Aims of the Palgrave Critical University Studies Series
Universities everywhere are experiencing unprecedented changes and most of the changes being inflicted upon universities are being imposed by political and policy elites without any debate or discussion, and with little understanding of what is being lost, jettisoned, damaged or destroyed. The over-arching intent of this series is to foster, encourage, and publish scholarship relating to academia that is troubled by the direction of these reforms occurring around the world. The series provides a much-needed forum for the intensive and extensive discussion of the consequences of ill-conceived and inappropriate university reforms and will do this with particular emphasis on those perspectives and groups whose views have hitherto been ignored, disparaged or silenced. The series explores these changes across a number of domains including: the deleterious effects on academic work, the impact on student learning, the distortion of academic leadership, and the perversion of institutional politics. Above all, the series encourages critically informed debate, where this is being expunged or closed down in universities.

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Dorothy Bottrell • Catherine Manathunga
Editors

Resisting Neoliberalism in Higher Education
Volume I

Seeing Through the Cracks
Step on a crack, break your mother’s back. (From an old children’s game)

The Soviet dissident poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky once said, “No man-made system is perfect, and the system of oppression is no exception. It is subject to fatigue, to cracks, which you are the likelier to discover the longer your term.”¹ Like a prison, the perverted logic of neoliberalism has captured the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in what we often refer to as the neoliberal university. Ensconced in a dehumanizing ethos of free market supremacy, social surveillance, and community shattering individualism, the cracks are not always easy to decipher. And even when the cracks become visible, it is not surprising that university professors and researchers often respond like domesticated children who must avoid the cracks in the sidewalk for fear it will break their mother’s back. Here, the great parent is the university industrial complex, which has unfolded a wretched instrumentalizing nightmare of marketization and accountability schemes meant to ensure that higher education fulfill its role as a roaring economic engine and military aegis of the capitalist class.

As such, the hegemonic culture of neoliberalism, predicated on a system of scathing competition, has deeply reinforced the global fear of scarcity, as well as obsessive preoccupation with ranking criteria, warning “underdeveloped” universities (like countries) that they will be left behind, if they do not acquiesce to neoliberal demands of a globalizing
institution. This is effectively proliferated through an authoritarian culture of so-called managerial transparency, accountability measures, and austerity policies within schools and society that promote the casualization of labor, emaciation of faculty governance over their labor, and diminishment of job security. This is most prevalent among university staff and faculty whose expertise lies outside the margins of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), where three-quarters of grants and fellowship monies are now consolidated, leaving programs in the humanities—where critique of the cracks is more likely—impoverished.

*Resisting Neoliberalism in Higher Education* accurately signals where the cracks exist within the system of higher education and how these are continuing to grow and deepen. As in the childhood game, generally we are conditioned to believe that these cracks are to be avoided, suggesting that danger lurks in its recesses. Speaking metaphorically, to *step on the cracks* in today’s neoliberal context is often met with a threat of loss of future opportunities, resources, and recognition. Shrouding these cracks is often mainstream apologia, dispensed by liberal and conservatives alike, with sunny assertions, for example, of improving economy and global well-being. Yet, in light of the three decades of growing consolidation of global wealth among a tiny minority, debilitating forms of racialization including mechanisms of social control and burgeoning incarceration, ghastly rates of unemployment and underemployment among even educated populations, persistent impoverishment among millions of people worldwide, and degradation of the environment, the abiding question this volume tackles is: Neoliberalism in the interest of whom?

**An Act of Love and Political Resistance**

*If they cannot love and resist at the same time, they probably will not survive.*  
(Audre Lorde 1984)

In many ways, this volume evolved from a deeply communal process, where radical academic discussions among colleagues about a pedagogy of love and the struggle for survival within the entanglements of higher education resulted in a collective decision to write a book together that would speak to the travesties they and their students were enduring within the
toxic environment of the neoliberal university. Hence, the book was produced as a political act of love and resistance for their survival as teachers, scholars, and public intellectuals. The notion of love and resistance is vital here, in that the roots of our political resistance against those academic conditions that erode our humanity must be understood as emanating from our love for ourselves, one another, and the world. This powerful expression of love, as a life affirming political force, can be sensed here in the philosophies of resistance and the emancipatory initiatives proposed for community empowerment within higher education and beyond. Furthermore, whether authors are challenging the casualization of labor, neoliberal marketization of the curriculum, unjust meritocratic schemes, the persistence of patriarchy, the politics of social class formation, or the persistence of colonialism, their ideas emerge from a profound sense of historical necessity. Similarly, their theorizing is guided by a tenacious spirit, which seeks to teach, write, speak, and survive—with both integrity and humanity intact—despite the oppressive social and political forces that defile our revolutionary dreams.

A pedagogy of love, in the pedagogical tradition of Paulo Freire, is very much at the core of Resisting Neoliberalism in Higher Education. Grounded in lived personal experience, decolonizing research, and political activism, Bottrell and Manathunga have skillfully brought together a collection of essays that deliberately and unapologetically tackle the cracks in the oppressive system of academic neoliberalism and, by so doing, discern the manner in which the once more liberal university project of the 60s and 70s was captured and is being held in chains, by the impunity and greed of an economic Darwinist ideal—an ideal effectively orchestrated and deployed for almost forty years by the wretched opportunism of neoliberal discourses. By carefully examining their Australian university context, the authors powerfully shed light on the variety of fissures that have been created by the ideological pressures at work within the so-called global university; fissures which threaten the very existence of democratic life. Here the glorification of entrepreneurialism, for example, as the great panacea for equality is exposed as an economic political swindle of the powerful and wealthy, designed, wittingly or unwittingly, to derail the radical historical momentum for cultural democracy waged internationally within the university and the larger society during anti-imperialist struggles and the civil rights era of an earlier time.

In forthright and innovative ways, the perspectives formulated across the chapters provide glimpses into the shrouded toxicity of higher educa-
tion, as the repressive culture of academic neoliberalism is systematically unveiled—from outside-in and inside-out—with an eye toward political resistance and transformation. Here the cracks in the current system of oppression become promising places of possibility, where the light of humanity still beckons us toward a more just and loving world. With this in mind, the authors walk boldly across the fire of hegemonic constraints and contradictions to address what Freire called limit-situations,\(^5\) from whence they, as teachers, writers and activists, can both resist and struggle to transform the authoritarian conditions that threaten to disable or obliterate emancipatory forms of university life.

These powerful discussions reflect on the ways in which critical educators have sought to defy the normalization of the neoliberal academy, by positing political and pedagogical challenges and establishing counterhegemonic spaces to defy “a logic of seeing ourselves as brands, cost centres, and purveyors of education and research.” In this way, these radical educators, scholars, and activists are laboring to resist and disrupt the perversions of corporate managerialism in the university, as they cast a critical eye toward emancipatory possibilities and initiatives that counter the economic essentialism that undergirds the quantophrenic neoliberal madness associated with teaching, research, and service today.

The Struggle for Cultural Democracy

*There can be no true exploration of cultural democracy without the acknowledgement that hierarchies of cultural value have always been, and always will be, imbricated in questions of power and authority*… (Hadley and Belfiore 2018)\(^6\)

With an overarching commitment to discover and unveil the cracks, this timely book redefines academic scholarship as a political force for resistance and a mighty harbinger for a culturally democratic world. The volume speaks to the cracked continuities and discontinuities as these relate to the struggle for cultural democracy with the university. This approach seems fitting, given the manner in which institutional concerns for diversity have been railroaded and overturned by the “flat world” pretenses of neoliberalism, which over the last several decades has rendered critical dialogue about cultural differences irrelevant, ignoring the conflictual tensions arising within
repressive academic contexts that demand assimilation. Nevertheless, Bottrell and Manathunga rightly affirm that the commitment to liberation still persists alive and well in the cracks and continues to provoke critical interrogations about the politics of democracy and education, social justice, cultural self-determination, community solidarity, and social transformation.

Throughout the book one can sense, despite authors’ various topics and differences, a resounding collective call to action—for it is only through collective action that the oppressive system of the university—subject to fatigue, to cracks—can be effectively dismantled and justly reinvented. Such a transformation entails, first of all, recognizing the ever-present and inseparable relationship between culture and power and its implication for rethinking questions of authority and freedom in our labor as educators, writers, activists, and public intellectuals. Ontologically and epistemologically, we are reminded of the need for respect for the expression of cultural integrity and diversity; the significance of critical consciousness to our pedagogical and scholarly efforts; the on-going need to grapple with difficult questions of class, gender, and racialized privilege; and the indisputable necessity for the redistribution of power, land, and wealth across oppressed populations—populations for whom the promise of cultural democracy has for too long remained deferred, by the persisting coloniality of power in Australia and around the world.

**Reclaiming Our Humanity**

_We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist._ (James Baldwin 2017)8

In light of the persistence of coloniality and economic apartheid around the world, *Resisting Neoliberalism in Higher Education* issues an overarching missive that knowledge produced within universities should above all serve in the interest of our humanity. In contrast to the toxic and dehumanizing impact of the neoliberal university, we must courageously set our sights toward reinventing the praxis of teaching and research within higher education. To do this requires critical evolution of how we define democratic principles of voice, participation, and solidarity; so that through our praxis, we come to challenge the historical and
contemporary roots of class, gendered, racialized, sexual, abled, and religious oppression that seek to foreclose our humanity.

The unquestionable message echoed here is that the underlying purpose of our labor in universities is to reclaim ourselves as subjects of history and makers of our own futures. This encompasses an incontrovertible political commitment to transform the lovelessness of neoliberal madness that daily assaults our freedom to learn, teach, and write openly; corrupting our political right to speak, to act, to live, and to exist authentically across our many cultural differences and, yes, even our disagreements. It is, therefore, our duty to resist, to seize control of our lives, and to steadfastly desist, with heart, and soul, the epistemological and economic tyrannies that alienate and erode our humanity. Heralded by this collective labor of love are dynamic possibilities for social change that invite us to rethink or to remember why we chose to become university workers in the first place—our unshakable belief that from deep in the cracks another world is indeed possible!

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Introduction

Under the ethos of neoliberalism, universities have been transformed. In Australia, the alignment of higher education provision with neoliberalism began in the 1980s, as successive governments advocated the need to boost efficiencies, productive competition and public accountability, all deemed lacking within the system of university self-governance.¹ The economic logic of reform ran counter to dominant conceptions of universities as collegial institutions concerned with public and democratic
purposes. The dominance of market-driven business models instituted by governments through regulatory regimes and a volatile, mainly lean or declining funding policy environment has similarly reshaped higher education in variegated yet consistent ways in the global north and south.

Twenty years of scholarship on the neoliberalisation of higher education has captured its features in designations such as the corporate or enterprise university, the entrepreneurial university and the overarching descriptor, the neoliberal university. All universities are now entrenched in academic capitalism, internally distorted by an audit culture and governed by managerialism that is intensified in internal conflicts over the purpose and conditions of academic work. These shifts and their collateral damage to academic autonomy and professional standing are captured in new designations of the measured university and the toxic university.

However, there are cracks in the neoliberal university that still present opportunities for academics to pursue alternative priorities, resistances and refusals. Seeing through neoliberalism is anchored in the strong traditions and values of academic freedom, autonomy, participatory and cultural democracy and the public good. In this book, as Readings noted, ‘dwelling in the ruins’ of the university is our starting-point for interrogating, understanding and articulating new ways of seeing the substance and politics of change.

Resisting neoliberalism in higher education: seeing through the cracks and a second volume, on prising open the cracks, aim to shed light on how academics are surviving neoliberal changes and working the spaces of managed life in universities. We use the metaphor of seeing through the cracks to emphasise the diminished space of “traditional” academic purposes within neoliberalised universities. It references the double meaning of academics seeing neoliberal and authoritarian managerialist processes for what they are; and articulating how we are continuing to find spaces to work in collegial ways that defy neoliberal logic: that is, a logic of bringing closure to non-economic aims of academic work; a logic of seeing ourselves as brands, cost centres and purveyors of education and research.

This collection furthers our understanding of current trends in working conditions under corporate managerialism in higher education in diverse
contexts, with a focus on teaching-research-service academic work alongside critical responses and initiatives. This chapter provides a brief account of how the books came about, then discusses some key features of the increasingly ruthless managerialism that drives universities’ internal reshaping of academic work. We then place our focus on resisting neoliberalism within the tradition of critical studies in higher education and explain how seeing through the small “window” of free education in Australia situates our view of academic work. Finally, we introduce the chapters of this volume, organised around the themes of seeing outside-in and inside-out. Throughout this chapter, we refer to ‘the university’ as a shorthand for the diversity of institutions and to emphasise that our concerns are connected into ongoing struggles over the idea of the university.\textsuperscript{17}

**Back Story**

As our initial work on this volume was conducted in Melbourne, Australia, we respectfully acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are traditional custodians of these lands and have been for many centuries. We pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and unique role of the Kulin Nation’s living culture in the life of this region. Thinking about the transformation of universities, the cultural protocol of Acknowledgement of Country brings to the fore questions of power, privilege, equity. The colonial establishment of Eurocentric universities deliberately excluded Indigenous people, their knowledge, science and culture\textsuperscript{18} and thus entailed the “logic of elimination”\textsuperscript{19} that undergirded genocidal massacres, expropriation of lands and resources, Stolen Generations and a school-to-prison pipeline, all carried into the present through widespread societal refusal to acknowledge systemic racism and White privilege. Because neoliberalism is built on structures accomplished through the dispossession, colonisation and the empire building of industrial and corporate capitalism, the issues we raise concerning contemporary universities “must be understood within the context of historical struggles for voice, participation and self-determination”\textsuperscript{20} that shaped contemporary universities and continues in the present.
This book and Volume II grew out of several research events conducted at local and national levels. These research activities were very much inspired by the opportunity to work with Professor Antonia Darder, an eminent critical theorist, Freirean scholar, activist and Leavey Endowed Chair of Ethics & Moral Leadership, Loyola Marymount University and Professor Emerita, University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign. As part of a Visiting Professorship at Victoria University, Melbourne, Antonia gave a keynote presentation on *The Legacy of Paulo Freire: The Continuing Struggle for Liberation* and facilitated research discussions at a one-day research symposium for academics, academic teaching scholars and PhD students in the Curriculum and Pedagogy as Complex Conversations (CPCC) Discipline Group. It was after listening to all of the presentations that one of our colleagues commented that we were all in some way engaged in ‘rattling the cages’ of the academy. This imagery of academics shaking the bars of the institution in protest at an increasing sense of imprisonment sparked the idea of an edited collection of essays about the ways in which our research was engaged in resisting neoliberalism in higher education.

This idea seemed to link very well with ongoing national discussions at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) about the state of Australian educational research. One of the dominant themes of the 2014 AARE/NZARE Conference in Brisbane was a feeling of grief that educational researchers were struggling to operate in a climate of funding cutbacks, persistent organisational restructuring and declining time for research and writing. In response, the AARE Professional and Higher Education Special Interest Group (SIG) invited a panel of speakers to offer provocations and insights about the troubled space of educational research at the 2015 AARE Conference. While the SIG convenors, Catherine Manathunga and Jan McLean, were convinced it was important to continue critical interrogations of the incursions of neoliberalism into education, the panel was designed to propose ways of moving beyond grief and mourning by investigating whether there were any generative spaces or cracks in neoliberalism that could be exploited in the fields of professional and higher education research. It seemed sensible to weave the emerging idea of an edited volume on resisting neoliberalism in higher education into these national debates.
So, when a group of academics from Victoria University had the privilege of joining Antonia Darder on a three-day Education Faculty retreat at Queenscliff by the sea south of Melbourne, we announced that plans were emerging in the CPCC Discipline Group, in collaboration with the AARE Professional Higher Education SIG, to produce an edited collection seeking to exploit generative spaces or cracks in neoliberal universities. Retreaters were invited to offer submissions for this collection and Antonia agreed to write a foreword for the volume. As we engaged in a series of creative, thought-provoking activities with Antonia designed to unearth issues of identity, culture, decolonising practice, critical pedagogy and liberation, we continued to think hard and write about what it meant to be involved in critical resistance to dominant neoliberal discourses in the academy. The proposed book was then discussed at the annual meeting of the AARE Professional and Higher Education SIG and a call for abstracts was issued through the SIG and international networks including those connected with the Academic Identities Conference series. There was such a response from colleagues around the world that the planned single volume became two volumes at the publisher’s suggestion.

**Neoliberal Managerialism**

In this book we focus on how academics are negotiating the internal neoliberal reform of universities, primarily centred on managerialism, the top-down, hierarchical structure of governance and decision-making that is the typical business model adopted by universities. Its predominant form is now line management, ensuring that hierarchical power resides with senior management and facilitates surveillance of academic work. Discussing the vast literature on managerialism is not possible here. Instead, we draw on the literature that articulates key features that we have recently observed and experienced.

Managerialism is both structure and modus operandi. The entrenchment of corporate structures in universities has produced new forms of class and ‘rankism’ with rarely blurred lines between ‘proletarian’ academics and the ‘managerial elite’ who determine institutional strategic
aims, centred on world rankings and local market share. Vice-chancellors (VCs) are re-branded as CEOs and Presidents and are now more likely to be management careerists than academic leaders stepping up. Along with councils and swelling ranks of deputy and pro-VCs, they constitute a governing-strategist class, directing line management, assisted by expensive consultants and lawyers. Alongside their generous remuneration, disproportionate funding has been directed to growing the professional-administrative class. This class includes designers and deliverers who serve the strategists and middle management (especially deans), developing the texts, processes and DIY requirements of policy, procedures, initiatives and audits passed down to academic labourers. In turn, academics are metrically positioned within a hierarchy of status according to managerial determinations of individual success and value to institutional prestige. As institutional “units”, academics are readily discarded in ruthlessly pursued restructures deemed necessary for the achievement of the university’s strategic goals (academics are frequently excluded from strategic discourse, especially the “we” of the university), presented within narratives of budgetary constraints and the needs of budget surplus. At the bottom of the hierarchy, casuals, temporary and short contract academics are now typically hired to replace discarded staff deemed excess.

As modus operandi, defining features of managerial regimes include an obsession with academic performance, productivity and their measurement and surveillance through numerous forms of accountability. Audit metrics now reach into every aspect of academic life but most effectually in relation to revenue raising research ‘outputs’ and ‘quality’ teaching ‘inputs’. Workload allocation is a chief mechanism of academic performance and compliance. As Kenny and Fluck point out, workload management was originally proposed as a protection from overwork yet increasing performance requirements are often decoupled from workload considerations as if all the invisible work that does not count in workload formulae has no bearing on “outputs”. As line managers “negotiate” (enforce) workload systems, “words like ‘equity’, ‘transparency’ and ‘fairness’ are trotted out”, but analyses of workload configurations point to arbitrary and inequitable allocations. For example, Papadopoulos found academics’ experience of workload models and the actuality of the work...
(including increased volume of work, enlarged class sizes, development of online studies, unrealistic time allocations for teaching preparation and coordination roles, arbitrary additions to individual responsibilities) fell well short of meeting enterprise agreements’ criteria of transparent, reasonable and equitable allocation. Papadopoulos concludes that the gap between model and practice constitutes workload allocations as mismeasures of academic work. Hil argues that managers nonetheless “have a stake in ensuring that this empirical device exists, primarily because it allows them to monitor academic staff to the nth degree.”

While top-down messages perpetually call for greater productivity, what this means for academics is generally “doing more with less”. Kinman summarises the most stressful demands including “long working hours, administrative load, providing academic and pastoral support, complying with quality assurance procedures, pressure to obtain research funding and publish, and managing the volume of emails”. These demands are stressful because they are meant to be accomplished despite the constraints of “ineffective management, lack of administrative and technical support, poor communication, rushed pace of work, frequent interruptions, role conflict and limited opportunities for teaching preparation, scholarly work and professional updating”.

Performance accountabilities based on the presumption of the need for greater productivity invisibilise the work that is not recognised in the workload device and that is subsumed into the hours of unpaid work performed. For example, a recent National Tertiary Education Union report estimated that Australian university staff work 38 million hours of overtime per year, contributing $2.5 billion to the sector in necessary but unpaid labour. Furthermore, accountabilities based on financial objectives invisibilise the care, collegiality, and political work that inheres in teaching, research and service, work with support or administrative staff as well as professional associations and external communities, including creative and public intellectual work, robust debate, unionism and activism.

How academics negotiate the ever-burgeoning performance requirements is highly differentiated according to position and continuing or casual status. In many universities, “cost-effective educational delivery” is driving the expansion of teaching-only positions and constitutes a
challenge to the normative model of teaching-research-service (professional and community engagement), as well as fundamental ideas and values premised on the reciprocal significance of research and teaching.\textsuperscript{36} Casualisation naturalises the expectation of academic work as solely teaching, though there are additional threats to the principle of research as a vital component of academic work. Benchmarks for research output can and are formulated in ways that ensure a continuing reduction in research time. Teaching-research-service academics may struggle to meet grant funding targets, especially in teaching-first workloads, likely shifting them into a diminishing research allocation spiral\textsuperscript{37} and providing the kind of data used to justify restricting research allocations to research-only positions. Within some universities teaching is being piled on while time allocated is reduced. This may occur, for example, through shifting postgraduate research supervision from research to teaching allocations or vice versa, with only superficial transparency in these processes.

Early career academics tend to be more vulnerable to exploitation and may find they need to be “super-heroes” to meet institutional expectations,\textsuperscript{38} while those who feel comfortable with and are adept at self-promotion may win additional support within a ‘stars’ system of researcher prestige.\textsuperscript{39} Members of the professoriate may accrue greater autonomy as leaders in their fields, though how they lead may place them at risk of losing academic freedom. Professors who use their status to act in solidarity with more junior academics, buffer them from the excesses of managerialism and aim to operate democratically and equitably “can also become targets of academic punishments, if they refuse to acquiesce or reform to neoliberal expectations – irrespective of the quantity, quality, or intellectual reach of their scholarship”.\textsuperscript{40}

It is unsurprising that academics may love teaching, research and community engagement while finding themselves/ourselves exhausted and questioning whether there is any such thing as work/life balance, whether we can survive the continual bombardment by email, endless forms, reports and “engagement” in strategic planning that is a tokenistic smoke-screen for our marginalisation from decision-making, and wondering what happened to the “dream job”. Holding to our quality standards that centre on critical pedagogy, fair assessments, meaningful feedback and
time for students outside classes, while juggling research projects and writing deadlines is achieved at personal cost. Many academics have experienced the pressures, thwarted opportunities, punitive accountabilities, and downright bullying of managerialism with increased anxiety, cynicism concerning procedural fairness and fear. Feminist research has highlighted detrimental impacts on personal-professional wellbeing in survivalism, anxieties, ambivalent and fraught emotional labour that has been accompanied by a diminishing assertion of intellectual desire and pleasure. It is at this level of lived experience that we clearly see the “ontoformative” dimensions of managerialism in intersection with neoliberalism’s economic, political, ideological and governmental dimensions and subjectivities that are “the starting point for a politics of refusal”.

Critical University Studies

The Idea of the University

We locate our two volumes within the field of Critical University Studies (CUS). This literature sits within a broader body of work on the idea of the university. There is no space in this chapter to review the whole history of ideas about the university starting, as most of this literature does, with 12th century Europe and working forward to Cardinal Newman and so on. This body of work is also narrow in its geographical scope, focusing largely on Europe and North America (eg. Perkin). Eurocentric Enlightenment arguments are made that dismiss the significance of Confucian, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Aztec and Incan and Japanese institutions of higher learning as teaching “high culture, received doctrine, literary and/or mathematical skills of their political or religious masters, with little room for questioning or analysis”. Pre-12th century European ‘monastic schools’ are dismissed in a similar manner and no reference is made to the role of universities in the “destruction of the medieval world order at the Reformation”. Much is made of the ongoing survival and spread of European universities around the globe via colonisation and the role these institutions had in anticolonial