



PALGRAVE STUDIES ON GLOBAL POLICY AND
CRITICAL FUTURES IN EDUCATION

Dark Academe

Capitalism, Theory, and the Death Drive
in Higher Education

Jeffrey R. Di Leo

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Palgrave Studies on Global Policy and Critical
Futures in Education

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FOREWORD

By rotting, the university can still do a lot of damage (rotting is a symbolic mechanism—not political but symbolic, therefore subversive for us). But for this to be the case it is necessary to start with this very rotting, and not to dream of resurrection. It is necessary to transform this rotting into a violent process, into violent death, through mockery and defiance, through a multiplied simulation that would offer the ritual of the death of the university as a model of decomposition to the whole of society, a contagious model of the disaffection of a whole social structure, where death would finally make its ravages, which the strike tries desperately to avert, in complicity with the system, but succeeds, on top of it all, only in transforming the university into a slow death, a delay that is not even the possible site of a subversion, of an offensive reversion.

—Jean Baudrillard, “The Spiraling Cadaver” (1981)¹

NOTE

1. Jean Baudrillard, “The Spiraling Cadaver [1981],” in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 150–151.

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And finally, I would like to thank my wife, Nina, for her unfailing encouragement, support, and patience.

Praise for *Dark Academe*

“It has become difficult to separate the attack on higher education from a frontal attack on democracy itself. Jeffrey Di Leo takes up this theme with unparalleled insight while providing a broad and brilliant context and theoretical framework for understanding and addressing it. And he does so with a prose that is lyrical, poetic, and engagingly disarming. *Dark Academe* is a brilliant and urgent book that could not appear at a more important time in our history. Every educator, student, cultural worker, and anyone concerned about the fate of the academy in dark times should read this book.”

—Henry A. Giroux, *Professor for Scholarship in the Public Interest and Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy*,
McMaster University (Canada)

“With fierce honesty, and making use of the latest conceptual tools, such as infra-structure analysis, *Dark Academe* carves out a new area for critique, political and social action, and acute self-reflection. Written in an accessible, crisp, and moving style, Di Leo’s study is ground-breaking and serious, inescapable for all who would seek to survive ‘the death of the university’ (the title of the book’s final chapter) to access a new beginning for critical thinking in the human species.”

—Daniel T. O’Hara, *Professor of English and Mellon Professor of Humanities*,
Temple University (USA)

“‘Be afraid, be very afraid.’ Jeffrey R. Di Leo, one of the keenest observers of the contemporary university, takes us on a rollicking dystopian ride in *Dark Academe* from Protagoras to Popper to Baudrillard and Berlant. Few people can equal Di Leo in his theoretical range, but he also writes from the perspective not of the cosseted Ivy League but of those who fight in the trenches of our public universities, where the vast majority of American students learn and their professors teach. For Di Leo, the neoliberal academy is a dark and paranoid place, and our fears are not misplaced, but they can be enlightening.”

—Paul Allen Miller, *Carolina Distinguished Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature*, *University of South Carolina (USA)*, and
Distinguished Guest Professor of English,
Ewha Woman’s University (Korea)

“In an uncompromising account of the ideological forces strangling higher education, Jeffrey Di Leo names the enemies of academia with clarity and fervor. Living in dark times, with racist and fascists horizons proliferating, and nostalgic yearnings for humanist times that never were, Di Leo turns to theory and critique’s most generative tools to unsettle the grounds of the neoliberal academy. In this bold defense of democratic education and critical citizenship, Di Leo not only marshals literary and cultural theory as a counter to the life-draining forces of dark academe, he also reenergizes theory, so often maligned from within and without academia, infusing it with a new purpose. *Dark Academe* is an unabashed testimony to theory’s resilience and indispensability.”

—Zahi Zalloua, *Cushing Eells Professor of Philosophy and Literature, Whitman College (USA)*

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
	<i>Dark Fashion</i>	3
	<i>The Dark Ages of Academe</i>	5
	<i>Dark Control</i>	10
	<i>Dark Humanities</i>	11
	<i>The Measure Is Man</i>	13
	<i>Humanism and Antihumanism</i>	16
	<i>Man Is Not the Measure</i>	17
	<i>Conclusion</i>	21
2	Dark Infrastructure	29
	<i>The Lifeworld of Structure</i>	31
	<i>Infrastructure, Failure, and Neoliberal Academe</i>	35
	<i>Theory in Dark Times</i>	40
	<i>Conclusion</i>	44
3	Are All Professors Paranoid?	47
	<i>The Scope of Paranoia in Higher Education</i>	49
	<i>Critical Paranoia</i>	55
	<i>Conclusion</i>	60

4	Affective Education	67
	<i>Pandemic as a Strong Theory of Academe</i>	71
	<i>Labor as a Strong Theory of Academe</i>	75
	<i>Conclusion</i>	80
5	Academic Racism	87
	<i>Race, Tenure, and Academe</i>	89
	<i>Race, Critique, and the Fear of Theory</i>	92
	<i>Critical Race Theorists as Bare Life</i>	96
	<i>Neoliberal Sell-Outs</i>	98
	<i>Conclusion</i>	100
6	An Epistemology of Ignorance	107
	<i>A Dangerous Creed</i>	109
	<i>On False Epistemology</i>	113
	<i>The Secularization of a Religious Superstition</i>	119
	<i>Antitheory and the Open Society</i>	123
	<i>Conclusion</i>	126
7	Ugly Theory	133
	<i>Stealing Theory</i>	134
	<i>Intersectional Identity Politics</i>	136
	<i>Racist Identity Politics</i>	142
	<i>The Theory Toolbox</i>	144
	<i>Conclusion</i>	147
8	The Pleasure of Cynicism	153
	<i>Cynical Austerity</i>	154
	<i>Cynical Controversialism</i>	157
	<i>Cynical Hedonism</i>	163
	<i>Conclusion</i>	170
9	Let it Be Your Dread	175
	<i>Fear, Dread, and Angst</i>	177
	<i>The Dread of Neoliberalism</i>	179
	<i>Dread in the Classroom</i>	184
	<i>Conclusion</i>	188

10	The Death of the University	193
	<i>Death and Symbolic Exchange</i>	194
	<i>Birth of the Death Drive</i>	198
	<i>The Dialectics of Death</i>	200
	<i>Radicalizing Death</i>	203
	<i>Death After Capitalism</i>	207
	<i>Conclusion</i>	210
11	Coda	219
	Bibliography	227
	Index	243

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In its most basic sense, *dark academe* is simply a term that can be used to refer to higher education carried out in dark times in support of dreadful ends. In the twentieth century, for example, there was no darker period for academe than the militarization of higher education in Nazi Germany. During this period, says Professor A. Wolf in *Higher Education in Nazi Germany: Or Education for World-Conquest* (1944),

[m]ilitary instruction and indoctrination with Nazi ideas form the major portion of university education. “Every subject,” says a Nazi authority, “should be treated as applied politics”—that is to say, Nazi politics, of course. All students have to attend certain courses of lectures on military subjects and Nazi racial, socio-logical, and political theories. Moreover, all courses of lectures are impregnated with Nazi views. Like the professors and the students many subjects of study have been put into military uniforms. “Physics,” “Chemistry,” “Biology,” “Medicine,” “Hygiene,” etc. now appear as “War-Physics,” “War-Chemistry,” “War-Biology,” “War-Medicine,” “War-Hygiene,” and so on.¹

But to term this period of higher education in Germany *dark academe* does not exhaust its meaning. Nor does it imply that all variations of the term need to be associated with *world conquest*, *fascism*, and *war*. Rather, its use here in the context of higher education in Nazi Germany is merely to point out one of the more extreme and obvious connotations of the

term—and to start the process of thinking through the range of meanings associable with *dark academe*.

In the twenty-first century, or what we call *the new millennium*, it is tempting to solely identify dark academe with the dark times that neoliberalism has brought about in higher education. From the corporatization of higher education and the recalibration of academic identity to the fear associated with student debt, continuous surveillance, and obsessive managerialism, neoliberal academe has become a veritable house of horrors. And though the horrors of neoliberal academe in the twenty-first century fall short of Wolf's description of the universities of Berlin, Halle, Heidelberg, and Tübingen wherein there was "the atmosphere of military camps," and "[m]ost of the students were in uniform, [and] so where many of the teachers,"² this is little consolation to the students, faculty, and staff that are currently living—and dying—through a very dark period in the history of higher education.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the resiliency of neoliberalism in higher education. This situation has left many scrambling for ways to deal with the rising paranoia and dread associated with job insecurity, changing teaching conditions, and threats to academic freedom. Challenges to longstanding affirmative action³ and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)⁴ initiatives have given new life to racism, elitism, and homophobia in higher education. While higher education in America has not yet hit its darkest hour, many fear that it will soon be upon us. Borrowing from Wolf, *dark academe* today might be described as follows:

[F]ree-market instruction and indoctrination with neoliberal ideas form the major portion of university education. "Every subject," says a neoliberal-education authority, "should be treated as applied economics"—that is to say, neoliberal economics, of course. All students have to attend certain courses of lectures on free-market subjects and neoliberal racial, socio-logical, and political theories. Moreover, all courses of lectures are impregnated with neoliberal views. Like the professors and the students many subjects of study have been put into free-market uniforms. "Physics," "Chemistry," "Biology," "Medicine," "Hygiene," etc. now appear as "late capitalist Physics," "late capitalist Chemistry," "late capitalist Biology," "late capitalist Medicine," "late capitalist Hygiene," and so on.

In short, *dark academe* in the new millennium can be summarized by evoking its semantic and systemic parallels with the nadir of dark academe

in the previous century. To do so is a reminder that we must always strive to not allow higher education to become complicit in repeating the horrific legacies of Nazism, fascism, and totalitarianism.

DARK FASHION

While it is important to continuously think of dark academe in view of Nazi, fascist, and neoliberal higher education, none of them accurately depicts the contemporary genealogy of the term. Rather, there is another source to its use today. It is one that is located in the reading practices of a particular demographic. Specifically, Generation Z—the designation for young people who were born between 1997 and 2012.⁵ These so-called *Zoomers*, who currently number nearly 68 million in the US alone,⁶ widely have in common an extensive knowledge of one particular academy, and the life and adventures of its most celebrated student.

The academy, of course, is “Hogwarts,” and the student, who is perhaps the most well-known of the new millennium, is “Harry Potter.” J. K. Rowling, the creator of this student and his academy, has sold more than half a billion Harry Potter novels⁷—and her influence only continues to grow. However, over a decade and a half after the release of the seventh and final installment in her series—*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007)—its impact is not just measured in the sale and readership of her books worldwide.⁸ Or even in viewership of the films or the purchase of trinkets based on them. Rather, her influence now includes the generative role her work has played in *dark academe*, an aesthetic style that has cast a powerful spell over Gen-Z.⁹

While the Age of Bookstores seems like ancient history now that the rise of Amazon and ebooks have brought them to the brink of extinction, Rowling’s success was in large part achieved in the twilight years of the bricks and mortar bookstore. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, bookstores would often organize midnight parties to celebrate the release of new titles in the series. Scholastic, the publisher of the Harry Potter series, would even supply these bookstores with midnight-party event-kits complete with lightning-bolt tattoos.¹⁰ These things were only possible at a time when books were primarily sold from shelves in bookstores—and the thrill of lining up for the release of a new book was on the same par as standing in queue at midnight for the release of an album, movie, or concert tickets.

It has been said that if all the printed copies of Harry Potter books ever sold were placed end to end, they would go around the equator over 16

times. In the US alone, Book 4 in the series (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*), which was published in 2000, sold 3 million copies in the first weekend of sales; Book 6 (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*), published in 2005, sold 6.9 million copies in the first 24 hours; and Book 7, the final book in the series, published in 2007, sold 8.3 million copies on the first day of its release. The initial print run of this last title was a mind-boggling 12 million copies. Moreover, in just the US, more than 180 million copies of this children's book have been sold.¹¹ So many copies of these books were supplied to big-box bookstores that customers would often be greeted upon entry to them by a Harry Potter *book monster*: a huge stack of these books on display which was impossible to miss when one first entered the store.

In 2016 it was estimated that 37 percent of children in the US at the time had read a Harry Potter book, and that almost 50 percent of children aged 15–17 had read one.¹² Moreover, it has often been said that Harry Potter has increased literacy among children.¹³ For example, one survey of parents resulted in 85 percent of them stating that reading these books led their child to want to read more frequently, and 76 percent said that reading Harry Potter books helped them in school.¹⁴ But what studies do not show is the connection between reading Harry Potter books and the explosion today of what has come to be known as *dark academe*—an aesthetic that is often linked back to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Dark academe is huge on social media today. #darkacademia has 13,000 videos and 4000 channels on YouTube, 2.2 million posts on Instagram, and 4.6 billion views on TikTok.¹⁵ In addition, Google reports that searches for “Dark Academia” have increased 4750 percent. According to the first ever Instagram Trend Report, which bills itself as a “guide to the upcoming next-gen trends defined by Gen-Z that will shape culture in the next year,” 50 percent of teens and young adults in 2022 were going to be trying “Dark Academia” as a “bold fashion.”¹⁶ Described as a form of “maximalist fashion” and “alt-fashion,” the survey¹⁷ contends that dark-academia fashion will reach its peak by the end of the year.

In contrast to “athleisure fashion,” a hybrid of athletic wear and leisure wear worn in the gym, workplace, and other settings, dark academe as fashion might be characterized as what you would wear if you attended or worked at the fictional Hogwarts School: blazers, cardigans, Oxford shoes, and shirts. The color palate of dark-academe fashion consists primarily of beige, black, browns, dark green, and white—with navy blue thrown in for

some spice and variety. And all-the-better if this clothing and these colors come in tweed, houndstooth, or plaid.

But dark-academe fashion is also associated with the type of clothing worn in the 1930s and 1940s at prestigious preps schools, colleges, and universities such as Oxford University and Cambridge University in the UK, and the Ivy League universities in the US.¹⁸ Ironically, this is the same period when in Germany university students were making another dark-academe fashion statement by wearing their military uniforms to class. Nevertheless, why teens are all of a sudden gravitating toward slow-drying tweeds rather than dry-fit t-shirts is a question that involves not only associations and imagery drawn from the ubiquitous middle-school narratives of Rowling but also an entire genre of fiction that is set in elite institutions of learning. Along with the Rowling's narratives, this other genre of fiction establishes two differing ideological paths for the fictional roots of the dark-academe aesthetic. Let's now look at each these two "ages" of dark academe a bit closer.

THE DARK AGES OF ACADEME

The novelist Amy Gentry argues that the fiction of dark academia is a new form of the campus novel.¹⁹ For her, it goes back to the publication of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992), which shifted the focus of the campus thriller from "sleuthing professors and students—often working-class outsiders struggling with imposter syndrome among posh classmates" to "a coming-of-age tale."²⁰ In this new form of campus thriller, Tartt "harnessed the intensity and volatility of young-adult relationships," says Gentry, "suggesting that the Dostoevskian combo of hormones and heady intellectualism could turn deadly."²¹

But the impact of Tartt's novel on the campus thriller was not immediate. It would only be many years later that a group of writers who grew up "worshipping" *The Secret History* began to imitate it in their own work. For Gentry, the foundational text of the "gothic, bookish online aesthetic" of dark academe is not Harry Potter, but rather *The Secret History*, which was published five years before the first volume in Rowling's series.²² "We are now living, belatedly," writes Gentry, "in the [A]ge of Tartt."²³

For Gentry, the "belatedness" of the Age of Tartt is because the first novels that clearly were influenced by the *Secret History* appeared over a decade *after* the publication of the novel. Both Tana French's *The Secret Place* (2014), which is set in a boarding school where four young girls

discover a secret power that sets them apart from other students in the school, and James Tate Hill's *Academy Gothic* (2014), where an amateur detective discovers the dean dead under his desk, are the first wave of the Age of Tartt. The latter novel is set on the gothic campus of Parshall College, which is annually ranked by US News and World Report as "Worst Value" in education. For Gentry, these characteristics move it from the more commonplace category of *academic satire* to the less common category of *dark academia*.²⁴

Then, three years after the publication of *Academy Gothic* and *The Secret Place*—and a dozen years after *The Secret History*—there was an outpouring of *dark-academia* fiction that continues today. It includes, M. L. Rio's *If We Were Villains* (2017), Ruth Ware's *The Lying Game* (2017), Megan Abbott's *Give Me Your Hand* (2018), Leigh Bardugo's *Ninth House* (2019), Rebecca Dinerstein Knight's *Hex* (2019), Susan Choi's *Trust Exercise* (2019), Nina Revoyr's *A Student of History* (2019), Mona Awad's *Bunny* (2019), Lisa Lutz's *The Swallows* (2019), J. T. Ellison's *Good Girls Lie* (2019), Kate Weinberg's *The Truants* (2019), Susie Yang's *White Ivy* (2019), Elisabeth Thomas's *Catherine House* (2020), Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* (2020), Micah Nemerever's *These Violent Delights* (2020), Layne Fargo's *They Never Learn* (2020), David Hopewell's *The Orchard* (2021), Laurie Elizabeth Flynn's *The Girls Are So Nice Here* (2021), Ashley Winstead's *In My Dreams I Hold a Knife* (2021), David Bell's *Kill All Your Darlings* (2021), and Gentry's *Bad Habits* (2021).²⁵

In *Bad Habits*, Gentry says that she "checks the boxes" of the elements of dark-academia fiction established by both Tartt and those that follow in her path.²⁶ These elements include "a fish-out-of-water protagonist from a hardscrabble background," "a charismatic professor who inspires cultish devotion in her students," "a gothic campus with lots of gargoyles," and "as much sex and drinking as studying."²⁷ But Gentry checks one more box regarding the fiction of dark academia: it is socially and politically *progressive*. According to her, all of the novels listed above including her own "reckon frankly with sexual harassment and abuse, class disparities, homophobia, and systemic racism."²⁸ This additional element of the dark-academic fiction is important because many have characterized it as *reactionary*: a genre of fiction that fetishizes assimilation, gender normativity, and whiteness.

One of the ways of distancing dark academe from reactionary views has been to distance it from Rowling, who has become identified of late with

the view that discussions of gender identity negate biological sex.²⁹ In 2020, for example, she posted a series of anti-trans tweets, and in 2022 she used social media to oppose Scotland's Gender Recognition Reform Bill. The bill would allow a trans person to receive a new birth certificate with their correct gender. "The law Nicola Sturgeon's trying to pass in Scotland," posted Rowling on Twitter, "will harm the most vulnerable women in society: those seeking help after male violence/rape and incarcerated women."³⁰ "Statistics show," she continued, "that imprisoned women are already far more likely to have been previously abused."³¹

Her disagreement with Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, has been international news—one that because of Rowling's association with dark academe unintentionally casts a reactionary shadow over it. The Gender Recognition Reform Bill, said Sturgeon, "doesn't give trans people any more rights, doesn't give trans people one single additional right that they don't have right now."³² "Nor does it take away from women," he continues, "any of the current existing rights that women have under the Equalities Act."³³ But it has not just been Sturgeon who has spoken out about Rowling's beliefs about gender and anti-trans positions. So too have some of the stars from the movie adaptations of her dark-academe, middle-school, book series. For example, Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry Potter in the film adaptations, wrote in response to Rowling's views: "[T]ransgender women are women."³⁴ "Any statement to the contrary," he continued, "erases the identity and dignity of transgender people and goes against all advice given by professional health care associations who have far more expertise on this than either Jo [Rowling] or I."³⁵

To be sure, association of dark academe with Rowling may be accurate. Nevertheless, for many, it is not politically correct. If you want your dark academe to be progressive, then it serves your social and political interest to locate its foundations in the Age of Tartt. However, if you are reactionary *and* want your political beliefs to mirror the fictional foundations of your dark academe, then you would be best to set it in the Age of Rowling.

Nonetheless, in spite of their ideological differences, both the Age of Rowling and the Age of Tartt offer a similar color and fashion aesthetic. "The first time I read Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*," writes a student at the University of Sydney in her student newspaper, "my daydreams were haunted by the woolen plaid blazers and wire-rimmed spectacles of dark academia for some time afterwards."³⁶ But, the student, Ezara Norton, also says that what interested her "was not just the colour palette and textures, but the base thirst for knowledge free of concern for

employment prospects or grades.”³⁷ “It was so contrary to my own studies,” continues Norton, “dictated by exams and assignments where it seemed my marks would determine both my future and my personal worth.”³⁸

Norton’s remarks go on to reveal one of the reasons that some say accounts for the rise of dark academe of late. “The shutdown of in-person teaching and shift to online learning models,” writes Norton, “renewed passion for seeking knowledge and learning for the sake of it.”³⁹ For this student and many others, immersion into the dark-academe aesthetic is a form of escape from neoliberal academe. Dark academe, both in its reactionary and progressive formations, affords us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in an academic environment where knowledge can be pursued without considerations of its market value or career impact. Moreover, the rise of dark academia during the COVID-19 pandemic might be attributed to the loss of more traditional spaces of learning—and the desire to once again participate in them.

Thus, whether it is a desire to pursue knowledge outside of its formation in neoliberal academe or to return to campus and a more traditional classroom setting, dark academe has been working overtime in the production of youth fantasy of late. That 50 percent of teens and young adults wanted to dress *as if* both the COVID-19 pandemic and neoliberal academe were over (when in fact both were still in full force) speaks to not only the deep value of education in our society but also the need for it to be conducted the right way. Still, dark academe provides conflicting portraits of what conducting education the right way means.

For those who enter dark academe in the Age of Rowling, it has come to involve a belief in the power of magic solutions and righteous battles. “A generation of Harry Potter-loving children,” writes Gentry, “were raised on the idea that a perfect combination of heart, ancient birthright, and excellent study skills dispatch any villain.”⁴⁰ Yet, what if those villains are neoliberalism, elitism, and homophobia? Or sexual harassment and abuse, class disparities, and systemic racism? The socio-political landscape has changed a great deal since Rowling began writing her series in the late 1980s. For one thing, identity politics has been replaced by a performative politics that is much more responsive to the needs and interests of the LGBTQ+ community. And critical race theory has shown the damage that privilege and elitism enacts on the BIPOC community.

For some, the Age of Rowling leaves us unequipped to deal with the villains we are battling today. In fact, given her recent anti-trans positions,

Rowling's version of dark academe has, for some, become the real villain: a villain that fetishizes assimilation, gender normativity, and whiteness. But as one vision of dark academe closes the door to progressive politics, another has been opened by the dark-academic descendants of Tartt. The Age of Tartt is one where there is no magic solution to the problems facing society. It is also one where there are no righteous warriors fighting battles against society's villains. Rather, as Gentry points out, dark academe in the Age of Tartt is one populated by antiheroes, revenge schemes, and vigilantes. It is a world where never-ending guerilla warfare is waged against villains—villains that include some of the nastiest and most resilient ones of all such as racism, gender normativity, and neoliberalism.

Still, in spite of the differences in the ideology of their aesthetic, dark academe in the Age of Rowling and the Age of Tartt offer “the promise of a fantasy of control, of mastery of the canon, and most importantly,” writes Amanda Horgan, “of already being special.”⁴¹ For Horgan, a British philosopher, dark academe is not about education transforming you. Rather, dark academe “offers the illusion of *already having been transformed*.”⁴² For her, it might be described as “ersatz Romanticism,” which offers “feelings of coziness and specialness.”⁴³ Thus, for Horgan, dark academia is dangerous because it *negates* education and learning. “Learning,” she argues, “relies on letting go of the idea of your own specialness, of being open to the possibility of being transformed, together.”⁴⁴ If Horgan is accurate in her accounting of the underlying cultural assumptions about the attraction of dark academe to Gen-Z, then all of those young people who are using #darkacademe on social media do not believe in the transformative power of academe. For them, education and learning are nothing more or less than this year's hottest fashion—one whose real power is its capacity to generate billions of views under the dark-academe hashtag on TikTok and Instagram. And just what is it that is viewed on the majority of these dark academia platforms? Answer: “[W]hite, thin, middle-class, cis women,” says the British sociologist, Sarah Burton.⁴⁵

While these two ideologies of dark academe give academics something to think about the next time they consider wearing a tweed skirt or houndstooth jacket to campus, they are not going to drive many to post their faculty-meeting fashions on TikTok. Nor are they going to sit well with those who still believe in the transformative power of critical education. A key part of this critical education is the recognition that *We live in a control society* and that “*Mastery of the canon*” is not possible. The former comes via the critical theory of Gilles Deleuze and the latter via the Culture Wars

that reshaped the humanities. Let's look at each in turn for a different perspective on the "promises" of dark academe offered in the Ages of Rowling and Tartt.

DARK CONTROL

Regarding "the promise of a fantasy of control," Gilles Deleuze argues the disciplinary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that Michel Foucault "brilliantly analyzed" were "vast spaces of enclosure."⁴⁶ "The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another," comments Deleuze of these enclosures, "each has its own laws: first, the family; then the school ('you are longer in your family'); then the barracks ('you are no longer at school'); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the preeminent instance of the enclosed environment."⁴⁷ Foucault, comments Deleuze, saw the enclosures of disciplinary society as a way "to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces."⁴⁸ They marked a transition from the goal and functions of societies of sovereignty that were "to tax rather than organize production to rule on death rather than administer life."⁴⁹

But for Deleuze, the "interiors" of disciplinary society underwent a crisis that accelerated at a rapid pace after World War II. For him, the prison, hospital, factory, family, and school endured a crisis of interiority. In spite of many efforts to reform these interiors, "everyone knows that these institutions are finished, whatever the life of their expiration periods."⁵⁰ "These are the *societies of control*," writes Deleuze, "which are in the process of replacing disciplinary societies."⁵¹ As such, for Deleuze, control society is currently in the process of *replacing* the prison, hospital, factory, family, and school of disciplinary society—interiorities with their own set of laws.

The shift from disciplinary society to control society ultimately concerns a fundamental change in social and political power. For Michael Hardt, Deleuze's political philosophy also amounts to a shift in focus from civil society to post-civil society. Whereas for early moderns such as Hobbes (and Rousseau), the distinction between the state of nature and the civil state, that is, between natural and civil society, was fundamental to the political order, by Hegel's time the focus shifted to a different dualism, namely, to civil society and political society.⁵² As Hardt sees it, Deleuze's

notion of control society is “a first attempt to understand the decline of the rule of civil society and the rise of a new form of control.”⁵³ Instead of disciplinary enclosures, comments Hardt, where the “coordinated striations formed by the institutions of civil society branch out through social space in structured networks” for Deleuze “like the tunnels of a mole,”⁵⁴ we need to move to a new animal to characterize societies of control: the snake, whose “infinite undulations” characterize for Deleuze “the smooth space of the societies of control.”⁵⁵ “Instead of disciplining the citizen as a fixed social identity,” writes Hardt, “the new social regime seeks to control the citizen as a whatever identity, or rather an infinitely flexible placeholder of identity.”⁵⁶

From the perspective of control society, the fears about the crisis lead to the increased use of surveillance technologies in a futile effort to end the crisis. In this regard, there is a similarity among schools, hospitals, prisons, corporations, and other institutions that turn to surveillance technologies as a response to fear and anxiety regarding their respective institutional crises. But as we know very well in the case of universities, no amount of student and faculty surveillance is going to end the crises facing the university under late capitalism. In fact, they often *intensify* the problems.⁵⁷ Not only do surveillance technologies not provide the desired type of control; they also hasten the demise of the university. As such, contra Rowling and Tartt, in the dark academe of Deleuze, there is no promise of a fantasy of control. Rather, academic life in control society is one where fear, anxiety, and institutional crisis dominate. In short, control society is hastening the death of the university, and the fantasy of control over its impending demise only remains with readers of fiction writers like Rowling and Tartt.

DARK HUMANITIES

Critical consideration of the second promise of dark academe in the Ages of Rowling and Tartt, namely, mastery of the canon, calls for us to revisit the Culture Wars that reshaped the humanities. One of the surprising consequences of these Culture Wars is that in spite of all of acrimony that they produced, public attitudes toward the humanities today appear to be favorable. We know this because the American Academy of Arts and Sciences recently conducted “the first nationally representative survey dedicated to understanding Americans’ engagement with and attitudes towards the humanities.”⁵⁸ The academy asked just over five-thousand people “what they believe the humanities contribute to the American