



**SERRC**  
Social Epistemology  
Review & Reply Collective

<http://social-epistemology.com>  
ISSN: 2471-9560

Towards a Schizoanalysis of the Contemporary University

Andy Broadey, [ABroadey@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:ABroadey@uclan.ac.uk); Richard Hudson-Miles, [rhudsonmiles@gmail.com](mailto:rhudsonmiles@gmail.com);  
[www.attackdotorg.com](http://www.attackdotorg.com)

---

Broadey, Andy and Richard Hudson-Miles. 2019. "Towards a Schizoanalysis of the Contemporary University." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 8 (12): 60-65.  
<https://wp.me/p1Bfg0-4JL>.

The history of the university has been read as a cycle of foundational paradigm shifts, wherein emergent socio-cultural forces destroy dominant-hegemonic university problematics and rebuild the institution in their own image. Most famously, Bill Readings (1999, 54) identifies a sequence beginning with a Kantian 18<sup>th</sup> century ‘university of reason’, followed by a Humboldtian 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘university of culture’, which gradually cedes to the techno-bureaucratic ‘university of excellence’ produced by the socioeconomic forces of 20<sup>th</sup> century globalisation and the decline of the nation state. For Readings, one of the catalysts for the emergent university of excellence was the otherwise revolutionary forces of 1968.

As institutional auto-critique, university occupations in Paris, London, and New York demanded the modernisation of the university through direct action and violent struggle. Of course, ‘68 also forged what Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) have called the ‘new spirit of capitalism’; that historic sublation of Left and Right energies which mitigates against meaningful social change. For Readings, what made France so unique within the global event of ‘68 in foregrounding the university as an institutional and political question was that the French university remained ‘paradoxically positioned as a structure that had remained largely feudal. The students thus resisted both the existing feudal structure and the nation state’s attempt to modernise it. This fed into a general critique of the nation-state’ (Readings 1996, 137). Pessimistically, Readings concedes that ‘what happened in 1968 as revolution now happens as student apathy, which is another name for consumerism’ (137).

If ‘the replacement of culture by the discourse of excellence is the university’s response to 1968’ (Reading 1996: 150), then could its recent wholesale ‘commodification’, ‘marketisation’, and ‘financialisation’ (McGettigan 2013), on a global scale, perhaps be figured as a form of accelerationism (Land 1993) bringing us closer to another reckoning, or even proto-formation of the post-university? Certainly, serious questions need to be raised concerning whether the ‘university of excellence’ adequately respond to the 2008 global financial crisis and recent breakthrough of populism, both of which have shook the triumphalism and security of the neoliberal episteme in different ways?

### **A New Feudalism?**

As Cruickshank (2019) has recently argued, one response could be a new feudalist problematic reasserting itself within the university. Herein the barometer of ‘excellence’ has become attuned to the spectacularisation of personas and brands, recalibrating knowledge production towards position, affiliation and jurisdiction. At a moment of unprecedented precarity, these ‘departmental big names’ game the system and consolidate ‘even more power as gatekeepers’ (Cruickshank 2019). Dumitrescu (2019) has recently described the behavioural patterns of such academics as an almost psychopathic ‘upward toxicity’. Such toxicity and cynicism abandons the classroom, and teaching is subordinated to ‘a perpetual recruitment drive’ (Darley 2019) and degrees become pseudo-commodities on unregulated markets that facilitate the formation of monopolies.

Decisions to recruit and enrol become speculative investments, on both sides of the equation, and research and learning are reduced to modes of fictitious capital. Surviving this

culture means discipline in accordance with performance indicators set by your funders or the size of your graduation debt. Griselda Pollock notes, 'management and leadership are now the only jobs that are rewarded by corporatized universities run on business modelling' (Pollock 2012). Given the above, we suggest that the emergent university problematic is not simply neofeudal but neofascist.

These are new concentrations of knowledge production within the university that appear to surpass accountability within the networked economies of research, teaching and knowledge excellence. Yet, if the rupture of 1968 forced the university to 'describe itself as either a bureaucratic-administrative or an idealist institution' (Readings 1996, 150), perhaps the contemporary university struggles, which manifest themselves in the short-lived Edu-Factory project (2009-11), or the occupation of Cooper Union College, NYC (2013), or the recent anti-fees protests (2010), SOAS's 'decolonise the curriculum' campaign (2017-present) and UCU trade union protests (2018-present) in the UK, can once again create a rupture where alternative university models can be considered.

Following Readings (1996, 151-2) we wish to keep alive the question of value in relation to teaching and pedagogy, which means decentering it from both the language of accountants, marketing departments, and university bureaucrats, as well as the bourgeois-humanist ideology of pedagogical idealists. To raise such questions, in the face of the various mutations in both the context and episteme of university pedagogy since Readings originally wrote of the university as ruined institution, we follow Cruikshank's (2019) lead and return to the university's feudal past, when religious and monarchical power entwined with the university's own becoming-rational.

### **The Conflict of the Faculties**

For Readings (1996), Derrida (2004), and many others, the ur-text of the 'university of reason' is Kant's (1992 [1794]) *The Conflict of the Faculties*. The titular conflict refers to the dynamic between the faculty of philosophy, presumed to be the 'lower faculty' of the university, and the higher faculties of medicine, law, and theology, deemed superior as they tangibly produce the next elite caste of skilled workers necessary for the reproduction of the state. However, in the final analysis, philosophy is deemed superior due to its autonomy in comparison to the heteronomous dependence of the 'higher' faculties on industries and powers external to the university's walls. Kant's argument here fights simultaneously on numerous battlefronts. As well as securing a privileged position for philosophers, who are promoted to the aristocracy of the 'university of reason', Derrida (2004) recognises that this text also implicitly acts as an apologia for the excesses of autonomous knowledge production in the face of monarchic power whose authority the institution of the university threatens.

King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia had threatened Kant with the 'severest of sanctions' should he pursue the path begun in *Religion Within The Limits of Mere Reason* (1793), which not only introduced heretical ideas but also derogated Kant's expected 'duty as a teacher of the young [*als Lehrer der Jugend*] and against [Prussia's] sovereign purposes (Derrida 2004, 86). As Eagleton argues, this defence puts Kant, and by implication the 'university of reason', in the compromised position of being both 'courageous *Aufklärer* and docile subject of the King' (1990, 15). Perhaps both agendas underpin Kant's curiously celebratory attitude to the original division of labour within the university, which could 'handle the entire content of

learning (really, the thinkers devoted to it) by mass production' (Kant 1992 [1794]). Yet, in salvaging a clandestine role for philosophy within the walls of the university, which would act as the ultimate arbitrator of faculty disputes internal to its walls' (Derrida 2004, 93) Kant's text begins formulating its own version of what Harney and Moten (2013) have called 'the undercommons'. Here, the humble lower faculty of the university gains secret traction over its apparent superiors, whose compromised heteronomy renders them dependent on philosophy for disciplinary self-reflexivity and knowledge advancement. However, as Derrida also argues, this argument also functions to protect both the university and philosophy, as its irreducible essence, from the impurity of the outside by articulating an impossibly pure university inside (93-105). Exteriority then, especially in the form of 'businessmen of learning or instruments of government power (103), is a threat which must be exorcised completely via a fictitious purity which is not only ideological but also carceral.

Writing in 1990, Derrida already questioned 'will it suffice today to speak of contradiction in the university' (93). The translation of Kant's university into our 'politico-epistemological space' (93) can only ever be limited. Of course, contemporary scholars working within the neoliberal university are less celebratory about this mechanic 'knowledge factory' (Caffentzis and Federici 2007), having witnessed its steady decline from raitional, to national-cultural, to techno-bureacratc, and now perhaps neofeudal or neofascist. Yet, parallels remain, as the Faculty of Philosophy at Middlesex University, London, found out to their cost in 2010, Here, like in Kant's day, the excesses of autonomous knowledge production were again met with the severest of sanctions.

Despite being the highest performing faculty in the university, and the highest performing philosophy faculty in any UK post-92 university, but perhaps because of its reputation of producing radical Marxist and feminist thought, the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy was permanently closed down. Despite a protest letter published in the *Times Higher Education* (2010) signed by Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, Judith Butler, Michale Hardt, Antonion Negri, Jacques Rancière, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Slavoj Žižek, amongst others, the department was permanently closed down by a Dean who insisted that 'academic reputation has no financial value' and therefore offers 'no measurable value' to the university (Charles 2013, 45). Of course, the foreclosure of this department also has much to do with the threat of autonomous power or radical philosophy in the face of the absolutist powers of Deans and VC's with the neoliberal university.

*The University in Ruins* (Readings 1996) was published just before Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire*, reductively marketed as a *Capital* for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it attempted a socio-economic totalisation of the flows and structures of a global neoliberal system which operates outside the control of any one singular imperial power. Writing just weeks ago, Hardt and Negri felt the need to revisit *Empire* in order to realign its analyses for the various mutations to the neoliberal system which have occurred over the last two decades. This task involves retrospectively analysing both *Empire* itself, and the historic economic models it bases its argument upon. Coincidentally, Cruikshank's suggestion of the reemergence of a feudal university brings with it similar retrospective demands, to not only reevaluate historic models of the university but also to map these against deformations of the 'University of

Excellence' which, since Readings (1996), has become the hegemonic figure for critical analyses, but perhaps now needs modifying.

### **The Death of the Neoliberal Order**

Hardt and Negri's recent reflections on *Empire* suggest the death of the global neoliberal order in the face of newly resurgent reactionary forces and nationalisms (2019, 67). For Hardt and Negri (2019) the current global social formation should be characterised not a global order but two infinitely complex, and rhizomatically interconnected, spheres of governance, on the one hand, and production and reproduction, on the other (68). The sphere of governance incorporates elements of new monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic powers, all of which can manifest themselves as progressive and regressive forces, and all of which compete for control of the ruins of Empire.

Old monarchies, like US cultural hegemony or dollar no longer carry the same influence. The aristocratic level of giant corporations and influential nation-states again, no longer exercise the same 'rule of the few' that they once exercised. Indeed, resurgent nationalisms like 'America first!' 'Prima l'Italia!' and 'Brexit!' are the plaintive cries of those who fear being displaced from their positions of privilege in global system' (74-5). The democratic sphere of governance is the 'most chaotic and least legible' (75), encompassing social media firms, NGOs, militias, capitalist forms, and religious organisations. An equivalence to this 'mixed constitution' (72) of power is located in the model of ancient Rome, whose uniqueness resided in how it sustained aspects of monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic rule simultaneously (72).

Beneath these forces of governmentality is the heterogeneous sphere of production and reproduction, which acts out of sync with the above but infinitely complex ways depends upon it and differences it from below. As a quick example, in the case of social media, new forms of producing commonality and counter-hegemonic discourse from below are infused with new forms of corporate extraction, such as data-mining, targeted advertising, and novel platforms for commerce, and both co-exist with the most banal forms of spectacularised compensatory culture. Like Ancient Rome, the constitution of the contemporary university seems similarly mixed, albeit schizophrenically and dysfunctionally so.

The point being, any analysis of the problematic of the contemporary university needs to account for the complexity of both of these spheres, and their attendant and interconnected subjectivities, microfascisms, not to mention aberrant or resistant lines of flight away from all of the above. As valuable as the suggestion of a neofeudal model is, or indeed the model of the neoliberal 'university of excellence', the model of 'the model' is always in a sense reductive, if not ideological. Instead, the following schizoanalysis, which can only be tentatively sketched here, proceeds from discontinuities between the neoliberal university as 'bureaucratic corporation' (Readings 1996, 21), the marketised structures of 'excellence', the deformation, if not rigging, of both the supposedly free-market higher education sector, and the subterranean educational commons.

By emphasising discontinuity and dissensus, and by pursuing an experimental and speculative mode of analysis, this schizoanalysis aims to facilitate metamorphosis within the university's current conjuncture, rather than forcing closure through diagnosis of its current

paradigm. Rather than positing ‘The Conflict of the Faculties’ as a master narrative and pure reason the university’s transcendental signified, which the neoliberal University commodifies, we seek to account for how rationality has fetishised various university models at the expense of broader flows of desire. If we remain anchored in the model of the model, we misread emergent transformations as the model’s deconstruction and thus cloak the generative forces the model itself over-codes.

Following Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) famous comparison of the root systems of trees and rhizomes, one could equate this teleology of university models to the tree or root, which ‘plots a point, fixes an order’ (7). To disrupt this succession of dominant-hegemonic university images we must perhaps begin thinking more rhizomatically. Schizoanalysis, for Deleuze and Guattari begins by contrasting the map and the tracing. The tracing models; it organises and stabilises, coalescing heterogeneous processes into a stable overcoding image. Alternately, the map ‘is connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, and susceptible to constant modification’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988 [1980], 13). Rhizomatic connectivity sustains multiplicity, combines distinct places and times, and facilitates acts of recombination (557).

## References

- Althusser, Louis. 2011 [1964]. “Student Problems.” *Radical Philosophy* 170: 11-15.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: NLB.
- Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello. 2007. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso.
- Caffentzis, George and Silvia Federici. 2007. “Notes on the Edu–Factory and Cognitive Capitalism.” European Institute for Progressive Cultural Practices.  
<https://eipcp.net/transversal/0809/caffentzsfederici/en.html>. Accessed 1 December 2019.
- Cruickshank, Justin. 2019. “The Feudal University in the Age of Gaming the System.” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 8 (8): 12-14. Accessed 1 December 2019.
- Charles, Matthew. 2010. “From Fiasco to Carnival: The End of Philosophy at Middlesex.” *Radical Philosophy* 162: 38-47.
- Darley, Sarah. 2019. “I’m Striking Because Insecure Academic Contracts Are Ruining My Mental Health.” *Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/nov/29/im-striking-because-insecure-academic-contracts-are-ruining-my-mental-health>. Accessed 1 December 2019.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Translation Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2004. *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, Gilles. and Félix Guattari. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. London: Verso.
- Deleuze, Gilles. and Félix Guattari. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: The Athlone Press.

- Deleuze, Gilles. and Félix Guattari. 1984 *Anti-Oedipus*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. London: The Athlone Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2004. *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. Translated by Jan Plug. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dumitrescu, Irina. 2019. "Ten Rules for Succeeding in Academia Through Upward Toxicity." *Times Higher Education*.  
<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/ten-rules-succeeding-academia-through-upward-toxicity>. Accessed 1 December 2019.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Edu-Factory Collective . 2011. "The University Struggles and the System of Measure." *Edu-Factory Journal* 1. <https://eipcp.net/n/1317065729/print.html>. Accessed 1 December 2019.
- Edu-Factory Collective. 2009. *Towards a Global Autonomous University*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995 [1977]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Bass. New York: Vintage.
- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri 2019. "Empire, Twenty Years On." *New Left Review* 120: 67-92.
- Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. 2013. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Struggle*. Brooklyn: Minor Compositions.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1992 [1794]. *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Translated by Mary J. McGregor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Land, Nick. 1993. "Machinic Desire." *Textual Practice* 7 (3): 471-82.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1962. *The Savage Mind*. Translated by George Wiedenfeld. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Pollock, Griselda. 2012. "Saying No!: Profigacy Versus Austerity, or Metaphor Against Model in Justifying the Arts and Humanities in the Contemporary University." *Journal of European Popular Culture* 3 (1): 84-104.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2008. "Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity." Translated by Gregory Elliott. Interviewed by Marie-Aude Baronian and Mireille Rosello for *Art & Research* 2 (1): <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/jrinterview.html>. Accessed 1/12/2019
- Readings, Bill. 1996. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Reisch, Gregor. 1503. *Margarita Philosophica*. Internet Archive  
[https://archive.org/details/gri\\_c00033125008256329/page/n447](https://archive.org/details/gri_c00033125008256329/page/n447). Accessed 1 December 2019.