**Changing the Shape of Higher Education: Troubling Neoliberalism and Imagining Alternativity**

In this presentation, I explore the complexities and contradictions of how the political economy of neoliberalism’s conceptual apparatus and reason have become entangled with higher education policies, values, practices, priorities, knowledge production, employment regimes, and identities in the knowledge economy of the global academy today. Neoliberalism can be a catchphrase, empty signifier or framing device, but also a potent condensate to express frustration at the rapidly changing value base and marketisation of higher education. The neoliberal transformation of higher education has been discursive and material, with ontological and epistemological consequences. However, higher education knowledge workers are increasingly placed in a binary of compliance or critique. We can perform neoliberalism or we can contest it, often simultaneously. Opportunities for resistance are differentially distributed in an increasingly asymmetricised, casualised or uberised profession. Deconstructions of neoliberalism and denunciatory analyses of its regulation and disciplinary technologies have become a central occupation of counter-hegemonic scholars. However, for others, neoliberalism represents progress, modernisation and a type of creative destruction that purges archaic practices and date-expired people. Measurement, audit and management by numbers are seen to represent a concretisation of academic labour, productivity and student satisfaction that counters the immaterialisation and abstraction of academic life. Financialisation and the economic matrix enables evaluation of higher education practices by means of market concepts. Cognitive capitalism suggests that there are rich rewards for those entrepreneurial academics who meet market demands, including lucrative leadership positions, large research grants, performance pay

increases and gatekeeper power in decision-making fora.

The accelerated academy and resulting cognitive triage reduce time for thinking otherwise, and promotes particular forms of subjectivities and citizenship. The financialisation agenda produces subjects who are managers of their own portfolios seeking investment and maximising their value. All academic labour, activity and productivity need to be made intelligible via dominant metrics and norms. How did this all happen? I argue that neoliberalism has been installed via material, discursive and affective means - often by stealth. This includes funding and employment regimes and the stimulation of a range of emotions including fear, shame, competitiveness and pride. While dominant discourses can form and speak us, I question whether, as higher education scholars, professionals and students, we can start to identify new discursive formations, value systems and lexicons for imagining alternative higher education futures?