Part 2: Impacts of the privatised university

Academics, the humanities and the enclosure of knowledge: the worm in the fruit

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If we want to combat contemporary 'neoliberal' attacks on universities, we should start by refusing the way that their pseudo-rationalities already determine so many aspects of the intellectual and institutional regimes that we consider under threat. This paper sketches an analysis of those aspects of the internal practices of academia that reinforce the interests at the origin of the attack on public education, and that make it possible, and indeed expected, for universities' leaders to oversee the betrayal of their institutions' very raison d'être. How have the physical and intellectual geographies of academic professionalism prepared the ground for 'neoliberal' reforms? How do the varied dispensations of modern higher education work against the ideal of open, democratic universities? How would university education, especially in the humanities, still exacerbate the privatisation and enclosure of knowledge in our societies, even if it remained public and accessible to everybody?

> *My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. — 1Kings 14*

The Biblical Rehoboam's promise to his subjects distils the same shocking moral that years of financial discipline have inculcated into Western public universities: pleas for clemency are futile; the next regime will be stricter than the last (see Schrecker, 2010, p.162 and Collectif Acides, 2015, pp. 61–70 for details). In ancient Judaea, the ensuing backlash led to the stoning of Rehoboam's emissary and drove the king himself into flight. Universities' reactions have mostly not been so decisive. In fact, it has often been movements external to university authorities themselves, in particular students, but also unions and grassroots political actors, who have taken the lead in contesting educational austerity. Recent developments in Australia, where the government's plans to abolish caps on university fees had to be withdrawn as a result of widespread community protests, despite being supported by most vice-chancellors (Riemer 2014), are an especially clear case of how resistance to the neoliberalisation of higher education may have to be mounted against the wishes of the most senior layers of the academic hierarchy.

Whether in Africa, Europe, the Asia-Pacific or the Americas, struggles for public higher education have gained a new lease on life amid the post-2008 convulsions agitating international capitalism. Sometimes, they have even experienced political success. But if the universally accessible higher education demanded by social movements is a necessary condition for progress towards educationally fair and democratic societies, it isn't a sufficient one. Universities must not just be opened to everyone who wants to study in them; what is taught, and how, need themselves to be critically reimagined (see Granger, 2015). While progressives are busy prising higher education from the neoliberal vice, it is therefore salutary to look more closely at exactly what the institutions are like that we're trying to save.

The exteriority of the defence of public education to the most powerful academics responsible for it should give pause. University leaders' enthusiasm in supporting, accelerating, and sometimes even instigating attacks on their own institutions has a clear entailment: higher education, and the institutions that provide it, do not 'belong' to them. Nor, can we only conclude, do they 'belong' to academics, who have often remained mute in the face of the wilful and systematic destruction being visited on their profession. Instead, it is to those who are most prepared to defend universities – students – that higher education most 'belongs' and who should, as a result, participate heavily in genuinely democratic decisions over how it is set up (despite its fifty years of age, Cockburn and Blackburn, 1967, still has many useful lessons on this point).

It is for students and society themselves to tell us how universities might really serve them. But they can do this best if they know more about what universities are actually like for the people who work in them. The simplifications imposed by struggle too often lead to an insufficiently dialectical view of the politics of university reform. According to this view, 'neoliberal' forces in government, business and culture exert pressure from the outside on hapless university authorities, who are left with no choice but compliance. Such an interpretation is obviously fanciful. The most natural way of correcting it, however, risks reinstating just as unhelpful a Manichaeism, by moving the frontier between the university's educational 'inside' and neoliberal 'outside' to within the institution itself, emphasising university leaders' membership of the socio-economic and political elites responsible for the dismantling of public higher education. The old dichotomy between universities and outside forces is replaced in this interpretation by a new one between, on the one hand, the plenipotentiaries of the economic order, whether they are the presidents of Goldman Sachs or of NYU, and rank-and-file academics and students on the other.

This revised dichotomy has elements of truth: vice-chancellors' and presidents' interests really do align with those of the business leaders on university councils; ordinary university workers and students really are in the firing-line of reforms, their positions ever more onerous, monitored and precarious. The problem is not in the basic characterisation of the actors, but in the way their relation is conceived. Tomorrow's vice-chancellors are drawn from today's rank-and-file academics. Bourdieu's claim (1989, p.12) that 'the dominated always contribute to their own domination' is politically counterproductive in many contexts. But, as a generalisation about the underlying mechanisms of academic cooptation by market logic, his reminder that 'the dispositions which incite complicity […] are also the embodied effect of domination' is entirely accurate. In what follows, I hope to address some of those aspects of the internal practice of academia that make it possible, and indeed expected, for universities' leaders to oversee the betrayal of their institutions' very raison d'être. How have the physical and intellectual geographies of academic professionalism prepared the ground for 'neoliberal' reforms? How do the varied dispensations of modern higher education work against the ideal of open, democratic universities? How would university education, especially in the humanities, still exacerbate the privatisation and enclosure of knowledge in our societies, even if it did remain public and accessible to everybody?

Enveloping institutions

While governments and policy-makers exert themselves to enclose the transformative opportunities of education inside the gated communities of social privilege, enclosure of an entirely literal kind has become an even more obvious feature of universities' physical environments. Universities around the world sustain a discourse of civic engagement and celebrate – in large part for marketing purposes – their 'public intellectuals' – while, at the same time, acting against the dissemination of knowledge by intensifying the policing of their external and internal boundaries. No presence on campus without identification; no access to libraries' holdings without a student number; restricted entry to university buildings; obstacles to non-enrolled students auditing classes; encouraged or obligatory RSVPs to academic talks; paying entry to public lectures; restrictions on the use of campus

venues for political purposes – measures like these will be well-known to anyone familiar with how modern universities work. As the built environment of higher learning is transformed into the 'hubs', 'pods', 'nodes' and 'resource' and 'engagement' centres of contemporary campus urbanism (see Coulson, Roberts and Taylor, 2015), everything in university life is closed, restricted and policed. This reaches its apogee for international students. Strict limits on the time available to complete degrees, the transfer to universities of responsibility for ensuring students not overstay visas or, in some UK universities, the use of regular fingerprinting to confirm lecture attendance, all blur the lines between education and border control.

This insistence on universities' territorial demarcations, and their integration into the national immigration apparatus, is not just about the enclosure of academic spaces with respect to the physical bodies of students, staff or members of the public. In a different register, the university takes those very bodies as sites on which its sovereignty can be asserted. The proliferation of university-branded clothing and accessories, just like the ID cards often worn on branded 'lanyards' around staff members' necks – a distant echo of the metal collar worn by enslaved Scottish coal miners, engraved with their owner's name (Losurdo, 2013, p.82) – emblazons the university's authority onto staff and students' clothing and personal effects, symbolically subsuming individuals under the institution's identity. In the same vein, ubiquitous 'wellness' programs – offered to staff as an ideological non-solution to the problems created by structural overwork – extend institutions' authority into domains lying outside the traditionally understood ambit of professional life. Rather than fostering a neutral intellectual commons evacuated of the most overbearing insignia of market rationality, the university increasingly distinguishes itself as a 'total' – or better, an 'enveloping' (Darmon, 2015, p.84) – institution, its monopolisation of its members' lives and its omnipresent crests and logos a permanent reminder that, on campus, thought and thinkers belong to it.

A single example offers, in a nutshell, an insight into the typical logic of enveloping institutions and their mechanisms The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney prefaces the University's 2015 internal discussion paper 'A culture built on our values' (University of Sydney, 2015) with the observation that the document 'introduces and explains some core values that have been proposed by our University community and describes some key mechanisms that will embed these values into our everyday behaviours.' It emerges that these values – 'courage and creativity', 'respect and integrity', 'inclusion and diversity' and 'openness and engagement' – miraculously all support the university's core commitment to 'excellence'. Despite its rhetoric of empowerment and personal flourishing, the report attempts to engineer an institutional 'culture' within an overpowering bureaucratic structure, and in the absence of any pretence of democratic organisational governance. In such a context, the purpose served is clear: the insistence on university employees' obligation to conduct themselves with 'openness', 'respect', or 'empathy' will mainly function to discourage criticism of the institution's top-down and authoritarian tendencies, precisely on the grounds that such contestation violates the respect and empathy due from staff to managers.

Accordingly, it comes as no surprise to discover, at the end of the Sydney document, that conformity with the university's 'values' – that is, 'excellence' – is to be made directly relevant to recruitment and promotion in the institution, and that, in particular, the university's 'Code of Conduct needs to be revised in light of the values that we agree as a part of this strategy process, and this code needs to be used more regularly as a resource for considering behaviour' (p.13). Culture and values, then, provide new avenues for the exertion of managerial authority and the maintenance of campus-level social control. This outcome is exactly parallel to the way in which, at the same university, formalised anti-bullying provisions, which a naive observer might have expected to protect subordinates against superiors, can be used as a mechanism of managerial pressure against staff who contest management decisions (see the chapter on 'Bullying – a standard managerial practice at the University' in NTEU Sydney University Branch, 2015, pp. 15–16).

University staff have, in one way or another, if not always initiated, then regularly accepted, largely cooperated in, and sometimes welcomed developments like these, along

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with most of the other transformations that have reshaped their profession in the last several decades (see Schrecker, 2010). The worm, so it would seem, is in the fruit. Instances of contestation – strikes, attempts to break corporations' monopoly over the dissemination of research, programs aiming to increase the participation of exploited, low-income members of society in higher education, or efforts to directly introduce wider political stakes into questions of institutional practice – are welcome, but unmistakably constitute exceptions to the norm. The fact that it is no doubt among the most exploited workers in higher education, casuals, that contestation is most obvious, tells us much about most academics' acceptance of the way we live now.

What is more, any contestation that does arise within the ranks of academia is usually seen, and understood by the actors themselves, as the mere complement of a broader compliance. Compliance with the ideological norms of the corporate university has certainly become second-nature to many. A minor example but, as an entirely unforced development, initiated by academics themselves, a telling one, is supplied by the shifting ways in which researchers are now choosing to describe the seminars and other talks at which their work is presented. The prominence of 'masterclasses', 'in conversation' sessions or 'retreats' as emerging formats for the dissemination of research does not just – or, perhaps, does not even – represent a much needed attempt to diversify and open up traditional genres of academic communication; it also suggests that the dissemination of knowledge should not be promiscuously open to all comers, but confined within an already established in-group. These examples are just a small selection from the remarkable proliferation of new genres of academic communication, and new labels for old ones, that the academic world is currently generating: 'quick-fire presentations', 'brain-storms', 'idea showers', 'Q&A sessions', 'brown bag sessions', 'elevator pitches', 'talking circles' and even 'collaborative micro-hacks' are among the evidence of the large-scale refoundation of the forms of intellectual dissemination currently underway.

It is, however, in the very bread-and-butter of universities' business – teaching – that academics' participation in the enclosure of knowledge is most apparent. Humanities disciplines – the very ones that the popular imagination strongly associates with critique and political radicalism – play a particular, and particularly disavowed, role in this enclosure. As a result, they have a distinct responsibility in combating it. It is a striking measure of the mystifying capacity of ideology that, whether in the mouths of critics or supporters of the humanities, clichés of their separation

from the 'real' world and its exigencies should be so widely accepted, commanding sufficient authority in the – admittedly particular – context of Japan, for instance, for the Japanese Education Minister to have called in 2015 for the closure of humanities and social science departments. This banal conviction of the humanities' intrinsic irrelevance is supremely ideological, and it has thoroughly occluded one of their major functions: the ideological preparation of the next generation of the economy's administrators, teachers, community workers and technocrats, as well as of the pool of precariously employed knowledge and creative workers responsible for safeguarding capitalism's hegemony in the public mind (cf. Paschal, 2012; see Coates and Edwards, 2009 and Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, 2015 for graduate employment data from Australia and the UK respectively).

Ideological preparation is, of course, a general feature of universities' role across all faculties, and before addressing the content of humanities education specifically it is worth taking a moment to reflect on it. Whatever the faculty in which they study, one important but inadequately discussed way in which universities format the next generation of workers is in the systematic disenchantment they generate by confronting often idealistic and optimistic students with the dismal realities of tertiary study. In Australia, the widespread frustration of hopes of intellectual and social blossoming that is an almost inevitable result of exposure to the marketised university classroom has been fascinatingly demonstrated by Richard Hil (2015). In their more crowded, less frequent classes, the increasing replacement of the seminar room by the online course, narrowing course options, a heavily casualised and precarious academic workforce, the absence of free time for socialising on campus, and the unmistakable atmosphere of constraint and pressure in which they learn, many students experience a disappointment and alienation that will soon be replicated on the employment market, for which the affective shock of university constitutes a rehearsal.

The severity of this alienation is moderated in those wealthier institutions which force themselves to preserve better learning conditions, for some students at least. In the Australian context, it is likely that it will be elite students – in other words, mainly those whose socio-economic circumstances allow them to achieve higher academic results, always under the ideological cover provided by discourses of academic 'merit' (cf. Bourdieu, 1989, chapter 2; Collins, 2002, p. 29) – who are most sheltered from degradation of learning conditions. Recent developments

in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at one 'leading' Australian institution (the University of Sydney) are no doubt representative. In an environment characterised by significant financial pressure on the faculty, Sydney has recently introduced a 'Faculty Scholars Program', apparently modelled on Yale's Directed Studies program and similar courses elsewhere. The program is designed to 'provide intensive small-group teaching with an expert on a topic that they are passionate about' (Arts and Social Sciences Faculty Handbook, University of Sydney). While the handful of students selected study an 'exclusive' and 'prestigious' program in small groups with the faculty's 'leading academics', the thousands of other students, and their peers elsewhere in the Australian comprehensive tertiary system, will have to make do, as best they can, with the ongoing erosion of the preconditions for a liberal education worthy of the name.

The demands of the contemporary economy mean that a proper education cannot be denied to everyone. Modern states clearly need some institutions of high quality to furnish the expertise on which administrative and technical competence depends – as long, of course, as those institutions do not seriously challenge their economic or the ideological bottom line. But not too many: many graduates clearly leave university with an educational preparation that is only just adequate for the roles they will assume as employees and citizens, and highly deficient in comparison to the fantasmagorical promises they are made by university marketing departments. This state of affairs is entirely consistent with the underlying place of higher education in a capitalist economy (see Collins, 2002 for some useful contextualisation). Just as modern manufacturing and distribution is organised on a 'just in time' basis, designed to reduce costs incurred by overproduction and unnecessary storage, so too the mass higher education industry is predicated on avoidance of costly over-education of the graduates it supplies to the labour market. Graduates must be professionally trained, but not over-trained: they mustn't be too good at their jobs when they arrive in them. Overtraining students is not just a waste of universities' limited resources, it would also supply employers with a more self-confident and capable workforce, able to fulfil the demands of their positions more easily. As a result, they would dispose of the surplus of time and, above all, mental energy necessary to press demands for greater workplace justice. Structurally negligent, just-adequate education, by contrast, weakens graduates' position vis-à-vis their employers, and restrains their availability for anything other than their immediate professional tasks.

Consolations of philosophy?

Universities have, in the last century at least, been reservoirs of dissent against capitalism. The intrinsically centrifugal nature of thought – the fact that ideas can always transcend the ideological context in which they are generated – ensures that sparks of counter-hegemonic thinking cannot fail to be struck, even within the academic furnaces of neoliberalism.

But what kind of flame are those sparks used to kindle? There is no doubt that the non-instrumental character of the humanities can, despite everything, favour the expression of critique. The pressure to increase tuition fees, to degrade the quality of the time students spend in the classroom and, on a different level, to court corporate sponsorship of research all evince the desire to place teaching and research across the university under the thumb of the market. In the same way, the continual attacks on the humanities specifically can be understood as the attempt to close off opportunities for politically transformative education in future salary-earners, and to maintain a 'fragmentation of social consciousness which prevents them from developing a comprehensive perspective on society as a whole' (Callinicos, 1989, p.116). Needless to say, it is the market and its masters who benefit.

There is also, however, the uncomfortable reality that in addition to this critical work, the humanities – like the pure sciences – also prepare graduates to join a large and mainly compliant labour force in sectors of the economy for which they are often significantly over-qualified. What is it, we might ask, about the forms of rationality promoted in humanities disciplines that prepare students to accept as normal post-graduation prospects that are considerably bleaker than those in other disciplines? In comparison to other graduates, Australian humanities graduates may, for instance, be less perturbed by starting salaries consistently falling at the bottom of the scale (GCA Australia, 2014). But are they really sanguine about the risk of being trapped well beyond graduation in inadequately-paid and often part-time jobs, notably in the retail and services sector (see, among other sources, Lamb, 2002, conclusions supported by more recent media reports)? Should liberal conceptions of the consolations of 'philosophy' really compensate for the slimness of its material rewards?

The Left has regularly engaged in ideological critique of the humanities, drawing attention to the political import of received ideas in many disciplines, and contesting the perpetuation, under the cover of disinterested scholarship, of diverse oppressions. But it is perhaps

not too inaccurate a generalisation to suggest that it has characteristically been less sensitive to the ways in which, regardless of the particular content of a discipline, the habits of mind that the humanities foster in students may contribute to the social relations that support capitalist domination. As Horkheimer and Adorno put it, 'the expulsion of thought from logic ratifies in the lecture hall the reification of human beings in factory and office' (2002, p. 23). The spread of critical epistemologies and counter-hegemonic theoretical currents since the 1960s has done little to reverse the trend – quite the opposite. Students' 'reification', indeed, is more likely to be acknowledged, in essentially celebratory terms, in apologias for the utility of traditional humanities subjects to the world of business – an increasingly common genre – than it is to form the basis of any comprehensive progressive critique (cf. Blackburn, 1967). In particular, the attempt to understand the humanities' ideological role has often not adequately taken up Said's call for research into 'the relationship between administrative ideas and intellectual discipline' (1977, p. 24).

Students are not just broken in for the labour market through systematic under-preparation and premonitory disenchantment. The forms in which knowledge and the activity of thinking are presented to them also play a crucial role. Education in the humanities, as elsewhere, takes the form of an elaborate disciplining of the diverse impulses of creative human intelligence – 'the servant which the master cannot control at will' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p.29) – into a narrow, and continually shifting, bandwidth of canonical formats, recognised questions, and authorised structures of intelligibility. This channelling of the currents of thought is significantly underdetermined by any necessity inherent to rationality itself, but reflects the fundamentally contingent, historically constituted nature of academic disciplines (see Gadamer, 1960). In this situation, it is beyond a cliché to observe that the exercise of power is necessary to the creation, recognition and dissemination of knowledge. The very idea of an academic discipline, in fact, is inseparable from the structure of intellectual authority, from students to recognised experts, that governs it (see e.g. Lagasnerie, 2010, pp. 34--40).

It is not that the particular modes of reasoning and discursive practice into which students are inducted in humanities subjects are irrational or arbitrary: it is, rather, that they always represent discretionary selections from among the many forms of discursive rationality that could equally have been chosen instead. Any curriculum entails choice – of theories, emphases, authors, schools, methods,

and so on. In the humanities above all, this selection is shaped in an obvious way by the ideological hegemonies at play, all grounded and justified in the classroom by the rationalising authority of the lecturer. Through assessment, students' facility in accepting this authority is made the criterion for the measure of their 'intelligence', and hence for their credentialisation for the purposes of entry into the labour market.

In this way, the humanities classroom becomes an elementary site for education in the discretionary exercise of power – the same kind of power to which students must learn to submit if they are to assume a role in the economy. The practices of assessment and examination inherent to higher education, which bury students' intellectual demonstrations in often oppressive bureaucratic constraints (word-limits, formatting prescriptions, due dates, and so on) 'prepare students both to undergo and, doubtless, also to exercise and impose the modes of population administration and the practices of new [public] management', as Muriel Darmon has noted in her study of French *classes préparatoires* (2015, p. 308).

More abstractly, the authority invested in the lecturer to dismiss competing theoretical claims on a discretionary basis encourages an acceptance of arbitrary symbolic authority which is soon reengaged outside the lecture theatre. The discretionary theoretical authority on which their lecturers' position is based resurfaces in the discretionary material authority – the authority of the market and the state – that students confront in the outside world. The symbolic power to which young people are subject in the humanities classroom, and which they also learn to deploy for themselves, offers a foretaste of the arbitrary dispensations to which they are subject as essentially disenfranchised citizens of capitalist states or as job-seekers in employment markets. The symbolic domination exerted in the world of ideas prepares students for the material domination they endure, and exert, as graduated wage-earners.

A contingent, tradition-embedded, and 'discretionary' character is intrinsic to any discipline in which knowledge is produced creatively, and in which interpretation, especially when uninformed by strongly empirical techniques, holds pride of place. As such, while any number of reforms could be envisaged that would contribute to the democratisation of humanities disciplines, and work against their domination by intellectual elites, there can be no question of surpassing this state of affairs entirely.

Rather than fully transcending the discretionary character of humanities research, the critical task is therefore to recognise the connections between the forms

of symbolic authority contracted and disseminated in the seminar room, and the wider forms of social and political authority in which they are embedded, and which they can simultaneously either reinforce or challenge. How far is theoretical analysis instrumentalised in the seminar room as a fundamental tool of careerism or personal advancement – lecturers' or students' – as opposed to one of social progress and collaborative emancipation? How often are hypotheses or discretionary normative judgements disguised as objective factual ones? How far are the propositions generated within disciplinary frameworks presented as fixed constraints to which students must submit, rather than as points of reference for exploring new forms of possibility? Is understanding itself conceived of as obedience (reproduction of a norm), or as response (Volosinov, 1929)? How far is the diversity of human understanding reduced to the positivities of technoscience? Is the complexifying impetus of critical rationality used to dampen or amplify the impetus to emancipation?

It is important that the manoeuvres of intellectual power and control demonstrated in the classroom not simply model the material forms of coercion on which economic exploitation rests. But the coercive tendencies latent in the basic forms of intellectual sociality are most fully expressed not in relations towards students, but in the regulation of academic professional life itself. One of the striking consequences of the recent managerialisation of academics' professional lives is that a certain sociology that emphasised the status of higher education as a total institution for the student (Bourdieu, 1989; Darmon, 2015) now has greater resonance as a description of what universities are like for staff.

There is certainly no need to observe how, in an employment market where supply vastly outstrips demand, every aspect of academics' professional activity is destabilised – or, rather, constituted – by an incessant round of assessment, evaluation and control. Teaching, research funding and 'output', as well as the 'performance' of whole departments, journals, discipline areas and institutions is analysed via managerial assessment practices fundamentally incompatible with the hermeneutic character of either education or discovery, whether within the sciences (Feyerabend, 1993) or outside them (Gadamer, 1960; Zarka, 2010; Rastier 2013). And, because power is not real unless it is arbitrary, the criteria on which this new academic phrenology is based are continually changing and, in any case, always subjective. The remark attributed to a senior administrative staff member at the University of Sydney – 'every day at work feels like

a job interview' (NTEU University of Sydney, 2015, p.11) – perfectly captures the effect of these mechanisms, and applies fully to academics. The scholar has become either the beggar-supplicant, imploring, through their grant applications, the deities of funding, or the caped penitent, ritualistically submitting themselves to the latest ordeal of evaluation, their guilt already confirmed by the very necessity of the trial.

In the six years since she articulated it, the accuracy of Schrecker's (2010, p. 185) indictment has only matured:

> Instead of mounting a campaign to explain what really ails higher education and how the states' dwindling support for their public colleges and universities has contributed to their perceived defects, much of the academy's official leadership is scrambling to show that it can evaluate itself. Just as administrators purged their faculties of suspected Communists in the 1950s in order to keep outsiders from doing it, they are now struggling to implement accountability procedures before trustees and politicians devise ones for them.

The problem, however, is far from confined to the 'academy's official leadership'. Ordinary academics' acquiescence to, and, often, celebration of, the tyranny of evaluation is a striking illustration of our compliance before arbitrary regimes of intellectual coercion. Academics' refusal to acknowledge this and other aspects of their profession's increasing proletarianisation has, no doubt, many sources beyond simple careerism. Middle-class professionals are unwilling to accept that they could be either dominated or, themselves, the agents of domination. Intellectuals' conviction that they maintain a monopoly over their own analysis discourages them from questioning whether their own hagiographies – Davis (2010) is a clear example – really do represent the *ne plus ultra* of critical reflection on their institutions. Excessive deference to the instruments of technocratic rationality dulls critique of its fundamental cardsharpery.

Less often observed perhaps, the fetish of the quantitative rests on a peculiar masochism: the tendency, widely obvious among academics, to take each tightening of the administrative screw, each subsequent degradation of working conditions, as just the next opportunity to showcase individual resilience. The willingness, through puritanical discipline, to surmount whatever punishment the institution next inflicts becomes a perverse mark of superiority in a competitive professional milieu deeply marked by Darwinian logic. The symbolic prestige still conferred by academic employment, the largely unalienated character of research work, as well as the proliferating institutional rewards for teaching, research and, no doubt, administration – the academic equivalents

of the 'employee of the month' certificates awarded in Starbucks – supply any number of rationalisations in response to those who have the effrontery to suggest that this might not, perhaps, be the best of all possible worlds. Academia, after all, isn't a job: it's a calling, and living is something that our servants will do for us.

Education: the new Greece?

If we want to defeat the pseudo-rationalities of contemporary attacks on universities, we should start by refusing the way that their logic already determines so many aspects of the intellectual and institutional regimes that we consider under threat. Neoliberal ideologues must not be allowed to get any further in doing to education what they have already done to Greece.

But how to unscramble the egg? In seventeenth and eighteenth-century England, the enclosure movement – emblem of the dispossession at the heart of the capitalist economy (Harvey, 2014; Schui, 2014) – was justified by the idea that it would greatly boost agricultural productivity. That claim wasn't just highly exaggerated: it was wholly indifferent to the injustices involved (Allen, 1992, 2004; Crawford, 2002, pp. 50-1). In the twenty-first century, there is no more urgent intellectual task for universities than resisting the market rationality that would impose a similar enclosure of knowledge on them.

As is often observed (e.g. Sievers, 2008, p.243), most academics' alienation from any recognition of their own capacity for agency is impressive. Its effect – reinforcing the status quo – is never, perhaps, more powerful than when it is enacted with that mix of complicit irony, semi-lucidity, and opportunistic fatalism that any institutional agitator will easily recognise in the mouths of their contradictors. The complacent reasoning, proffered with all the disabused assurance of the world-weary political sophisticate, leads to one conclusion only: nothing can be done, and especially not by us.

We cannot continue to block our nose and cover our eyes forever. Nor can we go on behaving like the audience at the very drama of which we are the actors. It is time that academics became, in Cahill and Irving's pithy (2015) formulation, not just idea makers, but idea users, and actually start working against the 'normal madness' (Sievers, 2008) of their institutions. 'In order to supersede the idea of private property, the idea of communism is enough,' Marx wrote in the 1844 manuscripts. 'In order to supersede private property as it actually exists, real communist activity is necessary'. An identical conclusion follows in the battle between neoliberalism and education.

We need, however, to beware of the idea that what is mostly called for is more analysis of the kind that has been undertaken here. There is no need, in the university context, for the 'theoretical heroism' criticised by Rancière (2011) – the idea that the academic 'masses' can only make history because their 'intellectuals' have theorised it. Nothing in the foregoing analysis will come as a deep revelation to academic workers: the description of universities that has been offered here simply assembles what is already under everyone's noses. Any utility that reflections like these might have lies in something else than uncovering putatively occult truths that academics are somehow too unenlightened to grasp. The central critical task in resistance to the privatisation of knowledge is not mainly an analytical or an epistemological, but a political one. We mostly do not need to understand more about what is wrong with universities; above all, we need to make the reality that everyone understands already, but will not say, sayable – by saying it ourselves, repeatedly, and by seeking to increase the situations on campus in which others are confident enough to say it too, and then to act together to change it.

It is not just our universities that desperately need change: our economies and our societies do, too. Nothing less than the future of the environment depends on it (Tanuro, 2010). Thankfully, the road to a 'nexit' – a definitive break with 'neoliberalism' and its accompanying imperialism and war – is not paved by academics or the other ratified thinkers of the contemporary opinion bubble. It is social movements and their organic intellectuals, who are fighting the depredations of the current world-order concretely, as well as writing about them, who will supply the ideas needed to support transformative social change, whether on campus or beyond it. It is certainly not academics who lead the struggle for a better world. But, in our own workplaces if nowhere else, we might at least participate in it.

Acknowledgments

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