

## 'Upon the gears and upon the wheels'

McCann, Leo; Granter, Edward; Hyde, Paula; Aroles, Jeremy

DOI:

[10.1177/1350507620924162](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507620924162)

License:

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

McCann, L, Granter, E, Hyde, P & Aroles, J 2020, 'Upon the gears and upon the wheels': terror convergence and total administration in the neoliberal university', *Management Learning*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 431-451.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507620924162>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an accepted manuscript version of an article accepted for publication in *Management Learning* <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/journal/management-learning>

### **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

## **‘Upon the gears and upon the wheels’: Terror convergence and total administration in the neoliberal university**

### **Abstract**

University governance is becoming increasingly autocratic as marketization intensifies. Far from the classical ideal of a professional collegium run according to academic norms, today’s universities feature corporate cultures and senior leadership teams disconnected from both staff and students, and intolerant of dissenting views. This is not a completely new phenomenon. In 1960s America, senior leaders developed a technocratic and managerialist model of the university, in keeping with theories around the ‘convergence’ of socio-economic systems towards a pluralist ‘industrial society’. This administrative-managerial vision was opposed by radical students, triggering punitive responses that reflected how universities’ control measures were at the time mostly aimed at students. Today, their primary target is academics. Informed by Critical Theory and based on an autoethnographic account of a university restructuring programme, we argue that the direction of convergence in universities has not been towards liberal, pluralist, democracy but towards neo-Stalinist organizing principles. Performance measurements – ‘targets and terror’ – are powerful mechanisms for the expansion of managerial autocracy or, in Marcuse’s words, ‘total administration’. Total administration in the contemporary university damages teaching, learning, workplace democracy and freedom of speech on campus, suggesting that the critique of university autocracy by 1960s students and scholars remains highly relevant.

**Key words:** Berkeley Free Speech Movement, Clark Kerr, convergence theory, Herbert Marcuse, managerialism, neoliberal university, performance targets, redundancy

## Introduction

‘[I]f this is a firm, and if the Board of Regents are the board of directors, and if President Kerr in fact is the manager, then I’ll tell you something, the faculty are a bunch of employees and we’re the raw materials! [...] There’s a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even passively take part. And you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you’ve got to make it stop.’

Mario Savio, speech at University of California, Berkeley, December 2, 1964 as reproduced in Cohen (2009: 327)

Professor Clark Kerr (1911-2003) was Chancellor of Berkeley from 1952-8 and President of the University of California from 1958-1967. With an academic background in economics and industrial relations, Kerr was ‘a leading voice in American social science’ (Schrum, 2016: 500). His writings focused on the ‘convergence’ of socio-economic systems. This was the idea that ‘industrial societies’ anywhere in the world – even the Soviet Bloc – were becoming increasingly similar; more urban, technocratic, knowledge-driven, and professionally ‘managed’ (Kerr, 1983). As part of this vision of a knowledge economy governed by technical administrators, Kerr wrote widely about university reform, most notably in *The Uses of the University* (1963/2001), while enacting major changes at the University of California. He was a significant figure in the postwar U.S. technocratic elite (Bernstein, 2016) during a time when management and administration were heralded as advanced technologies for governing every aspect of complex modern societies amid the ‘end of ideology’ (Docherty, 2011: 10-12; Klikauer, 2013; Schrum, 2016; Waring, 1991).

But it was on Kerr’s campus that one of North America’s most significant student protests erupted, prefiguring the conflict that engulfed universities in the late 1960s and early

1970s. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM) of 1964-5 was led by radical students who were experienced Civil Rights campaigners schooled in sit-ins, teach-ins and other forms of civil disobedience (Cohen, 2009; Schrum, 2016). The speech quoted above was delivered by prominent FSM leader, Mario Savio, addressing a rally of fellow students before the largest of several sit-ins and demonstrations. FSM students protested about the attenuation of their education into narrow, technocratic training (Draper, 1965/2009; Rossinow, 2002), and the increasingly disciplinarian governance of the university that reprimanded and expelled students for ‘mounting social and political action’ on campus (Draper, 1965/2009: 35).

These protests were highly prescient, feeding into contemporary debates about the nature, purpose, management and future of universities (Collini, 2012; Docherty, 2011, 2015; Gerber, 2014; Ginsberg, 2011). Present-day students, staff and other concerned citizens continue to bemoan many aspects of university life: increasing commercialization, expensive tuition fees, narrowing curricula, excessive focus on employability and transferable skills, and – especially among academics – restrictive and cumbersome external mechanisms of scrutiny, the growing assertiveness of management’s ‘right to manage’, and the aggressiveness of universities as employers. There have been strikes (Burns, 2018), student occupations (Busby, 2018), votes of no confidence in senior leaders (Adams, 2017; Slawson, 2018), and thousands of university staff threatened with redundancy<sup>1</sup> or disciplinary action (Freedman, 2018; Gardner, 2014). A torrent of critical writing depicts universities as ‘toxic’, (Smyth, 2017), ‘at war’ (Docherty, 2015), ‘Stalinist’ (Brandist, 2017; Lorenz, 2012; Tucker, 2012), run undemocratically by administrative fiat (Gerber, 2014; Ginsberg, 2011; Erickson et al, 2020; Marginson and Considine, 2001), profit-driven, and blinkered by the distorting commercial

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on searches of media accounts, we estimate that between the years 2015 and 2019 a total of 7511 university posts at 69 British universities were put ‘at risk’ of redundancy via restructuring programmes. Jobs targeted and lost included academics, and support staff such as IT, library and estates. Job losses have included voluntary severance, early retirement and compulsory redundancies. A further four universities opened voluntary severance programmes during those years with no publicly-announced targets of headcount reductions.

logics of metrics, league tables and journal rankings (Deem et al., 2007; Hussain, 2015; Parker, 2014; Sayer, 2015). Students and academics feel disempowered (Geppert and Hollinshead, 2017) and fear of management reprisal for expressing critical opinions (Reidy, 2020; Morrish, 2019). Staff who challenge managerialism are ‘persecuted’ (Morrish, 2020: 247)

This paper contributes to the growing literature on crisis and conflict in universities by developing a management history of authoritarianism in university leadership, informed by a Frankfurt School interpretation of the nature of administration and authority in Western and Soviet contexts. We begin in 1960s Berkeley before focusing on a contemporary conflict over restructuring, redundancies and governance change at ‘Civic University’ (pseudonym - apostrophes omitted hereafter). We show that targets, league tables and measurements of quality were central elements of the Civic dispute. Contentious and inaccurate, these measures provided managerial justification for hostile restructuring. Critical literature on public administration and university governance often notes that the concepts, mechanisms and language of ‘targets and terror’ closely resemble the problematic control and reward measures used in the Soviet Union’s command economy (Bevan and Hood, 2006; Brandist, 2017; Mironova and Bovaird, 1999: 12; Sayer, 2015: 100-1; Tucker, 2012). This is ironic given the explicit Cold War and ‘end of ideology’ backdrop to the 1960s debates over the ‘multiversity’ (Kerr, 1963/2001), the ‘knowledge economy’ (Bell, 1974; Brown et al., 2012), and Kerr et al.’s (1960) convergence thesis. We suggest that what happened to universities in the fifty years since Kerr’s multiversity and convergence theses reflects his expectations of the university as a training school for technicians, while inverting his convergence thesis. The university – via targets and terror – has converged on a Stalinist operational model, rather than a vision of a pluralist, democratic industrial society (Kerr et al., 1960).

The paper unfolds as follows. First we describe the conceptual roots of our analysis in Critical Theory and historical sociology, where we consider ‘the uses of the university’ and convergence theory as ideological facets of administrative dominance. We then draw on the

historiography of the FSM conflict showing how students' criticisms of the university as a 'knowledge factory' and 'unresponsive bureaucracy' resonate with Marcuse's analysis of the domination of administrative rationality. Following a discussion of methodology, we then turn to our autoethnographic account of the contemporary Civic University restructuring, documenting the expansionary logic of administrative dominance as it spread from the control of students to the control of academics. In the discussion we show how Marcuse's Critical Theory provides a rich conceptual tradition through which to view historical and contemporary contests over the nature of the university as an educational and research institution, and as an employer of expert knowledge workers. We argue that the intensification of managerial autocracy – largely but not exclusively via the mechanism of performance targets – has destructive implications for teaching, learning, and workplace democracy on campus. In the conclusion we look to possibilities of resistance beyond the penumbra of the autocratic university.

### **'The operation of the machine': Understanding Kerr's knowledge factory**

The 'uses' of a university are matters of debate across all disciplinary areas. Controversy is especially intense in business and management schools (Parker, 2014, 2018), with these highly-commercialized organizations showing other academic departments a likely image of their future. The commercial-administrative orientation of a university was something that post-war modernizers such as Clark Kerr encouraged, partly by means of developing the academic discipline of 'administrative science' within business schools (Schrump, 2016; Waring, 1991). From the 1960s onwards, discussions around the nature of university modernization have dovetailed with debates over knowledge work and the post-industrial society, the roles of universities and scientific research in economic development, the military-industrial complex, and the employment of academic experts in executive branches of government, think tanks and foundations (Jewett, 2016; Kerr, 1963/2001; Montgomery, 1997; Schrump, 2016).

The Cold War was the ideological setting for these early debates around the knowledge economy, as well as those around ‘convergence’ and ‘pluralistic industrialism’ (Kerr et al., 1960; Marcuse 1958/2018). Kerr mentioned the higher levels of political and social freedoms found in Western systems and noted signs of stagnation in the Soviet command economy (Kerr, 1983: 101-2). But convergence theory never really claimed an inevitable adaptation of Soviet systems onto a superior American model. Rather, it claimed that all societies are adopting a general paradigm that was industrial, knowledge-intensive, managerial and administration-driven, making it imperative for universities to provide the labour power and continue to act as ‘an instrument of national purpose’ (Kerr, 1963/2001: 66).

Despite the explicit Cold War backdrop the industrial convergence literature often emphasized the *similarity* of the daily activity of Soviet and American managers (Brandist, 2017: 595; Granick, 1960; Kerr, 1983: 55; Montgomery, 1997: xxvii-xxviii). Both were increasingly dealing with expanding bureaucratic rules as part of a ‘technostructure’ (Kerr, 1983: 60). Professionalism and expert discretion had grown, ‘knowledge work’ was becoming ever more valued, and the need for professional, rational, often quantitative-based, administration and management was paramount. It followed that the university’s role was to prepare students for employment in these rapidly-expanding white-collar roles in commerce, government and the military-industrial complex, implying that the ‘uses’ of the university were self-evident and, to a large extent, dictated by external context (Draper, 1965).

This model of the university as finishing school for the ‘Organization Man’, or a ‘factory for bureaucrats’ (Jewett, 2016: 555) was one of the prime issues the Berkeley FSM objected to (Cohen, 2009; Draper, 1965; Savio, 1965/2009: 2). Kerr’s ‘multiversity’ promised pre-packaged futures for students while erasing conflict and political discussion from the curriculum. It is instructive that Savio objected so strongly to the idea of the university as ‘a firm’, highlighting the similarities between capitalist industrial enterprise and the bureaucratic systems of the Soviet command economy: tight control, high degrees of conformity,

quantification, abstract systems, remote and unresponsive bureaucracy, and the mechanisms of ‘targets and terror’ (Bevan and Hood, 2006).

Of course, the Soviet system no longer exists and the corporate world has changed in significant ways since the 1960s, particularly as regards downsizing middle management, flattening organizational structures, and (ostensibly) removing bureaucracy and embracing innovation. But in universities a bureaucratic, hierarchical, and heavily-audited modality has intensified over that time, with increasing micromanagement, centralization, external scrutiny and restrictive and punitive measures (Martin, 2016; Parker, 2014; Woodman, 2016). Superficially, this seems odd given the commercializing imperatives of universities amid narratives of competition, adaptability and reducing bureaucracy in favour of agility and innovation. But metrics of evaluation are means through which markets and competition are created and hence inserted into fields where they previously did not exist (Brandist, 2017).

The dynamics of managerialism and neoliberalism are hence closely intertwined (Klikauer, 2013; Lorenz, 2012). It is ironic, therefore, that political control in universities – the nerve centres of the knowledge economy – would become so severe that parallels are drawn with abusive, dishonest and discredited Soviet management structures (Brandist, 2017; Docherty, 2016; Martin, 2016: 10). We are drawing a figurative comparison between the new dynamics of university governance and Soviet totalitarianism. It would be factually and morally wrong to assert a literal equivalence between contemporary universities and one-party-states, political repression, labour camps and show-trials. Our approach is to indicate how the tensions and conflicts involved in intensifying managerial planning, measurement and control over academic professionalism closely reflect similar tendencies that were inherent in Soviet administration; a figurative move that is well established in critical writings on New Public Management and on the current crisis in universities (Bevan and Hood, 2006; Brandist, 2017; Docherty, 2016; Tucker, 2012). We explain this dynamic further in the following section using Marcuse’s Critical Theory to explain, explore and understand these contradictions.



### **‘Raw materials’: Marcuse and the uses of the university**

Herbert Marcuse is another figure who came to prominence during the 1960s, gaining influence as a radical scholar of organization and society. Marcuse, often considered a ‘guru’ or ‘idol’ of the New Left (Alexander, 2018: 105; Macdonald and Young, 2018: 535), saw the role of education and university very differently from Kerr. Like Kerr, he understood college education as preparation for joining the machinery of corporate capitalism. But, for Marcuse, this ‘real world’ beyond the university is one characterized by:

‘...stupid, inhuman, and unnecessary jobs, which conducts its booming business on the back of ghettos, slums, and internal and external colonialism, which is infested with violence and repression while demanding obedience and compliance from the victims of violence and repression, which, in order to sustain the profitable productivity on which its hierarchy depends, utilizes its vast resources for waste, destruction, and an ever more methodical creation of conformist needs and satisfactions’ (Marcuse, 1969: 62).

Universities do at least still function to provide something of a habitat for critical thought to develop and ‘it is in the university where you become radical’ (Marcuse, 1971-72: 13). Marcuse, like the FSM, sought the ‘reconstruction’ not ‘destruction’ of the University (ibid). As a system, however, education ‘serves as an institutionalised rationality that “contains” knowledge “in order to protect the society against radical change” (Marcuse, 1975/2009: 34, cited in Cunningham, 2013: 542). Marcuse’s views on education exist within a wider analysis of corporate capitalism (and its emerging ‘neo-liberal’ variants; Marcuse, 1964: 50) and Soviet Communism. Both regimes operate as a system of ‘total administration’ (Absher, 2016: 486; Marcuse, 1964: 7). This is achieved partly through wider cultural and

ideological means, but also through a more specific form of bureaucratic or managerial ideology that justifies itself through appeals to a distinctive form of (distorted) rationality. Part of this rationality, which dominates both Western and Soviet societies, is based on the elevated value of productivity (Marcuse, 1964: 145) and efficiency within a society that seems to be ‘delivering the goods’ (Marcuse, 1964: xiv). This is the ideology of the ‘established societal apparatus; it is a requisite for its continuous functioning and part of its rationality’ (Marcuse, 1964: 145). Under such conditions classical liberal ideas such as autonomy, professionalism and spontaneity ‘are confined to the level of efficiency and performance within the established pattern’ (Marcuse, 1958/2018: 85).

This rationality unfolds in work and employment as well as politics, scholarship and philosophy. It is an *instrumental rationality* based on scientific or technological ‘reasoning’ that prizes objectivity and calculability above all else (Marcuse, 1964: 153). Calculability is assumed to allow the correlation of ideational and empirical reality; to create an autonomous and absolute truth (Marcuse, 1964: 162) that can serve as a benchmark for evaluation and action. Measurement can be used for ‘exactly determining and calculating empirical objects and relations’ (Marcuse, 1964: 163). What remains unspoken in this model of rationality is that it conceals the overwhelming *irrationality* of life under advanced capitalism. This irrationality reveals itself through the continuation of toil, poverty, war, terror – all of which ‘value free’ rationality appears unable to criticise. In fact, quantification and calculability come to serve as a form of mystification behind which horror can be hidden:

‘the scientific approach to the vexing problem of mutual annihilation – the mathematics and calculations of kill and over-kill, the measurement of spreading or not-quite-so-spreading fallout...promotes behaviour which accepts the insanity’ (Marcuse, 1964: 190).

Under such conditions however, it is the ‘refusal to go along’ which is considered subjective, radical and unrealistic. In the Soviet Union dissent was a ‘political crime’ but in both Soviet and Western society it is also understood as ‘technical stupidity, sabotage, mistreatment of the machine’ (Marcuse, 1958/2018: 85). Marcuse saw many parallels between the Soviet Union and Western democracies. As such, Marcuse shares Kerr’s (qualified) belief in the tendency of convergence. Where they disagree is that Marcuse saw industrial society in both East and West as destructive, coercive and unequal. For him, Soviet society was dominated by a nexus of technology, pseudo-rationality and ideology which ‘dominates the rulers and the ruled while sustaining the distinction between them’ (ibid). Kerr on the other hand saw industrial rationality and the knowledge economy as progressive, modern, rational and open (Draper, 1965/2009; Savio, 1965/2009).

This fundamental disagreement over the nature of industrial society was reflected in the schism over free speech and autocratic university governance in the 1960s. The FSM students won significant victories in their confrontation with university bureaucracy. But, as we shall see, university autocracy has adapted, reformatted and intensified itself (Lorenz, 2012; Parker, 2014) to such a degree that today’s university is a hostile climate not only for student activism but for academic employment.

### **‘So sick at heart’: A collective, activist, autoethnography**

This paper is an example of ‘writing differently’ (Gilmore et al 2019). Rather than being the product of a pre-planned research strategy it developed organically from the collective experience of a precipitous, hostile, and protracted redundancy programme. Academics of varying levels of seniority, the restructuring threw us into dramatic and threatening new realities. We had to try to make sense of events, to resist as much as possible and to document the new managerial tactics being used. Out of this came a form of collective action, analysis and writing. We enlisted the traditions of autoethnography as ‘figuring out what to do [...] a

reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain’ (Ellis, 2007: 26). Evocative autoethnographies have been criticised for being self-absorbed and detached from communities outside of universities (Atkinson, 2006; Delamont, 2009). The academic profession has a strong degree of social status. Compared to other occupations on campus and in wider society, academic jobs are well-paid, and usually enjoy wide discretion and attractive perks such as trips to overseas conferences.

There is a danger, therefore, that our paper might be read as reflecting a privileged sense of outrage. Our approach necessarily involves a degree of introspection, reflexivity and evocation. But, by linking our collaborative account closely with a Marcusean analysis of broader historical and contemporary struggles over the idea of the university, we subscribe to Anderson’s (2006) model of ‘analytic autoethnography’. The struggle we faced is not an isolated example; there is a wide range of research indicating the progressive deterioration of university working conditions (Erickson et al, 2020; Morrish, 2019). Such has been the impact on certain disciplinary areas that some have spoken of an ‘attack on organization studies’ (Burrell 2018). Taken more widely, the Civic case is one among hundreds where conflict and total administration under neoliberal conditions are hostile to the very idea of a university for the public good (Docherty, 2011). The level of toxicity in many universities has led to them being described as ‘anxiety machines’ (Hall and Bowles, 2016; Morrish, 2019: 40-44) where counselling services are ‘inundated by stressed academics’ (Richardson, 2019). Academics have been driven to suicide by stress, overwork and metrics-based micromanagement (Deacon, 2014; Parr, 2014).

University communications proclaim their commitment to valuing their staff and students, but this is at odds with the experience of the workers themselves:

‘on another part of the website, the voluntary redundancy scheme is now permanently open, punctuated by frequent compulsory redundancy operations. Both are designed to

erode morale and force staff to accept increasingly degraded conditions of “service” (Malik, 2011).

A permanent contract is an anachronism for many, and the issue of zero-hours, precarious academics has existed for many years (Swain, 2013). One step up from zero-hours is the fixed term contract, on which 34% of academic staff are employed; another source of mental health distress (Loveday, 2018). Levels of anxiety have been ramped up by significant increases in precarious employment, heavy workloads, increasing metric-based surveillance and the general replacement of secure with temporary employment conditions (Hall and Bowles, 2016; Knights and Clarke, 2014; Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015). Of course, millions of workers in other sectors also face great challenges. Even within higher education, there are particularly under-privileged workers; cleaners for example, who face pay and conditions that are far less adequate than those of academics. More positively, some of them are beginning to find a stronger voice, organizing together, supported by academics and trades unions, and taking action for better workplace rights (Donda, 2019).

What we present broadly takes the form of a research paper, but the research on which it is based is better described as a series of collective actions: combining resistance and activism, self-education, capacity building and collective acts of support and coping. Downsizing programmes have taken place in more than sixty UK universities in the last five years, but the experience at Civic was especially aggressive. The programme of change proved impossible to stop. But we felt we had a duty - not just to ourselves but to academic communities elsewhere - in trying to resist and document these abuses as much as we could, aiming to raise awareness and build support networks (Gilmore et al., 2019: 9). Whilst we cannot speak directly to the experience of those who are less privileged than academics in UK universities, we have tried to document what happened from our perspective, where we have found that, even for relatively privileged workers, managerialism has a ‘human cost’ (Chandler

et al., 2002). This represents a contribution to a broader critique of economic, ideological and managerial processes that place all workers on a damaging and unnecessary spectrum of stress, overwork and vulnerability.

Literature on research methods and ethics normally assumes researchers and their research designs create the risk of harm for their research subjects. Here, we were the ones being experimented on without consent, with no opportunity to refuse, and without being ‘given voice’ in any meaningful way. Civic’s leadership appeared to have scant concern for the wellbeing of staff whose careers, family stability and health they had threatened, or for students whose studies they disrupted. This does not mean we can ignore concerns around ethics, harm and privacy (Lapadat, 2017; Winkler, 2018). Autoethnography can raise some especially difficult ethical dilemmas, in that self-told stories always involve the appearance of others who have not given consent to ‘take part’ in a research study (Delamont, 2009; Tolich, 2010). In this regard we have followed the general guidelines of social science research ethics as applied to autoethnography (Tolich, 2010). We decided, in contrast to the traditions of evocative autoethnography, to merge the identity of each of us into a collective. Where other individuals beside ourselves feature in the narrative we present, we have extensively anonymized them. Where we draw on personal reflections from, or observations of, others outside the authors’ group, we employ as far as possible the strategy of ‘cloaking.’ This involves ‘the subtle alteration of text through changing word order and/or using synonyms to preserve meaning while avoiding traceability through search engines’ (Glozer et al., 2018: 10). These measures serve to help anonymize individuals in the narrative who might be harmed by our telling of our version of events, and that includes those whose actions have harmed us and others in the university and beyond. We have tried, as per the advice of Ellis, ‘to understand how they put their worlds together, how you can be a survivor of the world they thrust upon you’ (2007: 26).

To further reduce the risk of unfairly including the stories or identities of others in our collective autoethnography, we drew on documents which we have rendered anonymous and untitled. These were predominantly emails, sometimes including attachments to official strategy documents, minutes of meetings, and slideshow presentations. The discussions, actions and counter-actions all travelled in digital form through the semi-public organizational space of workplace email. In addition to this, we worked together to coalesce and interpret our reflections on the Civic experience. Events, meetings and discussions are described as we remember them, so they remain somewhat sparse rather than the rich description available from traditional ethnographic field-note techniques. We also have the issue of anonymity to consider. While many of these documents are a matter of record, we also had to anonymize the university itself, meaning we cannot make direct reference to possibly-identifying information such as exact employment numbers, dates, or descriptions of departments. Some of the account will have to remain frustratingly opaque.

Autoethnography and writing differently raise a multitude of considerations. We don't assert that ours is the only account of what transpired at Civic or that we can prove that our account is objective and fair. Our story is not a scientific research paper, but a collective, activist autoethnography that seeks to contribute to a growing body of writing that is explicit in its defence of the traditions of academic autonomy and a university for the public good. It should be read with this position in mind.

### **Downsizing 'a bunch of employees': The restructuring is launched**

In keeping with their industry counterparts, the leadership team of Civic University focus clearly on the organization's status and performance as portrayed in a plethora of national and global league tables and rankings. Top echelons of the university are anxious to intervene using whatever methods they think will be effective in stimulating activity and change that could boost the university's position. Civic leadership opted for a multi-dimensional approach,

systematically complicating attempts at, and removing avenues for, resistance and debate. Staff at all levels were de-stabilized and confused, baffled by the ‘evidence’ given to justify the changes.

At a University Board of Governors meeting a plan was approved to make nearly 200 academics, at all levels of seniority across the University, redundant. The reasons given focused on potential risks around the Teaching Excellence Framework, uncertainty about Britain’s exit from the European Union, pension costs and inflationary pressures; these reflect sector-wide concerns (PWC, 2019). With proposed staff losses of more than 10 percent in some units, the potential financial savings ran into the millions of pounds.

A few days later, the restructuring was announced to all University staff with an email announcing an ‘aspirational and daring’ programme of restructuring entitled Project Civic (or the Project hereafter). In effect, this was a redundancy programme in multiple areas for multiple reasons; financial sustainability in one academic unit, reduced student numbers in the business school, consistent staff structures elsewhere. This multidimensional approach meant that from the outset, attempts at resistance, including those by the trade union (University and College Union – UCU hereafter) would be fragmented by having to fight redundancies on multiple fronts.

A subsequent email from senior management at Civic summoned recipients to a meeting later that day and provided a link to a webpage that outlined one aim of the redundancy scheme as the creation of scores of early career appointments. This led many to speculate that one of the unstated aims of the restructuring was the replacement of more established staff with less well established, and less well paid, counterparts. Further emails followed with more details of the aims of the restructuring. Confusion began to swirl around the issue of staff/student ratios. Colleagues wondered how teaching quality was to be improved if staff numbers fell by a greater proportion than student numbers, as some predicted, and later communications from management seemed to confirm.



The unfortunate hundred-odd business school academics who had received a personalized email inviting them to the official meeting to launch the Project assembled in order to be taken through the details by senior academic managers and HR professionals. In an attempt to prepare for this, some staff had already met informally, struggling to work out some kind of unified response. They talked of writing letters to local politicians, journalists and the student body, and suggested continued engagement with management until every other option was exhausted before trying anything more antagonistic. No effective strategy could be launched in the time between the announcement of the restructuring and the official meeting. Leaving minimal time for staff to organize a collective response appeared to be an element of management strategy.

At the official meeting, staff were informed that they were - effective immediately - ‘in scope’ of a redundancy programme and very likely ‘at risk’ of redundancy. Staff were told they could apply for voluntary severance by a fixed deadline or risk being dismissed as redundant on the statutory minimum if insufficient ‘volunteer’ cases were received and approved. A long and detailed PowerPoint presentation purported to explain the rationale. Replete with university brand-names and logos, it opened with an image of an impressive campus building overlaid with the name and title of the Project. The language and format were in line with a corporate presentation: the Project - not to be described as a restructuring - was about ‘excellence’, ‘improving efficiency’, enabling a ‘forward leap in performance’. Catchphrases from blockbuster leadership gurus were cited. Kerr’s vision of the university as corporation – Savio’s nightmare – became a vivid reality.

Numerical targets were displayed and ‘our performance’ was measured against them. Some forms of progress were reported, ‘with some world-class research, teaching [...] and social responsibility’. But the performance was ‘not-consistent’ and in certain areas ‘underperforming against competitor benchmarks’. Various reports noted areas where ‘we’ are ‘currently not on target’ towards some objectives. The presentation displayed cascading

metrics from each level of the management hierarchy down to the Civic Business School level, where ‘in-scope’ staff were informed ‘the student experience’ and ‘employability’ were ‘not on a par with our main competitors’ according to ‘rankings’. Much of the ‘problem’ was constructed out of disappointing teaching-related metrics. The School (along with some other academic departments) had not fulfilled its plan targets, letting down the university as a whole. The Project would tackle this by substantially reducing student recruitment, requiring the simultaneous elimination of dozens of academic posts. Reduction of student numbers would boost quality indicators and the employment downsizing would allow for more appropriate staff/student ratios while creating financial savings to enable the recruitment of a large number of new junior academics. The Project was not, supposedly, motivated primarily by financial considerations.

Documents and presentations were polished and sharply confident. But their content in terms of problem-framing, strategy and predictions of success was curious. Not all academics in the business school were ‘in scope’; the redundancy programme targeted specific specialisms leaving about half its academics untouched for reasons unclear. Staff were pre-selected for possible dismissal based on the teaching group they happened to belong to. The redundancy ‘business case’ was constructed in terms of excess supply of teaching once student numbers were reduced. But many of the staff put ‘in scope’ for possible dismissal taught students on degrees not scheduled for reduced recruitment. Some academics were on research-only contracts and did not teach at all. Most spent a nominal 40% of their work time on research - was their research redundant, too? And if job cuts were a regrettable outcome of reduced student numbers then why the simultaneous announcement of dozens of new ‘early-career’ academic posts?

Questions and complaints were aired at the end of the meeting but the mood was quiet and orderly. It soon became clear there was, effectively no difference between ‘in scope’ and ‘at risk’, and this was confirmed by email as part of a drip-feed of information slowly released

from the confidential ‘consultations’ with campus trade unions. Academic colleagues at other universities expressed their shock, anger and disbelief. Many signed petitions and open letters of complaint. Students, research participants and collaborators outside of academia largely had little clue that these changes were happening, and were confused and dismayed when they learnt of them. Personal communications featured comments such as the following: ‘Making academic staff redundant in order to create new academic roles? It’s amazing that HR would let the university admit this...’

For many, this ‘launch meeting’ for the restructuring project was the first time they had met the university’s Human Resources department, and certainly the first time it had appeared as an antagonistic management body implementing a rapid downsizing. Rather than semi-autonomous professionals with a strong degree of security, the academics – from junior lecturers to internationally-renowned professors - now constituted merely ‘employees’, precarious and disposable. The significant number of colleagues on probationary and fixed term contracts appeared acutely vulnerable. The university was in turmoil.

### **‘You’ve got to make it stop’: Amplifying targets and terror**

By the end of the week following the restructuring announcement, it became apparent that the stated reasons for the redundancy programme were highly malleable. Exit from the European Union, for example, had apparently ceased to be a reason for the staff reductions. Through a subtle process of shifting emphases, these ongoing management pronouncements constructed a ‘rationality’ of justification for the redundancies that was fluid and opaque. Some began to speak of gaslighting (Sweet, 2019) as colleagues negotiated a highly unstable discursive reality; one which was beginning to have observable and substantive human impacts.

Members of the ‘affected’ group began to suffer from shock and experience stress reactions. A health and safety concern was raised by a professor through department heads. It noted that staff were indeed profoundly ‘affected’; experiencing confusion, suicidal ideation,

insomnia and extreme agitation. Serious concerns around staff wellbeing were met with apparent disappointment on the part of senior leaders, who sought instead to encourage an ‘atmosphere of equanimity’. Colleagues were reassured that support was available, including the university counselling service. Amongst affected staff, doubts existed that the level of support offered would be sufficient.

As the restructuring unfolded, the sense of vulnerability around those on temporary or probationary contracts intensified. Probation targets, like the justifications for the redundancy project itself, acquired a sense of being arbitrary and mobile, as did those for junior ‘at risk’ staff seeking promotion. It became clear that those on fixed term contracts would not have these made permanent. At a certain point in the weeks following the restructuring announcement, those in the ‘at risk’ group who had not had informal confirmation from managers that they were in fact ‘safe’, began to apply for posts at other institutions, doubtful of their ability to resist the Project effectively.

In contrast, ‘safe’ academics (generally members of the professoriat), were emboldened to mount a more public resistance. By the end of the first month, over 200 professors from across the university had written to the Chair of the board of governors to suggest a more positive route forward but also expressing no confidence in senior management. The response emphasised the Chair’s full support for the redundancy project. In turn, letters expressing serious concern about the management of the redundancy process were ignored or forwarded to senior managers who were themselves implicated in this mismanagement. It seemed to many academics that governance procedures were at best unfit for purpose, and at worst subverted by the senior management of the university. In spite of this, as weeks of turmoil turned to months, further letters of protest from internal and external academics and students were sent to university leadership. Students launched online petitions and social media campaigns. Academics produced their own reports highlighting how the new project would not only significantly damage the reputational capital of the university (Cronin, 2016) but also harm its

research, publishing, funding and teaching strategies, and therefore the metrics that govern modern university life (Research Excellence Framework, Teaching Excellence Framework, National Student Survey, etc.).

In terms of institutionalised forms of resistance, UCU representatives participated in several months of ‘consultations’ before the union finally issued a ‘Notice of a Failure to Agree’ and held a successful ballot for industrial action. The Student Union voted for a student-led campaign opposed to job cuts. Hundreds of UCU members (academics and PhD students) picketed buildings and attended strike rallies. Local and national newspapers reported on the redundancy plans, the strike and the unprecedented Professors’ ‘no confidence’ letter.

Senior managers continued to refuse to engage in meaningful discussion, recalling the kind of ‘unresponsive bureaucracy’ decried by the FSM and Marcuse. Collegiality, professionalism, workplace democracy and academic expertise appeared to be no match for strategies driven by metrics, rankings and league tables. In keeping with classic symptoms of organizations in distress (Gabriel, 2012: 1141), feelings of fear, low self-esteem, anxiety and paranoia were widespread, limiting the boldness and scope of staff resistance. While protections for academic freedom typically exist in university Statutes, the UK has minimal legal and constitutional protection for academic freedom and employment security (Karran and Mallison, 2017). Even for those who felt able to resist, ‘the wear and tear of the encounter can still hurt and leave its mark’ (Chandler et al. 2002: 1064).

Informal networks of staff resistance emerged, with some opting to remain clandestine. There was one, more public and creative form of resistance that boosted staff morale and developed a sense of collective action: an internal, unofficial staff survey. This was assembled by a group of business school professors and circulated to all academics in that department. The results demonstrated devastating negative impact across the whole school. Approximately 80% of all school staff in response to separate questions indicated; no clear rationale for the targeting of subject groups, no trust in management, lack of response to concerns raised through

governance mechanisms, reputational damage, and increased intent to leave. Free text comments reflected a depth of emotion on the part of staff, raising concerns over toxicity of culture, bullying and the apparent sense on the part of management that staff were little more than a disposable factor of production. Some commented on the contradictory status of the University's much vaunted social responsibility goals in the context of the restructuring project. The discursive framing of the redundancy programme was also highlighted; filtered as it was through a distinctive managerial representation of positivity – progress, aspiration, excellence.

Around six months after the announcement of Project Civic, it became clear that the planned total of staff departures had been reached, through a combination of staff applying for severance, temporary contracts not being renewed or staff resigning to take jobs elsewhere. Both the union and university management claimed wins in the dispute; management got its headcount reduction while the union could plausibly claim at least some credit for the fact that all were 'voluntary' and no-one was dismissed. Civic Business School over-fulfilled its planned targets. It could be forgiven for being 'dizzy with success'.

### **'You can't even passively take part': The aftermath**

The project thus concluded with the timing largely determined by senior management. A major university was able to bear the costs of staff discontent and bad publicity, presumably regarding this as the cost of doing business. School leadership was conspicuous in its nonchalance when respected academics left to join competitor universities; a stance achieved in part by denying that these universities were competitors at all. Due to the perversity and problematic design of the REF, Civic University even got to claim the research metrics generated by staff who had departed.

The effectiveness of UCU was limited by legal strictures of 'collective consultation' which favour employers and which prolonged the process for months under a shroud of secrecy. Some students joined picket lines and offered support, but most were difficult to

mobilize as they were off-campus during the Project's most critical phases. Unlike the FSM there were no dramatic occupations or rallies. It was also hard for academics to find external support that would have substantive impact. Efforts to contact politicians with letters, emails and social media posts resulted in one or two meetings and a few supportive messages but nothing significant. One MP explained to 'at-risk' staff that redundancies and restructuring plans happen on a daily basis in other sectors, so why should there be any sympathy for Civic academics? At the conclusion of the Project, remaining staff demanded a culture change to re-establish their autonomy and prevent further top-down management aggression. No-confidence motions in university leadership structures started to get passed in various academic departments with the aim of feeding upwards into formal discussions about improving governance. One of these was tabled at the business school. Around fifty signatures were added to the motion as co-proposers in an effort to avoid the targeting and isolation of 'ring-leaders'. It was added to the agenda of a School Board meeting, with staff speaking at length from the floor about the progressive deterioration of workplace democracy at Civic.

The motion passed easily, with just a handful of abstentions and votes against. It was an exhilarating moment of vindication, but in reality a hollow victory. While the carried motion indicated staff's dismay with the leadership of the school, there was an opportunity missed to make a more dramatic and aggressive move. Academic staff had the numbers to carry an overwhelming vote of no confidence that could have been targeted at specific individuals. But that move was never made. Staff were fearful of disciplinary action and threats, with contemporaneous examples of such behaviour not far from their minds. It was also unclear if a vote of no-confidence would even trigger management resignations and what would ultimately be achieved by their removal.

Although the staff and the union basically failed to 'make it stop', the destructive features of the downsizing nevertheless made themselves felt. There were shortages of teaching staff. Workloads of survivors increased. While supposedly carried out with the interests of

students in mind, the redundancies had deleterious effects on the student experience. Doctoral students lost supervisors. Lecturers were unavailable because of sudden departures and sickness absence. This translated into serious complaints, dreadful student feedback and widespread disillusionment. Graduate teaching assistants, who should have been primarily focused on their PhDs, found themselves providing more hours of teaching and marking more assignments. Replacement teachers were brought in from other universities on emergency, short-term contracts. There were multiple student complaints about course disruption, including lecturer absence. Comments of support for academics occasionally appeared on student module evaluations, for example: ‘It’s disgusting that Dr [...] has been removed from Civic. Shame on the university for treating its lecturers this way.’ Managerial autocracy had created a toxic, farcical environment.

Resentment with management autocracy was mixed with sadness and embarrassment about how poorly the organization had treated its staff and students. There was little hope for change in the near future. Indeed further entrenchment was on the horizon, including senior leadership pushing to modify the university’s Statutes and Ordinances to provide even less job security. The staff-led campaign for governance reform remained on-going, but was seemingly lost amid the usual work demands. As the new academic year rolled in ‘business as usual’ prevailed (course outlines, teaching, recruiting Teaching Assistants, marking, etc.), somehow erasing from view the Project and its consequences. Like others before them, and like expert workers in other sectors, the option that many academics took was the gamble of leaving for another employer (Gabriel, 2012; Parker, 2014).

## **Discussion**

The uprising at Berkeley was an event of major historical significance (Cohen, 2002, 2009). Students in the 1960s achieved some extraordinary successes in confronting campus autocracy. But the struggles around free speech, democratic representation and progressive education have



been on-going, with managerialism now resurgent (Brandist, 2017; Docherty, 2016; Gerber, 2014; Tucker, 2012). Recent years have seen ‘total administration’ (Marcuse, 1964: 7) in education extend well beyond the repression of unruly students to include intensive control over academics and their intellectual labour using processes reminiscent of Soviet autocracy. This ‘terror convergence’, which we observed at Civic, is manifested in various forms. Many of the perspectives from the work of Marcuse, from which the student radicals drew such inspiration (Cohen, 2009: 119), have significant resonance, as we indicate below.

At an overtly political level, democratic forms of governance are subverted. Civic, like other universities, uses a form of democratic centralism *sensu* the USSR. Much as it did in the Soviet context this, among other factors, allowed the state (university) to be characterized as representing the ‘general interest’ (Marcuse, 1958/2018: 127), with this characterization also covering the Project. When formal democratic structures such as School Boards or Governors’ meetings threatened to come close to offering a forum for substantive, formal opposition to the plan, management closed off any such possibility. Votes in democratic fora happened, then nothing happened. Counter-figures (dissidents) were excluded from committees for spurious reasons. Countermeasures such as unofficial surveys were ignored and senior managers attempted to colour them with a tint of dishonesty – the unofficial survey did not comply with the appropriate standards of information security, it was argued. Those involved and their fellow travellers were framed by management effectively as dissidents. Although impossible to prove, some of these dissidents seemed to be passed over for promotion, encouraged to leave and/or their careers and work sabotaged in other ways. This is reminiscent of academic dissidents in the USSR where ‘administrative control over careers, and the inculcation of fear’ (Karklins, 1987: 330) operated in a similar way. It is reminiscent, in turn, of Marcuse’s notion of ‘technological terror’ in the Soviet Union: ‘Inefficiency and poor performance at the technical and business level are punished; so is any kind of non-conformity: politically and dangerously suspect attitudes, opinions, behaviour’ (Marcuse, 1958/2018: 112).

Unlike the Soviet case, where ‘friendly’ admonition (Karklins, 1987: 342) may have served as a warning against damaging one’s career, little such interaction between managers and staff took place at Civic, and the former tended to move directly to the punitive measures described above. Like a number of ‘leading academicians’ (Maggard, 1986: 100) in the USSR, some at Civic believed their international renown and respect from peers would be enough to save them from repression; the signatories to the Professorial ‘no confidence’ letter did at least receive distinctly personal and individual, if not ‘friendly’, attention from senior management. Their substantive protests, however, had no effect.

Technocratic/technological rationality is operationalized by management in the form of a Project or ‘plan’ based on a series of targets. To achieve the goals of the plan, management at Civic took recourse not only to their own targets for staff to be removed, but also to performance criteria at various organizational levels, in some cases down to the level of the individual. In the Soviet era, managers sought to deceive the planners and workers operated their own forms of resistance through ‘low productivity, shoddy work and absenteeism’ (Urban, 1982: 29). At Civic, the Project was understood by many staff as representing the ‘ideology of administration’ (Urban, 1982) – that is, academics recognized it as not reflecting objective reality but rather as part of a ‘legitimation for the uneven distribution of power within a bureaucratic hierarchy’ (Urban, 1982: 125). However, there was little scope for resistance through deception at Civic; senior planners based their own calculations on their own figures, which staff were unable to question. Low productivity, shoddy work and absenteeism were hardly options either, since this would make one’s position even more precarious. The execution of plan/target/Project management at Civic was therefore more effective than its Soviet antecedents.

Another central facet of total administration was management’s careful and deliberate linguistic strategy. Language was used in a way that erases ‘the ability to think against the status quo’ (Kellner et al. 2008), as part of ‘a systematic assault on meaning’ (Gabriel, 2012:

1142). Managerialist and commercial artefacts such as metrics, benchmarks, key performance indicators, ‘stocktakes’, and identification of ‘competitors’ played central roles at Civic. For Marcuse, this is ‘functional’ language (Marcuse, 1964: 98; Slater, 1975: 467) which, through the use of ‘self-validating’ (Marcuse 1964: 88) linguistic formulas, excludes the possibility of mediation or opposition (Marcuse, 1964: 86). Critiques of this Orwellian managerialist language feature powerfully in a wide range of critical organizational scholarship (Gabriel, 2012; Learmonth, 2005; Parker, 2014). As in the Soviet case, management communications at Civic, by ‘virtue of the power of the apparatus’, pronounced ‘established facts’ (Marcuse, 1964: 101). Their language didn’t explain, it communicated ‘decision, dictum, command’ (ibid). Management communication assumed a ‘magical character’ (Marcuse, 1958/2018: 87) where it ceased to provide any purchase for critical analysis, since its pronouncements bore only tendential - sometimes zero - relation to reality. In such a situation, the propaganda function of management discourse came to reside precisely in its non-rational character (Lorenz, 2012; Woodman, 2016). In fact, the Civic case and the Soviet approach are similar in that they go beyond the ‘telescoping of meaning’ (Marcuse, 1964: 91) which characterizes management/political discourse in democracies, and into the Soviet realm where demonstrable falsehoods (of the Orwellian type) are interpolated with more observably true ‘facts’: ‘It’s the exact pattern of the Stalinist Purge, mixing facts with lies so it’s impossible to separate them’ (Marcuse quoted in the LA Times 27 July 1969, cited in Katz, 1982: 188). At Civic, ‘[t]he official language itself assumes magical character’ attempting to create a context where ‘illusions guide a behavior that shapes and changes reality’ (Marcuse 1958: 88).

As the ‘purge’ at Civic progressed, management communications took on an ever more hypnopaedic character, and seemed to operate almost at the level of post-modern irony in that they paralleled the strained familiarity and essential functionality of Soviet-era propaganda, but in a more enigmatic way. Staff were regaled with management recommendations for inspiring books: tales of working class resilience against the odds; resilience, apparently, in the

face of large scale job-losses, in one literary example. Some of us were reminded of Stalin's pronouncement in 1935: 'Life has improved, comrades. Life has become more joyous. And when life is joyous, work goes well. Hence the high rates of output' (Stalin, 1935). So mendacious were management pronouncements, so clear their ideological function, that some staff began to view them as a form of psychological warfare, almost a form of gaslighting (Sweet, 2019). Perhaps their 'frustration, indignation, alienation' really were their 'own personal fault' (Marcuse, 1975/2009), perhaps they were going crazy. Processes, discourses and management behaviours became cloaked in a miasma of non-rationality, an experience in keeping with those of many other contemporary organizations (Gabriel, 2012).

The attacks on academic employment at Civic were highly selective. Possibly reflecting broader trends, the situation at the Business School was particularly alarming. Scholars at the more critical, social sciences/humanities (Absher, 2016: 490) end of the business school spectrum seemed disproportionately targeted (although management denied this). Following a line established by Critical Theorists such as Marcuse, Walsh argues that these are the disciplinary areas where the possibility of 'education' - in the sense of students learning to think critically - is concentrated:

'As Marcuse and Althusser both attest, the intellectual fertility of the arts and humanities represent a potential threat, whereas the disciplines desired by the state – natural sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, are more easily commodifiable, and render individuals more exploitable' (Walsh, 2014: 25).

In an evolution of the eponymous Marcusean concept (Marcuse, 1972), Walsh (2014) proposes that we are witnessing a counter-revolution in education and learning. Although education has served for centuries as a key component of the 'ideological state apparatus' (Althusser, 1970/2014) it retains, as noted above, vestiges of the liberal ideal of freethinking and open

critique. Elements of learning which represent a threat to the total domination of administrative rationality - of technocratic capitalism - must be eliminated before any 'revolutionary' dynamic can be formulated (Walsh, 2014: 24). At the same time, financial concerns, which simultaneously were and were not the ostensible reason for the Civic Project, provide a justification for favouring disciplinary areas which 'produce more technicians to serve the aims of the system' (Walsh, 2014: 27) whilst at the same time 'eliminating the faculties of dissent before they can even develop' (ibid).

While students of the 1960s experienced some success in confronting university autocracy via occupations, rallies, sit-ins and pack-ins, the contemporary university 'machine' has evolved in a way that weakens the power of this kind of resistance. Democratic channels are closed. Votes of no-confidence are ignored. Performance metrics are intangible, vague and contradictory, existing on a digital and vaporous plane that escapes rational interpretation, physical identification and bodily confrontation. As part of a social totality of financialized market capitalism, Civic's Project is simply part of a journey of progress to greater productivity and technical efficiency, with students and academics unhindered by criticality or opposition and ready to serve as productive and obedient components of society. The Civic Project is a late-model product of 'the gears and the wheels' of the 1960s 'knowledge factory', far surpassing it in sophistication and robustness. It was a masterpiece of counterrevolution in both theoretical and practical terms, 'defaming' reason in the former, and subverting it in the latter (Walsh, 2014: 24). It successfully created its own non-rationality – one impervious to the exertions of the traditional guardians of rationality as the very essence of learning - academics. In this sense its methods and its aims coincided with those familiar from the era of 'Soviet Marxism'. Civic's management proved that from the perspective of authoritarian academic management, *redundancy* (rather than death, as Rybakov's (1988) fictionalized Stalin had it) 'solves all problems.'

## Conclusion

Our account of academic resistance at Civic University has, to this point, been pessimistic. Resistance was significant but was unable to defeat a sophisticated, multi-dimensional attack on academic professionals. Every attempt to use democratic channels to halt or influence the change programme failed. The Project not only restructured the gears and wheels of the organization, it also formatted a system of language and metrics which recast the ‘reality’ of the university’s nature, status and future. The rise of new threats to academic discretion, security and dignity requires a reconsideration of resistance. Using optimism as a strategy (Chomsky, 2017) we propose some suggestions in this conclusion section.

Under the lengthening shadow of total university administration, academics need to build alliances with the largest set of ‘stakeholders’ on campus – the students. A customer experience approach now dominates the teaching models envisaged by university leadership. Challenging marketization and the administrative logics that flow from it is far from easy. Some parts of the student body may accept or be resigned to marketization, especially given the tuition-fee driven debts they have accrued. But, assuming they still have a job, critical scholars retain wide scope to build on classic and contemporary scholarship that broadens perspectives beyond the confines of transferable skills, employability and commercialism, and to do this in partnership with students.

Trade union organizing needs to be redeveloped at local and central levels. Academic union density can be surprisingly low – often well below 50% of the eligible workforce. Many departments need to rethink how they recruit and energise union membership so that there is a stronger base when academics face the kinds of assault on their professions and jobs described here. Academics also need to strengthen alliances with support staff – many of them are unionized and most are acutely vulnerable to job loss (Hughes 2018). While union leadership and its strategy are of vital importance when it comes to fighting national campaigns, unions

also need to have functioning and activated local ‘shops’ to provide mutual aid, practical support, protection from managerial abuse, and advocacy for academic freedom.

Total administration has been made possible because the existing university governance mechanisms (senate, boards of governors, etc.), have become moribund. With academics facing severe workload pressure from growing teaching, research and administration duties at departmental level, attendance at and engagement with broader, university-wide meetings and decision-making bodies has collapsed (Docherty, 2015; Ginsberg, 2011). This has allowed senior management to marginalize collaborative decision-making and pursue marketizing agendas with impunity. Universities in many countries are legally charities, non-profits, or state-run organizations yet are increasingly managed as if they were private corporations. The existing governance structures born out of universities’ rich histories and founding principles are supposed to provide powerful forms of workplace democracy. Intellectually, democratically and morally their operation and remit are far more ambitious than the straightjacket of managerialism that senior leadership is trying to establish. Academics somehow need to find the time and energy to reshape these traditional governance modes that have become subverted and debased.

At present, university management roles can be unappealing to those motivated by academic concerns and workplace democracy. But academics committed to the notion of the university as a public good need to be encouraged to move into leadership positions and help build a rampart against managerialism. When the abuses of managerial fiat reach such extremes that lead to the kinds of hostile attack discussed in this paper, then academics at all levels need to become politically active, to document the abuses, to challenge the doctrine and practice of total administration, using all means of resistance possible, up to and including holding these organizations legally to account.

We are under no illusions that what we propose implies a long, protracted battle with dim prospects for success. But if the university is to survive in anything like the form it could

be and deserves to be, then we have to orient ourselves to this task with optimism over despair (Chomsky, 2017). Everyone concerned with the future of the university needs to appreciate that the ‘gears and the wheels’ are unlikely to be stopped by traditional forms of debate, dialogue and reason. The gears and wheels of total administration now operate on a miasmic vector of deliberately functionalized language and arbitrary calculability. It is incumbent upon critical scholars (in organization studies as well as other disciplines) to help create a ‘counter language’, a ‘language of negation capable of articulating this critique’ (Kellner et al. 2008: 27). If there is one particular message we wish to extract from the wreckage of the Civic dispute, then it is the urgent need to develop new ways of understanding the challenges we now face as part of a concerted effort to develop new tools with which to confront it.

## **Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## **References**

- Absher B (2016) Beyond the One-Dimensional University: A Marcusean Critique of Outcomes Assessment. *New Political Science* 38(4): 485-500.
- Adams R (2017) Bath University vice-chancellor quits after outcry over £468k pay. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/28/bath-university-vice-chancellor-quits-after-outcry-over-468k-pay> (accessed 10 November 2018).
- Alexander JC (2018) The Sixties and Me: From Cultural Revolution to Cultural Theory. *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 63(234): 99-110.
- Althusser L (1970/2014) *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Verso Books.



- Anderson L (2006) Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 35(4): 373-395.
- Bell D (1974) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- Bernstein MA (2016) *The Uses of the University* After Fifty Years: Introduction. *Social Science History* 36(4): 473-479.
- Bevan G and Hood C (2006) What's measured is what matters: Targets and gaming in the English public health care system. *Public Administration* 84(3): 517-538.
- Brandist C (2017) The *perestroika* of academic labour: The neoliberal transformation of higher education the resurrection of the 'command economy'. *Ephemera* 17(3): 583-608.
- Brown P, Lauder H and Ashton D (2012) *The Global Auction: The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs, and Incomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burns J (2018) University lecturers begin strike in pension dispute. *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43140726> (accessed 20 October 2018).
- Burrell G (2018, March 25) The attack on Organization Studies in UK Universities - An open letter by Gibson Burrell. In Gabriel Y ed. (blog) Available at: <http://www.yiannisgabriel.com/2018/03/the-attack-on-organization-studies-in.html> (accessed 7 November 2019).
- Busby E (2018) University strikes latest: Students clash as protesters storm Sussex University lecture hall. *The Independent*. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/university-strikes-latest-updates-sussex-students-video-protesters-pensions-lecturers-a8224831.html> (accessed 15 January 2019).
- Chandler, J., Barry, J., & Clark, H (2002) Stressing Academe: The Wear and Tear of the New Public Management. *Human Relations*, 55(9): 1051–1069.
- Chomsky N (2017) *Optimism Over Despair*. London: Penguin.

- Cohen R (2002) The Many Meanings of the FSM: In Lieu of an Introduction. In: Cohen R and Zelnik RE (eds) *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.1-53.
- Cohen R (2009) *Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Collini S (2012) *What Are Universities For?* London: Penguin.
- Cronin AM (2016) Reputational capital in 'the PR University': public relations and market rationalities. *Journal of Cultural Economy* 9(4): 396-409.
- Cunningham J (2013) Praxis exiled: Herbert Marcuse and the one dimensional university. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47(4), 537-547.
- Deacon, T (2018) Overworked and undervalued: The crippling stress university lecturers face. *WalesOnline*. Available at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/overworked-undervalued-crippling-stress-university-15422303> (accessed 28 February 2020).
- Deem R, Hillyard S and Reed M (2007) *Knowledge, Higher Education, and the New Managerialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delamont S (2009) The only honest thing: autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork. *Ethnography and Education*. 4(1): 51-63.
- Docherty T (2011) *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Docherty T (2015) *Universities at War*. London: Sage.
- Docherty T (2016) The boiled frog and the dodo. *Prometheus*, 34(1): 25-37.
- Donda, L. M (2019) Why won't UCL treat us cleaners like its other staff? *The Guardian*. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/04/ucl-cleaners-strike-outsourced-staff> (accessed 28 February 2020).

- Draper H (1965/2009) *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*. Alameda, CA: Center for Socialist History.
- Ellis C (2007) Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research with Intimate Others. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13(1): 3-29.
- Erickson M, Hanna P and Walker C (2020) The UK higher education senior management survey: a stactivist response to managerialist governance. *Studies in Higher Education* online early.
- Freedman D (2018) Lectures are fed up with being the big losers in the higher education market. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2018/sep/13/lecturers-are-fed-up-of-being-the-big-losers-in-the-higher-education-market> (accessed 18 February 2020).
- Gabriel Y (2012) Organizations in a State of Darkness: Towards a Theory of Organizational Miasma. *Organization Studies* 33(9): 1137-1152
- Gardner B (2014) Professor suspended from top university for giving off 'negative vibes', *The Telegraph*. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/11187063/Professor-suspended-from-top-university-for-giving-off-negative-vibes.html> (accessed 10 June 2019).
- Geppert M and Hollinshead G (2017) Signs of dystopia and demoralization in global academia: Reflections on the precarious and destructive effects of the colonization of the Lebenswelt. *Critical perspectives on international business* 13(2): 136-150.
- Gerber LG (2014) *The Rise and Decline of Faculty Governance: Professionalization and the Modern American University*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gilmore S, Harding N, Helin, J and Pullen A (2019) Writing differently. *Management Learning* 50(1): 3-10.
- Ginsberg B (2011) *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Glozer S Caruana R and Hibbert SA (2019), 'The Never-Ending Story: Discursive Legitimation in Social Media Dialogue' *Organization Studies*, 40(5): 625-650.
- Granick D (1960) *The Red Executive: A Comparison of the Organization Man in Russian and American Industry*. London: Macmillan.
- Hall R and Bowles, K (2016) Re-engineering Higher Education: The Subsumption of Academic Labour and the Exploitation of Anxiety, *Workplace*, 28: 30-47.
- Hughes, O (2018) Union attacks Bangor University job cuts and warns over student safety *NorthWalesLive*. Available at: <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/business/business-news/union-attacks-bangor-university-over-15547888> (accessed 28 February 2020).
- Hussain S (2015) Journal list fetishism and the 'sign of 4' in the ABS guide: A question of trust? *Organization* 22(1): 119-138.
- Jewett A (2016) The Politics of Knowledge in 1960s America. *Social Science History* 36(4): 551-581.
- Karran T and Mallison L (2017) Academic Freedom in the UK: Legal and Normative Protection in a Comparative Context. Report for the University and College Union. Available at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/academic-freedom-in-2017> (accessed 6 March 2020).
- Karklins R (1987) The dissent coercion nexus in the USSR. *Studies in Comparative Communism* 20(3-4): 321-341.
- Katz BM (1982) *Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*. London: Verso
- Kellner D (1984) *Herbert Marcuse and the crisis of Marxism*. University of California Press.
- Kellner D, Lewis T, Pierce C (2008) *On Marcuse: critique, liberation, and reschooling in the radical pedagogy of Herbert Marcuse*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Kerr C (1963/2001) *The Uses of the University*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kerr C (1983) *The Future of Industrial Societies: Convergence or Continuing Diversity?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Kerr C, Dunlop JT, Harbison FH and Myers CA (1960) *Industrialism and Industrial Man*. London: Heinemann.
- Klikauer T (2013) *Managerialism: A Critique of an Ideology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Knights D. and Clarke, C.A(2014) It's a bittersweet symphony, this life: Fragile academic selves and insecure identities at work. *Organization Studies*, 35(3): 335-357.
- Lapadat JC (2017) Ethics in Autoethnography and Collaborative Autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry* 23(8): 589-603.
- Learmonth M (2005) Doing things with words: The case of 'management' and 'administration'. *Public Administration* 83(3): 617-637.
- Lorenz C (2012) If You're So Smart, Why are You Under Surveillance? Universities, Neoliberalism, and New Public Management. *Critical Inquiry* 38(3): 599-629.
- Loveday, V (2018) The neurotic academic: anxiety, casualisation, and governance in the neoliberalising university. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 11(2): 154-166.
- Lynch, K. and Ivancheva, M 2015. Academic freedom and the commercialisation of universities: a critical ethical analysis. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, 15(1): 71-85.
- Macdonald BJ and Young KE (2018) Adorno and Marcuse at the Barricades?: Critical Theory, Scholar-Activism, and the Neoliberal University. *New Political Science* 40(3): 528-541.
- Maggard MH (1986) *Soviet Dissent and the American National Interest*. MA Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.
- Malik, R (2011) Universities under Attack. London Review of Books 33(4) Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v33/n24/rachel-malik/universities-under-attack> (accessed 28 February 2020).
- Marcuse H (1958) *Soviet Marxism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Marcuse H (1958/2018) *Soviet Marxism*. FB&Co.
- Marcuse H (1964/1986) *One-Dimensional Man*. London: Ark.

- Marcuse H (1969) *An Essay on Liberation*. Beacon Press.
- Marcuse H (1971-72) The movement in a new era of repression: An assessment. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 16: 1-14.
- Marcuse H (1972) *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Beacon Press.
- Marcuse H (1975/2009) Lecture on Higher Education and Politics, Berkeley, 1975. In: Kellner D, Lewis T, Pierce C and Cho KD (eds) *Marcuse's challenge to education*. Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, pp.39-45.
- Marginson S and Considine M (2001) *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin BR (2016) What's happening to our universities? *Prometheus* 34(1): 7-24.
- Mironova A and Bovaird T (1999) Performance management in the Soviet Union: A conceptual framework. *Research paper series – Aston Business School Research Institute*.
- Montgomery D (1997) Introduction. In Chomsky N ed. (1997) *The Cold War and the University: Toward and Intellectual History of the Postwar Years*. New York: The New Press.
- Morrish, L (2019) *Pressure Vessels: The epidemic of poor mental health among higher education staff*. Higher Education Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/education/documents/higher-education-sector-risk-profile-2019.pdf> (accessed 28 February 2020).
- Morrish L (2020) Academic Freedom and the Disciplinary Regime in the Neoliberal University. In: Dawes S., Lenormand M. (eds) *Neoliberalism in Context*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 235-255.
- Parker M (2014) University, Ltd: Changing a Business School. *Organization* 21(2): 281-292.
- Parker M (2018) *Shut Down the Business School: What's Wrong with Management Education*. Pluto Press.

- Parr, C (2014) Imperial College professor Stefan Grimm ‘was given grant income target.’ Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/imperial-college-professor-stefan-grimm-was-given-grant-income-target/2017369.article> (accessed 28 February 2020).
- PWC (2019) *Managing Risk in Higher Education; Higher Education Sector Risk Profile 2019*. PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/education/documents/higher-education-sector-risk-profile-2019.pdf> (accessed 8 November 2019).
- Reidy T (2020) ‘Naked intimidation’: how universities silence academics on social media. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/feb/12/naked-intimidation-how-universities-silence-academics-on-social-media> (accessed 18 Feb 2020).
- Richardson, H. (2019) University counselling services ‘inundated by stressed academics’. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-48353331?fbclid=IwAR02nhE3BI2EGcO85SZm67XqXF4KyJ-yPBOq6lSMSKRmJ7e-C0aLBoQtcwE> (accessed 28 February 2020).
- Rossinow D (2002) Mario Savio and the Politics of Authenticity, in Cohen R and Zelnik RE (eds.) *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 533-551.
- Rybakov A (1988) *Children of the Arbat*. Hutchinson.
- Savio M (1965/2009) Introduction, in Draper H *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*. Alameda, CA: Center for Socialist History.
- Sayer D (2015) *Rank Hypocrisies: The Insult of the REF*. London: Sage.
- Schrum E (2016) To “Administer the Present”: Clark Kerr and the Purpose of the Postwar American Research University. *Social Science History* 36(4): 499-523.
- Slater I (1975) Orwell, Marcuse and the Language of Politics. *Political Studies* 23(4): 459-474.

- Slawson N (2018) Open University staff pass vote of no-confidence in vice-chancellor. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/apr/05/open-university-staff-pass-vote-of-no-confidence-in-vice-chancellor> (accessed 15 January 2019).
- Smyth J (2017) *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Swain, H (2013) Zero hours in universities: 'You never know if it'll be enough to survive.' *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/16/zero-hours-contracts-at-universities> (accessed 028 February 2020).
- Sweet PA (2019) The Sociology of Gaslighting. *American Sociological Review* 84(5): 851-875.
- Stalin JV (1935) *Speech at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites*. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1935/11/17.htm> (accessed 31 January 2019).
- Tolich M (2010) A critique of current practice: Ten foundational guidelines for autoethnographers. *Qualitative Health Research* 20(12): 1599-1610.
- Tucker A (2012) Bully U: Central Planning and Higher Education. *The Independent Review*, 17(1): 99-119.
- Urban ME (1982) *The ideology of administration: American and Soviet cases*. Suny Press.
- Walsh SN (2014) *Counterrevolution and Repression in the Politics of Education*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Waring SP (1991) *Taylorism Transformed: Scientific Management Theory Since 1945*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Winkler I (2018) Doing Autoethnography: Facing Challenges, Taking Choices, Accepting Responsibilities. *Qualitative Inquiry* 24(4): 236-247.
- Woodman C (2016) Warwick University plc: neo-liberalism, authoritarianism and resistance. *Prometheus* 34(1): 39-48.