A Call for Slow Scholarship: A Case Study on the Intensification of Academic Life and Its Implications for Pedagogy

Yvonne Hartman and Sandy Darab

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written recently on the increased pace of scholarly life and its ill effects. More generally, work intensification has been identified as a widespread malaise in contemporary workplaces, and academia is no exception. In this article we make the argument that the kind of higher order thinking that is a critical part of the scholarly endeavor requires nurture through the provision of sufficient time, unpressured by other demands. This article examines one case of “speedy scholarship” in an effort to shed light on the phenomenon of time pressure and its effect in the contemporary university. We attempt to explain how this is an artifact both of a certain form of governmentality, as well as a new temporality, operating on a global scale. In so doing, we hope to show how pedagogical practices become a site of contest in an unequal power relation where students are the absent partners and scholarly endeavor is eroded. Such a critique leads us to draw upon the discourse of the slow movement in an attempt to invoke an alternative vision.

We begin by situating our subject matter within the field of cultural studies generally and governmentality more specifically, before going on to consider how the corporatization of the university is an effect of a particular mode of governance arising out of a neoliberal rationality. We then describe one means by which the change in academic culture was sought and analyze this case study in terms of the practices in which immanent power relations shape scholarship. In this way we seek to investigate an example of what Foucault (1988) calls technologies of power, whereby subjects are objectified. From this we draw some implications both for pedagogy and scholarship before attempting to envision an alternative that resists the objectifying tendencies mentioned above. We conclude by reflecting upon the merits of slow scholarship (incorporating slow pedagogy) and call for a reinvigorated discussion of what it means to be a scholar. Firstly, though, it is necessary to briefly outline the sense in which we are using the word scholar.
If we were to ask the question, What does it mean to be a scholar?, a range of responses would no doubt be elicited. The everyday or common-sense understanding, however, would probably correspond roughly with a general or lay definition, which would see it as having to do with systematized knowledge, erudition, and rigor—in short, academic work (Oxford Dictionary 2001; Webster’s 2010). It is this definition we wish to focus on here—what academics do, what is expected of them, and the means by which they accomplish it. Throughout this article, we will refer to scholars and scholarship in this sense until our later sections, where we reach toward new conceptualizations.

How scholars act and are acted upon is partly constitutive of a culture we might call academia, which itself is part of a broader culture. Tony Bennett has suggested that culture be conceptualized in terms of “a historically specific set of institutionally embedded relations of government in which the forms of thought and conduct of extended populations are targeted for transformation” (Bennett cited in Bratich, Packer, and McCarthy 2003, 6). Effectively, Bennett charts a novel way of “doing” cultural studies by integrating Foucault, in particular his work on governmentality. In the following section, we lay out this theoretical groundwork and its relevance to our case study.

NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

According to Couldry (2000, 39) cultural studies undertakes the task of studying “how hierarchies and exclusions, as well as inclusions, work in practice within culture.” This indicates that the field of cultural studies is vitally concerned with the link between culture and power. Culture is a contested terrain within which power is exercised with varying degrees of success by manifold groups, the results of which are reflected in its outward manifestations—what Jameson (1991) might call a cultural logic. We can study these manifestations in terms of texts, discourses, or representations to discover what they might reveal, but as Couldry asserts, they are always grounded in material practices and are often far from transparent. It is therefore important to closely examine these material practices if we wish to understand a particular cultural logic.

One method of attempting to uncover these power relations is by examining the interface between culture and government, and this has been a fruitful source of inquiry for students of culture, since Bennett controversially suggested a reorientation of cultural studies toward a focus on policy. Bennett has drawn upon Foucault’s (1988, 1991) work on biopower and governmentality, which has been instrumental in providing avenues for uncovering the means by which modes of subjectification operate upon individuals. Foucault proposes that at some point in the eighteenth century, the denizens of (Western) nations were no longer conceived of as the subjects of a sovereign power, but reconceptualized as individuals to be governed by means of a new rationality made possible by advances in the social sciences. Populations could be now observed, measured, and recorded in new ways, and this facilitated pastoral approaches that encouraged subjects to discipline themselves by engaging in certain practices, for example by eating the correct foods and exercising in order to achieve good health. Foucault
(1991) coined the term *governmentality* to refer to this process. Bennett (2003) argues that Dean’s (1999) formulation of governmentality as the shaping of conduct comes remarkably close to what would be regarded as culture in other contexts. Political rationalities are specific manifestations of this new way of thinking about government. It should be noted that political rationalities cannot be reduced simply to philosophies or ideologies; firstly because the practice of government inevitably means an accommodation between ideals and what is practically possible, and secondly because such rationalities also include an assemblage of techniques, strategies, and practices that, in their execution, inevitably modify philosophical objectives.

Governmentality theorists have studied how power is exercised in the form that has become dominant in the last few decades. During these decades, a shift to a more thoroughly globalized capitalist economy took place, in which the relationship between market and state was redefined and underpinned by the new political rationality of neoliberalism. One part of this new rationality involved an altered sense of time consciousness to govern social life; this aspect of the accommodation process follows historic patterns because as societies evolve so does the concept of time (Giddens 1984; Lash and Urry 1994; Thompson 1991; Thrift 1990).

The concept of time varies as a new paradigm of development achieves social dominance and reshapes social structures and activities. In the medieval era, the notion of time was imprecise, marked only by the changing of seasons, religious rituals, and market fairs (Thrift 1990; Thompson 1991). According to Thompson (1991) prior to industrialization, time was measured as task orientation, and people’s sense of time was geared to the work-rhythms of their everyday life. Harvesting the crops was an observed necessity to the peasants and their working day extended or contracted to suit the task. Social interaction and labor were intertwined in “passing the time of day” and conflict between labor and time passed was rare (Thompson 1991, 138). However, the measurement of time changed with the introduction of industrial capitalism, and clock time became the prominent method of regulating social life (Lash and Urry 1994, 229; Giddens 1984). Thompson (1991) explains that changes in manufacturing technology demanded greater coordination of labor and thus, greater specificity in social time routines. A shift in time consciousness was fundamental in disciplining the new industrial working class to the abstract concept of keeping time by the clock and employers had a range of time management techniques to encourage workers to develop a new time-sense. Punctuality was espoused as a moral virtue in employers’ battle against slothfulness and idleness, and workers were monitored to ensure they did not waste their labor time. Time was now viewed as currency and was no longer to be passed; time was to be spent (Thompson 1991).

However, there is a salient difference in the latest shift in time consciousness. We are not witnessing a shift to a new economic system but rather the expansion of capitalism through the globalized economy. As Sassen (1988) points out, we are familiar with its operations. Namely, the pursuit of profit remains the driving force of the system; ownership remains in the hands of the few; the labor market has a tendency to polarize into professional and unskilled workers and the
expansion of production and reduction of costs remain central strategies (Sassen 1988). In the global economy, the "free" market is privileged, and governments and businesses are committed to stimulate economic growth by enhancing international competitiveness, implementing deregulation policies in relation to markets and capital, and relocating public resources and responsibilities to the private sector. The attempt to speed up production reflects a broader trend identified by Castells (1996) as "timeless time," facilitated by new technologies that allow round the clock operations on a global scale. Work can now be deployed more flexibly; it can be performed from remote locations; it can be speeded up (long hours work) or it can be slowed down (short hours work); or tasks can be compressed in order to accommodate cycles of production.

THE CORPORATIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

This cultural manifestation of a neoliberal governmentality is partly achieved by corporatization and concomitant marketization, whereby techniques and values derived from the sphere of commerce come to be applied to institutions in the public sector. This facilitates the rise of a culture whose defining characteristics are meant to be efficiency, productivity, and excellence (Lynch 2006, 6), driven by an entrepreneurial ethos. Universities have not been exempt from this trend, which has necessitated the implementation of certain practices designed to achieve the new objectives. Thus, educational institutions are impelled by governments to adopt, to varying extents, the neoliberal values of competition, privatization, efficiency, and self-reliance.

Lynch (2006) is concerned by the pace, intensity, and moral legitimation of the commercialization of the university, whereby public interest intellectuals are replaced with "commercially oriented professionals" and the cost of higher education is to be offloaded onto the individual (Lynch 2006, 2). For Giroux (2001), this intrusion of corporate culture within universities is deeply disturbing. He defines the corporate culture as:

An ensemble of ideological and institutional forces that function politically and pedagogically both to govern organizational life through senior managerial control and to produce compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and passive citizens. (Giroux 2001, 30)

Senior corporate management of universities govern by forming business partnerships and tailoring research projects to the needs of their corporate sponsors (Williams 2001). However Giroux's (2001) argument is that education must be recognized as a public good rather than a site of corporate investment, if we are to achieve a vibrant democratic culture. In the corporatized university, he questions how students will be provided with the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and ethics to equip them for rich participation in social life. Furthermore, he warns that knowledge has a critical function and that research projects that are unpopular with those in power must be defended and pursued as a part of intellectual inquiry. Otherwise, he argues, public intellectuals are downgraded to mere functionaries of the corporate order (Giroux 2001). Moreover, the neoliberal emphasis on self-reliance means that if an
individual struggles to manage within this culture, s/he is perceived to be at fault. For example, a paucity of time to engage in scholarship and to be sufficiently productive to appease corporate culture can be claimed as incompetent time management by the individual.

*Timeless time* means the dominant workforce trends identified above are also evident in the corporate university with all workers, whether full-time or part-time, experiencing work intensification (long hours of unpaid labor). However, those on short hours who are working on casual, part-time, or sessional contracts may require two or three jobs or partial reliance on welfare in order to make a living.

**CHANGING THE ACADEMIC CULTURE**

However, remnants of the older culture persist in universities. In some quarters, the academy is still fondly thought to be a place where scholars will generate new knowledge, new ideas, innovation, and creativity for altruistic purposes. A central enabling pillar of this edifice is intellectual freedom, or “freedom to think,” underpinned by a “humanistic ideal of individual critical development” (Samier 2010, 241), though the reality is in fact somewhat different as the university becomes increasingly corporatized. Nevertheless, such principles are still held dear by many academics in Australia. For example, Jenny Rea, the President of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), believes that “universities have always had noble intentions of seeking answers to the dilemmas of the human condition and to challenge ways of thinking and acting” (Rea 2010, 2). The role and work of the academic is key in the pursuit of these goals.

But this work can only take place if certain necessary conditions obtain. To quote Rea again, “good ideas do need nurturing...they come out of thinking people having the space and time and resources to talk, argue, experiment, write, challenge, teach and learn” (Rea 2010, 2). Here Rea is articulating a university culture that may only exist in an historical sense, as corporatization and marketization change this culture by the use of various techniques. In the above quote, Rea identifies three conditions that are interconnected—space, time, and resources—as crucial to scholarship. In the case we now describe, the strategy employed has been to change the temporal rhythms of the teaching year, providing an example of what we call “speedy scholarship.”

There is agreement in the literature that work intensification in universities is a clear trend both in Australia and other countries (Acker and Armenti 2004; Anteliz and Danaher 2004; Bryson 2004; Davies and Bansel 2005; Houston, Meyer, and Paewai 2006; Kenny 2008), the reasons for which have been discussed above. One way of increasing academic workloads is to increase the proportion of teaching relative to research, which is a reasonably common strategy. There are a number of ways to do this. Academics can be allocated more students, or the hours they engage in teaching and related duties can be increased. Yet another method is to introduce extra teaching sessions.

In 2009 University X introduced a three-session teaching calendar, replacing the traditional two-semester model, which contained thirteen teaching weeks
plus summer school, that had previously been in place for undergraduates. The new calendar consisted of three teaching sessions of equal length comprising twelve teaching weeks, one study week and orientation and study periods. A review of the new model commissioned by the Vice Chancellor was conducted in the first year of its operation, after which an extra study week was added to each session, though this necessitated a severe compression of the breaks between sessions, as well as to the orientation and examination periods.

The rationale provided at the time was couched in terms of flexibility, both for students and for academic staff. Students would be able either to accelerate their learning or spread their load more evenly throughout the year by undertaking fewer units per session. Reflecting a marketized rationality, this may be seen as an attempt to enhance the university’s competitive standing against some of its nearer neighbors, by offering greater choice and catering to students’ individual circumstances.

Through Enterprise Bargain negotiations, continuing academics at University X are now not expected to teach or engage in teaching-related duties in more than two sessions in the year without their agreement, but casual academics can work in all three sessions, a matter for some concern given the precarious nature of sessional work and the need to take work when it is available in order to maintain employability. In the case of tenured staff, the managers reasoned that this arrangement would allow an uninterrupted block of time to pursue forms of scholarship such as research. Leaving aside the question of whether this is occurring, this reasoning suggests that scholarship can be broken into discrete activities—teaching, research, and service that can be pursued independently of each other and asynchronously. In reality this is not the case; at the very least, administrative duties and service responsibilities recur on a cyclic basis throughout the year. But the compression of the teaching period does mean that academics with a heavy teaching load are unable to pay due attention to research for two thirds of the year without significant work intensification. For general staff, the calendar means that processes that prior to the change were undertaken twice a year (e.g., enrollment procedures) must now be performed thrice in a year, indicating a significant increase in workloads.

In response to grave concerns expressed by members of the university community, the local NTEU branch conducted a survey of its members in July 2009 and again in April 2010 to gauge the effects of the new calendar on staff. Questions in the first survey related to prior consultation with staff before the introduction of the new calendar, the effect on staff workloads, and the impact of their work. The second survey asked about satisfaction with the calendar, its effect on wellbeing, and opinions on effects relating to students. Over 40 percent of members participated in the first survey, and around 32 percent in the second. Roughly 70 percent of respondents were academics and 30 percent general staff. Both surveys contained space for qualitative comments, and this is the data that we draw upon here, specifically those that related to how scholarship as we defined it earlier is impacted by the new arrangements. However it is firstly worth noting that 84 percent of the first sample reported difficulties experienced in their work as a result of the new teaching calendar, and 76 percent
of respondents in the second sample were still unhappy with the impact of the new calendar on workload.

Respondents overwhelmingly cited time pressures as enormous. They reported exhaustion, depletion, and an inability to maintain the same level of quality as before the introduction of the new calendar. Statements from the first survey refer to vastly increased time constraints, constant rush, and urgency. This compromised the need for time to think, which was sacrificed as academics struggled to cope. They noted that the speed with which the session moved allowed no planning time or opportunities for review and reflection. Moreover, the time constraints led to stress and exhaustion, with many academics stating that their health had been negatively affected.

Many academics expressed concerns for their students, who were now receiving one less week of teaching time per session. Academics had to choose between attempting to squeeze the same content into the shorter timeframe, or reduce content to accommodate the loss of a week. They also reported that students were struggling with the changes, many of whom were openly angry, believing they were now receiving an inferior education, or succumbing to stress-related problems and exhibiting anxiety as due dates for assignments accumulated.

Academics felt the fast pace and the lack of adequate breaks between sessions isolated them from their intellectual peers in other universities, firstly, by not allowing them to attend conferences because the new sessions do not correspond to those in most other universities or to conferences held in the northern hemisphere. Even if they could attend, for many there would have been no time to research and prepare a paper. The time compression can be understood to isolate academics in a second way, by requiring them to focus only on the tasks at hand, rather than being allowed to involve themselves in the time-consuming activity of intellectual reflection, scholarly debate and engagement with ideas.

At the time of the first survey, academics had not experienced the full calendar year, and many were hoping that the third session would allow them to attend to their research. The second survey was conducted after a full cycle of sessions had elapsed and a mid-session study week had been reintroduced. In this second survey, there was some reduction in the dissatisfaction expressed by academics, though over three-quarters of respondents were still articulating the same concerns. It is not possible to know what proportion of academics were tenured or precariously employed, but as noted previously, it is now possible for casual academics to work in a more or less never-ending cycle. Alternatively, they are faced with a much longer break without work than previously. For tenured staff, the exhaustion experienced by the two back-to-back teaching sessions makes for a less effective engagement with the work that has been pushed aside until there is time to deal with it. In addition, holidays must be taken at this time, further reducing the amount of time available to engage in research during what is traditionally a holiday period for the majority of the populace.

What has been presented above is but a brief overview of one example of the speeding up of work and learning practices in academic institutions. It serves to
demonstrate a phenomenon that is not occurring in isolation. It reflects the shifts we have previously discussed. Work intensification via an altered temporality becomes a technique deployed at a particular historical juncture that expresses unequal relations of power between managers and intellectual workers within the cultural logic of the corporate university. It also dictates the emergence of particular pedagogical practices. We turn now to consider what implications these changes might hold for pedagogy.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The changes we describe lead to what Payne and Wattlow (2009, 17) characterize as “fast, take-away, virtual, globalized, download/uptake versions” of pedagogy. The assumption appears to be that students, who are now paying customers, are not necessarily willing (or indeed able, given the imperative to be an autonomous, self-provisioning unit) to submit to the older order of temporal rhythms that marked the traditional university education. They now require flexibility in delivery, pace, and location consistent with a neoliberal rationality. Furthermore, it is assumed that it is possible to compress learning into shorter timeframes. However this time compression necessitates the delivery of intellectual content in short chunks that often allows only for the teaching of concepts rather than encouraging an ability to range widely, reflect upon the material, interrogate its underlying assumptions, and look for applications to other areas of knowledge. In other words, “speedy pedagogy” only enables students to view snapshots rather than the fuller picture, let alone engage in reflection and/or praxis. It belies the work done by learning theorists who have demonstrated that deep learning is only able to take place under conditions that allow mature reflection and critique (Biggs 1999; Cantwell 2007). We would argue this is disempowering if one accepts Giroux’s (2001, 2005) view that the wider aim of pedagogy is to produce citizens who are able to challenge prevailing orthodoxies and enlarge the democratic sphere for the benefit of the wider public.

These new modes of teaching, such as disembodied (online) delivery, slimmed-down content, and a compressed timeframe, constitute an expression of power; they reveal who can or cannot speak and who will or will not be listened to. The voice of university managers is dominant in establishing the new learning regime. Academics are obliged to conform despite some protestation. And even though students have been recast as consumers, they are consulted only in a ritualized way through end of session online surveys that allow any expression of dissent to be reinterpreted to maintain the status quo. Thus the pedagogical practices that result—such as reduced content, accelerated delivery, and the curtailment of debate—constitute a site of contest between academics and the executive managers in an unequal power relation, where students, who are the absent partners, receive devitalized learning. We would argue, after Foucault, that these practices constitute a technology of power by which certain subjects become the objects of the drive to achieve efficiency. If this seems less than satisfactory, it may be timely to call for alternatives.
INVOKING ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSES

Honore´ (2004) has called the new sense of time consciousness discussed above the “cult of speed,” which he identifies as rooted in the global capitalist economy. In response, a global grass roots movement has grown up that seeks to reinstate a slower pace in cultural practices related to food production and consumption. The official Slow Food Manifesto states that we are “enslaved by speed,” having succumbed to “fast life,” dominated by fast food stripped of its nutritional value and cultural connections. In place of this, Slow Food emphasizes the value of local produce, regional tradition, and the savoring of food as a pleasure that should be available to all. Since its inception, the Slow Food Movement has spread to more than 130 countries with a membership of over 100,000 (Andrews 2008) and has spawned a number of initiatives that include education on taste, as well as sustainability and a growing number of farmers’ markets worldwide.

The movement has been variously interpreted. Nosi and Zanni (2004) see it as a new business paradigm, whilst it has also been critiqued as an elitist gourmet’s club that is out of touch with the realities of working-class life (Andrews 2008). Indeed the emphasis on the sensual enjoyment of food is reflected in Germov, Williams, and Freij’s (2010) study, which showed that, at least in the Australian media, representations of the movement articulate a discourse that emphasizes conviviality, localism, and romanticism. Germov et al. note a “lack of overt political discourse” although they acknowledge that the very idea of Slow Food implies an underlying “resistant and oppositional discourse to the assumed risks of ‘McDonaldized’ food” (102).

In fact the Slow Movement has its roots in leftist politics of the 1970s, even though it does not advocate the methods of those politics in order to bring about change (Andrews 2008). Nevertheless, from its inception the movement has explicitly and extensively addressed the negative consequences of the current global economic order and its associated temporalities. Indeed, its manifesto states that “to be worthy of the name, homo sapiens should rid himself [sic] of speed before it reduces him to a species in danger of extinction” (Petrini 2003, xxiii). The Slow Food movement is therefore widening its analysis beyond food production and consumption to a broader critique that encompasses the social and environmental realms. The alternative to “fast life,” proponents argue, is “slow living” which seeks transformative modes of existence that in fact challenge the dominant narratives of the current order (Andrews 2008, 40–41). Slow is therefore a counterhegemonic concept, which strikes at the core of neoliberal rationality.

Slow Food is probably the best known aspect of the movement as a whole. However, the concept of Slow has spread to other areas of life, evidenced by the growth of a number of organizations such as the World Institute of Slowness (2011) and the Cittaslow (2011) initiative, which seeks to improve the quality of city life. Indeed, Andrews asserts that we are witnessing the emergence of “slow theory,” a theoretical perspective that “amounts to a critical, theoretical engagement with globalization,” which is exerting influence in many spheres (2008, 177) including pedagogy. For example, Payne and Wachtchow (2009, 30) have
proposed a Slow Pedagogy in their field of environmental/outdoor education. They have devised an experiential learning program that draws upon aspects of the principles and practices of the Slow movement in order to provide students with a learning experience that “encourages meaning-makers to experientially and reflectively access and address their corporeality, intercorporeality, sensations, and perceptions of time, space and ... place.” This kind of critical praxis challenges the orthodoxies of speedy pedagogy and points the way toward an educational alternative that might create the kinds of citizens Giroux desires.

Payne and Wattchow (2009) have predecessors who have also confronted speedy pedagogy and its ill effects. The dean of an undergraduate school at Harvard, Harry Lewis, held such concerns for students engaged in accelerated scholarship that in 2001, he wrote a seven-page letter to all newly enrolled students that is entitled: “Slow Down.” The letter since has become a tradition at Harvard. To quote Lewis:

Empty time is not a vacuum to be filled. It is the thing that enables the other things on your mind to be creatively rearranged, like the empty square in the $4 \times 4$ puzzle that makes it possible to move the other fifteen pieces around.

In advising you to think about slowing down and limiting your structured activities, I do not mean to discourage you from high achievement, indeed from the pursuit of extraordinary excellence. But you are more likely to sustain the intensive effort needed to accomplish first-rate work in one area if you allow yourself some leisure time, some recreation, some time for solitude. (Lewis in Honoré 2004, 248)

Lewis argues that to extract the best from university life and to engage in creative thinking, students need to do less and to factor leisure into their schedules. His letter is an apt illustration of our argument that scholarship can only flourish when the pace of work is decelerated and the mind has time to be creative. Thus, we could venture toward the beginnings of identifying the characteristics of slow scholarship as being distinguished by engaging with ideas through deep reflection, experiential learning, and reflexivity, ultimately resulting in critical insight, creativity, and innovation.

CONCLUSION

It may be argued by university corporate managers that such formulations are utopian. It must be acknowledged this is because of the pressure managers themselves are subject to by government-funding formulas and requirements for transparency and quality. Hence educational institutions are impelled toward a rationality that privileges competition, privatization, and efficiency, all of which involve changing the temporalities of academic life for both students and academics. As Lynch (2006, 12) asserts, the university “operates in a complex cultural location...It is at the one time a product of cultural practice and a creator of culture.” Thus the enactment of scholarship is speeded up, creating new kinds of subject positions for teachers and learners. The temporal technologies that are deployed are inscribed with power relations between managers,
academics, and students that can be read as the representations of the culture that is emerging.

Nevertheless, we conclude by maintaining our argument that time is an essential factor for the kinds of deep cognitive processes that are involved in innovative and creative thinking. It is not that we advocate a return to quills and ink; however the freedom and time to engage in thinking, to immerse oneself in experiential encounters, to synthesize information and reflect upon it—this is how new ways of knowing are formed. In the time-poor corporate university, understandings of what it means to be a scholar need renewed interrogation—if anyone has the time to do so.

NOTE
1. The Executive of the University X Branch of the NTEU has kindly granted access to the surveys. However for ethical reasons we can only discuss responses in general terms.

REFERENCES


