


Between Scylla and Charybdis: Navigating discursive constructions of competence

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- 
- What is discourse analysis?
 - Discourses of competence
 - “Of what earthly good?”



What is Discourse Analysis?

A wide-angle photograph of a calm ocean under a vast, blue sky. The horizon is visible in the middle ground, with a faint rainbow on the left side. The water is a deep blue with gentle ripples. The sky is a lighter blue with wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Just a way of talking?

Reality is constructed through
language

Schools of Discourse Analysis

- Linguistics
- Sociolinguistics
- Empirical methods - genre, conversation analysis
- Critical discourse analysis



- Micro focus on semantics
- Text and its 'activation'
- All constructions and representations of meaning are part of discourse

Discourses...

- are lenses or filters to seeing the world
- make it possible to say some things but not others
- make it possible to act in certain ways, for there to be certain jobs

Making the Matrix Visible



Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Concepts/statements of truth			
Subject positions (roles)			
Institutions that gain power with this discourse			
Objects created by this discourse			

Discourses of Madness

As Spiritual Possession



As Deviancy



As Medical Illness



If you use the discourse of...

Spiritual Possession you make visible:

- *Possessed individuals*, and create a role for
- *Spiritual Healers* working in *religious institutions*

Deviancy you make visible:

- *Deviant individuals* and create a role for
- *Judges/Jailors* working in *prisons*

Medical Illness you make visible:

- *Mentally Ill* individuals and create a role for
- *Psychiatrists/Psychologists* working in *hospitals*

“We are not dealing with the same madmen”

- Possessed ≠ Deviant ≠ Mentally Ill
- Spiritual Healer ≠ Jailor ≠ Psychiatrist
- Church ≠ Jail ≠ Hospital

Foucault 1969, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

A wide-angle photograph of a calm, deep blue ocean stretching to the horizon. The sky is a rich, clear blue with thin, wispy white clouds. On the left side, a bright light source creates a shimmering, rainbow-like reflection on the water's surface. The overall mood is serene and expansive.

Making Strange

Smelling Urine, Talking to the Wife



Flexner 1910

Making Strange



Place

Language

Architecture

Dangers

Place



Harrison's
Island

Miller's
Island

Cronbach's
Island

Taylor's
Island

Schön's
Island

Language

Harrison's Island
Knowledge discourse

Miller's Island
Performance discourse

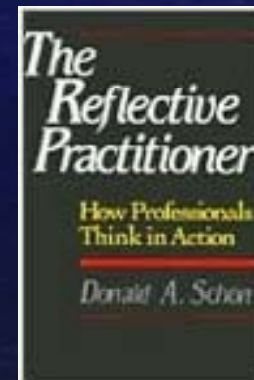
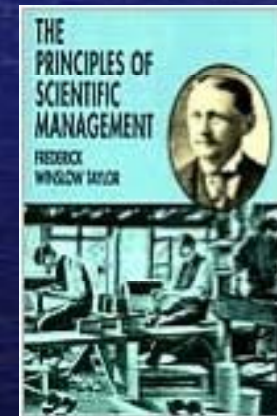
Cronbach's Island
Psychometric discourse

Taylor's Island
Production discourse

Schön's Island
Reflection discourse



$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$



Architecture



Dangers, Storms, Side-Effects and Diseases



*Avoiding
Scylla, he fell
into Charybdis.
- trying to avoid
one danger, he
fell into another
equally fatal.*





**Harrison's
Island**

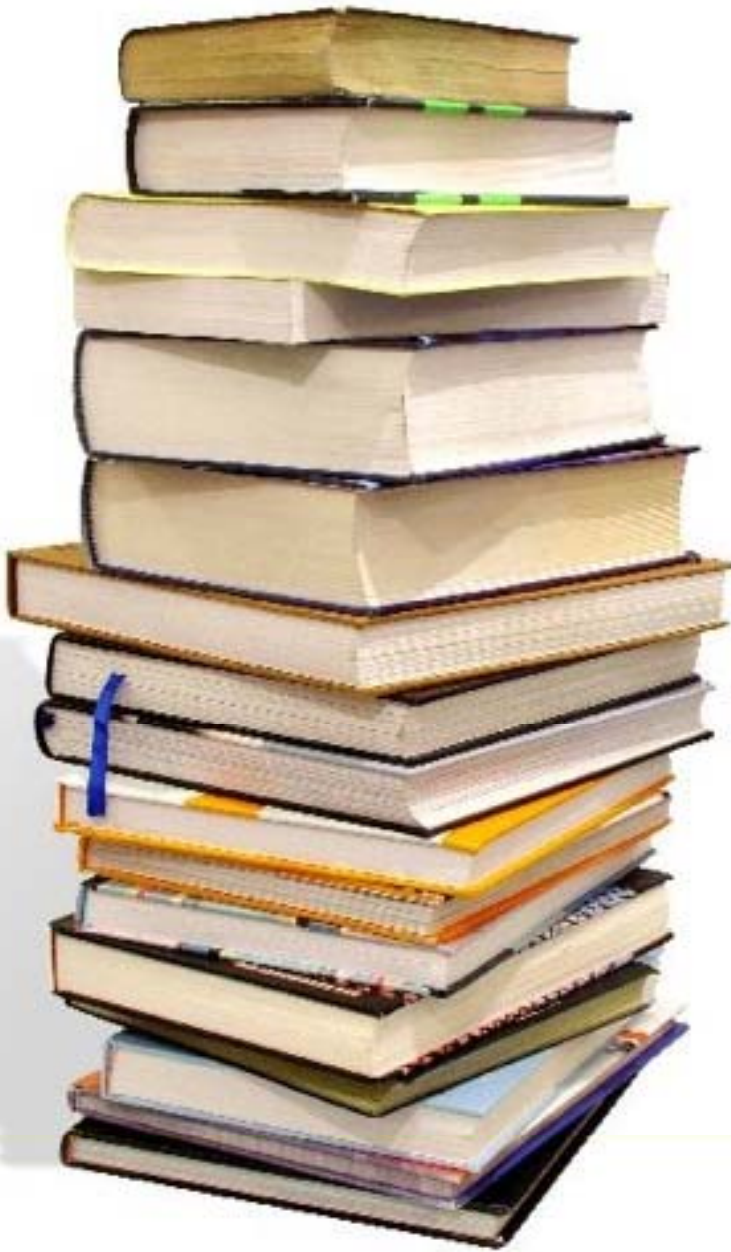
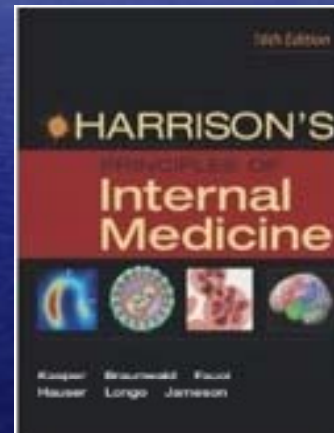
Miller's
Island

Cronbach's
Island

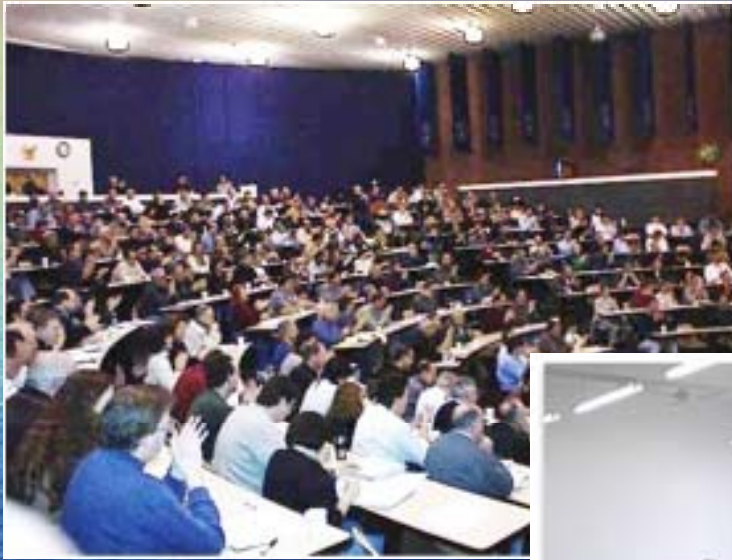
Taylor's
Island

Schön's
Island

Harrison's Island



Architecture on Harrison's Island





Harrison's Island

Knowledge discourse	Facts, foundational knowledge, basic science, first principles, fund of knowledge, classic text books, classic articles
Roles and activities	Teacher's: Lecturers, source of wisdom Student's: Memorize, reproduce Tests: Multiple-choice exams
Believe in...	Knowledge accumulation
Origin	Monastic Tradition

Side-Effects



The preoccupation with doing well on standardized tests has conditioned the way young people ...think. They have better-developed cognitive abilities to recognized random facts than to construct patterns or think systematically.

Jacques Barzun, 1988

Madam, do you have higher conjugated or unconjugated bilirubin?



Harrison's
Island

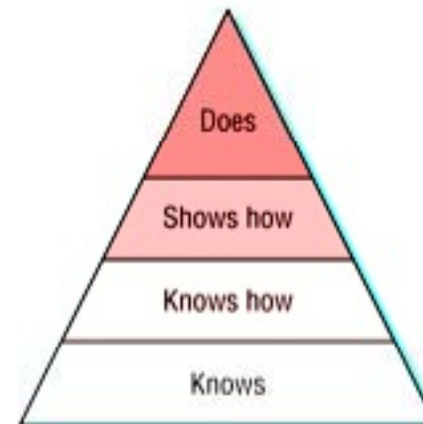
Miller's
Island

Cronbach's
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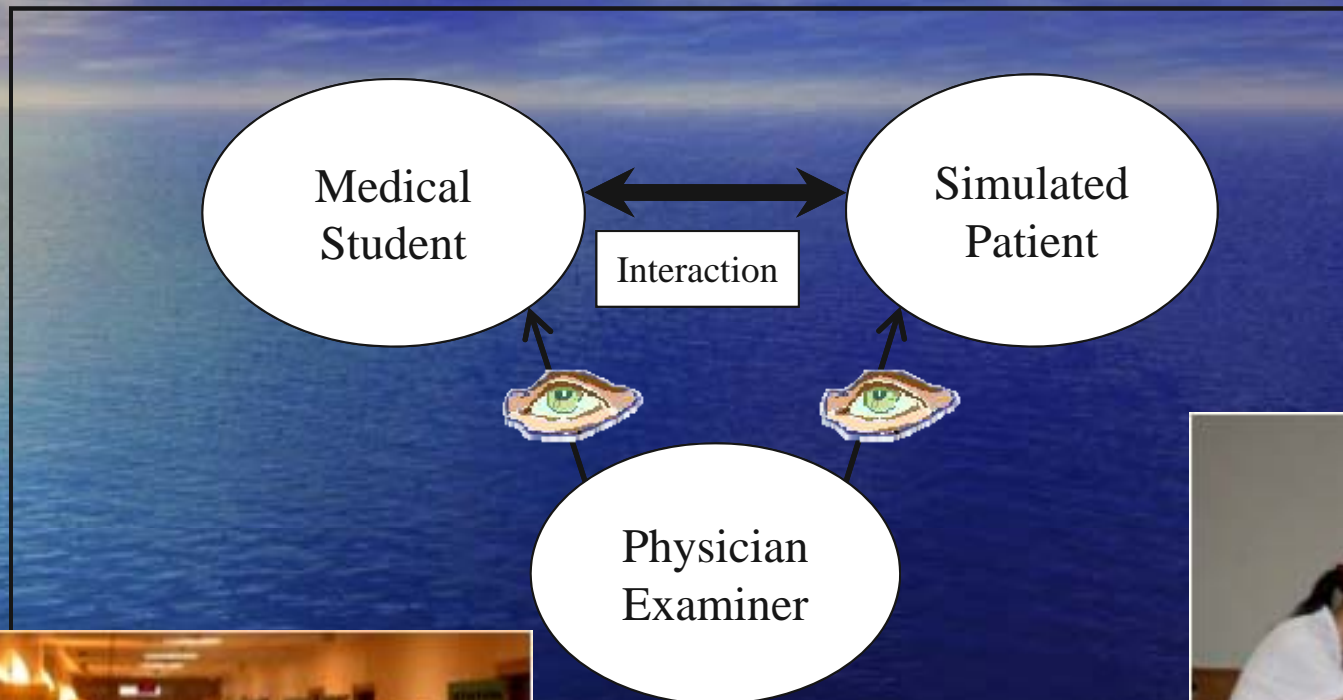
Taylor's
Island

Schön's
Island

Miller's Island



Architecture on Miller's Island





	Miller's Island
Performance discourse	Simulations, simulated patient, feedback, performance, skills, skills centre, OSCE, multiple observations
Roles and activities	Teacher's: Demonstrating and observing skills Student's: Performing for observers Tests: Performance-based assessment (simulation, OSCE)
Believe in...	Observation of performance
Religion	Behaviourism Drama

Talk on Miller's Island



In many places they would ask students to write an essay on the origin of the word shoelace, or give them a multiple choice question on the design of shoelaces or even ask them to describe the steps in tying a shoelace.

Whereas really the only way of doing it is showing you know how to tie a shoelace.

Ronald Harden 2005

Side-Effects



Exclusive reliance on a pedagogical approach of simulation training may be encouraging students to become “simulation doctors” who act out a good relationship with their patients but have no authentic connection with them

Hanna and Fins (2006)

Student: Oh that must be hard for you...wow that must be hard for you... oh, yes that must be really hard for you

Patient: Can you stop saying that?!

Medical Student, Miller’s Island



Harrison's
Island

Miller's
Island

Cronbach's
Island

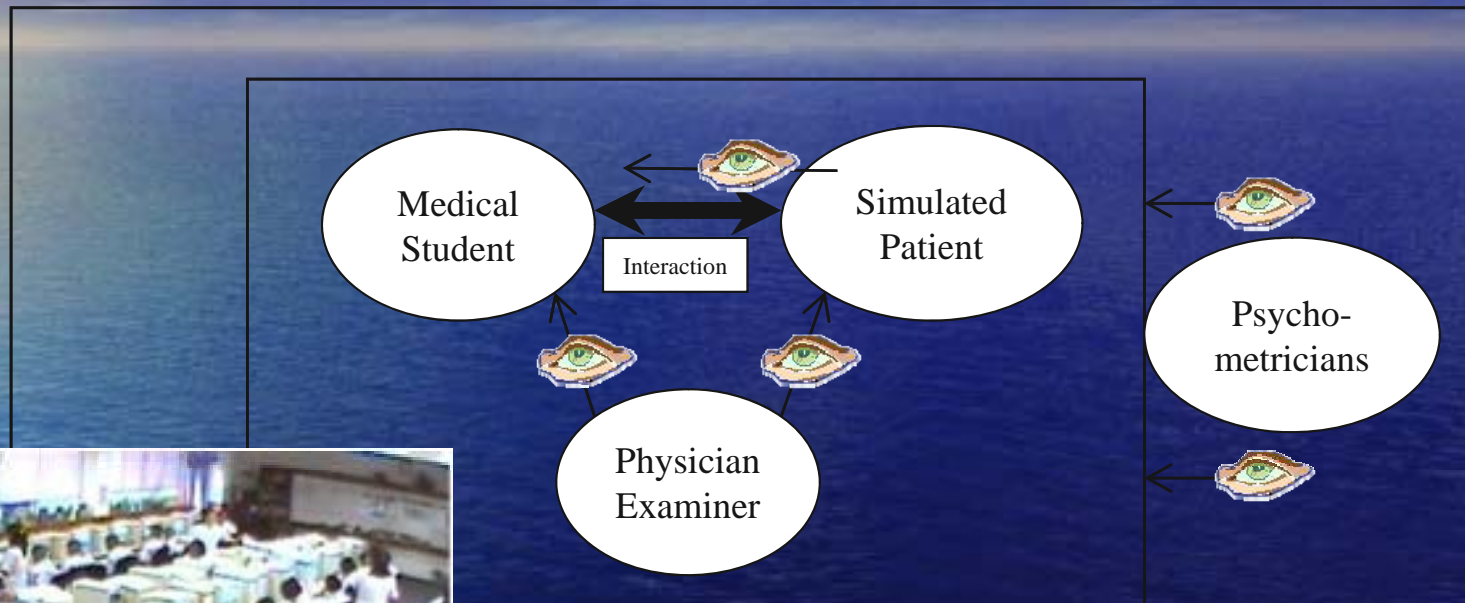
Taylor's
Island

Schön's
Island

Cronbach's Island

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

Architecture on Cronbach's Island



testing centre



$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

Cronbach's Island

Psychometric discourse

reliability, validity, generalizability, data, psychometrician, candidate, checklist, item-banking, cut-point, standardization

Roles and activities

Teacher's: Preparing students for exams
 Student's: Strategies to max scores on exams
 Tests: Standardized, summative exams,

Believe in...

The conversion of human behaviour to numbers

Religion

Psychometrics
 Mathematics

Talk on Cronbach's island

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N-1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

Knowledge of educational products and educational purposes must become quantitative, take the form of measurement.

Education is one form of human engineering and will profit by measurement of human nature and achievement as mechanical and electrical engineering have profited by using the foot-pound, calorie, volt and ampere.

Thorndike, 1922

Learning the language

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N-1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

The standardized-patient technique ...has many of the same advantages of the multiple-choice question

It is a standardized item, can be given in multiples, and can be scored in reliable and valid ways.

Howard Barrows, 1993

Paradigmatic Storms



Worshiping at the Shrine of Reliability

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N-1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

In a standardized environment, it becomes a problem when [a patient] doesn't look the same as everybody else

-Diana Tabak 2006

I have heard enough anecdotes about the shotgun behaviour induced by checklists to shift the burden of proof onto the advocates of this strategy

-Geoff Norman 2005

I think the problem is that as we've tried to get more valid and more reliable statistically, we've actually come away from what we were really trying to do in the first place.

-Jean Ker 2005

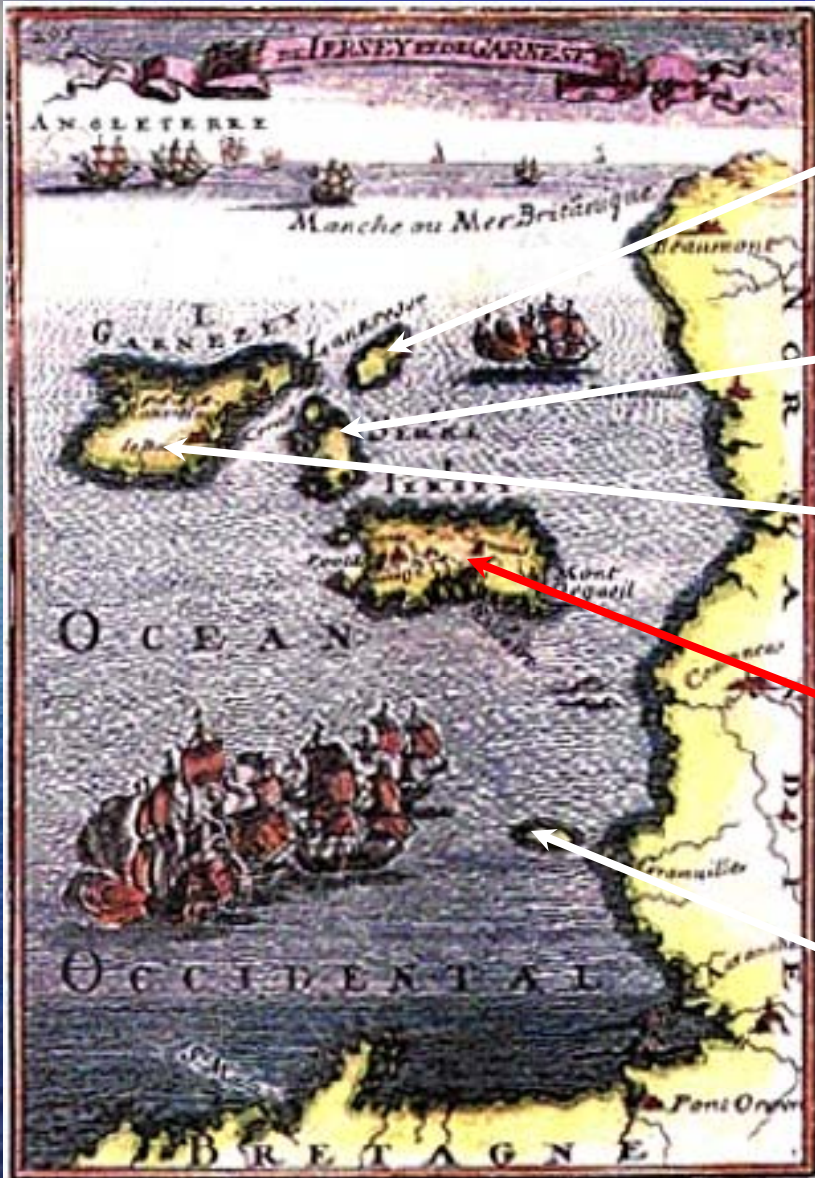
A plea for a new paradigm

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N-1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

We dismiss variance between observers as error because we start from the assumption that the universe is homogenous, where in fact the more logical conclusion would have been that the universe is more variant.

Assessment should be fair, honest and defensible...but the strict operationalisation of these values is – in our humble opinion – currently of limited value.

Schurwirth and van der Vleuten 2006



Harrison's
Island

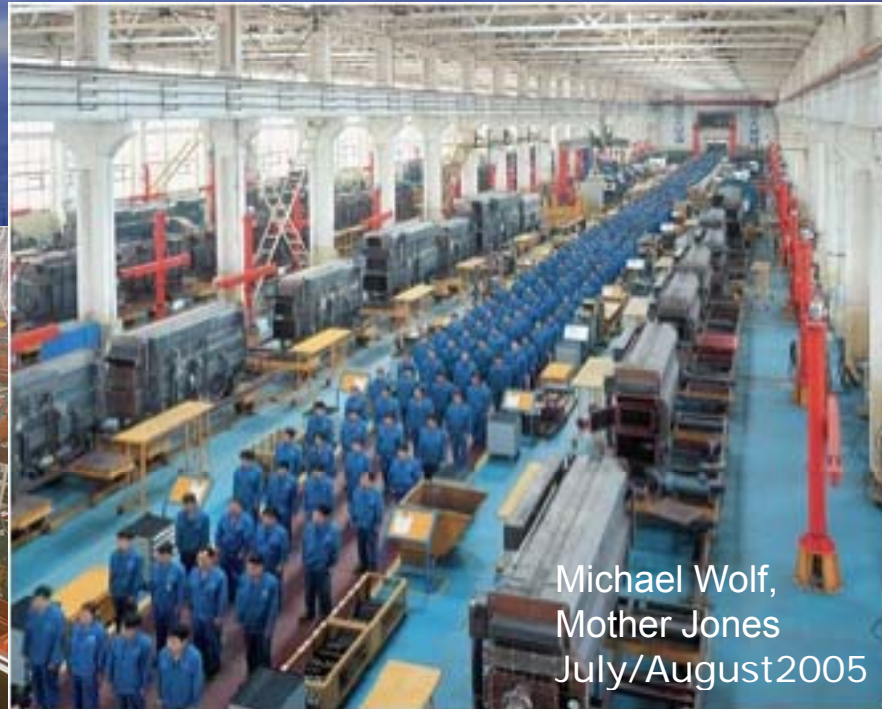
Miller's
Island

Cronbach's
Island

Taylor's
Island

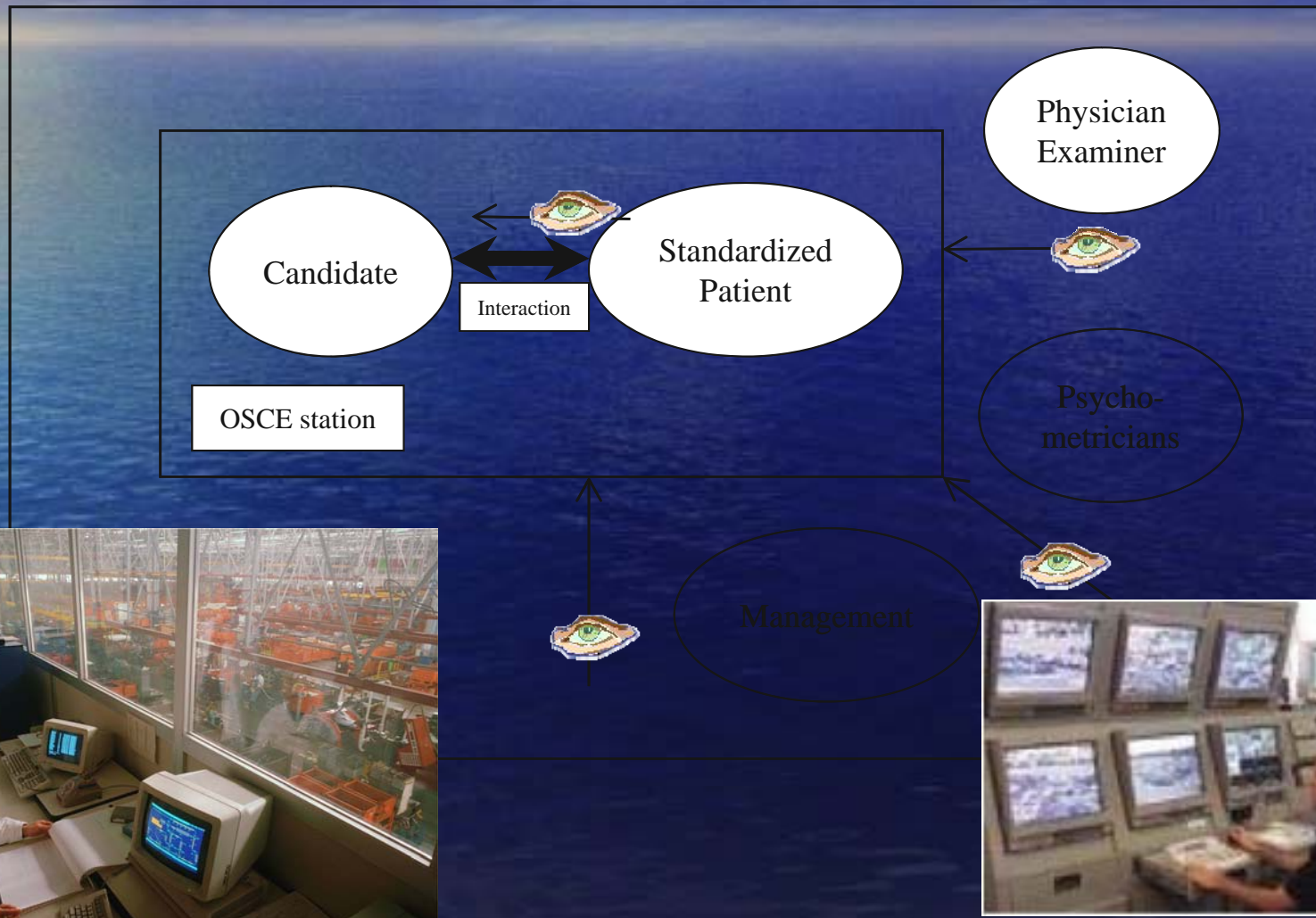
Schön's
Island

Taylor's Island



Michael Wolf,
Mother Jones
July/August 2005

Architecture on Taylor's Island





Taylor's Island

Production discourse	Cost, production, finished product, accountability, outcomes, efficiency
Roles and activities	Teacher's: Management and labour Student role: Raw material or product Tests: Mass Testing, quality assurance
Believe in...	Productivity and efficiency
Religion	Production/Capitalism Alchemy

Talk on Taylor's Island



The corporate order, with its assembly-line techniques, job differentiation, and increased organizational size, demanded a different type of office space and a more regulated and regimented flow of time

Kwolek-Folland (1994)

Learning the Language



Today, we have reached new heights in the science of producing and testing medical students.

We run the operation using standardized and efficient process.

As a result we are in a much better position to assure the public that we are graduating a product with the skills for safe and effective practice.



The Scylla of Taylorism

If you create a sausage factory - you will get sausages



- In a production model, the many assessments of “quality” are summative, for external bodies, and there is no feedback to students.
- Constant surveillance and testing locates the responsibility for their competence externally to the individual.



Harrison's
Island

Miller's
Island

Cronbach's
Island

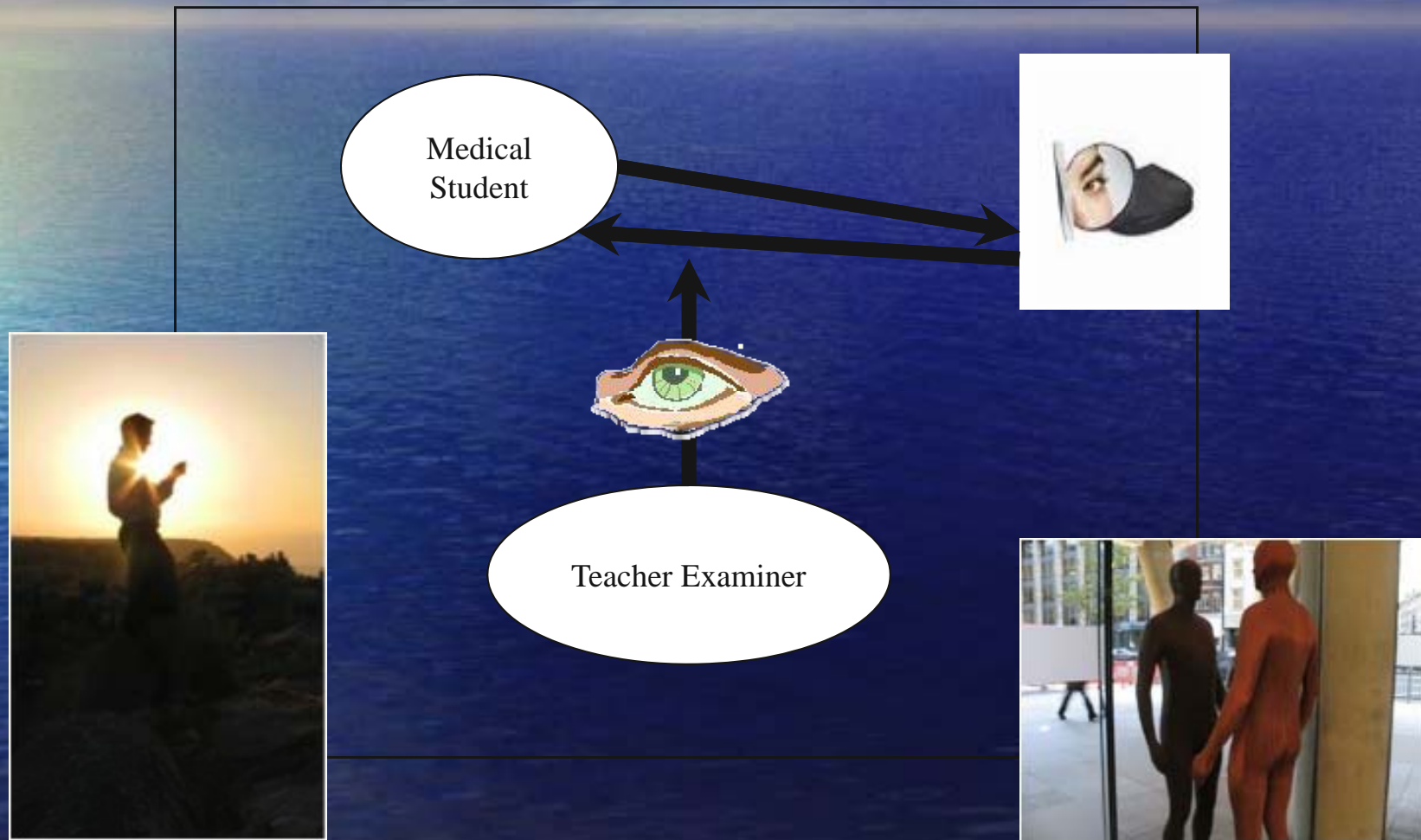
Taylor's
Island

Schön's
Island

Schön's Island



Architecture on Schön's Island





Schön's Island

Reflection
discourse

reflection, self-directed learning, learning contracts,
portfolios, adult learner

Roles and
activities

Teacher: Guide/Mentor/Confessor
Student role: Reflecting, self-analysis
Measures: Portfolio

Believe
in...

Self-assessment, self-direction, self-reflection

Religion

Self-actualization, psychoanalysis
Asceticism, Eastern Religions

Talk on Schön's Island



The concept of learner as a mere processor of information has been replaced by the image of a self-motivated, self-directed problem solver.

Ministry of Education 1980

The 'Trinity' of Reflective Technologies

- Self-assessment, self-direction and self-regulation
- Adult learning theory and the idea that the locus for control of competence is internal

But if we read the literature...



- We look for gaps?
 - “Self-protective” function of self-reflection
- We find gaps when we look?
 - The ineffectiveness of self-assessment
- We try to address gaps through learning?
 - We study what we are already good at
- We incorporate new information into practice?
 - Ineffectiveness of CME for changing practice



Vanishing
into the
Charybdis

Sucked Into The Void



- “...a subset of clinicians who appear, either by training or personality, unable to judge themselves”
– Dave Davis (2006)
- “Regulators appear quite unconcerned about the lack of coherence between what is being monitored ‘at a distance’ and the actual professional knowledge (needed) to function skilfully and competently”
– Nelson and Purkis (2004)
- It is impossible to make people understand their ignorance, for it requires knowledge to perceive it; and therefore, he that can perceive it, hath it not
– Jeremy Taylor 17th century



Just a way of talking?

Reality is constructed through
language



Of What Earthly Good?

I Can See Clearly Now...

Foucault's theories do not tell us what to do, but rather how some of our ways of thinking and doing are historically linked to particular forms of power and social control

His theories ... raise questions...to reveal their contingency and thereby free us from them



Sawicki (1991)

No one is “outside” of discourse

Discourse of Competence as a Construction

- Key words: construction, matrix, subject positions, regimes of truth
- Subject positions: social scientist oriented (me!)
- Institutions gaining power: departments/centres
- Religion: critical theory, philosophy
- Side-effects: Worth some sabbatical thought!

I hope you enjoyed the trip!
(Sorry if anyone has seasickness)



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