CHAPTER

1

The Virtual University?

Kevin Robins and Frank Webster

The 'virtual university' is becoming a commonplace idea or trope. In this book, we aim to explore both the concept and the practice of the 'virtual university'. Our exploration will be a critical one, hence the insertion of the question mark into our title—the 'virtual university?'. Here, at the outset of our discussion, it will be useful to signal two particularly significant issues that must be addressed. The first concerns the importance of distinguishing between futurological predictions about the 'virtual university', on the one hand, and the more complex situation of what is actually happening in higher education, on the other. We need, that is to say, to separate the myths and ideologies that are proliferating about the 'university of the future' from changing realities and practices in actual universities now, in the present. The second issue concerns the problem of the narrow and restrictive technological bias that distinguishes most accounts of the 'virtual university'. The basic assumption is that the 'virtual university' is the outcome and consequence of a new technological revolution, and that we may start and end our discussion of contemporary transformations in higher education with the question of new digital or virtual technologies. A principal aim of this volume is to counter the futurological and technological biases in the debate on the meaning and significance of the 'virtual university'.

The contributors to this collection are all concerned with the contemporary realities of change in universities in different parts of the world. And they all go beyond technological reductionism, in order to address the broader economic, social, and political dynamics that have been bringing about change in

This book stems from a study of Virtual Universities funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC's) Virtual Society? Programme, grant no. R000223276. We would like to thank Steve Woolgar who directed the Programme for his unqualified support, and John Goddard, David Charles, Neil Pollock, and James Cornford whose ideas we have found of immeasurable value.

the higher education sector. What will be apparent in the chapters that follow this introduction is the range and the complexity of issues raised by the 'virtual university' agenda. There are, of course, immediate issues to do with the day-to-day activities of higher education institutions, where new information and communications technology (ICTs) may play a significant role (distance education, virtual learning, information resources, new management, and administration systems) (*Information, Communication and Society* 2000). Then there are issues to do with the emergence of a new political economy of higher education (Robertson 1998), the development of what has been called 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie 1997), associated with new (transnational) educational markets and new corporate forms of academic management. And, at the most fundamental level, there are the more philosophical and theoretical issues, associated with a shift in the paradigm of knowledge (Gibbons *et al.* 1994; Delanty 2001), which manifest in the emergence of a new ideology, or even mythology, of information and the information society (Garnham 2000; Webster 2002). The contributors to this book range across all these different dimensions of academic and intellectual change.

The issues that are being raised in discussions of the virtual university are of the utmost importance. Ronald Barnett puts it dramatically in his announcement that 'the Western university is dead'. 'We have lost any clear sense as to what a university is for in the modern age', he continues. 'We need a new vocabulary and a new sense of purpose. We have to reconstruct the university if it is to match the challenges before it' (Barnett 1997: 1). It might seem as if these challenges, and the invention of a new vocabulary and sense of purpose, are matters for educational theorists and policy-makers—for specialists in higher education. We believe that the challenges are of much greater significance, and that they must be of concern to a much broader intellectual constituency, across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. For what is at issue is the future of intellectual life and culture, no less.

THE UNIVERSITY, THE NATION-STATE, AND CULTURE

We should be more specific about what it is that is being challenged by contemporary developments. What is in crisis is, in fact, the university as a national institution. A key point of reference here is the work of Bill Readings (1996), which somewhat echoes Ronald Barnett's sense of an ending, but which makes apparent that, if the university is now a 'ruined institution', it is the national model of the university that is in ruins. What Readings demonstrates is how the modern university developed as an adjunct of the modern state, and was instrumental especially in that state's project of national cultural integration. And what he argues is that, in the context of contemporary developments associated with

globalization, the relation between nation-state, national culture, and higher education is breaking down.

> The nation-state and the modern notion of culture arose together, and they are, I argue, ceasing to be essential to an increasingly transnational global economy. This shift has major implications for the University, which has historically been the primary institution of national culture in the modern nation-state (Readings 1996: 12).

Like a number of other public institutions, the university has ceased to be '[a] privileged site of investment of popular will' (Readings 1996: 14)—by which is meant national will. Its status has shifted from that of ideological apparatus of the nation-state to being a relatively independent bureaucratic system. The era of the 'university of culture' is thus giving way to that of what Readings calls the 'university of excellence', alias the 'technological university' or the 'corporate university'.

The modern university was, then, a historically specific agency, concerned with the reproduction of national knowledge and national culture. And it developed into a particular kind of national agency, shaped through the transmutation of classical and medieval scholarly principles into the codes and practices of nineteenth-century professionalism. This liberal model of the university was an elite or expert institution—in its commitment to the nationalization of culture and knowledge, it was pre-eminently concerned with high or official culture. Whatever its national pretensions, it could also regard itself as a defender of higher, civilizational values—in Newman's resonant phrase, it was 'a place of teaching universal knowledge'. As with other nineteenth-century professions, academic institutions were self-regulating—the principle of academic freedom was one of professional autonomy. The integrity of the profession was underpinned by a particular ethic of academic responsibility, and by the 'gentlemanly' ideal of collegiality. And this ethic was further sustained by the principle of co-location—Newman's idea of the university was to do with a *place* for teaching universal knowledge. As Krishan Kumar (1997: 29) puts it, 'universities bring people together'. They have been about 'attendance and participation in a certain sort of social and cultural life'. In summary, we may say that the modern university was organized around a particular culture and ethos of academic community.

It is this particular culture and ethos of what we might call the national-liberal university that is now in crisis. And we may say that there have been two prevailing kinds of response to this perceived crisis, each of them, we think, problematical. The first—it is the minority perspective—is that of cultural critics—amongst whom we would include the neo-conservative Allan Bloom (1987), but also Bill Readings himself—who are primarily concerned with what has gone wrong with the 'university of culture' (to use Readings' term). We can agree with much of what Readings says about the crisis of the national university, but we think that Dominick LaCapra identifies an important weakness in his

narrative. Readings is, he argues,

> close to the neo-conservatives in relying on an abstract intellectual history to elaborate his big picture based on a contrast between past and present. Indeed Readings's very understanding of institutions is largely conceptual rather than oriented to institutions as historically variable sets of practices relating groups of people . . . Readings's big picture fits into conventional oppositions between a past-we-have-lost (for good or ill) and a present-we-find problematic—a picture that may be too simplistic to do the critical work Readings wants it to do (LaCapra 1998: 38–9).

Readings' conceptual—and as such unsociological—historiography produces a conventional history of decline and fall. The second response to the crisis of the national-liberal university—which has by now become the hegemonic response—is associated with the idea of educational technological revolution and the virtual university project. It is an approach that has little concern for historical reality or nuance—if Readings' thinking tends to be abstract and conceptual, then we may say that this approach presents us with a crude mythology of the liberal university. What is painted is generally a caricature of the academy as a solipsistic, unworldly, and irrelevant institution. Thus, when Majid Tehranian (1996: 443) tells us that 'universities can no longer pretend to be the ivory towers of yesterday', he is mobilizing a familiar and potent stereotype—one that is familiar to us all—to discredit everything that universities have stood for until now. Here, too, the big picture is based on a contrast between past and present—but this time it is a contrast between a past-we-must-lose and a present/future-we-find-'progressive'. Desecration of the image of the bad ivory tower of the past is rhetorically translated into affirmation and vindication of the corporate, technological, or virtual university of the future.

What we are offered, then, in each of these responses to the crisis of the university, is a contrast between two successive epochs in the history of higher education (in one case good turns into bad, and, in the other, bad into good). The point, in each case, is to bring out the differences between the liberal-national model and the virtual-global model of the university. As is always the case with such epochal schemes of historical development, the internal coherence of each epoch is overstated, and the contrast between epochs consequently overdrawn. In order to more adequately address what is actually happening in higher education now, it seems to us that we need to find an alternative way to think about the nature of historical change. And what we suggest, in place of the metaphor of passage between epochs or eras, is a geological style of metaphor, in which we can think of change in terms of the accumulation or accretion of new layers of complexity over what already exists from the past. The virtual-global university might then be seen in terms of new (transnational) ideas and initiatives layered over (rather than displacing) already existing strata of (national) educational discourses, practices, and institutions. This shift of frame works against the false polarization of past and present, making it easier, we think, to develop a more sociologically grounded narrative of change in higher education—one

that is aware of continuities, as well as transformations, and that acknowledges the complexities, conflicts, and contradictions that must necessarily exist in any real-world institution.

The first imperative is to be aware that the liberal-national university has not been what it seems to be in its 'ivory tower' caricature. This image—which combines sentiments of both nostalgia and resentment—should not be confused with the experience and reality of most higher education institutions. Nor have actual universities corresponded with Readings' ideal historical image of 'the university of culture' (as Desmond Morton (1997) puts it, 'the university, is theory, whilst universities are facts'). Let us consider some important areas in which university culture has been a great deal more complex than contemporary discussions of the virtual university would lead us to believe:

1. The liberal university is characterized as elitist, in terms of both access and the construction of the curriculum. This has, of course, clearly been a powerful dynamic in the idea of the university, and we must recognize that elitist agendas and interests are still deeply entrenched (in Britain, for example, Oxbridge continues to be a preserve largely of the rich and privileged (Adonis and Pollard 1997)). But at the same time, we should acknowledge that—partly as a consequence of economic forces, and partly as a response to campaign after campaign for equality in higher education—there has been constant pressure for democratization. The push for mass education has forced universities to expand (Scott 1995)—though to different degrees in different countries—helping bring about significant decline in what A.H. Halsey (1992) has called 'donnish dominion', as a consequence. The same pressures have been progressively exerted on the curriculum—culture wars on the national intellectual patrimony—opening up new fields of study and new perspectives (women's studies, cultural studies, postmodernism, post-colonialism, etc. (Nussbaum 1997)).
2. Another issue concerns the collegial model as the basis for ordering university life and culture—it is a model that seems to epitomize the university's lack of connection to, and relevance for, the 'real world'. Two points should be made here. The first is that this principle of self-regulation was held in common with other professional domains that came into existence in the nineteenth century, and was intended to ensure internal probity and prevent external interference or corruption. As David Pan (1998: 70) puts it, with regard to the particular context of universities: 'Because the knowledge produced at universities is held to be objective and universal, academics claim to provide for society a moral centre protected from the prejudices of sectarian religious and political interests as well as from instrumentalization by a technocratic government and a capitalist economy.' If this principle has now become much more difficult to maintain, this does not mean that it has ceased to be an important issue. The second point is that many universities have also acknowledged the need to adopt a more managerial

approach—this is a move that has appeared necessary in the face of the growing scale and complexity of higher education institutions. As Ronald Barnett (1997: 7) observes, 'the fundamental clash in the modern university is that between instrumental reason and reason guided by a collaborative search for the better argument; crudely, we might say, between managerialism and collegiality'—let us note that this clash is only possible because managerialism has been allowed into the university system.

3. We have already referred to Bill Readings' argument that the university of culture was fundamentally a servant of the nation-state and the national culture. This, it seems to us, is a crucial point. But we should also recognize that academics and intellectuals (at their best) have always aspired to produce knowledge that transcended local and particular interests. For those with more progressive aspirations, that has been a crucial aspect of their personal and professional self-image. We should recall that, according to Newman's (Catholic) principles, universities deal in universal knowledge. Bryan Turner (1998: 73) refers to a historical 'tension between national and cosmopolitan standards', arguing that 'the University has been, since its medieval foundations, fractured around a contradiction between nationalistic particularity and a commitment to more universalistic standards'. We need to be cautious in our claims for what these universal aspirations have achieved. David Pan (1998: 87) reminds us that there have, in fact, been connections between the idea of universal knowledge and the interests of Western nations ('the very idea of knowledge as secular and value-free brings with it a colonizing perspective which seeks to eradicate all other cultures by claiming that they are sectarian and prejudicial rather than neutral and objective'). We should not underestimate the gravity field of the nation-state and the national imaginary. But, at the same time, we have to take account of counter-national imaginations—forms of cosmopolitan culture and thinking that, in the context of globalization, have seemed to be gathering further momentum.
4. Through its 'ivory tower' image, the university is associated with the idea of liberal knowledge—knowledge as an end in itself. What we also have to take into account is the extent to which universities also made accommodation for applied or instrumental knowledge. In Britain, where universities have had a particular reputation for being shy of the 'real world', the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a significant expansion in scientific and technological education and research. The establishment of universities in industrial regions of Britain—Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester—was in large part a resistance to the Oxbridge model, as well as an endeavour to service the growing industrial need for engineers, chemists, physicists, and so on (Sanderson 1972). What we have to recognize, then, is that there has been a long history of compromise between liberal and utilitarian models of knowledge (Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993). And, as Gerard Delanty (1998) makes clear, the nature of this compromise has varied in different national

> contexts. In France, there is a long tradition of technocratic education, associated particularly with the *grandes écoles*, whilst in Germany there has been a stronger emphasis on culture (*Bildung*). The point, again, is that the culture of universities has in reality been far more complex than the stereotype of the 'ivory tower' would have us believe. The development of applied knowledge and research in the service of corporate interests has long been an integral aspect of higher education. As an essentially national institution, the university has been able to respond to both the 'spiritual' needs of the *Kulturnation* and the more pragmatic and competitive aspirations of the nation-state (Delanty 1998: 7–11).

What we are drawing attention to here is the actual complexity and diversity of universities as institutions. Universities have been remarkably adaptable, demonstrating the capacity to continuously re-invent themselves, whilst apparently continuing to pursue their fundamental mission and sustaining their core values. Reflecting on the *raison d'être* of the university in 1980, Lord Robbins looked comfortably back to Newman's *The Idea of the University*. 'I am not out of sympathy with the value which Newman attaches to knowledge as such,' he noted, '—quite the contrary so far as I am personally concerned. But I find entirely unworldly and unhistorical the idea of a university devoted entirely to such ends, regardless of training for subsequent careers or the utility which comes from knowledge' (Robbins 1980: 7). He was quite at ease with the world of 'utility', the world of 'the practical knowledge which has raised the standard of living of the majority of the western world from the state of nature, where life is poor, precarious and short' (Robbins 1980: 8). Universities are institutions where 'cultivation of scholarships and of scientific speculation (should be) carried on side by side' (Robbins 1980: 11). The idea of the university here is, in fact, compatible with both liberal ideals and instrumental reason. And the key point that we want to make here is that this accommodation was made possible by the national context in which the issues were framed. Liberal and instrumental models both made sense in terms of an agenda determined by the economic and cultural objectives of nation-states—within a national project and agenda for higher education. The function of national universities was to hold these two models together, in productive tension.

But now, just two decades on from Robbins' musings, this compromise formation seems a far more difficult thing to sustain . . .

A DIFFERENT KIND OF INSTITUTION: GLOBAL–CORPORATE–VIRTUAL

So we return to Bill Readings and his idea of the university as a ruined national institution. As Readings (1996: 3) says, the university now seems to be becoming 'a different kind of institution, one that is no longer linked to the destiny

of the nation-state by virtue of its role as producer, protector, and inculcator of an idea of national culture'. Universities have been changing significantly as a consequence of developments associated with globalization, and the complex implications of these developments for nation-states and national cultures. They are developments that are increasingly taking universities (like other public services) into the marketplace, and into a marketplace that is becoming increasingly transnational or global. At the same time, the marketplace has been entering into universities, compelling them to adopt a more corporate ethos and a new managerial approach to their business (like other corporate actors, they are now expected to cultivate new kinds of competitive 'flexibility'). Along with these changes, we are seeing new kinds of 'product' (i.e. changing curricula), new styles of 'delivery' (with new ICTs expected to play a key role), and a new kind of relation to what have now become 'consumers' of higher education. Back in 1970—a decade before Lord Robbins' satisfied reflections—there were early intimations of these developments from a thinker who was very dissatisfied with what was happening, even then, in higher education. E.P. Thompson was then attacking Warwick University as the 'business university', arguing that it had established a 'symbiotic relationship with the aims and ethos of industrial capitalism, but built within a shell of public money and public legitimation' (Thompson 1970*a*: 301, 307; see also Thompson 1970*b*). Even Thompson could surely never have anticipated the rate at which the corporate takeover of higher education would progress over the next thirty years (see Monbiot 2000; Press and Washburn 2000).

In recent years, the term 'virtual university'—which seems especially able to evoke both the global and technological aspects of change—has been used with increased frequency to characterize the 'new' higher education. It is a term that, in fact, covers a variety of developments. There are new showcase distance-learning institutions like the University of Phoenix and Jones International University. The latter self-consciously regards itself as operationalizing 'a new model for higher education':

> JIU learned that adult learners desired the following: flexibility and convenience to overcome time and distance challenges, high quality, relevant education, and value for their money. The research resulted in the development of a virtual campus, using the asynchronous attributes of the internet and the WWW. 'Anytime and anywhere' aspects of online learning provide a venue for a flexible and convenient learning environment (Pease 2000: 627).

(For those who invest in JIU, the ultimate reward is a web-cast Cybergraduation.) At the other end of the spectrum, the concept of the 'virtual university' is invoked to refer to the complex range of changes affecting already established universities. In this context, the concern is with how new practices can be reconciled with an already existing institutional structure and ethos (for the 'old' model of the university cannot simply be abolished by fiat). Our point, then, is that the idea of the 'virtual university' encompasses a diverse range of initiatives and developments in higher education. And (as with the liberal university) we must consider it, not

in terms of its ideal type (or self-mythologization), but sociologically—addressing the realities, that is to say, of 'actually existing' universities in transition.

If conceptions of the virtual university prioritize two key dynamics—globalization and technological innovation—then we would highlight developments in three closely connected domains which signal important changes taking place in higher education. These, from which we take the subtitle of this book, are *knowledge, markets*, and *management*.

Knowledge In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of transformations in the domain of knowledge—an awareness that the quantity of knowledge has grown explosively, and that new dynamics have come to regulate the production of knowledge. There are two prevailing logics at work, we would suggest. First, there is the growing significance of the logic of performativity, which has increasingly come to undermine the Enlightenment justification of knowledge in terms of the pursuit of 'truth' (Lyotard 1984). In the sciences, it is clearly the case that discovery-led or 'pure' research has been increasingly rivalled by applied research, which has been more concerned with the pursuit of patents and profitable solutions to problems. But it is more generally the case that the imperative of performativity has now become primary definer of knowledge. New subjects—Business and Management Studies, Marketing and Information Science (Bolton 2001)—have come to gain a hold inside the institutions of higher education on the basis of satisfying productive and utilitarian needs. These developments have also been associated with challenges to the university from without (Bauman 1987). It is now impossible to ignore the contribution to knowledge production from private corporations, media organizations, and dedicated think tanks (*Economist*, 1997). A significant consequence of it is that the university has been increasingly losing its position as the privileged locus of authoritative knowledge.

The second logic at work in the transformation of knowledge has been that of globalization. Globalization has been associated with what Bill Readings (1996) identifies as the 'dereferentialization' of knowledge. What he is referring to is knowledge that is de-linked from specific and particular contexts, that is to say from the contexts of the national culture. In the context of new academic knowledge, what are valued are knowledge and curricula that will 'travel'—ones that will be bought and consumed in as many places in the world as possible. What also become particularly significant in a 'globalizing' world are what Robert Reich calls 'symbolic analysts', knowledge workers whose prime skills are the capacity for abstraction, system thinking, experimentation and collaboration, all marshalled to 'solve, identify, and broker problems' (Reich 1991: 178). In this context, it is not surprising that universities have come to put an increasing emphasis on the promotion of 'transferable skills' (skills without content). The concern with 'competencies'—such as 'analytical abilities', 'problem solving', and 'communication skills'—is also clearly about generalized forms of knowledge and expertise—knowledge that is disentangled from local (i.e. national) contexts.

Markets These changes in the domain of knowledge are closely connected with a heightened concern for markets, involving the commodification or 'marketization' of teaching and research activities in universities (Brown and Lauder 2001). This has been apparent in a variety of developments, for example, the shift towards the idea of the student as consumer, the adoption of corporate accounting and management systems, or the trend towards individuated salaries and contracts for faculty. One key issue clearly concerns the increased corporate presence on the campus (in sponsored buildings, in support for dedicated research, and so on). The spread of what has been called the 'corporate classroom', which has been estimated now to account for over 50 per cent of spending on higher education (*Economist*, 28 October 1995), has clearly had a marked influence on the form and content of university activities. But what has been just as significant as these connections with industry—and in fact a result of them—has been adoption by universities themselves of a corporate-style mentality and approach to their 'business'. The logic of the market is evident in the new discourses of higher education, where talk of 'customers', 'products', 'growth', 'investment', and 'human capital' is now quite routine. What we are also seeing as a consequence of this increasingly entrepreneurial orientation is the take off of higher educational consortia and alliances, intended to ensure a competitive position in what are regarded (by the leading institutions, at least) as a global educational market. Here the 'business of borderless education' (CVCP/HEFCE 2000) is increasingly germane to the university's future, as both opportunity and threat. In this context, it is scarcely surprising that universities are also paying close attention to their 'brand' image, which is vigorously promoted and protected to maximize advantage in competition in relation to other institutions. Universities have entered the marketplace, and as a consequence, the marketplace has entered the soul of the university.

Management New styles of management and a new 'business-like' ethos have accompanied these changing economic arrangements. In the context of their new market orientation, universities have tended to distance themselves from the older style of collegial ethos, and have adopted a new, corporate-style managerial approach. The old-style Principal has now given way to the CEO, working with a 'central management team', according to a 'business plan', and with clearly established 'targets' and 'performance criteria'. Legitimation of these shifts has come from the emergence of what Michael Power (1997) has termed the 'audit society', a term which captures a tendency towards making universities (along with other institutions) into more 'transparent' and 'accountable' organizations (Strathern 2000). This new managerial and audit culture has been facilitated by the way in which the logic of globalization has been undermining the national university frame (Newby 1999). Globalization has disrupted the relative stability of the old order, and introduced a new unpredictability into the environment and activities of higher education institutions. The accelerated mobilities of knowledge, the relative ease of movement of academics and students, the heightened competitive circumstances of universities in competition,

have all had destabilizing consequences. And it is precisely this uncertainty that has served to boost the new managerial culture. The remit of the new managers in higher education is to plan for uncertainty (Thorne 1999)—to make the university 'flexible', adaptable, and capable of responding quickly to the shifting circumstances of global competition.

These, then, are the key contexts of change—change with respect to knowledge, markets, and management strategies—that are of significance in the contemporary transformations of higher education. Out of, and in response to, these diverse contexts there have been various efforts to address both philosophical and policy issues relating to new developments in higher education. These have ranged from pleas for the defence of liberal educational values, via advocacy of virtual technologies and distance learning, to eager endorsement of the business of borderless education. For the most part, however, we would say that the debate on the future of the university has taken place within relatively narrow educational circles. The present volume has been produced from a conviction that the discussion now needs to be opened up to a much more wide-ranging constituency, for it poses important and urgent questions for the future of intellectual and cultural life more generally.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

We have organized the present volume into three parts. Part 1 introduces the broader dynamics that are now challenging the coherence of the national university. Without an appreciation of these contemporary features and historical trends (Chs 2 and 3), as well as alertness to the conditioning effects of political economic processes (Ch. 4), it is impossible to adequately comprehend current changes in higher education. In Part 2, our contributors take up case studies and policy issues, and make clear the actual complexities and unevenness of changes that are taking place in higher education now. Each of the chapters takes up a different issue, and all are concerned to resist simplistic presumptions. Whether it is in assessing the introduction of management information systems (Ch. 5), looking at students' experiences of virtual education (Ch. 6), examining new management formations (Ch. 7), exploring the recent history of MBA degrees (Ch. 8), or gauging conflicts between commodification tendencies and more communal values (Chs 9–10), these chapters each warn of the perils of assuming that ICTs, or distance-learning developments more generally, automatically announce progress, or even change. What is conveyed is the sense that on-the-ground developments are complex and shifting. In Part 3, we return to more general concerns, with our contributors exploring broader prospects and possibilities for higher education. Chapters 11–14, as well as our Afterword, explore possible future scenarios, considering the new economic and technological forces now shaping the strategies of higher education institutions, as well as the question of how to adequately respond to these dynamics.

Part I: The New Global Context

John Urry (Ch. 2) highlights the need to situate developments in higher education within wider contexts of change, drawing attention to the importance of emerging transnational 'scapes' and 'flows' for the culture of higher education. At the outset of the book, he reminds us that developments associated with the 'virtual university' have to be situated in this context of processes of globalization, that is to say, that the virtual university is about a great deal more than the impact of new technologies on higher education. Gerard Delanty (Ch. 3) complements Urry's contemporary analysis, providing a historical overview of the development of higher education to the present—from the Enlightment-oriented university, via the civic-liberal university of the nineteenth century and the mass university of the late twentieth century. This development should not be seen in terms of a straightforward succession of stages. What is clear is that elements of earlier formations continue to persist, and to be fought over, in the university. What we have, then, as we shift into the new circumstances and challenges of what Delanty acknowledges as the virtual university, is the co-presence of both residual and innovative elements, with all the attendant tensions and contradictions that follow from this.

Masao Miyoshi (Ch. 4) then provides a review of the growing corporate and global character of higher education, addressing an issue to which all considerations of higher education must surely pay heed now. This is a development in which the Humanities (a traditional home of critical and imaginative thought) become marginalized, as they lack potential for profit. In Miyoshi's view, higher education is becoming increasingly subordinated to corporate goals and values—dependent on commercial sponsorship, concerned with the protection of intellectual property, and willing to adapt teaching and research agendas in line with the dictates of market forces.

Part II: Practices and Policies

The chapters in Part II are substantive and empirically informed accounts of recent changes in higher education, each in this own way underlining the need for caution and nuance when it comes to analysing complex developments on the ground. James Cornford and Neil Pollock (Ch. 5) warn of the dangers of assuming that it is ICTs alone that will take the university into a virtual era. Their contribution insists that such linear thinking is a misrepresentation of what is actually taking place in higher education institutions. In the context of the introduction of a university management information system, they note that the condition for effective operation of this new system of accountancy and management is that established university practices—which have been diverse, *ad hoc*, and often only implicit—must be brought into the domain of the new system's rules and procedures. This requires that the administrative and management practices across

the university become formalized and standardized, and thereby synchronized and coordinated. As such, virtuality may not so much introduce new procedures as standardize and formalize what went on before.

When we conceive of the development of virtuality in the university, we also need to appreciate that applications of ICT are introduced across a variegated terrain where there is much diversity of response and much to play for. Here Charles Crook's (Ch. 6) criticisms of orthodox (and narrow) models of learning that inform the approaches of virtual university enthusiasts is especially apposite. Crook draws on the perspectives of 'cultural psychology', drawing attention to the significance of student participation and location in a broad learning environment—one that includes such matters as time-tabling arrangements, the architecture of buildings, and friendship networks among students. This offers a far more complex and subtle understanding of virtual education than one which assumes that a combination of technology and software are the sum of web-based teaching and learning.

Rosemary Deem and Mike Reed (Ch. 7) address the 'new managerialism' in higher education, a phenomenon that we have suggested is a key feature of the changing university. The picture that Deem and Reed draw is one in which there is considerable confusion and tension between collegial pressures and new demands placed on heads of department who are required to operationalize changed protocols. Developments are thus paradoxical, noticeably with regard to new technologies. On the one hand, ICTs encourage audit and accountability, and are thereby powerful tools in the service of more hierarchically oriented managers. On the other hand, new technologies make management practices more transparent than before, a development that may encourage openness and participation. Again then, while the trend is towards more corporate, hierarchical, and directive management in higher education, on-the-ground implementation is more complex and contradictory—with possibilities for the negotiation of alternative practices.

Yiannis Gabriel and Andrew Sturdy (Ch. 8) then offer a sceptical interpretation of the global expansion of Master in Business Administration (MBA) programmes. It is often argued that MBA programmes through distance learning can serve to benefit less privileged parts of the world. Gabriel and Sturdy reject such idealism, arguing that MBA programmes offered by universities in metropolitan centres are in fact about commercial advantage and opportunity—in their view, what is happening is something comparable to the marketing of motor cars. Here we have a vivid illustration of the priority of market principles over educational ideals (whatever is said in the sales pitch, the priority is selling).

In their reflection on policy directions in higher education, Lee Benson and Ira Harkavy (Ch. 9) recognize the scale and significance of market pressures. However, they also believe that the present time also presents opportunities for democratization and for opening up the university to hitherto excluded groups, as well as for reforming curriculum. New technologies can be harnessed, they suggest, for a radical and reforming agenda in higher education. They challenge

readers to consider what interventions may be made in higher education, and what goals and values are most desirable.

Philip Agre (Ch. 10) addresses associated conflicts revolving round the forces of community and commodification, those of the collegium and the market. Agre is at once less enthusiastic about community (it can easily be exclusive and exclusionary) and less scathing as regards commodification (an emphasis on economic return can encourage efficiency in higher education). In his view, the university must change with the spread of digitization, and it will need to find ways to manage the inevitable tensions that surround the community and commodity constituents of higher education. In line with the argument of Benson and Harkavy, the argument is again made that developments in higher education are open to direction by human decisions. There is no preordained path to the virtual university.

Part III: Prospects and Possibilities

Part III returns to broader issues. Throughout this book, the importance of considering virtual education within wider contexts leads our contributors to reject the popular discourse that suggests that the virtual university will be introduced by ICTs alone. Les Levidow (Ch. 11) also argues in these terms. To be sure, he is sensitive to technological innovation, but Levidow keeps his eye on the major political economic factors shaping the higher education environment. Let no one be deceived: it is to the growing forces of commercialism, competition, and corporate organization to which those concerned with higher education will have to attend.

Tim Luke (Ch. 12), while acutely aware of the commercial agenda that now drives higher education, sees possibilities in the new technology for improved pedagogy and more effective learning. Luke refuses to take an excessively hardline anti-commercial position, since that, he believes, means defending the indefensible—the old-fashioned 'sovereignty of professors', minority access, and demonstrably inadequate systems of teaching and learning. What Luke underscores is that there is no way forward for higher education in trying to defend uncritically what has gone before. Nostalgia may have a place in resisting unpalatable developments, but it cannot provide an alternative.

David Noble (Ch. 13) compares recent developments in distance learning with the experience of the growth of correspondence courses in the inter-War years, discovering that much the same rhetoric we hear with respect to the virtual university was current in the 1930s. This is a salutary message to those who announce the new and insist that we must adapt to its imperatives. Historical analysis enables us to contextualize today's realities, and to resist the seductions of a discourse of virtual technological revolution.

Martin Trow (Ch. 14) contends that we need to acknowledge that the introduction of ICTs is inflected by substantive decisions and relationships. However, this

does not mean that their effects may be straightforwardly foreseen from established patterns. As Trow argues, one of the most important features of the take-up of ICTs is that their consequences are difficult to predict and sure to be mixed, precisely because so many variables are in play. This is not to suggest that we shrug our shoulders and mutter that we do not know what is happening around us. It is, rather, to say that we must engage in the exercise of serious research and thought.

These, then, are the various contributions to *The Virtual University*? Certain themes run throughout—the refusal of a narrow focus on higher education alone; a rejection of the kind of approaches that put an excessive emphasis on ICTs; caution about the logic of the corporate agenda and the 'business of borderless education'; and an insistence that there must be possibilities for intervention and re-direction of the higher education agenda. It is in this spirit that the editors offer an Afterword that sets out our own hopes and fears for the virtual university. Insisting that nostalgia for national-liberal university is misplaced, and even disabling, we want to put high on the agenda the issue of globalization—the cultural threats and possibilities in higher education institutions that are now permeated by global and transnational knowledges and cultures. Our concern, at the end of this volume, is with the possibilities for the global-cosmopolitan university.

REFERENCES

Adonis, A. and Pollard, S. (1997) *A Class Act: The Myth of Britain's Classless Society*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Barnett, R. (1997) *Realizing the University*. London: Institute of Education.

Bauman, Z. (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: Modernity, Postmodernity and the Intellectuals*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bloom, A. (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Bolton, A. (2001) 'The cuckoo in the nest? The business school in a university', in D. Warner and D. Palfreyman (eds) *The State in UK Higher Education: Managing Change and Diversity*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press, pp. 127–37.

Brown, P. and Lauder, H. (2001) *Capitalism and Social Progress: The Future of Society in a Global Economy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

CVCP/HEFCE (2000) *The Business of Borderless Education: UK Perspectives*. London: CVCP/HEFCE.

Delanty, G. (1998) 'The idea of the university in the global era: from knowledge as an end to the end of knowledge?', *Social Epistemology*, **12**(1): 3–25.

—— (2001) *Challenging Knowledge: The University in the Knowledge Society*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.

Economist (1997) 'Survey: Universities', 4 October.

Garnham, N. (2000) '"Information society" as theory or ideology: a critical perspective on technology, education and employment in the information age', *Information, Communication and Society*, **3**(2): 139–52.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzmann, S., Scott, P., Trow, M. (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge*. London: Sage.

Halsey, A. H. (1992) *Decline of Donnish Dominion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Information, Communication and Society (2000) 'New Media in Higher Education and Learning', Special Issue, **3**(4).

Kumar, K. (1997) 'The need for place', in A. Smith and F. Webster (eds), *The Postmodern University? Contested Visions of Higher Education in Society*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press, pp. 27–35.

LaCapra, D. (1998) 'The university in ruins?', *Critical Inquiry*, **25**(1): 32–55.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Monbiot, G. (2000) *The Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*. London: Macmillan.

Morton, D. (1997) '"The university" is theory: universities are facts', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, **66**(4): 593–600.

Newby, H. (1999) *Higher Education in the 21st century: Some Possible Futures*. London: Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom.

Nussbaum, M. (1997) *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pan, D. (1998) 'The crisis of the humanities and the end of the university', *Telos*, **111**: 69–106.

Pease, P. (2000) 'The virtual university: Jones International University, Ltd.', *Information, Communication and Society*, **4**(3): 627–8.

Power, M. (1997) *The Audit Society: The Rituals of Verification*. Oxford University Press.

Press, E. and Washburn, J. (2000) 'The kept university', *Atlantic Monthly*, in four parts, available from www.theatlantic.com/egi-bin/o/issues/2000/03/press/htm

Readings, B. (1996) *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reich, R. (1991) *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st century Capitalism*. New York: Vintage.

Robbins, L. (Lord) (1980) *Higher Education Revisited*. London: Macmillan.

Robertson, D. (1998) 'The emerging political economy of education', *Studies in Higher Education*, **23**(2): 221–8.

Rothblatt, S. and Wittrock, B. (eds) (1993) *The European and American University since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanderson, M. (1972) *The Universities and British Industry, 1850–1970*. London: Routledge.

Scott, P. (1995) *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.

Slaughter, S. and Leslie, L.L. (1997) *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Strathern, M. (ed.) (2000) *Audit Cultures—Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. London: Routledge.

Tehranian, M. (1996) 'The end of university?', *The Information Society*, **12**: 441–7.

Thompson, E. P. (1970*a*) 'The business university', *New Society*, 19 February: 301–7.

Thompson, E. P. (1970*b*) *Warwick University Ltd.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Thorne, M. (ed.) (1999) *Universities in the Future*. London: Office of Science and Technology.
Turner, B. S. (1998) 'Universities, élites and the nation-state: a reply to Delanty', *Social Epistemology*, **12**(1): 73–7.
Webster, F. (2002) *Theories of the Information Society*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.