Regimes of performance: practices of the normalised self in the neoliberal university

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Universities today inescapably find themselves part of nationally and globally competitive networks that appear firmly inflected by neoliberal concerns of rankings, benchmarking and productivity. This, of course, has in turn led to progressively anticipated and regulated forms of academic subjectivity that many fear are overly econo-centric in design. What I wish to explore in this paper is how emanating from prevailing neoliberal concepts of individuality and competitiveness, the agency of the contemporary academic is increasingly conditioned via 'regimes of performance', replete with prioritised claims of truth and practices of the normalised self. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's writings on governmentality, and Judith Butler's subsequent work on subjection, I use findings from a series of in-depth interviews with senior university managers at National University of Ireland, Galway to reflect upon the ways in which academics can respond effectively to the ascendant forms of neoliberal governmentality characterising the academy today. I contemplate the key task of articulating broader educational values, and conclude by considering the challenge of enacting alternative academic subjectivities and practices.

Keywords: Performance management; neoliberal university; Foucault; Butler; governmentality; subjection

Introduction

> Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency (Butler, 1997, 2).

Judith Butler's writing on subjection has been immensely valuable in deconstructing and revealing how power 'not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject' (1997, 84). Butler's work has been critically considered in the context of higher education previously, but chiefly in the context of students as subjects, as Barbara Grant and Bronwyn Davies have explored (Grant, 1997; Davies, 2006). Grant (1997, 101) has analysed the disciplining function of the university, which produces subjected and docile students, disciplined by 'both technologies of domination, which originate in the institution, and those of the self'. The 'self' Grant refers to

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is the liberal self, of course, underscored with long-established claims, however illusory, of autonomy and individualism. The key neoliberal register of 'individualism' is given further interrogation by Bronwyn Davies, who explores the subjectification or subjection of the self in the context of teacher-student university practices. For Davies (2006, 436), the concept of 'responsibilisation' that underpins neoliberal forms of government requires the 'individual to accept responsibility for self but to shed any responsibility for others – except to participate in acts of surveillance control'. And, more broadly, as Davies continues, neoliberalism 'heightens individuality and competitiveness, seeking to shape each student as an economic unit of use in a market economy' (Davies, 2006, 436). One could certainly substitute the word 'academic' for 'student' in the above quote, and, in a way, that is the starting point of this paper. In it, I consider academics as self-governing subjects operating within a university governmental architecture that has been increasingly inflected in recent years by neoliberal designs to affect a performing, optimal individual in and for a performing institution. That we are largely witnessing the beginnings of regimes of performance management in higher education in Ireland makes for a fascinating critique of the emergent forms of governmentality and subjection, but I do not wish to simply theorise here the resulting prevailing subjectivity of the performing academic. I hope to offer too a critical reflection on how to potentially enact a progressive and even emancipatory subjectivity with broader educational and civic values and responsibility.

Any given academic community can be read as an exemplar of what Foucault's calls a 'biopolitical population' – an assemblage of subjects, in other words, whose conduct is 'regulated within a multivalent and transformable framework' (Foucault, 2007, 20). As commonly seen in universities everywhere today, a central management goal at National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) is to fashion a new academic subjectivity defined by accountability and performance. In this paper, I explore how NUI Galway's managers are actively seeking to 'affect' academic engagement in this emergent performance culture. The empirical evidence derives from research undertaken for a master's thesis I recently submitted as part of an MA in Academic Practice at the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in the university, where I am a lecturer in Geography (Morrissey, 2012).[1] The research involved in-depth interviews with each of the main university managers, including the President, the Registrar, the Vice-President for Innovation and Performance, the Director of Quality, the Institutional Research Officer, the Director of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, the Dean of the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies, and the Executive Director of Operations. In addition, I also interviewed the

Principal Officer of the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA). Keeping anonymity, I variously draw upon these interviews below.[2] Comparatively, the Irish higher education sector has only recently begun to be systemically influenced by the kinds of neoliberal education policies that have been adopted in the UK, US and elsewhere. For this reason, NUI Galway is an illustrative example, I think, of how Irish universities are situating themselves, and reacting to, what is undoubtedly a more globalised higher education landscape today, in a more competitive neoliberal economy.

Towards a critique of governmentality in the academy: the problem with Foucault

In critically considering practices of neoliberal governmentality in the contemporary academy, an important theoretical reference point is the work of Michel Foucault. For Foucault, neoliberalism seeks to 'extend the rationalities of the market, the schemas of analysis it offers and the decision-making criteria it suggests, to domains which are not exclusively or not primarily economic' (2008, 323). However, the use of Foucault's writings on governmentality, subjection, resistance and power can be both problematic and contradictory, often leading to what Sam Porter (1996, 76) calls 'praxical paralysis'. To begin with, as Clive Barnett (2010, 281, 282) points out, the Foucauldian approach typically sees governmentality in terms of a 'politics of subjection' (i.e. it 'reduces the social field to a plane of subjectification'), and this assumption inevitably leads to 'the conclusion that neoliberalism degrades any residual potential for public action inherent in liberal democracy'. In addition, as Barnett makes clear, 'the analytics of governmentality only admits to a one-dimensional view of strategic action as always competitive action, having difficulty in accounting for observed forms of cooperative strategic action that are the outcome of communicatively-steered agreement' (2010, 285). For Barnett and others, one of the key problems with theorizations of neoliberal governmentality is that they frequently assume neoliberalism to involve a zero-sum game (see also Gordon, 1991; Lemke, 2002; Peters, 2006 and Donzelot, 2009). Here is Barnett again:

> The idea that governmentality is a distinctive mode of political rule which seeks to hail into existence its preferred subjects, which are then only left with the option of 'resistance', needs to be treated with considerable scepticism. Understood as a mechanism of subjection, governmentality is assumed to work through the operation of norms. However, Foucauldian theory is chronically unable to acknowledge the work of communicative rationalities in making any action-through-norms possible […] It is a style of analysis that makes it impossible to acknowledge diverse dynamics of change, and in turn remains blind to emergent public rationalities (2010, 281, 292)

In critiquing the governmental modalities that are seeking to affect and optimally manage the academic subject at NUI Galway, I do not wish to narrowly equate governmentality with templated practices of subjection. Rather, I wish to consider governmentality more broadly to also reflect on the emergent possibilities of alternative subjectivity; what Barnett calls above 'emergent public rationalities' (2010, 292). Furthermore, I consciously do not wish to stop at being simply critical *of* something, but rather want to take seriously the challenge of both articulating the necessity of being critical *for* something, and subsequently being part of its enactment. In this sense, it may be useful at this juncture to acknowledge one of the fundamental contradictions in Foucault's thinking on power and truth. He once argued that the 'essential political problem for the intellectual' primarily involved 'ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth' because of the repressive 'political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth' (Foucault, 1980, 133). Elsewhere, however, he moved beyond this idea of externalised resistance to repressive power, stressing instead how modernity's 'system of discipline-normalisation' involves a governmental form of power that 'is not in fact repressive but productive, repression figuring only as a lateral or secondary effect with regard to its central, creative and productive mechanisms' (Foucault, 2003, 51, 52. Cf. Foucault, 1977). I want to build on Foucault's latter point below, which seems to me a vital starting point for successfully navigating the forms of power operative in the academy today.

At NUI Galway, as elsewhere, articulating an alternative academic subjectivity, which embraces specific values, is neither straightforward nor bereft of a politics that is, as one university manager observes, compromisingly 'dirty':

> We have to recognise that we operate in a particular climate, and it's one that's dirty. The politics is dirty. And yes, there's a place for the person who is completely abstracted from that, who critiques it from the outside, who doesn't get their hands dirty, but you have to have some people who will because otherwise our argument will be seen as that of the classic ivory tower academic.

As a starting point, I certainly do not to seek to nostalgize some glorious past for the academy, replete with morally superior values of equality and democracy internally, or solidarity in and with the broader public sphere externally. Although notions of the ivory tower, languid productiveness and long holidays have often been registered by those seeking to negate legitimate criticisms of the performance culture that academics find themselves in today, there is no doubt that there have been previous and ongoing elitist subjectivities reinforcing relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and so on. Rather, I

wish to take seriously the challenge of situating a critical subjectivity in a higher education environment that is increasingly constituted by an array of neoliberal market concerns.

Neoliberal inflections in the academy

In recent years, we have seen a proliferation of commentary across the globe on the 'neoliberalization' of university education (Biz/ed, 2005; Kealey, 2006; Brown and Scott, 2009; Baker, 2010; Fearn, 2010; New Statesman, 2010). And it is perhaps no exaggeration to assert that most academics today, when reflecting on emergent regimes of performance evaluation, connect this development to broader influences of globalisation and neoliberalism (Rhoads and Torres, 2006). Many are conscious of the sounds being made publically by university presidents and vice-chancellors, such as Terence Kealey, Vice-Chancellor of Buckingham University. For Kealey (2006), the 'liberation of the higher education market in the UK and, sadly, the resultant bankruptcies' is not only inevitable but a trend to be welcomed. And if, as Wendy Bastilich (2010, 855) argues, universities today 'find themselves within a policy culture dominated increasingly by the values and precepts of economic doctrine', a key danger lies in 'allowing economic logic to supersede educational concerns'.

For Jauhiainen et al. (2009, 417, 426), 'neo-liberalistic social and education policy has changed the working conditions and working culture' of universities today. They draw upon research undertaken at the University of Turku in Finland to examine the experiences of academics who are increasingly operating in the context of what they term the 'efficiency university', dominated by a prevailing culture of 'accountability'. For Kathleen Lynch too, universities have effectively been transformed over the last decade into 'powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks'; a trend that has 'very serious implications' for the academy, not least of which is 'regulation of publications, lectures and engagements according to a narrowly defined set of market principles' (Lynch, 2006, 1, 3, 8; see also Giroux, 2002). And any transformation of the university from a 'centre of learning' to a 'business organisation with productivity targets' has, of course, implications too for the nature and quality of both research and teaching (Doring, 2002, 140). There is a danger in much of this critique, however, of ascribing a somewhat misleading unilateral sense of the contemporary university. All universities are, of course, not the same. There is considerable diversity in terms of research and teaching quality, constituency of students, whether publicly or privately funded and so on. My critique here is concerned with teasing out the emergent performance measurement practices in a publically funded university in Western Europe that is more

broadly happening under a neoliberal regime of public management. I situate this narrative in the specific context of Ireland's publicly funded university system in more detail later.

In considering initially, however, the broader inflection of neoliberalism in the academy in recent decades, a key question revolves around how neoliberal ideology has become so hegemonic in society? David Harvey is especially instructive on this point, underlining the significance of the prevailing 'common-sense' dimensions of neoliberal thinking:

> For any system of thought to become hegemonic requires the articulation of fundamental concepts that become so deeply embedded in common-sense understandings that they become taken for granted and beyond question. For this to occur not any old concepts will do. A conceptual apparatus has to be constructed that appeals almost 'naturally' to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities that seem to inhere in the social world we inhabit (Harvey 2006, 146).

As Clive Barnett notes, moreover, the key persuasive register at work in neoliberal rationality is 'freedom', which is an 'intuitively appealing concept' that has resulted in neoliberalism being transformed over time from 'an ideology into hegemonic common-sense' (2010, 270, 272).

At the heart of neoliberal rationality is the promise that 'individual behaviour and happiness, the 'public good' and responsible government can be secured by the extension of the logic of the market' (Bastilich, 2010, 848). And as many critics have pointed out, neoliberalism has never equated to laissez-faire economics; rather, it has always involved governmental intervening to 'further the game of enterprise' and facilitate specific economic subjectivities, defined by ideas of 'productivity', 'improvement' and 'efficiency' (Gordon, 1991, 42; Harvey, 2005; Donzelot, 2009). Over the past decade in particular, we have seen university strategic plans, operational plans and 'key performances indicators' (KPIs) calibrate to the tune of market forces and often nebulous ideas about 'policy-relevant research' in/for the 'knowledge economy'. This omnipresent discourse appears to have attained an unrivalled discursive ascendancy across the globe, serving to simultaneously marginalise dissenting voices. As Wendy Bastalich observes, the 'rapid expansion of knowledge economy policy discourse in the face of widespread disagreement about the underpinning realities might be understood in terms of an attempt on the part of neo-liberal 'expertise' to colonise the domain of higher education' (2010, 848).

The neoliberal colonisation of higher education has been specifically critiqued by a range of authors who have variously drawn on Michel Foucault's writings on liberalism, security and governmentality (Marshall, 1990; Ball, 1994; Trowler, 1998; Peters, 2001; Doherty, 2006; Simons, 2006; Weber and Maurer, 2006; Peters and Besley, 2007; Peters et al., 2009).[3]

Situating her critique in the context of neoliberal education reforms in New Zealand during the 1980s and 1990s, Tina Besley (2006) has used the concept of governmentality and its integral forms of self-regulation to critique the professionalisation of one particular discipline, counselling. The operation of self-regulation and ostensible autonomy at the heart of practices of neoliberal governmentality is the defining characteristic for Foucault of the forms of biopower that 'affect', rather than coerce subject formation and conduct (Foucault, 1997, 2007, 2008, 2011). In considering Foucault's writing on biopower, Michael Peters underlines how 'the emphasis of education to contribute to economic growth through research, innovation, and creativity is a development of historically deep-seated liberal notions about the expressive and creative self and the ways in which various freedoms to speak, teach and publish form a basis for governing liberal societies' (2009, xliv; see also Peters, 2006). This connects to Bronwyn Davies' point about the autonomous self's reliance upon a prioritised liberal discourse on how best to be governed and successful as a recognisable, accomplished and ultimately 'viable subject' (Davies, 2006, 427). Davies observes the essence of subjection and dependency realised via this hegemonic discourse (however imagined that may be):

> The agentic subject disavows this dependency, not out of a flawed capacity for reflexivity, but because [of] the achievement of autonomy, however illusory it might be (Davies, 2006, 427).

And it is precisely the illusion of autonomy at the heart of liberalism that Foucault has in mind when he reflects that 'freedom is nothing else but the correlative of the deployment of apparatuses of security' (2007, 48).

The performing self and the performing university at NUI Galway

The 'apparatuses of security' deployed at NUI Galway to oversee performance management appear to rely centrally upon liberal notions of freedom, individuality and competitiveness. And linking the autonomous performing individual to the performing institution is a strategy that is clearly driven by a strong desire to be competitive, productive and integrated in a broader neoliberal economy, as one senior manager asserts:

> whether we like it or not, we are now in a competitive international market for the best students, the best graduate students, the best staff, funding opportunities and so on. To be competitive in those environments means that you have to have a measured performance culture that is reflected in things like league tables […] and so we need to be able to position ourselves as effectively as we can for the division

> of national resources and for the division of international resources. So, it's about competitiveness for the institution. The other side of it – and I think it's as important – is about the individual academic.

Performance measurement then is effectively 'a compromise between what the university is trying to do, what the individual is trying to do, and to what extent we can marry those two together for the mutual benefit of both'. Another managerial colleague agrees:

> If you respect the fact that the institution has to perform as well as the individual, and the two have to integrate, the individual's own career or own performance would be influenced by the university standing, and of course vice versa.

And neoliberal conceptions of integrated individuality and competitiveness even serve to legitimate those knowledges and communities of academic practice left outside research priority areas: 'the challenge for those areas that currently stand outside the priorities is to show that they are strong, to show that they could be a priority area'.

The key facets of individuality and autonomy at the heart of neoliberalism are implicit in the managerial positions articulated above. As David Harvey notes, neoliberalism is first and foremost a 'theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework' (2005, 2). Notions of autonomy and individuality in the envisioning of the optimal conditioned agency of university academics at NUI Galway also echo Barbara Grant's perceptive critique of the neoliberal 'technologies of the self' that operate to similarly condition student subjectivities:

> The culture of autonomy and individualism at the heart of the university constructs students who believe that success or failure lies with them. Thus, solely responsible for their academic success, they seek to take care of themselves, and in this way the institution takes care of itself (Grant, 1997, 110).

Grant helpfully continues:

> The technologies of the self, the more covert constructive effects of the university's practices, function to create a certain kind of identity […] with a 'conscience' which is informed/formed in particular ways, resulting in the shaping of 'appropriate' needs and desires: the desire to know, to be wise, the desire to please, the desire to be successful (1997, 110; on this point, see also Jaye, Egan and Smith-Han, 2010).

The kind of academic identity and conditioned subjectivity being prompted and framed by the emergent regime of performance management at NUI Galway relies upon a ubiquitously registered discourse about the optimal performing neoliberal subject – performing, that is, in a market economy and ultimately in the service of capital. Such knowledge claims, of course, are part of a broader neoliberal 'truth-telling' that involves frequently uncontested understandings of productivity, entrepreneurship, innovation and research value (Peters, 2003). And this is precisely why it is so difficult to challenge the forms of neoliberal governmentality that work to convince 'students and workers that there is no choice at a systemic level' (Davies, 2006, 436). If, as Bronwyn Davies asserts, individuals believe that their only power 'lies in their individual choices to become appropriate and successful within that (inevitable) system', then it becomes 'extraordinarily difficult' to reflexively interrogate, let alone resist, that system (2006, 436).

The managerial university: fashioning and facilitating the neoliberal academic subject

For senior university managers at NUI Galway, the success of fashioning and facilitating the optimal, engaged academic subject is seen to hinge on firstly having the correct managerial structure and then having effective communicators to take up key leadership positions within. For one senior manager, what is centrally needed is 'a head of school or a dean or whatever the appropriate level is who has been trained and understands that it is his or her job to have these conversations [respecting performance], not in the sense of an inspector wielding a stick or wielding a carrot or a rod or whatever, but in the sense of a genuine conversation that is appropriate to the discipline and which provides a kind of a guide to the individual'. For a managerial colleague, 'you need the head of school network and the dean network to make sure that that is happening, and also to communicate back up as well'. And for another, the heads of schools are 'key' because 'the individual may not have as much exposure to what the strategic plans of the university are […] so communication is vital'. The same senior manager then sets out exactly how performance management is done effectively in the 'managerial university':

> I think you've got a generic set of KPIs and it's then up to each dean, and ultimately each head of school and head of discipline to benchmark against internationally competitive peer schools and disciplines in order to translate university KPIs into appropriate KPIs for their schools and disciplines.

Implicitly echoing neoliberal notions of individuality and autonomy, a managerial colleague elaborates, furthermore, on the imperative of 'cascading' KPIs downwards through the institution (Harvey, 2005; Davies, 2006; Foucault, 2007):

> If an institution is to perform and the individual is to perform, then they have to have some set of goals. So you have to know what they are and then you have to choose ones that are appropriate, and then having done that you have to ensure that they are translated or nuanced to relate well to particular schools and disciplines. So you can identify a top level set of KPIs and then the trick is to cascade them down.

Despite the optimism above, a key problem in facilitating performance measurement at NUI Galway, which is repeatedly cited by senior managers, is the newness of the leadership structures and the inexperience of many academics as team leaders tasked with communicating vision in the 'managerial university'. More than one senior manager reflected on the lack of investment in management structures and training and why that needs to change. One manager compares NUI Galway to private sector companies:

> Corporations like IBM or Thermo King spend lots of money working out structure and then bringing in trainers to guide people on the structure. We're on the way and it is going to take, I would say, at least five years to implement new structures and the behaviour around them.

A managerial colleague further underlines the import of leadership structures in a major institution that employs two thousand people:

> the single biggest challenge is to create a cadre of people who are willing and able to take on the job of leadership. It is just beyond ridiculous to think that an organisation that has a turnover of a quarter of a billion a year, and has two thousand people as we have, has a capital programme of 150 million euro, can be just run without management. But there are academics who think management is a pain in the neck.

Reflecting on the lack of leadership and management experience of most academics, one senior manager at NUI Galway manager sets out the challenge of implementing a constructive performance management framework:

> The difficulty with doing all this is that on paper it's very easy, it's not rocket science. Within a couple of hours, most people could agree on a set of KPIs. It's all doable, so why isn't it done? And that's the question, given that it is so easy. It isn't done because there's a real lack of leadership within the institution and that's not a surprise either if you think about it. That's the real challenge. If you put in

> place a structure – and I think we have done that – and that structure is the school structure, you can put in place systems, but the problem is how do you execute the plan?

There seems little reflection here on what the plan actually is, however, or on any of its inherent contradictions (or indeed on the broader competing discourses within higher education). The easy out is to cite the fact that plans should emerge from Schools via a bottom-up exercise. But, even when this is the case, such exercises typically rely upon existing normalised and templated work plans that implicitly and often uncritically feed into broader neoliberal designs of productivity, output and value. For one university manager at NUI Galway, 'communication is the life blood between the different parts of the organisation', and in the whole process of performance measurement 'one of the core principles is 'engagement', how do we engage the individual to be better?' But the question is doing better for whom? Our students? A more broadly constituted public that we are actively engaging? A better, more critically informed world? Perhaps a combination of these? Or is it primarily better for league tables, status and the impossible-to-negate calling card of more grants, jobs, opportunities and capitalist enterprise in a period of national austerity?

The engagement challenge

Engagement, however scripted that may be via the emergent regime of performance at NUI Galway, is continually cited by senior managers as crucial in the broader defense of the Irish university sector at a time of 'competing demands for public investment'. And there is certainly a growing competitiveness too within Irish higher education, which is publicly funded. NUI Galway is state-funded through the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA), and the wider higher education landscape in Ireland has been increasingly attuned to concerns of performance management in recent years (Boland, 2011). Indeed, performance management is currently a core element of public sector reform more broadly in Ireland. In the recent Labour Relations Commission Proposals (colloquially referred to as Croke Park 2), there is a specific section on 'strengthening performance management'. It includes the following pronouncements on managerial policy: 'the introduction of performance management systems will be accelerated at the level of the individual'; '[t]here will be active management of the performance improvement action plans'; and, '[m]easures will be introduced to further develop and enhance a culture of performance across the management cohort of the public service' (Labour Relations Commission, 2013, 15). The latter declaration betrays a trend in discourses of public sector reform and public

management in Ireland in which higher education is seen just like every other sector, and therefore warranting the same performance management protocols for public accountability to a broader economy – and especially so in fiscally precarious times.

Robert Rhoads and Carlos Torres, in their excellent edited collection, *The University, state and market*, have shown this bonding of universities and regimes of public management to have first emerged in North America. One contribution, for example, helpfully divulges how public institutions have been affected by increased neoliberal competitiveness and privatisation in the broader university sector, resulting in a shift in the 'target of public subsidy in higher education' to the point where the functions of universities in terms of 'public good' and 'public interest' are seen primarily in the service of a global knowledge economy (Rhoads and Slaughter, 2006, 103-104). And this, in turn, has served to elevate public management discourse in the broader higher education landscape, effectively redefining the traditional educational public service role of universities. In this sense, insisting upon the broader values and functions of higher education (and not simply economic utility), which require deeper, more nuanced and more reflective mechanisms of performance evaluation, is surely a crucial challenge for senior managers in universities today? But one must wonders if this argument is being made loudly enough, often enough and in a united fashion across the sector. Neoliberal competition, after all, does not encourage cooperative action.

At NUI Galway, linking the need to document accountable and publicly useful academic enterprise to the question of state funding is evidently important. One university manager explicates the imperative of positive public relations in the current economic climate:

> to a certain extent the measurement culture, hopefully driving performance forward, helps because if you can demonstrate in a measurable way, pound for pound or euro for euro, each institution is as productive as the other, then it helps your case I think.

Another senior manager affirms the importance of optics and not being seen to refuse to engage or to adapt a position of 'resisting something' with no alternative offered:

> if you're resisting something, you're already potentially defeated, because it's a rear-guard action to resist something, whereas actually what would be much more satisfying would be if there was something that people could feel was a positive alternative as opposed to an alternative forced on them by necessity.

And another managerial colleague further underlines the imperative of constructively articulating alternatives:

> There are two ways of changing the system: one is to resist, but ultimately there is no guarantee that that will work because it will be seen as negative; or, if you are going to do something that is different you are going to have to define what the parameters are. You can't just say 'trust us', you need to get some degree of solidarity. If you have an idea that captures people's imagination of what education is, then you will get people going for that idea provided it's seen as positive, seen as potentially effective – not just idealistic – it's got some momentum in a pragmatic sense as well.

Certainly, for arguably the key element of performance measurement – work plans – there seems little doubt about the need for direct academic engagement and authoring, which perhaps should not be seen as a threat but an opportunity. As one senior manager notes, work plans 'work really well in a department that functions really well anyway'. I return to this point later, but I want to first reflect on the broader challenge academics face in effectively communicating the values and contributions of a 'productive' and 'performing' university.

The authorship challenge

For Kathleen Lynch (2006, 11), a central imperative for academics today is to 'create allies for public education in the civil society sphere and in the public sector sphere so that the public interest values of the universities can be preserved'. Lynch continues:

> If we have regard for the public service purposes of the university, for our responsibility to educate all members of society and educate them for all activities in society, including non-commercial activities, be it in the arts, in politics, in caring work or in public service work itself, then we must radically alter the ways in which we define university education (2006, 11).

If we accept Lynch's essential point, the key challenge then becomes one of authorship – authorship of the role of the academy, its valuable inflection in the civic sphere and its usefulness for a more broadly constituted public. For Stephen Ball (1994), the challenge of narrating alternatives to neoliberal higher education policy is considerable given the pre-eminence of ideas – 'regimes of truth', in effect – about benchmarking, performance and competitiveness in our globalised world. Paul Trowler (1998) too observes the prevalence of neoliberal finance, marketing and business registers in higher education discourse. He reflects on how policy-makers, through language, 'constrain the way we think about education':

> The use of discursive repertoires drawn from business, marketing and finance is one of the ways by which this is accomplished. Franchising, credit accumulation, delivery of learning outcomes, the possessions of skills and competencies, skills audit and the rest can become part of everyday discourse and begin to structure the way people think about education. Perhaps, most importantly, they work to exclude other possible ways of conceptualising the nature of education (1998: 132-133).

For one senior manager at NUI Galway, we need to pay particular attention to language in revisiting the 'idea of the university as a scholarly community'. For this manager, the time has come to reimagine the broader role of the university with a 'deeper sense of purpose'. Furthermore, academia's public intellectual role must be authored into the very raison d'être of universities, in mission statements, work plans and KPIs:

> In effect, it means saying that critical thinking and critique of policy are our priority areas, that they're part of our mission, that it's our mission to talk to the media, to talk to the general public, and to disseminate ideas beyond the usual scholarly routes.

In addition, NUI Galway's performance culture must have students firmly in view:

> Surely a better model of a university would be one in which there is a closer understanding of what the nature of being a student is, and a stronger feeling of responsibility among academic staff for nurturing?

In terms of performance management at NUI Galway, however, one cannot help but surmise that, despite a noticeably growing recognition of the import of teaching excellence and external community knowledge initiatives, what matters first and foremost for both the institution and, by extension, individual academics is research output. As one senior manager puts it bluntly, and in stark contrast to the vision proffered above, there are 'only two measures of research output, and this is putting it absolutely crudely: publications and PhDs to completion'.

Considering the broader import of public intellectualism, one senior university manager asserts that 'the things that we do and we have always done and will continue to do are things that are of real value to society, and they can be measured'. For this manager, it is 'crucially important that we speak, and that we speak in a language that people can understand'; noting, in particular, a key post-Celtic Tiger role for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences scholars in Ireland to address concerns of 'environment, place, quality of life, cultural value, social value, connectiveness and community'. This connects to the key question of how academics today can effectively define themselves vis-à-vis their publics – to document and demonstrate an

'engaged university'. However, another senior manager offers an unambiguously competing vision. When asked if there are 'ways in which we as academics can begin to author the very culture, the very mechanisms of measurement that might reflect values other than economic output values', the reply was clear-cut:

> There is an overwhelming weight which stands against you I suppose in that project. It's back to the 'science of management' […] The tools that we've got are economically based, the tools that we've got do come from industry and the private sector, from management […] Yes, there are dangers in there because the application of all this stuff in the university environment is not mature, but that doesn't mean that it's wrong to try […] Performance is something that we need to have an adult approach to.

Though an 'adult approach' to performance could, of course, be defined in myriad ways, academics are mostly faced with engaging a hegemonic discourse that is commonly framed in 'economically based' terms. Transmuting that discourse to reflect a broader constituency of intellectual and social values is an onerous task for academics today, but it is a vital one.

Conclusion: the challenge of enacting alternative subjectivities

Constituted subjectivity in the academy, however hegemonically scripted and anticipated, does not mean it is necessarily determined, as Judith Butler (1995, 46) makes clear:

> to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked, resisted?

The first challenge in reworking conditioned agency is recognising it. Then, of course, comes the difficult task of autoethnography – narrating what it is that we do, ascribing value and, if necessary, appropriating the idioms of the neoliberal hegemon en route. There are powerful and persuasive registers of autonomy, entrepreneurship, accountability and responsibilisation at the heart of the neoliberal managerial university today, which we simply cannot concede. And if we do not acknowledge or choose to refuse the practices of the normalised self, without insisting upon other values and practices, we will have already failed. Articulating them and building consciousness around them are no easy tasks, however, and cannot be done unproblematically, as Clive Barnett reminds us, via some vague 'moralistic register', or without 'addressing normative problems of how practically to negotiate equally compelling values' (Barnett, 2010, 271). In seeking to coordinate – from the bottom up as it were – institutional

and indeed pan-institutional responses to ascendant neoliberal values in the academy, we must assert the vital pedagogic and public knowledge roles, functions and responsibility of academia. We need to insist too upon broader educational and research values and outputs, and we need to seek creative ways to bear testimony and represent this. And, finally, we must engage the culture of work plans if we wish to alter them, author them and insist upon alternative formulations of subjectivity and self-identity.

For the possibilities of effectively articulating alternative subjectivities in the academy, Barbara Grant offers hope:

> Because the process of constituting subjects is riddled with conflicts and contradictions, there are always spaces for resistance. There is always the possibility that the acting subject, who is both the target and source of power relations, may contest the dominant meanings and oppressive positions constructed by the discursive field in which she or he is located (Grant, 1997, 111).

Her point connects closely to Butler's thinking on power, subjection and conditioned agency:

> As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical […] We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from outside [but if] we understand power as forming the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence (Butler, 1997, 1-2).

And drawing upon the positions articulated above is surely vital if we are to respond to neoliberal inflections in the academy creatively and effectively; to see neoliberalism, in other words, as a 'generative process' (Barnett, 2010, 272).

So, what are the ways in which academic subjects of universities today could conceive the inherent power relations of performance measurement and management as 'generative' and 'productive'? To begin with, it is important, I think, to courageously take on the challenge of what Foucault calls *parrhesia* or 'truth-telling'. For Colin Gordon (2009: xxiii), we need to be vigilant in telling 'a demagogue from a truth-teller' – and in the context of performance management for the contemporary university, this is surely even more challenging when faced with hegemonic knowledges about performance and productivity for/in a neoliberal economy. All claims of knowledge, of course, in being legitimated as truth or indeed common sense, are buttressed by power relations. But I think it is important to remember that our constituted agency does not negate our capacity for altering regimes of truth and organising and building consciousness through what Barnett (2010, 271) calls 'decentralised coordination'. At NUI

Galway, as no doubt elsewhere, there are competing visions of the optimal performing academic, and there is a newness to the regime of performance measurement emerging, which means that econo-centric formulations can be transmuted and inflected with other values that are equally compelling and persuasive. The key challenge revolves around articulating alternative truths, values and responsibilities and insisting upon them. On this point, Judith Butler's writing on 'responsibility' is especially instructive. In *Precarious Life*, she reflects:

> I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the Other; if I do, I have taken myself out of the relational bind that frames the problem of responsibility from the start (Butler, 2004, 46).

Butler's concept of responsibility is, as Bronwyn Davies (2006, 436) notes, 'in profound contrast' to the neoliberal concept of responsibilisation, which involves only a responsibility to the market and the service of capital. For Davies, our responsibility as teachers should be primarily directed to enabling our students to attain a 'viable life'; and that responsibility should be seen as emergent and approached with humility and reflexivity, precisely because it lies 'inside social relations and inside responsibility to and for oneself in relation to the other' (2006, 436). Davies' call echoes much of Kathleen Lynch's important critique of the 'careless university' and the ways in which a 'culture of carelessness' has been 'exacerbated by new managerialism' (Lynch, 2010, 54). And the wider educational and civic responsibilities of academia that I have argued for here are, of course, always relational to both a broader public and a duty of care that far exceeds neoliberal individualism.

Neoliberal individualism, as David Harvey (2005) observes, has long successfully championed appealing ideas, however illusory, about freedom, autonomy and competitiveness. That competitiveness is always seen as progressive, and key to innovation, entrepreneurship and optimal econo-centric subjectivity. Attaining that optimal performing subjectivity is now targeted increasingly in universities today via regimes of performance management. And if these are firmly part of our contemporary moment, this surely behoves us in the academy to critically reflect on how best to work within and through our conditioned agencies to author the values, functions and responsibilities of a 'performing academic'. To this end, it is vital to remember the foundational urges of public universities 'to promote independence of intellectual thought' (Lynch, 2006, 11). If we wish to successfully respond to the forms of neoliberal governmentality inflecting universities everywhere today, we must work together to insist upon, author and enact alternative subjectivities, and take seriously the

challenge of demonstrating to a more broadly constituted public the very raison d'être of the contemporary university.

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Notes

1 The challenges of doing 'insider research' in higher education are, as Justine Mercer (2007, 2) observes, 'under-researched'. She argues that 'small-scale case studies' and 'in-depth interviews' are best 'as a means of constructing participative knowledge', and notes that a key issue is the question of 'what to tell colleagues, both before and after they participate in the research' (Mercer, 2007, 11). My preference was to not overly 'pre-script', as David Silverman (2000, 200) cautions. I am inclined to disagree, however, with Silverman's consideration of the validation of interview transcripts as 'a flawed method' (2000, 177). Once my interviews were transcribed, I made them available to each interviewee – for both professional courtesy reasons and validation purposes. All interviewees confirmed the transcripts, with four making minor substantiations of particular points and one asking for specific comments to be 'off the record'. As a result of validation, I drew with full confidence upon the transcript material.

2 In keeping anonymity, I am conscious that not naming the specific managerial position for each quoted contribution might suggest a somewhat free-floating set of discourses decoupled from managerial agency. However, all significant university managers were interviewed and all feature variously in the discussion, which I believe is reflective of the emergent governmental architecture of the university, along with its inherent contradictions and degree of competing visions.

3 I have also drawn upon Foucault's writing on biopolitics, security and governmentality in a forthcoming sister paper to this one in *Oxford Review of Education*. The paper, entitled 'Governing the academic subject: Foucault, governmentality and the performing university', entails centrally a critical consideration of NUI Galway's efforts to enact practices of performance management in anticipating and planning for an 'aleatory' and increasingly 'governmentalised' future.