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Simon Cooper, John Hinkson and Geoff Sharp (eds)

**Scholars and Entrepreneurs: The Universities in Crisis**

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Australian universities are in crisis. That is the premise of all 13 of the contributions to this collection, which forms a special double issue (numbers 17 and 18) of *Arena Journal*. For the last two decades, and in a similar way to universities in the UK and elsewhere, they have had to contend with tighter budgets for both teaching and research, a rapid expansion in student numbers, with a consequent decline in the staff-student ratio, and increasing casualisation.

The collection is divided into three parts. Part I reprints four articles originally published in *Arena* (*Arena Journal*'s forebear) in 1988, in the immediate aftermath of the so-called 'Dawkins reforms', which initiated the transformation of Australian universities. Part II contains five chapters offering 'perspectives on the university today', while Part III considers 'the university and global restructuring'. The four pieces in this final part are all written by editors of *Arena Journal* — including one by each of the editors of this particular collection — but it is not otherwise entirely clear to me what distinguishes them from those in Part II. Clearly I cannot deal here with every chapter individually. Instead I will pick out some of those sections I found most interesting, before turning to some general criticisms.

In the book's most empirical chapter, Simon Marginson ('Towards a Politics of the Enterprise University') describes how Australian universities' external funding regime or environment has been changed such that they are manoeuvred into 'demanding deregulation for themselves, as a natural incremental development and the only escape from resource scarcity' (p. 117). Thus, between 1977/78 and 1997/98, government spending on teaching and learning in higher education actually fell by 4.6% in real terms, while student 'load' (i.e., numbers) rose by 113%. That is, government spending per student in 1987/88 was only 45% what it was two decades earlier.

With less than half of university revenue deriving from taxation revenue (down from 90%) and publicly-funding student places generating little income, universities have been forced to seek finance elsewhere, primarily from international and selected postgraduate students. This has, in turn, affected the type of courses offered and the composition of university staff: 'the new private dollars are largely absorbed by the new Enterprise University functions — marketing, communications, community relations, financial and asset management, executive salaries, alumni stroking, quality assurance, international offices, off-shore activities and the like — and in the cost of raising private revenue itself'. Money available for teaching has 'plummeted' with the proportion of university employees in teaching-related positions falling to 38% in 1999; the student-teaching staff ratio has risen from 12.8 in 1990 to 17.8 in 1998; and, with teaching increasingly funded from 'soft money', there has been an increasing casualisation of teaching staff (pp. 118–19).

With regard to courses studied, Marginson suggests that while business studies has expanded by leaps and bounds, total domestic graduates in all other disciplines excluding computing actually fell between 1995 and 1999. Many arts, humanities and social science courses, if they haven't been closed down altogether, have been 'refashioned as branches of business studies', 'semi-vocationalised', or subsumed as part of 'the trend to "tagged" general degrees such as BA (Tourism)' (119–20).

Besides the empirical detail, one aspect of Marginson's chapter which sets it apart, is that he quite clearly sees the current transformation as having its roots in the past: the Enterprise University 'is a neo-liberal political response to the "red bases" strategies on the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which the New Left student movement sought to reorder the university on the basis of participatory democracy and turn it into a factory of social intervention and political revolution' (p. 110). What also makes this chapter interesting

is that he suggests that several different futures for the university exist, at least potentially: ‘in the Enterprise University, the capacity for reinvention is channelled and limited. But it is never altogether controlled’ (p. 111). As part of this alternative-futures approach, he describes the universities’ dual power structures: on the one hand, the old collegial structures, now withering, and on the other, new executive structures, presided over by Zeus-like vice-chancellors. Yet the contradiction is that the power of the collegial structures derived/derives from their constitution as fields of knowledge, and hence, ‘the executive leader feels impelled to weaken or break the power of the disciplines in teaching and research’ (p. 128). Although Marginson does not say so — and maybe disagrees — this asymmetric relationship of domination and dependence is none other than that between capital and labour.

In their chapter, ‘Abstracting Knowledge Formation’, Paul James and Douglas McQueen-Thomson discuss the dominant trends in knowledge production. They distinguish five such trends: rationalisation (systems have been set up to assess research performance); commodification (academics’ ‘output’ is increasingly being treated as something which can/ought to be sold); codification (there is now ‘an imperative to break down information into comparable, transferable, applied information bits’, such codification allows the Australian government, for example, to estimate that Australia produces 2.5% of the world’s knowledge); increasing mediation by technological apparatuses (for example, the provision of electronic material as substitute for face-to-face teaching); global extension (knowledge production is linked across the world). James and McQueen-Thomson go on to consider the extent to which these five trends are manifest in book and journal publishing and in library organisation. One of their conclusions is that, with both the proliferation of journal titles and their ‘skyrocketing’ prices, ‘more information has become available than ever before, just as access is becoming increasingly exclusive, rationalized and commodified’ (p. 194).

An interesting aspect of this chapter is that the authors also attempt to consider opposition to these trends. For example, they mention the Public Library of Science, which by January 2002 had collected signatures from almost 30 thousand scientists ‘opposing the monopolistic exploitation of academic publishers’ and calling for all science publishing to be freely available after six months. They also mention the possibility of electronic publishing being used to bypass the journal-publishing giants, such as Carfax and Elsevier. Their pessimistic assessment of the potential here is largely based on the costs of online publishing being comparable to those of publishing on paper and, as such, seems somewhat misplaced. The problem with paper journals is less their costs of production, but that ‘pricing is now related to the upper purchasing limit of a captive market, rather than being a reflection of genuine production costs’ (p. 196). In fact, according to the Public Library of Science’s website — [www.plos.org](http://www.plos.org) — it will begin publishing two new primarily online journals, *PLoS Biology* and *PLoS Medicine*, in the second half of 2003. These are intended to compete head-to-head with the leading existing journals biology and medical research and will be open access. Once these two initial journals are established, it has plans to expand into other fields.

More generally, I found that the book and its individual chapters promised a great deal, but frequently did not deliver. For example, Simon Cooper, in his chapter on ‘Post-Intellectuality?: Universities and the Knowledge Industry’, suggests he ‘will explore the changing function and status of knowledge and consider the role the university plays in this transformative process’ (p. 209). Yet the chapter quickly retreats into a discussion of contemporary changes in academic publishing and the rise of an audit culture within universities. (This is not say these are not important issues and Cooper makes many valid points here.) When he returns to consider the ‘Knowledge Nation’, he never really makes clear what he or others really understand by this concept. (He seems correct, however, to contrast ‘knowledge’ and the ‘Knowledge Nation’ from intellectuality.) Cooper suggests that there is ‘an increasing fusion of knowledge with capital’ (p. 219) and that ‘intellectuals are increasingly locked into a process of production where knowledge is valued instrumentally, like the commodity’ (p. 221), but he appears to accept uncritically, and as uncontested, the categories capital, commodity and production. He raises the question of ‘what it might mean when knowledge no longer interprets the world but radically expands its *constitutive power*’ (p. 222), but suggests no answer.

These criticisms — a tendency to consider categories such as the commodity, capital and class as generally unproblematic and uncontested, and a failure to consider academics' constitutive — can be levelled at a number of the book's chapters. Where class and class structures are mentioned, they are something which *exist* outside of and separate from the university. Within the university, academics are contrasted with, and frequently opposed to, administrators and managers. Yet, there is no discussion of how these groups are constituted. As E.P. Thompson famously put it, class is 'something which in fact happens ... in human relationships' (1968, p. 8): surely class is something which is *happening* in the relationships within universities. At the most simple level, university managers are frequently drawn from academics. At my own university — a 'new' university in the UK — it seems likely that academic promotion will soon become possible only by taking a certain level of management functions.

The university is considered by many here as a static and autonomous category. This allows Raimond Gaita to ask 'Is it Finished?' Gaita defines universities as 'homes to forms of life of the mind' (p. 94), while John Hinkson ('Perspectives on the Crisis of the University') argues that 'the university somehow stood outside the flow of mundane everyday life and the social structure' (p. 233), agreeing that it is (or was) 'in the world but not of the world'. But in the conceptualisation of the transition from 'traditional university' to 'entrepreneurial university', of 'the university that is substantially drawn into the social structure' (p. 256), there seems to be little role for academics themselves bar that of victims. But like other human beings, academics surely make their own history, even if they do in circumstances not of their own choosing. What *practices*, for example, have led to the administrator becoming 'a figure of more significance than the professor'? (p. 254).

More importantly, this perspective ignores the efforts of those academics who have consciously sought to intervene in social and political struggles *against capital*, who have sought to draw universities into their external social structure, whilst simultaneously turning that social structure upside down. (An exception here is Marginson, who as I have already mentioned, notes the New Left's university participation and contrasts the 'Enterprise University' to the 'Gramscian university'.) It also ignores all those struggles outside the university for an existence which is 'in the world but not of the world', that is, in the world, but not of *this* world, the world of capital, commodities and wage-labour. (The impulse of such struggles is captured well by the contemporary slogan 'Another World Is Possible'.) Bernd Hüppauf ('Universities and Postmodernism') is quite simply wrong when he suggests that 'the situation at universities was and still is very different from that of the labour market *where there is no debate about who determines the process of production and owns its product. ... [W]orkers have no reason to claim that they control the production process, own the product of their labour and negotiate the conditions of its relinquishment*' (pp. 18–19; my emphasis).

It is quite possible that regular readers of *Arena Journal* and those more sympathetic than me to post-structuralist and post-modernist analysis will also view this collection much more positively. Some of the issues it raises — the connection between intellectual practices and capital, the constitutive nature of intellectual practice, the relationship between university and society — are incredibly important, and perhaps for this reason the book should be read. Personally though, I found the tendency of nearly all the authors to either leave interesting questions hanging, or to pursue them in directions I consider unhelpful, deeply frustrating.

Thompson, E.P. (1968) *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

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