Beyond individualism: the psychosocial life of the neoliberal University

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> *The end result of reading this article was – I had to lock my door – I cried...*
> *Maybe, if I'm being honest, perhaps I also cried for myself – which surprised*
> *me. I wonder if I'm cut out for this game. How can I survive in it? Do I want*
> *to do this? Do I want to be part of this? Am I really any good? I hope it*
> *moves people to some form of action. It has stirred "something" in me'*
>
> *Early career male academic, writing to Andrew Sparkes (2007, p.541-2)*

Introduction

Several years ago I co-edited a book with a dear friend and colleague, Roisin Ryan Flood. Titled *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections* (Flood & Gill, 2010), the book was situated in a long tradition of critical work that sought to interrogate and trouble practices of power in research- in this case, asking about the secrets, the silences, the erasures that mark research. In her powerful and generous foreword to the collection, Sara Ahmed captured the multiplicity of ways in which secrecy and silence matter:

> Sometimes silence can be a tool of oppression; when you are silenced, whether by explicit force or by persuasion, it is not simply that you do not speak but that you are barred from participation in a conversation which nevertheless involves you. Sometimes silence is a strategic response to oppression; one that allows subjects to persist in their own way; one that acknowledges that, under certain circumstances speech might not be empowering, let alone sensible. Sometimes you might speak out to announce a disagreement with what is being said, sometimes not, as to speak can mean to participate in a conversation you don't agree with. Sometimes we might stay silent about some of the findings of our research because we do not have trust in how those findings might be used by other actors...To recognise this contingency as feminist ethics is to live and work in a state of suspension: we will not always know in advance (though sometimes we might) when it makes sense to be silent and when it does not (Ahmed, 2010a, p. xvi)

It was with this sense of 'not knowing' that I approached my own contribution to the book, an attempt to raise questions and open a dialogue about the 'hidden injuries' of neoliberal academia. The conditions in which research is produced, our experiences as 'knowledge workers', and our labouring subjectivities – these seemed among the biggest and most systematic silences about research. For all the talk of reflexivity, its parameters often seem to lie at the boundaries of the individual study and not to enquire more widely into the institutional context in which academic work is produced. Yet all around me I saw colleagues and students suffering from 'exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, shame, anxiety, aggression hurt, guilt and feelings of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear of exposure within the contemporary academy' (Gill, 2010, p. 229). These feelings,

these affective embodied experiences, I argued, had a strange relation to questions of secrecy and silence. They were at once ordinary and everyday, yet at the same time they remained deeply silenced in the official and public sites of the academy. They suffused the 'spaces between' – corridors, bathrooms, conference coffee breaks – but they were (and perhaps still are) 'officially' unrecognised, do not have 'proper channels', and rarely make it to the agendas of departmental meetings or committees or formal records of University life.

What would it mean, I asked, if we were to turn our lens upon our own labour processes, organizational governance and conditions of production? What kinds of insights could we generate if we were to 'think together' literatures about transformations in capitalism, the corporatization of the University, the micro-politics of power, and emerging interests in the 'psychic life' of neoliberalism? How might we make links between macro-organization and institutional practices on one hand and experiences and affective states on the other, and open up exploration of the ways these may be gendered, racialized and classed?

Writing the piece was an uncomfortable experience. With no claim to science or authority, my 'data' were the 'unending flow of communications and practices in which we are all enmeshed, often reluctantly: the proliferating emails, the minutes of meetings, the job applications, the peer reviews, the promotion assessments, the drafts of the Research Assessment Exercise narrative, the committee papers, the student feedback forms, even the after-seminar chats' (p.229). The article necessitated personal exposure, including quoting from a rejection letter I had received from a journal, and reflecting upon my own shame, disappointment and multiple failures to 'cope'. In doing this, I experienced breaking the 'feeling rules'(Hochschild, 1979) of the academy. More importantly, it involved great discomfort about privilege – both the privilege of academics generally as an occupational group, and my own particular privilege as a white, tenured academic living in a metropolitan centre. My 'check-your-privilege' meter is well-honed, and my worry about self-indulgence significant; for those reasons the piece nearly did not get written. Ultimately I placed discussions of all these dilemmas at the heart of the paper: questions about the obligations of a critical, politically-engaged scholar; reflections on the way that experiences in the academy are related to structural inequalities and biographies that produce very different degrees of 'entitlement'; and a searing critique of precariousness.

Breaking the silence: sharing stories

Like Andrew Sparkes (2007) whose poignant, honest and painful stories 'seeking consideration' prompted the epigraph which opens this chapter, I could not have been prepared for the reaction that greeted my modest attempt to speak out about what I saw and felt. In the six years since publication scarcely a week has gone by when I have not received at least two or three emails from people telling me how and why they have been touched by it. Many of these were expressions of gratitude and relief that their writers no longer felt so alone or 'the only one who felt like this'. My archive of letters and emails now runs to nearly two thousand items of correspondence; a veritable catalogue of tales of toxic experiences within the neoliberal University, which underscore my sense of a deep, affective and somatic crisis.

I have become, in effect, a particular kind of accidental 'vulnerable observer' (Behar, 2014), a bearer of witness to collective injuries and struggles that are nonetheless always experienced as individual – leaving their traces written on our bodies and psyches. Many of these letters have moved me profoundly. I have tried to respond to each one as I have received it, with care and empathy. I'm sure I missed a few on days when my inbox was especially punishing. But more widely I am not sure how to respond to them or to honour the experiences they share. The social scientist in me recognises that they represent a huge 'selection bias'. More significantly, as a human being, I am not sure how - or indeed whether - it is ethically permissible to report these stories, which have been entrusted to me by strangers – even with all the usual caveats about anonymity and confidentiality that pass for 'research ethics' in the corporate university, with its check-boxes and barely concealed concern with brand management , global reputation and avoidance of litigation, rather than anything I would understand as ethics. Representing others is always and ineluctably a political project, suffused with power relations that are rarely acknowledged (Alcoff, 1991; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). For now, I treat the stories as gifts: fragments of letters dance around my head; others haunt me with sadness; I practice the 'art of listening' (Back, 2007).

These responses represent merely a fraction of the voices that are now debating, arguing and, protesting conditions in the neoliberal University. Six years on from *The Hidden Injuries* there has been an immense shift in discussion and debate about the transformation of Universities and life within them. The silence has been broken. As Maria do Mar Pereira (2016) puts it:

> It is no longer a (thinly veiled) secret that in contemporary universities many scholars, both junior and senior, are struggling – struggling to manage their workloads; struggling to keep up with insistent institutional demands to produce more, better and faster; struggling to reconcile professional demands with family responsibilities and personal interests; and struggling to maintain their physical and psychological health and emotional wellbeing. (p. 100)

Central to the new visibility of such concerns has been the huge variety of social media that provide sites for a wide range of commentaries about academia – from critical essays, personal accounts, tumblrs, gifs, jokes, twitter feeds, memes and a number of well-established blogs such as Chronicles of Higher Education, Tenure she wrote, Academic Diary, Hook and Eye, The Feminist Wire, and Academics Anonymous. Much informed, critical debate circulates in and between these spaces – and many others – with particular focus on the academic precariat. Compared with the early 2000s there has also been a significant upsurge of research into academic labour including – in a European context - major research networks concerned with Gender (GARCIA and Gender Net), and a growing interest in the toxic effects of 'new public management' (Lorenz, 2012; Shore, 2008, Martin,2012). Books, articles and special issues abound (Back, 2016; Collini, 2012; Evans, 2004; Edu-factory, 2009; Giroux, 2002; Readings, 1996; Roggero, 2011). Activist movements both within and outside traditional trade unions have also flourished bringing together students, academics and other workers to protest the privatization of Universities, the 'enslavement by

debt' of students, and promoting new visions of a 'public university' (e.g. Halffman & Radder, 2015). Alongside demonstrations, strikes and occupations have featured prominently in this activism in Canada, the Netherlands and the UK.

Life in the neoliberal University

In this chapter I will draw together some of the themes of current research and writing on the university highlighting contemporary concerns about precarious employment, working hours, and surveillance and audit cultures. I want to raise some critical questions, returning to my original interests in the psychic life of neoliberalism – in particular its individualism. I will make three brief arguments: first arguing against individualization and calling for a collective struggle and resistance; secondly, calling for an expanded notion of precariousness that can speak to the multiplicity of ways in which precarity operates in the neoliberal University; and thirdly and relatedly discussing what I will call 'difficult solidarities' – particularly the need to work collectively across differences and to resist the pressures towards competition and division.

Casualization and the academic precariat

Q: How many PhDs does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: One but 500 applied.

A: None because changing a lightbulb is a job and there are no jobs for PhDs currently.

A: None. The broken bulb has tenure (ref: Twitter*)*

The energy, creativity and rage of 'contingent' and precarious workers within the Academy has been central to the discussion of casualization - and activism around this - in recent years (Adsit et al, 2015; Krause et al, 2008; SIGJ2 Collective; Res-Sisters, 2016). The idea that academics are privileged, with 'cushy' tenured positions (and long holidays) has a firm hold in the popular imagination. In reality, precariousness is the 'new normal' (Berlant, 2011), and one of the defining experiences of academic life. In the UK, the 'adjunct' system is not as institutionally ossified as it seems in North America, and there is greater mobility from short-term, temporary positions into more secure ones. Nevertheless data from the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU, 2016) shows more than 50% of academics are on short term contracts – some of them 'zero hours' that is offering no security or benefits beyond any particular hour being worked, with the possibility of being 'dropped' at any time– with considerable vulnerability. This resonates with figures in Australia, Canada and the US - where the figure is reported to be as high as 70%. Only the hospitality industry has a greater number of temporary workers and 'casuals'. As Ruth Barcan (2013:114) has noted in the Australian context 'this is an intellectual and social catastrophe masking as flexibility'.

The speeding up of this process in the last few years has been devastating – echoing trends in other sectors which have seen the systematic casualization of workforces, and the degradation of pay and conditions. This is not a conspiracy –

though it can feel like one - but it is a marked and patterned feature of this moment of capitalism, and surely needs to be recognised as such. More than 150 years ago, Marx explained how a 'reserve army of labour' operated as part of the dynamic of proletarianization. Today, the notion of a 'precariat', brings a focus on precariousness to novel understandings of the proletariat- a 'class' (if you will) that includes increasing numbers of artists, journalists, doctors and academics alongside cleaners, janitors, and others (Mitropoulos, 2006; Galleto et al, 2007; Morini, 2007; Weeks, 2005; Federici, 2011; Standing, 2011).

As I noted in *The Hidden Injuries*, the workers most affected by this shift are early career academics – though the term is really a misnomer since 'the designation can now extend for one's whole "career" given the few opportunities for development or secure employment' (2010, p. 232). At that time 'teaching fellowships', in which staff were only paid during the teaching semesters, looked grossly exploitative, but now –in a measure of how much worse things have become - they seem to represent relative privilege compared with the reality of 'visiting lectureship' or 'teaching assistantship' positions in which tens of thousands of hourly paid PhDs and post-docs deliver mass undergraduate teaching with little or no support and few rights. Many are on zero hours contracts – or do not even have contracts – and often find themselves burdened with tutoring or grading responsibilities that, if costed properly, would work out at a fraction of the minimum wage. I know this from the Universities I have worked in. Like many colleagues, I have challenged this repeatedly, but with limited or sometimes no success. For those involved it represents 'hope labour' (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013) par excellence – imagined as a foot-in-the-door, a way of gaining a 'proper job'. As Valerie Hey (2004:80) has put it : 'we hope that if only we work harder, produce more, publish more, conference more, achieve more, in short "perform more" that we will eventually get "there"' . If the pay and insecurity are appalling, so too is the lack of care, sometimes bordering on contempt, with which such workers are treated: 'disposable staff are opportunistically left dangling with temporary contracts, often with an appeal to their sense of responsibility towards their students' (Halffman & Radder, 2015; see also Gill, 2014). They in turn are under extreme pressure to be 'uncomplaining' – to present a pleasing and happy countenance (cf Hochschild on emotional labour, 2003), the production of which could be understood as instantiating a further layer of injury: not only the exploitation itself, but also the requirement to self-censor and erase all 'bad affect', to keep on smiling and saying "yes" whilst inside every fibre of your being is screaming "No-o-oo" (For vivid examples see *Academics Anonymous*)

For younger people trying to gain a place in the academy, all this constitutes part of a matrix of intergenerational inequality that includes (lack of) access to housing, pension rights and job security. Even if they achieve the longed-for position ' younger academics are likely to retire 30% worse off than professors today' (Goddard, 2014, p.5). In this sense, things are getting worse not better for academics. However, this needs to be read carefully and with political nuance, not merely in terms of some kind of naturalized generational strife.

More, better, faster! Academic time in the neoliberal university

> Good scholarship requires time: time to think, write, read, research, analyse, edit, and collaborate. High quality instruction and service also require time: time to engage, innovate, experiment, organise, evaluate and inspire.' (Mountz et al, 2015:1237)

Compared with casualization it has seemed to be much harder for academics to recognize our punishing workloads as a political issue – rather than simply a private indication that we 'can't hack it', are not good enough, or are failing to cope. Finally we seem to be breaking through these individualized and pathologized responses towards a recognition that workloads constitute a structural political issue that is profoundly harmful to health. Increasing numbers of people report being at 'breaking point', completely exhausted and close to physical and mental collapse. Halfmann and Radder (2015) writing about The Netherlands, note terrifying levels of 'burn out'. In my own conversations with friends and colleagues I have noticed how metaphors of drowning and suffocation suffuse talk about work: people speak of 'going under', they dream about 'coming up for air' and routinely report they are 'drowning'. Such terrifying and violent imagery should surely give cause for concern.

Mike Crang (2007) has argued that time is perhaps the biggest source of dispute, anxiety and stress in academia as we are called on to do more with less in an 'always on' (Gregg) culture, marked by a constant state of 'emergency as rule' (Thrift, 2000). As Crang (2007) notes, academics want more time to research, don't have enough time to read, spend too much of their time at work, cannot spend enough time with students, can't fit their job into the available time, don't have time for anything outside work – children, friends, other activities – and then are subjected to the poisonous myth that they are time-rich and leisured! The harsh reality of long working hours is borne out by study after study. As long ago as 2006, the University trade union used official statistics to calculate that academics were working on average nine extra hours per week. In the UCU's 2016 survey, based on more than 12,000 responses from academics, published as I write this, that figure has increased to an average of 13.4 hours extra per week, with senior academics working significantly longer. Expressed differently, academics are working for free for two extra days per week – that is, **working the equivalent of a 7 day week every week**. The 2016 University Workplace Survey, conducted by the *Times Higher Education*, has free comments that translate these figures into reality, and make sobering reading:

> *'I feel unappreciated – I work 100 hours a week and I'm exhausted'*

> *'I thought this was my dream job… but the workload is unmanageable'*

> *'I don't think I can realistically keep this up until retirement without making myself seriously ill from stress'. (quoted in Grove, 2016)*

As well as chronic stress, exhaustion and increasing rates of ill health, there are a myriad of more subtle impacts of this kind of extreme pressure and overwork. In a moving blog for The Guardian's Academics Anonymous site (May 20 2016) one lecturer began: 'Dear student, I do not have time to mark your essay properly… In an ideal world your work would be read by an enthusiastic engaged professional, but the reality is very very different.' Such accounts hint at the huge

personal frustrations and disappointments experienced by academics, and the very particular forms of alienation that accompany not simply being stressed but also feeling unable to carry out one's job as one believes it should be done. Many public sector workers – not just academics - experience this at considerable personal psychological cost. It is another hidden injury that does violence to our sense of professionalism and integrity, that can be felt as an attack on the self.

Similarly injurious processes accompany the harsh decline in care, kindness and compassion in academic workplaces, and the isolation felt by many – vividly conveyed in hundreds of letters I have received. Again there are a multiplicity of things that need to be unpacked and explored. They include increasing rates of bullying and harassment, increasing competition, declining experiences of community, and the spiralling sense of not being listened to – not having a voice; more than half of academics report that they feel they cannot get their voices heard within the University (Grove, 2016). Academics often provide extraordinary care and support for their students, but feel unsupported themselves: 'dropped in at the deep end' as many new staff report, left to 'sink or swim'; the analogies to drowning once again abundant. For more established scholars the pressures can be different: 'I feel like I am the world's mentor and supporter' one friend tells me:' I constantly have colleagues crying on my shoulder, I spend my weekends writing references and commenting on their grant applications and trying to be a good supportive colleague and feminist. But I never get to do any of my own work and there's absolutely nobody to take any care of me. I've never had a f***ing mentor in my life!'

More broadly, as Kathleen Lynch (2010) has argued, these systems produce 'care-less' workers. Workloads are so heavy and expectations of productivity so high, she argues, that they can only be achieved by workers who have no relationships or responsibilities that might constrain their productive capacities. There is a growing literature about motherhood and the academy (Evans & Grant, 2008; Meyers, 2012; Connelly & Ghodsee, 2014), as well as a flourishing self-help and advice sphere which instructs on topics such as 'how to ensure that your children do not "show"'. One woman quoted by Mona Mannuevo (2015) suggests that her maternity leave makes her look very bad: 'like a criminal record on the CV'. Maria do Mar Pereira argues this pressure also extends to activism – increasingly squeezed out by time and proliferating other demands. In the current context, as Lauren Berlant (2011) puts it, to 'have a life' (p. 3)at all increasingly seems like an accomplishment.

Equally pernicious perhaps is the damage done to our ways of relating within the academy, where it becomes routine to see compassion vying for space with less generous emotions. Here is a typical scenario: we work in a small department, delivering several undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and already feeling overwhelmed. We get the news that one of our colleagues is unwell and has been 'signed off' work by her doctor for three months. People are genuinely sad and upset to hear this. Our lovely colleague is sick. We have been worried about her for a while. But then it hits: all the marking is about to come in and dissertation-anxiety has reached a peak amongst students. Who is going to take over her methods teaching, her supervisees, and pick up the grading of all those essays? It's nearly the end of the financial year and our Head of Department

informs us there's no money left to pay anyone to help with this. We sigh and a little hard knot of resentment forms. It is not directed against our colleague. Not really. Not yet. But before long someone will ask, 'isn't she better yet?' or 'Might she be well enough to do some of her marking from home?' And so it begins: the damage to relations of generosity and compassion. Indeed, I was asked to do marking when I was off sick by a colleague whom I like and respect.... She is not a bad person, but simply a person operating in a bad system, under impossible pressure, and where there is no 'slack', and precious few systems for dealing with even routine occurrences such as people getting sick. This is an occupational health disaster, but the care-less-ness is *structural*; it is institutionally produced, and it diminishes us all.

Against 'fast academia' (Gill, 2010) or, 'academia without walls' (Gill, 2010; Pereira, 2015) there has been a growing interest in 'slow academia' – captured in the quote at the start of this section, as a way of resisting the temporal logics of neoliberalism. However, some have chosen to interpret this slow movement critically seeing in it a failure to recognise privilege and an attempt to mystify institutional hierarchy. In a much circulated public letter, Mark Carrigan and Filip Vostal (2016) critique the authors of The Slow Professor (Berg & Seeber, 2016), calling into question the idea that academics are stressed and arguing that '"slow professorship" only makes sense when such decelerating professors can take it for granted that junior associates will accelerate to pick up the slack'. Yet this is to misunderstand the notion of 'slow scholarship' – at least in its radical versions -which repeatedly emphasizes that the '"slow" in slow scholarship is not just about time but about structures of power and inequality' (Martell, 2014). A feminist geography collective underlines that 'slow scholarship cannot just be about making individual lives better, but must also be about re-making the university' (Mountz et al, 2015)

Surveillance and quantified control

> Sometimes the antagonist isn't wielding a gun. In this kind of attack, there is no person or event that can be met head-on with a protest or a strike. There is no explosion, no great conflict, no epic battle. Such is the case with higher education's silent killer: the slow, incremental creep of "audit culture" (Spooner, 2015, p. 5)

> "Punitive accountability is undoing all things public"(Michelle Fine, 2015, this volume, p. XXX)

In a wonderful tumblr animation produced by The Department of Omnishambles, Karl Marx is catapulted forward to the early twenty first century and we see him having his 'end of year assessment' with his department head: 'Hi Dr Marx' says the computer generated voice, 'good to see you:'

> Thanks for coming in for this assessment. (Hi) So, Karl, I really like what you did with, what was it, *Das Kapital*? Great stuff. (Thanks – I aim to please). In terms of impact points it scored very highly. Very highly indeed. Great what you did with the whole 20th century and stuff. Those revolutions and whatever. Massive impact there. (Right). But, obviously, not a peer-reviewed document so I can't count it towards your

publications for the REF assessment. Er kind of a problem. (Oh?) I mean a man can't live by impact alone if you know what I mean Karl. And departmentally, I'm sorry to say, you're just not pulling your weight in terms of publications. (What about *The Communist Manifesto*? That had quite a lot of citations) It falls into the same trap, I'm afraid, Karl. It doesn't help the REF [Research Excellence Framework]at all. Where is the new work?'

The video goes on to reveal that the teaching evaluations are not great, and that failure to publish in top journals is letting the department down. Karl Marx is 'exposed' as a loser whose work just doesn't cut it in the contemporary academy. The Department of Omnishambles brilliantly uses what we might call (following the artist Marcel Duchamp) 'found objects' or 'ready made' language from the corporate academy to satirize our current state. In this case its target is the rapidly proliferating regimes of audit and surveillance in which academics are located. As Roger Burrows (2012) has argued, any individual academic in the UK can now be ranked and measured on more than 100 different scales and indices which become the 'qualculations' (Callon & Law, 2005) that measure academics' value and monetize them. These metrics measure our grant income, research 'excellence', citation scores, student evaluations, esteem indicators, impact factor, PhD completions, etc etc. They produce what I have dubbed the 'quantified self of neoliberal academia' (Gill, 2015). These metrics work with a regime of value that is highly selective and yet which seeks to render everything quantifiable. Some have suggested that we count different things – less (I suspect) to support a new proliferation of measures than as a radical thought experiment to disrupt the taken for granted reporting of 'marketable outputs of a quantifiable nature' (Nussbaum, 2010). 'What if we counted differently?' Mountz et al, 2015 ask: 'Instead of articles published or grants applied for, what if we accounted for thank you notes received, friendships formed, collaborations forged?' Undoing 'counting culture', they argue, becomes part of a broader project of decolonizing knowledge. Indeed, 'the very failure of our individual strategies of professional advancement and survival is the possibility of our collectively remaking the university' (p.1244) s Halberstam (2011) has argued the 'queer art of failure' offers subversive possibilities here to overturn established regimes and to value different things (see also Les Back, 2016).

Yet importantly, these metrics, this new algorithmic culture, is not simply about 'audit' – which suggests a measuring – however partial and problematic– of what is there. Much more perniciously they materialize new ways of doing and being in the academy. An example of 'governing at a distance, they take on a life of their own becoming autonomous actors that do things in the world – generate funding, damage reputations, single out people for redundancies, close down courses. They constitute a central part of the 'new managerialism' or 'new public management 'or 'performativity' (Ball, 2000). As Stuart Hall has argued they replace 'professional judgment and control by wholesale importation of micro management practices of audit, inspection, monitoring, efficiency and value for money, despite the fact that neither their public role nor the public interest objectives can be adequately reframed in this way'.(Quoted in Redden 2008:11). They incite a regime of "document everything, reveal nothing" (Butterwick & Dawson, 2005:, p.55) calling on us to remake ourselves as "calculable rather then

memorable" (Ball, 2012) – exactly as Marx is rendered in the Omnishambles tumblr and how he can be judged to be 'not pulling his weight' despite having produced work that transformed Western thought.

The psychosocial costs of this are enormous. It produces new structures of feeling in the academy, and contributes to our own self-surveillance and monitoring and commodification. Cris Shore argues that 'auditing processes are having a corrosive effect on people's sense of professionalism and autonomy' (2008:292). They produce what Chris Lorenz (2012) dubs 'inner immigration' – which I understand (through my reading of Fanon) as a specific form of alienation from oneself in which the ability to hold a 'double consciousness' – ie refusing to take on the university's way of seeing you and holding onto a separate/independent sense of one's own worth and value – is both essential, difficult and agonizingly painful.

We are exhorted to view ourselves through the optic of these metrics which permeate every sphere of our working lives and dictate the worth of everything we do. "How many papers is a baby worth?" asked two feminist geographers (Klocker & Drozdezewski, 2012). After an (ahem) pregnant pause, Higher Education Funding Council of England [HEFCE] delivered its answer: 'each period of maternity leave equates to a reduced output expectation equivalent to one paper across each four year period' (HEFCE, 2011) – ie. One! Sometimes it is hard not to think that one has tumbled down a rabbit hole into a parallel universe, so absurd does it seem that even a baby is 'calculable' within our 'metric assemblages' (Burrows, 2012). The politics of life itself indeed!

More broadly, what is fascinating and disturbing is our growing complicity in these processes as a profession, and the shift from a moment early on in these regimes in which they were felt as something alien imposed upon academics from the outside, to the situation now in which these qualculations are treated as meaningful and real (especially by those scoring best in them). I am always surprised when I see that otherwise apparently sane, critical and smart colleagues have added little statements to the bottom of their emails informing people how (well) their department scored in the REF or where they are located in some league table or other. What makes it even more comical/surreal is that there is now such an abundance of these measures – a new league table is published practically every week, and Universities hire armies of consultants and administrators to produce the best possible spin on each one: so your University dropped 50 places in the Global Reputation rankings – oh dear - but never mind because its score for employability of graduates in science disciplines ranks in the top 10 – definitely one for the website (kerching!)...Of course this is a deadly serious business – Shore (2008, p. 286) aptly notes 'the policy of naming and shaming failing institutions has become an annual ritual and humiliation'. But surely there is a need to keep some distance, even – dare I say - a level of playfulness that prevents us from suggesting that these indices genuinely represent 'quality' . I understand the need to try to do 'well' – these are the 'rules of the game' after all, and, hey, we are academics. But do we really need to suspend all critical judgment?, There is much to learn, I believe, from anarchists and other activists who explore what it means to be _In and Against_ the _State_ (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980 who embrace the

ambivalence and complexity of that location rather than becoming card-carrying members of a regime of spurious fabricated market competition that our combined intelligence – let alone ethical sensibilities – must surely tell us is deeply suspect.

Conclusions: Beyond individualism: the psychosocial life of the neoliberal University

> "Contemporary academic capitalism works through affects and languages of love, flexibility and productivity" (Mona Mannuevo, 2015, p86)

> "We must radically change the way in which we think about ourselves and our work." (Maria do Mar Pereira, 2016, p. 106)

In this chapter I have discussed some of the emerging debate and critique about working conditions in the neoliberal University. In concluding I want to interject some different perspectives. They develop from my interest in the affective and psychic life of academia. They do not start from the top – e.g. from accounts about the structural transformation of the University which stress corporatization, 'massification, marketization and internationalisation' (Barcan, 2013) - but begin from the bottom – from the ground up - with experiences of academics as workers.

One of the enduring themes of my research – including my writing about the University – has been to challenge the persistence of individualism as a way of organising and accounting. This has been evident in long held interests in the relationship between culture and subjectivity, in my interest in exploring the 'mentality' part of 'govermentality' and in investigating the psychosocial aspects of neoliberalism and postfeminism. *The Hidden Injuries* sought not simply to highlight the silenced and difficult aspects of academics' experiences and to render them knowable and speakable (Tuck, 2015, this volume), but also – crucially – to expose the extent to which these experiences are/were lived through a toxic individualising discourse. What I have been struck by, again and again, in conversations with academics is the dominance of an individualistic register – a tendency to account for ordinary experiences in the academy through discourses of excoriating self blame, privatised guilt, intense anxiety and shame. Whether it is paralysing job insecurity which made it impossible to make any kinds of plans for the future, or 100 hour working weeks, academics are more likely to respond in a way that suggested that *they* are failing, than to express legitimate anger at being placed in such a situation. Time and again I hear colleagues use languages of self-contempt, recrimination or self pathologization to talk about the struggles they experienced. Perfectly reasonable difficulties at dealing with hundreds of emails per day on top of 'regular' work, are evinced as signs of obsession or compulsion. Rejections (in a system in which nearly everything is rejected) are treated as evidence of shameful failure. Illness signifies an inability to cope and probable confirmation that one is not good enough or tough enough to be there. It wasn't that these injuries weren't *felt*; it was that they were apprehended through a resolutely individualizing discourse which turned upside down the notion of the 'personal

as political'. As Sara Ahmed has argued, consciousness-raising is – at least in part – raising consciousness of unhappiness. But there is a need to move beyond what M.E. Luka et al (2015:185) call the 'documentation of shared misery, frustration, or trauma' to something else- something that can transform these affects into action for change. It requires – as Eve Tuck (2015, this volume) has powerfully expressed it – not 'raising awareness' but making our experiences knowable in new and – importantly - *more disruptive* ways. As I see it this involves acts of translation, dialogue and political interruption.

There are examples of this in many sites – strikes, occupations, acts of solidarity, refusals, campaigns, reimaginings of the University. Indeed as I write I am just getting news that the campaign against brutal and coercive performance management at Newcastle University in the UK – the notorious 'Raising the Bar' – has been successful, that University management have climbed down and agreed to engage in a more collaborative and bottom-up process for improving research.

But what I am struck by too is how tenacious individualism is – how many of our responses to academia themselves seem to reproduce precisely the individualizing tendencies we need to challenge. We see them in the burgeoning of attempts by university counselling departments and occupational health services to respond to the crisis (that is the new normal) with courses, training sessions, yoga, meditation, events on time management or 'handling difficult people' - and the new program de jour: resilience training. These interventions address alarming levels of stress, unhappiness, precariousness and overwork through a resolute focus on individual psychological functioning. They systematically reframe our experiences in personal terms so that the solution becomes trying to develop your 'resilience quotient' (RQ) rather than organising for change. This is not a conspiracy - and from my experience the professionals who run such courses and programmes are caring and sensitive people, genuinely seeking to share resources and strategies – yet it is hard to avoid the conclusion that these are plans for managing the unmanageable, and 'fingers in the dam' of psychosocial and somatic catastrophe.

Another example is the proliferation of computer and smart phone applications which effectively take these courses and create mobile or online applications. Everything from mindfulness to 'getting things done' have been promoted to – and taken up with alacrity by – academics, instilling the idea that it is our *relation* to work that needs to be changed, rather than the *nature* of working conditions themselves. These apps – again frequently perceived as tremendously valuable by colleagues and students – construct a view of academics as 'inefficient' and 'failing', requiring a suitably upgraded form of subjectivity and a 'makeover' of how we work. Self-care can be 'warfare', as Sara Ahmed and Audre Lorde both argue, and it can offer a critique of the neoliberal University (Barker, 2011). But when it remains stuck within the confines of cognitive behavioural or neurolinguistic (re)programming interventions it risks trapping us within the very neoliberal logics that are in need of critique.

In thinking about the grip that individualism has, Ngaire Donaghue and I (Gill & Donaghue, 2015) have also observed the agonizing contortions/paralysis that

surrounds (relative) privilege, and – with that – the apparent difficulty in offering politicised responses to anything other than the issue of casualization. Looking at academic blogs we noticed that, unlike discussion of the academic precariat, 'a striking contrast exists in the ways in which the experiences of tenured (or otherwise securely employed) academics are discussed – the sharp economic, political and ideological analysis shifts to a more personal register, with an orientation away from pressing the case for fundamental structural reform of universities in favour of venting, commiserating and sharing strategies for 'coping'.' (Gill& Donaghue, 2015: xx) The 'luxury' of having a secure job, makes writers feel 'like a jerk' if they complain about their position, as they know they are 'the lucky ones'. Embarrassed and ashamed of their privilege they retreat into what we call 'reluctant individualism' – reluctant because these are thoughtful and critical scholars and this is not their usual mode of analysis, but individualism nonetheless because it offers no way of framing the situation beyond strategies for better self- management (being better at saying no, organzing time more effectively, etc). The self-blame, guilt and self-contempt that runs through these accounts is extraordinarily painful to me – perhaps because it resonates. But in my view it produces a seriously impoverished critique (compared to what is needed). Perhaps unwittingly it suggests that 'the only intelligible and legitimate critique must focus on casualization', thereby 'missing so much else within the neoliberal academy that needs interrogation' (Gill& Donaghue, 2016 p.96.)

Going forward, we urgently need a collective consciousness and action to bring about change- as well as new ways of thinking. Here are four concluding thoughts about what we require – at least to consider – in order to challenge the somatic and psychosocial crisis affecting us. First, a much expanded understanding of precarity – one that acknowledges the multiple forms of insecurity, precariousness and dispossession within the Academy – which include the situations of all but the most privileged of our students as they find themselves effectively indentured by debt in a situation aggravated by unemployment and austerity; the cleaners, security and catering staff, increasingly employed by sub-contractors with dubious records in the carceral system on minimum wage and zero hours contracts; the ways in which precariousness is entangled with disciplinary marginalizations – especially for scholars working in ethinic and racial studies, women's studies, postcolonial studies, queer studies (Nash & Owens, 2015; Arrigiotia et al, 2015); and the devastating rise of ill-health as embodied effect of neoliberal regimes within the university must also surely count as a type of existential, ontological precarity, affecting more and more of us.

Secondly and related to this we need much more attention to power and difference and recognition of the deep intersectional inequalities that see women, Black and minority ethnic scholars, disabled people and others represented in disproportionately small numbers, concentrated in precarious positions, paid less , in more junior positions (Bailey & Miller, 2015; Leathwood & Read, 2012), making up what Diane Reay (2004) dubbed the 'lumpenproletariat' of academia. We need to explore the 'inequality regimes' in academia: 'the inter-related practices, processes, action and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and race inequalities' (Acker, 2006, p. 443). These

operate in large, quantifiable, patterned ways impacting hiring, pay, tenure status, etc, but also at a finer grain: in the (felt) disparity between women's and men's pastoral care or 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 2003) in the workplace; in how admin is shared out – what Tara Brabazon (2015) calls the 'housework of academia'.

Thirdly we need to address the affective and psychosocial aspects of life within academia. Of course it is possible to think about the neoliberal university or the corporate university or academic capitalism in terms of large scale macro-economic trends – and this is important. But to do only this is to miss so much of what is going on: the way in which these new regimes get inside us, shape our sense of self, produce particular affects and subjectivities (e.g. shame or anxiety), erode collectivity and collaboration, promote competition and so on. Some of the most exciting work explores these processes and examines the micro-politics of academic life (Gillies & Lucey, 2007; Mannevuo, 2015; Pereira, 2017), in all its complexity.

Finally we need to develop solidarities that go beyond our own locations. Drawing on the work of Gail Lewis (2009; 2010) on 'difficult knowledges' I have dubbed these 'difficult solidarities' as they require us to move beyond troubling animosities that often play out in terms of age, generation and tenure status . An example might be seen in the intergenerational hatreds mobilised by comments about "whining adjuncts" in which contingent , precarious scholars are attacked for complaining about current conditions. They find their counterpart in sneering accounts of "quit lit"- a disparaging shorthand for the letters written by established scholars, who publicly – and painfully - resign from secure positions within academia, and in ageist jibes at those with tenure, as if they were a bevvy of self-serving 'bed-blockers', stubbornly refusing to make space for the young, even after their sell-by dates have long since been exceeded. In these cases, the animosity is, in my view, misdirected – on the one hand it misrecognizes "the enemy" or at least what is at stake; on the other it is politically unproductive and unhelpful. Moreover it cements a way of relating that is the antithesis of the empathetic and generous engagement we need in order to go forward. To a longtime activist like myself it might cynically be seen as a deliberate attempt to orchestrate division so we fight amongst ourselves.

We must resist the 'neoliberal logics' and 'hyper extensions of colonial time' (Shahjahan 2014, p. 3) that sort individuals into opposing categories and develop new, critical solidarities (Mountz et al, 2015). These will not be easy- for there are real differences – but making dialogues across these and relating with empathy and generosity is our only hope for radical social transformation. As Audre Lorde reminds us, the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, but feminists in positions of power may be called on to "stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled" in order to create "our common cause... a world in which we can all flourish" (2007:114).

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