Talking about Leadership: How the Words We Use Shape Our Workplace

An Amazon search for books relating to leadership yields more than 50,000 results; we are, it seems, hungry to understand the dynamics of leadership—how to be ethical and effective leaders, how to identify toxic leaders, how to become leaders if we are not already, how to lead rather than manage, and how to steward the growth of both the people and the organizations we lead, and so on *ad nauseam*. It makes sense, then, that in the higher educational sector, yesterday's business administration, management, and organizational behavior degrees have given way to more amorphous degrees and certificates in "Leadership Studies," "Organizational Leadership," "Leadership Development," and "Professional and Leadership Studies," just to name a few. These programs do not fly by night; their home campuses run the gamut from the Ivy League to flagship publics to niche campuses with online offerings, and they are proliferating quickly. Elsewhere on the campus, however, the humans who do the actual leading do not stay long in their seats. The average tenure of higher-ed leadership in the C-suite has steadily decreased, with only a third of the presidents responding to *Inside Higher Ed*'s 2023 Survey of College and University Presidents having served for 10 or more years. The authors of the many recent articles analyzing the "nearly impossible" job of college president no doubt articulate the factors that contribute to this leadership deficit, including stresses on the higher education system, budgetary challenges, political upheaval, and competing stakeholder priorities—all of which have in this post-COVID era grown more pressing.[i] Many want (in theory) to lead, it seems—though doing so in practice is proves far less popular.

Higher ed leadership challenges do not belong solely to the C-suite, and the same publications that surface stories about the difficulties of being a chief executive also identify challenges facing provosts, who must at the same time serve as chief faculty member and second-in-command administrator; deans, who must wrangle tight departmental budgets and make difficult personnel decisions with the sometimes competing priorities of the institution in mind; department chairs, who must both manage and advocate for their faculty; and myriad leaders such as student success directors, student affairs professionals, DEI officers, and directors of centers for teaching excellence who must implement

their agendas more by influence than by direct reporting chains. While each set of leadership challenges may feel disparate, all stem from the same structural dynamic: we have collectively understood and described the higher ed space in ways that stymie the sorts of visionary leaders we say that we want. We employ metaphors such as *ecosystem*, *culture*, *factory*, *institution*, and *marketplace*—all descriptors that emphasize collective identities, systems, and shared processes over the individuals who shape them—while also seeking transformative leadership that can articulate and solidify a bold new vision. As Peter Senge (1990) succinctly puts it, "Systems cause their own behaviors (p. 43), so it makes sense to look within higher education itself for an answer to the question of why leaders so often find themselves unable to accomplish their goals—and at least one answer lies in our use of language. As Lakoff and Johnson note in their classic text *Metaphors We Live By* (1980/2003), the words we use to describe what we do shapes our approach to the more abstract concepts and beliefs that set our course.

On any given day, guiding metaphors capture important realities about how higher ed functions as well as about how a leader who wants to be effective might approach their task. Yet these differing terminologies also compete with one another, creating different demands, value statements, and expectations. For example, imagining the higher ed space as an ecosystem evokes concepts such as food chains, competition for resources, sustainability, and equilibrium, with the leader's primary role being something like "chief balancing agent." Describing higher ed as a culture positions leaders as keepers of customs and insider knowledge; treating it as a factory or a machine suggests conflict among workers, managers, and engineers; explaining it as a social institution places leaders in the role of privileged legislators or perhaps disciplinarians; and conceiving of it as a brand or marketplace turns administrators into product officers and students into customers. Each of these understandings of higher education has implications for how leaders perform their task, and these carry ethical freight. If behavior is "what follows from the way the world is showing up for someone . . . it's not events, communication, or stimuli that lead to behavior, it is the interpretation an individual gives to a phenomenon that leads to the actions taken" (Flaherty, 1999, p. 9). It makes sense, then, for leaders at all levels to consider deeply the implications of the metaphors guiding their field of service.

We discuss several common metaphors for discussing higher education with an eye toward both their philosophical and ethical commitments and their practical, day-to-day effects in the spaces where they operate. Although each of these systems of metaphor brings its own priorities that differ in important ways from one another, each also bears the mark of our post-industrial context. Specifically, each tends to formulate the relationship between the individual and the collective in ways that reflect the principles that led to the rise of industrial capitalism and its subsequent role in how we understand the individual's place vis-à-vis the collective. Regardless of our choice of metaphors to describe our work, we all bear the marks of living in our particular cultural moment, one informed by multiple and longstanding conversations about work and industry (Max Weber, Karl Marx), competition and free markets (Adam Smith, Charles Darwin), social order and the role of institutions (Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser), and postmodern hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard, Guy DeBord). Education serves, to some extent at least, as a significant means by which individuals learn to act as citizens, whether through gainful employment in the workforce or through other ways of participating in civil society, and it also teaches the skills necessary to take a reflective approach to the patterns and rhythms of the contexts in which we function. It perhaps goes without saying that, should we determine to adopt a different language to describe the work of higher education, we might in turn find that we can more readily imagine new ways of accomplishing our missions.

The Ecosystem of Higher Education

In a recent blog post, Provost Missy Alexander of Western Connecticut State University (2022) relies on the metaphor of an ecosystem to explain how university outcomes such as retention and completion rates depend on the environment in which that university functions. In her state, she notes, the ecosystem includes the UCONN system, the regional comprehensive state universities, community colleges, and a bevy of private schools, in addition to the factors that affect all of higher education, such as the growth in third-party content providers and the demographic cliff. Connecticut higher education is, in short, a small pond with a lot of hungry fish. The scenario Alexander describes resembles that of any

number of states across the nation, and it is surely no accident that now, more than any time in recent memory, we are asking Darwinian questions about the fitness many campuses to survive for the long term. Befitting her metaphorical frame, Alexander raises two possibilities for addressing this ecosystemic question, only to settle on a Darwinian answer. One solution might be for some outside body such as a legislature to make rules about what sorts of fish swim in which part of the pond, delimiting, for instance, which majors or types of programs can be housed at which campus. Of course, this process tends to happen naturally to some extent: a two-flagship state such as Indiana or Virginia often sees movements of students to one campus or the other based on its historic strengths (future engineers seek out Purdue or Virginia Tech; history majors flock to Indiana U or UVA). As a top-down solution, however, Alexander dismisses this possibility quickly, given that outside of a few specializations, it would prove logistically impossible—not to mention harmful to students pursuing a liberal arts degree. Instead, Alexander argues, differentiation by adaptation offers a better solution: campuses should find their place in the ecosystem by adopting distinct approaches to teaching and learning.

Darwin's large argument, that species shift based on generations of adaptation of organisms to their environment, with the most fit being "naturally selected" for survival, is as much an economic as a scientific one. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), a foundational text of western capitalism, predates Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) by nearly eight decades, and by the time of *Origin*, its ideas had thoroughly permeated western culture. Smith's thesis, that individuals acting out of economic self-interest benefit the collective, rests on certain key ideas: that competition, as opposed to communism or mutual self-sacrifice, is the *modus operandi* for civic life, for instance; that individuals benefit from performing differentiated roles and tasks within the economic system (division of labor); and that individuals can both identify and act in light of their own self-interest (as opposed to being unable to separate one's own interests from those of a guild or a family). In Darwin's understanding of the ecosystem, similarly, survival is a competition that only the fittest win, but as this happens across generations, improvements result. Alexander's suggestion that as campuses act within their areas of

differentiation and pursue their strengths, the larger ecosystem of higher education will find its balancing point illustrates a distinctly Darwinian brand of optimism about the future of higher education.

The metaphor of the ecosystem is indeed attractive, with its imbedded faith that the system's checks and balances are good and that they reveal a right and natural order, and that the conflict inherent in the system will lead to better outcomes. Ongoing discussions of "silos," for example, tend to draw attention to the need for collaboration and integration across parts of the higher ed environment, whether at an individual institution or across a system.[ii] For so many campuses that employ small armies of task-focused workers, the idea of a large, balanced system, with each contributor playing an important role vis-à-vis the whole, imparts an idea of mission and purpose where there may otherwise seem to be only an endless succession of disconnected tasks. A functioning campus ecosystem would engage all the different partners within an institution—student affairs, academic affairs, student services, physical plant, technology, instructor engagement, athletics, advising, residential life, parking, online student support, medical and counseling services, etc.—in a way that maintains balance for the good of the whole. Ideally, this balance would happen naturally, as all jointly work to accomplish the institutional mission, and any jockeying for resources or position among these various partners would ultimately result in a fuller achievement of the mission, rather than a weakening of the infrastructure. At the same time, Smithian or Darwinian patterns do not always fit the operations of any given campus precisely. What campus has not had challenges articulating what its own self-interests are, for example, much less acting in light of them in a unified and coherent way? And what campus cannot name times when internal jockeying weakened rather than strengthened the whole?

Leaders operating within the guiding metaphor of the ecosystem have a series of choices to make about their roles. To the extent that it is within their purview to do so, for example, they may choose to impose or withdraw controls on competition for resources. Funding for new initiatives may be tied to outcomes such as revenue generation, student completion rates, or graduate job placement, with the "fittest" departments or programs earning for themselves a larger share of the proverbial pie. Such approaches, which include the DOE's College Scorecard, will balance the system around how "fitness" is

defined. If fitness includes high completion rates and high income upon graduation, then a school accepting a small percentage of applicants that they train in high-demand STEM fields will no doubt fare well on all these metrics. By contrast, a school of fine arts, no matter how elite, is not likely to prove "fittest." A leader may thus choose to identify other metrics by which "success" may be measured, such as employee satisfaction or missional impact, or—to be very countercultural—they may put forward an understanding of "survival" or "fitness" that has less to do with metrics and KPIs than with other characteristics such as dispositions, virtues, or behaviors.

On the other hand, a leader may choose to take a more direct role in apportioning resources as a way of acknowledging that the ecosystem may need a course adjustment. For reasons of mission, to acknowledge the inequities that metrics sometimes create, or to create a broader range of opportunities for a diversity of learners, leaders may choose to impose handicaps on certain players or give others additional assistance. Affirmative action programs have tended to follow this line of reasoning, as have programs that make strategic investments in different populations or divisions within a college in order to strengthen them. A recent blog in *Inside Higher Ed* uses ecological thinking to ask whether the higher ed system as a whole might function more harmoniously if well-resourced institutions such as Harvard or wealthy flagships were to abandon their "miserly" ways in exchange for a "more collaborative higher education ecosystem with far greater sharing than is the case today" (Rutter & Mintz, 2019). As is, the authors argue, far too much of the burden of supporting risky populations rests with campuses whose resources are already strapped; the strong are growing stronger and the weak weaker, and this is not a desirable—or ethically acceptable—state of affairs. Leaders operating in ecosystems must embrace the guiding idea of the competitive yet interdependent system—its tensions, its checks and balances, its interdependencies, its constant focus on dominance—while also emphasizing the ways in which tension and even conflict might contribute to a stronger whole.

The Culture of Higher Education

Peter Drucker did not actually say the most famous line attributed to him, "culture eats strategy for breakfast," though there is truth in the statement: any initiative, no matter how good, will fail unless it fits within the context in which it will be implemented. Culture can be defined in any number of ways, but for purposes of leadership, it consists in all the things that people do not consciously think about—the "mental models" or "deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting" (Senge, 1999, p. 174). Culture works by a feedback loop: the way we see things informs how we behave, which affects how we see, and so on, and it manifests in things such as the regular ways people behave, overall feeling or climate, rituals and celebrations, espoused values, formal philosophy, group norms, implicit rules, identity and images of the self, embedded skills, habits of thinking, linguistic paradigms, shared meanings, and root metaphors/symbols (Schein & Schein, 2017). Bourdieu (2002) describes the "habitus," a sort of rough equivalent for culture, as a set of preferences or dispositions that shapes the way a person engages with the social world. While individuals cannot always articulate the shape of these "schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (p. 27), their shape is revealed in everyday behavior. In a similar vein, as Juergen Habermas has argued throughout his *oeuvre*, the ways in which individuals interact discursively with each other reveal the ethical and moral norms that govern their interactions. In the higher ed space, of course, there is no one culture that all campuses share, but even referring to "campus culture" evokes an ethically rich dynamic in which rules, both *doxa* and *orthodoxy*, must be learned; traditions and institutions must be assimilated into the individual's belief system; and the weight of history and praxis must be shouldered. In this context, a leader must find a way to be "in but not of" the collective, a fluent speaker of the native culture's language but also someone distanced enough to shift the terms when needed.

Rosowsky & Hallman (2020) have described higher education as a place "perhaps more than any other industry sector, [that] cherishes its history, traditions, ceremonies and institution/campus culture." Traditions in higher education include photogenic occurrences such as traditional rites of passage and ceremonies, but they also include the campus's unarticulated ways of approaching its tasks: for instance,

is there a culture of assessment, faculty governance, administrative pace-setting, networking or socializing, political activism, Greek life, or volunteerism? What sorts of individuals occupy dominant roles on the campus, and what sorts can be expected to rise quickly? To put this another way: culture helps one go from being a formal affiliate of the campus to putting down roots and flourishing; it is, as the name suggests, the ground in which a person's role is cultivated, the soil in which they grow. Simone Weil (1949/2002) famously argues that being "rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (p. 40), and roots come from active participation in a community. More specifically, the community establishes structures within which individuals can learn proper ways to participate, including ideas about duty (p. 4), rules and enforced order (pp. 9, 13, 19-20), opportunities to choose and to have free opinions (pp. 11-12, pp. 21-25), occasions on which to feel useful and necessary (p. 14), a sense of human dignity, honor, and equality (pp. 15, 18), meaningful hierarchies that help them find their place (pp. 17-18), ways to maintain real and perceived safety (p. 31), opportunities to take a risk (p. 32), the ability to claim property and territory (pp. 33-34), and the ability to learn the truth (pp. 35-36).

Weil's discussion of culture, which resembles an amplified and practical version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, offers a slate of strong communal practices that allow the individuals within to flourish. In higher ed cultures, these practices are widely evident. Ideas about duty show up in places like campus fight songs and honor pledges that students take ("I will not lie, cheat, steal, nor tolerate those who do") as well as in the proceedings of gatherings such as student government meetings. Rules, of course, populate student handbooks and policy manuals, and they find enforcement through conduct processes. Helping students find a place that they can claim, where they can fit, and where they can be treated with appropriate honor comprises much of the work of student affairs offices during the first few weeks of any school year, as they roll out "student activities fairs" and countless "get to know you" activities. Similarly, student centers and even libraries increasingly feature "hang out" spaces that students can reserve. Even in the less structured online environment, students participate in orientation programs, opt into special interest groups, and complete discussion board assignments whose sole purpose is establishing fit in the community. The same processes happen for faculty and staff, of course,

with an equally robust—and often equally unwritten—set of duties, rules, and expectations, all of which unfold in a rich matrix of interpersonal relationships.

The rest of Weil's cultural "must haves" have figured large in contentious discussions of higher education in the media in recent months, with no sign of slowing in the conversation—a testament to the power of the "higher education as culture" narrative. On freedom, for example, we have seen discussions of whether student affairs practitioners working at the conservative religious campus Houghton College are free to imply political or doctrinal positions by including preferred pronouns in their email signatures.[iii] On equality and human dignity, we have seen debates about the extent to which free speech rules on campuses permit platforms for groups that may have unpopular messages, such as Zionist speakers at UC Berkeley.[iv] On safety: were the Cornell University students who passed a resolution to require faculty to disclose and excuse students from any syllabus content that may cause emotional trauma or harm correct in their understanding of the university's duty to shield its students from real or perceived harm?[v] On risk: if an individual takes a risk that involves the overt statement of a heterodox opinion or idea, will that individual be "canceled"? What should the university's role have been vis-à-vis the 1101 instances of retaliation against faculty members for speech acts that the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) has documented since 2000?[vi] And on truth: to what extent must campuses, including governing boards, be transparent in their processes, use of data and statistics, hiring processes, and political commitments? A leader occupying a campus role at almost any level will have to confront these cultural realities as they lean into their position; in so doing, they not only reveal their place within the culture but also play a role in shaping it.

If, as Petriglieri (2023, April 24) argues, "Leadership, at its core, is an argument with tradition," a leader's existence is by its nature rhetorical: they are always making an argument, though they do so in a crowded and noisy space that argues with them as much as they argue with it. A recent article in *Harvard Business Review* traces the common pattern in which a leader is brought from the outside in order to create disruption and to offer fresh eyes, only to find that the proposed disruptions, even when they are clearly the right ones, meet strong resistance. This pattern typically has less to do with the actual ideas the

leader brings or with the leader's style but with "social defenses"—the "collective, and hardly conscious, effort to preserve traditional features of an organization—legacy structures, strategies, or cultures that make leaders feel proud and their followers feel safe" (Petriglieri, 2023). For instance, following a pattern that makes sense in our post-industrial context, physical objects often signify identity, and so a leader paying their respects at a student event may find that the clothing they choose to wear draws more commentary than their actual message. Things and tokens conjure the person. Of course, the options that occur to a leader as possible are themselves determined as much by their cultural context as by their own cognitive processes and moral reasoning (Blasi, 1980). Cognitive psychologists have demonstrated that individual cognition does indeed play a role in ethical decision making; sociologists, however, have differed in where they throw their emphasis. Durkheim, for example, famously demonstrates that in Europe, Catholic countries have far lower suicide rates than do Protestant ones, a trend he takes as evidence of the fact "that the propensity for suicide of Protestantism must relate to the spirit of free inquiry that characterizes this religion" (Thompson, 2004). For Durkheim, the group's reality, far more an any individual cognitive process, shapes the commitments and ends of those within them.

In such a context, a leader must be constantly aware that their actions signify, perhaps in ways they do not understand and cannot control. Still, culture, though tenacious, is not static, and change has been evident across the whole of higher educational culture in the last number of years. Dyed-in-the-wool practices such as the use of College Board data as a means to evaluate the quality of an applicant appear to be teetering, as do metrics such as the *US News* rankings. Today, we are in the midst of obvious culture war around the questions of the purpose of a degree, with ongoing debates about the future of liberal arts education, the overproduction of PhDs, and the relationship between funding and jobs outcomes. The leader who skillfully understands and parlays the symbols and trappings of the culture they want to affect will be the one who ultimately flourishes.

The Machine of Higher Education

Referring to higher education as a "machine" or a "factory" is likely to draw a sharp intake of breath from traditionalists who value education less for what it produces than for the experience it offers; even Melissa Woo, the CIO at Michigan State, worried aloud at a recent conference that AI and predictive technology might "in many ways risk reducing us to factories" (Lederman & D'Agostino, 2023). The magic of four years on a lush and aged campus, replete with history, collective pride, and free-wheeling conversation with like-minded others, is hard to give up when the alternative is an assembly line at General Motors, with an efficient, mechanized approach to building something useful—a financially profitable model, but one that brings with it other losses. The title of a mournful 2013 article in *The Independent* says it all: "When did the university become a factory?" (Alibhai-Brown). Alibhai-Brown laments the end of the university as a place of free inquiry and infinite possibility, this incubator for human growth having been replaced by a credential factory in which hedonism takes the place of social exchange. Howland (2021) approaches the losses that the corporatization of the university brings differently, tracing it to a series of powerful interest groups, including for-profit companies that benefit from the already-trained talent emerging from the higher ed pipeline; players in partnerships among investors, colleges, and governments that design credentialing programs to produce graduates who will fit existing needs; philanthropic organizations with ideological agendas that they can fund universities to reproduce; and metric-watchers such as accreditors, ed tech firms, and consulting companies who specialize in instructing campuses in how to achieve ready-made and uniform results. While we should view skeptically the idea that higher education was ever a space free from financial interest, an idyllic playground for young intellectuals to bat their ideas around like so many whiffle-balls, the increasing swerve toward a more "assembly line" mindset is indeed evident—as are the financial interests at work in the model.

If we trace the history of discussion of the factory system, the outlook for leaders is—to say the least—grim. Max Weber's famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-05) lays out the argument that industrial capitalism made such quick inroads in Britain because it fit well with

dominant ideas in Protestant (specifically Calvinist) teaching, including that financial success could be taken as evidence of God's blessings. While others have since questioned Weber's conclusions, the idea that capitalism flourishes in a highly individualized culture has remained largely unquestioned. Karl Marx's well-known critique of industrial capitalism, which he and Friedrich Engels developed after observing British factories in action in England in the 1840s, however, faults capitalism for the way it undoes the individualism, or even the humanity, of those on whose backs the system is built: the workers. Those who own the means of production (factory owners, for instance) are locked in a struggle with the wage laborers who produce their products and who, unlike the artisans of previous generations, have no inherent connection to the work that they do. The staple of factory culture, the assembly line, built on the division of labor about which Adam Smith writes so eloquently, alienates workers from their product. It does this through a variety of means: tying the money the worker earns not to the product but the number of hours worked, making it difficult if not impossible for the worker to appreciate the role they play in producing a finished product, and eliminating individual variance and expression in the production process. Similarly, in a degree-as-credential understanding of higher education, colleges and universities are notable more for the useful and standardized products they produce—trained workers who demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed to perform tasks in an industry-standard way—than for the human development evident in their graduates.

The solution Marx poses to the questions of capitalism, which involves top-down takeovers of the means of production and forcible redistribution of resources, does not seem suited, as Weil (1949/2002) argues, "for automatically creating justice" (p. 237). At the same time, certain elements of the higher educational system do indeed resemble the factories against which Marx rails. On any given campus, for example, hundreds and possibly thousands of "line workers" participate in some small piece of the educational process. They perform tasks such as completing financial aid verifications, assigning login credentials, monitoring parking permissions, stocking bookstore shelves, verifying attendance in online courses, performing tasks associated with food preparation and sanitation—and the list goes on. The introduction of a new process or piece of technology offers a potent reminder of just how dependent even

the most person-centered campus is on mechanized processes; doing something as pedestrian as changing the start date of a term requires many systemic dominoes to fall in just the right way. Even in less obviously mechanistic spaces within the higher ed factory, increasing requirements can make even the most creative of tasks—teaching—seem to happen by rote. On the first day of any given term, faculty need to verify students' attendance; communicate university policies about things like food insecurity, mental health counseling, Title IX, and attendance; and assure the presence of books and access codes in the right places. And this does not include the tasks associated with assessment and accreditation, grant-funded interventions, or other internal university research. In an effort to control quality and abide by regulatory guidance, colleges increasingly require instructors, especially in online or hybrid modes, to teach from shared syllabi and follow policies related to email response and grading turnaround times, interaction in the learning management system (LMS), and pedagogical practice. To be fair, most if not all of these quality- and R&D-related standards come from a good place: a genuine desire to assure that what students experience in the classroom represents the best that a college can offer. At the same time, the mechanisms by which quality tends to be sought and enforced resemble a factory more than, say, an art studio.

Within the higher ed machine, leaders can choose to play one of several roles. They may think of themselves as workers tasked, like everyone else, with running the machine—and indeed, when so much of a leader's day-to-day tasks include machine-management items such as apportioning budget dollars, tracking enrollments and outcomes, and completing innumerable performance reviews, the impulse to fall in the rhythm of the educational factory is understandable. They may see themselves as line managers, involved in the day-to-day operations of the factory but primarily from an enforcement or managerial point of view. Or they may envision their role in a more forward-thinking fashion, as engineers of the factory's operations, processes, and products. A still more visionary leader might instead imagine himself as an architect of the factory space, reimagining possibilities and processes on a large scale. Although the guiding discipline for Zander & Zander's (1994) leadership study is music, with chess as a useful metaphor, their advice to leaders to "rename yourself as the board on which the whole game is being

played" (p. 141) invokes this sort of understanding of leadership, one where the leader defines not the specific "how tos" that govern processes in a factory, but the goals and limits that define what the factory might imagine making to begin with. Understanding leadership within the higher ed factory in this way opens the possibility for a less dehumanizing, more meaningful way of engaging the process of educating students—but it also requires an extraordinarily committed team of engineers, line managers, and workers who buy into the vision.

The Institution of Higher Education

It is hardly a stretch to refer to higher education as an institution, given that schools routinely refer to themselves as such (though to be fair, the use of that term on a daily basis on any given campus is not likely to carry the freight that thinkers such as Michel Foucault have bestowed upon it). Thinking of higher education as an institution draws to the surface the relationships between individual campuses of higher education and the governing bodies to which they must relate: the US Department of Education, CHEA, regional accreditors, states legislatures, and so on. Second, it draws attention to the ways that different institutions, even in a highly decentralized education system such as we have in the United States, behave in certain expected, almost scripted, ways (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, and Schofer 2007). In 2022, *Inside Higher Ed* issued a "pocket primer" explaining the shorthand used to describe higher educational institutions in the U.S., including "the academy," "accredited institution," "college" versus "university," "Division I, II, or III," "Hispanic-serving" and "historically Black," "land-grant institutions," and so on (Bowles). Hence, statements such as the following, which appeared in a recent news story in Northern Virginia, do hard definitional work, positioning individual campuses within a nexus of authorized power relationships: "Northern Virginia economic development officials are working with Virginia's two public historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to establish a joint satellite campus in the region that officials say would fill a gap in higher-ed offerings in Virginia's largest population center" (Freehling). Similarly, a study about the experience of women at land-grant universities calls to mind a wealth of possible assumptions from the title alone: that land-grand colleges

enroll large numbers of students in programs focused on technology and agriculture, that women may not gravitate toward such programs, and that women who do choose to enroll at land-grants may find their experience to be somewhat less than optimal. A leader working within the "institution" of higher education, that is, acknowledges their role in both teaching and enforcing the power structures that order society.

What is at stake in thinking of higher education as an institution? For Foucault, institutions exist primarily to transmit and enforce the regulations, rules, and customs that shape individuals' behavior within a group. Institutions such as the corrections system, for example, serve as literal means of enforcing the law. For Foucault, the interest of the system lies in its role as a pedagogue: for example, by continually enacting a drama of crime and punishment in a way that is visible to the public, the institution of the prison encourages individuals to internalize the rules it enforces. Foucault's example of this is the Panopticon, a model prison envisioned by Utilitarian thinker Jeremy Bentham. In the Panopticon, prisoners are arranged around a central guard tower, with their movements visible at all times. The genius—or terror—of the Panopticon is that once the prisoners have grown accustomed to being watched, there is no need for a guard in the tower: the prisoners have internalized the guard's gaze.[vii] This process of internalizing the voice of institutionalized authority, what Louis Althusser calls "interpellation," has arrived at completion when, for example, a person hearing a police officer shout "Hey, you!" automatically turns around, assuming they are the one being hailed.[viii] Interpellation happens through state-sponsored activities such as policing (what Althusser calls "Repressive State Apparatuses" or RSAs) and through other institutions, such as universities, that train people by propagating ideologies ("Ideological State Apparatuses" or ISAs). ISAs work less by overt disciplinary means than by myriad small corrective instances such as grades, favor given or withdrawn during class discussions, small-scale shaming rituals, and award structures. In a system such as this, the leader needs to be mindful about whose hand they shake—whom they hail with their "Hey, you!"

While Foucault and Althusser paint institutions in a mostly negative light, they acknowledge the role that institutions play in maintaining a sense of order and security, whether through punishment or

proactive instruction. The institution of higher education functions by instructing individuals in the knowledge and skills needed to find meaningful, secure spaces to occupy. As Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt (2008) argue, “a great deal of our human cognition and behavior should be directed toward sustaining faith in the accepted cultural worldview and in our personal significance within the context of that worldview. And social validation should play a particularly large role in this sustenance” (p. 116). Through a relentless process of worldview instruction, examination, and reinforcement, the institution of higher education helps those within it to internalize the dominant ideologies that the community accepts, and demonstrates by example that acting in a way that falls in line with them promises some degree of safety for an individual. For example, a football player on a campus such as Alabama or Clemson likely already has some cultural cache, given the dominance of his sport of choice, but that individual’s cache can be increased if he engages in volunteer work, maintains a friendly presence on the campus social scene, and steers clear of any serious conduct violations. While there is no inherent connection between being a friendly, upstanding football player and career success, the cultural capital a friendly football player would collect would, at the very least, seem to promise some modicum of security. Similarly, and in a far more politically charged register, we see daily in the media wide-ranging debate about the ideological commitments of higher education (“wokeness,” for example) and the extent to which it ought to function as an Althusserian ISA or, by contrast, a haven of free speech. What behaviors should the institution of higher education reward?

Leaders who understand their role as players in institutional culture must be mindful of the fact that they are always reproducing something—some idea, some standard, some belief—and that they are imprinting it on others. They must also be aware that within a campus understood as an institution, fear most likely motivates behavior: fear of specific things like losing a job or the conduct process, or fear of abstract things such as rejection, disapproval, or irrelevance. Within times of anxiety and uncertainty, leaders who promise people to help manage their fears tend to thrive; these leaders more often than not have narcissistic tendencies, however, which allow them to see themselves as the solution to systemic problems larger than any one individual could solve (Maccoby & Fuchman, 2020). Indeed, when

leadership turnover happens, fear is so often part of the process that narcissistically inclined leaders come to seem more desirable than circumstances warrant (Grzesiak, 2023). As Lasch (2002) argues in a classic text, the narcissist thrives in a climate where people hunger “not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being . . . the ‘psychological man’ of the twentieth century seeks neither individual self-aggrandizement nor spiritual transcendence but peace of mind, under conditions that increasingly militate against it” (pp. 7, 13). Leaders who promise safety, even implicitly, rarely escape a feedback loop in which people submit to their authority based on that promise, only to find that they are bound by ever-increasing “anxiety, uncertainty, restless dissatisfaction” as safety comes to feel more like domination (Lasch, 2002, p. 181). The idea of the institution of higher education creates a space, perhaps more friendly than any other, for a leader to rise up, impose a vision, and see it replicated across an institution. However, forged without an awareness of the ways that institutional culture tends to work on the individuals within it, a leader’s vision may well end up replicating the very dysfunctions he intends to remedy.

How then can a leader within institutional higher education proceed? Martin Buber (1958) draws a clear distinction between the individual understood as an “I” or a “thou”—a person viewed by another as a fully forged being with agency and personhood—and an “it,” which is an individual who experiences and uses the world, and who coordinates with others but does not allow himself to come into being in relation to those others. Institutionalized higher education will tend, of course, to produce individuals who function as “its”: individuals who view the world and other people in an instrumental function and who are themselves treated as such by the collectives within which they operate. Pace Buber, “The development of the function of experiencing and using comes about mostly through decrease of man’s power to enter into relation. . . . Taking his stand in the shelter of the primary word of separation, which holds off the *I* and *It* from one another, he has divided his life with his fellow-men into two tidily circled-off provinces, one of institutions and the other of feelings—the province of *It* and the province of *I*” (p 43). Yet through relationships, what Buber calls “relational events” (p. 33), an institutionalized “it” can become an “I” addressing a “thou.” The “I” of personhood, Buber argues, relies on relationships, while

individuality relies on differentiation, the very undergirding of the capitalist marketplace, in which each must find a way to be fitter than the competition. For Buber, the key to building relationship in an otherwise institutionalized context is neither making space for people to feel things for another, nor for each individual to define and claim a space that belongs to them alone, but for all to find a common center and establish personal, unique relations through it. A leader within the institution of higher education, then, would do well not to promise to assuage fears or to cast a new vision that will bring safety to all, but rather to lean into core values and principles, not only so those within their sphere of influence will internalize them but also so that through them, relationships—and people—might grow.

The Marketplace of Higher Education

A final—and heavily dominant—model of understanding higher education revolves around the idea of the marketplace, of higher ed as a company hawking a product line. A recent *Forbes* article asks the question directly: If colleges are businesses, why not run them that way? (Rosowsky, 2020). As Rosowsky rightly notes, the very idea of a college as a business whose chief product is education runs contrary to many old and deep-seated ideas about the nobility of intellectual labor, the value of study for its own sake, the importance of education for the common good, and so on. Yet financial exigencies cannot simply be ignored: students must be recruited, and the means by which campuses do this typically look much more like corporate advertising than Athenian public square rhetoric. Still, the idea of the higher educational marketplace runs far deeper than acknowledging that schools, like businesses, do indeed engage in marketing. Instead, it involves the full-on embrace of the idea on a variety of levels, from the ways campuses sell themselves to potential students and their families, to the ways they self-narrate their own identity, to the ways that branded imagery, rather than lived experience, comes to define what membership in the higher educational community means.

Each of these manifestations of the higher educational marketplace includes as part of its *modus operandi* a variety of strategies that philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994) might classify as "simulation" or the "hyperreal," in which an idea of something (in this case higher education) is conjured

without clear referent to anything (a campus, perhaps) in particular, or in which a map to a student experience or degree credential is drawn before the territory to which is ostensibly refers is known, or even exists (p. 1). Examples of this within the marketplace of higher education include the semi-standard recruitment materials produced by firms such as EAB, which follow a template and which, outside of the presence of quotations and facts supplied by individual campuses, colorful branding, and logos, resemble one another to a remarkable degree. It is a map with a territory imposed on it, rather than a real reflection of a real campus. Other standard recruitment mechanisms such as the virtual tour and chatbots that answer student questions also use images and pre-determined text to mediate the prospective student's engagement with the campus. Campuses themselves need not be involved at all, in fact, as matching services such as Naviance and CollegeVine do the work of recruiting students based on information uploaded into a templated profile, and lists promising the "top 10 online MBAs" reflect not objective measures of quality but advertising dollars at work.

Leaders functioning within the higher education marketplace might define themselves as image-makers or branding strategists whose chief tasks are to solidify and disseminate the imagery and talking points that call into being the desired image of the campus. The president of an institution such as Notre Dame or Harvard may find that task already partially accomplished because of the strong and entrenched brand of the college; at the same time, they may struggle to add new talking points or to broaden the messaging. Yet brand leadership goes well beyond the President's talking points and is evident at all levels of an institution, including the front desk greeting at the financial aid office, the things the crowd chants at basketball games, the branding of the LMS, and the size of the touchtone menu a student must navigate to speak to a human. Indeed, once a campus's image culture has reached a saturation point, human relationships outside the reality they create become increasingly difficult (Debord 1967/1995), and people mediate their interactions with each other via the spectacle. Thus, leaders at all levels must assure that their institution's brand is not simply a dialed-in set of catch phrases or logos, and that the experience of a campus amounts to more than a series of movements through pre-determined workflows, as people who are overexposed to "manufactured illusions" tend to disengage from whatever is in front of them—

even if that is reality itself (Lasch, 1978, p. 87). Once a barrage of such images is launched, they will define the ways that people treat one another.

Debord's warning about what happens when a society of any sort, including a higher ed space, becomes so image-bound that it runs more by spectacle than by other means reads to a great extent like the reality in which so many of us now live. As images define our reality, we increasingly rely on them to tell us what we want and need; over the long term, we eventually lose touch with our actual wants and needs, and we exist only to the extent that we can use images to represent ourselves to ourselves. It is Marxist commodity fetishism taken to the next level: not only do we need to acquire commodities to communicate our sense of identity, but we lack a sense of ourselves to begin with outside of the imagery such commodities provide us. To take a simple example: in a society functioning outside of images and spectacle, a person choosing a restaurant might ponder what sort of meal sounds good—what does their body want to eat? Within a society of the spectacle, however, a person choosing a restaurant would consider factors such as how Instagram-worthy the dinner might be, whether the overall ethos of the restaurant aligns with their chosen self-brand, and whether the restaurant is the sort of thing that would increase their social capital. The food they subsequently consume at that restaurant will not fully exist when it enters their stomach; rather, it must be posted to social media and validated by comments from connections before the full extent of their hunger is satisfied. While this example, though simple, may seem a bit imbalanced, it does not lie so far afield from those moments when, for example, a student who has earned a degree entirely online arrives at a physical campus for commencement exercises and immediately feels at home, or when a freshman attending orientation tears up during the first playing of the college's *alma mater*. Image and idea create an imagined feeling of historical heft that, in turn, writes itself into the life stories of those living in the spectacle.

Today, the society of the spectacle shows up most obviously in the complex codes of identity politics that operate in nearly any higher education space, where images and identity-signifying tokens, many of them beyond the control of any individual campus, define and mediate the way real life plays out. For instance, and as noted above, at Houghton College, two residence-life staff members included

their preferred pronouns in their email signatures and were subsequently terminated (Zahneis, 2023). On the other end of the political spectrum, a conservative writer and podcaster was shouted down by students at SUNY Albany who disagreed with his stance on transgender people. What the protest meant was itself open to debate, with the protestors saying it was a "joyous moment" in support of trans students but videos of the protest itself showing a more aggressive-seeming display, including profanity and *ad hominem* attacks (Alonso, 2023). What does a pronoun mean? What does a protest phrase mean? In campus-as-spectacle, a pronoun is far less a part of speech, and a protest phrase far less a statement of ideological difference, than a flag to identify an "us" and a "them." Forgas and Crano (2021) see identity politics of this sort as both an heir of Marxist commodification and evidence of the decline of Enlightenment values and priorities, such as liberal discourse, reason, and individual autonomy. When fully and unquestioningly embraced, Forgas and Crano further argue, the higher ed space as spectacle encourages tribal models of self- and group-definition, including shared anger, fear, and grievance-hoarding; practices such as authoritarianism and ethnocentrism; and a devotion to simplistic propaganda that seems to offer certainty in a time of doubt and confusion. It makes the world navigable by oversimplifying it as a simple series of "us versus them" contrasts. In the spectacle-bound higher educational system, then, a leader who wants to make a positive difference must find a way to recover a sense of identity and community that both exists outside of and plays a role in managing image.

How might this be accomplished? While there is no failsafe solution, making room for events and moments that, as much as possible, downplay the role of imagery in mediating relationships can help; these might include service projects that bring together disparate groups of people in support of a shared interest, phone-free spaces for conversation, and community talk-back sessions on topics that are not already highly political or divisive. In addition, Kohn (1992) argues, caring and generosity might be discussed publicly as core human motivations that can lead to meaningful action. Engaging in practices that display a general respect for humanity, outside of any virtue-signaling, can be a powerful illustration. Careful listening, giving and receiving meaningful gifts, and sharing delight and appreciation with and for others can forge a path towards real friendship, which helps us to find our humanity again by making a

space for shared vulnerability and healing (Bondi, 1991). Practically as well, leaders who do what they can to avoid blind participation in moments of virtue signaling, who eschew public shaming based on uncritical interpretation of identity tokens, and who practice meaningful ideological exchange, model the rules of appreciative civil discourse, and show ways to work alongside of—and even love and appreciate—those with whom they disagree. These leaders can do much to assure that the marketplace of higher education does not undo the humanity of those within it. To the extent that this sort of gesture can be made away from cameras and without the intended end of social media virality, so much the better.

The Leader's Selfhood

Each of these metaphors for higher education—ecosystem, culture, machine, institution, marketplace—acts on the individuals within them in certain ways, as we have seen thus far. All, however, have in common their understanding of the role of the individual within the collective: less a single, unified self than a part of a system that mediates relationship via various mechanisms that assign or remove power based on value criteria within the system. If in ecosystemic higher education a leader adapts well, they are likely both to survive and to thrive; if in a machine-like higher education system the leader proves to be a useful tool, a strategic engineer, or an efficient operator, they are likely to be promoted; and if in a higher educational marketplace a leader wisely deploys their image in such a way as to increase their cultural capital, that individual is likely to seem highly desirable. Each of these systems could be read as a game with winners and losers, with the winners collecting assets (salary and perks, more responsibility, or increased access to the corridors of power) according to the system's value hierarchy. But—it is worth asking—where does the person of the leader land after "winning" in any of these systems? A significant percentage of leaders who enter the higher educational space do so because they hold certain high ideals (the potential of education to improve the lives of students, for example), love their students and want to assure they have a good experience, or strongly value the process of personal development they underwent during their own formative years. Leadership is not, for so many of them, a selfish undertaking, and they play power games only insofar as they are needed to be effective in

their roles. Yet these games come at a cost: often the individuality of the people within the systems the leaders dominate. Might we imagine an approach to leadership that allows the leader to operate out of their core self and that preserves intact the unique selfhood of the individuals within the higher educational system?

Such a humanized and humanizing approach to leadership might go by any number of names: relationship, love, ethics, altruism, or even—fittingly—education. The Greek root of the word "educate" also grounds our English words "ductile" and "ductwork," both of which have to do with drawing things out, or moving things from one place to another. To educate is not to impose or to systematize but to call forth, or to mobilize. At its core, effective and ethical educational leadership must grant the point that people exist to each other not as instruments to be put to use but as independent centers of worth (Post, Underwood, Schloss, & Hurlbut, 2002). This concept finds solid grounding in the work of a number of well-known philosophers. Levinas (1969), following Husserl and Heidegger, for example, argues that ethics originates in the relationship between two people, when one realizes that the other is very different from himself; Ricoeur (1992), similarly, defines moral agency as a tension between sameness and difference, self and other.[ix] Both Levinas' and Ricoeur's thought grew from phenomenological and hermeneutic roots, so their keen awareness of the importance of individual experience and interpretation as a guide to action informs their theories.

Similarly—though more pithily—Murdoch (1970/1996) calls this sort of "knowledge of the individual," the basis of ethical behavior in Levinas' and Ricoeur's thought, by an oft-abused term: "love" (p. 28). Murdoch uses "love" to refer not to warm, fuzzy knee-weakness or even companionable friendship but rather to the interior motivations that lead us to pay attention to another as an-other, someone different from ourselves. For Murdoch, choosing to what (or whom) we attend to changes the possibilities within which we can act, for we can only choose among the options that we can see: "One is often compelled almost automatically by what one *can* see. . . . if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up the structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is

already over" (p. 37). In this logic, we have freedom to act, but that freedom is exercised more in the thousand small instances in which we direct our gaze to one thing or another than in some moment of visionary and disruptive leadership. To love another is to use our freedom to see that person clearly.

A leader in a higher ed environment may well be able to see clearly the inner circle with whom they share most of their time—a cabinet, for instance, and some select friends and advisers. On a small campus, leaders in any number of offices can likely choose to see clearly both those with whom they work on a daily basis and another small group who offer a difference experience of the world. Yet on a campus of tens of thousands, knowing how and when to listen can prove challenging. George Eliot, in a poetic passage in her realist masterpiece *Middlemarch* (1872/1994), describes the human need for selective hearing in this way: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence" (p. 194). There are simply too many other people to attend to all of them equally. Nouwen (1975/1990) offers counsel on the process of selecting effectively how and when to pay attention to another: it results, he says, from our decision to work on our own humanity. The steps he suggests include learning to be alone (as opposed to lonely), owning and experiencing our own pain in order to have solidarity with others who suffer, and learning to anticipate the "gift" that guests may bring with them when they enter our space or our attention (p. 44), all of which together will poise us to notice the important things and let ephemera pass us by. These steps also give us the confidence we need to balance receptivity with hospitality: a setting of clear boundaries that allow each person to define their own position vis-à-vis the leader or host, who takes on the task of serving as a "point of orientation and a frame of reference" (p. 71). Human action undertaken from this point of view will welcome and calm the "fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion, always expecting an enemy to suddenly appear, to intrude and do harm" (Nouwen, 1975/1990, pp. 43-44). It will, in short, make a space for identity beyond those defended by tribalist confrontations, instead making it possible for people to imagine an "outside" to the system they occupy.

Within each of the systemic metaphors discussed above, leaders must find ways to make a space for the individual selves within the system, even if those selves do not always serve the needs of the whole. In so doing, of course, leaders acknowledge that though the system may be a fact of life, there are spaces outside of it, and it does not define the whole of a person's reality, worth, or contribution. For example, while a leader may behave altruistically because they identify strongly with their team or because they equate their team's interest with their own, such behavior is unstable, in that it depends on constant identifications of likeness between the leader and those surrounding them. Instead, a more stable means of creating an altruistic workspace, one that allows the "me" of the leaders and the entire team, as well as the "we" of the organization to exist freely, is to focus on identifying ways in which selves within the team are differentiated (Jarymowicz, 1992). This may include going through a series of self-reflective exercises such as Enneagram, Meyers-Briggs, or StrengthsFinder inventories, or it may be less formal—a conversation in which leaders and team members reflect on their points of commitment and relationship to one another, to the group, and to the higher educational space they share, while also articulating the existence of spaces outside of those points of connection. Relationships and alliances tend to fall along two lines: attachments, which are interpersonal commitments that involve practices such as bonding and caretaking, and inclusions, which are deliberate and not necessarily emotionally significant behaviors such as networking and conversing reasonably (Oliner & Liner, 1992). This approach to leadership, one that requires "sophisticated perspective-taking" and deep self-awareness (Van Hesteren, 1992, p. 173) allows colleagues to choose to relate to one another in a variety of ways, many of which exceed, or simply ignore, the post-industrial, self-interested logic of the metaphorical systems within which they work (Osiatynski, 1992).

As intuitive as it may seem, taking an approach such as this to leadership calls into question both the logic and functional terminology underlying the common post-industrial ways we understand higher education today. In fact, the language and framework for this sort of shift must be found not in post-Marxist philosophy but in moral and developmental psychology. Kohlberg's stages of moral development offer a useful framework in which to understand the moral and ethical implications of each common

higher ed metaphor, as well as how one might imagine models of leadership that behave differently. The Darwinian behavior of individuals in an ecosystemic higher education environment would fall in Pre-conventional Stage 2 (Self-Interest), for instance, while the higher ed culture and institutional metaphors belong respectively to Stages 3 (Interpersonal Accord and Conformity) and 4 (Authority and Maintaining Social Order). While Kohlberg was never able to find empirical evidence for his sixth stage (Principled Conscience), it—and the *agape*-based seventh stage (Justice) about which he merely hypothesized—clearly point to the models of leadership that might inform a more morally advanced system of higher education (Carter, 1986). Individuals in such a morally advanced system relate to each other as individuals, with particularities and freedom of choice rather than universalities and functional interaction determining their engagements, and they speak truthfully because they operate from a position of secure individuality (Seidler, 1992). This sort of system allows the leader to self-define and behave as the kind of person that they value (Van Hesteren, 1992): a neat feedback loop by which their own identity and individuality as a leader are solidified by their decision to treat others altruistically (Osiatynski, 1992).

The concepts that underlie this approach to leadership—sympathy and empathy most obviously—were first discussed in earnest by the likes of David Hume and Adam Smith in the eighteenth century in no small part as a corrective to the abuses that had the potential to occur with widespread adoption of the idea of the *homo economicus*, or the equation of identity with economic activity. Smith was in a particular position to understand this, as of course, his *Wealth of Nations* was the fundamental text for free market economic theory; with Hume, though, Smith also acts as a forerunner of today's moral psychologists. Both Hume and Smith describe the mental and emotional disciplines of willful sympathy and empathy as means by which individuals can, through deliberate acts of imagination, pay more attention to the suffering and experiences of others (Wispé, 1986), thus leading to a more harmonious and peaceful social whole. For both Hume and Smith, the idea of the whole, the collective, is key: we do not sympathize willy-nilly, imaginatively putting ourselves in others' places simply for the sport of it; rather, we do this as a means to understand how others relate to the ideas and structures that frame and motivate us—mission, purpose, and core values, for instance—in order to work together more effectively. This is not an

easy or fluid process: one cannot simply imagine oneself in another's place without introducing a high degree of inaccuracy, unfairness, or even quiet prejudice. Gilligan (1982/1993) notes, for instance, that when men and women speak of themselves, ostensibly as individuals, what they mean by "self" typically differs significantly, with men tending to imagine their experience as akin to that of most of humanity and women often negating their voice, desires, and experiences when they use the "I." Males, similarly, tend to reason in value hierarchies while women reason in networks; men tend to describe moral problems in legal or rule-bound ways, while women tend to describe them as "conflicting responsibilities." However, even making the gesture of attempting to understand another, albeit imperfectly, represents a step toward achieving our organizational missions in a way that is likely to have long-term impact.

Leadership in Action

A leader in the higher educational space who chooses hospitably and altruistically to welcome, pay attention to, and work for the good of those they lead takes a radical stance, working "to overturn the way things are but shouldn't be" (Smith, 2018, p. 75). In the same way that the promise of a warm welcome, a vibrant conversation, and a shared cup of coffee can turn any dingy apartment into a desirable meeting spot, so also can a leader who works to create beauty in the way that those under their authority treat one another, relate to their roles, and embrace the system in which they work create a sense of safety, mutual support, and sharing in which individuals thrive. Kofman and Senge (1993) describe such spaces as "learning organizations," with three key characteristics defining them: (1) core values such as love, wonder, humility, and compassion (as opposed to values such as efficiency, productivity, and profitability); (2) practices that encourage productive conversation and coordinated action across silos (as opposed to competitive or isolating behavior); and (3) deliberate attention to the way the whole system works (as opposed to over-focus on individual's expertise or mastery of their own tasks). The key to effective—and ethical—leadership within any of the metaphorical realities by which higher education understands itself is to embrace the idea of system with all its moving parts, checks and balances, and intricately woven processes, in order to, as much as possible, orient its practices around desirable and

communally minded core values. Such an approach, which privileges learning over already knowing and growth over attainment, will position higher education to be more nimble as we move into an increasingly difficult future.

How might this look in practice? On a campus that understands itself as an ecosystem, a leader must communicate frequently and thoroughly about what it would mean for those within the system to thrive: what will it look like if the whole campus is operating at an optimum balance point? In cases where some areas may have to give up some resources to assure the health of others, for instance, a leader will do well to explain the reasoning behind their decisions, and, as much as possible, invite those who have to sacrifice to participate in the rewards that will come. The leader in such a system will spend a good deal of time focusing on boundaries, on resource distribution, and on territory management; they must understand themselves as the "point of orientation and a frame of reference" (Nouwen, 1975/1990, p. 71) rather than one of the competitors for resources. Beyond this, while the ecosystemic higher educational space will never be free from conflict, such conflicts should be, as much as possible, used to help individual parties understand how the system as a whole works, rather than to validate individual assertions of territory-marking. An even better version of this might end with conflict leading not to resentment but to cross-silo collaboration, resource-sharing, and mutually enforcing actions.

On campuses that understand themselves as cultures, leaders must attend to all the moments where unconscious or internalized processes, language, assumptions, and patterns shape the ways in which all the individuals therein live together and interrelate. They must take time to bring to the surface the invisible factors that define the "us" that constitutes the campus's sense of its own identity: they must articulate the "way things are." For Murdoch (1970/1996), these shared symbol sets make it possible for people to live together. A person driving a car, for instance, needs to stop at a red light each and every time one is encountered, or chaos will ensue as basic "togetherness" rules cease to apply consistently. On any campus that sees itself as a culture, a leader who wants to be effective must learn the rules by which someone announces himself to be part of the "us." These include small-scale knowledge points such as knowing how to respond to in-group jokes or repeated phrases; a leader at Ohio State, for instance, would

not fare well if they did not know to respond to the common greeting "O-H" with "I-O." They also include larger ones, such as the political and personal implications of naming the library after a major donor who once feuded with the state governor or cutting down a beloved campus tree under which innumerable couples have gotten engaged. At the same time, as Murdoch notes, shared symbol sets take on their real force in culture as, over time, we come to live out their significance personally. Stop lights matter most to those who have seen others run them—with negative consequences. The "I-O" response matters most when you shout it in a restaurant in Prague in response to a stranger who called out because he saw you wearing a scarlet and grey football shirt. Even if the leader understands that the "plight your troth" tree must be cut down because it is diseased and poses a risk of falling, if they are culturally adept, they will make space for that tree to be mourned and celebrated. They will function both as thinkers and feelers—leaders aware of the emotional heft of the work of identification and group-formation that higher ed cultures do.

By contrast, though not unrelated, on a campus that understands itself as a machine or a factory, leaders must commit time and energy to understand and, as needed, mitigate the consequences of the ways that the machinery of the campus is deployed to produce the many outputs of the campus. Schein's (2016) famous three-level model of organizational culture applies here. The sky, which represents the espoused values of the organization, meets the surface or land, which are the cultural artifacts or the "real things" of the campus's machinery, which overlays those things beneath the surface, or the tacit assumptions those within the organization hold. A machine-like campus will tend to operate mainly on the level of surface, attending to and constantly reconfiguring the concrete work that each part of the campus does. A leader must thus take the time to address the ways in which espoused values and tacit assumptions shape that concrete reality in light of the larger "product" the campus hopes to launch into the world. For example, a matter as apparently niggling as a policy around whether faculty may freely choose third-party software for their courseware adoptions may have repercussions for other parts of the product line. If the desired third-party interface does not integrate with the LMS, for instance, will IT be able to extract necessary data from it (and, to be fair, does it matter)? If this sort of courseware adoption

were to happen in a significant percentage of courses campus-wide, would that have a positive, negative, or neutral effect on the student experience in the LMS (and again, does it matter)? By contrast, if the leader were to say that third-party software must have full integration with the LMS in order to preserve data integrity and maintain a consistent student experience, what are the consequences for faculty academic freedom? For Schein and Schein (2016), the work of a leader in this sort of place will have to do with building consensus around broad categories like mission and goals, processes and metrics, terminology and conceptual understandings, and ownership/authority issues, rather than simply adjusting and readjusting concrete processes and procedures. In a factory, surface-level process and procedure always reflect assumptions and goals that need to be articulated.

Leaders working in higher ed settings that see themselves first as institutions must be constantly aware of the ways in which self and system intertwine. Institutional higher ed will typically focus on making sure that individuals understand and comply with the ways that the system operates, and it will in turn reproduce itself as that individual internalizes the rules of the game. Too easily, of course, institutional higher ed might garner such compliance by tactics of fear and shaming. A leader working in such a system, however, might introduce other means by which the institutional machinery might function, including taking a posture toward non-compliance that seems more like teaching or mentorship than rejection or shame. In systems where people feel as though they are highly regarded, Murray (2008) shows, moments of correction will actually cause them to draw closer rather than pull away. Indeed, a leader who can encourage individuals within institutional higher education to see themselves as active participants in the shaping and maintaining of the institution will find that they can create a sort of synergy between the individual and the system. The true horror, Buber (1958) notes, is in thinking that there is no balance between the “in here” and the “out there,” or the self and the system. For example, then, a leader in institutional higher education may want to encourage and take seriously forms of participatory governance such as student government and faculty senate. They may also want to encourage individuals within the institution to create formal mechanisms of engagement, including new organizations, events, and dedicated spaces. Above all else, though, the leader should ask hard questions

about whether the rules and norms the institution enforces embody the mission and stated values of the campus; a campus that says it values free inquiry, for instance, ought to be deliberate about assuring that it goes on, even when it is unpopular or out of line with the trends in campus culture. Similarly, a leader looking to shift their campus in some key way—introducing an emphasis on STEM, for instance, or offering more virtual degree programs—ought to make sure that the structures of reward and correction in the institution align with this directional shift.

Finally, a leader within a higher educational space that understands itself as a marketplace can function best by casting a clear vision that can become a "mental model" to which people can commit (Senge, 1990); that is, they can advertise a "product" that they want to sell. Doing this requires continual communication of a vision of a desirable campus within which people can see themselves. Of course, adopting a new vision will require that individuals within the leader's particular higher ed marketplace leave behind certain other versions of their self-definition, including the idea of the self as position (e.g., I am a tenured professor of computer science; I am a financial aid middle manager), as a reactor (e.g., I am a traditionalist, and I believe everything is worse now that we have online learning), or as a not-something-else (e.g., I am committed to our campus because it is not a big, impersonal flagship). If the idea of a marketplace is that the self is both projected into and located in relation to image systems, then the leader who calls individuals into a place of better selfhood by showing them a picture of what could be will likely prove to be an effective in implementing that vision. At the same time, this vision, if it comes from a place of altruism, ought not to be cast in a cynical or manipulative fashion that suggests the vision will be in everyone's self-interests (Grant, 2001) or that it can define the self to a greater degree that it truly can—or even should. Rather, the vision should become something around which individuals can arrange themselves; it becomes a way for each person to see their part in the system and, in so doing, find ways to recognize the worth of the parts others play as well. Instead of creating a homogeneous and unidimensional product, the ethical leader in the higher ed marketplace uses marketing tactics to help individuals relate to each other as legitimate beings—the diverse and infinitely valuable "Thous" of Martin Buber (Kofman & Senge, 1993).

No leader can operate outside the metaphors that describe and shape the higher educational system in which they operate; neither should they necessarily try to do so. At the same time, leaders who want to make a positive difference for the people within the organization, who want the missional end-game of the organization (student success, teaching and learning, civic impact, etc.) to be something worth playing for, and who want their organization to run smoothly according to its own logic can adopt certain behaviors that encourage the good within each metaphoric system, while protecting against its dangers. Healthy higher ed spaces ought to feel hospitable rather than punishing, and the posture of those within them ought to be altruistic rather than self-interested. The way that each leader creates that culture within their area of responsibility, however, will vary greatly by individual. A middle manager in residence life may need to reckon with the strain their staff feels because of extended "on call" hours, management of increasing levels of student anxiety and depression, and the long-term effects of COVID-19 on social life. A junior manager in admissions and recruitment may struggle with their own identity as a leader, having been promoted to the role at the age of 24, and may need to first learn to read the system before they can make any real progress. For such a leader—as for leaders at all levels, really—mentorship is key to successfully learning to understand and navigate the culture. It is key as well in giving leaders permission to extend the same hospitable and altruistic attitudes to themselves and their own challenges that they extend to others. Indeed, a leader who can create a system in which they themselves want to operate has done a great deal toward undoing the potential of higher educational approaches to do harm rather than the good they ultimately seek.

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[ii] See Hoopes, L. (2021, September 9) and Lauer, D. (2019, September 11).
[iii] See Zahneis, M. (2023, April 26).
[iv] See Lubet, S. (2022, October 12).
[v] See Nietzel, M. (2023, April 6).
[vi] See https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/scholars-under-fire
[vii] See Foucault, M. (1975/1995)..
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