

## **A1 Beaumaris Lounge, Wednesday 5 December 12.00-12.30**

*Are we denying ourselves space for academic integrity in the changing landscape of marketed H.E.? (0156)*

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### **Introduction**

The question posed is existential and the fleshed-out answer to it lies less in the corridors of Westminster's masculine power structures but in the nature of the identity work academics undertake. University in a neoliberal setting matters greatly; flowing from is the notion of sovereign student-consumer. Student satisfaction as a core legitimising force produced and reproduced through institutional structures and, vitally, through the routine practices of academics that signify what really matters. Contentiously, I posit that an intensified focus on pursuing our own career but on others terms is complicit in the co-production of the discourse of managerialism, and it is this that poses the greatest threat to maintaining meaningful space for academic integrity.

### **H.E. Context**

In a neo-liberal culture, the 'marketised university' has become the assumed model where institutions operate within a free market and their purpose is to stay operating within such (Dean 2014). For 'neoliberal accountancy technologies' to work, the metrics of audit need to be accepted and acted on (Bainbridge and Gaitanidis 2017). Markets contain a totalising amoral logic and it is this all-consuming feature that generates a dominating discourse worthy of the label hegemonic. Through the structures and practices of our quasi-commercial universities, the organising principles produce 'student as a sovereign consumer' as the dominant position. This legitimises as central, notions of student satisfaction, which has come to be valorised, (Nixon et al 2016). This is so *despite* established arguments that suggest student satisfaction is an irrational term, (Clarke and Knights 2015). Marketised H.E. turns learning into a having rather than being mode (Fromm in Molesworth et al 2009). A thing we can possess, the ubiquitous 'getting a first' and having a degree'. (Nixon et al 2016).

However, the impact of marketisation means the role of the academic is diminished too (Bainbridge et al 2017) and it is to this I now turn.

### **Careering through an increasingly vacuous H.E. landscape**

One aspect of H.E. that appears to have been claimed by the neoliberal agenda is career and progression structures that signal what it is to be a successful academic. It is 'increasingly linked to discourses narrowly and managerially defined [through] academic excellence' (Bristow Robinson and Rattle (2017 p1189). Thus, we are increasingly valuing what is measured in our university life. For Clark and Knights (2015) academia is a site primality of identity *regulation* where resistance is limited due to careerism. 'Restricting academics ability to make critique personal' (p1866). Trapped in a set of mutually reinforcing affinities (Weber in Shiel and Jones 2016) that serves to cultivate primarily transactional relationships leading to career trajectories rooted in individualism and the privileging of short term, easily measured goals. Shiel and Jones argue this becomes a self-perpetuating act that fails to

challenge the normative ideas of market and so we deny ourselves and the sector transformative possibilities. Any critique offered remains distant and abstract from the reality faced in the everyday experiences inside a neoliberal machine. Indeed, current modes of resistance are characterised as ‘distancing strategies’ (Worthington and Hodgson 2005) enacted through learned incompetence so others are tasked with carrying out the audit/quality assurance work. As Worthington and Hodgson show, this can result in more junior vulnerable academics being burdened, a form of peer exploitation. Further, such apparent resistance does nothing to change the system and is the antithesis of collegiate integrity. Such responses to the neoliberal agenda can also be considered forms of self-exploitation with recourse to versions of professionalism manifest in dedication, commitment and a willingness to put ourselves in vulnerable positions (Hall and McGinity 2015).

An eagerness to engage in the career progression structures that serve to reproduce practices that sustain the neoliberal agenda (Wilmott 2013), generate fabrications (Butterwick and Dawson 2005), inauthentic performance that signals our acceptance of our always observed status. Whether this is purposeful cynical compliance or not is a moot point here, regardless of intension, such approaches to our academic labour serves to stabilise the hegemonic control of marketised H.E. The “neurotic citizen’ (Isin 2004) governing themselves primarily through response to anxieties and uncertainties is a useful way to think about the construction of the contemporary ‘successful academic self’. Predicated upon rather than in spite of anxiety, and manifest through entrepreneurial ways of coping with these stresses. Anxiety becomes a tactic of governance fuelling a never-ending striving for ‘excellence’. Academic performativity responding to the panoptic disciplinary regime of producing not just evidence but the right kinds of evidence. Obedient academic subjects are created.

**Integrity** is the quality of being honest and having strong principles. Transferred to the context of a university sector it is about establishing a philosophical underpinning to our pedagogy – that knowingly informs both our identity and practice. And further, that we appreciate this is *so* essential, we need to do the hard work of retaining our stance in the face of both ideological assault and from ‘mere’ pragmatic convenience, itself recently referred to as ‘the most underestimated force in understanding why we do what we do’, (Macfarlane 2004).

### **Concluding remarks**

Labour remains a critical source of human flourishing (Sayer 2007), thus Bolton and Laaser (2013) renew the call for a moral lens to consider labour issues, that challenge the disembodied orthodoxy of economic practices; recognising that ‘neither markets nor people act autonomously’ (Bolton and Laaser 2013 p517). Academics with integrity have potency. Education, most especially higher education, with echoes of the *Humboldtian* traditions, ethos and spirit – reminds us that the logic of pedagogy is *not* disposed to a takeover by markets. We should remind ourselves, and do so frequently, that the academy is nothing if not the collaborations between academics and sometimes between academics and students, that generate the very things of substance, of meaning, even of beauty. We are not docile bodies. Indeed, the existence of scholarship itself means the neoliberal agenda in

repurposing HE will always be partial. Space for critical distance is inherent in the process of learning (Rorty 1999). Writing and maybe occasionally getting published in the burgeoning genre of dystopian critiques of H.E. feels deeply insufficient as a process of disruption in the face of amoral market forces and this, if rather too neatly, leads to the idea of 'points of reversibility' (Macfarlane 2011) asking what we can do to reshape academic identity in order to retain sufficient integrity ensuring our practice is worthy.

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