



# The pecuniary animus of the university

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## ABSTRACT

This essay suggests an alternative accountability process on the basis of critiques of current evaluation practice in higher education. Using cases in the British university system, with some international commentary and thinking through experience in Asian universities in four countries in the wake of ‘audit culture’, the work of Thorstein Bunde Veblen is revived. With Veblen, the current structures and mechanics of the corporate and fully-monetised university might once more be challenged. The risk of importing the metrics and audit culture of Britain, and the neoliberal managerialist administration-led university of North America, wholesale into Asian universities is questioned by acknowledgment that exiting hierarchies are persistent, and competing on Euro-American terms is a recipe for disaster. Due recognition is curtailed, hard work and standards are ignored, prospects for junior staff are constrained to a kind of intellectual and social penury. Resources based on research skills more robust than the current axiomatic research assessment calculus are suggested from within the university. The solution is not to emulate a declining system, but to innovate and invent new horizons and terms of engagement. The proposals offered here are only a suggestion for reflexive inquiry and informed self-examination—criticism-self-criticism from co-research sociology, ethnographic film and urban geography, among others—offered as alternate concurrent paths to accountability.

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## The accountability process

What would be a genuinely radical example of the university evaluating itself? I propose that this would not be the blunt branding exercise of metrics, quality assurance and league tables. In any case, the current practices of assessment and review in the Universities of the West are under siege and have been for some time, whether it be as ‘audit culture’ (Strathern, 2000) or ‘bullshit jobs’ (Graeber, 2015). The time is past for bureaucratic beauty contests of merely cosmetic interest, limited in intellectual merit and with frankly opaque conceptions of transparency that are contagiously not-transparent, ill-suited to purpose, and a danger to all. Julian Hamann in particular has shown that research assessment is based upon a vague notion of ‘excellence’ which merely confirms existing patterns of funding and privilege (Hamann, 2016:761). To export such notions of excellence, and the rhetoric that flows from these otherwise empty notions, is a mistake. An impasse which leads me to argue for a return to the critical perspective of Thorstein Bunde Veblen (1857–1929), updated with the orientation of co-research and other resources

already, and still, extant within the departments and perhaps available in places administrators, old and new, have not yet been minded to look. I invite debate by assuming three things: 1) the university has a responsibility to the community, especially in the Global South, to its entire population, students, academic teaching and research staff, administrative, support, and infrastructure staff, and users, stakeholders, vested interests of the public more widely; 2) all these constituent groups in the university, and those looking in on the university, are capable of self-review, and this can be supported, probably for less cost than the current evaluations, if people looking at their own work are understood as researchers and tasked, from day one, with participation in workplace inquiry and other reflexive research; and 3) the wider community, or communities, that look to invest in the new university sectors spread now across the globe, bring with them a variety and proliferation of ambitions, research styles, report modes, and transparencies that are ultimately communal and compatible, despite a possible 'logical' non-commensurability. That every cook can govern, every farmer is a soldier, a hundred flowers can bloom and in the many schools there are thoughts that need not add up to any single algorithm, thereby exceeds present evaluations many fold.

Performativity, therapeutics, ethnographic film, counter-mapping, inquiries and reflexivity—there are many existing practices able to trade on resources already inside and outside the university and thus foreground the self-critical DNA of what the university mission should be all about. It would seem important for those not already wholly in thrall to audit culture to anticipate and avoid the mistakes of the UK and other centralised reviews and learn from experience to appreciate existing resources, deploying these for internal reflection. It is my argument that solutions to the predicament of the global university already lie locally within the universities in their diverse forms, contexts and communities, but any autonomous nurturing of this (utopian) university requires a radical transformation of all roles in the university to include self-auditing as a robust research component in all jobs. From closely observed experience in India, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam over thirty years, I am confident that the main impediment for any alternative organisation and administration of the university now is the question of time. A break in the headlong and pell-mell rush of conventional development and competition is a break in time that in turn must be allocated and funded from gains available once senior executive positions and moneys spent on consultancy and groundless audits in the Western model are judiciously redistributed. Training of the workers in the sections for the new deeper critical auditing can be provided from budget lines freed up by departing executives and consultant fees left unpaid.

All manner of statistical evidence can be tabled, via corporate memoranda of agreement, cooperative understandings and franchised multi-campus satellite offers, to indicate the global university is a fraught discussion. It is not accidental that Thorstein Veblen's witty deconstruction of *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (Veblen, 1918), has been in and out of favour for over 100 years, always available but only occasionally availed of in policy debates. The initial targets of Veblen's ire were keen to keep his critique of the university as industry under an embargo (Moser 2014) and it seems like retrospective embarrassment at him saying 'I told you so' that excludes reappraisal of his systemic critique today. It was Veblen who identified the encroachment of private industry into university research as part of a widespread reorientation of the sector. Privatisation is now presented by advocates and opponents alike as *the* critical juncture, picking up momentum at times, at other times threatening to stall. The negative assessment, that owes so much to Veblen, finds articulation in Andrew McGettigan's more recent formulations, where the new measures threaten 'to supplant traditional understandings of universities as communities advancing public knowledge' (McGettigan, 2017:112). Similarly, Sinéad Murphy notes 'the degradation of education by its subordination to job availability' and the dissolution of education's 'inherent value in favour of its instrumental value' (Murphy, 2017:116). Murphy however goes further as she notes that the Higher Education Authority (HEA) do not favour actual jobs, but the lesser potential of

'employability. Education is no longer [even] in the service of jobs in the world but ... of being employable' (Murphy, 2017:117). A reserve army of potential labour waits in the wings.

The education debate in public—as opposed to scholarly journals, too often ignored by the press and policy wonks at large—relies in Britain upon a cosy compact between government ministers, research councils, and the vice-chancellors—gathered without circumspection under the banner 'Universities UK'. The absence of critical scholars or, heaven forbid, students, or the public, from such public discussion is unmistakable and a follower of Veblen might well point out here that a malignant and parasitic bureaucratic class has taken over the university sector. Manager spokespersons, corporate CEOs and ex-academic 'captains of erudition' (Veblen, 1918:221) are doing the talking, as omnipotent administrator-kings.

In contrast, the view from inside the universities varies from dismay through anxiety to outright retreat and a scorched earth policy of despair. Hamann has already moderately shown that 'performance assessment [does] stratify disciplinary fields' and through consequent selective funding has ensured that the established centres remain well-funded, are unduly influential through assessment panels, and in turn appear uniquely well-regarded in public perception because of this assessment process (Hamann, 2016:762). Less moderately, the impression on campus forums (and twitter, facebook etc.,) is of burnt-out middle-level administrators who fear for their jobs, passing on relatively inscrutable accreditation, quality assurance and so-called accountability survey tasks to low-morale scholars, themselves relentlessly drawn into ever increasing clerical expectations, leaving them distressed and time-poor for research, or pressured to research for gain. Students construed only as easily panicked customers, are made to feel anxious and insecure, batched in larger and larger cohorts, taught by lesser and less well-remunerated hourly-paid adjunct staff, at best rebelling in a quixotic, self-consuming and alienated recklessness, cut off from any credible forum where they might effectively articulate criticisms of their systemic exclusion. Documentation of the crisis as a critique of administrative bloat is well underway in work from people as different as McGettigan (2013, 2017), Murphy (2017), Derek Sayer (2015), Bernard Stiegler (2015) and Apoorvanand (2018), among others. Yet still critiques of the university struggle to contest the folly of the corporate promotional blitz, even as the need to address the crisis creatively is often declared. Apoorvanand, for example, in the Indian context, suggests 'universities need storytellers. We have statisticians instead, who are into tables and charts, with crooked curves linking numbers and figures' (Apoorvanand, 2018:3). Going much further, the assessment process is skewered in Derek Sayers' book exposing the 'rank hypocrisy' of claiming 'expert peer review' as the best way to evaluate what universities do. Sayer argues for 'scrapping centralized national research audits altogether' (Sayer, 2015:2).

It is far too easy to see that aside from occasionally pertinent 'articles in high-impact journals' (Hamann, 2016:731), it seems deeply unfortunate that the 'debate' about higher education is more and more limited to league tables, statistics of knowledge transfer, vaguely assessed impacts, commercial gains, and with GDP as a magical weather-vane of so-called 'consumer confidence' (UK GDP currently stagnant between 0.1% and 0.4% from at least 2013 to 2018). This is also very much the most articulate line run in the University sector in places like Japan, where the crisis of demographics—of an aging population meaning a lowering of incoming student numbers—has tempted Japanese University officials to emulate Western counterparts and seek international students and or campuses overseas. Nagoya University for example has set up satellite campuses in Hanoi, Vietnam, Cambodia (three satellite campuses: <http://asci.nagoya-u.ac.jp/campus/cambodia/>) Laos (two satellites), the Philippines, Mongolia and in Uzbekistan. At home, the University has bolstered its impressive international student recruitment record along with a number of other universities competing for the funding the international students bring.

Even outside the peculiar intensities of the now allegedly colour-blind global university, it seems particularly remiss that choices about what is taught, what is knowledge, what is research, what should be studied and what is of value in universities, are made almost wholly with an eye as to what will win a status competition run by private polling companies articulated to industry

and government agendas. This is of a type with the limited demands and weak tools of assessment currently in use within the classroom as well. Nothing seems to have been learnt since the days of common room shaming, and tables of the names of the elect. Multiple choice questioning, and even essay grade scores, ever open to be inflated at will or on demand, tell us nothing given the circumstances in which grading is performed as a disciplining action. The letter or percentage grade system is too simplistic even for vocational sorting, and in terms of teaching students to write or think, next to useless since the time required to get meaningful responses is well beyond any realistic allocation.

The Indian scholar and critic, Shiv Visvanathan points out that 'To understand this crisis, one must go beyond the anecdotal and wrestle with structure because ... the very existence of the university as an experiment in freedom and creativity is being threatened' (Visvanathan, 2018:56). Complicit with template-boiler-plate assessment, the key research evaluation structure and the various research evaluation framework processes cluster around the bankable middle ground. Hamann diagnoses this as a 'stratification' that 'reproduce[s] a disciplinary centre' (Hamann, 2016:761). The crisis is made normative, with a stagnant economy, limited credit and competitive advantage acting as blinkers on challenge and critical innovation. The contingencies of research review, evaluation and the 'impact' agenda reinforce a conservative orthodoxy offering the semblance of relevance—it is 'not the actual "impact" of *any* research that is at stake in the REF, which, after all rewards only the *appearance* of "impact", insofar as it manifests as a premonition, declared in advance on 'the labyrinthine forms that it requires academics to submit' (Murphy, 2017:58, emphasis in original). It is a collectively edited narrative about 'impact' that is demanded in the rush to 'fill out the forms' before the deadline, while the plunder of neoliberalism makes the running for actual change. Murphy speaks forthrightly when she complains that the REF 'pulls academics out of the solitary confinement of their offices of old, in which they used to enjoy albeit limited space and time to carry out their job of thinking' and it then herds them into 'collaborative networks' with industry, while 'soaking up ... potential for collaborative resistance' by having them devote their collaborative effort to the 'endless representation of ideas which comprises academic administration' (Murphy, 2017:59).

In his brilliant summary, Visvanathan makes the point that any dalliance with corporate agendas betrays a temporal challenge:

attempts at ranking and rating have no sense of plurality and often destroy the playfulness of the university. Accounting and accountability are worlds apart. One is a method, the other is the basis of an ethic where dialogue is as crucial as accounting. As heritage, as commons, as a promissory note to the future, a university has responsibilities which a corporation has no sense of. Partly it is a function of time. A half-life of a corporation is twenty-five years, even the best extend to a few hundred years. A university lives for centuries and is thus responsible to stakeholders, past and future, who will never be citizens of a corporation (Visvanathan, 2018:58)

Accountability, quality assessments, performance reviews, research application formulas for funding with overheads, schemes of assessment and finance department-led or HR restructuring ... all this *excellence*, is presented as a model for emulation. Yet the idea of the university, its rational and purpose, is defiled 'without dialogue, without pluralism, without a creative, even cantankerous, tension with society, a university cannot function as a creative or communicational system' (Visvanathan, 2018:58). The alternative to be suggested here, for plural evaluation in a one-size-won't-fit-all way, means we need not return to hierarchical Ox-bridge senior common room, but take stock of how the abundance of research capabilities encompassing the globe as the context for a plethora of University types could plausibly still offer a vital, creative and exciting diversity of research evaluation. Instead of the narrow closed horizons of the league table and statistical calculus, the idea that 'every cook can govern' (James, 1956, quoting Lenin) holds promise and potential.

## Can the university be transformed by making everyone a researcher?

One possible path towards a more viable necessary transformation of the universities might begin with expansion of the assumption of research as critique at all levels and for all members of the university community. Having thought a lot about my own (allegedly) critical positioning, a proposal I want to make (and have made in my classes in Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, India and Vietnam) would turn every department—administrative, service and scholarly—away from brand marketing and towards critical research. This proposal has not yet caught the fire it needs, of course, and in turn probably requires a vast expansion of the conception of who does self-evaluation research—criticism-self-criticism that is rarely taken on in the old or new Universities of the region today. Perhaps this can only be something that must first find favour with students and scholars. The proposal, step by step, however also implies a critique of their/our comprador complicity, of the appropriation of the role of researcher to themselves, which itself has limited the role—and indeed character and quality—of research in a classist and corporatist way. Most teaching staff in the university, despite the overwhelming time-suck of the new administrative protocols and the threat of teaching-only contracts, can still more often than not be expected to consider themselves researchers. More difficult might be accepting all students as researchers—rather than passive vessels for ideological instruction (or for reporting to the counter-terror police or visa office)—but there are extant examples of institutional leaders providing at least rhetorical support for such advocacy (Ingold, 2018). The old credo of teaching to question can still occasionally be heard to echo in the halls. Still more radical in appearance might be the proposal that administrative staff all be considered researchers. This would mean, of course, that like students, they need research training and cannot be left only to ‘look it up on Google’—it being nearly impossible to dissuade students from clinging to their phones in class, in my case for translation purposes (see Rancière, 1991 and Solomon, 2016:32 on this) even as the need to do so is surely not a difficult notion to grasp. Long ago C. Wright-Mills, under the influence of Veblen, had commented on aspects of the higher learning (in his widely read but only posthumously published doctoral thesis). He, for example, supported the University of Chicago offer of correspondence classes for those who could not attend in person, on the principle of recognising (pragmatic) aspiration for all: ‘Sociologically, correspondence schools are anchored in a faith that individuals can advance their life chances and personal fortunes through increased vocational and “social” competence’ (Wright-Mills, 1969:60). Aspiration for all was lost at some point when ‘audit culture’ became an exercise in accountability, rather than accountability itself. Here, Strathern’s insights following Pels and Amit, reinforce the view where ‘the concept of an ideal towards which every person would strive ... is missing from contemporary ethics’ (Strathern, 2000:11) and where both ‘the new “ethical” injunctions imposed on research’ and anthropological ‘ethics (including taking others into account)’ are ‘coopted ... in the service of regulation’ (Strathern, 2000:12). Academic freedom too turns to its opposite just when it is identified as the ‘ecological requirement for the growth of any university’ (Visvanathan, 2018:58). If in the reformatting of the current university we can see all the old verities are inverted, then administration and surely administrative staff must now be (re)turned into researchers and in comprehensive way, be expected to be more investigative than administrative, with resources and research geared not only towards graphs, publicity and league tables. The benefit in terms of knowledge and participation, as well as relevance and aspiration, should be clear, and a model for elaboration. Estates and service staff should have research roles, support activities reimagined as having a responsibility of looking into best equitable distribution of resources, architectural and environmental processes, low-carbon building methods and best practice models in widest possible remit. What is the role of estates in relation to local, regional and urban regeneration; what is the role of catering vis a vis the environment, pollution, sourcing of materials, health, well-being; chemical use in cleaning; time-based wages for security; health and community?

These suggestions would replace administrative ‘metrics’ style calculus, ‘quality’ reporting, league tables and the like (again, see Sayer, 2015:2). Instead, robust, wide-ranging, participative research by those involved, in real participation. Stake-holding stakeholders in the activities of a research-led institution we call a university. What specific forms this research can take remains to be worked out from place to place. But it should begin with, and move beyond, a pervasive participation and commitment to use the best creative and critical resources of the university to do research on all aspects and contexts of its practice. It may be that new and more expansive, exciting—to be too optimistic here by half—emancipatory collective modes of academic production will be invented. It is difficult not to agree with Sayer that the varieties of scholarly production ‘are not always well understood, even within universities’ (Sayer, 2015:8). Collective mass training for research that favours an institutional reflexivity would require new investments in the self-evaluating tools of critical research, with workplace inquiry, co-research, but also community concern, counter-mapping, parallel sociology, exposures, commissions, delegations and tribunals. Co-research names a wide range of existing methodologies of participatory inquiry into the conditions of a workplace or institute. This can take the form of making informative maps in a class on labour and value theory in Vietnam, diagrammatic representations of dynamics in the faculty or institute in the context of competing factional struggles in a college in Istanbul, Turkey, staging debates in person or online, with articles and opinion pieces to be read and discussed, published and disseminated, sometimes in samizdat formats (for the nostalgia of it, in Taiwan—see *The Invisible Finger* 2016 from a National Chao Tung University graduate class on *Capital*) and sometimes in real time online across geographical distance with multiple participants. The traditions of factory exposures have a long and healthy pedigree, best articulated in a number of works gathered under the autonomous Marxism tradition, but antecedents can be found among the Bolshevik’s Factory Exposures, Rosa Luxemburg’s worker education, so-called parallel sociology linked to the Frankfurt School, the work of Castoriadis and the group *Socialism ou Barbarie* the Johnson-Forrest tendency, Council Communism and CLR James (1956), Italian Operaismo, and the more recent manifestations, often inspired by Hardt and Negri (2000), Negri (1988, 1991) or Figiel, Shukaitis, and Walker (2014) and Shukaitis and Graeber (2007), or small groups or magazines like *Riff Raff*, *Aufheben*, *The Paper*, the Queen Mary Map Mob and many more.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, but not detailed here, the prospect of turning ethnographic film back on the university, and indeed all kinds of media and communications methodologies, economics and performance analysis, sociologies and discursive analyses would seem the obvious and plentiful sources for improving so-called accountability research.

The process of agreeing upon and securing a radical widespread shift away from the limited forms of accountability-research is however not easily conjured into existence. We do perhaps as yet not have sufficient and diverse models, besides Veblen (1918), and perhaps Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Readings, 1996) and Strathern’s *Audit Cultures* (Strathern, 2000), some campus novels might also serve as a critique of university practice, if perhaps they might could be updated: recall Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (Amis, 1954), Malcolm Bradbury’s *The History Man* (Bradbury, 1975), through to Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* (Smith, 2005) and more recently Suzette Mayr’s *Dr Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall* (Mayr, 2017). More critical and challenging volumes, that should inspire something more than contemplation, include Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Harney & Moten, 2013), and the aforementioned Apoorvanand’s *The Idea of a University* (Apoorvanand, 2018), on the corporate and communal transformation of Indian universities. There are a few emergent examples and enthusiasms, and resources that can be expanded to narrate a displacement, even where the problem and solution can seem inevitably entangled, as noted by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993:53). At least an initial debate about these possibilities, and the kinds of displacements required, should be on the table. Disputes about who gets to debate at that table will be part and parcel of this protocol. My view is that everyone has a say, and a displacement towards Asia in preference to the corporate spokespersons of the various business lobbies should certainly be

promoted, since a vital debate should not be determined by societal proximity to wealth or the executive committees of the bourgeoisie aka the UUK and Westminster. Who does training, how inquiries are conducted, problems of self-examination, criticism-self-criticism, hierarchy-bombing progressive speaking lists, redistribution of resources and roles, inclusivity, break with restrictions, changing direction, openness to insight, questions of oversight ... these are without doubt problems for discussion in any restructuring, but the emphasis up front must be on the transformation of knowledge and knowledge creation as the focus of research, and who does what research and why.

Veblen quips, in his usual acerbic style, that the 'munificent patrons of learning habitually distinguish between scholarship and publicity' (Veblen, 1918:170). A better relation to the public would mediate not through the mechanisms of fees and dollars, but through community and concern for the uses of the university, where a public debate and genuine accountability (having no illusions that this isn't also fraught, and yet) might still prevail. Veblen at least is wary enough to warn about 'ill-disposed critics' (Veblen, 1918:87) but the prospects of transforming the University must face significant, possibly insurmountable, problems of public perception. The up-front confrontation with problems in any transparent way will necessarily be visible in a transition period towards a University that evaluates itself on the principles of criticism-self-criticism and restorative cooperative justice. The public vulnerability of the institution is of course something to be cherished in comparison to the world where the institution acts with the semblance of legal authority, vested in an overpaid legal apparatus, empowered to enact vengeful removal of any 'thorn in the side'—an unwanted or uncooperative critic of the profitable university. Yet how does a radical reform movement defend a principled argument when any attempt to block the march of managerialism incurs an 'indelicate' effort to 'retire' that impediment. Non-inclusion in research ratings, delays in promotion, whispering campaigns or a course of 'vexation and equivocation' designed to force 'voluntary' resignation, no matter what 'fitness' for university life there may or may not be. The tactics involve defamation of character, of domestic lifestyle, of after hours recreations or of political convictions' (Veblen, 1918:130) and the recent cases documented in the press are only a few of many examples which confirm this as a common process—in the UK, Thomas Docherty, Marina Warner, Stefan Grimm; in the US, Norman Finklestein, Joel Kovel, Steven Salaita, Avital Ronnel ...<sup>2</sup>

## Accountability proposals

Might the university take seriously the participation of its members and invest them with the resources to review the needs and values of the institution as it serves that community? At what point do real resources return to that enabling community for which the University provides and with which the University is provisional?

Despite the crisis, and the imperative power of the privatisation agenda, to insist on accountability should not be occasion to disparage methods of scholarship. Massive sophisticated methodologies are available in all, and to all universities, yet accountability processes, rankings, promotions and surveys use the thinnest of quantitative instruments to measure a complex, complicated, and correspondingly valuable set of practices. What would happen if there was an effort to turn those who do accountability work to more nuanced research practice—deep ethnography, discursive analysis, workplace inquiry, counter-mapping?

To defuse the stressful effects of administrative work, it might be functional to introduce a longer, closer rhythm of investigation into accountability practice. Train middle-level managers in counter-mapping techniques, expose chart-makers and spreadsheet compositors to participant-observation, parallel sociology or socio-political inquiry. Research auditing could be the preserve of a reconfigured visual anthropology filmmaking, with endless opportunities for documentary study of the human condition under stress and fatigue turned towards paeans to the glorious

pursuit of new knowledge. Instead of the opportunistic cringe-worthy promotional video on the university website, public display of the practices of enquiry, discovery, criticism-self-criticism. Institutional critique can be well-edited, screened in public, open to debate—there are many under-employed wannabe film-makers ready to do this work, others can be trained up in a general transformation. Public enthusiasm would follow. The unexamined resentment of the lower levels of the administrative office and the ignored hierarchy that denotes and demotes the service roles of the university can be reintroduced to a wider university project where everyone has responsibility for their own accounts. This is not to say help with financial fiddles would not be required, but that the finances of the cleaning section should not be outsourced and ignored, the intricacies of security are not a concern only for the Women's Officer of the students' union and the one lonely campaigner in the Estates office who is treated to raised eyebrows every time they open their mouth to speak, 'oh no, not again' (Barbagallo, personal communication). Catering is not better as a buy-in when an event to be catered also has some concern with how the informal sociality of conversations between the conference sessions might be expected to unfold.

Scholars have regularly shown how education, gentrification, urban restructuring and renewal are bound up with capital investment in depressed areas of the city—Columbia in Harlem, Sydney University in Redfern, Goldsmiths in New Cross, Sunway campus in Kuala Lumpur are all examples. Architecture, urban planning and regeneration literatures might all be able to provide critical resources for those that are part of the university community to allow them to think, comment and act on the place of the university in the context of the socio-economics of the city, within the urban-infrastructure movements which confront communities. These issues of how we live cannot be left to an embattled sub-section that does diversity work when white supremacist social structures pervade academia despite this weak rhetoric. University executives appear afraid and averse to critical discussion of racism and class as exclusions that need to be redressed by more than diversity training. It seems important to expand the scope of discussion beyond containment in polite seminars on cosmopolitanism, hybridity, diaspora and inclusion. Better to risk actual appointments, enrolments and redress of the urban exclusions perpetrated by the routine of repetition of performance reviews, which do little more than confirm 'previous allocations of resources' (Hamann, 2016: 775).

The university is as much a part of the city as the culture industry is an industry graphed upon the population that participates in cultural activities. The university has a place in reclaiming and decolonising the ways the galleries, museums, libraries, as well as shopping malls and high streets, industrial parks and housing estates, have been treated as investment resource by capital, not as lived space for people. Critical evaluation shared across participating constituencies in the university, not only the elite theory salons, would displace the tendency to grab the most convenient, most available empiricist or positivist frameworks to hand. Debate over approaches can infuse all levels of participation, can shape discussions from practicalities to aspirations. The university is not an argument that can ever end; there is always another question to be raised—'there is no final word' (Stiegler, 2015:163).

Education has a role in the reproduction of class and in training skills for corporate gain, but education for all is a responsibility that can infuse and enthuse throughout the communities. The generalisation of more radically inclusive research practices can also unblock the requirements needed to ensure an institutionally based process of social mobility (Spivak, 2012) open to all.

## Conclusion

I have made just three points: about crisis, corporatism, and accountability. The University sector is always in a crisis—whether people say it is terrible or it is fine are the twin poles of a static

nonchalance which opens the door to a malignant and parasitic bureaucracy (had to say it again). The patina of distractions ensures each part of the university seems now to be fully formatted to do duty for finance—the VC after-dinner speech at an alumni donors event, opening a new named wing of a grant-winning department—with no care as to what the grants are about, as long as we have more of them, more PhDs enrolled and more cash coming in. Ideas are secondary, useful only as publicity, controversies must be mild. HR is reputation management, with a pecuniary interest. The publicity department, recruitment and events, all commit only to competition with other institutions over money, not ideas. Prestigious eccentric academics are tolerated only if they bring in cash, anyone that criticises or is a block to the ongoing managerial reformatting to industry is smeared. Alumni donors do not distinguish between ideas and advertising, research grants are awarded more patently for value-for-money bargain methods, less than for scholarship. Branding requires the timetable to be full, the conferences to have *hors d'oeuvres* (of affordable 'quality') and the campus entrance must be newly swept. Money spent on promotional activities far exceeds that spent on instruction.

None of the above—the symptomatic crisis—is picked up by the existing forms of review accepted as necessary under present 'accountability' processes. This is because the methods used—reviews of review procedures, multiple choice answer sheets, performative assessment reviews—are not robust research, they are bureaucratic diversions, generally mistrusted by all, returning nothing new. A better use of the research capacity that, arguably, lies already within universities, would be to turn this as a resource to a practical auditing—workplace inquiries, counter mapping, documentary, ethnographic contextualisation within urban regeneration, etc. And to do this by making every section of the university do its own robust self-criticism, with every employee—in departments, in necessary administration sections, in estates, in catering—to have some of their work time allocated to this review research. With time for training in co-research where necessary. All this paid for by redistribution of the moneys otherwise frittered away on professional consultancies, needlessly stressed figurehead Deans and administrative/professional service career administrators. These all can all retrain within the departments or sections of the university they care to choose, or if internal absorption at standard rates does not appeal, they would be freed up, in their own terminology, to 'seek opportunities beyond the university' (actual quote, real story). Savings here can be allocated to still greater self-reflective research by the necessary sections of the university. Of course there will be those who will insist that administrative departments remain to deal with payroll and records, service requirements and other necessary accountabilities. The accountability audits could however be undertaken by workers in each department and section themselves, with their former executive minds who wanted to stay, reeducated and retrained for allocated roles on equal footing, and pay-scale backdated through restorative taxation, with a view to them at last gaining relevant experience.

Such a transformation of accountability implies an autonomy of the university that may be the only way to forestall the sub-prime crisis of the sector coming soon enough. The figures for future UK debt are eye-watering—and seem to demand a renewal of university accounts, as accountability. Stiegler calls this a 'global economic war in which knowledge has become a commodity' (Stiegler, 2015:168) and the 'global competition between universities established a logic of supply and demand' (Stiegler, 2015:169). I would say this even understates the case, compared to the perspicacity of Veblen already at the start of the 20th century, in a perspective so very vitally relevant across the entire globe today.

The warnings are stark, the UK faced a £12 billion deficit from the student loan scheme alone in 2018, with £5 billion added to that estimated within five years, 'according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies' (Coughlin, 2018). This blows out to a projected £191 billion outstanding balance by 2046 (McGettigan, 2013:13). Another SWOT sheet is not an option, the trauma of centralised audit systems and associated metrics and privatisation requires urgent action if those not yet caught up in the baneful consequences of audit culture are to avoid the troubles to which the 'uncontrolled' experiment in university commercialisation will lead. It of course cannot mean

there should be no investigation, no review—and no critical reevaluation. But just as audit culture and the administrative putsch have been the shock troops of this commercialisation ‘without democratic mandate or oversight’ (McGettigan, 2013:2), so in the face of this, it might still be possible for some to imagine and call down Veblen-inspired investigations of the university that would forestall and challenge such impositions. And even where Auditing holds sway, it is still possible to turn to new time, rather than slavishly repeat the mistakes of the past: as McGettigan, possibly channeling Veblen, says: ‘we must develop new methods of analysis and concepts which grasp the transformation we are living through’ (McGettigan, 2013:9).

## Notes

1. Resources for counter-mapping can be found here: <http://www.countercartographies.org/> and here: <http://countermappingqmary.blogspot.co.uk/>. Resources for workplace inquiry can be found here: <https://hutnyk.wordpress.com/2012/05/16/workers-inquiry-refs-and-what-not/>. The Invisible Finger is here: <https://capitalnctd.wordpress.com/2016/01/13/the-invisible-finger-2015-2016-2/>
2. Elsewhere I have discussed Max Weber’s essay ‘Science as a Vocation’ (Weber, 1919) and Derrida’s *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Derrida, 1983). Besides Veblen and aforementioned others in the text, I am inspired by Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira’s edited collection: *The Imperial University* (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014) and critiques like David Graeber’s *Bullshit Jobs* (Graeber, 2015).

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