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Title: Have you ever considered a career in total revolution?¹ Drama and the corporate reform of UK Higher Education

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Key words: UK drama; education reform; neoliberalism; Glynne Wickham; performance studies.

Abstract

This paper examines the corporate reform of UK higher education and its implications for drama. The paper first sets out the background to this reform and its ideological reference points. It then outlines the discourse surrounding the foundation of drama in British Universities and relates this to the discourse developed several decades later by performance studies. In mapping out these areas, the paper draws attention to drama academics' professed emphasis on rejecting commodification in favour of multiple and/or wide-ranging practices, progressive and democratic principles and a concern with the complexity of human beings. The paper argues that corporate discourse cuts at the joints of drama's identity as a discipline because what constitute many of the 'professed' principles and modes of practice within drama and performance studies are antithetical to the models of commodification promoted by corporate thinking. The paper also engages with the ethical issues raised by corporate reform. As a wide range of critics point out, allowing corporate discourse and practices to dominate higher education is problematic because of the extent to which these practices do violence to the human and promote antidemocratic, antisocial, dehumanising and alienating modes of governance. The paper notes that, while drama's 'old' discourses may seem contradictory, problematic or even to collude with élitism/corporatism, they can nevertheless help us clarify our understanding of the institutional place of drama in contemporary higher education, as remembering the democratic and progressive in drama's past - as well as acknowledging where it has colluded with the corporate agenda - provides us with a means both to contextualize policy reform and engage critically with its implications.

Knowledge (and the) Economy, or: How managers think

[U]nderlying and driving the information revolution are two powerful tides that are rocking the power structures of the world. The first is the vast increase

¹ The title of the paper is a slogan of the Situationist International (Plant 1992: 17)

and swift and widespread dissemination of knowledge and information of all sorts. The second is the increasing importance of knowledge in the production of wealth and the relative decline in the value of material resources. . . . In sum, the world of work, the drama of economic production, the essential basis of our material existence, which for several centuries has been dominated by the brute forces of industry is now dominated by products and processes that consist more of mind than matter. (Wriston 1992: 7)

Ever since the corporate world began to develop a discourse concerning 'the knowledge economy', it has perhaps been inevitable that the university would become the target of corporate reform. This discourse is most effectively grasped by examining the ideas of management executives such as Walter Wriston (former CEO of Citicorp and advisor to the Reagan administration) who, in his 1992 book *The Twilight of Sovereignty*, offers two far-reaching propositions. First, that following the decline of industrial capitalism, 'economic progress is (now) largely a process of increasing the relative contribution of knowledge in the creation of wealth' (Wriston 1992: 5), and second, that in the face of globalization, ideas concerning sovereignty and market regulation are thoroughly anachronistic and thus to be replaced by free-market fundamentalism. The discourse promoted by Wriston firmly places education at the heart of the military-industrial complex, as a source not only of global competition but of global domination. This is 'capitalism with the gloves off and on a world scale' (Ross and Gibson 2007: 7). For Wriston, competition between nations is more than rivalry, it is warfare, and success in this warfare (both analogous and literal) requires technological superiority over the enemy (Wriston 1992: 161). Wriston's unashamed ambition to colonize social life is underlined by his frequent invocation of the sweep of history and categorical assertion about the inevitability of the future he imagines. Lest we are in any doubt about the imperialist ambition, or the hubris, we might note that Wriston's locutions extend to a recasting of 'knowledge' itself so that it is synoptically linked to the production of wealth:

The dictionary defines knowledge as 'acquaintance with facts, truth or principles, as from study or investigation'. But knowledge can also be thought of as what we apply to work in the production of wealth. Knowledge is the ultimate source of value in work. (Wriston 1992: 4)

This discourse and its attempt to refashion knowledge as synonymous with a specific economic paradigm will be recognized as implicit in the educational policy taken forward over the last four decades by US-backed multilateral agencies (such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the European Union, and in the UK by the Thatcher government, John Major's Conservative party, New Labour and, most recently, the Liberal-Conservative Coalition government. In corporately driven education policy, in all cases, the logic is the same: knowledge has a key role in the production of wealth, and consequently the business world (via government) has a responsibility to ensure that this knowledge is properly produced and managed. As the university is the primary site for the production and distribution of knowledge, the logic is that business imperatives should be setting the academic agenda and closely monitoring university/intellectual life. Under this analysis, rather than being important because it provides a site of public good or independent thought formation, higher education 'matters' primarily because 'it drives innovation and economic transformation' (Browne 2010: 14).

The narrow view of education advanced here owes much to the doctrine of Neoliberalism, an ideology developed in the 1940s by the Chicago School of Economics, based on the advocacy of economic liberalizations, free trade, deregulation of markets, and promotion of the private sector's role in society. As defined by David Harvey, neoliberalism 'proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2). Although this theory often promotes itself as libertarianism without ideology, its architects, in fact, work from some very clear assumptions. On the one hand, adapting Adam Smith style, laissez-faire, liberal economics to argue that 'the invisible hand of the market' rather than government intervention is the best means of managing society and, on the other, arguing that economic and social progress and public benefit are best served, not by virtuous individuals working in the interest of others, but rather by encouraging self-interested individuals, to pursue accumulation for personal ends. Thus channelling the ideas of Bernard Mandeville (1714), for neoliberals 'private vice' and vicious greed are to be encouraged because ultimately they are the source of social progress. According to Frederick von Hayek, this combination of laissez-faire economics operating without

co-ordination and the pursuit of untrammelled individual interest will produce 'spontaneous order' (1991: 6).

Under the doctrine of Neoliberalism, all public-sector institutions must justify themselves in terms of their 'value' to the economy, and contribute to national competitiveness in the context of the globalized market. In 1994, the World Bank's first policy paper on Higher Education outlined this argument in relation to education by identifying an education sector 'in crisis throughout the world' (World Bank 1994: 1), with 'quality' under threat amid 'widespread fiscal constraint', an urgent need to reduce dependency on government funding, and a need to replace the role of the public sector in education with a new market orientation (World Bank 1994: 1-2). A few years later, in 1998, at the *UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education* in Paris, Maris O'Rourke, Director of Education at the World Bank, repeated the argument, once again invoking crisis, this time a crisis of 'quality and relevance', and forewarned of the major challenges facing tertiary education:

New paradigms require new language and new behaviours. . . . The old ways will not do this. The old curriculum will not do this. We must urgently rethink what we do and how we do it. As I said we can only do this together. I assure you that we in the World Bank look forward to working with you and being part of the solution - not part of the problem. (O'Rourke 1998: 3)

Consequently countries with significant differences in wealth, at dissimilar stages of industrial and technological development and with dissimilar political-economic systems and higher education traditions are held to be prone to the logic of the global economy. Among the World Bank's 1998 reforms we find recommendations for 'tuition and full cost recovery fees', 'cost-effective, market-responsive learning', devolution of authority from the government to individual institutions, increased business and private sector involvement in HE, and 'entrepreneurship on the part of institutions, departments, and individual faculty . . . adding revenue to the institutions and benefit to societies' (Johnstone 1998: 27-28).

Subsequently, in Europe the emphasis on the business agenda has been advanced by the Lisbon Conference 2000 and the Lisbon Strategy 2000–2010, which set a 'new strategic goal' for the EU: 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' (Lisbon, 2000). The 2008 banking crisis and subsequent global economic downturn has led the European Commission to push the business agenda more aggressively through its 2020 strategy and the policy of 'smart

growth', developing 'an economy based on knowledge and innovation' and establishing priorities such as the 'flagship initiative' 'Youth on the move', which has the mission 'to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market' (EC).

The financial crisis is a wake-up call, the moment where we recognize that 'business as usual' would consign us to a gradual decline, to the second rank of the new global order. This is Europe's moment of truth. It is the time to be bold and ambitious. (Barroso 2010: Preface)

The intervention of Neoliberalism into education is indicative of the ongoing shift from a market economy to a market society (Blair & Schroeder 1999: 1), the imagination of the market as the basis for universalization of 'social relations, with the corresponding penetration in almost every aspect of our lives of the discourse and/or practice of commodification, capital accumulation and profit making' (in Ball 2012: 3). As the OECD has it, in the modern world 'no sector or set of institutions can set itself apart from (these) wider developments, expectations and constraints' (Alexander 1998: 1).

The election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 marked the beginning of the formal period of Neoliberal economic policy domination in the United Kingdom (Ward 2010: 60), with her government's attitude and approach to higher education foregrounding an interventionist policy, the implications of which were encapsulated, in 1987, by the junior minister for Education and Science, Robert Jackson;²

... more and more it has been understood that the universities are central to the strategic design of Britain's economic revival, and that if they are to make the contribution they must, the apparatus and ethos of the self-regarding academic producer-monopoly must be dismantled. (1987: 491)

The abolition of arm's-length funding for higher education in the 1988 Education Reform Act confirmed this ethos and, thereafter, successive UK governments would pursue a similarly interventionist HE policy.

The Liberal-Conservative coalition government's recent educational policy (Willets 2010, 2011) and the outlook presented in their White Paper (sub-titled *students at the heart of the system*) might be characterized as being thoroughly under the spell of post-Thatcher corporate discourse (BIS 2011: 5, 6, 38), as we see in its

² Jackson was a junior minister at the Department of Education and Science from 1987 to 1990. In 2005, he defected to join New Labour under Tony Blair's leadership.

adoption of policies that bring to fruition the World Bank's 1994 reform agenda and its promotion of market-based values throughout its policy statements. Instead of the ineffable and unaccountable returns of old university practices, a business-focused education promises a tangible economic product allowing the 'productivity of knowledge workers' to be measured and intellectual assets to 'appear on the balance sheet of the world' (Wriston 1992: 12). Under this line of thinking, HE is cast, not as a site for public good or an individual's self-development, but as the source of credentials for employment. With the individual reduced to a 'fragment of a business plan' (Levidow 2007: 252), employability, a concept that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century to denote the needs of the long-term unemployed, socially disadvantaged or 'difficult to place' (Feintuch 1955: 1), is rendered the *raison d'être* of higher education. HE's mission is to produce individuals who are a significant element for the state – 'willing' 'self-governing' and 'entrepreneurial' (Ball 2012: 3) – and student/consumers meanwhile are to purchase the commodity known as 'education' to enhance their employment prospects and (debt-incentivized by increased tuition fees) to measure the value of this commodity in terms of the subsequent market value it confers upon them (Browne 2010: 14).

Violence against the young

As a range of critics have pointed out, there are many negative consequences attached to these developments: the narrowing of education to the instrumental, the impoverishment of critical thought, the stifling of creativity and intellectual freedom, the reduction of social mobility, the increase in inequality, and the erosion of 'the public forums in which decisions with social consequences can be democratically resolved' (Lipman in Ross and Gibson 2007: 55). Perhaps, though, the most troubling aspect of market-driven, Neoliberal education is not what it threatens to do to public institutions but what it threatens to do to minds (Ball 2012: 3). Neoliberal thinking implicates those who teach in higher education in promoting a particularly violent and dehumanizing technology of the self. Individuals are required to construct themselves under a doctrine of self-reliance and self-efficacy as autonomous economic units, in competition with others rather than as social beings. Raising the spectre of Thatcher's analysis that there is 'no such thing as society' (1987), 'individual advancement' and 'self-interest' are valued over 'the collective good and common well being' (in Ball 2012: 2). The idea of HE as a source of humanistic values that contribute to 'civic

virtue' (Dearing, 1997: 5.47) and shape 'a democratic and civilised society' (Dearing, 1997: 5.39-42) is abandoned. As noted by Adam Smith's contemporary Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1775) more than two centuries ago, educating young people into self-serving behaviour, rather than towards the maturation of 'their inner dispositions' can produce only narrowly rational, self-interested and impoverished human beings. The consequence is utterly antisocial: to foster *amour propre*, the tendency to conflate one's individual worth with what one owns and one's consequent pursuit of un-rational over-accumulation irrespective of personal need or the impact on society as a whole.

In the battle for the present of education (if not its future), it is clear that Neoliberalism has won. Literature from academics critiquing the antidemocratic, antisocial policy of the market-place and proposing alternative paradigms has been utterly marginalized (Dewey 1916; Friere 1996; Giroux 2000; McLaren 2007; Chomsky 2012), and other functions that might be attributed to education have been bleached out. Similarly sidelined is the body of literature clearly articulating the failure of Neoliberal educational reform.³ And, finally, wilfully ignored, is contemporary evidence about the failure of free markets, which clearly demonstrates that the consequence of 'laissez faire' is not spontaneous order but economic chaos.

International and national policy makers are, nevertheless, wholly on board with the business agenda, and, in the UK, the Coalition government is driving this policy through with some violence. The arts, of course, are at the sharp end of these consequences as illustrated by the withdrawal of the government grant for the arts and social sciences in England from 2012. Although, the reforms have created anxiety about the future of the sector, and a growing sense of alienation among some academics, they have not, as yet, led to any meaningful dissent about the nature of the reforms themselves. In drama, in particular - with a few notable exceptions (e.g. McKenzie et al 2010) - researchers have been relatively silent on the topic of education policy.

Part of the challenge of constructing an alternative discourse is, of course, convincing others that there is anything to contest in the first place. The logic of Neoliberal education reforms can appear utterly unassailable. Neoliberal and

³ See Levidow (2007: pp. 243-245) for a brief account of the track record of Neoliberal educational reform in Africa, and Ball (2012) for a more substantial discussion of the impact of Neoliberal educational reform in global terms.

managerialist discourses are founded on appealing to common sense and economic ‘reality’. Accompanying this is a ‘rhetoric of derision’ about the anachronistic, élitist and inefficient university practices that Neoliberal education seeks to displace (BIS 2011). The rhetoric of Neoliberalism also invokes a world driven by forces beyond human control (*pace* Wriston) and thus denies the idea of critical thinking and human agency. It tells us the future has already happened and insists that any alternative to the Neoliberal paradigm is hopeless idealism. There is thus a significant challenge to construct an effective counter discourse when the existing discourse so thoroughly demarcates what is legitimate and what is not. Adding to this difficulty is how power has been redistributed within the university over the last few decades. In this period, HE has shifted from being the professional space in which the terms of practice and conduct are informed by peer dialogue and exchange to a space in which practice and conduct are dictated by ‘structural levers that are outside academic control’ (Olssen and Peters 2005: 325). There is thus the sense that academics have already been excluded from decision-making, and educational policy is now the province of economists and business leaders (cf: the Browne Review⁴ and as illustrated by Universities being managed at the national level by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills⁵). The increasing tendency to appoint non-academics into management positions within universities reinforces this circumstance while at the same time embedding higher education inside the logic of a business world discourse that is often proudly anti-intellectual. Meanwhile, as noted, at the macro level the influence of transnational organizations on educational policy leaves little space for manoeuvre. It can thus seem we are caught in an apparently irresistible tide, and achieving a purchase on local education in light of this can seem impossible.

In addition to these pressures, and perhaps most significant of all, is the economic pressure on the profession itself. There is the real prospect of departments being shut down. For some time now, we have been told that the ‘do nothing university will not survive and it will not be the job of government to bail it out’

⁴ ‘Lord Browne, a businessman with no particular experience of teaching or working in a university, was chosen to chair the seven-person committee, whose members included the head of McKinsey’s Global Education Practice, a former Treasury economist who is a member of the UK Competition Commission, and a banker; one of the two university vice-chancellors on the committee had also worked in the engineering industry’ (Collini, 2011).

⁵ Between 2007 and 2009, the amalgamation of the University and business sectors was confirmed with the renaming of the Department of Education and Skills as the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and then a merger of this department with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, and a further renaming (withdrawing any reference to Education or University from the department’s title) as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

(Blunkett 2001). As the future beckons, plans for structural adjustment grow and some disciplines begin to be positioned as inefficient and unsustainable (Browne, 2010; BIS 2011), there is a real concern that the arts and humanities could be ‘an endangered species’ (CRASSH 2011). In addition, as the importation of business models and more intrusive management practices and auditing take hold (with new regulatory frameworks, student charters, complaints procedures, performance indicators, consumer protections and the Higher Education Funding Council operating as a consumer champion, BIS 2011: 2, 68, 73) it becomes highly attractive to take the pragmatic course and get on board with the Neoliberal agenda. Noncompliance after all could easily place you on the wrong side of the new auditing mechanisms. ‘Being commensurable’ (Lyotard 1979) is thus the prudent course of action for those concerned about their jobs.⁶

I make these points to highlight the difficulties faced by anyone ‘foolish’ enough to take issue with Neoliberal education. However, having said this, uncritical acceptance of the unassailable logic of Neoliberalism is perhaps even more unpalatable because of the deferral of responsibility it entails. As Olssen and Peters note, it sees us throw out as an irrelevance an entire intellectual heritage, abandoning the founding ideal of ‘the university as an institutionally autonomous and politically insulated realm . . . [embodying] . . . traditional commitments to a liberal conception of professional autonomy, in keeping with a public service ethic’ (2005: 326). Also significantly, in terms of current debate, it means ignoring the evidence of contemporary lived experience for, as noted, the economic reality of the post-2008 banking crisis of unemployment and austerity utterly contradicts the idea that Neoliberalism means economic stability and growth.

Before we give up hope of the prospect of any other kind of education, we can note that these reforms do not work without academics. They require academics, not only to passively acquiesce, but also to engage actively in implementing educational change. We have to promote ‘as normal the view that public concerns or issues with a deeply civic quality are, as Canclini puts it, now “best answered in the private realm

⁶ The future outlined in the World Bank report 1998 and its proposals for structural adjustment underline the point: ‘Radical change, or restructuring, of an institution of higher education means either fewer and/or different faculty, professional staff, and support workers. This means lay-offs, forced early retirements, or major retraining and reassignment, as in: the closure of inefficient or ineffective institutions; the merger of quality institutions that merely lack a critical mass of operations to make them cost-effective; and the radical alteration of the mission and production function of an institution—which means radically altering who the faculty are, how they behave, the way they are organized, and the way they work and are compensated’ (World Bank 1998: 24).

of commodity consumption” (in Molesworth et al 2011: 231). As noted above, Neoliberal policies seek to achieve their ends through indoctrination, and though this indoctrination can be a powerful force, it can be resisted. The freedom Neoliberal ideology bequeaths to individuals can be turned to other ends. Rather than uncritically enforcing handed-down imperatives, individuals may engage, and even actively promote, alternative ways of thinking. Because of this, despite claims to the contrary, both agency and the idea of constructing an alternative social reality are possible. The public space we occupy may be compromised, but it has not as yet been eradicated, and, as Peter McLaren notes, ‘ominous resignation’ is not the only choice available to academics. We might still seek to bring about an alternative kind of education (McLaren 2007).

The foundation of drama departments in the UK

Perhaps a first task for drama is to locate contemporary educational policy in relation to its own tradition and the educational values it holds most essential. Remembering how drama first legitimized itself and defined its function might, after all, help us resituate present day debate and shed light on our current predicament. Most significantly, however, as Neary and Hagyard note, remembering a discipline’s past may help us connect with the ‘subversive inspirations around which new forms of pedagogies [are] invented’ (Neary and Hagyard 2011: 220). For, in looking back, we discover a subject with a progressive and critical mission founded on democratic principles; a subject committed to protecting and expanding knowledge and cultivating and critically engaging the individual; a subject that at its point of origin is not only anti-commodification but that depends on this anti-commodification for its identity. In looking to the past, some of the detail thus comes into focus of how the current reforms cut at the joints of the discipline, its history and its legitimizing discourses.

Making sense of drama’s tradition and values is, of course, not necessarily a straightforward matter. In contrast to the monological and colonizing discourse of the corporate world, drama’s discourse is notoriously diffuse, and comprised of discursive practices that can appear formidably complex and self-contradictory. Furthermore, making sense of this tradition is complicated by the extent to which drama, as an academic subject itself, might be considered to be part of the ideological apparatus that helps serve capitalist imperatives (Eagleton 1996: 174). We have to

acknowledge, as Eagleton points out, the humanities' historic function of producing literate workers to serve state interests, and Shannon Jackson's related point that academics have long formed part of the professional managerial class and are themselves deeply implicated in the 'reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist relations' (in Jackson 2004: 46). Similarly, we cannot ignore drama departments' image in the public imagination as places of frivolous, conservative, élite and/or niche activity (Rose, 1979: 9). These charges might certainly seem pertinent when we consider the origin of drama in the UK as an academic subject. Class privilege stalks the university of this era with the arts and humanities serving primarily as an arena for cultivating the 'governing class' (Wickham 1962: 48) and the conversation of white, aristocratic men conditioning the terms of debate. The launch of the first drama department at Bristol, in 1947, was deeply embedded in such a context, with the precedent for drama being provided by amateur dramatic societies in the UK's élite Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Our sense of concern about the élitist roots of British university drama might be increased when we consider that the interest in the discipline of the founder of the first drama department, Glynne Wickham, had been developed during the 1940s as leader of the Oxford University Dramatic society. While acknowledging these points, it is also important to recognize the tensions and contradictions that have always been so central to drama as an academic discipline. The evidence from drama's early days as an academic subject, as throughout its subsequent development, takes us into a more complex narrative. The values, ideas and practices promoted by the first drama department suggest a wide ranging and, in some respects, a resistant site of practice.

One of the most striking things when reading Wickham on these terms is his absolute rejection of commodifying drama and his commitment to establishing a forum for the exploration of disciplinary boundaries and the problems in subject knowledge. Adopting this position was a far from obvious strategy for a new discipline. The defining quality of undergraduate education in Wickham's era was a focus on specialism (Shepherd and Wallis 2004: 11). However, rather than seek legitimacy by neatly packaging drama and tagging it to a specific set of practices, Wickham instead defined drama in extraordinarily wide-ranging terms. He imagined an all-embracing discipline that would stand at the crossroads of the university and reach out to other areas:

Ideally, it should be as broadly based as possible and aware that it has grown out of the needs of the twentieth century . . . the department should justify its existence on the grounds that drama of one sort or another is never long absent from human affairs. In other words, the department should be as much concerned with psychology as it is with literature; as much with the architect and engineer as with the man of letters; as much with theology as with economics; as much with the philosopher as with the actor. (in James 1952: 115).

He criticized the fencing-off of disciplines and the practice of *a priori* designation of proper and improper subject interests as ‘timid, parochial and inbred’ (1962: 46). For Wickham, such an approach was to be challenged as ‘wholly improper to a university because a contradiction of [a university’s] very name, nature, and function’ (1962: 46). In his earliest formulations, Wickham, instead, argued for drama being constructed as a subject that would prepare graduates to understand [their] own society, its traditions and its prospects. It must offer to prospective students ‘not just another subject to which they . . . become slaves’ but a subject which can ‘advance them in the art of living’ (1962: 48). For Wickham, the first imperative of drama education was thus ‘to heighten students’ sensibilities to the mysterious sources of human behaviour and to the forces motivating human conduct’ (in James 1952: 115).

At the first symposium on the place and future of drama in UK higher education, at Bristol in 1951, these sweeping ambitions were pushed forcefully, with delegates arguing that drama was coterminous with social well-being:

The theatre is something that concerns not only the expert on theatrical history, but everybody who is engaged in the study of the growth of human culture. And this is not only because to quote Shakespeare’s famous words it is ‘the abstract and brief chronicle of the time’ (and as such certainly valuable enough as a historical source) but because it so often has taken an active part in the modelling of the face of the epoch. (Beijer in James 1952: 52)

Drama was ‘an art which more than any other can shape and send out to the world the ideas and feelings on which our civilization is based, and in which our vision of the quality of life finds so communicable an expression’ (Coghill in James 1952: 50).

We cannot ignore that the imperatives established here are, in part, a reflection of the era. In the 1950s, the university was still considered a ‘seat of learning’ with a responsibility to ensure ‘man’s general education’ (Chevrillon in James 1952: 23) by

providing *paideia* and an opportunity for humane study. A considerable proportion of the early discourse concerning British drama education thus centres on the idea of producing well-rounded individuals, training critical sensibility and cultivating taste, learning and judgment. The formulations developed at this time would, nevertheless, prove remarkably prescient in highlighting issues that would preoccupy drama for the following decades, including drama's contribution to society, its relationship to professional theatre, the sort of students it sought to produce, and, most significantly of all, its philosophical mission (Wickham in James 1952: 105).

The purpose of the study of drama at a university should be the formulation of a philosophy of drama. By that I mean the study of such questions as the following. What is drama? Why has drama from primitive times to that of our own day been a dominant means of human expression? What is a theatre? What is acting? Since only a small part of ordinary social interaction is completely natural, are the unnatural assumptions that comprise everybody's social façade to be described as acting? What are the social or political or economical or ethical functions of drama? [...] At present we are simply fooling around with this primitive and powerful means of expression. (Guthrie in James 1952: 2-3)

Also of considerable note, in this early discourse, is a violent resistance towards the vocational. The 1951 conference was entitled 'The University's Responsibility to the Theatre'. However, in turning their attention to the topic of practical work, Tyrone Guthrie notes, delegates offered 'loud disapproval' of the idea of a curriculum focused on 'training' and denounced the 'dangerous tendency' for 'universities to become, not seats of learning, but . . . centres for jobs' (in James 1952: 2). Delegates repeatedly condemned the idea of the university reduced to a site of preparation for employment, with one delegate arguing 'a drama department's courses must not have any vocational purpose whatsoever' (in James 1952: 105). A more moderate position was taken by a visiting American delegate, Sawyer Falk.⁷ However, while he argued that it was not unreasonable for drama departments to turn out practising theatre artists, he also concluded that 'no self-respecting department would . . . consider the

⁷ The tradition of drama in American Universities had been associated with practical and even vocational training since the beginning of the twentieth century (see Jackson 2004 for an account of George Pierce Baker's efforts, beginning in 1905, to establish drama as part of the undergraduate curriculum).

securing of jobs for its graduates as the main reason for its existence' (in James 1952: 9). The general consensus was, perhaps, most effectively summed up by Neville Coghill:

what mainly matters is the subject studied, studied as a thing of intrinsic and absolute interest in divorce from the saeculum and in disregard of its value as a technical training or job winner. (in James 1952: 40)

In reviewing these ideas, it is tempting to assume that this is simply an era of privilege without practical pressures. The problem of how to reconcile drama as a subject pursued for its own sake while also providing students with future prospects, however, also loomed large in discussion. This was in fact an era when the practical pressures on Universities were complex, as beginning in the 1950s and accelerated in the 1960s, was a transition from a UK higher education system based on privilege and economic advantage to one based (in theory at least) on meritocracy. The publication of the Robbins Report in 1963 pushed the reform agenda centre stage setting out the principle that 'higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability' to pursue it and 'who wish to do so' (1963: 8). However, although in this period higher education's profile would begin to change and become increasingly associated with class mobility and economic advancement, the education system continued to balance imperatives rather than allow industry to dominate. The function of the university was not over-determined. The paradigm of the Robbins Report invoked the vocational, the personal, the social and the study of discipline for its own sake, but the principal task for a university remained in the realm of contributing to knowledge and cultivating the individual so they might better understand and engage with the world. The university's responsibility was still to initiate the student 'into a realm of free inquiry' promoting 'partnership between teacher and taught in a common pursuit of knowledge' (1963: 181-182).

In the 1960s, the objectives of drama increased, and incorporated many practical tasks. Among these Wickham cited ambitions to evaluate and support serious drama; to care for the artistic heritage of the past; to help develop the art of the future; to support contemporary playwriting and artistic experimentation; and to engage with the question of the vitality of public theatre (Rose 1979: 18-26). However, a sense of social responsibility - and anti-vocationality - remained at the core of his endeavours. The 'quintessence of drama as an academic subject' was to provide the mirror of moral values in society (Wickham 1962: 55) and thus to prepare

the student ‘to understand his own society, its traditions and its prospects’ (1962: 48). Drama must engage the student with ‘every issue of serious consequence from the future of television and the Commonwealth to Africa and the H Bomb’ (1962: 48). What drama departments must not do is rest satisfied with merely giving the student ‘a gilt-edged ticket to present to the Labour Exchange’ (1962: 48).

A surprising number of these early principles and ambitions find themselves echoed throughout the history of drama education in the UK. The anti-commodification rhetoric, however, entered its most elaborate form a couple of decades later in the discourse of performance studies.

The rhetoric of performance studies

As has often been recounted, the first performance studies department was established at New York University in 1980, by NYU’s former professor of drama, Richard Schechner. While there is no direct genealogy between Wickham’s and Schechner’s endeavours,⁸ performance studies’ commitment to promoting connections between drama and other disciplines, importing strategies and methodologies from the social sciences and rejecting vocational training all appeared consistent with Wickham’s call for an open-ended and non-instrumental discipline. The discourse of performance studies would of course, though, also lead the discipline into territory Wickham had only begun to imagine: via performance studies, Wickham’s cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary endeavour would become a ‘(post)disciplinary’ subject (in Bial 2007: 47) or even an ‘anti-discipline’ (Jackson 2010: 73). Performance studies’ impact on UK drama departments would be substantial from the 1980s onward, serving to widen both the subject’s approaches to, and its objects of, study (Roms 2010: 51-66). The influence would, in fact, be such that commentators such as Roms now claim that many drama departments in the UK might be considered to “do” performance studies in all but name’ (Roms 2010: 54).

In his much-cited 1988 essay, ‘Performance Studies: the Broad Spectrum Approach’, Schechner outlined his vision for the subject. The starting point here was a critique of the idea of the university as a site of the vocational: ‘instead of training unemployable performance workers’ (1998: 5) the curriculum should be organized to

⁸ See Shepherd and Wallis (2004: 51) and also Heike Roms (2010: 61-65) for US performance studies’ tendency to under-engage with UK scholarship.

focus on performance as a key paradigm in cultures. According to Schechner, there was a need to examine:

how performance is used in politics, medicine, religion, popular entertainments and ordinary face to face interaction. The complex and various relationships among the players in the performance quadrilog – authors, performers, directors and spectators – ought to be investigated using the methodological tools increasingly available from performance theorists, social scientists, and semioticians [...] Performative thinking must be seen as a means of cultural analysis. (1988: 5)

Schechner argued that, if the idea of the university as site of performer training was not abandoned, ‘the whole academic performing arts enterprise constructed over the past half-century’ would collapse (1988: 6). In the years following this essay, Schechner’s model of the discipline became ever more expansive. Thus, in his 1998 essay, ‘What is Performance Studies Anyway?’, he rejected not just commodification but definition: ‘performance studies is “inter” – in between [...] and therefore inherently unstable. Performance studies resists or rejects definition. As a discipline, PS cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be’ (in McKenzie, 2001: 50). In his text-book, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, first published in 2002, performance was presented as ‘coexistent with the human condition’ (Schechner, 2003: ix) and all human activity was thus proffered as apt for analysis. For Schechner, ‘the one overriding and underlying assumption of the discipline [was] that the field is open’ (Schechner 2007: 1). Performance studies promoted unfettered exploration. It was endlessly ‘capable of absorbing ideas and methods from a wide variety of disciplines’ (Phelan in Schechner 2007: 13). It set ‘no limit on what [could be] studied in terms of medium and culture. Nor [did] it limit the range of approaches that [could] be taken’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007: 43) Thus, performance studies provided ‘a framework for the analysis of twenty-first century global culture’ (Bial, 2007: 6).

At the heart of these investigations, Schechner stressed an ethical and social mission. The discipline celebrated activities with humanizing potential. The teaching of performance focused on ‘understanding historical, social and cultural processes’ (Schechner, 1988: 6) and concerned itself with human and social relations. The curriculum’s task was to expose ‘the tensions and contradictions driving today’s world’ (Schechner, 2007: 3) and to ‘enhance human life’ (Schechner, 1992: 9): as

such, performance studies was held to provide nothing less than ‘a necessary tool for living’ (Schechner 2007: 11). The ‘cutting edge’ of the discipline meanwhile was its ‘transgressive or resistant potential’ (McKenzie, 2001: 30). It provided a ‘catalyst to personal and social transformation’ (McKenzie 2001: 30). The task for the student was to use performance studies to identify and address ‘the problems facing the world’ (Schechner 2007: 26). Echoing Wickham, Schechner thus argued that performance studies could provide the core of ‘a well rounded education’ (Schechner 1992: 9) in the contemporary world.

This commitment to ‘in-betweenness’ and to transformation achieved synthesis in performance studies via the concept of liminality. As Jon McKenzie notes: ‘The idea of liminality would function as an exemplar for the discipline’ (McKenzie 2001: 37), providing ‘perhaps the most concise and accurate’ means of encapsulating its activities (McKenzie, 2001: 52). ‘What is performance studies? [...] it is a dramatic rite and ritualized drama of passage, a rehearsed movement that carries theory-builders into a distinctive mode of existence and realization’ (McKenzie 2001: 37). The anthropologist Victor Turner had argued that the university functioned as a liminal site in industrialized societies (McKenzie 2001: 37), and performance studies departments could therefore be thought of as liminal space within liminal space. As such, their endeavours could be positioned as anti-structure, as ‘removed from daily activities for members of a culture “to think about how they think in propositions that are not in cultural codes but about them”’ (Carlson 1996: 23). The main purpose of such a site was to allow ‘participants to reflect, take apart and reassemble symbols and behaviours and, possibly, to transform themselves and society’ (McKenzie 2001: 36). This meant the conceptualization of the university classroom as a site of play, free from the conditioning influence of capital. The classroom was not a site of training, but a site of exploration, the purpose of which was to facilitate human contact, freedom of expression, critical reflection and transformation. The classroom could provide ‘an open testing ground for new social and cultural structures’ (Carlson 1996: 28), and, privileging chance and the playful, could also foster activity ‘likely to be subversive’, by providing a means of introducing or exploring different structures that ‘may develop into real alternatives to the status quo’ (Carlson 1996: 24). Adapting Marvin Carlson’s use of Bakhtinian language, the classroom could provide ‘the place of working out in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship* between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful

socio-hierarchical relationships of [quotidian] life' (Bakhtin in Carlson 1996: 28 italics in original). As McKenzie identifies, performance studies scholars were, thus, understood to be operating in 'the interstices of academia [seeking] to transform both the academy and society at large' (2001: 36). Fundamentally, then, performance studies promoted the idea of a university affording an autonomous space, resisting 'settled hierarchies of ideas, organizations, and people' (Schechner 2007: 4) and 'the global forces of capital' (Schechner 2007: 23).

Drama, performance studies and corporatism

Given these kinds of missions (both Wickham's and Schechner's) and the rhetoric against commodification, the question arises as to why our discipline has not done more to provide an alternative to corporatism. To address this, we have to take seriously the criticisms that may be laid at our door. First, that, as McKenzie identifies, the discipline has been living under a false consciousness about its own radicalness, with the 'valorization of liminal transgression or resistance' serving a normative function (McKenzie, 2001: 50). This has allowed false reassurance about the extent to which performance practices are contestatory and challenge social norms when, under reflection, these practices may equally be considered to be conservative and to have little real impact on either society or the individual. Under this analysis, (and given what has happened to HE under performance studies' watch) the rhetoric concerning the radical and resistant might be read as somewhat hollow and the university considered a site that has rested satisfied with providing a denuded kind of liminality, a place of 'letting off steam' rather than making good on the promise of efficacy (McKenzie 2001: 49-53).

There is also the discipline's overt conditioning by capital to be considered, and the repositioning of the arts and humanities in general from a 'priceless asset' (Dearing 1997: 18.18) to a commodity that must be quantified in purely economic terms. Assuring the subject's legitimacy has inevitably meant conformity with dominant discourses. There have been many calls for the discipline to get its act together in corporate terms. As Jill Dolan noted nearly twenty years ago: 'to continue to be viable as an institutional practice, and as a discipline that receives funding, students, and faculty lines, theatre studies needs to orientate itself to these new modes of production' (1995: 28). In the *Performance Studies Reader*, Henry Bial identifies that the pressure to deliver 'a "product" to student consumers' and assert the

discipline's 'relevance in the global market place' (Bial 2007: 5) has long been among the main drivers shaping the discipline. It is, thus, possible to frame developments like those in performance studies as a response in significant measure to corporatism. A cynical reading might even conclude that performance studies' historical strategy of casting its gaze so wide and fitting in by not fitting in has been a means of ensuring its legitimacy as funding imperatives change.

Going further with this logic, we can note our discipline's own corporatism and colonizing tendency. As McKenzie identifies, the exporting of Americanized performance studies to the global HE market, 'sounds uncannily like developments in economic and political neo-imperialism' (McKenzie, 2010: 3). 'US research universities have become models through which "innovation" and "creativity" can be fostered for the "new competencies" thought to be essential if less-advanced societies are to become knowledge nodes in the global circulation and production of information' (McKenzie: 2010: 7). Under this analysis, performance studies provides 'suitable and commodifiable fodder' for capitalist exploitation, as discipline content becomes less important than 'being part of the curricula for "creative" tertiary education' (McKenzie: 2010: 7). Finally, we also have to take into account what might be read as the empire building of individual academics. As Shepherd and Wallis identify, there has been much criticism of Schechner, in particular, over the years. His championing of performance studies has often been read as self-promotion. His desire to be the voice 'announcing the field to undergraduates' (2004: 106) has, for some, been interpreted as a 'grabbing for institutional power' (2004: 108) or even a bare repression of 'a desire to be the institution' (Dolan cited in Shepherd and Wallis 2004: 108). As McLaren identifies, such academic self-promotion can be considered to be another species of the genus of 'capitalist schooling' (McLaren 2007: 268), with the desire of ruling-class academics to perpetuate their own hegemony serving to limit the options of educational policy and thus ultimately to protect the bulwark of ruling-class power (McLaren, 2007: 269).

Passive learning for alienated labour

This raises an interesting problem - our disciplinary inheritance may be as much problem as solution in any effort to 'face down capital' (McLaren, 2007: 286). This should not, though, distract us from awareness that our disciplinary inheritance is also crucial in helping us to make sense of our present circumstance. Evoking the past

does not have to entail an exercise in nostalgia, a call for the resurrection of former practices, or a disavowal of what may be problematic in our history. Connecting past to present rather provides an occasion for new critical engagement. Acknowledging the contradictions in our disciplinary history, and its tendencies towards commodification, normativity and being incorporated into capitalist relations are part of this process. The tensions in the values of Wickham's era, or in performance studies ambitions, remind us of the complexities that have always existed. Theorization of such a norm may, however, provide the first step towards constructing an effective contemporary critical pedagogy. Accessing the ideas that gave our discipline life in the first place provides an important means of clarifying the terms of any contemporary mission. As Neary and Hagyard identify, 'recovering the subversive inspirations around which new forms of pedagogies were invented' (2011: 220) is key to developing 'an alternative political economy of the student experience' (2011: 209). The challenge is to cling on to what is humanizing, enriching or enabling in the tradition of which we are a part and to discover the resistant potential in even the most, apparently, conservative practices. On these terms, the creative, critical, democratic, social and life-enhancing principles, with which Wickham's humanism and Schechner's idealism are bound up, have much to say to our contemporary situation.

This may invoke a sense of idealism, but such idealism is preferable to the disavowal of responsibility and agency promoted by contemporary educational reform, and the bureaucratic insistence that education policy be deferred to economists and politicians. Our disciplinary inheritance certainly highlights our recent abnegation of responsibility: that is, how uncritical acceptance of market-oriented processes has allowed the education system to be driven in a deeply regressive direction. Our history forces us to acknowledge that the corporate model of education - under which the only legitimate knowledge is knowledge that serves capital - is a denuded and dehumanizing model, a model that rests satisfied with producing passive individuals for alienated labour, and which contributes to a society characterized by blinkeredness and inequality (Giroux: 2000; Chomsky: 2012). Furthermore, it also forces us to acknowledge how we have colluded with a particularly reductive understanding of the academic's role in contemporary society, a role characterized by Molesworth et al. as that of 'pseudo academic' - a passive, neoliberal consumer who 'accept(s) a work and spend culture' and conceives of the

‘job’ as ‘to maximise efficiency and wait for the rewarding weekend shopping trip’ (Molesworth et al 2011: 232).

Although it is now best remembered for recommending the introduction of tuition fees to UK higher education, fifteen years ago the Dearing Report⁹ outlined a vision for higher education which took for granted a whole series of principles that have since been lost. Among these we might note three in particular: its call for a higher education which contributes to ‘national well being’, provides ‘crucial underpinning [for] modern participative democracy’ (Dearing 1997: 18.18), and which ultimately contributes to a society ‘where few have too much and fewer too little’ (Dearing 1997: 5.42). Despite the current abnegation of these ideas in education policy, we should not forget that these kinds of principle remain central to any democratic understanding of education and society. For, as Dewey points out, if we want individuals ‘with qualities sustaining democratic values, they [have] to be nourished in communities marked by such values’ (Wirth 1991: 61; Dewey 1916: 259-260). Despite corporate insistence to the contrary, there remains a responsibility for educators to provide a freeing and enabling education that liberates young people ‘from something and for something’ (Heffner 1964: 18) – from narrowness and instrumentalism and for critical and democratic citizenship in ‘the realm of the intellect’ (Heffner 1964: 18).

Given the prevalence of corporate discourse, making these arguments is not easy. In this regard, we can, however, remember that Neoliberalism was once itself a fringe discourse, self-consciously constructed by ‘a small beleaguered minority [of] eccentrics’ (Friedman 2002: xi) in order to win the future from Keynesian economics. In his 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom*, Milton Friedman summed up the state of the Chicago School’s mission before Neoliberalism came to prominence:

What then is the role of books such as this? [...] to keep options open until circumstances make change necessary. There is enormous inertia – a tyranny of the status quo - in private and especially governmental arrangements. Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs,

⁹ Dearing commissioned a statement by the philosopher Stewart Sutherland, quoting it as ‘a fitting conclusion’ (1997: 5.47) to the ‘Aims and Purposes’ section of his report: ‘Higher education’s central contribution to civic virtue is first and foremost in the spread of sense and practical wisdom in our society. Sense includes the capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood, knowledge from opinion, and good argument from bad. All of these fall within the tradition which emphasises the cultivation of the powers of the mind as central to all levels of education. Practical wisdom is the capacity to apply these to the needs of others as well as oneself in the time and place in which one lives’.

the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable. (Friedman, 2002: xiii-xiv)

The challenge for those who find contemporary education policy problematic is similar. Our academic inheritance, however, provides us with, at least, some of the tools necessary to assemble counter-narratives founded on basic democratic, progressive and humanizing principles. It also provides some pointers on submitting corporatism to the same wearing attack to which it has submitted higher education in recent decades. Appropriating some of Friedman's energy, the project of constructing and promoting such counter-narratives deserves serious attention. For if we continue to abnegate the past and uncritically accept the present, the education we bequeath to future generations – as the management executives and bureaucrats keep telling us – really will 'have no alternative'.

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