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Investment in Time and Space: Anticipating the future of higher education

A substantial amount of research demonstrates the dramatic shift underway in universities worldwide. These concerns are raised in studies such as Academic Capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004) and in the Australian context The Enterprise University (Marginson and Considine, 2000) as well as concerns about the impact on students and on questions of equity (Williams, 2013; Leathwood and Read, 2009; Burke et al, 2017). A common theme that runs throughout these studies is the reorganising of the university towards a more corporate and commercial structure as higher education is increasingly marketised. As Sellar and Cole (2017) point out, education is tipped to be the largest industry of the 21st century, and so education is not only seen as an imperative for the broader economy, but an important economic sector of its own. One of the difficulties that the university faces in light of such changes, is the rapid pace in which significant decisions about the future of the university are being made. The space to deeply ponder the character, form and contribution of the university is increasingly being undercut, and replaced not only by a business model, but a need to continue to react to the economic, political and social climate in which it is placed. Within this context fears are raised that these changes will impede upon the integrity of universities, and result in a reduction in teaching standards and academic rigour. As a logic of 'more is better' dominates, student intake, research income and publication output are recast towards an economic imperative. Yet, with such substantial work on concerns about the structural changes to universities, and what this will/might look like, there is only limited research engaging with the way in which these new temporalities are perceived and experienced by different groups within and across the university.

This paper draws from ongoing comparative research of two universities in NSW, Australia. Drawing from mixed methods, and utilising a survey and in-depth interviews, the research explores how students and staff within universities apprehend this projected future, and how it shapes their current practices and dispositions in relation to formations of difference. It explores the complex relationship between and across undergraduate and postgraduate students and academic staff in (re)shaping pedagogical spaces and the competing understandings of the unfolding of this future. Glennie and Thrift (1996: 289) note that 'it is necessary to enquire about wider questions of changing combinations of temporal practices and the new meanings that are ascribed to them' instead of assuming 'time-competence from the presence of immanent stimuli, which are presumed to have universal and ahistorical effect'. This study therefore charts the way in which *anticipation* of the future becomes part of the way in which new temporalities and specialities are being formed, through for example the building of new (physical and virtual) spaces designed to meet the needs of the future.

This paper draws out the shared experience between staff and students, while also examining their differences. We will pay attention to the ways different and competing perspectives of the future are unequally re/presented in the shaping of institutional policy and practice. A key shared element of the experience of staff and students is a 'temporal density' (Wajcman, 2015: 104), whereby new technologies allow for more to be done in ever shortening periods of time. While this is often heralded as time saving, it also leads towards a greater sense of time pressures, as any given unit of

time holds increasing amounts of tasks and responsibilities and hence is 'wasted' when not engaged. We want to understand the relationship between different temporalities in the way that the future is represented and enacted in the context of institutional decision-making processes. The paper will hence draw out issues of *temporal equity* in to explore the unequal access to discourses of the future and the tools required in which to interrogate these changes. This is because the way that time is lived and experienced is shaped by issues of class, gender, race and uneven relationships with power (Bennett and Burke, 2017). Understanding of, and means to characterise the way that the future is envisioned are often inaccessible, and replaced with an overburden of concerns within the present.

Indeed, undergraduates have a potentially much shorter experience of the university than academics, and must navigate its temporal structures with much less access to its structures and policy-making, particularly if coming from a disadvantaged background. This is likely to deepen as students must interpret the value of universities through a veneer of university branding and marketing that reduces the transparency of these discourses. For postgraduates, or more broadly early career academics, there is a heightened imperative to maintain a keen and careful awareness of these futures to produce a meaningful narrative around precarious employment. An increasingly casualised academic labour market means that early career academics must carefully juggle the tasks of any given role that they undertake for work, while also maintaining alignment with their projected career path (Osbaldiston, Cannizzo and Mauri, 2016). For more stable and tenured staff the increasing shift towards a demand for productivity is seen as altering the character of academic thought, where the open time required of deep engagement with a scholarly question is seen to be being replaced by an accelerating need for output and engagement. One interviewee in this study went so far as to suggest that academics are being 'proletarianised', in the sense that managerial power is stripping the democratic power of academics to engage in the structure and character of the university, and are increasingly expected to perform as knowledge workers. These themes around temporal and spatial inequities emerging from the data will be the focus of our analysis in this paper.

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