

Editorial

In May 2014, *Prometheus* published one of its occasional debates on innovation, this one about the academic publishing industry. The industry's product has become less academic knowledge than the indicators of academic performance. These determine the allocation of most of the resources higher education requires, a reality suggested by the debate's proposition paper, 'Publisher, be damned! From price gouging to the open road'. The paper's authors are David Harvie, Geoff Lightfoot, Simon Lilley and Kenneth Weir, all from the centre for philosophy and political economy at what was then Leicester university's school of management and is now its school of business. The school of management long housed the country's major centre for research and teaching in critical management. Weir left Leicester for Heriot Watt university a year back; the other three authors face dismissal next month in Leicester university's purge of critical management.

Leicester is among many universities cutting costs following unfortunate expansion. Critical management, it would seem, is expendable; after all, no other university in the UK has such focus on the subject. Instead, they have lookalike business schools offering a diet of instructive stories and consequent success to those who swallow the narrative whole. *Prometheus* has published several papers noting the similarity between the neoliberal script of the classic business school with its mantra of excellence and the magic formulae of the African witchdoctor. To question either would be to imperil the achievement of success.

Indeed, many a university is managed in just such a way, an MBA education recommending mindless expansion just as surely as it resorts to desperate contraction. Like any other international business, universities compete. For two decades now, higher education's obsession with global competition has been driven with all the imagination of herd instinct. Facilitating this strategy to be best at something – anything – has been the academic publishing industry. The industry publishes the papers to be cited, the journals to have impact factors and it measures much of the other academic performance required to concoct the rankings by which university managers can demonstrate success.

The academic publishing industry, as Harvie *et al.* made plain in their proposition paper, is dominated by a handful of firms with profit margins to make envious even the most avaricious mafia boss. Taylor & Francis, one of this handful and publisher of *Prometheus* at the time, disliked Harvie *et al.* Without the knowledge of either its authors or *Prometheus* editors, the paper's proofs underwent major manipulation by Taylor & Francis managers on the grounds that the managers who control the academic publishing industry know more about the industry than the academics who study it. In response, *Prometheus* editors refused to supply any copy at all until Taylor & Francis agreed to publish Harvie *et al.* uncensored and to issue a public apology. During that year, the dispute was widely reported and generous support for authors and journal was received from individual academics: the institutions of higher education, at the forefront of research that is (in their own words) internationally excellent, leading edge, world changing . . . remained resolutely silent, unmoved even by such egregious trampling on academic freedom. Without the questioning of the sort of individuals who are an essential part of the critical management tradition at Leicester, and the likes of *Prometheus: critical studies in innovation*, the university becomes a business like so many others – selling whatever it can for whatever it can get.

We start this issue with an unusual paper for an academic journal, though not for *Prometheus*. It is not so long since we published a film. 'Cultural exploitation in Chinese politics: reinterpreting Liu Sanjie' is not actually a film, but it is about a film. Quan Liu, from the department of music at Liverpool university, writes about the conversion of the film from the 1960s into a modern Chinese theatrical version of a Hollywood extravaganza. Both are about Liu Sanjie, but the Liu Sanjie of the film is a Chinese folk hero leading resistance against grinding landlords. The Liu Sanjie of the

reinterpretation, *Impression Liu Sanjie*, has been transformed into the personification of ethnic harmony under the hegemony of a benign Han majority. The Liu of the film, as a symbol of class resistance, satisfied the propaganda requirements of Mao Tse-Tung: the Liu of the reinterpretation those of Xi Jinping for a demonstration of how strong central government produces harmony among China's ethnic minorities.

Julia Le Monde is from the University of Queensland and it is about an Australian innovation that she writes. 'An Australian newspaper campaign and government vaccination policy' examines the impact of a media campaign on government vaccination policy in Australia. In August this year, a senate inquiry will report on Rupert Murdoch's ownership of Australian media and on the influence of Murdoch's News Corp on the country's democracy. In 2013, the Murdoch press launched a campaign which would end in the government's transformation of vaccination policy. Adults reluctant to vaccinate their children were stigmatized and financial penalties imposed for non-compliance. The paper looks at how the tabloid press fuelled moral panic, resulting in innovation in government vaccine policy influenced less by health experts than by the tabloid press.

Michael Flavin from King's College London writes about disruptive innovation, specifically about the lack of it in higher education. His paper combines the theory of disruptive innovation with Foucault's concept of the episteme. It explores the extent to which the integration of Foucauldian analysis clarifies understandings of disruptive innovation; the process by which innovation happens; and its applications in higher education. Flavin examines three specific innovations in some detail – Second Life; massive open online courses (MOOCs); and the virtual learning environment. Each has been cracked up to be utterly transformative, and each has been something of a damp squib. Second Life, first released in 2003, is a virtual world in which avatars interact. Lots of universities bought Second Life campuses, but Second Life transformed nothing in higher education and the fad was on the wane by 2009. More still was made of MOOCs, but the vast majority of students dropped out of these courses before completion and MOOCs turned out to be anything but massive. As for VEL, the virtual learning environment, adoption of online teaching was already well advanced in higher education in the absence of the acronym and VEL has been thoroughly superseded by provisions to cater for covid-19.

Our book review section grows and grows, and always contains reviews that are works of scholarship – and sometimes literature – in themselves. Should a review overshadow what it reviews? An interesting question, but with an obvious answer: whyever not?

Stuart Macdonald
General editor