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Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving Beyond the Neoliberal Academy

Jeffrey R. Di Leo

CORPORATE HUMANITIES IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

MOVING BEYOND THE
NEOLIBERAL ACADEMY

Jeffrey R. Di Leo

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CORPORATE HUMANITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism is recalibrating academic identity. The paradigmatic neoliberal academic is a docile one. He is the product of an academic culture dominated by the recording and measurement of performance, rather than the pursuit of academic freedom or critical exchange—an academic climate that renders him risk averse and compliant.¹ Neoliberal managerialism constructs and functions through manageable and accommodating subjects. These docile neoliberal subjects excel when they “follow the rules” regarding say “outcomes-based curricula” and the “culture of continuous improvement,” but risk failure when they begin to question the neoliberal academic practices to which they are subjected.

The freedom to question and to explore subjects wherever they may lead is the heart of a healthy academy—and the soul of academic freedom. The reinforcement of faculty and student subjectivities that are passive, docile, compliant, and submissive may be suitable for vocational training centers—which seem to be the telos of neoliberal academe—but are not acceptable in a vision of higher education wherein dialogue and critique are championed. The ability to challenge authority and to think critically about all aspects of society and culture, including academic culture, is absolutely necessary for higher education to flourish—without this ability, higher education flounders.

The docile academic subjects privileged by neoliberal academic culture are the products an authoritarian ideology that is an anathema to both the liberal arts in particular and academe in general. The active or engaged academic is necessary not only for progressive education to occur, but also for the academy to engage in democratic education, that is, education that supports critical citizenship and progressive values. Nevertheless, in spite of its centrality to the performance of neoliberal academe, this docile academic subject was not its formative subject. Rather, the formative subject of neoliberal academe was a far more active one.

The promise (or illusion) of neoliberalism was that it would allow everyone the opportunity to be a shareholder, an owner, and an entrepreneur.² The rise of the information and knowledge society over the past 40 years afforded academe an unprecedented vantage point within this new economy—an economy derived in large measure through neoliberal policies. As knowledge production and information dissemination is an integral part of academe, it emerged as a major stakeholder in this new economy. However, this new economy is quickly fading away and being replaced by a much more vicious one: the debt economy.

Like its predecessor, the knowledge economy, the debt economy is a derivation of neoliberal policies, and, as such, is very difficult to both avoid and fight. “Neo-liberal discourse is not like others,” warns the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. “Like psychiatric discourse in the asylum, as described by Erving Goffman,” comments Bourdieu, “it is a ‘strong discourse’ which is so strong and so hard to fight because it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations which it helps to make as it is, in particular by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relations and so adding its own specifically symbolic-force to those power relations.”³ But just as the neoliberal economy is not absolute, so too are the identities and relations associated with it not absolute.

The “indebted man”⁴ that emerges out of the intensification of neoliberalism is the docile subject of academe. However, the earlier illusions of neoliberalism led us previously to believe that the neoliberal man was an entrepreneurial one. Recall the images of the entrepreneurial man as a creative visionary and an independent worker who was proud of being his own boss and aggressively leading academe through the marketplace of ideas. This illusion ended when the dot-com bubble burst in 2000, and officially gave way to the debt economy with the financial collapse of 2008. But old habits are hard to break.

We still see colleges and universities partaking of neoliberalism’s entrepreneurial apple in their frequent calls for management that are “entrepreneurial” in spite of the association of these identities with neoliberal managerialism. What makes the emergence of the “indebted man” out of the grave of the “entrepreneurial man” so scary though is that while the latter at least held promise—even if it turned out to be snake oil—the former is completely bereft of hope.

Neoliberalism’s indebted man only brings despair. He is the return of the existential man who was both responsible for his freedom

and—in turn—guilty for his fate.⁵ All of his actions are carefully monitored, measured, and assessed so that he knows exactly the limits of his freedom and the scope of his guilt—or, more appropriately, the limits of his credit and the range of his debt. However, unlike the existential man whose “hell” was other people, the indebted man’s hell are his creditors, or more precisely, his debt. In fact, his entire social existence is defined by it.

Unlike his predecessor, the entrepreneurial man, whose social existence was defined by economic and/or social exchange, the indebted man’s social existence is demarcated by debt, or, alternately, credit. For neoliberalism’s entrepreneurial man, equality of exchange was the groundwork of his identity. Economic and symbolic exchange for him was predicated on some notion of equality. Such, however, is not the case for the indebted man—a type of existence wherein equality (and symmetry) of exchange has given way to the inequalities (and asymmetries) of the debt–credit relationship.

If one is concerned with the infection of academe by neoliberalism, then it will be difficult to avoid consideration of how the concept of neoliberalism’s indebted man refigures academic identity and the relationship among members of the academy both with each other and with the emergent debt economy. It would certainly be helpful if there were some clear and distinct theoretical tools and vocabulary both for the economy of debt and its resultant ethics, but unfortunately there are none. This makes the task of identifying the emergent “indebted academic,” the newest and latest modulation of neoliberalism in academe, all the more challenging. So, what can we expect from academe in the age of debt? And, more particularly, what is the identity of the indebted academic—and how will he critically function—within academe’s emergent debt economy?

CRITICAL DEBT

At the manifest level, deepening student debt is one of the principal results of neoliberal policies in academe. Since the mid-1970s, neoliberal policies have transformed the financing structure of welfare state spending. Instead of central banks coining money to ease public debt, neoliberal policies promote appeal to financial markets to deal with increasing debt. This means that in practice debtors such as our students now find it necessary to rely on private creditors and to “submit to the conditions dictated by shareholders, bondholders, and the other owners of securities.”⁶ These students form the groundwork of indebted academe—and are its most repulsive consequence.

The indebted condition of students compels increasing numbers of them to see higher education as a means of getting out of debt—and not as a means to getting an education. The circle here is vicious: by going to college, students get themselves into debt. This, in turn, leads them to see education only as a way to get themselves out of debt. Given the vicious circle of student debt, it is not surprising that many of them choose to use their “credit” hours toward more vocationally based majors where it is believed that the odds of being able to repay their student debt more quickly are higher.

All of this student debt then comes to roost on the house of higher education. It has produced an academic environment wherein higher education is viewed as having an economically driven, or, more specifically, debt-driven, rather than an educationally driven mission, an environment wherein decisions about higher education and its practices, policies, and mission are determined by the debt-credit relationship, and not by the production of knowledge and reproduction of democratic values.

The neoliberal academy in the age of debt literally views students as “credit hours,” that is, potential sources of debt from which the academy may profit by being “lenders” or extending these students “credit.” It recognizes that these students are faced with choices in the marketplace for education and encourages institutions of higher education to compete with each other for their debt. In this environment, measurement and ranking of things like reputation, student satisfaction, and graduation rates come to have a major role in educational practices and policies. Moreover, they have become directly related to the allocation of resources and acquisition of funding.

Completely lost in this vision of higher education as driven by debt and market mechanisms is the notion of education as a public good that is supported by the state. This has led to a decrease in state support for public education and its increased privatization. In this “post welfare-state” environment,⁷ student debt has reached epidemic proportions, and higher education has been compelled to forge closer ties with industry—and anything else that can bring in revenue. “Under neoliberalism,” writes Henry Giroux, “everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit.”⁸ This includes, of course, higher education, upon whose house neoliberalism has become a scourge⁹—and the rise of the debt economy is only aggravating the situation.

Caught in the crosshairs of a situation not of our choosing or making are those of us who work in higher education and who do not see it as fundamentally driven by finance. Nonetheless, the debt economy has now become our economy. We participate in it by working for

institutions that sustain it and teaching students that suffer from it. So what do we do?

In this debt climate, a major part of our job is to make this economy clearly and distinctly visible, and to wrest it from power. Debt is at the center of neoliberal politics, and consequently, central to understanding and combating neoliberalism. Critically engaging debt in our scholarship and classroom praxis is vital for wresting the stranglehold of neoliberalism from our universities. However, this task is complicated because, as noted earlier, the subjectivities privileged in neoliberal academe are docile and risk averse—and these will not be the characteristics of those who work to undermine neoliberalism in academe.¹⁰

Critically engaging the performance paradigms of neoliberal academe is not for the fainthearted—or perhaps even the nontenured. Protecting our students—and ourselves—as much as possible from the negative consequences of participating in neoliberal academe is found in both acts of resistance—and acts of *vision*. One of our specific tasks is to help our students understand the lure of the entrepreneurial man and his connections with neoliberalism; to help them understand the double meanings of “interest” and “credit,” namely, how they allow debt interest to determine intellectual interest, and how academic “credit” is linked to sustaining a debt-credit economy.

In this vicious climate, the indebted academic should not be blamed for losing all hope. It has been said that credit is “one of the most effective instruments of exploitation man has managed to create, since certain people, by producing credit, are able to appropriate the labor and wealth of others.”¹¹ Whereas neoliberalism’s entrepreneurial man held out the promise of profit, the indebted man only offers the perils of debt—entrepreneurial vision has morphed into indebted blindness. The labor and wealth of academe has been squandered—and we are now left to pick up the pieces with what little time and resources neoliberal academe affords us.

However, we know that “neo-liberalism is a very smart and very modern repackaging of the oldest ideas of the oldest capitalist.”¹² We also know that it is very dangerous too. It has been called “an ideology and politic buoyed by the spirit of a market fundamentalism that subordinates the art of democratic politics to the rapacious laws of a market economy that expands its reach to include all aspects of social life within the dictates and values of a market driven society.”¹³ But how do we make visible something like the debt economy when theoretically we barely have a conceptual hold on it? I think that this can be done by going back to the larger frame of the consequences

of neoliberalism in academe, and asking what these have contributed to the educational mission of the university—asking whether the emergence of the debt economy is something that has benefited or harmed students, faculty, and society. Few will be surprised to learn from this exercise that the consequences of neoliberalism in academe have primarily been harmful to those who are supposed to be the primary beneficiaries of higher education, namely, students, faculty, and society.

Looking back now with students and others at the plundering of higher education by neoliberalism's entrepreneurial man becomes an object lesson in the terror of neoliberalism. Where the entrepreneurial academic saw profit and sales, the indebted academic now sees only credit and debt. Gone too is the notion that higher education still trades on equalities of exchange and is fundamentally fair to all. The debt economy is one of continuous economic inequality and asymmetry. All profits gained by the entrepreneurial man are now seen by the indebted man as merely loans generated through credit. The myth of exchange is replaced by the existence of debt.

The debt economy now becomes an excuse to prolong and intensify the neoliberal agenda. In many states, this amounts to reclaiming state education through accountability and austerity measures. In many others, it means expanding the privatization of higher education by passing along the cost and debt of education to students. For the indebted man, these actions come with a specific type of moral psychology, namely, one wherein the indebted is always already guilty or at fault for their debt.

The power of debt is that it frees one to honor their debt. Like Socrates who on his final day felt the need to settle his debts, we too absorb the freedom to repay our debts, which may in fact occupy the entirety of our adult life,¹⁴ or better yet, our existence.¹⁵ Just like the cars and homes we buy on credit, so too is our education—acquired on credit—and in debt. One of the many tragedies of credit-card education is the erosion of the humanities and critical thinking.

As the neoliberal academy grows in power and influence, the humanities decrease by the same measure. Unlike Socrates whose humanities left him enough to repay his debts upon his death, the humanities of the university in the age of debt do not. Moving beyond the neoliberal academy though may not be as easy as simply paying our debts or returning to its predecessor—but it certainly will not be as difficult as trying to function as an academic committed to critical inquiry, social justice, and democratic education in the age of neoliberalism.

Critical inquiry, social justice, and democratic education are antithetical to neoliberal academe. Pursuit of them is a form of debt accumulation for each moves counter to the performative telos of neoliberal education and against the grain of neoliberal academic identity. However, to acquire and function through debt in this way is not the same as a student owing monetary capital to a financial institution, but it is no less reprehensible as the loss of critical and intellectual capital cuts to the heart of academic freedom—"the right to teach what one believes, to espouse unpopular academic and non-academic causes, to act upon knowledge and ideas as one perceives them without fear of retribution from anyone."¹⁶ Pursuit of critical thinking, social justice, and democratic education are only possible by functioning outside of the parameters of neoliberal academe as pursuit of each works against the ends of neoliberalism.

The indebted academic is in large part characterized by the limits placed on his critical freedom in neoliberal academe. These limits are determined by the performance measures and outcomes assessments that determine and delimit his existence in academe. The difference between his critical aspirations and what is expected of him in neoliberal academe might be regarded as his "critical debt." In a pre-neoliberal version of academe, critical debt might have been thought of as a type of moral obligation, that is, what is owed to others for one's critical contributions. However, in neoliberal academe, critical debt is about intellectual shortcoming, that is, what critically is lost through our participation in neoliberal academe. This is, of course, an ethical problem too as it cuts against our ability to pursue our critical vision or academic freedom wherever it may lead. Debt as the basis of academe recalibrates academic identity such that even one of our most basic functions, critical thinking, becomes an exercise in debt accumulation—and a fundamentally punitive activity. Question is, how much critical debt must we acquire before we deem academe itself bankrupt?

REVEAL, RESIST, REMOVE

In the spirit of two inspiring books, Bourdieu's *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (1998), a book that aims to "provide useful weapons to all those who are striving to resist" neoliberalism, and Henry Giroux's *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy* (2004), a book that aims to make it visible, critically engage it, and remove it from power, this book aims to reveal and critically engage its presence in the humanities with the

ultimate aim of providing strategies for resistance and removal. There is no more urgent task currently facing the humanities in particular and higher education in general than dealing with the consequences of neoliberalism in academe.

However, it is important to remember that neoliberalism is not *only* a problem in academe, but also for many other aspects of society and the world. "Public lands are looted by logging companies and corporate ranchers; politicians willingly hand the public's airwaves over to broadcasters and large corporate interests without a dime going into the public trust; Halliburton gives war profiteering a new meaning as it is granted corporate contracts without any competitive bidding and then bilks the US government for millions; the environment is polluted and despoiled in the name of profit making just as the government passes legislation to make it easier for corporations to do so; public services are gutted in order to lower the taxes of major corporations; schools increasingly resemble malls or jails, and teachers, forced to raise revenue for classroom materials, increasingly function as circus barkers hawking everything from hamburgers to pizza parties," laments Giroux, "—that is, when they are not reduced to prepping students to get higher test scores."¹⁷ As such, the problems brought about in academe as a result of neoliberal practices are but a slice of a much larger set of problems caused worldwide by it.¹⁸ Still, regardless of this fact, these problems are no less significant: for those of us in academe who do not believe in teaching for the test or viewing students as customers, the corporate environment of higher education has become a threat to our academic identities and the very culture that sustains them.

Corporate Humanities in Higher Education puts forth the following questions: How do we *critically* function as academics in an environment where extreme free market capitalism has become the driving force of higher education? How do the humanities crumble under the knife of neoliberalism and vocational training? How do we speak with our colleagues and students in this environment? How do we write about each other in this environment? How do we value what we write as academics in this environment? How should we regard the aim of the humanities in general in the age of neoliberalism? Responses to these questions and related ones get at the core of how we function as academics within the neoliberal academy. They reveal key aspects of the character of academic identity in an educational culture dominated by market mechanisms and managerial control. Responses to these questions also lends support to a few fundamental theses about neoliberalism in academe.

Thesis One—Neoliberalism in Higher Education Is a Bad Thing

Overall, this claim is fairly straightforward until one qualifies it with “—even though the marketplace for ideas is not.” As much as it would be easier to avoid this qualifier, it would not be true. As I have pointed out elsewhere, academe is often characterized as an *oasis* from the market-driven forces of the public–private sector.¹⁹ Within the academy, ideas are many times said to be pursued without regard to their market value by individuals dedicated to the life of the mind, and students and teachers often enjoy in academe a reprieve from the pressure to conform their practices to the requirements of “cash value” or “public sentiment.” While this “market-free” vision of the academy may be its ideal, it has never really existed. Academe is and has always been a type of marketplace or site where knowledge is disseminated, discovered, and debated, and academic values are directly linked to these knowledge-driven practices within this marketplace. While it may bother some to regard academe as a marketplace of ideas, particularly when one sees the damaging effects of academe through the lens of an extreme free market philosophy, there is a difference between the two—and it is not trivial or unsubstantial. *Extreme* free market capitalism as the determinate of higher educational policy, practice, and values *is* a bad thing, but not all uses of the market in academic decision making.

Thesis Two—Neoliberalism Threatens to Turn Academics into Docile Subjects

This damaging dimension of neoliberal academic culture is an important one even if it is one that is not widely acknowledged or discussed. One of the few to recognize this is Joëlle Fanghanel in her recent study, *Being an Academic* (2012), where she notes that compliance with neoliberal academic culture can be seen as “reinforcing the notion that the neoliberal agenda renders academics risk averse or “docile neoliberal subject[s].”²⁰ Again, as noted earlier, instead of pursuing academic freedom or teaching to transgress, the paradigmatic neoliberal subject is caught up in an academic culture that revolves around the measurement and assessment of performance, that is, academic accounting rather than intellectual agency. It is interesting to note that at the macro-level of institutions, neoliberalism creates an environment of competition, whereas at the micro-level of individuals within those competitive institutions, neoliberalism constructs

and functions through manageable and compliant subjects. Rule-following behavior, particularly in the pursuit of predetermined curricular learning outcomes within a culture of measurement and assessment, affords the docile neoliberal subject many opportunities for achievement and success. However, scrutiny and failure are the consequences of academic behavior that goes against the norms of neoliberal practice.

Thesis Three—Docile Academic Subjects Are a Bad Thing

At its very best, the academy is a place where any and all topics may be pursued by individuals vested with the freedom to take this inquiry wherever it may lead. Knowledge production and intellectual inquiry require faculty and student subjectivities that are active, forceful, resistant, and assertive. The passive, docile, compliant, and submissive characteristics favored by neoliberal academic culture are more suited to vocational training and information dissemination, rather than intellectual inquiry and academic agency. The freedom to think critically about all aspects of society and culture, including the academic culture within which one participates, is vital to a progressive vision of higher education. The capacity to challenge authority comes from academic subjects who are active and engaged. The docility of the neoliberal academic subject has at its source an authoritarian ideology that is the scourge of both the liberal arts in particular and the academy in general. Progressive and democratic education requires academic subjects that are active and engaged—without them it flounders.

Whether or not one agrees with all three theses, it is important to foreground them at the outset as they provide a stage for the various interventions in this book. Roughly speaking, the first two chapters, “Corporate Literature” and “Humanities, Inc.,” take up Thesis One; the third and fourth chapters, “Paralogical Inquiry” and “Apocalyptic Fear,” take up Thesis Two; and the fifth chapter, “Critical Affiliations,” takes up Thesis Three. The final four chapters return to the first thesis, but with a twist as each deals with a different negative aspect of neoliberalism in scholarly practice in the humanities. Chapter 6 (“Wrangling with Rank”) looks at the shortcomings of neoliberalism’s emphasis on rank as applied to academic journals; chapter 7 (“Authorial Prestige”) examines how the neoliberal value of prestige undermines poststructuralism’s “death of the author”; chapter 8 (“The Publishing Market”) discusses how neoliberalism—in spite of its emphasis on the market—has, in fact, shrunk the publishing

market; and chapter 9 (“The Junkyard of Ideas”) considers how the neoliberal value of productivity in academe increases the quantity of academic publications—while at the same time establishes their “obsolescence” or “disposability.”

The reason the final four chapters deal with neoliberalism in scholarly publishing in the humanities is that this is one of the more publicly accessible faces of academic culture. Academic journals circulate and are produced both inside and outside of academe; books published by academics are also part of a production and distribution industry that extends from within academe (e.g., university presses) to outside of it (e.g., multinational publishing corporations and independent small presses); and, finally, the products of our academic labors—be they reviews, articles, essays, books, and so on—are academic culture’s most lasting and public aspect. Whereas the first five chapters deal more with internal dimensions of academic culture (e.g., how we talk to each other within the academy), the latter four chapters take up some of the more external dimensions of academic culture.

Be that as it may, the circuit of culture does not lend itself well to an internal/external distinction—even when applied to the academe’s supposed “ivory tower.” Following the work of the former directors of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Richard Johnson and Stuart Hall, the circuit of culture involves how the cultural artifact is articulated (representation), what social identities are associated with it (identity), how it is produced (production), how it is consumed (consumption), and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use (regulation). On this model of cultural studies, the beginnings of an explanation of the meaning of cultural artifacts are found in the articulation of these processes and none of the processes are privileged. In order to explain adequately the meaning an artifact comes to possess, the various combinations of these processes must be explored. To be sure, the articulation of these processes can and does lead to variable and contingent outcomes.²¹ It is for this reason that any consideration of academic culture is a slippery and messy business.

The title of this book, *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education*, alludes to the Janus-faced nature of academe today: one face is that of the corporate university with its increasingly extreme emphasis on a neoliberal management philosophy coupled with vocational training; the other face is that of a humanities with roots in the philosophy, literature, and history of Greek antiquity. As the neoliberal academy grows in power and influence, the humanities seem to decrease by the same measure. This presents a serious problem for humanists, namely,

how does one function in an academy that values critical inquiry into the humanities less and less? And what does this mean for the future of the humanities in the neoliberal academy? How does one speak for and from the humanities in this academic environment?

Corporate Humanities in Higher Education proposes that working in the humanities in a neoliberal age requires us to be even better at what we do best, namely, providing critical insight on each others' work and valuing our contributions for the ways in which they advance critical dialogue within the academy, rather than stifle it. It is in this spirit that the works of a number of prominent humanists writing in America today—people such as Martha Nussbaum, Louis Menand, Frank Donoghue, and others—are engaged in this book.

On the one hand, their contributions should be valued for their efforts to identify and respond to the challenges facing the humanities today. These efforts should also be as widely disseminated and discussed as possible—and it for this reason that care is taken to review and represent their arguments as fully as possible. They are the stars and public faces of our profession, and what they have to say about the humanities is well worth our time and attention. Their arguments also represent major branches of response to the crisis in the humanities. And while for some it may be preferable to disguise their positions in generalities or hide them in footnotes, it is not so here.

On the other hand, valuing these contributions does not necessarily entail agreeing with them. This gets to the heart of the healthy academy—and the soul of academic freedom. If we are not critically dialoguing with the work of our colleagues, then we are not engaging in that aspect of academe that makes it special. In a similar vein, the position may be advanced that the more dominant an idea and more prominent a critic, the bigger the demand for a more strenuous response. Rather than regard the work of prominent critics in our field as precious and beyond reproach, the healthiest response to them is a thoroughgoing critical engagement—wherever this engagement may lead. To respect our colleagues and their ideas does not necessarily mean that we need to agree with them. For some, following this principle can be very difficult. The resolution to the problems facing the humanities in the age of neoliberalism will not be achieved through mere consent with the positions of any and all advocates of the humanities. Even the positions of the most public advocates of the humanities must be met with a spirit of critical engagement.

One of the unique features of *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education* is that it is written by an upper-level university administrator who is also the editor of two major humanities journals. For nearly

a decade, I have been a dean of Arts and Sciences at a state university, and for over two decades, a humanities journal editor. Moreover, based on the comments and reports of others, I have been highly successful in both endeavors. Regardless, however, of the quality of my administrative and editorial experience, it must be noted at the outset that my approach in this book is tempered by a pragmatism grounded in these real-life, academic-world experiences. I am not speaking from the position of someone who is theoretically espousing a critique of mainstream (“neoliberal”) administrative policies, but as someone who lives with and administers in the context of these policies and practices every day. Administering—and editing—in dark times not only gives one a different sense of the perils of higher education today—but also provides one the opportunity to resist pernicious and destructive higher educational practices from within.

The other unique feature of *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education* is that it is written by someone who has strong affiliations with a number of distinct disciplines within the humanities. My doctoral work is in both philosophy and comparative literature, and I have published widely in both areas. However, by professional title, I am a professor of English and philosophy. Thus, by my count, I have professional footprints in three distinct disciplines: English, philosophy, and comparative literature. Add to this an undergraduate degree in economics—in addition to philosophy—and you have someone with a fairly robust perspective on the liberal arts. Thus, my point of view on the problems facing the humanities today—steeped as it is in a combination of interdisciplinary education and administrative experience—both provides me with not only a great vantage point to identify and assess these problems, but also to work toward alleviating them.

Corporate Humanities in Higher Education does not aim to provide all of the answers to the questions facing the humanities. Nor does it presume that its own critical interventions and conclusions are beyond reproach. Rather, it strives to advance at least one fundamental idea: that is, moving beyond the neoliberal academy may not be as easy as returning to its predecessor—but it certainly will not be as difficult as trying to function as an academic committed to critical inquiry and democratic education in the age of neoliberalism. Shaping the academy of the future is our most urgent task. One that we must approach with a sense of openness and dialogue tempered by feelings of hope and optimism—even though the academy, and the humanities in particular, are going through dark times.