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ACADEMIC TIME AND MOTION IN AN AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY: THE DEGRADATION OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE

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The role of intellectuals in public life and the future of academic community are threatened by losses in state funding for universities, a retreat from tenure, the use of part-time and contingent faculty, online courses and calls for faculty accountability. In this paper, we explore the implications of each of these trends and propose an alternative vision of the university as an academic community and contributor to a democratic public sphere.

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Public universities are increasingly losing state funding and replacing their lost budgets with funded research (Cheslock and Gianneschi 2008). Tenure has come under attack as an expensive luxury and teaching is increasingly outsourced to contingent, non-tenure track instructors (Bradley 2005). Universities offer online courses accessible anytime and anywhere (National Center for Education Statistics 2008). Faculty are criticized for their leisurely lifestyles and required to account for their time use and research productivity (Fish 2010a; 2010b). These trends degrade intellectual life and are an assault on academic community. Certainly, individual faculty, students and even some administrators challenge these trends and try to preserve the university as an academic community that does not operate on a business model. But, in spite of pockets of resistance, the trends seem inexorable, mirroring larger developments in global fast capitalism. At stake is the role of intellectuals in public life (Agger 1991).

In this paper, we discuss the implications of each of these trends for universities. We contend that society needs academic communities in which faculty, students, staff and citizens all have a voice. We need an inquisitive, activist citizenry and intellectuals who are gadflies. Universities should be counter-institutions that nurture ideas, dialogue, dissent, and, in this way, anticipate a good society and help bring it about. This utopian world would be democratic, dialogical and full of discourse. Every citizen would find her voice and a sense of political and social efficacy. Within universities, faculty would not be reduced to their "productivity," their market value, the length of their working day but would be valued for the contributions they make to a vibrant academic community and to a democratic public sphere.

What Do Academics Produce?

One of the main things that academics produce is new knowledge, such as the early-1980s discovery of the HIV retrovirus. It could also be said that they produce human capital in the form of an educated labor force. Academics are engaged in both kinds of production because our academic "commodity form," as Marx termed it, involves both research (new knowledge) and teaching (human capital) (see Agger and Rachlin 1984). Research may be basic and not directly or intentionally relevant to business or social problems, but it is and always has been available for practical application. Similarly, the products of our teaching, educated citizens, have not always been trained to provide a service to capital directly, although an educated worker, possessing basic literacy and numeracy and a smattering of cultural knowledge, has economic value.

Our labor, then, produces value through both our research and our teaching. Most academics reject the notion that they are producing commodities, primarily because they value knowledge for its own sake, rather than for the commodified value it represents. Academics create, poetize, follow our intellectual muses, but we are also institutionally situated in capitalism such that we produce commodities in the form of knowledge and labor power.

Accountability

As salaried workers, academics are ensconced in the value-producing process. To be sure, professors of management and engineering contribute more directly to human capital formation than do philosophers and poets. However, even liberal arts faculty contribute to human capital as they educate well-rounded, literate students capable of critical thought in a complex and rapidly-changing world. In spite of this, many academics resist evaluation based only on our vitas, instead proposing evaluations based on our creativity, teaching effectiveness and contribution to intellectual life, admittedly a subjective matter.

To measure contributions to human capital based on time spent teaching or research productivity by time spent in the office or research dollars ignores the serendipity of academic life, as academics “work” in unusual ways and places. We mull problems or pedagogy while driving, when reading for “leisure” or when exchanging ideas with colleagues, often via the Internet rather than in our university office or at the weekly faculty social hour. Faculty time oozes into every nook and cranny of our waking hours, and may even inhabit our dreams! To assess research productivity by reference only to the vita, or to funded research dollars, misses the weird and often chaotic generation of ideas. Idle time is never idle. And publishing eight articles is not necessarily more productive than publishing four. It depends on the quality and significance of the articles for a discipline or for knowledge broadly conceived, rather than for their marketability or value to business.

As we write this, we have just learned that faculty in our academic unit must now publish at least once every three years or risk having their teaching load increased. For example, publishing this article will result in a three year window without the risk of a heavier teaching load, the same elimination of risk that a sole-authored book would provide. Other colleges and schools in our university have higher demands. In one, a faculty member must publish two or more articles each year to retain her current teaching load. Lower research productivity (value) results in higher teaching load (contribution to human capital). This new metric for measuring value produced is aimed at raising research expectations and productivity generally, while acknowledg-

ing the heterogeneity of the faculty by offering a teaching-intensive track for those who fall short of research expectations.

This academic commodity form is curious because capital (via the state) does not directly fund all of academic labor. Only a few operate with large research grants that return to universities in the form of what is called indirect cost recovery. Much of universities' budgets come from private donations ('giving'), from state allocations, in the case of public universities, and from tuition payers, who gamble that their investment in their own human capital will eventually pay off, even after student loans are taken into account.

In this sense, the only really 'productive' academics, those who produce commodified research value, are those who obtain grants that return a portion of the proceeds to the operating budget of the university. Generally, faculty blazing trails in nanotechnology are productive of research value. But how are English professors who write books about Shakespeare productive? How – or why – must they account for their time use?

The answer lies buried in the history of the research university, which, in the US, is modeled on the 19th century German university. This type of university is departmentalized, and faculty members are expected to conduct research as well as teach. For the most part this model of academic productivity came from the natural sciences and engineering, where scholars conduct applied as well as basic research and are often funded by grants. We borrow the image of 'production' from the hard and applied sciences to evaluate faculty in soft fields such as the social sciences, humanities and even the fine arts. Social scientists who do policy-oriented research and manipulate large data sets can obtain grants, and increasingly, empirical social scientists in the U.S. are expected to seek grant support, even as a condition of tenure and promotion (Boyer 1990).

But that leaves the English professor or the purveyor of cultural studies. How are we to explore 'productivity' in their fields? An easy answer is publication, amassed on the pages of a curriculum vita. One is one's vita, how much one has published, numbers of papers presented, courses taught, grant proposals submitted, and grants awarded. Henry Ford valorized productivism – massive output of inexpensive commodities such as his automobiles, accepting slender profit margins in exchange for volume. Of course, net profit is what mattered to Ford, which is calculated as profit margin (price less cost per unit) times units sold. Unlike Rolls Royces, made slowly by hand, Ford could afford slender margins of profit; indeed, those margins kept prices down and enabled him to sell (to his workers, for example) in great volume. The norm of massive productivity is built into our Fordist culture and so we assume

that an intellectual's worth is equivalent to the length of her vita. In any case, it is easier to count vita lines than to read the work itself.

Why do we need English professors and sociologists to be 'productive'? We have somehow entangled the German model of the research university with productivism that issues from Fordist mass production. To 'produce' books and articles is equivalent to obtaining grants (that augment university budgets), which is equivalent to manufacturing Fords. A 'productive' person in the social sciences and humanities earns her keep by writing and publishing, much as the diligent factory or office worker justifies her paycheck by producing surplus value through the products or services she efficiently provides. Not to be productive is to be 'dead wood,' worthy of being pruned. The problem here is that thinking and reading are the mode of production of intellectuals, even – no, especially – those who may publish slowly. Real intellectuals have no or little down time. And yet the best wines may take years to acquire their distinctive bouquets.

This helps us answer the questions with which we began: what do academics produce? They produce academic value, which becomes surplus value when it takes the form of grant money or publications that enhance a research university's reputation, perhaps measured by the rankings published in *U.S. News and World Report*. This production of status has 'sign value' (Baudrillard 1981) – the symbolic value attached to commodities. Because we lack the metric of economic value (except in the case of grants) with which to valorize academic production, we substitute prestige rankings, which take on a life of their own as they are reified by university administrators, parents, students and even faculty members. Texas's move to increase the number of Tier-One universities (a term that usually refers to the top 50 or so universities in *U.S. News and World Report's* ranking), exemplifies this trend. In the race for Tier-One status, funding, student retention, and PhDs awarded matter, not intellectual vitality, learning, or research quality (Hacker 2009). Universities are now ranked like football teams (and football teams, if they go to bowl games, ironically enhance university rankings by generating revenue and donor support).

Thus, we can conclude that Berkeley is more prestigious than Kent. But we need to distinguish between the aggregate and individual levels of academic value; it is possible that a distinguished faculty member at Kent is more productive and hence valuable than a modest producer at Berkeley. And so we must go deeper than the magazine's prestige rankings and burrow into faculty vitas themselves in order to evaluate the work they (we) do.

This is typically done in two ways; we count publications and we attach a coefficient to them based on the prestige of their publishing outlet, whether journals or publishing houses. Again, sign value intervenes to help us compare outlets and hence vitas. One suspects that quality (of outlet) and quantity (of publications) are strongly correlated, and one hears endlessly that a few 'good' articles are better than scores of mediocre ones. How do we valorize journals? We poll faculty about their perceived prestige, we compare rejection rates, or we calculate impact scores (Boyer 1990; Monastersky 2005).

All of this is far different from the Kantian idea of enlightenment, carried forward by the Frankfurt School. Kant wanted academic work to liberate people from dogma just as the Frankfurt School theorists imposed an additional condition on intellectual creation, borrowing from Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: knowledge should change the world as theory and practice blend to the point of near identity.

This model of intellectual engagement is a far cry from Fordist academic productivism. Although prolific, Adorno rejected being judged by the length of his vita (Adorno 1974). He wanted his work to be evaluated in terms of its truth content, which he construed to mean close attention to the object of an elusive and increasingly managed and thus 'total' capitalism (Adorno 1973). And Adorno composed carefully, endlessly revising and polishing. He did not watch the clock; indeed, he would have written about and against academic time-and-motion, as we do here.

An extreme but logical outcome of this academic productivism is exemplified by a recent attempt to measure faculty productivity: A proposal at Texas A&M is to compare a professor's salary to her research grant amounts and tuition generated by student enrollment in order to calculate how much of the faculty member's salary she 'earns.' This naked cost-accounting measure reduces academic life to a business – a popular move among conservative legislators and a skeptical public who suspect that faculty are freeloaders (Patel 2010).

Similarly, an academic unit at the University of North Texas (north of Dallas) is now requiring faculty members to be present in their offices at least four hours a day, four days a week, in addition to time spent in class (Mangan 2010). They will thus, it is said, be more available for students and other faculty with whom they might do collaborative research. This requirement is especially odd in that it flies in the face of the nearly universal tendency to 'office' anytime/anywhere, with the help of the Internet, laptops and smartphones. The very notions of place and time have become fluid and mobile in our postmodern moment.

The North Texas faculty may now be sitting in their offices, but they will surely not be entirely 'present,' as they will use their computers and other electronic devices to transport themselves into cyberspace and into iTime (Agger forthcoming). This time-and-motion requirement ignores what every undergraduate understands: faculty can be physically present but unengaged. The University of North Texas measure, like the A&M measure, ignores quality for easily measured benchmarks.

Underlying the need for greater faculty accountability is mistrust of faculty by administrators, a caste of professional managers on a separate career path from faculty who increasingly dress, think and act like men and women of the corporation (Aronowitz 2000). They have values that could be found in a corporate culture. Many if not most faculty shun administration because they do not want to push papers, supervise others and experience the daily stress of administering at a time of economic downturn and accountability measures that pit academic management against faculty labor. Career administrators who have taken over many universities are increasingly distant from faculty members and their concerns (Breslin 2000) and may even mistrust faculty who seem to live lives of leisure, compared to almost everyone else in our capitalist society. There is a sense among many administrators, often deriving from the sentiments of state legislatures, that tenured faculty are "getting away" with something (*Chronicle* 1993). We suspect that some of these administrators are envious of faculty who come and go, wear jeans, drive Volvos and spend unsupervised time on their reading and writing.

The Loss of Public Funding and the Rise of Corporate Higher Education

What President Dwight Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex of the 1950s has become the military-industrial-educational complex of the 21st century. Shifts in capitalist state functioning have occasioned this as public funds to support universities have dwindled and universities increasingly rely on funds from research, gifts from alumni and patrons, and tuition. In the past, universities were more likely to be academic communities bound up with the pursuit of knowledge, truth and the creation of beauty. Now, universities are more like businesses, as this statement from our university's web page indicates:

> Academia's new role:
>
> RSP is a method to transform the culture of Academia to becoming sellers and marketers of research and ideas. The role of academia is catalyzing the transfer of knowledge and creating an environment for the rapid deployment of that knowl-

> edge by speeding the movement of ideas, innovation and information throughout the marketplace and the economy. Universities are the nation's greatest "untapped" resources for spurring economic growth! (https://www.uta.edu/ra/real/)

Let's deconstruct this. RSP refers simply to the posting of our university faculty members' vitas on a single web site that can be accessed by other faculty, students, and businesspeople. The goal here is nothing less than to change the culture of academia, which, strangely, here sports a capital "A." The model of scholarship within a harboring academic community is now replaced by an entrepreneurial model of universities as businesses and as handmaidens of industry. Instead of doing scholarship, faculty members are expected to 'sell' and 'market' our research.

The language of fast capitalism is abundant here. Our knowledge transfers to corporations will be "rapid"; our ideas will be "speeding" along to their private-sector users, potential sources of funding. This is very much the instantaneizing discourse of the information superhighway, and university web pages certainly participate in that discourse. At a certain level, there may be practical efficiencies to be gained by housing all the faculty vitas on a single web site. But once one delves into this assemblage of scholarly profiles, they are much more difficult to read than a traditional curriculum vita. In particular, it takes much scrolling and clicking to read through the list of an individual faculty member's publications and creative activities, somewhat betraying the speedy discourse of the wired university.

Outsourcing of Academic Labor: Part-Time and Contingent Faculty

Tenure is expensive, especially when compared to part-time instruction. It also commits the university to a faculty member in a way that is not required with full-time contract instructors. Outsourcing replaces expensive, permanent, full-time labor with less-expensive part-time labor or full-time contract labor. Unlike other industries, this typically does not involve transferring jobs to less expensive job markets in other countries but, instead, relies on taking advantage of cheap labor at home. In a crowded job market, unemployed PhDs and ABDs can be enticed to instruct on a part-time basis, without benefits or the prospect of tenure. Community colleges, in particular, have come to rely heavily on non-tenure track instructors, many of whom hope, one day, to obtain an increasingly rare full-time, tenure track job (American Federation of Teachers 2009; Stainburn 2010).

Fifty years ago, typical undergraduate students had a 75% chance of encountering a tenure-track or tenured professor in a class; today the chances have

decreased to 27% (Shea 2010). As tuition rates have increased faster than the cost of living, universities seek to reduce costs by relying increasingly on inexpensive labor, especially in lower-division undergraduate courses. In a sense, students are paying more and getting less. This is not to say that instructors are necessarily bad teachers but they often teach many courses at multiple campuses as they weave together enough work to make a living. This itinerant worker is, of necessity, less available to students than a full-time faculty member would be for the simple reason that her teaching load is likely to be heavier. However, using Texas A&M's proposed metric of productivity, part-time and contingent faculty are highly productive, given their low pay (often $2,500-$4,000 per course and even less at community colleges) and large numbers of tuition-paying student customers.

Outsourcing of Academic Labor: Online Courses

Shifting university education to the Internet is the ultimate form of outsourcing. Labor costs are minimized by one-time payments, with modest royalties, to instructors who prepare online courses. The University of Phoenix is a well-known example of this, offering full undergraduate curricula and even graduate degrees, but 66% of all two-and four-year institutions of higher education offer some form of online courses for credit (National Center for Education Statistics 2008). The campus is no further away than one's laptop or iPhone. Universities love these courses both because they lower labor costs and they reach untapped audiences of people too busy for, or too far removed from, on-campus instruction. Increasingly, university administrators wage battles with faculty who oppose online instruction because it lowers standards, threatens the viability of their own employment, and fundamentally changes the nature of academic community (Sloan Consortium 2009). Some faculty embrace online instruction as they are willing to prepare online courses and profit from them, at least until intellectual property rights revert to the hosting university or, perhaps, their own courses are outsourced via online instruction.

Academia and Utopia: Thinking Otherwise

The original members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse in particular, attempted to think the world "otherwise." According to them, this was a real challenge in a "one-dimensional society" (Marcuse 1964) in which all truths are relative and people are so immersed in everyday life (think of 'reality television') that they cannot escape the world's gravitational pull sufficiently to imagine it otherwise. Russell Jacoby (2000) argues, in the same vein, that we have lost the ability to portray and work toward utopias – good societies in which social problems are eased. One of

the last utopian books written as a manifesto, a call to action, that shook the world was Marx and Engels' 1848 pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*. Since then, we have experienced a decline of discourse (Agger 1990) and a numbing of people's critical sensibilities.

Frankfurt School theorists and Jacoby do not want utopia to be science fiction; as materialists who practice dialectical method, they want the new world to emerge from the ashes of the old. Marx, miming Hegel, called that forward movement the dialectic. What might a utopian university look like? The answer is inextricably connected to the question of what a good society would resemble. Indeed, Marx, Freire, Sartre, Gramsci and Giroux have considered how intellectuals might contribute to social change. The eleventh thesis on Feuerbach urges an engaged intellectuality – writing and teaching that not only analyze and criticize the world but seek to change it.

A utopian university that brings about and reflects a utopian society might have the following features:

- It would be public, open to all regardless of class background.
- Job security would depend on good teaching and good writing–teaching and writing that help young people find their Muse.
- Good writing ('research') would be evaluated not in terms of its 'productivity' but in terms of creativity, particularly in the ways in which the writing challenges or innovates within established paradigms (Kuhn 1964).
- It would be a gathering point, a veritable Chautauqua, for a community of citizens as well as scholars and students who participate in lifelong learning, creating and debating. The university, anchored in the local community and even the national and global communities, would become a public sphere from which democracy and culture emanate.
- The state would valorize public universities by recognizing that they educate the next generations of citizens and tackle important social and human problems. Universities would not have to pay their own way through large research grants and via alumni gifts tied to success on the gridiron.
- Faculty governance would replace the professional-managerial model of academic governance. Faculty would not only run their university; they would be the university.

Academic utopias are worth sketching, even if they are politically unlikely at a time when academic life is moving in the opposite direction. Although universities are becoming corporate cultures and faculty viewed as expendable

employees, academia is still a world apart, especially with regard to the existence of academic freedom, job security, and relatively unsupervised time. We don't want to eliminate academic exceptionalism but to work toward a world in which everyone is free, has security, and is not subject to time-and-motion regulation. It is understandable that alienated non-academic workers resent our privileges, as they view them. But we – the tenured class – exist as rare examples of people for whom their work is also their play. We resent accountability because we know that intellectuals have little down time; we are always thinking, reading, writing. Even our daydreaming is 'productive' if we count images of utopia as valid 'output' at a time when nearly no one dreams.

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