Editorial Perspective - Squids, University 3.0 and Activism

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I would argue that we could all do with becoming a little more rebellious. And this word, "rebel", often appears in the context of academic freedom. As Howson in this volume suggests, not having had a universal definition of academic freedom has not stopped at least some countries from having histories of universities as hubs of rebellion. And as Manathunga states: universities offer "important spaces for resistance, rebellion, and political rejuvenation". Connected to this is, I would argue, that Universities are key to creating that underpinning knowledge for us humans to understand the difficult choices we will surely have to make. And here today, writing this, I would argue that this special issue is one of our feeble attempts to nurture that little bit of healthy rebellion, a little bit of academic activism for the sake of our collective futures, feeble in the context of the size of the challenges upon us: from human extinction, the rejection of democracy, to the denunciation of the value of knowledge. But it's not so feeble in the light of slowly, but steadily building up a critical body of work that will undoubtedly be used to build our future institutions that will be much more designed to handle these challenges without retreating into a helpless paralysis, one I feel has affected many of our institutions of today.

I recently listened to a well-known podcast that explained in simple terms how I feel at the moment. It accounts for a scene in a film where it started to rain squid. It mentioned how – in an extraordinary fleeting moment – the protagonist of the story experienced the soft thuds, the Dali-like looking scene of falling rubber, the never before vision of ocean creatures in the air,- and then the moment passed, and life went on. Like this was not the most unusual phenomenon ever experienced. Like the moment it appeared in our existence, that moment made it normal.

It seems we humans are designed to adapt.

To conform our behaviour in the most extraordinary situations in order to cope with life. And when we see a surrealistic painting of raining squid, we are amazed and astounded, but when it happens in real life, within 5 minutes, we accept it as the new norm.

And this essential individualistic human survival skill poses now an essential threat to humanity's survival as a collective.

And the question for me, as an academic who happens to be part of this humanity, is how we are able to rebel and speak out against the normalisation we find ourselves in during this covid recovery period. Having lived through the last extraordinary years in which much of what has happened is as unbelievable as the raining squid, a year experienced as a dystopian novel, we accepted much as the norm by the end of it.

So, I would argue we all could do with becoming a little more rebellious and acting out against this normalisation.

But what does this mean in the context of academia? What is academic activism, and what does it look like? And how is it different from …. what…'normal' activism?

And this question has been attended to in this collection of essays, from looking at academic activism and how it plays out in the very specific country context of India, as Kumar does in his exploration of sedition, democracy and

privatisation, to how it relates to institutionalised racism and unconscious bias, as Manathunga does. Opportunities and the need for activism "within a legacy of neoliberal change" are identified By Spolander (et al.), drawing from a Brazilian context, and how the phenomena of activism related to particularly the STEM disciplines are explored by Howson. A very personal perspective is explored by Lockley, using rhythmanalysis of labour, education and home settings, and an extreme position is understanding these discourses in one of abolition, as Schwoerer and Murray do in their article. Deeply philosophical questions are also attended to, from positioning research as a form of activism as Soeren does, with an exploration of researcher activism, which in its "inherent criticality never seeks to reaffirm dominant political, cultural, and scientific views but to destabilise what we already know and expect", and with it disrupts. A different format is provided by a transcript of a roundtable held to discuss where academic activism happens inside and outside of the classroom, with an introductory foreword by Forkert.

For me specifically, one of the essential tools in our survival chest is the ability to bring forward a progressive version of the cultural turn, a substantive shift in society and the economy to accommodate creative co-creation and co-production processes that support a collectively experienced progress, one that prioritises ethics, social responsibility and environmental sustainability. It is the move of power back to the collective and a more healthy and sustainable balancing of the needs of the individual with society in general.

For learning organisations, this means that we need to see ourselves as communities of practice which co-create these environments where learning takes place, rather than the industrially conceptualised mass-production houses of knowledge transfer from those who have it to those who don't. I feel this to be crucial to allow us as individual learners in a collective learning community to not accept a lesser world hurtling towards its own demise but to rebel against our own human tendency to normalise this situation and become activist enough to pave the way towards becoming much more responsible collaborative citizens of the world. But there are tensions for universities at the heart of how and what we do for learners; the way we create, develop, transmit, acquire and verify the validity of knowledge; who the individuals are that create or co-create; who claims ownership and how we measure its value. (Boehm, 2019)

So to understand this moving trajectory of the last 2 to 3 decades and where we need to be in the future, in order to still have one, I have started to use a conceptualisation of an evolutionary journey from University 1.0 to University 3.0. (Boehm, 2019, 2022)

In short, in this conceptualisation, **University 1.0** represents more predominantly those periods and institutional cultures associated with an inherent perception of "knowledge ownership", including, for instance, modern aspects of institutionally owned knowledge content. This "knowledge patronage" model influences how content is managed, taught, protected and produced. Typical teaching practices include processes that represent a knowledge exchange from those employed within the institution seen to have the knowledge to those who don't (such as large lectures).

University 2.0 moved into the era of massification of Higher Education, characterised by expanding and fragmenting knowledge domains (Boehm, 2014); as well as the use of metrics to personalise mass-produced and marketed learner products. Like a box of assorted chocolates, and through new digitally enhanced methods such as learner analytics, we were able to personalise to the extent that learners felt they received what they needed, whilst experiencing a 'mass-produced' service. We see the emergence of quality assurance products (e.g. validations); standardisation of content (e.g. QAA benchmark statements); and concepts around students as consumers and universities as businesses. The key

aspect remains - that knowledge is central, and in our neoliberally conceptualised and marketised industrial complex of Higher Education, knowledge is a thing to be packaged up, to be sold, to be bought.

The justification of neo-liberal introductions into our market economies was growth, investment, lower unemployment, productivity, innovation, and debt. But the biggest irony is that neoliberal ideologies have been evidenced to fail on almost every level. It has led to inequality, child poverty, insecurity, massive transferal of wealth from the majority of the population to the small top percent, and an unfair distribution of power, including political power and electoral power. (Brown, 2017) This stratification in society is mirrored in University 2.0 sectors, which display similar failings, opposite to government's claims of the benefits of increased competition. Brown (Brown, 2010, pp.6–19, 2017; Roger Brown, 2018) lists the following headers, expanded by contextualisation within a University 2.0 model:

1. Increased stratification between the highest earners and the lowest earners.
2. A reduction of diversity in the HE sector through externalising strategy by externalised performance metrics.
3. Decrease of innovation. With powers of OfS increasing, the existential risks for institutions also increased.
4. Increased risk to quality, with for-profit alternative providers' inbuilt conflicts of interest with shareholders.
5. Diversion of resources to non-core activities, such as marketing.
6. Greater instability and short-termism.
7. A weakening of universities' role in society.

So what to do, and how to move into the next phase of our sectors, the Universities 3.0 of the future. According to Brown (2019), his simple list should probably be on every Vice Chancellor's desk, and I have merged it with my own. It is a plea for me to every Vice-Chancellor to practice that little bit of academic activism that will potentially – without being overdramatic – save us all:

1. Resist marketisation in Higher Education, it does not work. Demonstrate costs and detriments of continuing marketisation. Use the evidence we have to expose the fallacies of the claims made for the application of market theory to every sphere of human activity. It might work when selling socks, but it does not in Higher Education.
2. Refuse league tables; develop your own performance metrics to support your own unique institution's progress into the future
3. Explain in publicly accessible language what the problems are to your public
4. Show how to use resources for the best for our students. Remind everyone and often what Higher Education is for, and how it differs from the business sectors and why it should be a protected place for society
5. Find ways to limit expenditures on marketing and branding, work with the whole sector to agree on limits on market expenditures
6. Avoid a mode of governance and resource allocation that mirror the worst sides of the corporate sector
7. And then point out the obvious detriments that University 2.0 models have had, from high levels of student debt, high level of stratification of university staff income levels and job security, casualisation of academic staff and – so far - the opposite of life-long learning.
8. Support the sector leadership to speak up. It is telling of the fear within the sector and its individualised but collectively shared experience of existential Angst that, as Brown suggested in 2018, "collective VCs have been far more vocal on the threats to their research funds than they have on the existential threat to Europe's security and integrity" as a fallout from Brexit.

And I reiterate in my words what many researchers (Including Brown, 2015; Roger Brown, 2018; Hazelkorn, 2016; Wright & Shore, 2017; Levin & Greenwood, 2016) have evidenced; the neo-liberal fantasies of a Culture 2.0 marketised higher education system have been a disaster in those countries where it has been taken the furthest. It has resulted in stratification and homogenisation, leaving ironically less choice and poorer value-for-money for both society and students.

This has also been the take on many articles in this special issue. The term "neo-liberal" appears in every single article in this volume, indicating the strong feeling of the need to provide more critical underpinnings that will allow us to resist this particular homogenisation of our higher education institutions. Our Universities have a key role to play in exposing the fallacies on which neoliberalism is based, as well as in working with other groups to rebuild knowledge-informed civil society. This takes civil courage in a system where resisting a status quote could be considered an act of disobedience, an act of activism.

For me, understanding what a University 3.0 of the future means is part of this process. And here, on a positive note, and applauding all the hidden-from-plain-sight-activism introducing new effective ways of learning, new ways of 'academic-being' into the academy, I would suggest that many professional and academic staff are well on their way to entering an era of University 3.0 without being able to name it as such. It is often seen as a common-sense approach or providing learning environments that work for students and staff, despite university systems attempting to push everything back into a University 2.0 system.

Thus we do not find University 3.0 conceptualisation in policy at the institutional or governmental level. It is often not understood by current policymakers, which seem to still have an image of the university from the time they received their degree 30 – 40 years ago. Many are still stuck in University 2.0 (See table below)

Table 1 - University 1.0 - 3.0

University 1.0	
	• Owners of knowledge • Focus on knowledge
Universities 2.0	
	• Curators of the knowledge, teachers and researchers as professions • Mass higher education, mass products • QAA products, standardisation, students as consumers, CMA, etc • Linear research to commercialisation routes
Universities 3.0	
	• Facilitator of learning • Curators of interfaces between knowledge and society • Developers of environments where learning happens

However, university education is already becoming more of a process of curation of interfaces between knowledge and society. The quality of learning environments is increasingly becoming more important than specified and static learning content, learning objects or knowledge packages. And with it, Universities are becoming more permeable and learners and researchers more often co-own, co-produce and co-create.

There is a big role here for knowledgeable and expertise-rich actors as lecturers and professors, but their predominant role of interacting with learners moves away from transmitting knowledge (University 1.0) and also away from curating knowledge (University 2.0) to facilitating learners to bring knowledge that is all around them to the learning process and managing this complexity in a curated learning environment in which sense-making and knowledge-creation is constantly part of that environment (University 3.0).

In University 3.0, we carefully position various interfaces between different levels of learners, different types of communities and different disciplines. This careful positioning is a process of curating interfaces, with the <u>facilitation</u> of learning being at the heart of this process rather than the acquisition of specific knowledge content itself.

This, of course, stands in tension with University 2.0 boundaries due to a larger focus on content-based regulatory constraints (e.g. QAA subject benchmark statements) combined with risk-rich, metric-driven performance measures (TEF). The focus on environments in University 3.0 models allows support for learning and knowledge production processes to be considered indirectly feeding into the design and curation of knowledge interfaces; these learning environments, in which learners are supported by drawing from knowledges that are ever-present and all around us.

With a focus on interfaces between University and external sectors, these environments are more permeable to allow universities to be a key element in benefiting our knowledge economies. Partnerships are key for this trajectory. The importance – and challenges – of partnership-rich learning ecosystems feeding into forward-looking sustainable learning environments foregrounds the need and current trajectories within higher education to move away from 'content' to 'environment'.

So is University 3.0 an act of academic activism if it actually builds upon a long history of learning concepts that educators and pedagogues have developed, as can be seen from the table below.

Table 2 - Prior concepts fitting within University 3.0

Well known educational concepts	
	Problem-based learning
	Work-based Learning
	Collaborative Learning
	Peer Learning
	Personalised Learning
	Socially constructed learning
Increasingly commonly-used concepts	
	Challenge led learning
	(Simulated +) Real-life Learning
	Experiential Learning
Still considered new….	
	Flipped classroom
	Just in time learning
	Live briefs

These pedagogical tools demonstrate that we have already moved our own academic practices from a culture of specifying learning objectives, devising constructive alignments, specifying terminologies according to Bloom (Bloom, 1956), quality-assuring every single knowledge 'package' within a curriculum and validating its specific mode of assessment, to a more open consideration of learning environments and their related study practices, and how these need to be designed in order for learners to tap into their own passion of learning and drawing from the knowledges that surround them, both within the academic institutional boundaries and from outside. These environments will need

to be designed to be permeable themselves, have both the academic dimensions with their deep knowledge domains and the applicability and cross-fertilisation opportunities of the world outside. (See Boehm, 2019)

And academics transformed themselves from being owners of knowledge to curators of knowledge situated within an expanding and increasingly fragmented set of multi- and interdisciplinary knowledge fields. And once our knowledge society really took off, with its open platforms, its digital connectivity and its mass distribution without mediators, providing quality higher education provision increasingly focuses on the learning environments rather than specific knowledges (University 1.0), or the curation of fragmented areas of knowledge (University 2.0). It will, and is starting to already be about focussing on curating the environments where learning happens, and where knowledge is brought in from all around us (University 3.0).

So I think this volume, with eight contributions and three editorial pieces on academic activism, is timely in providing a significant addition to the critical mass of literature that will allow us to imagine different university futures, some of which – I personally would hope - will not only have clear characteristics of University 3.0, but also allow those nooks and crannies where academic activism continues to push forward our relationship with each other and the knowledge of this world.

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