

# Governmentality and Academic Work

## Shaping the Hearts and Minds of Academic Workers

BRONWYN DAVIES

*University of Western Sydney*

PETER BANSEL

*University of Western Sydney*

**T**HE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE of neoliberal government is that it systematically dismantles the will to critique, thus potentially shifting the very nature of what a university is and the ways in which academics understand their work. Through establishing a new cultural hegemony as Gramsci (1997) said, you can occupy people's heads, and their hearts and hands will follow. Within neoliberal mentalities of government "welfare," or government responsibility for the well-being of the people, is constituted as a degraded mentality, and competitive market mentalities are elevated and given monolithic status. The market becomes the singular discourse through which individual and institutional acceptability will be recognised (Bok, 2003; Marginson & Considine, 2000). In this paper we draw on Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism, and its practices of shaping individuals through specific modes of government in order to analyse the phenomenon of the market oriented, audit university. We analyse the discourses taken up by managers and academics as they speak into existence the neoliberal subjects of the new university.

Discourse analysis as Foucault (2000) defines it does not adopt a form of linguistic analysis (the study of discourse as a set of linguistic facts linked together by syntactic rules) but discourse:

As games, strategic games of action and reaction, question and answer, domination and evasion, as well as struggle. On one level, discourse is a regular set of linguistic facts, while on another level it is an ordered set of polemical and strategic facts. (p. 2)

He links the study of discourse, so defined, to a study of the formation of the individual subject through new forms of knowledge, and to "a reworking of the theory of the subject" (Foucault, 2000, p. 3). He is interested in a "subject that constitutes itself within history and is constantly

established and re-established by history. It is toward that radical critique of the human subject by history” he says “that we should direct our efforts...In my view, what we should do is show the historical construction of a subject through a discourse understood as consisting of a set of strategies which are part of social practices” (Foucault, 2000, p. 4). In this paper, we take up a three part interest in discourse, the formation of the subject through knowledge, and the radical critique of that subject.

As Gordon (2000) points out, Foucault was particularly interested in the movement from liberalism to neoliberalism:

[Foucault]addresses *government* itself as a practice—or a succession of practices—animated, justified, and enabled by a specific rationality (or, rather, by a succession of different rationalities). In the context of modern Europe, this leads him to particularly attentive analyses of liberalism and neoliberalism. (p. xxiii)

In Foucault’s analysis, neoliberalism is one in a succession of different rationalities, and as Saul (2005) points out, neoliberal rationality is fast approaching its use by date, since its flaws will inevitably lead to new/old discourses that weaken its hegemonic grip. It is hard for many to imagine what can possibly lie *after* neoliberal modes of government, especially for the younger generation who have grown up within neoliberal rationalities (Davies, Gottsche & Bansel, 2006). By placing modes of government in a broader historical perspective, Foucault’s analytic strategies enable those particular sets of practices to be made visible and analysable as historically specific. And history, it is worth remembering, is not only made up of endless repetitions but also of disruptions, shifts, and the emergence of different modes of thought. We hope in this paper to make some headway in dismantling the sense of inevitability that neoliberal practices of government appear to have generated both within the university sector and in other work sites.

Reconstituted through the mentalities of the market, the new university can be characterised as having three major lines of force, each of which is played out differently in local sites. First, all products are redefined in terms of their dollar values and their exchange value. Rather than valuing the product in its own terms (a book that opens up new ways of thinking, for example), financial or pseudo financial calculations are made for the purpose of facilitating economic flows (Gare, 2006). In Australian universities, for example, a book’s worth is uniformly calculated as 6 points (less if it is an edited book) and points are made meaningful through being given dollar values, which in turn translates into government funding to the university, and into points scored for the calculation of teaching loads and research status. Second, through setting individuals against each other in intensified competitive systems of funding with clearly defined measures of success, those individuals are de-individualised and converted into the generic members of an auditable group. For example, in Australia individual researchers’ work under the new “Research Quality Framework” is no longer assessed individually, but as a product of a research group, of which the researcher must be an integrated member, so integrated in fact that s/he is codable, along with other group members under a single, narrow RFGD (Research Fields Courses and Disciplines) code. Third, the critical gap between the liberal subject and government is collapsed. Whereas the liberal subject, had as part of its responsibility the maintenance of a distance from government and a responsibility to call it to account, the neoliberal subject does not. As Gordon (2000) says of liberalism in his introduction to Foucault’s work on power: “Liberalism is a

critique of state reason, a doctrine of limitation, designed to mature and educate government by displaying to it the intrinsic limits of its power to know” (p. xxvii–xxviii).

In this paper we examine the ways in which such lines of force and their related practices affect historically specific modes of subjection and subjectivity in universities. In doing so, we accept Foucault’s challenge to resist the collapsing of the gap between subject and government, through engaging in thought. He enjoins us to think, and as a consequence of critical thought, to become ethical subjects:

By “thought,” I mean what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently constitutes the human being as a knowing subject [*sujet de connaissance*]; in other words, it is the basis for accepting or refusing rules, and constitutes human beings as social and juridical subjects; it is what establishes the relation with one self and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject. (Foucault, 1997, p. 200)

In order to undertake this analysis we draw on interviews with academic subjects that form part of a larger project on the impact of neoliberalism on workers’ subjectivities.<sup>1</sup> The academics interviewed were selected on the basis of their positive reputations as teachers and researchers and were from universities varying in status and size, in both major metropolitan universities and regional universities in Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and the US. Their status ranged from Senior Lecturer to Professor, with many of them having had major administrative responsibilities at some time in their career. Their disciplines were in the Sciences and the Social Sciences. For the purposes of this paper, we draw on the interviews with Australian academics, though our insights are informed by our work with the entire corpus (see for example Davies 2005a, 2005b; Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, & Somerville, 2005; Davies & Bansel, 2005; Davies, Gottsche, & Bansel, 2006; Davies & Petersen 2005a, 2005b). We also draw on various public documents, such as emails from senior levels of management in Australian universities sent out to all members of their universities during the national AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Assessment) audit, and on Australian government policy documents.

Although in this paper we focus in particular on the specific iteration of neoliberalism as it has emerged in Australian universities, we situate our analysis in the broader global context of neoliberal forms of governmentality, which had their resurgence in France and Germany in the mid seventies, then in Britain and the US in the late seventies and in Australia and New Zealand in the early eighties.

## Audit Technologies

Audit technologies standardize and regularise expert knowledges so that they can be used to classify and diagnose populations of workers and the potential risks in managing them. Discourses of efficiency and quality, for example, regularise academic practice, narrowly defining values and successes in order to render them measurable. Academics are persuaded to teach the same way, complete the same forms, make applications to the same funding bodies, make links with industry—in short to reproduce the same practices in order to re/organise themselves to fit the template of best practice as this is defined by management.

In the following example, which might be recognised as a generic managerial email from anywhere, the senior university manager in an Australian university makes it clear that all staff in this particular university should model themselves and their work on the exemplars that are being provided. At the same time, it is suggested, reassuringly, disarmingly, that there is nevertheless room for innovation and individual difference, since “each site is constructed differently.” Staffs are not therefore instructed to be identical to others, but to shape themselves toward an ideal generic model:

## Document 1

*Dear Colleagues,*  
*The [professional development centre] has developed a new resource to showcase exemplary e-learning practice in [our online learning site]. Two exemplars from each [School/Faculty] will be profiled this year. Each exemplar...is prefaced by reflective comments from the designer. The aim of the exemplars is to share practical examples of e-learning design and development. Thanks to the staff who have made their sites available for this project.*

*Each exemplar site presents a range of learning materials, communication activities with/between students, assessment information and examples, and varied types of explicit learner support. Each site is constructed differently, to achieve a range of purposes associated with engaging students in extending their learning beyond their experiences in face-to-face classes. These sites have evolved over several semesters and have incorporated student feedback. Many pages within each site contain detailed author notes about particular items, and/or contain commentary from the [professional development centre].*

*This resource is a way of sharing the good practices and rich experiences of staff in e-learning and I encourage you to use this resource as a self-reference, in curriculum projects and in workshops.*

Since e-learning is a new teaching technology, many academics have not yet taken it up. Persuasion to take it up here is not through the production of examples (which one may or may not read as exemplary), but through “exemplars” (meaning a person or thing to be copied or imitated). These exemplars, the email explains, *extend* what students can learn through face-to-face teaching and they show what “good practice” is and “enrich” staff experience. The email both entices the individual (this is how *you* can be a better teacher) and it contains and constraints (*this* is the format you will choose).

On the face of it, the risks academics must manage, in responding (or not) to such enticements and containments, are the risks associated with their own employment conditions and promotion prospects. While for some it will be reassuring to be told what will count as being good, for others, there is a risk in abandoning the critical perspective that tells them there is something wrong with this new definition of what will count as good. The risk in resisting such directives lies in loss of institutional credibility and membership, since the new university makes it clear that each individual is readily expendable. Further, in management discourse the risk is figured in terms of the credibility and survival of the university itself and its capacity to be an

employer of academics. The self-interest of the academic is re-constituted in terms of the interest of the university, and the self-interest of the university translates back into the interest of the academic. These acts of translation install the interests of the institution at the heart of these transactions such that those who do not comply put the institution itself at risk. Conformity thus acquires a moral imperative larger than one's personal survival as an ethical being.

The individual's dilemma is that compliance with dominant discourses, practices and positions, figured as self-interest and survival, produces a tension between discourses of individualisation and autonomy and de-individualisation and regularisation. This tension is not new. As Gordon so beautifully puts it in analysing Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish*: "progressive Western societies have ostensibly operated for two centuries on principles of liberty and the rule of law, while effectively operating on a basis of coercive *dressage* and disciplinary order" (Gordon, 2000, p. xxii). Like a well trained pony, the free individual responds willingly to the smallest of signs telling it where it should run and how it should leap. Compliance can be normalised and so taken for granted as the everyday practices of work as usual, that the *dressage* is barely visible. It can even become morally correct and desirable:

*they need accountability, we do need some accountability...there is a certain amount of accountability that we have to do, I mean they do pay us.* (Female Science Professor)

*I don't personally feel a particular level of surveillance. We have a performance appraisal system in this university and I prepare an annual report on my achievements of the previous year and so on. But that process is administered locally. My [Research] Centre has always been focussed on my career development...So I don't ever experience a sense of surveillance. So I've got no problems with the accountability dimension of my work as it's practiced.* (Male Social Science Professor)

Technologies of audit and surveillance, of self-audit and self-surveillance, are not simply discourses of responsibility and accountability but technologies for the production of responsabilised and accountable subjects. We think, then, of auditing as not primarily concerned with organising and managing finances and outputs, institutions and workers, but as producing specific sorts of worker subjects. Audit technologies are a means of governing subjects; of making them more governable by constituting them as the sorts of subjects demanded by the programmatic ambitions of government. In being taken up as one's own ambitions, the ambitions of government become a technology of the self. The operation of these technologies on and in the subject simultaneously secures the subject's viability and subjection. It secures their individuality and their regulation as responsabilised and accountable subjects who support an expanding industrialisation of the university: that is, capture by the market, market forces and practices. In this take up of the institutional ambitions as one's own and one's willing work on oneself to become the appropriate and appropriated subject of the new university, there is a slippage away from the liberal subject (who might provide critique of the forces being applied to shape academic subjects), and toward the neoliberal subject whose morality is intimately muddled with that of the entrepreneurial institution whose project is a pragmatic one of survival within the terms of government. In this slippage the subject takes up responsibility for that which is institutionally defined as politically acceptable and economically viable (Beck, 1992; McWilliam, 2004).

In another generic email to all workers, a senior manager of an Australian university congratulates the workers for having performed as appropriate subjects during and leading up to an official audit of their university. The email makes clear what forms of subjection are to be lauded, and what further work there is to be done in shaping appropriate selves. It is interesting to contemplate, in reading this email, how easy it is now for management to circulate managerial discourses and directives to everyone simultaneously, thus engaging in everyday group dressage:

## Document 2

*Dear Colleagues,*

*This message comes with my sincere thanks to the University community for a wonderful effort both leading up to and during this week of the audit. It's been a long time coming—at least 18 months of dedication and hard work by many, many people in preparing the documentation, organising the team's visits, and appearing before the audit team.*

*The consistent feedback was that staff, students and friends of (our university) who spoke to the panel were open and honest in their responses and committed to (our university), our mission and this region.*

*The words used by the panel chair in describing the spirit individuals and groups conveyed was that “[our university] is a University of the people” of which all are clearly very proud.*

*The team gave their preliminary feedback on areas likely to attract audit commendations, affirmations and recommendations.*

*They commended us on our engagement with the community, the strong governance of the [academic board and governing council], the systems we have developed such as online course approvals, tracking and improvement for learning and teaching, and complaints management, and Library services, the heads of programs network and research register.*

*We received “affirmations” relating to our planning, [our on line learning systems], the measurable recent improvement in student satisfaction, the development of the work loads policy and University funding model, the commitment to research concentration and the strategy for research development, and community engagement.*

*The areas which the panel recommended need further work are all-of-University action on Indigenous education, IT governance and client service, quality assurance of our offshore programs, tracking the improvements in student administration and client service, the development of “commercial” activity to increase non-government revenue, and defining the distinguishing features of the student experience.*

*This is a good outcome which confirms our own assessment of our achievements and progress and where we need to focus going forward.*

*The team thanked us for the exceptional organisation and for our hospitality, commenting on the cooperation and welcome they received.*

*This audit represents to me one of the most significant events in [our university's] recent history in that it has clearly recognised our strengths and passion for our mission, given us some timely guidance, and affirmed the results of the hard work of the last five and more years by the extended University community.*

*Thank you all.*

Through this email, discourses of community, of collegiality, openness, honesty and commitment locate the audit event in a moral domain of responsible subjects. These subjects are responsible for both that which is “good” in the university and for that which might be “improved.” As McWilliam (2004, p. 154) points out, “the management of risk demands knowledge of risk, and knowledge of risk produces new risks for the organisation and its personnel.” Possible areas of failure and opportunities for improvement are relocated from a state of ignorance, of not knowing, to a condition of knowing. The responsibility for this knowledge, for this risk, is located in the self-auditing, self-managing subject.

These technologies of risk management simultaneously offer a mode for “doing the right thing,” and define, expose, and potentially exclude those who might “do the wrong thing.” They are mobilised to simultaneously regulate and reward, discipline and punish those individuals who might not conform to the auditable ethos of the university. The responsabilised moral subject, caught in this simultaneity, is both innocent and guilty, both entrusted with institutional success and a tick from the auditor, and not to be trusted to be responsible and productive without closely specified guidelines and routine surveillance. This is indeed, what Foucault (1977/1991) refers to as a “penal accountancy,” an accountancy that errs on the side of threat and punishment in taking up the task of transforming already guilty subjects.

Integral to this accountancy is the technology of feedback. The emails from which we have quoted mobilise ‘feedback’ in a number of strategic ways. One is feedback from the national government audit process, fed back via management to all staff simultaneously. Another source of feedback is from students in response to teaching practices, feedback which is to be incorporated into everyone’s online e-learning technologies. Feedback is both a practice and a metaphor for signalling the discursive loop through which meanings are made, circulated, reiterated, normalised and established as business as usual: *I get so much feedback from students face to face that in some ways the written things are a formality. But of course we have to have them to demonstrate for other purposes, how students see us* (Female Social Science Associate Professor). Feedback is situated as an unequivocal good, as providing naturally emerging truth accounts that reveal, for good or bad, the state of the university and the status of academic workers within it. The university management is focussed on the performance of the university as desirable (and fundable) and it enjoins its members to collude with it in that performance. The collusion is not however presented as a game of equals pragmatically responding to unavoidable government pressure. After all, such truth telling might lead to collective resistance. Instead, technologies of audit are mobilised to generate the level of vulnerability that will guarantee the right performances, without resistance.

Neoliberal practices of regulation suppress references to considerations of power, control and interest. They install instead, a collective commitment to “quality” through which “progress, efficiency, best practice, science, expertise, professionalism, coordination and the Common Good” (Higgins, 2006, p. 9) will be accomplished, and none of which will be taken to be real unless they can be measured. “Quality” and “quality auditing” become primary objectives, accomplished through measures and management technologies applied to both institutions and individuals.

Quality made auditable invests itself in the technologies of management through which it is delineated and measured rather than to the substance of what is done or produced (Power, 1999). As Higgins (2006) argues: “The true significance of the quality industry may not lie in producing better products and services..., but in elaborating ‘practices of the self’... [providing no more than] an occasion for recurring auditable self-presentation” (p. 21).

‘Quality assurance’ seems not, then, to ensure ‘quality’ in the academic arena. Rather, ‘quality assurance’ as compliance with audit procedures is more likely to produce a compliant subject, one for whom possibilities for critique and creative innovation are more likely foreclosed than encouraged (Davies & Petersen, 2005b). Risk management then becomes, for the individual, the management of the risk to oneself of non-compliance, of non-viability within the audited policies and practices of the institution. It is in this sense that the individual is simultaneously made more visible as an auditable subject, and effaced of their individuality and their capacity or will to engage in individual or collective critique. The practices of accountancy cannot recognise or countenance anyone who sees their job as responsibly working against the grain of dominant discourses, of asking dangerous questions of government, of opening up spaces of difference where new possibilities might emerge from the previously unthought or unknown. In this way the university, the student, and the academic populations are de-individualised and homogenised through the rationalities and instruments of an audit culture.

The following email, again from a senior manager to all staff in an Australian university, reins in any messy tendencies to step outside a mandated format for presentation of notes for students:

### Document 3

*Dear Colleagues*

*I am pleased to advise you that the “Student Unit Outline Consistency Project” has been completed and is now ready for implementation.*

*A review of unit outlines provided to students was conducted [earlier] this year and it was found there were many inconsistencies, both in terms of appearance and the generic/policy information contained in them. The project aimed to address these matters and achieve University-wide consistency in the outlines provided to students.*

*A standard unit outline template has been developed, drawing on valuable information provided by most Schools. As a result of the collaborative efforts of several staff, the standard template has been endorsed by [a team of senior managers].*

As it happened, this generic unit outline was found to be faulty and went through several versions, each one requiring staff to spend many hours rewriting their outlines, and then rewriting them again. The imposition of management driven risk-free sameness in this case turned out to import risks, rather than eliminate them. In the production of the generic academic, the individual and his or her accumulated wisdom are effaced, and at the same time, each individual is charged with the responsibility, and is held accountable, for the production of themselves and their work within the generic model.

### A Brief History of the Emergence of Audit Culture: The Australian (Re)iteration

The restructure of higher education in Australia (1988-1992) was an attempt to force scholarship, universities and academic practice to conform to the corporatist ideology of the



Hawke/Keating Labor government (1983-1996). It took control of academic practice through the productivity agreements in the National Wage Case of 1987. The restructure was conceived and conducted through practices favoured by large corporations. Its ambition was to make universities higher level technological training organisations for large corporations and government in the pursuit of profit in the global economy, rather than organisations for systematic inquiry in the advancement of knowledge.

Rather than a (re)valorising of knowledge, the restructure initiated a changed relation between government and the university, with the advancement of knowledge and academic teaching narrowed to reflect the government's economic agenda. The concept of a 'knowledge economy' cemented a constitutive relation between 'knowledge' and 'the economy.' The concept of the advancement of knowledge was thus narrowed in favour of the advancement of the information required for training the higher level skills needed to achieve the restructuring of the Australian economy. The focus on profit meant that the basic sciences and arts were to be displaced by technology and business.

The corporatist ends which were to be achieved were first recommended in the 1987 report, 'Australia Reconstructed.' Legislated means to achieve the recommendations included The Second Tier Settlement for Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions, which came into effect in 1988. The Federated Association of Australian University Staffs (FAUSA) and the Australian Universities Industrial Association (AUIA) had to agree to various productivity measures demanded by the Minister for Education to justify the "second tier" wage increases being granted by the Industrial Relations Commission. Salary increments were linked to a commitment to implement government technologies for the management of academic work and workers. In this way economic rationalities of government were instantiated as economic rationalities of the academic subject. Measures the parties were required to agree to included higher teaching loads, staff development programmes and staff assessment procedures. Importantly, the broad thrust of these reforms could not be debated as they already had legal force.

The legislative power of the Commonwealth Government thus extended to both knowledge and finance. Legislative control over what counted as knowledge came under the direct control of the Minister for Education in 1992, with the Higher Education Funding Amendment Act (No.2). Section 61 IIIb states the principal aim of the act to be the strengthening of Australia's knowledge base and enhancement of Australia's research capabilities to align with national economic development and international competitiveness. The university was thus restructured as an economic knowledge enterprise in the service of the market and in Australia's participation in and profit from the global economy.

In 2003, the Liberal Minister for Education, Science and Training released 'Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future' (Nelson, 2003), outlining the government's plans for reform. This plan consolidated the marketisation of the university within a global economy and emphasised performance based funding and incentives and quality control. It emphasises commercialisation, individual profit, performance management, accountability and measurement, and at the same time incorporates the language of choice and difference, thereby supporting and maintaining the idea of the individualised, responsabilised subject. The coercive nature of the government's programme was challenged by the national academic union in court, but the judge failed to see it as coercive. What this plan nevertheless made clear was that the university must become an economic enterprise that would be accountable to the public with regard to its receipt of government funds, but free to take commercial risks in the development of market products

through the commercialisation of “intellectual property.” Further, institutional regulation, positioned variously as either deregulation or reregulation, was linked to newly defined individual merit and reward—old hierarchies still needed throwing over in favour of the new compliant individual. Individual prosperity, promotion and achievement were tied to success in the corporatised and commercialised university. This focus on the individual, the individual good, and the good individual, places the burden of responsibility for the government mandated success of the university on compliant individuals who will support government in the work of undermining established practices. The individual is thus simultaneously made visible and de-individualised as an instrument of government.

### Generic Institutions, Generic Subjects

Technologies of measurement, audit and surveillance assume and generate stable uniform entities that can be compared and evaluated through the application of stable and uniform technologies of calculation. This is a model of management that simultaneously captures and effaces differences within a model of standardised similarities even where that standardisation requires and commends “engagement with the [local] community” (Document 2). What might be specific to an institution, a geographical/cultural/political location, disciplinary knowledge and practice is shaped according to whatever is seen to be required by government in the nation’s competition for a dominant place in a global market. In this way a specific enterprise is detached from its local place and identifications, and reattached to a hypothetical global market. Through practices of mimicry, ‘this-place’ is converted into ‘every-other-place’; and ‘this-subject’ into ‘every-other-subject,’ while each one seeks within the standardised formats to present itself as the one at the cutting edge, the one which has capitalised on its own “identified strengths” and thus differentiated itself from the others.

Within globalised corporate institutions there is a tension between the global and the national/local that is played out in the subjects who inhabit those places. Inside a rhetoric of difference and competition, their knowledges, identifications and practices are being flattened to accommodate the normalising technologies through which their enterprise is constituted as just such a player in this global market. Whilst some enterprises might be easily detached from their founding context, and operate in the same manner everywhere, universities are, says Marginson (2002), too context dependent for this. And yet, in a climate of decreased government funding, they must fashion themselves as both local and specific *and* as a self-supporting global corporation able to be assessed according to whatever measures government adopts. Survival in this climate becomes a function of competition with other globalised institutions, all responsive to globalised standards.

Survival in this globalised system subjects higher education workers to multiple, standardised performance measures of “quality,” transparency, and efficiency. These create intense levels of stress (Davies & Petersen, 2005a, 2005b; Forgasz & Leder, 2006, Marginson & Considine, 2000) with significant impacts for health (Davies & Bansel, 2005). The intensified scrutiny of performance produces concomitant levels of vulnerability and insecurity. Teaching evaluations enlist academic subjects to ask, ‘Am I good enough?’; measures of quantity (productivity and income generation) enlist academic subjects to ask, ‘Am I productive enough?’; and evaluations of quality (impact and academic standards) enlist academic subjects to ask, ‘Am I smart enough?’ These three questions form the matrix in which generic subjectivities are constituted,

performed and measured. They are not, however, only productive of what will be recognised as quality teaching and research, but of anxious subjects and performances.

Knowledge about risk for these competitive vulnerable subjects is no escape from danger: rather, it is itself dangerous knowledge. It produces an ever-present awareness of the danger of failure to recognise, anticipate, and manage risk. It provides academics with the means for deciding what action to take but also the means by which they might be found to have done something wrong. This produces a set of imperatives through which the gaze of academic subjects, as both self-managers and risk-managers, is simultaneously turned on the self and on others as a means of minimising danger to the university and the self (Schmelzer, 1993).

### Retreat, Defence and Accommodation

*The 'evaluative state' (Neave, 1988) has...fragmented the professional intelligentsia and provoked a set of retreats and defences as well as aggressive accommodations (Dominelli & Hoogvelt 1996).*

*(Hey, 2001, p. 69)*

When asked about teaching evaluations, a male Science Professor reflected on his own passionate attachment to scoring well in university audits:

*I would be very upset if I got a low score. I mean my scores are mostly right up near the top on that critical question two. But we actually, I mean there are direct incentives here... We actually get financial incentives. If we get a high score, over 4.5, it's a one to five scale, over 4.5 out of 5, then we actually get a budgetary reward to the department. It's still trivial but nonetheless we do. And if we get a score under 3, we're penalised.*  
(Male Science Professor)

Technologies of surveillance which have an economic imperative conflate the moral subject with the fiscal subject. This can be, for the successful, a source of pleasure as much as it can be a source of anxiety for those who are less successful. A male Social Science Professor, for example, who has successfully generated significant research incomes, says:

*Getting in research money is, yeah, research that is well funded is a pleasure and a joy... I think that now I am pretty secure for the rest of my academic life ... I feel more relaxed about my work than I had prior to that.*

For him the very conditions of his viability and future survival are tied to the mechanisms through which he has secured external funding for research, and these have served him well. Yet he worries when he reflects on the obsessive way in which the new system overrides collective wisdom:

*Well, maybe you get on to these sort of issues a bit later on, but it [managerialism], but it sort of conditions its activities very much to the kinds of numbers and kinds of students you can attract, which is sort of good in a way but it becomes a bit of an obsession. It also produces a kind of managerial style that I think runs the risk of ignoring the kind of*

*collective wisdom around the place in teaching and research staff.* (Male Social Science Professor)

The managerial technology is simultaneously enabling and disabling. This simultaneity, alongside the inevitable ambivalence it produces, is a necessary condition that secures the amenability of the subject. It does so, not by unravelling prior commitments and investments such as collegiality, equity and individual merit, but by appropriating them within more compelling regimes of logic and practice. That which might otherwise be grieved for and its loss resisted is still present in a truncated form, and in lingering patterns of desire. The successes in scoring well in the new system, and the lingering desire for collegiality, serve to make the university still seem like a university. But as one interviewee said, it is possible to see it as having become something else entirely:

*Well the one way in which the spirit of the new University I think has affected all of us is that people who take themselves to be researchers and scholars increasingly have to understand that they're basically workers. We're basically workers in factories. And I think that's very disheartening in that decisions are no longer made collegially. Decisions are made by managers. Decisions are made on funding driven grounds rather than necessarily academic grounds.* (Female Social Science Associate Professor)

The factory worker metaphor evokes a sense of powerlessness in the face of the demand for mindless compliance with procedures which one has very little power to change. This interviewee characterises this as resulting from the shift of decision making power away from individuals and collegiate groups to managers, and a shifting emphasis from knowledge production to financial flows. As another Professor says:

*Well it does bother me that the current, the financial monetary budgetary imperatives in universities have run the risk of universities being hamstrung, or even their critical stance, not being willing to criticise government and government decisions in general and about universities in particular. I think there is a danger that they, we will lose our kind of status as independent sources of critical thinking in society and it will be a very subtle process where we start self-censoring. That is the big danger that people don't speak out much to protect their positions, be it personally or institutionally and that's a big danger.* (Male Social Science Professor)

The discursive link between 'money' and 'morality' takes place, he says, through tying them together in acts of self-censorship. The gap between what the government wants and what the individual wants is closed.

How is this closure accomplished without generating resistance? As Foucault (1981) says: "There is no power without potential refusal or revolt" (p. 253). We suggest that where funding to universities and research groupings, and salaries for academics, are calculated through compliance with managerial and surveillance technologies, the capacity to pursue, produce and speak certain knowledges is foreclosed. As we have shown this is not achieved only through external surveillance, but through self-surveillance, through the cognisance of the limits to what might be said and done, and what might not. This is shaped by directives such as the email cited earlier which explicitly invites academics to use web based teaching format as a source of self-

reference. Self-reference, self-management and self-surveillance amount to self-censorship. The individualised subject takes up the responsibility for performing themselves within the terms laid out for them. Their viability depends on compliance, and compliance itself is taken over by economic discourses as a term of accountancy and measurement.

Compliance is thus simultaneously neutralised as no more than a descriptor of specified outcomes, and reinvigorated with a positive moral value of productivity within a fiscal model of management and of survival. As the male Social Science Professor observed “people don’t speak out much.” Critique and resistance is damped down, de-fused/ diffused. Individuals are made highly visible and vulnerable within audit models of management, whilst simultaneously homogenised and disconnected from collegial networks. He suggests that this is a big danger for universities, but it is not a danger as danger is constituted by rationalities of risk. Rationalities of risk are mobilised towards averting danger to the university, the government and the relation between them. Given the centrality of knowledge production to the academy, this shifting of the perception of risk has serious implications for the generation of new and different knowledges, as well as for critique and resistance to the discourses, practices and technologies of government. Academics accommodate to these shifts in order to survive and de-fuse their own anger, hoping that good intellectual work can nevertheless go on:

*I’ve accommodated, I’ve resolved for myself what the new University is about. And I’m aware now, and know enough about how the University works to know what to expect and what not to expect and what to hope for and what not to hope for. And trying to be realistic as distinct from angry about what’s going on because I have enough faith in myself that I can keep myself happily intellectually engaged under the conditions that I have now. I don’t like what has happened and it’s certainly not going to damage the core of my work. Maybe it’s because I’m more towards the end of my career than at the beginning that I know what I’m doing. I know what I want to do. So I’ve changed in the sense that I always used to be, I used to have a belief in justice, that things could be absolutely just and I don’t believe that anymore. I still get very angry at injustice. But I think we never hear that word any more. It’s almost never used. (Female Social Science Associate Professor)*

There is a tension in this interviewee’s comment between being individualised, responsabilised and self-interested and an ethics of concern for the other as represented by a discourse of justice. She suggests that her work is not at risk and that she has found a way of accommodating the changes that preserves her capacity to get on with her work. This amenability, produced through accommodation and pragmatic compliance, results in a flattening out of affect. In managing risk to her own work she tries to be ‘realistic as distinct from angry,’ and she cedes her belief in justice to her disbelief in the new University. This flattened affect is added to that flattening out of disciplinary differences, of privileged knowledges and practices which characterise the neoliberal marketised university.

In juxtaposing email directives with interview transcripts we hope to have shown how the viability of the academic subject is intimately tied to the viability of the university as defined by audit technologies that simultaneously individualise academics and efface differences, making difference, in fact, dangerous. Valorised identities, individual and collective, are characterised as isomorphic with their institutions. They become identifiable, comparable, measurable and viable as a result of their accordance with the regulatory goals and technologies of government.

How might academics possibly resist such enticements to actively become the auditable entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism? How might we understand both our historical embeddedness in a new set of coercive practices, engage in pragmatic acts of survival, and also re-open the distance between the subject and management, or government, and ask how am I and my work being constituted and with what effect? For Foucault, the work of the intellectual:

Is not to form the political will of the others; it is, through the analyses he does in his own domains, to bring assumptions and things taken for granted again into question, to shake habits, ways of acting and thinking, to dispel the familiarity of the accepted, to take the measure of rules and institutions. (Foucault as cited in Gordon, 2000, p. xxxiv)

Foucault also suggests, in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus* that we use “analysis as a multiplier of the forms and domains for the intervention of political action” (Foucault, 2000, p. 109). He characterises the form of individualisation under neoliberalism as dangerous, saying that what is needed is to “‘de-individualise’ by means of multiplication and displacement” not in order to become isomorphic with one’s institution as it shifts and changes at government’s economic will, but in order to free ourselves up to engage in an ethical reflexivity that gives us the insight and the courage to engage in incisive critique, however dangerous that might seem to be. His call is for a radical openness to difference and the multiplication of ideas. We have written this paper in that spirit of opening the normalised everyday world of university life to critique and to new possible lines of action that do not bend to the knee of the governing rider intent on the art of dressage. We should understand, says Foucault (1997), that

Criticism—understood as analysis of the historical conditions that bear on the creation of links to truth, to rules, and to the self—does not mark out impassable boundaries or describe closed systems; it brings to light transformable singularities. These transformations could not take place except by means of a working of thought upon itself; that is the principle of the history of thought as critical activity” (p. 201).

In case the task of freedom might seem too daunting, it is helpful to remember that Foucault follows Nietzsche in saying that change comes from very small things:

The historian should not be afraid of the meanness of things, for it was out of the sequence of mean and little things that, finally, great things were formed. Good historical method requires us to counterpose the meticulous and unavowable meanness of these fabrications and inventions, to the solemnity of origins. (Foucault, 2000, p. 7)

### About the Authors

Bronwyn Davies is a professorial fellow at the University of Melbourne and works as an independent scholar. She is well known for her work on gender, literacy, children’s play, classroom research and her writing on poststructuralist theory. More recently she has been working on a critique of neoliberalism as it impacts on subjectivities at work and at school, the relations between pedagogy and place, and a Deleuzian approach to collaborative writing. Details of her books and other publications can be found at [bronwyndavies.com](http://bronwyndavies.com).

Peter Bansel is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Educational Research at the University of Western Sydney. His research interests include: globalisation and governmentality; labour markets, work and worker subjectivities; universities, academic work and academic subjectivities; and biography, experience, memory and practices of narration.

## NOTES

1. The major part of this project was funded by the Australian Research Council.

## REFERENCES

- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Bok, D. (2003) *Universities in the marketplace: The commercialisation of higher education*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Davies, B. (2005a) Winning the hearts and minds of academics in the service of neoliberalism. *Dialogue*, 24(1), 26–37.
- Davies, B. (2005b) The impossibility of intellectual work in neoliberal regimes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26(1), 1–14.
- Davies, B., Browne, J., Gannon, S., Honan, E. & Somerville, M. (2005). Embodied women at work in neoliberal times and places. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12(4), 343–362.
- Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2005). The time of their lives? Academic workers in neoliberal time(s). *Health Sociology Review*, 14(1), 47–58.
- Davies, B., Gottsche, M. & Bansel, P. (2006). The rise and fall of the neoliberal university. *European Journal of Education*, 41(2), 305–319.
- Davies, B., & Petersen, E. (2005a). Intellectual workers (un)doing neoliberal discourse. *International Journal of Critical Psychology* 13, 32–54.
- Davies, B., & Petersen, E. (2005b). Neoliberal discourse in the academy: The forestalling of collective resistance. *Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences*, 2(2), 77–98.
- Dominelli, L., & Hoogvelt, A. (1996). Globalisation, the privatisation of welfare and the changing role of professional academics in Britain. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 7, 191–212.
- Forgasz, H. J., & Leder, G. C. (2006). Academic life: Monitoring work patterns and daily activities. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 33(1), 1–22.
- Foucault, M. (1981). *Omnes et singulatim: Towards a criticism of ‘political reason.’* In S. M. McMurrin (Ed.), *The Tanner lectures on human values* (pp. 223–254). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin. (Original published 1977).
- Foucault, M. (1997). Preface to the History of Sexuality, Volume 2. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity and truth* (pp. 199–205). New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (2000). Truth and juridical forms. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Power* (pp. 1–89). New York: The New Press.
- Gare, S. (2006). *The triumph of the airheads and the retreat from commonsense*. Sydney: Parkstreet Press.

- Gordon, C. (2000). Introduction. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.) *Michel Foucault: Power* (pp. xi–xli). New York: The New Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1997) *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.
- Hey, V. (2001). The construction of academic time: Subcontracting academic labour in research. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(1), 67–84.
- Higgins, W. (2006). Globalisation and Neoliberal rule. *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 57, 5–30.
- Marginson, S. (2002). Nation-building universities in a global environment: The case of Australia. *Higher Education*, 43, 409–428.
- Marginson, S., & Considine, M. (2000). *The enterprise university: Power, governance and reinvention in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McWilliam, E. (2004). Changing the academic subject. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(2), 151–63.
- Neave, G. (1988). On the cultivation of quality, efficiency and enterprise: An overview of recent trends in higher education in Western Europe, 1968–1998. *European Journal of Education*, 23(1/2), 7–23.
- Nelson, B. (2003). Our universities: Backing Australia’s future. Retrieved November, 2006 from [www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au](http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au)
- Power, M. (1999). *The audit society: The rituals of verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Saul, J. Ralston (2005). *The collapse of globalism and the reinvention of the world*. Camberwell: Viking.
- Schmelzer, M. (1993). Panopticism and postmodern pedagogy. In J. Caputo & M. Yount (Eds.), *Foucault and the critique of institutions* (pp. 126–136). University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

