

CHAPTER 10

FORGET TRANSFORMATION; F*CK THE UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Every so often, an idea and its sedimented meanings and forms should be put aside and forgotten. A range of such thoughts and practices in a variety of religions, politics and cultures come to mind, so do entire languages and discourses, such as the discourses on ‘human rights’, ‘decolonisation’, ‘reconstruction’ and ‘reconciliation’. All these notions and discourses share one key characteristic: they are or are becoming empty placeholders that absorb an infinite number of diverse and contradictory meanings, and in the process they generate semiotic black holes (Morrione 2006: 162). Their meanings have been exhausted and, in their dominant ‘tagline’ forms, they do not offer pathways for re-animating socio-cultural and political traditions and practices.

In the university, ‘the faculty’ as a way of organising teaching and knowledge should perhaps be forgotten to make way for new, less ego-centric, more queer epistemic architectures. And there are certainly strands of scholarship in which it has been argued that the ‘the university’ itself and ‘the professor’ should be shelved, as in ‘f*ck the university’. Key here, in reflecting on Lis’s intellectual contribution,

is that she had come to read transformation in its current form and discourse as a dead political project. She also connected the death of transformation in this sense to the ‘university in ruins’ (Readings 1996), and argued that the #MustFall protests stand as a profound example of defiance of the university’s authority; f*ck the university. From this position, she put forward the idea of the ‘university on the border’—its identity, social function and organisation giving rise to a decentred institution located in an uncertain ‘border’ position (see Lange et al. 2021).

Regarding the first phrase of this chapter’s title, Lis has given us a rich intellectual matrix to ‘forget’ that which transformation has become in the South African university sector. As for the second part of the title, ‘f*ck’ was undoubtedly one of her favourite words. She used it as an interjection or as an intensifier and not in a vulgar manner. This tribute is an attempt to honour the intellectual import of a routine utterance, in this case, ‘f*ck’, as regularly deployed by Lis in discussions on transformation and in disputations on the university’s false sense of itself as an enlightened institution.

The university was never a ‘settled’ configuration in Lis’s mind, hence ‘f*ck the university’ is not intended as a rejection of the idea of the university, but rather as a refusal of the university-as-such.¹ This comes through in her conception of the ‘university on the border,’ which I elaborate on later in this piece. Both ‘forget’ and ‘f*ck’ sign for the possibility of radical renewal of the university and both can be read as modes of refusal generally associated with abolitionist and decolonial university studies. ‘Forget transformation’ may mean to suspend the conceptual and institutional project of transformation so that other radical categories of institutional change may emerge, while ‘f*ck the university’ is refusing to grant the institution its own disciplining languages with the authority to define knowledge and change.

1 See the Undercommoning Collective (2016): ‘The university-as-such (conventionally understood) has never been a bastion of progress, learning, and fairness; it has always excluded individuals and communities on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship and politics. Indeed, it is implicated in the past and present of slavery and colonial genocide in North America’ and apartheid in South Africa and crimes in other parts of the world.

A black hole concept

In South African higher education and beyond, ‘transformation’ seems to have emerged as a primary black hole concept in need of conceptual rescue. Considered as a set of meanings, practices and actors, it has reached an impasse without the internal resources to renew itself. One may say that it suffers from a credibility crisis.

Though critics are quick to argue that transformation in South African universities is performed as compliance, it is perhaps more accurate to distinguish between two types of compliance. On the one hand, compliance culture is a strategic orientation that refers to the shared attitudes and behaviours within an organisation that prioritise adherence to laws, regulations, internal policies and ethical standards as an integral part of the university’s daily operations. It is the indispensable safety net of the institution. On the other hand, there is tick-box or checklist compliance: a superficial approach where required activities are completed on paper yet lack deep engagement with the underlying principles of transformation.

Transformation critique, however, is not limited to compliance but includes the entire system of what Lis called ‘institutionalised, performance-oriented transformation’. That is, a once-contested, intellectually rich and politically charged idea of ‘transformation’ in South Africa that has turned into a routinised, bureaucratic, common-sense and performance-managed object at state and university institutions. As a black hole concept, it has also largely become equated with demographic equity. Lis was deeply troubled by transformation’s disciplining effects, which depoliticise knowledge, as well as the way in which it projects itself as a new, progressive truth-package (separating good from bad) rather than as a project, or better, a *process*, of ongoing contestation. This ‘right, sector-specific transformation’ has detached itself from the structural constraints of the economy and political settlement and located itself in a performance-indicator metric.

In essence, as important as compliance may be in our country’s equity context, in Lis’s analysis it has not, in substance, contributed

to the deep changes envisaged by higher education policy. The paradox of the multiple, contested meanings of transformation reduced to one expedient and dominant frame suggests the functioning of a semiotic black hole where meaning is absorbed, collapsed and annihilated. Further, the fact that almost everyone and anyone can speak so definitively and with such authority about transformation (everyone is a transformation expert) is possibly an indication of its emptiness, its true absence, of what perhaps now exists only as meaningless noise. If this is indeed the case, should we not ‘forget transformation’ (after Baudrillard 1987)?

In much of the relevant scholarship and many of the reports, transformation is described as compliance driven.² That is, universities focus their transformation efforts on conforming with and drowning themselves in the regulatory requirements (law and policy) of the institution and higher education sector, which results in a ‘change-without-change approach’ (HSRC-TOC 2023: xxi). Stellenbosch University, where Lis spent the last leg of her impressive professional life, is probably the best example of this in our country (see Khamphepe Report 2022). There are also others (see HSRC-TOC 2023). As it so often happens, it is only when, as a stranger, one ‘downscends’³ into the genetic code of the university as a place of work that the structural outlines of the institution with all its possibilities and constraints, are more clearly drawn. Lis was without doubt one of the sharpest analysts and observers from this position at all the universities where she worked; always an insider-outsider.

2 As seen in the 2008 ‘Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions’ (henceforth MCTHE 2008); the South African Human Rights Commission 2016 report, ‘Transformation at Public Universities in South Africa’ (henceforth SAHRC 2016); Minister Pandor’s 2018 Higher Education Transformation Colloquium; and the Human Sciences Research Council’s 2023 report, ‘The State of Transformation in South Africa’s Public Universities: Research Report of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in the South African Public Universities’ (henceforth HSRC-TOC 2023).

3 ‘Downscend’ is a blended neologism combining ‘down’ + ‘scend’, the Latin root meaning ‘to climb’. The term plays on ‘down’ as a homonym, using the intransitive verb ‘to go down’ and the slang/adjective meaning ‘to thoroughly understand’.

The interface

Lis's work toiled at the interface of 'forget transformation' and 'f*ck the university'. Deeply critical of how the meanings and work of transformation took on a shallow, yet dominant character where universities mainly focus on meeting the formal legal and policy requirements of change—her ideas of the 'university on the border' suggest a militant break with the institution as it currently exists. This position is not dissimilar to that of decolonial and abolitionist university scholars and activists in their critique of the university-as-such. Yet, she was a radical pragmatist, always seeking courageous and imaginative changes with a keen sense of what may actually work in the real world and combining progressive ideas with efficient programmatic innovations.

Her ideas were always connected to the broader questions of our times, and she was profoundly troubled by the current geo-political madness, global instability, irrational politics, and the erosion of multilateralism. At the same time, she was also clear that these crises have long been in the making. Transactional diplomacy, the crude deployment of economic and military power rooted in re-energised forms of racism, nationalism, ethnicism and exclusion, have made liberalism's long-standing contradictions and hypocrisies glaringly transparent in present global discourses (see Keet & Staphorst 2026). Together with racial capitalism and the racial governance of the world, these developments have re-animated both the everyday life of bigotry and the structural mooring of its attendant discriminations in South Africa and elsewhere. If the current challenges of the world—social, economic, political, planetary—were delayed and stripped to bare bones, the racial and gendered structure of the global order would be revealed as the sole remaining affliction.

Thinking the university as defined by liberal values is nowadays a tricky, perilous task, but a necessary one, as Lis demonstrated. Institutions of higher education were always meant to be of a 'special type'—an independent community of teachers and knowledge

producers that exists to advance critical inquiry. Yet the university's capacity to engage and contest the boundaries of social and scientific discourse is slowly being eroded, globally. These questions were always key for Lis as she wrestled with a higher education scholarship that either assumes a 'fluffy' agency (an unconstrained capacity to act in which the individual tends to reflect themselves into innocence), or presupposes we are totally powerless in how our possibilities are shaped by institutional and structural arrangements, at all levels.

That the university is in crisis has for decades been a popular, almost standard point of entry into critiques of the institution. In addition to being 'in ruins', it is according to some observers perpetually at a crossroads. Though the critical treatment of the 'university-as-institution' has always been part of the sector's discourse, a different, more gloomy mood has become palpable. In her typically direct style, Lis engaged these challenges head-on even as the angst of our time weighed heavily on her shoulders. She felt that something must be done and, given the current state of the world and the state of things, she drew from her long-standing engagement with Open Marxism.⁴ In this interpretive scheme she could hold many concepts and ideas together: base (economy) and superstructure (society, culture, ideas); critical theory and psychoanalysis; the commodification of the self and its education; alienation and exploitation; technology and the neoliberal university; contradictions and tensions, and so forth. I return to several of these later.

At the interface of 'forget transformation' and 'f*ck the university', Lis's deeply critical take on the meanings and work of transformation in the higher education sector connects with her ideas of the 'university on the border'. The difference between Lis and those of us who have been enthralled by the Latin-American 'tourist-cum-scholars' (Maart 2020: 34)—who have been flooding the South African university landscape ever since the #Must-Fall-Movement (#MFM) of 2015/2016—is that she was deeply engrossed in the actualisation of what the movement

4 For a comprehensive study of Open Marxism, see Memos, C. (2025). *Open Marxism: Critical Theory as Militant Enlightenment*. Bloomsbury.

was calling for and not simply its noise and semiotics. She invested time and energy in drawing whatever insights and resources she could from what she regarded as a productive moment for the higher education sector and the country.

For Lis, ‘f*ck the university’ therefore meant a commitment to an insurgent thinking that violates the very sanctity of the university’s self-image. It is not about vulgar nihilism; because, she was convinced that the kind of self-knowledge that can burst open the conceited pretence of the university is also the kind of knowledge that will better facilitate deep transformation. Similarly, for her, ‘forget transformation’ was a project of conceptual rescue and renewal, for opening more productive pathways of practices. She insisted on ‘rethinking’ transformation; turning it upside down, inside out.

Reflection and examined reflexivity

Lis was determined to write on Hannah Arendt, and, from a selfish point of view I wish she did have the time to engage the competence of reflection and reflexivity more systematically precisely because these concepts are so widely used yet seldom internalised. Unafraid to track and learn from her own ideas, failures and the derivation of her thought, Lis regarded both examined reflexivity and political-ethical capacity as commonsensical in university life and critical thinking. Consequently, she subjected her own thinking to the criticality she brought to bear in her work and engagement with texts. I want to make a few observations in this regard.

There are many reports on transformation in the sector (such as HSRC-TOC 2023; MCTHE 2008; SAHRC 2016) and many valuable review publications from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) itself. Yet, true to her reflexive nature, Lis approached these with criticality, based on close, analytical readings. As a result, she had a firm grasp on what was ‘floating’ in the sector. Her work, from governance to curriculum, is frequently cited in the HSRC-TOC report and elsewhere and provided key analytical insights for positioning the

empirical material deployed in the study. Key here was her insistence that transformation needs to be read as contextual and dynamic, with different priorities emerging in different historical eras: access and democratisation, throughput and efficiency, epistemology, identity and institutional culture. In addition, her work on transformation and its knowledges in pursuit of a scholarly treatment of transformation is seminal and unequalled.

The distinction between knowledge *for* transformation and knowledge *of* transformation (Lange 2014) injected new energy into the conceptualisation of transformation and its programmatic expression. Knowledge *of* transformation refers to the policy frameworks, institutional plans, indicators, reporting regimes and audit cultures that track restructuring, efficiency, access, equity and responsiveness. While necessary, this form of knowledge tends to institutionalise transformation as compliance and performance management. By contrast, knowledge *for* transformation refers to the critical knowledge of the self (institutional histories, cultures and complicities), knowledge of knowledge (epistemological critiques of curricula, disciplines and research traditions), and knowledge of the other (how difference, marginalisation and belonging are understood and engaged).

Leadership for transforming universities depends on both these knowledges. Whereas the one requires critical reflection on the socio-epistemological basis of knowledge production, the other concerns understanding and interpreting the direction and processes of change necessary for sound decision-making, thereby enabling the kind of research and knowledge production that directly inform institutional change (Lange 2014).

Here again, the location of Lis's thought within the broader ambit of critical theories comes through in the broader idea of a disclosing critique of society in the mould of Theodor Adorno (1973) and the lack of a critical ontology of the academy if one mobilises Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) insights in *Homo Academicus*. More than that, Lis's work connects with the demand to see both the academy and its knowledges as profoundly historical, as part of the history of the present. Her

work, overall, may well represent one of the most productive attempts at developing a historical, critical ontology of the university and the academy in South Africa—way beyond what is on offer in the so-called philosophies and sociologies of education. Her work is certainly more sophisticated than much of the transformation scholarship in general.

Lis's engagement with transformation and its knowledges in the early 2010s followed a pattern of consistent, critical engagement in her treatment of the quality assurance and transformation interface and the interface between equity and quality. She pushed for the broader imperatives of transformation, access, success, development, efficiency and quality to be experienced and actualised as indivisible, perhaps indistinguishable, from one another. Moreover, the kind of transformation she had in mind drove at a justness that could both respond to the structural anchoring of inequality and misrecognition, and the actual shifts in the experiences of students and staff. This is not the exhausted and exhaustive rhetoric of social justice that so easily and meaninglessly slips off the tongues of leaders and academics alike but a direct engagement with challenges and the possibility of responding to them. This commitment to veracious actuality was also mirrored in Lis's private life and in her relationships with family, friends and students.

A weird, perhaps cautious idealism runs through Lis's work. She insisted on both a critique of our traditions and practices, as well as the proper justification of such critique. Moreover, she frequently asked of herself and others to 'show' the instances of the actual 'thing' that is the subject of critique. What is a modern/colonial epistemology? Where can you see it? How is it actualised? In what ways is it expressed in disciplinary knowledge? What can we do about it? What are its implications for pedagogy? And above all, how is it connected to the structural ordering of 'the system'?

Structure, understood as the modes of production and their relations that organise social life, was central in Lis's thinking and she was convinced that very little could be achieved if one's praxes were not located within a reflexive analysis of the political economy of higher education. While this was always an integral part of her ideation, she

engaged this conviction with greater urgency in her later writing. She had a healthy appreciation of how structuring structures constrain agency—even dictate institutional possibilities. Yet Lis’s critiques were never stifled by resignation toward structural control. On the contrary, the possibility of subversive agency, difficult as it may seem, is always present in her work. By connecting the social structures of everyday life with the institutional practices of the university, Lis worked on the assumption that while agency is always possible, it requires hard, difficult work and internal disruptions as opposed to ‘fluffy’, innocence-making self-reflections.

How and why ‘something’ appears to one’s mind as critique-able and worthy of engagement was a non-negotiable starting point for Lis, and she put a high premium on the importance of our responsibility to first engage with the inner workings and history of our own production and thought processes. For her, this ‘internal critique’ (Lange 2016b: 184) forces a self-reflexivity that demands justification for and from oneself—it requires ‘intellectual courage’ and works as a transformative tool, ensuring that one’s engagement with the world is intellectually rigorous and morally accountable. This is particularly central in her writings on transformation and is the reason why her contribution to thinking and doing the university at the nexus of institutional and social change is one of the great gifts to the sector. Her scholarship will continue to play a unique role in our transformation work.

Favouring a more expansive reading of transformation, Lis argued for transformation to be seen in all its complexities and layers. These include: the massification of higher education occasioned by the rapid and massive growth of the sector across the globe over the past four decades, which has resulted in several shifts and changes that directly or indirectly impacted universities; the global and local political, economic and cultural forces that shape the university system; shifts in the purpose and rationale of universities and their governance and management; access, quality and relevance; and different modes of accountability. The broad mandates or core

activities of the university—research, teaching, engagement—are all folded into this interconnected conceptualisation together with the key questions of equity, academic planning, decolonisation, the advancement of knowledge, and the university's interface with society, the world of work and the post-school sector. To these broad interpretive framings of transformation, Lis added her perceptive and critical analyses of knowledge and identity, the academic versus the institutional curriculum, the need for a more radical understanding of decolonisation, the far-reaching implications of the digital turn in higher education and the psychological reconfiguration of the human in techno-science-society. To be sure, Lis was not alone in working and thinking transformation holistically; there are others. But what stood out in her case was a theorisation enmeshed with empirical life and the reality of the university from which 'new' programmatic work can ensue. This, in part, is what made her such a successful leader, executive and thinker.

Although Lis's intellectual and professional work touched on many of the 'transformation' themes, her irritation with the in the lack of curriculum and programme renewal and the fact that spaces were not created to investigate knowledge and pedagogy in the curriculum was a critical area of concern and interest. She frequently made the point that knowledge transformation received the least attention in the priorities set out by higher education policy.

For Lis, transformation refers to the totality of the change project in two important ways. In the first instance, she was profoundly interested in the *transformational* elements of the sector: better planning, improved teaching and learning, rigorous research, advancing quality and furthering operational efficiencies for the way that universities deliver on their key mandates. In the second instance, she was committed to driving the *transformative* vocation of the university, that is, the university's orientation towards public good and justness. The *transformational* and the *transformative* thus stand in interactive service to one another within the university. In essence, operational efficiencies are meant to advance the justice project of

the university. The distinction between these two concepts is not sufficiently engaged with in the general literature and the concepts are frequently collapsed, leading to confused convictions that everyone and everything can be *transformational*, which is nonsense on stilts.

Lis critically treated the policy principles for higher education transformation—equity, redress, democratisation, development, quality and public accountability—as an interpretive package. At the same time, she remained particularly critical on the question of knowledge and the nature of the university itself—from which emerged her later position of the ‘university on the border.’ This university is constituted by a self-doubt that rebels against the self-assurance of the Western knowledge project; it is decolonial. Yet, this university is also steered by money and power, structurally trapped within the massive forces shaping our world: domestic politics, neoliberalism, racial and techno-capitalism, geopolitics, economic trends, technology, and environmental and social changes. Because of this reality, she was inclined to analyse the university from a political-economy perspective, which prefigured both her theoretical and pragmatic options apropos sectoral and institutional transformation. Her radical pragmatism, through which she sought to convert theoretical insights into the practical imperative of making universities work in ways that both serve and critique the policy ambitions of the sector, has deep personal and philosophical roots.

Her affinity for Arendt’s philosophy is as pragmatic as it comes viz the three distinct activities of the human condition: labour (sustaining life), work (building a durable human world), and action (speaking and acting with others in public). However, the endless labourer and consumer of modernity have eclipsed both the maker/worker and political action, and in the process, eroded the shared public world. For Lis, this erosion linked up with the flattening of the university’s ideals. In response and without fail, she argued for continuous analyses of and reflections on the structural conditions by which the university is to be a university and the hard work that is required to unburden agency for good, transformative work. Part of this unburdening process includes

as engagement with the subjective factors that operate unconsciously as constitutive of both the individual and collective psyche and praxis.

Arendt, whose work reflected on the holocaust and beyond, was therefore a very good choice as a thinking companion, particularly in the context of the university's role as a citizen, its role in developing citizenship, and its framing of democratic education and the role of the academic; as well as political education. The political pedagogy of the 'university on the border' is meant to counter the self-annihilating pedagogy of the market from which a solidaristic notion of citizenship may emerge, especially through Arendt's notion of understanding as a complex intellectual and moral process that can generate progressive political action.

In writing this piece it became clearer to me why Lis pursued a philosophy that allows one to perform responsibility in the face of despair, and why Arendt's thinking was so important to her own. Arendt provided Lis with productive tools and concepts crucial for making and living life within the academy: from labour, work, freedom and plurality to action, citizenship, the public sphere, and the space of appearance.

Conclusion

Lis had a rare commitment to three key principles: integrity in both governance *and* scholarship; rigour through reviews, audits, institutional reports *and* intellectual writing; and interrogative reflexivity of the self, the institution and society. With characteristic sincere directness she made time to raise matters of interest or concern with others, especially with her friends. She truly did not suffer foolishness, as Sioux McKenna (2025) commented on Facebook, whether in people or in thoughts or ideas—she was both funny and ruthless when going off on one of her sharp critiques. In one of our discussions, she once referred to education research as being in the grip of *Fairlady* methodologies. Her tongue-in-cheek analogy by no means intended to dismiss education research as useless but rather to highlight trends of small-scale research that provides neatly packaged answers to messy realities in much the

same way that magazine self-tests and quizzes employ methodologies that are invariably confident in tone, simplistic in design and far more authoritative in appearance than in impact.

This kind of incisive and funny critique, combined with her directness, characterised our collaborations with unexpected moments of contemplation. A few months before her death she submitted a chapter for one of our book projects accompanied by a postscript that reads:

When I accepted the invitation to write this piece, I did not realise the extent to which it was going to be an act of personal reflection and analysis of my own experience in university managements and of the doubt, uncertainty and hope that goes into making decisions, which sometimes are the wrong decisions. The higher education system in SA has been at the work of transformation for three decades and I think there is agreement that this is still an unfinished task. We keep on trying to theorise transformation as we go about it, and as circumstances and national and international conjectures change, we adjust our views about what it is that we are doing and aiming for.

One can never know, but I suspect that the ‘university on the border’ became a frame for Lis’s later work, as she so powerfully states:

[T]he University on the border has self-doubt as its constitutive principle and that since this self-doubt was, in fact, the negation of the self-assurance of the western knowledge project, on the border was a good place from where to rethink the university (Lange 2025: 380).

Most of her later writings engage with ‘the border’ as position, as strategy, as thinking, and as doing. For her, the hospitable university on the border is one that incessantly searches for alternative, more productive pathways towards the university for society.

At a personal level, and I learned never to ask and probe, Lis's personal experience—the brutal military regime in Argentina, her home country in the 1970s and 1980s, the massive human rights violations, the truth commission, memory, the disappeared—all perhaps generated a particular affinity for South Africa in her, a chance to actualise her global political commitment to build institutions and their practices in this land.

Although we shared a progressive politics, Lis and I had many beautiful disagreements and divergent thoughts on the higher education project. I strongly believe in what knowledge transformations could offer the university, and I separate this from curriculum change to escape the disciplining and domesticating effects of institutional power. I am more interested in wild, unregulated knowledges through which the university can play and experiment with alternatives, but this would require a type of university leadership that, with rare exceptions, we unfortunately do not have in the sector.

Lis thought that I am too optimistic about knowledge transformations. For my part, although I have very little faith in the transformative capacity of the formalised university-as-is, I have heaps of trust that an untamed, unregulated knowledge wildness can take us somewhere different ... better. And through this, it may undiscipline parts of the university's management and bureaucratic power. I have experienced such courage of experimentation at three universities, the University of Fort Hare, the University of the Free State, and Nelson Mandela University, so, it is possible.

The struggles of contradictions and paradoxes are collective and although Lis believed in the structural constraints of the university as tied into global and national economic and political forces, her own real work within institutions suggested that she herself was convinced that maybe, just maybe, agency can speak back to structure. We therefore share the idea of a 'feasible utopia' (Barnett 2017).

We also had different ideas on 'transformation modelling'. Lis, despite her worry about institutionalisation, was always more convinced than I that work needs to happen in the centre of the

university, in learning and teaching, curriculum and research. I generally favour working through fires on the margins—‘a particular form of a radical, counter-imaginary spaces at the boundaries of higher education’ (Keet & Rafaely 2026: 5)—going in and out of the centre, but never becoming it. I believe that great vice-chancellors, true leaders, have the courage to support these ‘fires’—even if they get burned by it themselves. These types of vice-chancellors and their councils are, as the Afrikaans idiom goes, *so skaars soos hoendertande* (rare to the point of not existing).

So here, I think, is an instance of Lis’s intellectual courage: always crafting at the centre, trying to open a gap in the darkness from which to frame and actualise a programme, always doing so with a stellar command of critical social theory. She was super excited about one such project at Stellenbosch University not long before she passed away. I marvelled at how her spirit could be excited about possibilities even as an institutional machine dictated otherwise. It reminded me of the idea, drawn from Walter Benjamin’s (1968[1940]), work of continuously circling an impossibility until a gap opens up ... hoping against hope (see also Chakrabarti 2016).

Regarding these contestations, we shared a key thought, namely to present agency against the disciplining and domesticating impulses of the university structures and machines as difficult and hard, but never impossible. She was not, as she often put it, in favour of a ‘fluffy conception of agency’, which allows us to reflect ourselves into innocence. Her task, as she saw it, was to convince us that institutional change is possible, but it requires hard, difficult and courageous work. Lis’s work demanded and continues to demand of the university to do something it is structurally disinclined to do: to doubt itself so thoroughly that its own organising concepts are continuously questioned.

In tracing her movements between the centre and the margins of various institutions, I tried to show that ‘forget transformation’ and ‘f*ck the university’ are not nihilistic gestures but disciplined practices of internal critique, militant border-thinking and radical pragmatism

rooted in a solid reading of political economy, the university-as-institution, and the psychic economies of moral disengagement. Her 'university on the border' is neither a romantic outside nor a managerial inside; it is a precarious in-between where self-reflexive knowledge, knowledge of transformation, and wild, unregulated knowledges can conspire to undiscipline bureaucratic power.

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