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**Abstract**

This article begins with a brief review of research on the development of ideas about the knowledge-based economy (analysed here as ‘economic imaginaries’) and their influence on how social forces within and beyond the academy have attempted to reorganize higher education and research in response to real and perceived challenges and crises in the capitalist order since the mid-1970s. This provides the historical context for three ‘thought experiments’ about other aspects of the development of academic capitalism. The first involves a reductio ad absurdum argument about different potential steps in the economization, marketization and financialization of education and research and is illustrated from recent changes in higher education. The second maps actual strategies of the entrepreneurial university and their role in shaping academic capitalism. The third speculates on possible forms of ‘political’ academic capitalism and their changing places in the interstices of the other trends posited in these thought experiments. The article ends with suggestions for a research

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agendum that goes beyond thought experiments to substantive empirical investigations.(HRK /  
Abstract übernommen)