

The Management of Time: New Orders for Executive Education

TOBY THOMPSON

Networked Learning Director, Cranfield University's Centre for CCED, UK

What is “execution,” and what are its various manifestations with respect to the carrying out education? Specifically, what can the processes involved in the education of corporate executives, known as ‘executive education,’ learn from musical executants, in particular? With corporate executives ranked as the pantomime villains of contemporary neoliberalism’s bonus culture, but with the figure of the corporate executive exalted as the darling of policy debates comparing the smart efficiency of private business compared to the inefficiency of public services, how does this executive manage their time? How do they even conceive of time? What constitutes the illusion of time for the corporate executive? Should the time of executive education incorporate more temporal illusions, so as to reveal a new order of time; and can the musical executant help to reveal this new temporal order?

INTRODUCTION

To execute something means to carry something out. Simply put, executive education could be seen simply as an education in carrying things out; or as the education of, or for, those who carry things out; or even, conceivably, the carrying out of education. The form of education I’m actually talking about in this paper is that geared towards senior ‘executives’ in large and multinational corporations: *that* type of executive, the one supposedly in control of an endless sequence of meetings, calls, emails, and decisions—sequences of execution—all ‘carried out’ on the move; the executive responsible for a huge workforce, for product and performance quality, a massive budget and for delivering on target and against oversight, the executive captains of the *uber*-capitalist corporations that our higher education institutions. And not just the pantomime villain that the figure of the ‘corporate executive’ cuts in the popular press. My interest is in the executive undertaking education on the job, no less; and in particular, the executive education process itself, one that is seldom the topic of examination of philosophers of education.

From my professional experience, this fabulously busy figure, for whom time *is* money, is plagued by a compelling illusion. The *illusory* is the tempo, the fleeting time, of their ‘corporate’ lives; they are embodied and ensnared by a particular conception of time that they simultaneously embrace, because “that’s what comes with the job”, and reject, because “it’s too demanding”: a tempo that is at once imperative and impermanent. That this is *illusory* will be my bold claim throughout the following. In which case, what role does ‘executive education’ serve with respect to this figure and this illusion?

But again, what is executive education? Perhaps my starting point here seems a little too broad; possibly because education is about more than giving instruction on how to carry things out; and possibly because the population I’m talking about—often, though not always male, fifty-something in age, grey haired, wearing a dark suit, working for that large corporation, highly paid, and principally as someone who gives orders—are more likely served with ‘training’

or 'development' at this late stage in their careers, than 'education': but not least because of the many connotations that the word 'executive' carries. Along with the figure of the handsomely paid corporate executive—for whom few have much sympathy—let's think of other figures involved in *execution*, and begin to consider how education could be conceived for them. For instance, think of the *executive* branch of government, those high ranking senior officials tasked with carrying out the orders of the current government; or the state employed *executioner* tasked with carrying out the sentences of the law courts; or the lawyer as *executor*, tasked with carrying out the wishes of the deceased; or the (theorised) *executive* function of the brain, tasked, as it were, with the carrying out of our isolatable cognitive processes. We'll come on to a useful addition to this list—the musical *executant*, tasked with playing the score of a composer on a musical instrument—a little later; an oblique example that I'll use to pick out some novel points about execution as they relate to sequences, and to education.

But given the wider consideration of 'execution' that the above list reveals, in the following I would like to come at my topic from an equally oblique angle, principally to side step a love-hate mode of commentary generated by a contradictory policy predilection for marketization and monetary efficiency, say, of educational services on the one hand, and an intolerance in the academy (at least) of managerialism and the neoliberal hegemony on the other (Peters, 2001; Chomsky, 2003; Giroux, 2006; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Hill, 2009; JOPE *Policy* Special Issue, 46; 4, 2012; Standish, 2003). Such finger-jabbing encounters generate a lot of din and suspicion; rightly so. But I want to advance a more subtle argument: more on exactly what this is shortly. I have three main reasons for adopting this oblique approach in this paper. Firstly, as someone working within the profession of executive education (I work at *Cranfield School of Management* as the Director of Networked Learning) with a philosophical bent, I can see the need and opportunity for a philosophically oriented, and decorous, reappraisal of the standardly conceived practices of educating executives; practices that a quick glance at the back page adverts in *The Economist* or the *Financial Times* hint at in their promises of boosting an executive's world-beating confidence in the face of their responsibilities alluded to above. Most institutions offering executive education are those university associated business schools around the world whose neoliberal tinged curricula is not dissimilar to these publications, and whose aspirations are equally (overly) confident. At the time of writing I am a PhD candidate in the philosophy of education, where this philosophical work attempts this reappraisal using Martin Heidegger's reconception of 'existential temporality' (from *Being and Time* as well as his other temporality-oriented works), followed by an attempted reconstruction of what constitutes 'time' in execution and in executive education. This paper stands merely as a prospectus for that more detailed endeavour.

The consequence of such a focus is an analysis of a curriculum (loosely speaking) stripped of its content and paired back to its structural components: where such a suspension of content-related concerns foregrounds a reconsideration of what the *time* of executive education consists of: which allows, in turn, a focus on the meaning of time for those at the end of their careers—the class of executives I'm interested in—and who are also towards the end of their lives.

This attempt is best (is only?) approached obliquely, I will claim, evidenced not least by the pragmatic, mercantile and short term nature of the parent bodies of executives—the

corporations—where the luxury of philosophical reflection has tangential or zero relevance to the corporations' timely concerns, i.e. philosophy has next to no perceived relevance in these contexts of profit maximisation. Concerning this, the second reason for adopting an oblique approach has to do with managing the reception of philosophy and philosophical thinking within the steel and glass cathedrals of neoliberal capitalism, the natural habitat of the figure of my concern, the executive; a citadel heavily defended against 'thinking' not directly aligned to the profit motive. Most classes and programmes that I'm involved with (all of which are *not* degree awarding—I'm concentrating on the customised and open enrolment aspects of post-graduate-only executive education, distinct from 'business studies', MBAs and master's degrees in business-related topics), not to mention the human resource departments that our institution (and I assume others) engages with to design these programmes, are fiercely anti-philosophical; this, in as much as the primary concern of the client and our programmes of education with them, as an instance, is to improve shareholder return, over and above any other (ethical, ecological, epistemological, ontological, soteriological, humanitarian—hardly an exhaustive philosophic muster, I concede) consideration. You get the picture.

Which leads me to the third reason for adopting an obliqueness to my approach of examining executive education, and to my main argument: namely, that only a concerted philosophical engagement with something of eminent interest to the executive (and to those tasked with 'carrying out education' with respect to the executive) stands a chance of being accepted as legitimate philosophical fodder. That only by way of managing the reception of philosophy and philosophical thinking into the swanky offices of city bankers, pharmaceutical executives, and shipping company vice presidents, can the philosophical academy hope to get these people chewing the philosophical cud, as it were. As previously stated, the specific constituent of eminent interest I refer to is *time*, the economy of which is all of our concern, not just that of our less than humble executive. Nonetheless, given that I have as little time as all of you, I should start where I am, in the carrying out the education of (in particular) late-career executives; a body for whom, by the way, most business school executive education offerings currently have little or nothing to show, and an agent with considerable influence over many instances of our neoliberal-saturated and consumerist-driven lives. Hence the contribution I perceive my overall study to deliver.

Obviously, all this talk of 'obliqueness' implies that a more direct approach could be taken, a direct alternative which would probably edify you all the quicker as to the current state of play of executive education: granted. And whilst I appear to be defending 'the' philosophical approach, and philosophy generally, in front of mercantile, commercial, corporate and capitalistic classes of contemporary society—an unnecessary and uncalled for defence—I am nonetheless sensitive to the narrowness of the chink of enthusiasm and interest that I believe the executive has—not to mention the reduced tolerance that the philosophic and educative academy may have towards this executive—regarding what the academy may see as cartoon or cliché philosophy, and the limited chances I have of filling this slot, so to speak: namely, the philosophy of time and its associated, though comic, existential question of the *meaning of life*. I fear that the subtle point my study is trying to make—that a contemplation of time for the fabulously busy, though strangely receptive, late-career executive is not only called for, given how they're running out of time to make those hugely influential decisions that affect most of us,

but that such contemplation is a determinant for arresting a range of society-wide ills—would be drowned out by the din that a predictable welter of philosophically (and politically) oriented engagements would surround a direct exposition. At the risk of setting that din off, but by way of establishing a contrast, the non-oblique welter looks *beyond* the following: *beyond* the social and cultural status of ‘the executive’ in contemporary society, as urgent as that debate has become (Lanchester, LRB, July 2013); *beyond* the debate about the accountability of the CEO-class to state regulators, and specifically about executive pay—notwithstanding the opprobrium attached to company shareholder’s wilful sanction of pay increases, bonuses or severance payments to senior executives (Economist, 23 September 2013); *beyond* the important and far reaching debate about the continued rise of neoliberalism long after it was pronounced dead in 2008 (New Left Review, July/Aug 2011); and *beyond* the history of executive education and its own special relationship to neoliberalism—from the establishment of Harvard Business School in the 1890’s United States to the present day (Khurana, 2007); and most certainly *beyond* the fads and fashionable training programmes aimed at busy executives for managing time (Guardian, 28 Jan 2012), as the double genitive of the thesis title refers to.

So enough of this executive (‘swiftly executed’) summary of the field; how to begin my attempted reconstruction of what constitutes time in execution and in executive education? As a lead-in to the illusory nature of time for the executive, I would like to assist and enchant the reader with a review of how the notion of ‘sequence’ constitutes execution and what status execution could have, using the ‘neutral’ and possibly more palatable figure of the musical executant.

THE MUSICAL EXECYTANT

Returning to that earlier list of types of execution: one element of commonality across all of these instances of execution is the notion of the ‘sequence’. The Latin transitive verb *sequor*, which means ‘to follow’ or ‘to come after’, lies in the midst of the word *executive*, as in *ex-sequi*. Thus, with *ex*-meaning ‘out of’ and *sequi* meaning ‘to follow up’ or ‘carry out’, the notion of sequentiality (L. *sequens*) is at the root of the word *executive*. So, with our roll call of the senses of ‘executive’, and leaving out the figure of the corporate executive for the time being, the (simplified) sequences are as follows: with respect to the senior official in the ‘executive’ branch of government, the sequence is from governmental policy setting to the daily administration of a country’s affairs: with respect to the ‘executioner’, from sentencing of the accused, through to capital punishment; for the lawyer ‘executant’, from the wishes of the deceased, to the carrying out those directions in the will; and for the ‘executive’ function of the brain, the sequence is from stimulus to response (so called). But what of the musical ‘executant’—which I introduced as likely to provide us with some novel lessons concerning execution as they relate to the education of the late-career corporate executive. To bring this outlying executant into line with the foregoing talk of sequences, what is the purely temporal sequence in this musical instance? Parking the comedic notion of playing all the right notes in the right order, simply put, the sequence moves from gaining mastery of the musical instrument, through engagement with a composer’s score, to a technically proficient and, one would hope, pleasing execution. But, like education, music is about much more than this; more is at stake.

Let’s assume that a musician can at least play his or her instrument. Let’s also grant that this

precondition need not be qualified with reference to a particular standard of playing, to allow for the fact that, as David Beard and Kenneth Gloag remind us in their book *Musicology* “the meaning [of a piece] is to be found in individual, subjective interpretations of the context of an art work, and that equally valid, multiple interpretations may result” (2005, pp. 122-123). This particular dislocation will serve the forthcoming correlations between respective executants well: one only has to consider how the concepts of discordant or atonal music would translate into analogues in the orderly corporate sphere. Given the above, what is at stake for the musician in *their* execution? Concerning us here is surely the issue of ‘interpretation’ and truth to the work. Though as John Eliot Gardiner says, speaking about comparable performers of early music; “...two performers can assiduously read the same eighteenth century violin tutor or treatise and still come to alarmingly different conclusions in the interpretation of it” (Gardiner, 2013, p. 10). Even ‘truth to work’ doesn’t really capture it: think of the ‘cover version’ concept concerning popular music, with the rich vein of interpretation this produces, and cut to a picture of the mayhem/originality that executives ‘riding the riff’ of shareholder return inside the corporation would wreak. All I can entice you with, from this paragraph-length introduction to musicology, concerning the novel lessons that a comparison with the musical executant provides, is to reiterate the question of ‘what is at stake?’ for our respective executants. No small question, this: not when weighing up equally abstract claims such as ‘the glory of God’ or ‘the sublime evocation of an emotion’ against ‘the imperative for profit-making in the face of forced redundancies’ or ‘the financial viability of a continent’. How then to proceed with this enchanting comparison?

As a basis of this oblique, and Romanticist-inspired¹, comparison and executant-setting example of ‘execution’, I am drawing from the cultural critic Edward Said’s essays on music—admittedly only one element from among his wide-ranging oeuvre—to highlight a singular approach to understanding musical ‘execution’. His collected music critic essays are gathered together in the posthumously published volume, foreworded by Daniel Barenboim, entitled *Music at the Limits* (2008), throughout which he refers directly to the varieties of ‘execution’ of (classical) music. My approach in the following will be to quote Said on an aspect of musical execution, to then interject with the senses of its wider meaning, and to then draw conclusions for the situation of our corporate executive and his or her education.

Firstly, with my claims for obliqueness in mind, what does a practice that is so “nonideological, so that any attempt to interpret music politically or to introduce contemporary concerns into musical practice is considered an intrusion” (2008, p. 134), have to do with such neoliberal (or neoconservative) inclined practices as executive education? I would say that simply setting up the ideological contrasts here is instructive for us, in as much as it allows us to examine that what would count as ‘intrusive’ to executive education would be the complete reverse of the notion of ‘instrumentality’ implicit in Said’s point. As was remarked earlier, the prevailing order demands that there be direct increases of profit for the executive’s corporation as a result of executive education. The contrast between the apparent mutual exclusivity of music and instrumentality, and between executive-ness and non-instrumentality, points towards a more subtle critique of executive education that calls into question the ‘out’ of ‘carry out’ that we started this paper with. Since education generally is the case of carrying something out, is not what’s on display here actually the structural notion of the *sequence* rather than that

for-the-sake-of-which, or that towards-which, the instrument of the educative process is directed (increased profits)? Said only implies a subject in the above quote, and one that is protected from the effects of intrusion at that; whereas executive education signifies its subject in its title, despite prioritising that which the subject of the executive 'carries out' over the subject itself. In what sense could an executive be regarded as a mere channel for the dictates of the composer (in the case of the gifted, though compliant, musician), and who is the composer-analogue for the executive?: their boss, the company, the market, the beckoning ideological forces of globalisation and neoliberalism, basic human instinct or divine forces? What opportunities present themselves to the executive to break the sequences of this beckoning and to refuse ideological intrusion, to Said's point, of any of the composer-analogues in my runaway list of analogues? Probably not many, as this would tend towards a deliciously oxymoronic 'anarchistic executive': but it begs several questions; of where on an ideological spectrum (left or right, inclusive or exclusive, on or off) executive education could/should sit; just how *political* executive education could become, given the liberating effects of foregrounding the sequence of command above the command itself; not to mention how revisionist such an anarchistic executive curriculum would be for the staid, conservative and resolutely non-anarchistic institution that most business schools have become.

Turning now, enchantingly it would seem, to Said's appreciation of Bach, and particularly of Glenn Gould's execution in the *Goldberg Variations*: says Said, "At one end of the work a simple theme is announced, a theme permitting itself to be metamorphosed thirty times, redistributed in modes whose theoretical complexity is enhanced by the pleasure taken in their *practical execution*" (2008, p. 4, my emphasis). That which is referenced here is Gould's practical understanding of Bach counterpoint in general. There is implicit in this quote a contradistinction and relationship between the 'theory' of counterpoint and the 'practice' of counterpoint—the theoretical complexity of the theme, against its being executed—and an interplay between these distinctly separate facets, where the intrinsic beauty of the counterpoint is augmented by the actual sound (and, one assumes, the associated moods thereby stimulated in the performer and listener) produced. What makes for interesting comparison here is where the notion of execution appears as just one of the many aspects of music making, and not simply the most important, as a superficial appreciation of music might aver. How Said references Gould's execution, for me, reveals a neutral stance towards execution: a suspension of the primacy of simply 'playing' the music, and where a level of interpretation is implied over and above any technical proficiency. Here the (admittedly exemplary) executant is only one link in the chain, or the temporal and interpretative sequence, between Bach and the listener, distinct from representing the terminus of appreciation. The obvious correlate questions from this take the form of 'how much is the corporate executive only one of many in the chain of command?' and 'does every order need interpreting?' Given that the corporate executive is as much an order-taker as an order-giver—just one of the command-related senses of 'order' that borders on those other senses of order more relevant to the notion of sequences, such as disorder, ordered and orderly—they and their interpretation are not especially more important than that which is ordered: the order itself, in whatever pristine or idealised form this manifests.

The demoted status of the executive to that of a mere channel, as a mere 'sequencer' or conduit of orders, emerges once more, but this time with more vigour I would say: this is

despite the elevated rank, or grade (or order) that is often ascribed to the executive. Where the term 'executive' is used to denote luxury and privilege—as in a hotel's 'executive suite' or an airport's 'executive lounge', or the housing market's use of the bracket 'executive' in categories of up-market dwellings—a familiar lethargy with the term re-emerges, grounded here by an acknowledgement that the executive might only be a foot soldier, a dumb grunt or cipher in relation to the prevailing order, and not quite the exalted darling of policy debates comparing the smart efficiency of private business to the inefficiency of public services, say. When the executive is cast in this newly focused and menial role (new and menial, that is, for the executive themselves and their high class acolytes in the guise of business schools, who, I should say, would rail against the comparisons I'm making here by dint of their privileging capital over culture) then executive education, all of a sudden, takes on either a remedial role in assisting the hapless slave in executing for his master, or itself becomes the object of ridicule and lowly status (which perhaps it already is). Maybe executive education, in contrast to boosting the confidence of world-commanding executives, should help in balancing or playing down the execution role in favour of appreciating other stations in the orders of command or the governing dynamics of the capitalist corporation itself. Despite potentially re-hiding the thimble for another hunt somewhere else in the chain, executive education could instead view its role not as a party magician but as exhaustive of the whole hunt for maximal influence, or so called 'executive power'. By way of an aside, the Marxist political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis says of this reversal of fortune that "there is no such thing as "executive power" (its functions, which were in the hands of slaves in ancient Athens, are performed today by people acting more or less as "vocal animals," and they may one day be performed by machines" (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 169). Note to self: am I simply a circus trainer of vocal animals? A humbling thought.

At the all too real risk of disenfranchising executive education completely, let's continue under the shadow of the Edward Said inspired oblique commentary on executiveness, and further critique the executive's nominal status. Speaking about recorded music, he takes a dig at the expense of recitalists such as Franz Liszt and Vladimir Ashkenazy, thus; "Yet too often records are extensions of the recital stage, made with an eye towards immediate effect, interesting in a limited way (as Ashkenazy is) for the *momentary pleasures afforded by fine execution*" (Said, 2008, p. 56, my emphasis). As a quick glance at my copy of the *Oxford Companion to Music* confirmed, Franz Liszt was a consummate and archetypal recital player: he would, as a personal display, give piano recitals interspersed with didactic conversation with the audience between his musical items. Said's gripe with recital is where the recording of a piece of music can be limited not only by the technical competence of the recitalist but by their, and their producer's or promoter's, short-sightedness and eye for a quick buck. Surely a shoe-in correlation for our oft conceived myopic executive, fixated on executing the next (and the next) order. Whereas Said's musical criticism is itself an acknowledgement of a high order of appreciation which transcends the mere production of sound on a given occasion, i.e. the occasion of the recording, it's uncertain exactly what would be transcended with regards to an appreciation of execution of corporate executiveness. Who would be the equivalent to 'Said the critic' in the executive's case, and from what basis would spring their surety of critique? To appreciate that above which the so called 'corporate imperative' sits² implies that these imperatives themselves get in the way of that on which they rest. But on what do these

themselves rest (cue regress)? Is it the case that the executant/executive gets in the way of other aspects of music/profit making; that they are an inconvenience; that they are not just subordinate to the order but dispensable to it altogether? Who would then execute?: which slaves would do the work?

For these questions to persist and for them to generate useful thinking for the executive education audience, the question's sentiment needs careful framing if it's not to be bracketed as gratuitous-seeming navel gazing. And here is the subtle point I'm attempting to make: that perhaps that basis of appreciation, that on the basis of which this transcendent appreciation exists, is the *sequence*, and that a fuller examination of 'sequence' demands a different engagement with how time is viewed, over and above the ordinary time conceptions of executiveness. More on this counter-intuitive point in the next section.

Turning now to a comment from Said that probes the quality of orders in the sequence. Speaking of Claudio Abbado's conducting of a performance of Beethoven's Ninth symphony, "All in all, this cycle of the nine seemed to be premised on a vision that never appeared; perhaps it was that Abbado was unable to *translate his view of the symphonies into execution*" (2008, p. 60, my emphasis). This piece of honest reportage addresses a falling-short, a non-delivery of something that was promised: that the music was somehow predicated on a vision that stands apart from the actual music delivered; some sort of Platonic ideal form, of which the actuality was a poor replica: a gap between an expected and an actual reception. That poor execution is possible in both music and business is a platitude. Newsworthy stories of bad interpretations of original orders, and the consequently poor execution of that order, tagged as 'blunders', are common, i.e. large computerised system implementation failures, delayed national infrastructure projects such as rail links or Olympic stadia, and interruptions in energy or telecoms service deliveries. The failure here is not in the orders not being carried out but a failure to attain the desired 'order' of execution, the pristine and ideal form of that original requirement. Is failing to execute an order worse than executing an order badly?³ What claim for sanctity do temporally oriented sequences of orders maintain?¹ And what would be put at stake in either of these failures? Even where executive education is predicated on helping the executive, and presumably those who report to the executive, interpret the order properly—that is, the order of the original request, however that is gathered and understood; or the order with respect to a rank, grade or class of quality of execution—the balance of the sequence always remaining will inevitably be its actual and eventual execution, further down the executive sequence; possibly forever beyond the temporal limits of the educative process altogether. In which case, a *fundamental asymmetry* is the abiding feature of executive education, one that leaves the executive educator a chance to reconsider his or her role within that sequence. This leads me onto the final piece of parallel commentary inspired by Edward Said to be included here, this time concerning the role of lengthy apprenticeships for executants and the potential for master-disciple type relationships as a method to rank orders of execution.

Relating to a conductorless performance of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and comparing their particular performances of pieces against the performances of other orchestras, Said sums up their performance thus: "... Orpheus's programs are generally conservative and familiar, and strike one as studiously unadventurous, as if to highlight delicacy of execution and taste *rather than* dazzlement and virtuosity" (2008, p. 124, my emphasis). For me this highlights

a distinction in execution between the purely transmissive and the virtuosic, but where even this distinction appears as value neutral. Despite our preconceptions of the virtuoso as the ultimate performer, a virtuoso is a person with special knowledge of or taste for a work of art; as well as a person skilled in the mechanical, or technical, part of appreciating and performing fine art. So, for Said, while Orpheus as a whole was virtuosic in all the senses just mentioned, they still fell short in their interpretation of the piece of music: which reveals three distinct virtuoso types, none of which necessitate the others. In translation, this distinguishes an executive in possession of special knowledge of, or taste for, the order (emphasising the 'quality' and the 'sequential' senses of 'order'); from an executive skilled in the mechanical aspects of execution; from an executive who is good interpreter of the commanding order. Whilst a sequence connecting these qualities of a virtuosic executive is less clear, given their non-necessary and non-sufficient relationship, what emerges is the stance from which these distinct qualities are espoused, judged and ultimately surpassed: which leads me to draw an inference to some sort of executive 'sensei', teacher or master; of some sort of apprenticeship that an executive must serve with such a sensei, before they 'accede' as a legitimate corporate executives based on the sensei's nod. Whether this particular boot fits on the foot of executive education certainly tempts executive education with an interesting status, way beyond that of graduating executives with degrees, certificates or fancy ring-binders. What holy order, exactly, would these sensei represent; what rank, class or order of executives would they be; and how outside of the normal order of executiveness would they need to be, to sanction their sensei status?

At the risk of disappearing up my own fundament at this stage, I think the time has come to weave these preceding strands of thought together, and to lay out what I perceive to be the job of thinking redolent here; and certainly to bring these thoughts back to the issue of sequences, time and temporality of executive education as the title of my piece promises.

THE MANAGEMENT OF TIME

Revisiting my earlier valuation of an oblique approach, especially now that you've been subject to an exposition of the sequences in execution courtesy of Edward Said, you'll remember I was keen to manage the reception of philosophical thinking, especially concerning time, into the corporation, to intrude (to use Said's term, 2008, p. 134) in the meeting of corduroy and pinstripe. But I've not really revealed my reason for wanting to chaperone philosophy thus: what's at stake, aside from misunderstanding, and why the performance regarding music, of all things?

Here's the deal: what I'm attempting to have the executive come to realise, conceivably now via a revised executive education, is a more profound sense of time than the one they've become accustomed to, both in their normal modes of execution and, not least, in their expectations of the normal educative processes made available to them. The means at our disposal to effect this realisation is the structure and process of education simpliciter, beyond the content of the educative process itself. The means of bridging these differently paced worlds (of the philosophically attuned educator and the executive) to effect this reassessment of their time—of their impending mortality and their simultaneously illusory and yet real dance-to-the-death of execution—is primarily presented through an extended engagement with the notion of sequence: then, with a sustained philosophical engagement with the temporal aspects of

sequences (which have been conspicuously missing from this paper). So why should a late-career executive be the slightest bit interested in any of this, or motivated to waste time on this obscure caravan of concepts? Because, I would claim, they're nearing the end of their own sequence of all sequences: they are no longer newcomers, quite the opposite: hence, in my view, their being strangely receptive, while still being fabulously busy, embracing and rejecting the illusion of their temporal bounds, simultaneously. Our executives' lives are at once a dream—transient, fleeting and hence unreal, passing before their eyes—and yet these lives couldn't be more real, with the pressing quarterly returns and time-poor days, whose effects touch all of us indirectly influenced by that corporation's product or service. The executive's ontic concerns, framed as they are by the seemingly accelerated pace of time, seem unreal and illusory from the sanctuary that is the process of education; and yet this unreality, based on how insubstantial it feels, provides a hint of the absolute, of absolute nothingness towards which they're (we're all) careering: but where the seeming and the real are both true.

Now... this is an enchanting contrast, for sure. But so much so, in fact, that I believe exactly what's needed, almost more than the surety of philosophical arguments, are precisely the smoke, mirrors and paraphernalia of enchantment to draw attention to the double reality and double illusion mentioned earlier—the reality of the illusory-seeming, nay accelerating, time pressures of execution; and the reality of the illusory-seeming void towards which we are heading. The notion of enchantment I'm toying with is the one opposite to that characterised by Max Weber, speaking in 1917, where he claimed that “The fate of our times is characterised by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (Weber, 1946). I believe I stand a better chance of revealing the illusory-reality of execution I spoke about at the start of this ‘prospectus’ —the illusory nature of our headlong dash to our demise, one execution at a time; and the reality of the abyss that confronts us—by embracing and modelling that illusion via some form of enchantment. This is why I chose to use the ‘musical executant’ correlate to executive-ness: a rather tame and silly⁴ example of what could be used to see the world (of executive education) anew and to re-enchant it. The contrariness of enchantment to the affairs of executives; the enormity of the contrast thrown up in this bizarre (non-) ideological juxtaposition; the insane-ness of the agenda of unearthing that which was previously buried by the ploughshare of our rational age—angels and demons, magic, benevolent gods, dreams, the mystical and arcane—may just be in proportion to the effort required to get our hearts (and heads) to appreciate the illusion of time that I'm beckoning to in my study. I realise I would be straying into dangerous and unphilosophic territory here, were it not for the fact that Martin Heidegger (among others) has already beaten a path through these thickets of thinking. And that all this talk of illusions has a whiff of the East about it would not be an unkind observation.

This is heady stuff, I know: though not completely out of place as a short article to accompany a nice cocktail, as our executive relaxes in the first-class lounge at the airport, on their way to a shareholder meeting; nor unacceptable as the comments of a quirky, though thought-provoking, after dinner speaker put on the night before the Executive Board gathers to celebrate a successful corporate acquisition; or for that matter, neither is it unexpected as a the theme of a tax-deductible gift of retirement counselling, to assist our executive in contemplating their next Non-Executive Director appointment. As smarmy and as pinstripe as all this is, it has

at least brokered the chance of a philosophical engagement with the execution and management of time: of a new look at the orders of executive education.

NOTES

1. My PhD thesis expands on the relevance of such 'Romanticist' philosophy and literature to the topic of time in executive education, by mounting a defence, using Romanticist philosophy, against William Blattner's accusation that Martin Heidegger's philosophy of time is a failure because of its 'idealist' status. I attempt to convert a status of 'idealist failure' into a status of Romanticised success, given the proximity of the thinking of German idealism to German Romanticism. The 'oblique' choice of music and the musical executant in this paper is an attempt at working-through such a defence.
2. Such corporate imperatives translate into the pithy vision and service statements of companies, such as 'Forward Thinking' (Apple), 'Enjoy the Performance' (Royal Dutch Shell), 'to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful' (Google), all of which focus the whole of a corporation's constellation of intentions.
3. Site of the obvious redoubt for the skilled project and programme manager; an executive-type role within the corporate pantheon of executives most closely associated with the orderliness or orders.
4. As the oft quoted aphorism from Ludwig Wittgenstein goes, "if people did not sometimes do silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done" (Wittgenstein, 1998).

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