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On the metaphors and losers of academic capitalism: a response to Shore and Marcus

First of all, I would like to thank Mark Maguire for initiating this exchange and Cris Shore and George Marcus for their thoughtful comments. This is the sort of academic practice that makes scholarly work inherently valuable and that is in jeopardy of disappearing when pecuniary interests trump academic engagement within our professional vocabularies of motive.

In a famous debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, made even more famous on YouTube, Chomsky insists that scholars specify the institutional conditions under which human potential can be maximised. In reply, Foucault suggests that we ought to get a better handle on the scope of the problem before we jump to solutions: 'I admit to not being able to define . . . an ideal social model for the functioning of our scientific or technological society. . . . If we want right away to define the profile and the formula of our future society, without criticizing all the forms of political power that are exerted . . . there is a risk that they reconstitute themselves.' It seems to me that when it comes to understanding how science is being refashioned by the constraints of academic capitalism, we have a lot less of Foucault's documentary orientation than we do Chomsky's critical utopianism. I am glad that my esteemed critics suggest that 'The New Tools of the Science Trade' makes some headway toward balancing this disparity.

This is also why I maintained a largely descriptive orientation that sketches the main logics, conceptual vocabularies and capitals of this trend rather than a polemical one that decides, *a priori* to empirical study, whose social capital will dominate. While I outlined the scope conditions of my findings, I certainly appreciate both Shore's and Marcus's insights into the variation across national and institutional contexts. I am, however, concerned that the approach Shore suggests can too easily ossify the varied institutional processes I am trying to keep as alive, in flux and contextualised as the on-the-ground practices I observed in my case studies. Rather than produce a scorecard of winners and losers, then, which reduces institutional life to the oversimplified yet pernicious metaphor of competitive individualism, the combined insights of Shore and Marcus offer an opportunity to sketch out not *who* loses but *what* we risk losing when this game gets played.

First, open-ended, exploratory research is curtailed by the emphasis on demonstrable return on investment and accountability metrics. This is especially true for qualitative methods. A tremendous amount of high-quality ethnographic research begins not with a roadmap to its conclusions but with a hunting licence for looking. One can find evidence for this curtailment of hunting licence epistemology in the requirements of funding agencies and in the mighty efforts to codify universal standards for qualitative social research (Lamont and White 2009). While the road-map approach is likely to yield efficiency gains, one only needs to think about what passes as ethnography within marketing research to worry that removing too much uncertainty from the early stages of observational research often yields mind-numbingly narrow and very often exploitative insights into the human condition.

Second, what tends to get lost when researchers face significant pressures toward research capitalisation is what we might call, at the risk of Ivory Tower nostalgia, the autotelic quality of academic craftsmanship. As de Certeau grasped so well, there is nothing more important for personal autonomy, and I would add for high-quality humanistic inquiry, than time. Short-term pressures for revenue generation, especially when layered atop traditional professional responsibilities of teaching and publishing, along with the accountability demands so well documented by Cris Shore and his colleagues, tend to work directly against the time necessary for rigorous critical reflection. I was especially saddened to read Marcus's report on the potential demise of the Critical Theory Institute at UC Irvine. I was an undergraduate at UC Irvine from the early to mid-1990s, a time period I perceived to be the height of CTI's considerable campus-wide cache and influence. Although I frequently left its discussions a bit numbed by the fetish for turning verbs into nouns, they were largely responsible for having generated my love of critical engagement. To hear Marcus's report on its crisis and the desperate response of its members is deeply unnerving. It is sadly the case that manufactured crises, such as the budget shortfalls facing most US state governments, get mobilised to advance a neo-liberal policy agenda aimed at eradicating those institutions with a purpose contrary to the prevailing political orthodoxy.

This leads me to a third aspect of academic practice we are at risk of losing. Both Shore and Marcus take issue with my use of the category of 'old school' to characterise those researchers who resist and/or seek to adapt the conceptual vocabularies to their traditional professional values. Marcus discusses the notion of 'third space' as a better characterisation of critical anthropology. The term 'old school', which comes from a typology of scientific identity introduced by Owen-Smith and Powell (2002) and has become common within the research policy literature, tends to impose the 'view from above' of self-described 'new schoolers' and derogates how the actors it poorly describes would characterise their own work. I greatly appreciate Shore and Marcus pointing this out. Similarly, Marcus finds the term 'interdisciplinary' to be an impoverished descriptor. Although I largely agree with this point, it should not be lost that once he turns to his own observations of the CTI crisis meeting, members began using the operative vocabularies of entrepreneurialism (i.e. branding, grants for projects on digital communication), consumerism (i.e. a business ethics course), and interdisciplinarity (i.e. to justify contributions from deans).

A high-minded re-thinking of ethnographic practice such as 'third space' may indeed be a good way to conceptualise the future of critical inquiry. Marcus's suggestions are very helpful here. My point is that this very need to 'rethink', or to 'go beyond', as Shore says, or to 'create the frames . . . relevant to critical arguments in the places

where academic capitalism unfolds', as Marcus suggests, is itself work that is structured by local tactics of resistance and adaptation to the top-down pressures toward research capitalisation. No beggar asks a dean to save an academic programme or approve a faculty line because it will enhance 'third space' epistemology (until, of course, this buzzword gets normalised at the administrative level, as 'third rail' was in electoral politics). The vocabulary favoured by the administration is the current vocabulary of capital, whatever it may be, and that means 'third space' will get translated into the idioms of interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurialism, consulting and consumerism, regardless if these are impoverished ways of capturing what critical thinkers are actually doing.

I find a lot of clarity in Steven Vallas and Daniel Kleinman's (2008) concept of 'asymmetrical convergence', which points out that the norms and practices of commerce are increasingly prevalent in university settings, while academic norms and practices can also be found in the high technology industry. However, this convergence is asymmetrical, since it is heavily tilted toward the logics of managerialism, revenue generation and economic growth. This idea shares a similarity to the metaphor of schizophrenia offered by Shore, but does not have its equivocal connotations (i.e. it is unclear which of the multiple university missions hold sway among the multiplicity).

Lastly, I am loath to leave unsaid that perhaps the biggest loss in the game of academic capitalism is a sense of commitment to student learning. In the vast majority of US research universities, both public and private, undergraduate students have been steadily forced to pay more for less. Tuitions have been steadily rising in exchange for enrolment in larger and more anonymous courses taught by fewer tenured faculty who face strong incentives to pull back from their dedication to student learning and mentoring. The undergraduate student experience was, of course, far beyond the scope of this particular paper, which necessarily narrowed its focus to scientific practice in research-intensive universities, itself a hopelessly broad case. However, the demise in student learning, and the negative repercussions of this trend for radical democracy, are not at all beyond the scope of the institutional trends many of us are deeply concerned with.

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