

Transforming of Educational Institutions after GATS – Consequences in Social Relations as Corporation, Competition and State Regulation

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Abstract:

This article presents aspects of the regulatory reform work in public sectors was guided by the OECD in the 1990's manifested in GATS (1995) strategically planned by and through the Bologna Process and eagerly elaborated by boards and power holders of universities and university colleges. The tendency is privatisation which has as a consequence an increasing extension of hierarchical structures, standardisation and specialisation of educational institutions inclusive universities. Several contradictory issues appeared in the period. The balancing of demand and supply of the workforce is the foundation of education, care, social work and health and as such the education of and jobs as teachers, kindergarten teachers, social workers and nurses.

The financial crisis caused by practising the ideology of the free market and mainly regulated by contracting demands new critical reflexion about the relations between public and private finance and public and private supply on education and practise. Contradictions are sharpened by the crisis. The principle of performance-related budgeting and the mix of private and public financing is a key issue. Educational policies following the WTO agreement (GATS) lead to instrumental standardization of content, form and quantity in subject matters. This forms a kind of infrastructural alienation. Strategic goals transfer (educational) responsibilities from the state (the public) to the individual (the private) constructing the crossroad between “state education” and “market education”.

The global financial crisis impacts conditions and options for regulatory reforms on structure and function of educational sectors in modern capitalist societies. Our effort is to point out possible spaces and moments where the public democratically might challenge the hegemonic tendency with a struggle for empowerment, democratic participation and emancipation.

Keywords: Education, context, capitalism, ECTS, alienation, emancipation, empowering, democratisation

Context and key concepts

In our analysis we refer to context in the three different connotations: the horizontal, the vertical and the reflexive context. The horizontal context is about the contemporary structure and function; about economy, about hierarchical power and functioning ideology and about regulations and legislation. In the horizontal context the thematic will be the professions' collective experience and general knowledge versus the tendency of standardisation and specialization, rehabilitation (lifelong education) and the impact on agencies and agents embedded in educational praxis.

The vertical context is dealing with the same, but concerned about the biographic and historical development imbedded in societal changes in this case the educational institutions. The example will be standardised regulatory changes in economy, structure and function.

The reflexive context is about the themes or issues imbedded in relevant discourses which set the boundaries for what and how items can be discussed and what is not on the agenda. In the discursive context the thematic will be challenged by theories on alienating governance focusing on the loss of influence and the structural based alienation, corporation versus a revitalised democratic approach.

The distinction between the three contexts is helpful designing the investigation of economy, politics, the structure and function, and the issues of power and hegemony on education. Mills (1959) recommends to shuttle between intimate relations and the influence of global agencies. The trip is directed by our research interests, i.e. the contradiction between democratic education and the hegemony of WHO's General Agreement on Trade in Service. Our shuttle starts from the sociological micro level which is about how the individuals bodily adapt, but also reflect and interact in a relatively autonomous way according to the subject matter and the different social settings. And as the trip goes on one constructs a preliminary understanding and gradually a more conscious knowledge and praxis about conditions and options are reflected and unfolded in the biographies. The meso level is about how structural clusters are woven of legal, economic and institutional strings knitted together in patterns regulating the general behaviour of the public. Norm settings and standards are formed when hegemonic ideas about competition and market cross the individual life story. Dealing with the macro level is the investigation of how global agencies guide and regulate the frames of political, economic, structural and functional options at the meso level. Norm setting and

standards are realized with respect to private ownership of means of production and thus limiting democratic and individual influences.

The political-economy of knowledge production

During the 20th Century the realization of “endless” accumulation of capital had impact on the education system in Western societies changing the interrelation and thinking about “form and content”. This aspect is illustrated by the relation between the mode of production and the mode of educational praxis. Changing modes in production also entail a change in teaching practice.

According to Philip Wexler (1999) the Fordistic “Factory-School” was replaced by the Toyota-School. Wexler draws attention to the new corporatism caused by the ‘New American School’^[1] which increases the degree of enactments in the education system promoting the standardization of results, the measurement of “pedagogical products” and quality control.

The Toyota model is corporative team work dedicated to best performance of standardized procedures and products controlled and measured by quality standards. It is a “high efficient school” managed and conducted by “new-collar”-leaders. Wexler (1999, p. 37) argues that the “new knowledge” communicated in the school system is limited by a narrow instrumental frame within which the fields of innovation, originality and social reflection is restricted. “New knowledge” is reduced and limited to a “handing over” the solutions of practical problems based on tasks and aims of the workplace and its task-relatedness.

“New-knowledge” leads to superficial knowledge and becomes a hindrance for the development of cultural resources and even the actual realization of cultural resources (Bildung). “Toyota-skills” neglect – maybe destroy – the ability to reflect critically in a (relative) autonomous and reflexive-contextual way. Critique and contextual reflection are simply not on the agenda. Workplace related schooling demands teachers to be professional instructors, team leaders and salesmen without distraction from horizontal, vertical or reflexive context, nor the teachers' general concern about the subject matter and the students. The Toyota education separates education from the function of active democratic citizenship education and the mastering of aspects of life outside the factory while it is out of the concern or at least play a minor role for the

[1] The New American School is initiated by the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC). By the means of education decrees standardization of results and educational products are measured in the framework of “quality measurement”. (Wexler, 1999, p. 37)

interest of the owners of the means of production. Political concern is transformed into the execution of economic power. And the “liberation” from "expensive and ineffective" state institutions of education (ideological state apparatus)^[2] is organized by new managers implementing the effective use of capital and other resources legitimized by international agreements. The possible global political action is reduced to the decision of joining or not joining the WTO.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) suggests that specific forms of capital, social and cultural capital, can be exchanged into symbolic capital (status and recognition). Wesley Shumar (1997, p. 39) writes that the former public sector of non-profit institutions (organizations of higher education) are restructured to profit-making institutions by adopting the profit-making structure of industries. Shumar develops a theory of regimes of accumulation which are not just aimed to increase capital. The core is the socialization of workforce and the strengthening of consumerism, i.e. disciplining the workforce. The new aims of profitability of flexible accumulation – the priority of financial speculation – created and expanded new arenas, the public sectors like "schools, healthcare, government, [which] find ways to be profitable themselves, that is, to act like businesses (...) the metaphor of the market became more than a metaphor and extended the range of the market” (Shumar, 1997, p. 82).

Profit – the mystified form of surplus value – is still the primary aim. With respect to flexible accumulation university colleges and universities are like all other social segments related to surplus production, i.e. to meet the demand of workforce recruitment (human capital); to produce instrumental knowledge embodied in the work force ready to compete and be sold on the market. Stehr (1994, p. 110) claims that knowledge always has been treated and traded like a commodity. A significant change though can be observed in the relation of knowledge production and trade. The international agreements are about commodification of education and knowledge. The participating countries agreed to provide classified and standardized segments: primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, higher education and adult lifelong education and other forms of training services. The UNESCO describes the options and perspective in this way: “Trade in higher education is a million dollar business. The demand for higher education, on the one side, is growing, while on the other side, trans-border education (e.g. private or for-profit higher foreign university campuses, IT Academies, twinning arrangements with other universities, corporate universities, virtual universities,

^[2] Althusser, L. (1970), 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. In his Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays, (pp 127-186). New York, London: Monthly Review Press.

open universities, e-universities etc.) is increasing. The capacity of the public sector has not kept up with this demand. This coupled with the recent developments of ICTs and the ensuing growth in online learning has resulted in the creation of this very lucrative market.” (Knight, 2002, p. 3)

The market logic forces national governments to stimulate and enhance privatization and competition in educational institutions by regulating agents to become market competitors. Shumar (1997, p. 94) describes this development in the USA and claims: “State universities to survive must both seek corporate research partner-ships and prove that they are vital to an economy of the area, and they must also rationalize their faculties, departments and curriculums. Private universities have to sell a product and it must be a product that people desire, if not high prestige then a program of skill that serves a special niche market”.

Shumar (1997, p. 151) describes the process: "In this way, mass-culture, upward mobility, the reification of cultural capital, and the commodification of education can be seen as interlinking processes." The GATS policy has a crucial leverage on planning and implementation of both the production of credentials in higher education and the realization of its market value. One important contradiction within the theoretical framework of the international agency OECD can be found comparing its understanding of personal key competences and the strategy for regulatory reform. The key competence is a compound of the following interacting components: the personal capacity to reflect and act independently; the capacity of interactive use of knowledge, skills, tools, technology and language about the subject matter in relation to the third component: interaction in heterogeneous groups. The problem is how to organize an educational institution or university in a manner as give the students and the employees work conditions allowing them to practice their key competences in the contemporary societal context. We have a problem to solve. It deals with the freedom of methods, the right to make judgements and the issue of trust versus control. One quote from the report (OECD, 2005, page 5) is helpful: "Reflectiveness involves not just the ability to apply routinely a formula or method for confronting a situation, but also the ability to deal with change, learn from experience and think and act with a critical stance."

Knowledge production: ECTS as an example

ECTS^[3] is both a goal and a mean counting the “value” of the student’s knowledge. A crucial question is how the values of educational credentials are established and why students buy them? Are they buying signifiers, commodity signs or use value? Shumar (1997, p. 23-24) proposes credentials to be circulated and exchanged for the value of their appearance, not for their substance. Knowledge can be exchanged and converted into capital in different forms. McLaren and Rikowski (2001, p. 6) continue the discussion (referring to Paula Allman) that material use values “are only available in the commodity form, and (...) use-value is internally related and thus inseparable from the exchange-value of the commodity, which is determined by labour-time. Shumar (1997: 63) adds to this point of view “that higher education had turned into a process of students buying degrees“.

Shortly the story runs like follows: Students in many countries pay to get access to invest their time (the personal workload) which after control of the quality of their work is exchanged to ECTS points. When the points are accumulated to a specific amount they become a credential – as hopefully once in the future – and give access to specific selected parts of the labour market.

ECTS is the international acknowledged degree currency. The individual performance is evaluated and expressed in marks, counting failures and neglects of the standardized curriculum. In this sense knowledge value is the time invested by the students as well as their performance evaluated on a specific level of institutional education.

The ideal type of student gets her certificate in shortest possible time, using less work hours of the professional staff and so makes the institution more effective and competitive on the market. The neoliberal structures constitute – directly or indirectly – the aims and content of the assimilation process of neo-liberal ideology and are neglecting the active citizen as such. The workload as the individual student invests in her personal studies is calculated in the ECTS. ECTS is pre-designed and defines scholarly work: to study, read, listen and learn, doing home work structured and practiced in a way as in traditional secondary schools and

[3] The ECTS Users’ Guide states explicitly that the credit is not determined or influenced by the content, but “ECTS credits are a numerical value (between 1 and 60) allocated to course units to describe the *student workload* required to complete them. They reflect the *quantity* of work each course unit requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at the institution that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, fieldwork, private study - in the library or at home - and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a *full student workload* and not limited to contact hours only”(European Commission, 1995, p. D-1).

high schools. The goals of university colleges and universities are to get students socialized to be capable to manage themselves to accumulate the “academic currency” as easy and effective as possible.

Some European countries offering higher education - so far without payment just a part of the welfare society - are now considering to introduce fees. They follow the advices on regulatory reforms using cost-benefit rationality regulating and disciplining all, academics as well as managerial agencies in higher education. Neither the personal curiosity nor the relevance for the society as such is any longer the core. The communication of content and quality of education is now more directly related to the institutional structure based on the logic of market, i.e. the establishment of competition in all institutions of higher education. The single lecture is often described in a model telling the content, the students learning outcome, materials and work forms. The issue is that alternative approaches are disappeared such as student’s influence, i.e. organizational participation. A profit accumulating organization has to manage cost-benefit, accounting and of course to minimize the expenditures, especially the amount of calculated work load. The consequence is a decrease and limitation of the professional staffs' control over their own jobs; this means a solution which is in absolute contrast to what is evident for most research about work environment: the influence and control of one's own work are the key point for personal satisfaction and a good work environment. We are returning to the fundamental struggle between democratization and structural alienation.

Academic issues are treated as if they can be fully solved using positivistic problem solving methods and behaviour. Once again the dialectic disappears and instrumentalism takes power. The “adequate” transformation of the Danish marking system can illustrate this issue. Former the top mark was given to students performing independent autonomous analysis expressing surprisingly new angles and originality. This mark is gone in the European standardization process. The European marking system is deficit oriented: counting the lack and failures according to the European competence key which is based on both intellectual and practical job-oriented skills.

This counting of lack and failure *presupposes* the knowledge of the job-related definitive answer. The reflections on social praxis not only become narrow-minded but neglect also the students' independent contribution to the subject matter. Marks are seldom a good solution,

but not to consider the appraisal of the students' independent contribution is neither wise nor promising for their participation in their future job. Adorno (1972, p.134) described the issue as a disappearance of "ungedechte Gedanken" (originality) because they are not contained, covered and protected by neither the new educational and scientific practise nor the educational policy.

The international competition and the research institutions are accountable for both institutional and individual rivalry among the academic staff. The external and internal competitions establish a double nature of the budget. Budgets depend on the institutional performance and the wages on individual performance. The disciplining of the academic staff is about the buyer's disposition of the intellectual worker's labour and "restricted to a *specific* labour and is *restricted in time*" (Marx, 1953, p. 193).

As the quote illustrates, we are dealing with the same issue as Marx already described in productive work. In higher education the use-value of intellectual work is transformed into exchange-value to the benefit of the institution. The surplus becomes part of the universities capital. The cage is well known, familiar. The capitalist obtains disposition over alienated labour. Even if at a first glance the labour of a craftsman or manual worker and the labour of an university teacher or researcher seems to be very different, the use of human labour and thus abstract labour is an immanent aspect of all of these forms of labour. What the worker sells is the disposition over his labour, her specific skills, time etc.¹ The production of the "educated" labour force mirrors the logic of profit producing enterprises and constructs alienated scientific work at all levels of higher education.

Commodification of knowledge

Nico Stehr (1994, p. 111-112) expresses "that almost anything may be sold as 'knowledge' as long as this group is successful in persuading clients that they in fact have use and a need for the knowledge controlled by a certain occupation and that this knowledge is superior to everyday knowledge, 'professional' knowledge takes on the typical attributes of the construct of 'property'. Knowledge becomes a commodity because the peculiar nature of the demand (as well as the needs it serves) and the strategies to meet the demand are fully controlled by those who offer the knowledge in question."

¹ We are shortening Marx's explanation in Grundrisse. (Marx, 1953, p 192-193) "Labour is not this or another labour, but *labour pure and simple*, abstract labour; absolutely indifferent to its particular *specificity* [*Bestimmtheit*], but capable of all specificities." (Marx, Grundrisse, p. 144).

Let's assume that knowledge is a commodity which fulfils the criteria of use value and exchange value. Without the fulfilment of this requirement educational qualifications would be without any substance, a sham. In our case the value is compounded by a certain number of ECTS points leading to certificate would only be a "signifier". The essential elements of the use value are only realized whilst being used by consumption or transformed to be a credit-voucher (the credential).

The use value of knowledge is consumed by the students for whom it is necessary to obtain "qualifications". The value of qualification has two forms, use and exchange value. The unbalanced relation between these two value forms turns the qualification into an illusion; it becomes a means to select and distribute the work force into positions in the field of service production, and thus to maintain the given structural hierarchical power.

The structural preconditions are introduced and outlined by the Bologna Declaration in which the interpretation is an expression of the standardization of tertiary and higher educational studies. The analysis of the structural reform shows how the rules of the game are legitimized. The process also creates the platform on which the competition between rival institutions takes place. The game is established and accepted by the participants. They also recognize the outcome as a "fair" impact on their future as looser and winners. Fair, because it is justified by the rules of the game and the market competition as the overall judgement. Managers and also the audience produce comments while they are watching the game and express their comments in the new public management language, like: competences, accountability, top performance etc. And so do the players. Our analysis indicates that the participants are not only victims. The innocence and virginity disappears: The acceptance of this hegemonic idea is in reality the legitimation of a one dimensional governance.

Knowledge and experiences

Whilst analysing the content and form in tertiary education very interesting issues arises. Although the general guidelines for education of the coming semi-professions are based on three perspectives: it has to be based on praxis, it has to be orientated towards development and related to research. So far we have found only a few convincing investigation or collection about what is the core of semi-professional work knowledge and work experiences and how it was researched. Ford would possibly never have been able to invent the assembly

line if he had neglected this kind of knowledge. We can find examples just enlightening parts and tendencies about semi-professions' behaviour. EURYDICE does this kind of research, so does UNESCO and the OECD. The administrative regulatory reforms underline quality control which is the checking of benchmarks either decided by the superior part in the institution or by outside controllers – not the employees experiences on own active interaction with the subject matter or with heterogeneous groups.

The issue is what is semi-profession's knowledge and experiences? And how are they collected and become a part of the education? The research carried out by the international agencies mentioned above is negating the actor as an actor, i.e turning the subject into an object. It is a classic research problem to neglect the immanent relation between both sides "an sich" and "für sich". In this way the new education reform from the beginning chooses to create its own blind spot. This one dimensional approach separates the students from their future colleagues whom they – as part of their course of study – have observed in their practice of failure and neglect.

The discourse

Let's turn the focus on the context of discourse. Foucault (1980, p. 93) argues that: ". . . in a society such as ours . . . there are manifold relations of power that permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse."

Danielsen (1998) analyses in "New Class, new speak" how management language not only influences the work force but penetrates the workplace' daily small talk. This new language becomes both empty and meaningful. It becomes empty when the notions are used in everyday life as small talk and full meaning when the agenda is formed technologically and with instrumentalist connotation.

Marcuse (1964)^[4] mentions in "The One-dimensional man": "One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and

^[4] <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odmcontents.html> the quote is from chapter one

monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations." Marcuse^[5] suggests: "that the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction. This identification is not illusion but reality". And he continues, "However, the reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation. The latter has become entirely objective; the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms. The achievements of progress defy ideological indictment as well as justification; before their tribunal, the 'false consciousness of their rationality becomes the true conscious'".

Jensen and Walker (2008b, p. 6) suggest about the public sector: "The alienation of the public sector work force is managed through three distinctive shifts in discourse – performativity, accountability and surveillance. The understanding of each of these contextual relations are giving a broader and fuller understanding of the societal and biographical meaning. The performativity discourse concerns the technologies to do with measuring how teachers execute their duties and is alienating because it separates the public sector worker from the purpose and the object of their work. The accountability discourse permits and prohibits the processes on school inspection is alienating because it is based upon mistrust of professional competence and disbelief in the efficacy of self-regulation. The discourse of surveillance shapes the technologies through which educational work is monitored and self-monitored and is alienating because it realizes a compulsion to conform. The ideology for contemporary educational purposes impact daily practices is filling performativity, accountability and surveillance/control with contextual relevance *and* is the alienating process. We use the concept 'structural alienation' to encompass those features of macro-sociological dynamics which are the foundations of social structures, such as global regulatory frameworks emanating from the OECD, which in application 'estrangle' individuals as they live their lives." The outcome of this false reduction, i.e. the operationalization of a complex problem into technical and procedural, is delimited without notice of the social and liberating interests. (Michel 2009)

What happens when agencies like OECD goes into the business of strategies for regulatory reforms and they are transformed to political issues? In 1997 OECD published a report on regulatory reform, which also is a strategic program guiding through economic, social and

^[5] <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/one-dimensional-man/ch01.htm> quote chapter 1

administrative regulatory devices. Of course economy is deeply imbedded in ideology talking about market, efficiency, competition etc. The social regulatory reforms are referring to health, security, environment and social cohesion. One part of the administrative regulatory reforms has a nick name, red stripes, which is about collecting information making invention possible towards the private citizens. The key sentence is to improve regulatory quality that is to enhance performance and cost effectiveness. In 2005 OECD published an evaluation and analysis about the development from 1997-2005. Several issues occur in the process of regulatory work. One is well-known as the need and supply of workforce. Traditionally two kinds of efforts are established to overcome the never existing balance between need and supply. One kind of course is to increase the production of qualified semi-professionals the other one is new divisions of work. But these two strategies are trapped by the discourse of privatisation, as got influence through the critique of the public sector in general and expressing mistrust to public sector workers. The OECD reports are all about systems and socialisation and not mentioning at all a single sentence about participation. Regulation is about disciplining, controlling the implementation of economic, social and administrative reforms as means for governance of the citizens' behaviour.

The guiding principles on contemporary regulatory reforms are all about economic, social and administrative regulations which are constructed for relative economic independent institutions, "relative economic independent" because in the EU countries the nation state offers most of the financing. The nation state also keeps the control and uses economy as the primitive incitement. Parts of the budget are performance related. The more successful students are the higher the budget will be. The university college is looked upon as an industrial plant delivering the parts demanded by the contract, which contains the frame of aims and means of the content, the economy, the organisational construction, i.e. means for the hierarchical distribution of power and personalised in the positions with strictly and precisely described privileges. The boards controlling the institution have the vote. The members of the board are appointed except for the minority the representatives for employees and students. The public sector as a whole is regulated by constructing pyramiding holding companies to hold a voting control. Through these constructions the EU principles of subsidiarity have given meaning to the new public management implementation. The consequence is that the phrase "accountability" becomes the expression for doing what you are expected to do, it becomes a synonym of obedience. The democratic struggle is fought

decades backwards using the corporate model emphasising the top down control instead of using democratic representation with the options of electing the board members.

A counter strategy could be to give social praxis, culture and politics the same importance as economy. No one wants inefficiency, bad quality and costly prices, what we want is that the social relations become imbedded in public and private economy: civilised, culturally and politically. We want to influence the direction of development standing on a relatively stable institutional fundament which demands a key work force as in cooperation with our community produces health, education and social welfare services and distributes them guided by fairness and solidarity.

To question the instrumental thinking into the extreme: Why do universities accept and even improve the standardized ranking systems instead of marking the originality and the special? There is not just a single solution for any educational problem. Talking about evidence in educational research is a reduction of the complexity of education relations neglecting not only the social but also the individual empowerment.

Final remarks

In the beginning of this paper we introduced the way we separated context into three different forms the horizontal, the vertical and the discursive. The risk is of course that a picture of eclectic, pragmatic concerns take over. Our concern and starting point included an attempt to diminish over-determinism and reductionism. Instrumentalism is a reduction and regulatory devises for instructed work is to create self-fulfilling prophesies. Taking the notion of governance into account enlightens one basic theoretical problem of discourse theory and methods, which is the lack of social contradictions. Shuttling between personal concerns and GATS makes it clear that the supranational agencies establish antidemocratic praxices as has to be met by a counterstrategies. Student around the world tried to do this with the slogan: "reclaim your education".

It is crucial that institutions of education need to be understood as a democratic infrastructure as can't be absorbed inside the frame of market logic and neo-liberal ideology. For the time being the university as such has delimited its democratic potential and its task for being the place of the society's production and reproduction of culture and democracy. Education has become a place not only governed by the hegemonic idea of market ideology obedient to the

ideology of competition but also by all forms of structural alienation. A free and democratic society needs democratic education and education for democracy. The problem is how to achieve education for democracy in institutions that are lead to a big extent – in form and content – by false consciousness and alienation, i.e. by non-democratic processes which are in contradiction to originality and freedom? Neglecting education as a democratic infrastructure means to abandon the actor's potentials and to sell the crippled rests of the individuals on the market.

As a starting point universities are to copy the idea and capture structural power and establish democratic influence through participatory empowering strategies. Universities are to be the place of associations of free individuals building together in social processes and intellectual confrontations – not competitions – the basis of individuals and collective values that are both democratic and work related. The latter aspect is not directed towards standardization and market obedience but a social field of fulfilling collectively the true needs of the individuals. To meet this demand the “educational surplus value” has to be aligned to originality, imagination towards the idea of a good life instead of fulfilling the idea of delimiting social freedom, standardization and market ideology. Like the financial bubble the educational bubble will implode when the emptiness becomes obvious.

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