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**SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE GIG
ECONOMY**

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Abstract

The model of “platform-university, where gig workers play the role of academics, teachers and researchers, stands in direct opposition to the idea of scholarship of teaching and learning. It is a model that is stifling intellectual life, student engagement and – most importantly – the advancement and production of new knowledge. The gig university cannot be responsive to public demands, addressing social and political challenges fortuitously, mostly at the rhetorical level, in mission statements or as a part of ‘university goals’, which usually are not comprehensively assessed. Gig academia narrowed down the function of higher education to budgets and profits, making most universities in the Western Anglo-speaking countries a corporate entity with a maze of contradictory goals, unclear identity, an atrophied sense of public responsibilities and a structural incapacity to address the most important problems confronting us all. This study aims to stimulate new research and scholarship to create alternative models for Academia, based on the courage of thinking and the possibility of heresies, genuine creativity, and exploratory practices and ideas in teaching and academic life.

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Keywords: Edtech teaching, Gig economy, scholarship, SoTL



1. Introduction

Marketisation, managerialism and the advancement of new technologies changed universities to the point that scholarship, research, teaching and learning are placed in a new context, which is as new as it is fragile and at risk of collapse. Higher education is placed in the context of its technological mutations, accelerated also by the worldwide pandemic, reshaped by managerial transformations and the rearrangement of the workplace and the workforce relationships. Education and our contemporary cultures are facing existential challenges that require new and imaginative solutions.

The first challenge is probably best contextualised by a story shared by George Steiner, the erudite polymath and polyglot author and academic who was teaching at Princeton University, the University of Cambridge, the University of Geneva, and Harvard University. The Dutch public broadcaster presented a series of discussions with prominent philosophers that was titled “Of Beauty and Consolation”. In an episode of this program, George Steiner (Steiner, 2014) is interviewed the journalist Wim Kayzer and reminds us of a true story that involved Boris Pasternak in 1937; horrors of Stalinism became common across the Soviet Union. Just before the Congress of Soviet Writers started that year, Boris Pasternak was approached by the NKVD agents (later known as KGB) to inform him that if he speaks, they’ll arrest him, and if he doesn’t speak they’ll still arrest him at the end of the conference. In those dark times any sign and word of inspiration from a well-known bright mind was vital, and Boris’ friends implored him to say something – anything. In the first day of the conference – George Steiner reminds us – Pasternak was quiet. As the end of the congress approached the more impatient his friends became. Just when all thought that he’ll not say a word, staying quiet to avoid an even worse fate in the hands of NKVD, Boris suddenly stands up. He was a tall, imposing man. He said just one number. Spontaneously, the entire hall stood up and chanted the verses of the sonnet with that number, which was translated then from Shakespeare by Boris Pasternak. That translation is considered even today as one of the most beautiful versions available in Russian. That, explains George Steiner, was not a culture at risk: nothing, not even the threat of torture or years of imprisonment in the Gulag could take away people’s language, their poetry and culture. This is where they couldn’t be touched. That was shared and learned by heart and the power of this example was so powerful that even the famously cruel Soviet secret services decided that it wasn’t wise to arrest someone who is so closely identified with peoples’ imagination. That was not a culture at risk, George Steiner is noting, but today we are at risk every day.

We live in a time when coherent narratives are fragmented by screens with short texts, tweets or entertaining videos that lead to oceans of distractions that leave us empty and depressed. Evidence shows that we witness much more than simple jeremiads; the vast majority of adolescents is not reading books and spend their time mostly on social media and online entertainment. A nationally representative survey of over one million U.S. teens is providing comparative data since 1976 and reveal that free time is rarely devoted to reading texts of higher complexity: online time has doubled since 2006, and social media use moved from a periodic activity to a daily one. By 2016, nine out of 10 girls in 12th-grade accessed every day social media sites. In just few decades we witness an immense drop in the percentage of youth who said that they read a book, newspaper or magazine that was not required at school, dropping from 60 per cent in 1980 to only 16 per cent in 2016. The percentage of adolescents in the 12th grade who said that

they did not read any books for pleasure tripled in the same period of time (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 337). This is definitely a culture at risk where all we have as free societies, including the ability to build a sustainable future, is in a perilous state.

The fetishization of computing systems, with the promises associated with the application of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data, fail so far to show how we can all benefit from these superhuman solutions. The most important problems confronting humanity have so-far marginal benefits from computers and AI systems: climate change, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and the COVID-19 pandemic that killed worldwide over 4 million people. Promises are generous and usually reflected without critical inquiry by overly enthusiastic mass media. For example, IBM Watson announced in a press release in 2013 that MD Anderson, the cancer center at the University of Texas, will be “using the IBM Watson cognitive computing system for its mission to eradicate cancer.” (Cha, 2015; Herper, 2017). International media reported with endless enthusiasm on what AI can do; in 2015, Washington Post described the collaboration between IBM Watson and MD Anderson cancer center as a solution to replace imperfect humans, stating that “IBM’s computer brain is training alongside doctors to do what they can’t”. The Scientific American joined international media in announcing the miracle cure for cancer: “The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center is using Watson to help doctors match patients with clinical trials, observe and fine-tune treatment plans, and assess risks as part of M. D. Anderson’s ‘Moon Shots’ mission to eliminate cancer.” The AI failed to cure or “eliminate” cancer, stop a pandemic or serve as a miracle solution for humanity’s most pressing problems. The project to cure cancer with the super-AI Watson went so bad that the University of Texas stopped the collaboration after an audit noted that after spending over US\$62 million results are just disappointing (Greenemeier, 2013). This does not mean that AI is not useful, or important; it is definitely an emerging field with the potential to change entirely our lives. But we have to learn how we can use AI to our advantage; how we can take a realistic approach that is conscious of current limits and risks.

Education is also targeted by companies interested to fuel the hype on computers and what online education can deliver. MOOCs, Learning Management Platforms and endless other products were sold to schools and universities to “fix” education. These promises proved empty, and SoTL provided a solid rebuke of main hypotheses used by these solutions to secure adoption across the sector (Popenici, 2015, pp. 158-167).

Here we have the second major challenge, which can be summed by what Kurt Vonnegut (Vonnegut, 2020) observed in one of his books:

I hope you know that television and computers are no more your friends, and no more increasers of your brainpower, than slot machines. All they want is for you to sit still and buy all kinds of junk, and play the stock market as though it were a game of blackjack. And only well-informed, warm-hearted people can teach other things they’ll always remember and love. Computers and TV don’t do that. (p. 77)

In a world affected by some many existential crises and so much in need of wise minds that are able to ask important questions, computers shape our cultures to look only at answers rather than the im-

portant questions. Pablo Picasso observed that “Computers are useless; they can only give you answers” (Fifield, 1964, p. 37) and we have to rethink how our culture and education is inherently changed by big tech, so much that we lost the insight of inquisitive minds in education, at any level. Computers with the last techno fad and complex software tricks promise fast and efficient solutions, and we let them deal with learning and teaching. In this arrangement, those who teach are servants helping the software, and stand as dispensable and “flexible” workforce.

The affective and embodied relationships that shape education stand ignored in educational policies, in education at all levels. The hope that a computer can give us the magical solutions we need to solve what is normally taking years of effort, frustrations and discomfort is making education permanently vulnerable to hype and snake oil salesmen. Computers and TV definitely help and complete education, but only “warm-hearted people can teach” well – or, more specifically, can teach something of value for someone’s life.

2. Problem Statement

The impact of new managerial models is not only the extreme focus on computing systems to replace teachers, but the use of a managerial model made visible by companies like Uber and other corporations using what is called “contingent workers” as basis for their business model. Academic capitalism is not only associated with casualisation of academic work, teaching and learning, but inevitable ‘de-skilling’ of academic work, as temporary, short contracts and casuals are moved in roles that become available for a largely ‘flexible’ pool of potential applicants. The project of higher education is in the Western Anglo-speaking countries so disjointed that on the assembly line of “higher learning” an academic can get a job just for a semester, or just for the assessment – or marking assessments. “There is an app for that” is an ideal often presented with pride in many edtech events, where academic inquiries and knowledge production are often derided as by-products of a past era. Scholarship of teaching and learning is profoundly shaped by these cultural and managerial changes in higher education, which is particularly concerning when we consider that the Western Anglo model of higher education is often presented – and adopted – in other cultural spaces that could maintain and build on their specific strengths to build more suitable alternatives for knowledge creation, learning and problem solving.

Universities are not perpetuating the illusion that gig academic workers are “entrepreneurs”, adopting a more direct and shocking approach, where academics are just disposable parts of an assembly-line process built to produce efficiently “employable” graduates. The place and role of scholarship in this context is fundamentally changed, being placed in an arrangement that is structurally against independent thinking. Academia is in this way vulnerable to corrupt effect, such as those documented in the “Google Academics Inc.” report, an extensive analysis on academic corruption and corporate influence in higher education. This analysis provides well-documented – and mostly unknown – examples on how Google (Alphabet) is using the immense financial and political power to pay reputable universities and academics for so-called “independent studies” that obviously serve Google’s corporate interests (Google Transparency Project, 2017).

Corrupting scholarship impacts directly on learning and teaching solutions, which may become indifferent to pedagogical considerations but closely aligned with corporate interests of a well-represented and powerful edtech industry.

In effect, we analyse in this paper two main issues with a direct impact on the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education in the Western Anglo-speaking countries:

- As noted above and briefly analysed in this paper, academia is part of and vulnerable to a new type of capitalism, not interested in sustainability but open to any form of exploitation that is (or is perceived) suitable to secure profits. In this paradigm intellectual work is reduced to the narrow perspective of efficiency; if labelled as inefficient, any intellectual endeavour is eliminated and replaced with administrative processes designed to enhance the adopted managerial model. In this context, academics are disposable workers managed as resources that can be replaced, ousted, or hired according to the needs of the “platform university”. The neoliberal management (New Public Management) in higher education openly states the aim to make students “consumers in the tertiary education marketplace” (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997, p. 44). This shift rethinks the place of students in higher education; students as consumers are relevant to the process as a source of revenue, not as active participants in learning and teaching or the SoTL. Students’ role is determined by their main function, which is to secure income through tuition fees and other expenses related to the commodification of learning. In fact, students are pushed away from the learning process as they have a different role and function in the business; we can see how customers have a limited role in designing of a shopping mall. In this case, customers have a limited and external role in shaping the layout of entrepreneurial processes, as providers of income and profits. In this process, students are pushed away in practice from curriculum design and the higher learning process, and teachers are replaced with contingent workers, or outsourced workers.
- The platform university is placing not only the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) but the structure and conceptual function of academia at risk. The intellectual crisis of universities is enhanced by commercial interests – such as edtech corporations – and managerial models adopted from the corporate world (Lorenz, 2012, p. 600) lead to a set of negative effects on the ethos of academia and or the nature of learning and teaching. We explore here the impact of the neoliberal management generally adopted in higher education on SoTL, including the adoption of gig-work and platform-like arrangements in academia.

3. Research Questions

The impact of neoliberalism and new public management in higher education, accelerated in the first decade of this century, is currently the foundation of “platform academia”, a form of university that is defined by administrative arrangements designed to save on costs, alignment with reporting processes rather than in-depth learning and thinking, and a general marginalisation of academics. The manifest focus on forms of power and control alienates academics and increase stress, mental health problems and further impacts on the low morale of staff. In this context, the main research question revolves around the manifest opposition between meaningful SoTL and institutional priorities of platform universities.

The last decades are marked in higher education by the constant shift in work arrangements from tenure and other relatively secure forms of employment for the university workforce to gig arrangements, short contracts, casualisation and outsourcing of academic work and tasks. The first question is how it is possible to maintain key elements for higher learning, such as student-teacher connections and exchanged in within a campus ethos defined by openness, intellectual curiosity and vibrant academic life. This becomes even more important when we consider the main challenges facing our societies. The vast adoption of conspiracy theories and anti-science narratives requires new academic models and knowledge generation which is suitable to counterbalance post-truth narratives. Making universities more Uber-like is a trend that can only stifle academic life, the adoption of intellectual risks and serious endeavours in research and scholarship.

4. Purpose of the Study

The impact of neoliberal arrangements in academia imposed the model of ‘platform university’ as a predominant solution for most institutions of higher education. Similar to Uber and other companies built on the promises of gig economy, the platform university promises flexibility and agility, and implies that its inherent meritocracy makes possible to build solid academic careers if performance aligns with requirements, as workloads and performance is stated by the management. The meta-analysis of research on these promises is used in this study in order to find how SoTL can bring benefits in the context of these arrangements. In-depth explorations on the scholarship of teaching and learning and the capacity to involve students in these intellectual endeavours require stability, trust, and a stimulating intellectual life across the campus. The extreme focus on structures of power and control, cost cutting and increase of profit margins reduce academic life to formal arrangements that stand divorced from the SoTL.

The agency within higher education is becoming a vital element for the advancement of research, scholarship, teaching and learning and the creation of intellectual cultures able to provide solutions relevant for the common good. In effect, this study aims to open a necessary inquiry and dialogue on what is the role of SoTL in the platform university, which stands as a natural development of platform capitalism (Moore, 1995, p. 84),

5. Research Methods

The research design is based on critical qualitative research, which is taking an interrogative stance towards the meanings and impact of developments related to SoTL in general and, specifically, in higher education. It aims to understand factors influencing, and the effects of, the meanings or representations expressed. Methods of analysis engaged in this study do not use newly found quantitative data as a sufficient source of evidence, considering that a quantitative study can produce at most only a picture that is capturing a limited glimpse of a very complex phenomenon, in a field that can substantially change if just one of its tangled variables is altered. Quantitative data is valuable and finds its use in this study, but it is taken under the condition that it may present the risk of a subjective selection of various authors or points of interest. Moreover, statistical data is capturing the state of a phenomenon under investigation at a certain time. The research is using a wide range of pre-existing textual data, such as peer-reviewed research,

comprehensive reports, statistical data analysis, opinion polls and articles in the field of SoTL, gig economy and higher education. Data is collected and analysed to develop a descriptive model that is accepting subjectivity in research as a condition of a human rather than statistical interpretation.

In conclusion, this paper takes analytical induction as a research framework suitable to facilitate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, as well as a way to develop an original theoretical perspective and indicate further directions for policies and research in higher education (Denzin, 1978, pp. 256-288).

Succinctly, this study is using research findings for a comprehensive interpretation guided by the perspectives relevant for education, providing the reference point for interpretation. This is placed at the core of qualitative inquiries in social research. In this sense, qualitative research – which is preferred in this study – is compatible and completes the analysis with quantitative research, as noted by [Guba-Denzin](#) and Lincoln: “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Considering this we add that this analysis is considering that research is inevitably influenced by the perspective of the researcher, standing influenced by the theoretical background and specific point of interest of this study. This dynamic was probably best detailed by Gould ([Gould](#), 1996):

Facts are not pure and unsullied bits of information; culture also influences what we see and how we see it. Theories, moreover, are not inexorable inductions from facts. The most creative theories are often imaginative visions imposed upon facts; the source of imagination is also strongly cultural. (p. 54) (~~p. 54~~)

The interpretative analysis presented in this study benefits from the research framework presented; qualitative analysis in this case is descriptive and aiming at the same time to apply theoretical analysis that is relevant for policy makers and practitioners (users) in the field of education and edtech.

6. Findings

~~The Boyer's (1990)~~ model of scholarship is providing a key reference point for SoTL, at least in the Western Anglo-Saxon countries. This model is looking at the main dimensions of scholarship that are important for education: *discovery*, which refers to the advancement of knowledge through research, and stands as a key factor for the intellectual ethos of the campus; *integration*, referring to the act of interpretation and integration of new knowledge and research in forms that are suitable to contribute to new bodies of knowledge and inquiry; *application*, encompassing the use of scholarship for problem solving and contributions of research to practical and real-life problems; and teaching, placed at the core of research and practice, using research findings to nurture creative critical thinkers, active learning and curriculum designs suitable for specific new demands. Boyer concludes that we need “a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice and through teaching.”

However, one of the most important contributions of Boyer is often overlooked and refers to the aims of higher learning.

Boyer (1990) ~~(1990)~~ notes that the aim of education is:

-Not only to prepare students for productive careers, but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends; not merely to study government, but to help shape a citizenry that can promote the public good. Thus, higher education's vision must be widened if the nation is to be rescued from problems that threaten to diminish permanently the quality of life. (pp. 77-78)

At this point it is important to reflect that he is underlining that the main purpose of higher education goes beyond restricted utilitarian purposes, such as employability or marketable skills.

The analytical critique of Boyer's model is often raising the point of actuality in the model of SoTL proposed (Broggt et al., 2020, [pp. 143-160](#)), reflecting on possibilities to define scholarship in terms that are more relevant for the new realities of higher education. Rice (2007, [pp. 11-21](#)) in noting that "narrow scholarship is not enough" while proposing what he calls 'the scholarship of engagement', which is reflecting the importance of using "the wisdom of practice.". In this sense, we have to reflect on the scholarship of teaching and learning in the context of commercialised university; the neoliberal management in higher education is shaping academic practice, administration and scholarship in ways that cannot be ignored if we seriously seek practical solutions for teaching and learning, and research.

6.1. The oppressive management model for higher education

The last decades show that corporate models of management in higher education may boost productivity on a short term, but increase stress, low morale, encourage people to cheat, undermine trust and motivation, and foster selfish behaviours and resistance to innovate. Ironically, this extreme push of market-oriented solutions, which stands in line with a presumable ideal of capitalist efficiency, placed universities in a reality that is in close vicinity to the logic of Soviet Union and its internal arrangements. Before we dismiss this argument as extreme it is good to think about some obvious parallels and facts that stand surprisingly close to the Soviet-like nature of current arrangements in higher education. Lived life is offering us a very insightful example in this sense: Craig Brandist, a professor of cultural theory and intellectual history at the University of Sheffield in the UK, noticed while working on some old archives of universities in the Soviet Union that they look very similar in essence with the kind of documents requested by his own institution. Surprised by the striking similarity he had the idea to try an experiment. The British scholar translated and made minor tweaks to a document created by a Soviet scholar to justify the funding needs for his research and incorporated into his own report on research for his institution. The report was accepted without a comment. Craig Brandist observed that in the Soviet regimes the problem was not that much the absence of a vibrant intellectual life and the Communist Party imposing the strict line, but a more subtle and corrosive process. He notes that the problem emerged from the 'erosion of the structures that insulated scholarship from the demands of state policy and economic imperatives [...] parallels are surprisingly pervasive. They include the imperative for competition between institutions; the

subordination of intellectual endeavours to extrinsic metrics; the need to couch research in terms of impact on the economy and social cohesion; the import of industrial performance management tactics; and the echoing of Government slogans by funders. ”

For those who may argue that scholars in the Soviet spaces had to contemplate serious repercussions for criticizing the system and this is not the case in the Western universities it is important to follow the story of Craig Brandist. Just few days after his article was published by Times Higher Education, the British academic received a formal letter from his university’s HR Department where he was officially informed that he should “desist from publishing such materials and instead raise concerns internally” (Brandist, 2014, 2016). More junior academics just *know* now that free thinking in this space in an end of academic careers.

6.2. The adoption of platform capitalism in Academia

Under the pressure of market-oriented policies and neoliberal magical thinking of self-regulating markets for every aspect of life, universities had to become comfortable to sell false dreams and empty promises. Students were customers in large markets, where universities turned into corporations actively competing against each other with marketing campaigns. The cynical part is that many decision makers know that students do not get an educational experience, a pathway for a better future or the opportunity to cultivate their wisdom. We can reflect on the example of an institution of tertiary education in New Zealand that placed market forces so central in the institutional logic that not even the illusion of a higher education was marginal: to secure paying seats academics “were ringing up and offering to pick up students who had stopped attending classes” and tutors completed students’ assignments just to make them pass (Laxon, 2017). This is not an isolated case, and sector analysis often confirms the effect of marketisation and market-logic in tertiary education. A national report in New Zealand reached the conclusion that ‘over the past decade their ability to influence decision-making, communication between management and staff [...] student ratios, workload, stress, and staff well-being had all gotten worse.’ (Oosterman et al., 2017, [p. 3](#)).

In the current paradigm and unique model for administration, universities are defined by an ongoing trend of casualisation, and a culture of precarity where academics know that their positions are less stable than what their students have. The social responsibility of academia is de facto reduced to what Milton Friedman stated in September 1970, when he said that “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits”. In this paradigm universities function in a reality where the idea of ‘common good’ is marginal and useful solely for decorative purposes, such as marketing materials with positive – but empty – statements. Common good is colonised by ideology of self-regulating markets and profits as an end goal.

Speaking at the Global Education and Skills Forum in 2016, Andreas Schleicher, the Education Director of the OECD, noted that “[Australia] more or less defines teachers by the number of hours that [they] teach in front of students. That is part of the problem.” He was reflecting on the fact that “we treat teachers as interchangeable widgets on the frontline – they are just there to implement prefabricated knowledge.” (Bagshaw, 2016). It is underlined here not only how features of the commercialization of higher education (Bok, 2003, [pp. 1-17](#); Noble, 2001, 1998, [pp. 355-368](#)) and the corrupt nature of entre-

preneurial universities (Clark, 1998, [p. xiii](#)) impact on teaching and learning but reveal that the role of academics is now fundamentally changed: it is a gig job. Teaching is reduced to the number of hours spent in class, an absurd measure for anyone seriously involved in teaching once in life; assessment is quantified and the endeavour of educating students to access higher learning is reduced to what a Uber driver gets in return: a temporary arrangement in a job defined by uncertainty, where subsistence is determined by the ability to drive from point A to point B, as fast and efficient as possible. The precarious contract is maintained as long as the “efficiency” of the arrangement is perpetuated; in this undertaking, academics adopt extreme forms of self-exploitation, which severely impact on their own health and well-being. The complete lack of intellectual substance associated now to the teaching profession organised by the industrial work principles based on a new Taylorism (Bagshaw, 2016) require a new interrogation of the role and impact of SoTL in higher education, based on the reality of gig academia.

Language taken an even more important role in the neoliberal managerial approach. Newspeak and tokenism are favoured and overused as evidence contradicts too often the stated aims and the rhetoric; the unreflective use of language and cultivation of fear serve to hide internal contradictions within the system, and massive failures in outcomes and sustainability.

A comprehensive book, *The Gig Academy. Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University*, uncovers the mechanism of academic capitalism in the current age of tech platforms and marketisation of academia:

Academic capitalism and the Gig Academy are built on the concepts of privatization, corporatization and managerialism, entrepreneurialism and micro-entrepreneurship, marketization, atomization, and automation, which all work to dismantle community and collective action. This is particularly problematic in academia, which was previously organized around intellectual exploration and the pursuit of knowledge for the development and sustenance of community, democracy, and the public good. (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 76)

The exploitation is ruthless, and academics become co-perpetrators in their own abuse, which is imposed to fulfil required metrics, KPIs and maintain their jobs. In effect, various reports indicate that mental health in universities is reaching unmanageable proportions. In 2018, an accounting lecturer at Cardiff University took his own life “after being asked to mark 418 exam papers in a 20-day period. A note left by Dr Anderson in his office referred to his unmanageable workload”. This happened soon after academic at Imperial College London killed himself finding that he was “struggling to fulfil the metrics” for his professorial post (Pells, 2018). Numerous media reports indicate that universities had become “anxiety machines” and warn that “a surge in anxiety and stress is sweeping UK campuses” (The Guardian, 27 September 2019). Not only higher learning is severely eroded in the platform university where gig-academics struggle to survive, but the sum of pressures is significantly impacting on the health of students and their teachers. The impact of profit-platform is so significant in higher education that in the Uberised university numerous fatal cases stand now as evidence that student and academics’ life is seriously at risk.

Seduced by the marketing efforts of various profiteers in the gig economy, some academics are actually fervent supporters of these changes. The technological advancement, presented as a cover for what

is as old as any economic exchange, workers' exploitation for profits, is making this transition commendable for some administrators and academics. Neil Postman ([Postman, 1993, p. 10](#)) noticed in his book *Technopoly* that, while is normal to adapt to new changes:

There is something perverse about schoolteachers' being enthusiastic about what is happening. Such enthusiasm always calls to my mind an image of some turn-of-the-century blacksmith who not only sings the praises of the automobile but also believes that his business will be enhanced by it. ([p. 10](#))

Similarly, as Uber managed to make cities even more congested, more polluted and unhealthier and workers mercilessly exploited, the “enhanced academic” in the gig economy can contemplate only obedience for hierarchical structures, increasing workloads and a withering intellectual life.

7. Conclusion

In 1992, an American scholar summarised the repositioning of students, academics and administrators in higher education, noting that we must look at students as customers who have to be served and satisfied, as “higher education has the same operating characteristics as a bank, an airline, or a restaurant. The fact is that we do have customers. We provide them with a service and an exchange takes place” (Seymour, 1992, p. 128). The natural evolution of institutions that have “the same operating characteristics as a bank, an airline, or a restaurant” is to use gig work arrangements. Academics are similar to bicycle drivers delivering food, even this organisational logic is suppressing any space where free thinking, creative solutions and in-depth analysis that is vital for wisdom and sustainable decisions.

The impact of the idea to treat universities as any another industry susceptible to join the ‘gig economy’ is devastating for students, academics, generation of new ideas and academic life. Ironically, the extreme adoption of neoliberalism as a suitable framework to make universities ‘efficient’ and ‘accountable’ leads to arrangements that are very similar with those found in the Soviet communist systems. Henry Giroux (2014) ([2014](#)) observed that “in the United States and abroad, public and higher education is under assault by a host of religious, economic, ideological, and political fundamentalists [...] Ideologically, the pedagogical emphasis is the antithesis of a critical approach to teaching and learning, emphasizing a pedagogy of conformity and a curriculum marked by a vulgar ‘vocationalist instrumentality’ ([p. 61](#)).

A complete read on Boyer’s model for the scholarship of teaching and learning reveals that the advancement of knowledge and engagement of students based on new ideas and research stands in opposition to the model imposed by the gig academia. When we consider the magnitude of problems created by political and social imbalances, climate change, cultural and societal problems that can find answers only within the walls of academia, still a space of convergence for intellectual and scientific advancement, we can grasp why it is vital to further explore how current models chance universities and academics’ life. More importantly, it is vital to find new and sustainable models for a better – and possible – future.

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