

## Neoliberalism: An Alien Interloper in Higher Education

The sociologist and critical theorist Theodor Adorno provided a most appropriate opening move for this chapter in his *Minima moralia*, when he said:

...the entire private domain is being engulfed by a mysterious activity that bears all of the features of commercial life without there being any actual business to transact...[T]he whole of society is becoming hierarchical...proliferating wherever there used still to be an appearance of freedom... [now] expressed in the parasitic psychology of the individual...an uncouth interloper...seen as arrogant, alien and improper.... (Adorno 1994 [1974], p. 23)

Following on from Adorno, this is not a book for the faint-hearted. I will not be holding back from a robust critique of what is being *done to* universities worldwide, and for some, my critique may even be a tad too harsh. Nor will I be pointing the finger of blame for all of the damage solely as originating ‘outside’ of universities—there are some very potent agencies ‘inside’ universities that have become heavily complicit in perpetrating irreparable damage, and I will come to them in some detail, shortly.

However, if this were merely another book providing a blistering critique on the demise of the contemporary university fixated upon a nostalgic look in the rear vision mirror at what is being lost, then I will have failed demonstrably in my intent. As Couldry (2010) put it in his influential book *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after*

*Neoliberalism*, unless we ‘name the crisis’ confronting us, there is a ‘loss of the connecting narratives’ that constitute the basis for identifying ‘the resources for thinking beyond it’ (p. 1).

I need to, therefore at the outset, comment briefly on the tone and direction of the remainder of this book.

As a way out of the seemingly inextricable higher education bog, we have allowed ourselves to become implicated in, I want to posit a hopeful vision or disposition on what we might begin to do about it. The starting point is Couldry’s (2011) enunciation of Andrew Ross’ (2008) point that we must start by acknowledging ‘the new geography of work’ in which we develop a commitment within the modern university to being ‘clear-sighted about the conditions of our own practice’ (Couldry 2011, p. 7). In other words: ‘We must recognize our location in the ‘neoliberal university’ (Couldry 2010, p. 7) by unpacking the conditions within which to enact what Couldry (2010) calls ‘sociologies of voice’ (Chap. 6). For Nick Couldry (2010, 2011) and Butler (2005), this involves ‘giving an account’ of ourselves. Once we jettison this capacity, or assign it to others, we lose the capacity to ‘narrate things about ourselves’, and as Couldry (2010) argues, this is tantamount to ‘treating people as if ...they [are] not human’ (p. 1). According to him, the notions of ‘voice as a *process*’ and ‘voice as a *value*’ are crucial to developing the kind of social cooperation and forms of solidarity necessary to ‘countering neoliberal rationality’ (Couldry 2010, p. 11)—which will be the basis for a deeper discussion later in this book.

With this as a broad orienting context for the book, before I can properly articulate the nature of an alternative or a way out of the current desultory situation, I need to be clear as to the extant state of affairs as they exist in universities. In particular, with regard to the relationship of neoliberalism to universities, I need to do some ground-clearing around:

- where the term neoliberalism comes from;
- the forces that are arguing for this way of defining and organizing universities;
- when and where the term neoliberalism was first used in relation to universities; and
- in the end, how useful the concept actually is, in a context where no countries have the kind of ‘free market context’ argued for in the ideal concept.

I will deal with these ideas interactively rather than serially or sequentially, because that is in reality how they exist.

‘THE END OF THE UNIVERSITY AS WE KNOW IT’  
(BROWN 2011, p. 117)

As I indicated in my opening in Chap. 1, we are relentlessly assailed and assaulted these days by the elevated clamour about the fear of terrorism; it is pervasive, insistent, and fed insatiably by the mass media and self-seeking complicit politicians. There is no doubt an element of truth in the claims posed by terrorism, but it is also a massive distraction from the even more insidious ‘stealth revolution’ (Brown 2015) that has hijacked and completely taken over our lives, institutions, and societies, with scarcely a word of opposition being uttered. Wendy Brown (2015) argues that one of the great ‘political ironies’ (p. 9) of our times, is that at precisely the time we are smugly celebrating and congratulating ourselves on the end of the Cold War, a ‘new form of governmental reason has been unleashed in the Euro-Atlantic world that [has] inaugurate[d] democracy’s unmooring and substantive disembowelment’ (p. 9). What Brown is referring to is the way in which neoliberalism as a ‘normative order of reason’ has, over the past three decades, become ‘a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality... [that has] transmogrified every domain of human endeavour...’ (pp. 9–10). Neoliberalism has been able to do this because it is more than ‘a set of economic policies, an ideology, or a resetting of the relation between state and economy’ (p. 9). Neoliberalism’s defining logic of reason is the dictum of *homo oeconomicus* that:

All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized. (Brown 2015, p. 10)

In other words, neoliberalism works through the way in which it ‘disseminates market values and metrics to every sphere of life and construes the human itself exclusively as *homo oeconomicus*’ (Brown 2015, p. 176). Brown (2015) argues that the very fibre of democracy which we understand to be ‘individual and collective self-rule’ and which we take to be ‘a permanent achievement of the West’ and that cannot be ‘lost’, is in the process of being completely ‘overwhelmed and ... displaced by the economium to enhance capital value, competitive positioning, and credit ratings’ (p. 10).

What is animating Brown, in all of this, is the way in which neoliberalism as ‘a peculiar form of reasoning’ is coming to ‘configure.... all aspects of existence in economic terms’ and is ‘quietly undoing basic elements of democracy’ including ‘vocabularies’, ‘political cultures’, ‘habits of citizenship’, and ‘above all, democratic imaginaries’ (p. 17). Neoliberal reason converts the distinctly ‘*political*’ character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into *economic* ones’ (p. 17, italics in original), notwithstanding that the term democracy ‘is among the most contested and promiscuous terms in our modern political vocabulary’ (p. 18).

In her earlier treatise on *Neoliberalized Knowledge*, Wendy Brown (2011) provides her understanding of the term as well as pointing to the origins of the term neoliberalization in US higher education:

Neoliberalism, that often confusing signifier for a unique governmental and social rationality—one that extends market principles to every reach of human life—germinated in California during the Reagan gubernatorial years, 1967–1975. It wasn’t called neoliberalism then, but rather, Reaganomics, supply-side economics or tax revolts or rebellions against “big government.” (p. 118)

What lies at the ‘heart of these reforms’ in higher education, she argues, are the:

...basic neoliberal principles of deregulation, marketization, and privatization of all public goods, a forthright attack on the public sector, and the beginnings of casting every human endeavor and activity in entrepreneurial terms. (p. 118)

As Brown (2011) goes on to say, neoliberalism is ‘more than mere economic policy’ (p. 118). It is:

...a governing social and political rationality that submits all human activities, values, institutions, and practices to market principles. It formulates everything in terms of capital investment and appreciation (including and especially humans themselves).... (p. 118)

As a governing rationality, neoliberalism extends from the management of the state itself to the soul of the subject; it renders health, education, transportation, nature, and art into individual consumer goods and

converts patients, students, drivers, athletes, and museum-goers alike into entrepreneurs of their own needs and desires who consume or invest in these goods. (p. 118)

Brown (2011) says that:

Neoliberal rationality takes aim at the very idea of a public good' (p. 118) encapsulated in the outrageous claim by Margaret Thatcher that "There is no such thing as society... [only] individual men and women". (Thatcher 1987, p. 18)

Public goods are 'privatized' in three senses, according to Brown (2011):

First, they are outsourced to nongovernment for-profit providers, hence submitted to calculations of profit rather than public benefit. (p. 118). Second, they are marketed and priced as individual consumer rather than public goods... [user pays university fees are an example]. Third, ... [since] funding and accountability ... are devolved to the lowest and smallest units [in universities, they are called cost-centres], these units themselves are forced into wholly entrepreneurial conduct... to protect and advance their own interests without regard for common or public ones. (p. 119)

So, at its heart 'neoliberal rationality challenges the very idea of a public good' (p. 119), while at the same time 'displac[ing] democracy and equality as governing principles in provisioning goods like education', with education becoming 'an individual means to an individual end, something individuals may or may not choose to invest in' (p. 119).

Under neoliberal rationality 'education is rendered a consumer good in which students invest (often by incurring considerable debt) to advance their own prospects for economic success. The value of being an educated individual is reduced to its income earning capacities; being an educated public registers no value at all by this metric' (p. 120).

For their part, the 'neoliberalization' or 'privatization' of public universities '... is not simply a matter of converting them into private universities. In fact, the process of making public universities entrepreneurial submits them to far more vulgar forms of marketization...' (p. 120). To take a particular instance of this, the commodification necessary to replace the diminution in public funding has meant that activities like research, which is supposed to serve a broader social purpose, has become corrupted, corroded, and distorted. As Brown (2011) put it:

Neoliberalization ... means research [is] increasingly contoured by and to corporate ... funding [or the government's desire that universities secure this type of research funding], [with the effect that] research [is] both curved toward potential sponsors ... which risks overt compromise or corruption by the need to serve, attract, or retain them. (p. 122)

The distortion can be summed up in the cryptic comment 'what can we study that will sell? (p. 122) both in the literal and metaphorical senses, as "scholars" own interests, questions, or approaches' (p. 122) become pragmatically subsumed to what they need to do to survive or keep their jobs.

The imbrication of universities serving corporate and profit-seeking interests, also bring into universities forms of governance that are alien, foreign, and hitherto unwelcome, as neoliberalism insists on the 'replacement of principles and protocols of shared governance with managerial and business principles' (p. 123). As Brown (2011), argues, this insistence comes via 'increased involvement by non-academics in academic matters (whether corporate funders...or managerially-minded administrators deciding academic priorities)' (p. 123). While the proximity of universities to 'the world of financial capital is not [entirely] new... [w]hat is novel is the degree to which the university is being merged with this world and remade in its image—its powers, needs, and values' (p. 123).

What is especially disturbing about the naturalization of this 'merging'—or replacement—of university interests of independence, by corporate ones of subservience and dependence, is the acceptance of this as normal 'by a neoliberalized public that increasingly judges universities through market metrics: the enhancement of earning power for students and the development of profitable research' (p. 123).

Transformed in this process is the very nature of knowledge:

Neoliberalization replaces education aimed at deepening and broadening intelligence and sensibilities, developing historical consciousness and hermeneutic adroitness, acquiring diverse knowledge and literacies, becoming theoretically capacious and politically and socially perspicacious, with [forms of] education aimed at honing technically-skilled entrepreneurial actors adept at gaming any system. (p. 123)

According to Brown (2011), the project of neoliberalism will be complete 'when all academic knowledge, and indeed, all university activity is valued

according to its capacity to augment human, corporate or finance capital' but it will have brought with it 'the disappearance of ... an educated citizenry and [along with it] the soul and sinew of democracy' (p. 124).

Notwithstanding the potency of these trenchant criticisms, Boyer (2011) argues that neoliberal governance in the modern university 'should...not be seen as a novel institutional regime, but rather as the selective intensification of longer term processes' (p. 179). Analysing the genealogy of the 'idea' of the university as a historical aristocratic elitist institution, Boyer (2011) claims that:

Neoliberal academic governance, whether of the technocratic or market-centred form, extends the late nineteenth century idea that universities should function as crucibles for the generation of epistemic artefacts to the present purposes of stimulating private commercial interests, or enriching and empowering states in the global knowledge economy. (p. 179)

By way of explaining why there is so much internal unrest and dissension in universities, Boyer (2011) says that the 'dominant critical narrative' emerges from the 'dissipat[ion of] organizational and collegial autonomy in order to better saturate universities with market-oriented principles (knowledge as commodity, faculty as wage labour, administration as management, student body as consumer public, university as marketplace)' (pp. 179–180).

The loudest opposition to this intensified neoliberal regime has come from 'faculty' who, 'among the three estates of the university (students, faculty, administrators)...has experienced the deepest erosion of autonomy under the current reforms' (Boyer 2011, p. 180). Coupled with this is the view that students stand to 'enhance their social power with their new image as sovereign consumers, and the re-imagination of the university as a kind of for-profit corporation run by profit-minded managers has helped to cement the political hegemony of administrators' (Boyer 2011, p. 180).

While there can be no denying the reality of intensified faculty workload, alongside the diminution of faculty autonomy, these have failed to attract wider public condemnation. This is due largely to the widely held perception of universities as aloof institutions, with the result that this degradation, rather than attracting public condemnation, has instead had a certain degree of 'populist political' (p. 180) appeal, especially Boyer (2011) argues, in the US.

Turning to what might be done to oppose or turn around what some would argue is a juggernaut ideology (Doherty 2015) that has Western societies in its vice-like grip, will entail much more than vague utterances and calls around the necessity of a nostalgic return to forms of ‘critical thinking’. As Brown (2011) put it, ‘critical thinking, great historical ideas and literatures do not address what markets and students think they need’ (p. 124). Challenging this obdurate entrenched ideology that has captured universities worldwide will need to be far more sophisticated, strategic, and nuanced. It will require:

... persuad[ing] a [skeptical] public that our worth lies apart from science and the market and that [the alternative that we envisage] is one that a democracy, a self-governing or even self-regarding people, cannot do without. This means developing a compelling account of what we do that articulates with extant public meanings, desire and anxieties without capitulating to the dominant normative valuations and schematics of them and especially without submitting to neoliberal criteria. (p. 125)

We need to be crystal clear about what the antithesis to neoliberalism is, and we will need to craft a convincing and compelling story about its merits as an alternative ‘platform [to that of] capital accumulation and appreciation’ (p. 125). In essence, we will need to convey an image of the ‘prophylactic against the reduction of us to specks of human capital, against the flattening and hollowing of self and world toward which neoliberalism drives (pp. 125–126).

Countering the ‘one-dimensionality of *homo economicus*’ as the defining force in our lives will necessitate demonstrating ‘precisely what a neoliberal rationality would extinguish in us individually and collectively’ (p. 126) and how what is needed in its place, is a political alternative ‘featuring shared power and purpose, [that will open up] the play of ambiguity, vulnerability, awe, ambivalence, psychic depths, boundary, identity, spirit, and other elements foreign to neoliberal rationality’ (p. 126). As Brown argues, this does not mean that the survival of the academy as a social institution depends upon all of us having ‘to become marketable, immediately applicable, or scientific in [our] method’ (p. 127). However, it will require that we ‘recover our connection and value to enriched human life’, and become better at ‘explain[ing] or justify[ing] our value to the public or even other university colleagues...’ (p. 127). This will not only be the means of saving the

obliteration of our own disciplines and their ‘cannibalization’ in the university, but resistance of this kind will ‘exploit the link between humanistic inquiry and prevent the complete neoliberalization of knowledge and humanity’ (p. 127). Above all, this will require us to demonstrate a broader and more comprehensive ‘connection with purposes broader than our own small professional universes’ and a rejection of the ‘nose-in-the-air posture toward those too ignorant to appreciate what we do or an equally useless moral righteousness about how good and true, if undervalued, we are’ (p. 127).

The last word on this recovery, for the moment, to Brown (2011):

But [all of] this is only possible if we recover in our work as scholars and teachers what is ineffably moving, sublime, or meaningful [in our work]. It is only so if we place these elements at the heart of a campaign to save higher education from being reduced to an appendage of capital’s latest and most remarkable modality. (pp. 127–128)

The more recent genesis of neoliberalism as it applies to universities in Australia, at least as an illustrative case, had its beginnings in the mid-1980s under the Labour Party Minister of Education, John Dawkins, who had previously been Minister for Trade. Under policies introduced by Dawkins, ‘Universities were redefined as competitive firms, rather than branches of a shared higher education enterprise’ in which ‘deliberative planning was quickly replaced by struggle for advantage, and a scramble for amalgamations [that] produced [the] current odd collection of universities’ (Connell 2013, p. 1). In a country well known for its reliance upon ‘extractive’ industries, Connell (2013) leaves us in no doubt as to the nature of this neoliberal turn when she notes that: ‘Higher education was increasingly seen by government as an export service industry in which Australia could find comparative advantage, the cultural equivalent of iron ore. High fees for overseas students monetised this idea... [and domestic] fees were re-introduced... Federal government funding as a proportion of the higher education budget collapsed, from around 90% to under 50%... [bringing to an end] a national university system...of remarkable uniformity...[and its replacement with a] new stratification... [based upon] positional advantage....De-regulation [of university fees] is currently being [further] deepened to include domestic students’ (p. 1).

In the Australian case, as elsewhere, the features of this neoliberalization of universities is clearly on display:

... universities have been re-shaped on the model of corporations...[evidenced by a] growth in managerial power...with Vice-Chancellors and Deans increasingly understood as entrepreneurs, being paid like corporate managers...

... greater social distance, and often distrust, between university managers and academic staff.

Corporate techniques of personnel management along fractal lines (performance management, auditing regimes)...

...Older forms of collective deliberation, such as the departmental meeting, have declined, and no new ones ... created... (Connell 2013, p. 1)

Academic work has also been dramatically altered:

[With] about 50% of Australian undergraduate teaching ... now done by casual labour (euphemised as “sessional”)... ...another stratification is emerging, between research-only, research-and-teaching, and teaching-only posts.

Significant fractions of non-academic labour in universities are outsourced. Some support functions close to teaching staff are deleted from organization charts (e.g. the departmental secretary), while new ones close to management are added (e.g. marketing). The expansion of student numbers has been handled with rising class sizes and a cheaper labour force.

[Accompanying this is]...a widespread sense among academic staff that the demands of the job have become more relentless, the benefits more uncertain, and the level of trust lower...

Competitive markets require visible metrics of success and failure...[and this has been done clumsily by successive Australian governments through] quality assurance and competitive assessment of research [under names like Excellence in Research in Australia, ERA] ... with opaque international league tables an unsatisfactory substitute...[for] powerful metrics [with which to measure research]. (Connell 2013, p. 1)

These changes in the labour processes of academic work (Smyth 1995), have also dramatically changed the nature of knowledge creation and utilization in universities. As Connell (2013) argues, ‘the first order effect of the neoliberal turn is to instrumentalise research and teaching’ (p. 1). What is valued in research is that which ‘benefits a corporate or organizational interest, or fits a politician’s definition of national priorities’

(p. 1). The notion of ‘philosophical reflection’ or thinking deeply about important issues, has been replaced by ‘performativity’ or ‘auditable output’ that fits ‘the logic of the system’, rather than simply trusting people to ‘be doing valuable work’ (p. 1). Within this scheme, what counts as valued, has to be countable—which in turn, produces a preoccupation with ‘obsessive quantification of research output, both individual and institutional’ (p. 1).

Far from ‘competition’ supposedly driving ‘innovation’, Connell (2013) argues that it does the reverse. In the first instance, what a neo-liberal conception of the university produces, is the ‘reproduction of global dependency’ (p. 2)—through a ‘neocolonial dependence...built into performativity through international rankings of journals, department and universities’, whereby local intellectual cultures are undermined and obliterated through an unhealthy reliance on ‘impact factors and ‘citations’ (p. 2). Secondly, the ‘entrenchment of social hierarchies in knowledge production and circulation’ (p. 2), act to further sediment privilege in the already advantaged—institutionally, in Australia in the older so-called ‘sandstone’ universities, and individually in the scions of the privileged who attend them.

To give Connell (2013) the final word, at least for the moment, in her helpful analysis, and like Couldry (2011) earlier, I will return to this later:

Neoliberalism is the dominant logic in our world...But it is not the only possible logic, and there is more than one way to respond to the neoliberal pressures that exist. (p. 2)

Now that we have seen something of the contours of how neoliberalism has been impacted upon universities, or been warmly embraced as the case might be, it might be appropriate to ask: Where did neoliberalism come from?

This is where things get somewhat more complex and murky. In its most proximal form, neoliberalism was a doctrine developed as a bulwark against the perceived restrictions placed upon individuals by fascism, communism, and dictatorships in the 1970s and earlier (Harvey 2007). We can understand it somewhat more clearly through an understanding of history and the meanings attached to human nature. The following extended quote from David Harvey (2007) from his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, points to the two fundamental foundations of the concept, and how it became so attractive:

For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom, as ‘the central values of civilization’. These values, they held, were threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements for those of individuals free to choose. (p. 5)

Harvey (2007) goes on to observe that concepts of ‘dignity and individual freedom are powerful and appealing in their own right’ (p. 5)—so much so that they can be mobilized to stir up emotions against all manner of incursions and interventions, real or imagined. Harvey traces the more recent antecedents of the concept of neoliberalism to the settlement reached after the Second World War, and the new world order constructed ‘through the Bretton Woods Agreements, and the various institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, [and] the IMF to stabilize international relations’ and ensure peace through the construction of ‘the right blend of state, market, and democratic institutions’ (p. 10). Economically, this meant establishing ‘fixed exchange rates’, even though it became clear as time progressed that these were a barrier to the ‘free flow of capital’ and hence ‘free trade in goods’ (p. 10). Keynesian ideas were interventionist in their attempt to smooth out the bumps in the business cycle and ameliorate its worst excesses, so as to guarantee full employment. Keynesian economics was, therefore, predicated upon ‘a “class compromise” between capital and labour’ to guarantee both peace and relative stability’ (p. 10). Institutionally, Harvey argues, this compromise amounted to a kind of ‘embedded liberalism’, whereby market and entrepreneurial processes were given the space to operate ‘surrounded by a web of social and political constraints and a regulatory environment’ (p. 11).

As an explanatory theory, the largely Keynesian view of economics stood up fairly well until the occurrence of a number of international crises. In particular, the ‘OPEC oil embargo of 1973’ (Harvey 2007, p. 12) that led to soaring oil prices throughout the decade, accompanying a period of ‘stagflation’ (stagnation and inflation), which started to raise questions about whether the system of fixed exchange rates had

become anachronistic in times of increased international capital flows needed to fuel development. It was unclear at the time—and I was working as a Keynesian trained economist in a university, who lapsed as a result of a ‘crisis of confidence in the ideas’—exactly what would replace a set of economic ideas that were clearly in a state of disrepair. As Harvey (2007), accurately, in my view summarized it: ‘The capitalist world stumbled towards neoliberalization as the answer through a series of gyrations and chaotic experiments that really only converged as a new orthodoxy known as the “Washington Consensus” in the 1990s’ (p. 13). In the background in the 1970s, was a group of University of Chicago-trained economists known as ‘the Chicago Boys’ (Harvey 2007, p. 8), who were committed to opposing socialist ideas, and that had gained influence in supporting the overthrow of the leftist Allende government in Chile, which was replaced by the Pinochet regime, who took on their ideas to roll back nationalization and pushed for a range of deregulationist policies in that country. The experience there, ‘provided helpful evidence to support the subsequent turn to neoliberalism in both Britain (under Thatcher) and the US (under Reagan) in the 1980s’ (Harvey 2007, p. 9). As Brown (2015) put it, neoliberalism was an “experiment” imposed upon Chile’ (p. 20), and that as events would have it, went on to subsequently infect the rest of the world, largely through policies incubated, developed, and imposed by international predator organizations such as the IMF.

We need to be a little cautious here in not ascribing too much in the way of certitude to the manner in which neoliberalism operates—it is much more opportunistic. Peck (2010) argues that in and among all of the ‘ameliorative firefighting, trial-and-error governance, devolved experimentation, and the pragmatic embrace of “what works”’, neoliberalism is more often than not likely to ‘become mired in the unending challenge of managing its own contradictions...’ (p. 106). In respect of this, Peck (2010) says:

For all of the ideological purity of free-market rhetoric, for all of the machinic logic of neoclassical economics...neoliberal strategy is inescapably, and profoundly marked by compromise, calculation, and contradiction. There is no blueprint. (p. 106)

This is not to say that it does not have some quite profound effects, but even these are provisional and depend on the particularities of context.

## THE ‘CORROSION OF CHARACTER’: THE CORRUPTION AND PROLETARIANIZATION OF AN ACADEMIC IDENTITY

A useful epistemological hook with which to examine what neoliberalism has done to academic work in terms of its distortion and corruption, is through the lens provided by Richard Sennett (1998) in his notion of ‘corrosion of character’ given expression in his *The corrosion of character: the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. Another way to put it is that we need to look at what is happening to academic identity—which is to say, how academics envisage their work, and how this is being transformed largely without their consent.

While there are some who suggest that academic identities are not ‘under threat’ by neoliberalism and that the fluidity of the concept of identity makes it such that individuals can ‘create...spaces for the exercise of principled autonomy and agency’ (Clegg 2008, p. 329), the overwhelming evidence suggests otherwise. The changes are as widespread and deep as they are profound. In order to understand the gravity of the changes, and without over-romanticizing the notion of some lost academic identity, it is necessary to know something about the immediate history of academic work prior to what we have at the moment.

I need to return to a somewhat earlier ‘social imaginary’ (Taylor 2004) as it was used in relation to universities, rehearse some of its major tenets, and do a little updating. In order to do this, I will look at the changing organization of academic work from the vantage point of the ‘Marxist-inspired labour process, political economy tradition’ (Dearlove 1997, p. 60; see also: Smyth 1995; Miller 1995; Pritchard and Willmott 1997; Smith et al. 1991; Parker and Jary 1995). A major strand of labour process theory, which derives from Braverman’s (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, uses the term ‘proletarianization thesis’ to describe the loss of freedom and autonomy, the fragmentation of work, the de-professionalization and enhanced compliance that comes with increasing managerialization, and the overall intensified control of work practices, imposed upon all manner of work in the past several decades, including that in higher education.

It has become somewhat unfashionable these days to refer to what is happening to the work of academics as being ‘proletarianized’. This kind of analysis is seen as a rather too deterministic, structuralist, and classist in its application of Marx, which has lost traction these days. However, I am not so sure we should be so quick to jettison the term

proletarianization—rather, I think we need to update and reconfigure it a little so as to see its relevance to academia.

Bernard Stiegler (2010a, b, 2011), a French philosopher working on the relationship between technology and society is helpful in this regard. In the preface to an interview with Stiegler, Lemmens (2011), put it succinctly:

Stiegler's philosophical enterprise can ...be seen as a continuation of the project of critical theory, of its social critique, its critique of political economy and its critique of the culture industry. (p. 34)

At the core, Stiegler regards society as suffering 'from what he calls a state of *generalized proletarianization*' (Lemmens 2011, p. 33 italics in original). He draws the distinction between the older conceptualization of proletarianization, and a revisited and expanded notion:

Whereas nineteenth-century capitalism proletarianized workers by delegating their knowledge and know-how to machines, reducing them to labor power, twentieth-century capitalism has proletarianized consumers by depriving them of their own ways of life and massively replacing them with preformatted and standardized 'life-styles' fabricated and marketed on a worldwide scale by global corporations exclusively driven by profit. (Lemmens 2011, p. 34)

In this regard, Vesco (2015) says that Stiegler is pursuing an understanding of proletarianization that 'is much older and goes deeper than the Industrial Revolution' (p. 86). In other words, Stiegler's view moves us beyond the nineteenth-century figure of the worker who is confronted by 'the capitalist standardization of modes of production' along with a view of this being restricted to certain fractions of the working class, to seeing the recuperation of the term as being much more extensive. Stiegler's 'recuperating proletarianization from its earlier roots' (Vesco 2015, p. 87) has constituted something unthinkable in contrast to the Marxist version, in its shift of 'the figure of the proletarian from the side of the producer to the side of the consumer' (p. 87). As with the proletarian worker, in the case of consumer proletariat, there is 'loss of knowledge' as 'the machine' appropriates it. The machine, in the case of higher education, is the machinery or the technology of the market. As Vesco (2015) summarizes Stiegler's argument:

Stiegler moves away from the figure of the worker and introduces a hyper-industrial figure of the proletarianized consumer. In much the same way that the producer is reduced through proletarianization to pure labor force, the consumer also undergoes disindividuation and endures the same loss of knowledge and memory... [through a reduction]... to that of mere purchasing power. (pp. 87–88)

In this consumerist-led version of proletarianization, which is very pertinent to what is happening with the commodification of higher education, the argument is that ‘consumers are “discharged” of the burden as well as the responsibility of shaping their own lives and are reduced to units of buying power controlled by marketing techniques’ (p. 34). For example, in rating and ranking scales and league tables, marketing agencies have essentially appropriated the decision-making process from students and their parents. Today’s ‘cognitive capitalism’, Lemmens says, is producing the ‘systematic destruction of knowledge and the knowing subject’ (p. 34), in what Stiegler calls the ‘systematic industrialization of human memory and cognition’ (p. 34). As Stiegler (2010b) cryptically puts it, what is at stake is ‘the battle for intelligence’ (p. 35) which had its most recent genesis in the ‘psychopathologies and addictive ‘behavior patterns’ (Lemmens 2011, p. 34) brought about by the ‘logic of the market’ ushered in by Thatcher and supported by Reagan. This unleashed ‘a cultural and spiritual regression of unprecedented magnitude, transforming the whole of society into a machine for profit maximization and creating a state of “system carelessness” and “systemic stupidity” on a global scale’ (p. 34). It is literally ‘a global struggle for the mind’ in a context where there is an erasure of ‘consciousness and sociality’ (p. 35).

While proletarianization in its original Marxist form referred to the appropriation by capital of the knowledge inherent in the labour process, what is being expropriated in the more pernicious current context is the proletarianization of the mind—or as Stiegler (2013) put it, a ‘battle for the mind’ (Lemmens 2012) or of intelligence itself. In the context of what is becoming ‘an increasingly totalitarian capitalism, the ‘life of the mind is [being] thoroughly technicized and industrialized’ (Lemmens 2011, p. 34) in what essentially amounts to a form of ‘psychopower’ (Stiegler 2017)—a kind of ‘cognitive and emotional proletarianization that affects all strata of contemporary society’ (Lemmens 2011, p. 34).

This primacy of technology (Lemmens 2011, p. 35)—and the logic of the market as a form of technology—has brought with it a much more instrumental form of knowledge than we have hitherto experienced. As Stiegler argues, the market logic is also 'pharmacological [in] nature' (p. 36)—in other words, it is addictive. As Stiegler (in Lemmens 2011) says, it is 'both...poisoning *and* ...curative in character' (p. 36 emphasis in original), meaning it is both producing proletarianization, while simultaneously claiming to be the route to 'deproletarianization' (p. 37).

As to the question of 'what is happening today', what started under Thatcher and Reagan amounted to a proclamation that 'we don't need the state any more', and in its place we have the extremely 'toxic' notion that the 'market' is deemed capable of organizing everything (Lemmens 2011, p. 38). The effect has been disastrous—massive deindustrialization in the West, and a 'new type of capitalism', one that is based on financialization and speculation—'Not a capitalism of investment but a capitalism of speculation' (p. 38). The state has seemingly withered to the point where it exists 'only for security and for controlling the pathological behavior of people. It is only military and police' (p. 39). However, it is not as simple as the state withdrawing. The state has had a very important psychic effect, of '...disciplining ... the population to adapt to the market, in encouraging citizens to become self-entrepreneurs, in installing competition everywhere, in turning the whole of society into a market.... It is in a sense a strong state, not a state that is withdrawing itself' (Lemmens 2011, p. 39).

Despite, or perhaps because of its gross distortions, its addictive and intoxicating nature, and its toxic effects, financial and speculative capitalism has within it the seeds of its own demise. It destroys everything in its wake including humanity—families, work, and possible futures for young people for whom 'there is no future' and in the end 'capitalism begins to understand this' (p. 40). The realization lies in 'a complete change of industrial model' of a kind that rejects the 'opposition between production and consumption' (Lemmens 2011, p. 41) that disavows dominant neoliberal capitalism's view which 'regards the mind only as human resource or consumer preference' (Lemmens 2012) and that instead relies on what Stiegler refers to as a 'peer-to-peer production model' (Lemmens 2011, p. 41)—something I will return to later in this book.

As Dearlove (1997) admits, when we deploy the term 'proletarianization' we are dealing with a term that is lacking a degree of precision, but it still has considerable value and force as an orienting term:

Proletarianisation is an imprecise term, but within a labour process perspective it is about control of workers by managers representing the interests of the owners of capital. This control is seen as inextricably caught up with the development of capitalism, and the rise of separate managements that were needed once autonomous self-employed craftsmen were forced to give way to a growing proletariat of employed workers in a division of labour in mass production. (p. 62)

Notwithstanding the imprecision noted by Dearlove (1997), what remains crucial to this day is the separation of ‘conception’ of work from its ‘execution’, which was central to Braverman’s (1974) thesis:

Braverman argues that employed workers brought together in large factories are deskilled, degraded, and robbed of their autonomy as they are subjected to the control of a management ‘head’ that is separated out from the working ‘hands’ down on the factory floor. (p. 62)

It is worthwhile to briefly remind ourselves of the broad contours of the changes, because it has not always been thus in universities. The kind of changes to academic work which bring it into the ambit of proletarianization are, according to Dearlove (1997), of several kinds:

First... the shift from elite to mass higher education...

Second... a move away from the liberal idea toward an “economic ideology” where it is seen as vital for universities to contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the economy; to wealth creation; and to [improving the country’s] internationally competitive position...[while] establish[ing] closer links with industry... (p. 59)

Third, ...the vexed issue of university funding...[where instead of being publicly supported, they are increasingly required to secure their own funds]...

Fourth, ...the shift away from allowing universities autonomy to regulate themselves and secure their own standards...[with assessments] through teaching quality assessments...[and] the quality of research through research assessment exercises (RAE, [now called the REF in the UK]).

Fifth, a process of 'entrepreneurialization' or 'marketisation'...[in which] universities have been forced to become businesses marketing themselves and their assets, whilst exporting education and competing in the world-wide higher education industry... (p. 60)

While none of these might appear to be especially novel, they do represent a very marked shift from what had existed prior to the 1970s, and they bear much in common with what was happening to other forms of professional and 'white-collar' work (Smith et al. 1991) at the time. In the case of higher education, these tendencies were possibly exacerbated by the rapid shift of universities from being largely public sector institutions, to their becoming for all intents and purposes, private sector organizations.

The proletarianization thesis is particularly apt as an analytical tool here because the shift in control from academics to managers, the rapid growth of a highly casualized bifurcated workforce of a small elite tenured (mostly managerial) professionals, with a mass insecure workforce, and the accompanying 'deprofessionalization' that came with the 'rise of managerialism and the fall of collegiality' (Dearlove 1997, p. 61). As a Marxist form of analysis, labour process theory, of which proletarianization is a part, uses notions of political economy 'to understand what is happening to the organization of academic work inside universities... [by] situat[ing] universities outside of themselves, in the larger context of the capitalist economy' (p. 61). In other words, it seeks to understand the shift in the control of academic work by analysing 'the trajectory... [and] distinctive organisation and dynamics of the capitalist society in which it is embedded... [and] the capacity of individuals to collaborate in, or resist, its seemingly relentless advance' (Willmott 1995, p. 1004).

Invoking Stiegler again, who claims that proletarianization is not a unidirectional or deterministic process but rather it has the quality of 'pharmakon'—meaning it is 'at the same time both poison and antidote' (Vesco 2015, p. 86), with both 'curative and poisonous aspects' (p. 89) that domesticate us, will as well provide a therapeutic element.

This is a helpful way of envisaging what is happening to higher education as having an aspect of destruction, at the same time as a tendency towards reconstruction. That is to say, it is not all gloom and doom, there is a hopeful dimension.

This poses a number of questions as follows:

- How does the neoliberal university work on the subjectivity of the individual?
- How does the neoliberal university corrupt and co-opt?
- How do individuals become complicit in the neoliberal university, as well as resist it?

To answer these questions in the context of what is coming to be regarded in the Anglophone world as the ‘measured university’ (The University of Sydney 2016; Smith and Rattray 2016, p. ix), we need to know something about what James Scott (1985, 1990) referred to as ‘hidden transcripts’.

### EXPLORING THE ‘HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS’ OF THE NEOLIBERALIZING UNIVERSITY

In this section I want to draw upon and extend James C. Scott’s ideas on political theory, especially in his *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (1985) and *Domination and the arts of resistance* (1990)—with the caveat that comes from his work on peasant and slave societies, and to that extent there are many places for potential ‘slip-pages’ when applied to higher education. As I have put it elsewhere (Smyth and Harrison 2015), this is no reason to shy away, but rather to be mindful of not pushing the heuristic he offers too far, while also being mindful of Scott’s critics (see Ho 2011).

As I put it on that occasion, in pursuing what an agenda of resistance might look like, Scott makes a distinction between what he terms ‘official or public transcripts’, and ‘hidden or private transcripts’. In the discussion of the working of power, the essence of Scott’s argument goes like this:

As Scott (1990) put it, the public transcript refers to ‘the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate’, and while such accounts may not be ‘positively misleading’, they are ‘unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations’ (p. 2). According to him, in the interest of social harmony, official transcripts are ‘frequently in the interests of both parties [because they enable them] to tacitly conspire in misrepresentation’ in accounts that are filled with ‘prudent and misleading deference’ (p. 2)—in

other words, official transcripts are a way of both parties maintaining a sense of dignity, in a context where there is a significant disparity in power relations. The problem with the official or public portrayal of power relations is that they can be partial or incomplete in three ways: (i) they are an 'indifferent guide to the [real] opinions of subordinates'; (ii) they may be "only" a performance' in the sense of being acted out, and hence raise questions about 'authenticity'; and (iii) what is really going on is tainted by 'disguise and surveillance' (p. 3), and to that extent public transcripts will typically be 'accommodationist [in] tone' (p. 4). (Smyth and Harrison 2015, p. 6)

The way Greenhouse (2005) put it, 'domination dramatizes itself with what Scott calls a "public transcript"—the open performance of power and a deliberate display of its signs' (p. 357). In contrast, the 'hidden transcript is the other side of that power, reworked as its negation. It comes to us, as social observers—and perhaps to the rebels too—first as a problem of interpretation (1990: xi–xii)' (Greenhouse 2005, p. 357). As Greenhouse notes, 'a hidden transcript is inevitably difficult to locate and read, at least until it has been consolidated as a coherent symbolic statement among a unified group of people (1990: 135)' (p. 357).

The concern of this approach is not so much a study of either 'resistance' or 'power', but rather how as Scott (1990) says, 'we study power relations when the powerless are often obliged to adopt a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful and when the powerful may have an interest in overdramatizing their reputation and mastery' (p. xii). The hidden transcript 'represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant' (Scott 1990, p. xii), and to that extent, it is 'disguised', and in order to understand it, we need to unravel its 'symbolic process... [of] recoding of power's key symbols' (Greenhouse 2005, p. 357).

How do we bring neoliberalizing of the university into this discussion?

The public transcript of the neoliberal university—what might be termed its economizing or 'respectable performance' (Scott 1990, p. 45)—is the one we are most familiar with arguments around for internationalization, competition, taxpayer value for money, consumer sovereignty, flexibilization, and the like.

The hidden or private transcripts take the form Shore and Davidson (2014) say, of the 'collusion', 'complicity', and 'resistance' by players within universities. The wider 'global isomorphisms' around which these less obvious transcripts are played out are occurring within the context of

the publicly proclaimed or official transcripts, summarized by Shore and Davidson (2014), drawing from Vernon's 'The end of the public university in England' (Vernon 2010), as being around the following:

1. The ontological shift of higher education from being conceived of as a 'public good' to a private investment in one's own individual career. This is linked to a more general process of increasing financialization of education, the expanded quest for new fee-paying consumers online or overseas, and rising fees and levels of debt. Student loans and privately funded accommodation are both expressions of the way venture capital and privatization have transformed universities.
2. Public disinvestment in higher education and a corresponding shift by universities towards the pursuit of new income streams, notably through commercializing university research (in the form of patents, licensing, spin-out companies, leasing of research facilities) and charitable fund-raising.
3. A preference (mainly on the part of governments and university managers) for more applied, problem-oriented, and interdisciplinary ... knowledge over 'basic knowledge', in part driven by the perceived need for academics to deliver greater relevance to end-users and accountability to taxpayers.
4. The expansion of management and administrative systems for measuring efficiency or 'excellence' of services, as part of the further colonization of the university by regimes of New Public Management (NPM) derived from the corporate sector.
5. A shift towards more hierarchical forms of leadership with Vice Chancellors assuming the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and university governing boards increasingly populated by representatives from the corporate and financial sectors. This is accompanied by a reduction of academic involvement in university governance, a weakening of academic unions and collective bargaining, and growing concerns over loss of academic freedom.
6. The creation of new hierarchies both between and within universities. This is particularly evident in the growing 'class division' between academics and administrators; the increasing size and power of the latter over the former and the disparities between the salaries of academics and managers (for example, in many

countries—including New Zealand—Vice Chancellors now earn higher salaries than Prime Ministers).

7. Finally, the casualization of academic labour. This entails a striking increase in the proportion of academic staff on temporary contracts, namely tutors, adjuncts, or teaching fellows. According to DiGiacomo (2005), higher education is now more casualized than the catering industry. In Australia, it has been estimated that over half of all undergraduate university teaching is performed by casual teaching staff (Percy et al. 2008), and staff paid on an hourly rate comprise over 60% of all academic staff (May et al. 2011) [or what we might call a] new 'academic under-class' .... (pp. 13–14).

To understand what is going on behind the veil or mask of these official and private transcripts of higher education, we need to have at least a passing familiarity with the notion of academic identity, which will be invoked as this book unfolds.

In the prefacing comments to their 'mapping the terrain of identity-work research' as it relates to the contemporary university, Smith and Rattray (2016) note that one of the most enduring myths surrounding the complex notion of identity in Western thought, is of it being solely 'a property of individuals', or a quality or attribute that resides within individuals. Smith and Rattray (2016), take a contrary view, arguing that identity 'instead [needs to be] understood as fluid, negotiated and performed in many different contexts' (p. vii).

If we bring a sociological understanding to the notion of identity, then as Lawler (2008) argues, this means adopting 'an expanded and fundamentally social and collective approach' that enables us to move beyond being captive to the 'individualist and psychological perspectives that have [hitherto] dominated discussions of this issue' (p. 1). Here is a flavour of what this different inflexion around the notion of identity looks like.

When the term 'identity' is used in this book, as it relates to 'academic identity, it will be taken as having a number of distinctive features, qualities, or attributes. First, even though the term identity is often invoked in the singular, as if it was a singular or stand-alone notion, in reality it is a pluralistic idea. As Lawler (2008) has pointed out, 'No one has only one identity', but rather they have a number of identities that may be 'interactive and mutually constitutive' as being 'dynamic' (p. 3). Second, and following from the notion of identity as having the quality

of multiplicity, identities can in some cases be ‘mutually exclusive’, in the sense that they are ‘oppositional’ and are constituted and defined by what they are not (p. 3). In other words, identities can sometimes only be made sense of in terms of their ‘*dis*-identifications’, or rejecting what they are not, for example ‘In identifying as a woman, one must reject an identification with the opposing category, “man”’ (p. 3). Additional to this, and third, all identities are ‘relational’ (p. 3) in that they come about not by any process of natural attribution, but rather from the process of being and becoming, and how they relate to what they are not. Fourth, because there is no such thing as a single ‘stable, coherent self’ in the sense of ‘only one identity’, multiple identities ‘may [exist in a state of] tension’ (p. 3)—this can sometimes make the notion of identities appear to be quite bizarre and contradictory. Fifth, and finally, identities are ‘asserted’—which is to say, people or groups proclaim their differences and distinctiveness, rather than simply accepting an identity, or it being ‘given in nature’—identities ‘need to be *made*’ (p. 4) in/against some context.

What follows is an illustration of how a particular view of what constitutes an academic identity is constructed, and how it might be contested, complicated, and supplanted by an alternative.

### OUT OF THIS CRISIS

As indicated earlier in this chapter, universities have failed to make any progress in attracting public support for condemning the state they have been put in, largely because they are seen as places that are preoccupied with an inward looking posture. The most prominent example of this is the constant hype around university rankings, which amount to little more than institutional forms of chest-beating. As Brown (2011) argued, and as I alluded to, universities have failed to connect to the ‘desires and anxieties’ of the public with the result that they are publicly perceived as being ‘weak’ institutions more concerned with themselves than with bigger social issues. This disenchantment can only worsen so long as the academy continues to reinforce the view about its own complete irrelevance. Universities are clearly not offering what the public wants, and positioning themselves largely as training institutes is nothing short of a travesty.

There is a way out of the disconnection of universities with the public imagination, but it will involve some very radical thinking. It involves starting with what is arguably (next to climate change) the most pressing

policy and social issue of our times—fear in its various forms, of which terrorism is the most prominent. The current muscular strong-armed political/militaristic approaches towards dealing with terrorism have failed dismally, and at untold human and financial cost, as we have had explained to us forensically in the British Chilot report of the Iraq War. Terrorism needs to be taken out of the hands of the militia, the arms producers, and the profit-making security industry. The political/military solution will never succeed because the problem is, at its heart, a deeply entrenched sociological one in the countries that are being afflicted by the militaristic onslaught, as well as those countries responding by perpetrating forms of terrorism. What is clearly needed, but what is not being proffered or sought, is an intellectual reconfiguration of the problem of terrorism—it sociological dimensions and historical antecedents, from within the academy—and by this I don't mean seeking even more of the same failed solutions from strategic or defence departments within universities. I am referring to completely fresh thinking of a kind that we have not hitherto seen brought to bear on this issue.

In response to the pressing issue of terrorism, and invoking and building upon Tyler (2015), I want in her style to ask a provocative question: What is the problem that 'terrorism' describes? Removing all of the ill-conceived supposed premature 'solutions' we have to this 'problem', I want to propose that if we think carefully about it, then we finish up in exactly the same place as with Tyler's (2015) question, 'what is the problem that [social] class describes' (p. 496). The answer in both cases is resoundingly social 'inequality'. If this is true, then who should be addressing the problem of terrorism, and where are they located institutionally? The answer to this rhetorical question, is of course, in universities, and in particular among people who are equipped through their training to think sociologically.

However, before we can move on to this pressing question, and a repositioning of how we begin to address it, there is the not inconsiderable problem of the repairing of the trashed credibility of universities in the wider public purview. There is a massive reclamation job that has to occur to convince a sceptical public that universities might be up to the task of totally rethinking the approach to terrorism. To do this institutional restoration, we will first have to demonstrate to the public that we have the courage—something desperately missing at the moment—to extirpate the ideological enemy of neoliberalism that we have allowed to invade and occupy our minds and institutions of thinking. If we can

begin by doing that, then we might be able to get to the point at which we can demonstrate that serious thinkers in universities have a better solution to terrorism than the failed political/military one that is rampaging totally unopposed. At the same time, and with a single stroke, we will have purged our universities of the greatest enemy to thinking in universities since mediaeval times. Now, there is an interesting and radical idea!

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