR practitioners to extract continuously higher levels of performativity from the man-machine complex. From the Human Relations school to TQM, the goal has been constant. That is, as one relentless TQM propagandist declares, the system's aim should always be to "get more from less" (Dobyns, 1994).

GETTING MORE FROM LESS

On its face, "getting more from less" appears to be just another simplistic TQM exhortation about the optimization of processes. However, under one deconstructive lens, the goal of "getting more from less" cannot unconditionally be a qualitative- effect. That is, by definition, the word "more" is a quantitative term, not a qualitative one. For as we all know, more is not necessarily better. In a purely formal sense, then, the slogan "getting more from less," used as a pro forma marker of quality, is oxymoronic. But when contextualized within the

econometric discursive-system and profit-maximizing strategies of TNCs, the aphorism makes perfect sense. Langdon Winner, describing a conversation with a young mechanical engineer just two years out of college, offers up a field-based, denotative, de facto corporatist definition of "getting more from less:"

> "What's the news from the front line?" I [Winner] asked him.

> A glum expression swept across his face. "The rule of thumb is: Get rid of people. People are expensive. So you automate where you can, keep a small permament workforce, and fill in with temporary workers paid low wages and no benefits. That's where companies find their `competitive edge' nowadays" (Winner, 1993).

> Winner goes on to discuss the effects of these widely adopted tactics:

> [This reflects] a fundamental shift in social relations . . . [Emerging] economic and technical arrangements are based on extremely weak human committments. Innovations praised as `lean production' assume a high degree of fluidity in bonds that link persons and organizations . . . But the long-term cultural costs [will] be enormous . . . One consequence of the rise of Lean America is a marked decline in our spirit of cooperation (Winner, 1993).

In one sense, TQM is the ideological symbol that legitimates those organizational practices that "get more" productivity, control, mobility and profit by intensively and irreversibly transferring skills from humans to hardware/software ensembles. This means that more can be done "with less." More can be done with less of a permanent workforce or with temporary workers working for less (low pay and no benefits) or with less health, safety, environmental or labor regulation by government. Occasionally, TQMer's reveal the material reality of this ideology. For example, Lloyd Dobyns, early in the narration of a TQM propaganda video, "W. Edwards Deming: The Prophet of Quality" (the homoynm with "profit" was surely intended), praises the TQM program at Ford as exemplary. As Dobyns' paean hums on, viewers see a 30-second video clip, much of it a wide-scan, overhead shot. The shot is of an automated factory production floor at a Ford plant. As robot arms smoothly manipulate and weld doors and windshields, the alert viewer sees that there are no people on that factory floor (Dobyns, 1994). The composite message is clear: Quality equals the replacement of human bodies and the transference of human skill by highly specialized and impeccably choreographed hardware/software ensembles (Zuboff, 1988). Is it any surprise that iconocrats (corporate public relations workers), wishing to soften the perceived impact of deskilling and the expendability of employees, spiritualize these effects? In the ersatz "philosophy" of TQM, acoyltes describe scenes of downwardly mobility as "win-win" situations where top management, in pursuit of the holy grail of quality, knows best. In TQM-speak, everyone cooperates and dissent is but a distant and desultory memory. Ideally, there should not be anything more than a faintly dissonant peep when substantial populations are defined as no longer economically viable and consigned to a neo-Darwinsque economic landscape.

Across the material and social landscape of universities, cultural and architectural environments that allowed spaces for interpersonal, intellectual and perceptual growth are eroding (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994). Over the last decade (1985-1995), most universities, facing a troubling nexus of rising costs, reduced federal and state funding, stagnant enrollment pools and frequent criticism over the competence of graduates have been vulnerable to corporatist inducements. In the highly volatile politics of higher education finances and goals, universities have reshaped their administrative and bureaucratic routines as they have redefined their purpose. A Los Angeles Times article titled "Industry Becoming the Big Partner on U.S.

Campuses . . . Colleges Put Themselves Up for `Adoption' in the Private Sector," details some of the rewiring of academic priorities over the last ten years:

> "The role of the university in the 21st Century is to transfer technology or ideas out of our labs into the commercial world," says Michael Hooker, president of the University of Massachusetts . . .

> "Intel is supporting the University of Arizona as if it were a group within Intel," says Ken Smith, dean of the College of Business. . . . we're operating in a more constrained resource environment for higher education."

> IBM, Xerox, Procter & Gamble, Intel, Motorola, Milliken, and Martin Marietta [have formed] partnerships with universi- ties to promote the use of [TQM] . . . (Chaddock, 1992).

This intensive wave of corporatization emerged in the wake of the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act (also known as the the University-Small Business) Patent Act (Chaddock, 1992; Negin, 1993). Soon extended by an executive order to include TNCs, the act gave research universities the exclusive rights to license information or commodities that were the fruits of projects funded by federal research grant monies (Negin, 1993). According to Negin

> This enabled schools to attract [TNCs] because they could now sell exclusive licenses on [innovations] made under a company's sponsorship. Universities promptly started to raise tuition to cover the exorbitant venture-capital [costs] of applied research . . . [The promise was that] universities would . . . earn a profit from royalties . . .

> These patent-law changes transformed the university [says Leonard Minsky]: "Formerly, universities had only employees and capital. Now they have products to sell. Once universities become a business, the objective is not `education for the people' but looking for marketable products and selling the institution to investors" (Negin, 1993).

Negin goes on to develop a plausible hypothesis that TNCs support university-based applied research projects as a means for tapping into public tax dollars. Tapping into tax dollars translates into "getting more" R & D projects initiated. Splitting the capital risk for commercially-driven applied research also dilutes the cost of potentially expensive failures. With the intensive corporatization of universities, TNCs "get more" R & D projects up-and-running "from less" internal capital, labor and material outlays. It has allowed TNCs to extend waves of personnel layoffs, transferring the costs of retaining technical talent to university systems. But even with this political and economic success, these cost-shifting tactics were but part of longer-term campaigns for reshaping the normative procedures, self- definitions and strategic plans of universities. To "get more from less," to maximize universities as productive sites for the extraction of corporate profits, higher education had to also mirror the day-to-day routines and symbolic bureaucratic rituals of the transnationals. To effectively "re-engineer" the university as de facto corporate colonies, TNCs required an ideological and moral discourse and a human disciplinary technology for reorganizing everyday routines in the transcorporate mode. Total Quality Management, with its prescriptive communtarianism and its vague and recodable signifier of "quality," remains an excellent vehicle for the progagation of bureaucratic morality. As a totalizing discourse, it joins those discourses that conflate the role of citizen citizen with consumer and the activity of democratic expression with commodity consumption. TQM overtly

and unambigiously stigmatizes dissent. TQM depicts difference as a political and technical threat in the form of a much dreaded "virus of variability" in need of survelliance, conversion or elimination (See note 3). In implementation into day- to-day material relations, it works as a salve to grease the transfer of human skills into technical ensembles. As a discourse, TQM is pure doublespeak. It is a technology of persuasion for managing cognitive dissonance (that asks us to abandon the "western idea" of competition in favor of cooperation to survive a permament economic state of war; or to accept the effects of downsizing and downward mobility as a "win-win" situation). As embodied in administrative apparati, it is a political technology of detail that works to standardize fields of human identities and thought. That is, in the universe of Totalized Quality Management, everybody is either a customer, internal or external, or a provider. There is another category, the "resistor." But s/he is a dark and furtive presence that is acknowledged as the true dangerous other, the skeptic, the unbeliever, the evil anti-Deming (Dennis, 1993).

WORSHIPPING THE SYSTEM THE CULT OF TQM

As Wieseltier notes in a comparison of TQM dystopias with those depicted in Huxley's Brave New World, TQM is a corporatist cult (Wieseltier, 1993). It is an idolatry of technique. It is a veneration of "the system." In his 1994 video, Lloyd Dobyns elaborately deifies W. Edwards Deming as "the prophet of quality." Dobyns proudly exhibits the claim, made by U.S. News and World Report, that Deming stands with the apostle St. Paul as one of the nine men who changed the history of the planet. An exegesis of TQM's holy "fourteen points," penned by Deming, is conducted in the video with a reverence shown to texts that are generally considered to be divinely-inspired utterances of timeless significance. And then there is Deming's self-described "system of profound knowledge." This profundity consists of a prescriptive mix of low-level positivistic methods with psychosocial techniques that are strongly reminiscent of the human potential movement (Clauson, 1993). But if it were only Deming, Dobyns and Clauson mouthing these banalities, it would not matter. Clearly, this is not the case. The haloesque Deming-effect circulates wide and far and is generally accepted uncritically. We'll take just one example, here, that of Secretary of Labor, Robert B. Reich. Reich compares Deming to "Benjamin Franklin . . . a guide, a prophet, and instigator" (Wieseltier, 1993). Indeed, there are many "true believers" among us. I have read their TQM testaments.

In the archives of the LISTSERV TQM-L, (Total Quality Management in Higher Education) I have read with interest the testimony of devotees. And I have witnessed the electronic wrath of the righteous. For when an unbeliever questions the scope of the claims made on behalf of TQM, the indignation of the virtuous instantly manifests. For example, when one professor of history at the University of South Carolina at Sumter critiqued the inadequacies of Ricordati's PDCA assembly line model of education on 10/01/93, the responses were digitally swift and certain:

> I cannot honestly believe that anyone who believes in TQM, continuous improvement, Demming [sic] or simply education would write the reply to the message offered.

> If this is the attitude of Professors of History . . . Quite frankly, I am beginning to understand why many schools are no longer teaching History . . .

> Is [he] for real? Is it possible he is just putting us on? (Walter Olson, on TQM-L, 10/01/93) On the same day, another TQMer wrote:

> Higher Ed has elements of snobbery and elitism that we must get rid of. When TQM

showed success in manufacturing, the design engineers said "Fine, but it can't apply to our creative process. We're at too high an intellectual level for something [like this]." Others - accountants, managers, marketers - said similar things. Now its clear that TQM applies to ALL processes . . . TQM can be made to work in them all (D. Jack Elzinga, on TQM-L, 10/01/93).

This anti-intellectualism and intolerance toward the practice critical inquiry is itself disturbing. But when such traits are fused with a cult of the leader and "true belief" in the eternally benevolent relevance of TQM to all facets of human activity, be it culture, history, politics or pedagogy, then the dogmas of TQM are no longer merely vexing. TQM has passed into the realm of the potentially dangerous. It is symptomatic of an escalating intolerance for difference disguised as "quality management." As we approach the millennium, an ominous spirit composed of equal parts performativity, piety and a corporatist political correctness haunts the academe (Pratt, 1994). Its name is Totalized Quality Management.

CONCLUSION: ETHNOCENTRISM REDUX

We live in an uncertain world that is concurrently more totalized and chaotic. Icons of U.S. commodity culture, such as Coca-Cola, Disney or Madonna, are everywhere but the rapid and discontinuous unfolding of events - events economic, events political, events cultural, events transcorporate - far exceed any linear, positivistic narratives of prediction, control or explanation. (Contemporary chaos theory is predicated on the insufficiencies of linear models of prediction and control). However, because regimes of control and prediction, such as Totalized Quality Management, are coextensive with moral, technical, political and pedagogical programs, epistemologies and methods that claim transparency of representation and immediacy of knowledge (in the form of "raw data") are compelling to the Security-driven. In the application of econometric grids such as TQM on to the routines of socio-cultural life, difference is tamed through the universal commodification of human identity and culture. Dissent is derailed by technocratic discourses of performativity. Obedience is inculcated by deploying psychosocial techniques of persuasion geared toward shaping "irrational" non- economic human desires toward managerially-defined "rational" economic ends. And through the worship of the ambiguous signifier of "quality," which is itself a metonym for "the system," the cybernetic-econometric grid becomes its own object of worship. This is an econometric ethnocentrism of the first order.

Totalized Quality Management is a set of universalizing, reductionist discourses/practices meant to impose a measurable, commodity-based set of categories upon the imaginative range of human identities. If TQM is successful in its reinscriptions, it will shape the total range of possible and thinkable activities and identities. The richness, diversity and uniqueness of human experiences across space, time and place will be flattened into the binary categories of customer (a term that is repetitively and stunningly defined as "the next person in line)" and producer/provider. This is an econometric ethnocentrism, par excellence. Once the transformation has occurred, once social reality has been "re-engineered," the perceptual fields and behaviors of populations, now defined in the binarisms of TQM (customer/provider) can be shaped by a mix of propagandistic campaigns and low-level positivistic techniques.

The political implications of such conceits, embodied in texts like Tribus' "The Germ Theory of Management", are ominous. That is, the more insidious the "enemy," who is a continuously redefinable germ of human "variation," (hence the HIV references in Tribus' piece), the more opportunities emerge for intensive development of survelliance technologies in the name of risk- management. The effects of these programmatics upon the nurturance of intellectual diversity, the practice of dissent, the vibrancy of extra-economic discourse, the physical architecture of institutions, the imaginative richness of our socius and the shape of

student and teacher identities could very well be devastating.

Recently, Linda Ray Pratt, in a Presidential address to the American Association of University Professors, analyzed the underlying political logic of such regimes as TQM. Forcefully, she argued that "what is at stake . . . is nothing less than the profession as we have known it" (Pratt, 1994). Indeed, it is not just the profession that is at stake. Having established that "quality" is a metonym for system-worship, which itself is a deification of mangerial prerogatives, the question remains: Are we moving toward a regime of Total Systematic Management of Humans? And, if so, how can we refuse, defuse and resist such a dangerously totalizing program?

NOTES:

(1) "Quality," says Dobyns in the video - W. Edwards Deming: The Prophet of Quality - "has no accepted definition." This gives the term a pseudo Zen-like characteristic. That is, in one book, quality is defined as "customer delight" (Roberts & Sergesketter, 1993). Notably, Deming conceptually thrashes around, unable to come up with anything near a usable definition of quality, in Chapter 6 of Out of the Crisis (Deming, 1986). In another book, the authors survey how TQM "gurus" define this elusive trait. For Juran, "Quality is fitness for use," a definition that has interesting political undertones (Dobyns & Crawford-Mason, 1991). Phil Crosby developed a definition with a similar set of connotations: "Quality is conformance to requirements" (Tenner & DeToro, 1992). For Feigenbaum, quality is "what the buyer says it is" (Dobyns & Crawford-Mason, 1991). The same authors cite John Stepp's definition of quality: "I know it when I see it," thereby unwittingly echoing the late Potter Stewart's famous quip about how he (Potter), as an associate Justice of the Supreme Court, decided whether a specific art work was legally obscene or not.

(2) The war metaphor is a central and repetitive motif of TQM discourse. Even a brief eyeballing of print materials on TQM makes this point amply clear. For example, James H. Saylor's 1992 book, TQM Field Manual, offers up a rationale, in page xvi of the preface for the incessant use of the war metaphor:

> The war theme is used to convey the seriousness of the economic situation in the U.S. today. We are engaged in total economic war. Our very survival as an economic force is at stake. Already there have been many casualties. Many organizations and people have been wounded, and some have been destroyed . . . [TQM] is the process that can turn defeat into victory . . . in the economic war (Saylor, 1992).

In this self-described "field manual," each chapter begins with a quotation from a translation of the ancient Chinese text, The Art of War by Sun Tzu. Many of the key subsections of a chapter are also graced by such quotations. And in Saylor's opening prose throughout the chapters, the invocation of the war metaphor shapes the tone and details of the subsequent text. For example, in Chapter One, Saylor begins with "In the atmosphere of economic war, American industry needs a full arsenal." In Chapter Two, at the top, Saylor says that "The current economic war must not be ignored. Every organization must adapt to a new world characterized by . . . rabid competition" ((Saylor, 1992). And in language that unpleasantly resonates with the bureaucratization of the "Final Solution," Chapter Eleven is titled, "The Final Campaign." Declaring that the survival of nations is at stake, he goes on to say that

> In order to achieve victories in this, the final campaign, many changes from traditional methods are required . . . [including] a strategy of flexible, rapid response . . .

Not surprisingly, the last quarter of the book is devoted to how the Department of Defense (DoD) has defined and implemented TQM at the Pentagon.

The same survival and suicide metaphor takes on an explicitly Social Darwinist cast for the late W. Edwards Deming:

> Survival of the fittest: Who will survive? Companies that adopt constancy of purpose . . . Charles Darwin's law of survival of the fittest, and that the unfit do not survive, holds in [society] as well as natural selection. It is a cruel law, unrelenting . . . [but] the problem will solve itself (Deming, 1986).

The point here is not that every TQM tome explicitly invokes the war metaphor (many do not) but that this trope is a normative feature of many of the ideological underpinnings of TQM, whether the trope is directly invoked or not. Teeter and Weller's piece, as well as Tribus', are not discursive outliers. Rather, they are standard fare within TQM linguistic and conceptual grids.

(3) Definitions of TQM are as multiple, vague and recodable as the signifier that is "Quality." But one common definition cited in several texts is from the Department of Defense (Pentagon). It is as follows:

> TQM is both a philosophy and a set of guiding principles that are the foundation of a continuously improving organization. TQM is the application of quantitative methods and human resources to improve the material services applied to an organization, all the processes within the organization, all the processes within the organization, and the degree to which the needs of the customer are met, now and in the future. TQM integrates fundamental management techniques, existing improvement efforts, and technical tools under a disciplined approach focused on continuous improvement (Brocka & Brocka, 1992; Saylor, 1992).

What "the philosophy" is varies from text to text. But one common demoninator across many definitions is that of Total Management, "involving everything and everyone . . . [and] all systems and processes" (Saylor, 1992). In fact, whether these global descriptors are found in the posts of TQM-L or in texts such as Saylors, the terms ALL and EVERYTHING are frequently and repetitively invoked. But the use of the DoD's definition is yet another thread that ties TQM, in a very material sense, to the trope of war.

Another trait common to TQM discourse is the conflation of a blind faith in methods and measuring ensembles with activities of critical inquiry and philosophy. One text says that

> The foundation of TQM is philosophical: the scientific method. It includes systems, methods, and tools. The systems permit change, the philosophy stays the same (Roberts & Sergesketter, 1993).

To my mind, a Nietzschean aphorism is the last word on such issues:

> It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our century, but the victory of scientific method over science (Nietzsche, 1968).

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