

## Income Outcome

### Life in the Corporate University

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—DAWN: EDUCATION VOVO-LUTION

We were promised an Education Revolution on the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007 and many in the ‘tertiary sector’ were desperately hoping for it, after twelve years of the economic rationalism of the Howard Government.

Rudd told us he would get to work, just as soon as he had celebrated with a cup of tea and an ‘iced vovo’. The iced vovo is known to cultural studies as a biscuit that, in its mass-produced marshmallowy nothingness, could be held emblematic of the breakfast television on which Rudd featured in his rise to national prominence. But those with revolutionary proclivities might have been given pause by the fact the new government wasn’t bragging about going off for a *drink*. What sort of revolutionaries were they?

And in the wake of the 2010 election, it all became horribly clear. Breakfast television inflated into the ‘24/7 news cycle’, and it turned out we had already *had* our revolution; the neoliberal morphing of the university from collegial to corporate, from medieval to modern, that began in the nineteen eighties. The Labor offerings,

of websites and one more iteration of a research-measuring exercise, were the mere icing on the cake.

Many didn't notice this change of epoch as revolutionary because it was more like the *bourgeois* revolution than the proletarian. More like the elision offered by a marketing slogan adopted recently by a major university: '*the evolution starts here*'. And it has been more of 'survival of the fittest', rather than 'to each according to their need'. It has been a *vovo-lution*: 'let them eat cake'...

Higher education on the corporate model imagines students as consumers, choosing between knowledge products and brands. It imagines itself liberating the university from the dictates of the state/tradition/aristocratic self-replication, and putting it in the hands of its democratic stakeholders. It therefore naturally subscribes to the general management principles and practices of global corporate culture. These principles—transparency, accountability, efficiency—are hard to argue with *in principle*. But an abstract argument in political economy comes down to earth in the challenges facing the arts and humanities, after the revolution, to justify their modes of life.

—7.45AM: BREAKFAST, CHEERFULNESS ETC<sup>1</sup>

I am in front of the *Today* show with a cup of tea. From a child's bedroom comes the manufactured noise of a 'Power Rangers' video. At a time of day that we would recognise as 'before work', I am not a theorist, I am a mother 'watching the news' as we commonly describe this activity, and struggling to wake up to the consumer society in which I live.

A panel comes on the *Today* show; a columnist from the *Herald Sun* (Andrew Bolt) and one from the *Australian* (Christine Jackman) are doing a segment on the 'Body Modification' conference being held at Macquarie University. As it happens, I have participated in the earlier conference of this name. The cosiness of the simulated domestic interior of the *Today* set, and the informality of the columnists' address, now suddenly jars with me, because I am not included in this joke—I am the butt of it.

Jackman: I am going to give Andrew Bolt a lot of credit for this, because wherever there's a wacky conference, Andrew Bolt will be there to bring it to our attention.

And at first I thought oh come on Andrew, this is when he raised it yesterday, this can't be this bad, but *I have to say, I read through some of the papers, or the paper names* [my emphasis] and I am at a loss even to understand what this conference is trying to achieve, or even to explain what some of the papers are about.

I'll read—the conference organiser, I'll just read this *because I'm pregnant* [my emphasis], I'll read this little explanation that she gave: 'We also want to suggest that all bodies are culturally produced, not only those which have been shaped by the surgeons knife. That a pregnant body as it is currently lived and experienced in mainstream Australia is no more natural or unmediated than is the body of the transman or the cyborg.'

....

Bolt: I thought the first time that I—this is the second conference right—and I wrote about the first one, I thought then that I'd laugh it off the stage. There it had papers with the title of, what is it, 'It's Time for Cake and Sodomy'. And I thought well look, if people know this, you know. And sure, the Government has since said we've got to get rid of cappuccino courses, be a bit firm about this stuff, here they have another one.

Here's some other papers: 'The Tattoos of Olive Oatman'. I don't know who she is, but they're going to discuss her tattoos. Here's another paper: 'Tattooed Bodies and their Relation to Split Personalities in Buffy the Vampire Slayer'.

I mean it's just unbelievable. On and on it goes. How about this? 'Home in Two Weeks: Don't Wash: Me and My Smell'. I mean we pay academics to do this.

...

Jackman: But I mean you've got to ask yourself, are universities teaching people that anything goes? And that is the whole cultural and moral relativism that's going on in a lot of humanities courses. Hey, if it makes you feel good, if you think it's important it is, rather than say 'maybe if you want to cut off your leg you might need some help'.

...

Bolt: But Christine, the whole thing is aren't there more important things for our universities to be doing? And some of this actually is a serious use of taxpayer money. I mean for example the Australian Research Council which hands out money to academics gave \$880,000—that's nearly a million dollars—to an academic who's going to study the *history of the body in modern Japan* [my emphasis]. I mean you know, give us a break.<sup>2</sup>

Despite having ridiculed the project on 'The History of the Body in Modern Japan', the *Today* show moves on to a sanctioned history of the body, when the anchorwoman announces at the end of the segment, 'Coming up next: we're all having our DNA sampled.'

They are having their DNA sampled, to find out if their ancestors were famous. She hopes for Vikings in her history of the body. Interestingly, this too reflects an academic endeavour, but this time a 'scientific' one, one that has been recorded in a documentary, also shown in Australia, on tracing the proportion of Viking 'blood' in the contemporary British population.

Cultural theorists' work on DNA, among other scientific conceptions, demonstrates one of the clear 'uses' of theory; developing an understanding of the materiality of signification allows for powerful analyses of social forms. The issue of signification becomes current in the meeting of theory and scientific fact; the production of bodies not occurring naturally. The science of life, the biotechnologies, the grotesqueries of cloning and the miracles of IVF, all offer theory a grip on reality, and the 'Body Modification' conference, and its subsequent 'Somatechnics' conferences, has been one such forum for this analysis.

The columnists' nonchalance, their lazy engagement with their subject, suggests that theory is a 'soft target'. I call it lazy because even by journalistic standards, reading the titles alone and not the papers themselves would not constitute good research. But also because we might suspect that the information on the 'Body Modification' conference has come to them as a *press kit* put together by the conference organisers themselves (but presumably not with satirical intent) and disseminated by the public relations unit that every university today has.

It is a lazy or flippant or 'light' kind of comment; is it meant to be 'taken seriously'? The moralism about taxpayers' money and 'this is what your kids are being taught at university', is cliché and effortless, but it refers to a real problem. It

betrays a problem *for theory*. The best one can say of the ease with which this ridicule and slander of academic endeavour can slip into breakfast television, a genre that imagines itself playing to popular opinion, is: *theory has an image problem*.

Following the strategy of reading not the papers but the paper titles, Andrew Bolt has previously ridiculed the awarding of Australian Research Council funding in his *Herald Sun* column. On the announcement of these grants in 2005, under the heading 'Paid to be Pointless', he wrote: 'How will taxpayers be better for spending \$255,000 on a research project called "Feminist Theory meets Indigenous art" ...? The ARC is one reason so many academics have had so little incentive to get involved in the pressing debates of our time—and have often had too little of worth to say when they do.'<sup>3</sup>

Sniping back at anti-intellectual snubs from 'opinion-makers' could miss the point unless it became itself an ARC Discovery Project with the attached infrastructure funding. Instead, we could ask: What is an image problem, and why does theory have one? Relations between reality and representation have been strained since Plato, but this scandal is currently the preserve of 'theory'. It is the means by which theory *distinguishes* itself, as an academic endeavour. The so-called 'theory wars', for example, have represented the relation between reality and representation as a battle, in which theory threatens to turn real scientific facts into mere representations, liquidating value at the same time.

The relation is left to theory to reflect on, since the naïve empiricism of science journalism is comfortable with the 'fact' and the 'cause' as real things, not representations. This naivety does not extend to 'high-end' scientific endeavour itself, where models and hypotheses and instruments serve their purpose in the production of knowledge, implicitly understood to be a process of manufacture, with all the resonances of capital, patents and profit that this suggests.

Of course, *everyone* has an image problem—which is to say, recasting the problem in 'theory', everyone lives with the signifier. This is an ontological predicament, for which theory can be blamed. Lacan's formulation: 'The slightest change in the relation of man [*sic*] to signification ... changes the course of his history by modifying the moorings that anchor his being'. To say it is ontological is to determine this signification as embodied. It is more than a metaphor when we

refer to 'the university body' and so on, because there is a sense in which we lend our bodies to it as members of the faculty; the university cloaks us, as it literally does when we put on cap and gown (which we almost never do now), it en-titles us by giving us an identity written into our name (Dr X, Professor Y).

The embodiment of the image problem is significant. Although I was not a theorist, or so I thought, as I watched the *Today* show, I was nevertheless called to be a theorist at that moment by the television when I felt attacked. I knew myself then to be a theorist even when not theorising, and I knew it because of *what I felt*. I was infuriated. I reached for the remote. It was affect that called me to consciousness of theory, and it was my affect that was changed, too, by producing a discourse in reply.

The story of the uses of theory is incomplete without this registration of the presence of the body, as more than a narrative device. In fact it works more the other way around; I find my way to the uses of theory through affects of the body, the hopes and fears felt not in the head but in the gut.

—HIGH NOON: THE COMMODITY OF KNOWLEDGE

To pose the possibility of the uses of theory is to implicate 'critique' in the present dominance of technological thinking. The idea that theory should have a use-value, and become commodity, is seen as anathema by some in the humanities, while seeming unavoidable to others. This was another aspect of the theory wars, the slur on theory that it would subject thought to fashion, and in this relativism, abandon its Kantian duty to knowledge. This question, of the extent of theory's implication or resistance to instrumental rationality, is critical to the 'image problem'.

The humanities feel particularly vulnerable in this pressure to take on an instrumental definition of their mission. As the instrumental style of thinking gathers force in relation to other institutions such as government, economy and law, the ethic of 'knowledge for its own sake' as a value seems less and less convincing.

When the columnists declare, 'This is what your children are being taught at university', are they laughing at something we should seriously explore? What if they are mocking the commodity that education has become? Perhaps they are in tune with the 'theory wars'; let's not make the mistake of running together the anti-intellectual and the fool. Perhaps, behind the ridicule, there is a real outrage at the

commodity culture moving in on the disciplines of knowledge. The resistance to commodification could itself be an action of theory, and it raises the subtle question of the action of theory; how it works, where and what it does. Perhaps theory does not always and only take place in the university.

The production of culture has long been exploited as a commodity, as the art market, the museum, and the venerable university—as embodied in an Oxford or a Harvard—attest. In Australia, the ‘export’ of education to foreign students has focused more on applied studies in sciences and social sciences, yet some caché is lent to the product by the established humanities departments of the G8 universities; they add to the branding. But it isn’t self-evident that commodification works unequivocally for the humanities.

This might further prompt the question of the uses of the *university*; whether certain things that take place there now routinely can be defended as belonging in a university. For example, when I was designated marketing coordinator for the School of Philosophy, I was made aware of a series of trinkets—key-rings, t-shirts and a version of Brighton Rock—all embossed with the name of the university and available to the school to purchase for ‘promotional purposes’. I appropriated the key ring for my own office keys—it had a rather clever clip on it—while reflecting that previously the university prided itself on giving out the keys to knowledge, not merely the *key rings*...

‘Body Modification’ was sold in its press kit as applied humanities, drawing its interest for the media from its reflection on tattooing, scarification and other titillations. But what would the commentators have discovered if they had read the papers, and not just the titles? Perhaps the sweetener of the commodity dissolves in the acid of critique, precipitating disappointment? I can’t avoid the suspicion that the press office, too, would recommend reading titles only.

What would it mean to commodify knowledge? At its crudist, this would mean to bring knowledge under the aegis of an instrumentalism, so that only those *techne* be recognised as expertise that can be held for a purpose, or a means to an end. From a Heideggerian perspective, it would mean to bring knowledge under the style of thinking that makes of its objects a ‘standing reserve’, the style of thinking associated with the technological. Before technology is anything, it is a way of thinking, writes Heidegger. The technological is firstly *a concept*. Heidegger makes

plain that the danger of the technological is that the human will itself become a 'standing reserve', and that the proliferant habit of technology will ensure that the human itself becomes a means and not an end.

And, although Heidegger is no Marxist, to separate the knowledge from the bodies whose practice they form is already to perform an abstraction typical of capital. From a Marxian perspective, to commodify knowledge would mean to induct it into that fund of exploitable resources capable of delivering surplus value to capital, and to make the specific alienation characteristic of 'labour' possible out of a general spontaneous human activity. As Marx writes of the category of human endeavours that fall outside and before the capitalist mode of production: 'Men [*sic*] made clothes for years before any of them became a tailor'; 'Milton writes *Paradise Lost* like a silkworm spinning silk'.

—3PM: BUREAUCRACY AS THE DEATH DRIVE

The more disturbing pressures of instrumentalism come not from the commodity, but from the culture of accountability being instituted in its name, with its attendant bureaucracy. The quality audits now common across the sector certainly have, as a knock-on effect, the production of 'leagues tables' of universities. But this is not its only or greatest effect.

Far greater is the insinuation into a diversity of pedagogies and passions, communicated to students via all the different transferences of 'the disciplines', of a standard bureaucratic form. The accountability is not to the consumer, nor to the taxpayer, except indirectly—arguably it is to instrumentalism itself, as the proper measure of 'quality'.

Australian academics are exasperated by 'admin', regarding it as a trivial impost on the 'real work' of academia. But this view is too sanguine as to the power of the bureaucratic, to institute its own forms of life. In the evolution of higher education as a 'sector' in the UK and Australia, the transition to an instrumental mode is clearly illustrated.<sup>4</sup> First, the university must be bureaucratized, if then the different battles of corporatism and entrepreneurialism of knowledge are to be played out. One must first have equivalence before there can be exchange.

Bureaucracy is the technocratic practice of a technological thinking, as scholars from Weber through the Frankfurt School have analysed. Bureaucracy begins as the



attempt to think every detail of a practice rationally, to submit it to the means and ends of a 'rational' thought that is indifferent to particular thinkers and actors at particular times. It is an effort to schematise the difference of individual particulars of the case.

It can be contrasted for example with casuistry, which builds its knowledge from repeated experience of practice. In bureaucracy, the movement is in the other direction, from the principle to the particulars classified under it as actual events in time. The bureaucratic description of a future possibility is an act of the highest invention. This is why the production of 'policy' is a struggle, to articulate unruly life as the operation in practice of an underlying principle.

It often seems too trivial to enumerate; it is, we say, 'bureaucracy gone mad'. Yet bureaucracy's rational limit is only finally satisfied in the *destruction* of the unruly particular in the name of principle.

Like the technological, the bureaucratic is conceptual before it is empirical. It is a *species* of the technological, where the end is rendered manipulable through the means of relativising and standardising. And as the bureaucratic seeks to schematise life under principle, then it can be seen quite technically to express the death drive. This could lead to more disturbing observations about the latent violence of the imposition of generic law. So it may not come as a surprise when everyday harassment emerges with the new regulations of practices as diverse as sexuality, family life and scholarship.

The redefinition of experiences by the bureaucratic is a continuing invention; the growing edge of policy moves into kinds of life hitherto experienced under different discourses and given different names. For example, there are many conceptions historically of a school of philosophy, but the latest may be the strangest—*philosophy as a spreadsheet*.

This 'underpinning' of its present administration is not exterior to its activities, but instead has come to embody them. The teaching mission is now understood as EFTSU (Equivalent Full Time Student Unit), a figure that signifies the *value* of students to the life of the school. Research, too, has a value, derived from the income in external grants and publications (which are now publications *points*). The calibration of the value of these experiences in turn directs the course of events for the following year, and turns the attention of the head of school to accumulation:

how to attract *more* students and *more* grants. These ends substitute for more philosophical ones in the investment of staff energy (for example, writing new teaching and research proposals rather than research papers).

More daunting is the revaluation of intellectual labour as a budget line. The value of the philosopher is now calculated and shown on the spreadsheet as a salary, as a percentage of the cost of the whole enterprise. Unsurprisingly, this succeeds in characterising the work of philosophy as a financial burden on the school. It raises the question of the *necessity* of a particular academic's 'budget line', where before there was no accounting for this avarice.

University bureaucracy, as the acting out of the technological, continually enacts its danger. The different kinds of thought are colonised by a rationality that understands only its own mode, the production of means for similarly produced ends. It imposes an intelligence that recognises only its own genius, and for which other intelligences remain uncomprehended.

—5PM: DRINKS (FRINGE BENEFITS TAX ETC.)

How can theory grapple with this techno-logic, and how might it intervene? We would need to understand in what way instrumentalism, which is today so ubiquitously plausible, might nevertheless be incoherent.

Consider the following hypothetical, as a way of coming to grips with this in practice—the imagined trajectory of a research project called 'Feminist Theory meets Indigenous Art'.<sup>5</sup> The grant ridiculed by Andrew Bolt would have been awarded under a program named by the Australian Research Council as the 'Discovery' Grants Scheme. The word 'discovery' sets the tone for an expectation of scientific-style research that will strike contemporary researchers as familiar.

It is acknowledged with frustration among those working in the arts and humanities that the model is ill-fitting. And even in the social sciences, the notion that research is a matter of 'discovering' empirical facts that are lying around on the ground in the field is questioned. But: discovering different things about the subject, surprising things about one's own assumptions, disturbing things about the whole project of research in culture—these could count as valuable 'outcomes' if one could only find the paradigm, *the box on the form*, in which to justify them as investigations.

Miriam Stengers advocates a model of research that sees the making of 'research events' as a process of negotiation between vernacular knowledge and scientific knowledge. Researchers mediate this through *objects* that play their part in the research. Our hypothetical research event would, on this analysis, bring feminist theory to bear on Indigenous art, taking as its object the sensual vitality of acrylic painting, for example. The pluralist knowledges of the object contributing to the research could include, on the 'scientific' side, the disciplinary knowledge of anthropology, European philosophy, art history and art theory, along with the academic discourse belonging to feminist theory and the politics of race, ethnography and cultural studies, all of which straddle traditional academic disciplines. The Dreaming stories, songs and practices of Aboriginal artists and their kin would also constitute a 'scientific' or technical class of knowledge.

Among the vernacular knowledges contributing to the project could be included the political discourses belonging to activism around race and gender, journalism of mainstream understandings of Indigenous people and culture, and the experience of living as black or white in a racist culture.

But there is a further layer of *techné* that will contribute significantly to the project, without appearing to bear on the object of the research at all. Arguably, even Stengers' model of research, so potentially instructive and productive, has not captured the layer of the bureaucratic. The administration of research funding including the terms of its granting, its detailed financial accountability requirements and its prescription of an 'ethics' through predetermined protocols will exercise a formative influence over the hypothetical research event at every stage, and the more so for being 'outside' its recognised contributors of knowledge and expertise. It operates by stealth, in effect; or perhaps it could better be described as unconsciously, as *the unconscious* of such interdisciplinary research in the real world.

Although it will be nowhere acknowledged as an input, the different requirements for attracting and deploying the funds will shape a project according to the pre-existing orders of the knowledge of the West, including the commodification of that knowledge. For example, the structuring of the process in advance through the grant document will require that the project be described in such a way as to forecast, at the beginning, the outcome of the work. To know at the

outset what one will find is not a priority of theoretical research, but of *risk management*, and it might be thought to inhibit research.

The schematic nature of the application format insinuates itself into all kinds of prejudgement, closing off possibilities before they can arise. Specifying aims and methodology in advance forecloses on a more hermeneutic process, and the accumulating of academic references and literature reviews nominates in advance what will count as knowledge of the object.

Ethics protocols will be dictated in advance by university committees applying pre-existing guidelines. This will rule out the possibility of cultural negotiation of protocols with Aboriginal artists, for example, and it will refuse the incorporating of any Indigenous ethical practice from the outset where it contradicts the university's. This will be done in the name of *objective scientific research*, eliminating an angle of inquiry that might have been instructive.

The segue around the commercial value of the research product—any artworks or artefacts produced or acquired in the course of the research, for example—will also reveal tensions between the research object and the economic imperative to claim a property right in government-funded research.

The specific requirements for 'financial accountability', according to university audit procedures, will make nearly every element of the research expenditure problematic. For example, the Aboriginal artists will be expecting to be paid in cash, but the university cannot pay 'staff' except by their payroll procedures requiring electronic funds transfers in arrears into bank accounts. The university can only pay 'suppliers' on invoice with tax numbers, and reimburse expenses on detailed receipts. None of this paperwork is the cultural practice in remote Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal artists would naturally be accompanied by relatives and dependent children wherever they go. It may be this particular cultural context that fires the link between feminist theory and Indigenous art, mandating the prospect of reflecting on the value of maternity and family by being part of it. This will mean receiving the Aboriginal people as relatives, and with their relatives, in residential settings, and will involve the researchers' dependent children in the task. Anything else will seem socially inappropriate to the Aboriginal people.

But university financial procedure will likely find it *improper* to spend research money on the 'private expenses' of children, family companions and living allowances. Universities are required to levy a fringe benefits tax (FBT) (designed to target executive male salary packages) on these expenses, which would be charged to the cost of research at a rate of one hundred per cent of the expense. This is to say, the research will require not only the expenditure of fares for people who financial law views as private responsibilities but that this cost will be doubled by the imposition of the tax designed to curb the shifting of such private expenses onto the public purse.

The issue of the handing around of cash, and the accruing of FBT liability, could create cultural intolerances of a kind completely unregistered on the face of the grant application. The cultural inappropriateness of insisting that the Aboriginal people use bank accounts, or of requiring them (or feminist theorists, for that matter) to leave their dependents behind, will not be anywhere evaluated. Grant administration does not require cultural appropriateness; the research may be theoretical, but accounting practice is not an act of interpretation. It is a matter of complying with the law.

Supposing this grant application to be successful, these intolerances will only emerge through the attempt to perform the research. The irregularities in the handling of funds might generate friction with administrative functions of the university and could even become the instigation to undertake an *audit* of grant expenditure, with the implications of impropriety this conveys. These controversies, conducted at the subliminal level of project administration, might in turn disturb the credibility of the research and the researchers, and create a sense of the project as problematic. Perhaps it will not receive further funding.

One of the disturbing discoveries of such a project may be that *this kind of research cannot succeed* inside the framework in which it was funded. By succeed, I mean become collegially recognised and cited, spawning like projects and critique in a developing literature. This research may not be assimilable by the instrumental and commodified knowledge production of the West. Not fortuitous, nor merely a matter of bad luck or the conspiring of circumstance in the event, this would be an *uncovering* of a structural 'unthought' in research funding.

It could *discover* (or rather uncover) *the mode of domination* by instrumental reason of its others. It could have as an *outcome* the recognition of how specific a form of thought instrumental reason is and how, in consequence, the corporate university animates a highly specific form of life.

—DUSK: AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN

The implausibility of arguing with this ‘unthought’ of research funding, shows that the institution of an ‘audit culture’ in the university globally is well advanced. Ethnographer Marilyn Strathern observed it as an emerging culture ten years ago, its mark being that ‘Only certain social practices take a form which will convince...’<sup>6</sup> And writing even earlier, in 1997, of an ‘audit explosion’ in higher education, she warned: ‘While the metaphor of financial auditing point to the important values of accountability, audit does more than monitor—it has a life of its own that jeopardizes the life it audits.’<sup>7</sup>

Some have diagnosed this emergence, and retold its history, in the Foucauldian terms it begs for.<sup>8</sup> But strangely this hasn’t brought forward a plausible *resistance* to the culture from even those academics for whom Foucault is a reliable theoretical consort. Why not?

Cris Shore and Susan Wright advocate the need for ‘political reflexivity’, and of course this is right—taking on the task in any theoretical terms is better than the paralysis that seems to overwhelm individual arts academics. But ‘political reflexivity’ is an *aporia* of democracy, the non-convergence of the ‘we’ who govern for and on behalf of the ‘we’ who are governed ... ‘Disguising how power works is, as Foucault (1977) observes, central to political technology,’ they admit.

The theoretical antecedents of the faculty of arts reach back to Kant. At the dawn of modernity, Kant writes of ‘the *conflict* of the faculties’. Like an internal combustion engine, the university runs on a series of controlled explosions, driving the machine on. While we experienced the imposition of ‘economic rationalism’ as a kind of intrusion, Kant would suggest it was the *essential function* of the university to be in this conflict, to play out this contradiction, between disinterest and interest, and to become an unworkable machine for distributing the effects of that most powerful cultural capital, knowledge.

The university is an old place of compromise, but it has taken on the specifically modern task, of compromise with the style of rationality that is formative of modernity: instrumentalism. Drawing on a polyphony of critique—of modernity, the state, science and order in general—we need to set up the dilemma, as we set up camp. A provisional field for locating the specific effects we experience as teachers and researchers, as consumers and spectators, on a larger scene of struggle.

Kant proposes philosophy as the faculty of the university that is divorced from utility, precisely to oversee it; that faculty where knowledge is reason for its own ends, and before any means and ends of any application, whether it be for the service of society (as in the professions, which occupy the higher faculties, on his scheme), or in the direct service of the sovereign which is to say, political and bureaucratic power.

It is worth noting that Kant writes the first essay of *The Conflict of the Faculties* to defend himself from what we would call ‘interference with his academic independence’—the King himself demanding that he not write such impious books. The ‘theory wars’ are nothing new. Indeed, ‘theory’ has been the inheritor of this suspicion of knowledge before its application. The struggle to hold knowledge to, or to free it from, the aims and purposes of institutions has a long pedigree.

The university is at once the repository of an impossible dream—of the ivory tower, disinterested knowledge, that must be foregone in a social world governed by instrumental rationality. And of its contrary; a clearing house, a factory or a transmission chamber, perhaps a power-house, for the preparation of the materials for instrumentalism—just as impossible or incoherent, ‘the application of knowledge’.

It is important that this be acknowledged as a machine for an *impossible* end; if the antinomial motion of the conflict of these contraries were to become more than force or impetus, and were become imagined as a kind of progress, the schema would over-reach itself, and fall into the instrumentalism that it is attempting to reflect upon.

This is why thought and reason for Kant (as read by Derrida, anyway) must be positioned as virtual systems without justification beyond their self-justification. The ground of rationality must fall away ‘into the abyss’. This is how Derrida—writing from Cornell University nearly twenty years ago—imagines Kant’s

description of the place of philosophy in the university, and of the life of the university in society.

Our recent education revolution has not respected this abyss—on the contrary it has sought to cover it over, to seal it off with the instrumental rationality of government oversight and social utility. Perhaps some in the humanities are afraid that the technologising of the university is inevitable. But what of the possibilities that theory highlights, of other inevitabilities? The analysis of technology suggested by theory is that it *will exceed itself*, that it must fail its own rationality in this inevitability, in the insistence of its ‘unthought’.

This would not mean we could return to the ‘old humanism’ and cling to its values, riding out this ‘economic rationalism’. The change technology engenders is epochal, and the post-commodity is not yet quite imaginable. But it means that the slippage produced by instrumentalism’s studied ignorance of ‘the abyss’ will provide sites of analysis like the foregoing discussion of the media report, the spreadsheet and the research project.

It is daunting that in the twenty years since the concept of audit migrated, mutated and transformed the university, its diagnosis remains a specialist knowledge in anthropology. It has not risen to be challenged noisily by all in ‘the sector’, nor even become a recognisable line of intellectual inquiry.

Resistance would start with *auditing the audit*. It would explore the data of present university administration, its imperatives and impositions, bringing to light the way they are ‘funded’ by an anxiety that instrumentalism might *not* be the universal governing principle it is held to be. Audit would point up the violence in this rationality, its coercive undercurrent, the disciplining that is implicit in fiscal, or any other, discipline.

In the dystopia of a commodified culture, it could provide the consolation of the insight that life *isn’t* always and everywhere the same. By pointing up the frame, the habits of signification by which it has become so effortless to convey an impression of reality, resistance is set in motion. It might shake apart the assumption that a history of the body is risible, for example, or that a meeting between feminist theory and Indigenous art could not take place in an ivory tower.



What am I thinking of? This can't be approached rationally, as though thinking were a calculus of income/outcome.

Intellectual labour is about something quite different. What about Marx and the idea that 'my labour affirms me in your eyes'? It is clear that, without that recognition, I can't do the work at all. It's clear that it takes candour and trust in the task, to research, write and teach well. But that trust is no longer there, between the university and its *collegium*. We are no longer a guild, we have become 'employed'; vocation has mutated into vocational.

The way this has been done has wrecked something worthwhile. It is driving intellectual life out of the academy. But where will it go? The press is already dismembered by multinational ownership, and has become inane. Ditto the publishing industry. Australia will have no philosophy. Culture will become stateless, a refugee.

Kant and Derrida becomes *Kant avec Sade* ... A new channel has been created in the faculty for the sadism that is a long-time feature of the university's cultural value of mastery. It now has frighteningly real consequences.

*Dream large* of narcotising the practice of thought, of putting to sleep the old cultures of criticism, inquiry and analysis, in favour of a consumer opportunity. Culture becomes brand. Dream large of how to educate and polish up your young people, so that they think efficiently but within certain limits, and so that they never engage their passion and pain as sites of intellectual activity, or as sources of intellectual energy. Perfect stainless-steel-coated technocrats, taking care of their affects through sex and drugs. And otherwise, trained to be accomplished but docile consumers; much like the education of previous generations of upper-class young ladies to grace the drawing rooms of power without challenging them.

The faculty of arts become a finishing school in the *decorative* liberal arts? Graduates knowing 'just enough to use the trope', as an American cultural theorist has said, speaking of the death drive? The university become a place for the *destruction* of thinkers? And collegiality now amounting to little more than averting one's eyes while some of our number peck more vulnerable members to death? Such a form of thought is paranoid, a nightmare.

Look to the dawn.

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—NOTES

<sup>1</sup> cf Friedrich Nietzsche, 'How the "True World" Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error' discussed as 'Nietzsche's Overturning of Platonism' in Heidegger, Martin *Nietzsche* vol. 1, trans. David Farrell Krell, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991, pp. 202–7.

<sup>2</sup> 'Transcript of *The Today Show*, Channel Nine, April 21 7:39am', *Media Monitors*, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Bolt, 'Paid To Be Pointless', *Herald Sun*, 26 November 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ramsden, 'Organisation Cultural Shifts in Fifteen Australian Universities', Figure 2.4, in Paul Ramsden, *Learning to Lead in Higher Education*, Routledge, London, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> In truth, there was such a grant awarded and acquitted by my colleague Dr Jennifer Biddle and myself from 2005 to 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Strathern, 'New Accountabilities', in Marilyn Strathern (ed.), *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy*, Routledge, London, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Strathern, "'Improving Ratings": Audit in the British University System', *European Review*, vol. 5, 1997, pp. 305–21

<sup>8</sup> See Cris Shore and Susan Wright, 'Coercive Accountability: The Rise of Audit Culture in Higher Education', in Marilyn Strathern (ed.), *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy*, 2000, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 61.