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Struggling for Visibility in Higher Education: Caught Between Neoliberalism “out there” and “in here” – an autoethnographic account

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Abstract

What happens when neoliberalism as a structural and structuring force is taken up within institutions of higher education, and works upon academics in higher education individually? Employing a critical autoethnographic approach this paper explores the way technologies of research performance management, specifically, work to produce academics (and academic managers) as particular kinds of neoliberal subject. The struggle to make oneself visible is seen to occur under the gaze of academic normativity - the norms of academic practice that include both locally negotiated practices and the performative demands of auditing and metrics that characterise the neoliberal university. The paper indicates how the dual process of being worked upon and working upon ourselves can produce personally harmful effects. The result is a process of systemic violence. This paper invites higher education workers and policy makers to think higher education otherwise and to reconsider our personal and collective complicity in the processes shaping higher education.

Introduction

What would it mean to turn our lens upon our own labour processes, organisational governance and conditions of production? What would we find if, instead of studying others, we focussed our gaze upon our own community (Gill 2010: 229)

My starting point in this article is Rosalind Gill's call to academics to turn a critical gaze upon ourselves. Gill makes the invaluable point that while the transformations of academic life captured by reference to 'neoliberalism' are systemic and the product of multiple decisions, and are often experienced as brutal, we suffer in silence as if this suffering was a form of private weakness. Gill recounts how academic colleagues feel shame as they struggle to meet the ever-increasing demands of systems of research performance management; and how they impose demands on themselves as individual academics feel the moral pressure to meet institutional requirements. She insists that we resist this privatization of systemic pain and speak truth to power by speaking out about the human costs of the current political economy of higher education. This article is my contribution to this speaking truth to power.

Going mad in the neoliberal university

The locus for this autoethnographic account is a particular political economy of higher education, of a particular configuration of policy, economics, and governance that characterises the dominant way the university is imagined. Although there are

certain recurring features of this political economy that circulate through various policy networks, they are taken up and articulated within local conditions that reflect specific historical trajectories and balance of political and social forces (Ball 2010; Henry 1992; Lingard 2010; Rizvi & Lingard 2009). In a paper that explored the patterns of neoliberalism in Australian higher education in the late 1990s, Simon Marginson (2000) noted the way key structural features of an emerging global model of higher education were adopted by governments to align the semi-autonomous nature of the sector to pressing economic concerns. Marginson, in a series of papers (Marginson 2004, 2006; Marginson & Considine 2000; Marginson & Rhoades 2002), identified the common parameters of the regime as it went global:

- Government support for increased participation in higher education as part of an economic strategy to maximise the stock of human capital in aid of securing economic competitive advantage in a global economy.
- Reduction in direct funding from governments so promoting a diversification of income streams.
- Government steering of research priorities to meet economic needs, specifically prioritising certain STEM areas that are perceived to be close to the market.
- Introduction of quasi-market conditions, particularly around research funding and competition for student income, and financial diversification through recruitment of international students.

A significant feature of this new political economy is the perverse nature of its currency. Whilst revenue is an enduring topic of academics' concerns the primary

currency of the global higher education market is ‘status’ (Marginson 2004). Universities and other providers of higher education are caught up in a status economy. The prevailing technology of this economy is the annual university rankings (see Hazelkorn 2014 & 2015). Marginson (2007: 131) regards the introduction of rankings as “*the* decisive move” in normalising a global market in higher education because “Ranking exposes universities in every nation to a structured global competition that operates on terms that favour some universities and countries, and disadvantage others” (132). Essentially, the normative successful university is imagined in terms of élite research universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale. This technology of global comparison imposes on national systems and individual institutions a compulsion to co-ordinate their resources and strategies to improve their marginal position in this status economy.

At about the same time that Marginson was writing about the early transformation of Australian higher education, Mary Henkel (2000) was profiling similar changes in the English system. Of importance for the discussion in this paper is her account of the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the fore-runner of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Henkel noted that as the system of international rankings introduced national technologies of research selectivity, often via competitive funding and quality assurance mechanisms, so individual institutions initiated internal systems of staff evaluation (Henkel 2000: 132). These micro-systems of evaluation are closely associated with the emergence of forms of interventionist management practices (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed 2007; Fanghanel & Trowler 2008). These systems of internal selection, management practice, and their affective impact on individuals are what I will later refer to as

‘academic normativity’. Academic normativity provides the immediate context for this autoethnographic account. In particular, the events that populate the account occurred in one of England’s research-intensive Russell Group universities while it was preparing its submission to the 2014 REF. I don’t name any individuals nor their specific job titles as I am concerned to direct attention to the micro-political economy of academic life, while also asserting that the toxic actions I refer to are made by real people rather than abstract systems; I want to claim that those who enacted the technologies of selection were themselves worked upon by neoliberal discourses. Nonetheless, I also maintain that while we are all worked upon by powerful discourses, we also work upon ourselves, and so always have the option, to some extent at least, of choosing other actions. It is this embodied reality of neoliberalism in a specific context that I want to interrogate.

Writing the my story/our story - layered accounts

This article is intensely personal. It is my story, but in being thus it is also a collective story since personal stories are always in context, and so always also social (Ellis 1991). It is a story of modern academic life and how it is moulded by internal and external dynamics. Specifically, I explore the intensification of academic labour and how this occurs in the context of discourses of ‘excellence’ and the ‘global university’. I narrate a phenomenology of academic life that captures the lived, embodied experience of these discourses playing out institutionally and personally. The question is how to write in a way that maintains a connection between my personal and academic self, how to write the my/our story without privileging the abstract mind’s eye (Bochner 1997; Palmer, 1993: xxiii) and subjugating the heartfelt

concern that has prompted me to write this paper.

The approach I take in this paper is based on that of other autoethnographers who have crafted texts that seek to write layered accounts, where layered means ‘...a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience’ (Ellis 2007: 14). This approach can work to decentre academic authority (Ronai 1998: 407) by combining ‘a novelistic and scholarly voice’ (Behar & Lindisfarne 2009: 114). So, this my/our story utilizes a movement between literary non-fictional accounts (emotional introspection) and more obvious ‘academic’ reflection (see Jago 2002). This movement will take on the character of a dialogue or set of discussions between my ‘being there’ (the work of recreating felt states) and ‘being here’ (academic reflections on the autoethnographic context) (Spry 2001). I draw on my diary entries written during the period covered in the autoethnographic account and other personal artefacts, as well as scholarly debates about the political economy of higher education. Consequently, I speak to debates on the intensification of academic labour and the performative culture that is overdetermined by a changing political economy of higher education. But I do so from a standpoint that my body is inscribed by ‘traces of culture’ (Spry 2001: 711).

The movement between ‘being there’ and ‘being here’ is reflected in the register of the authorial voice. While this is an autoethnographic account and I am the subject and object of inquiry, I utilize a number of devices to draw the reader’s attention to the quality of the experience being described and how policy plays out on our corporeal bodies. In this paper I use the term ‘we’, even when I am speaking of

myself. This is deployed to create some distance between the me who is writing this text and the me that is written into the text, the recreated experience of my depression and encounters with particular management practices. But it is also deployed to highlight how such literary devices, often used in academic writing, work as distancing techniques, and it is this distancing that conveys a sense of critical objectivity. My aim is not to claim objectivity. It is simply to draw attention to the literary devices used in normative academic writing that would lay claim to objectivity. A key distancing device I employ is to render the text nearer to that of literary fiction. I construct a character that becomes the object of the text – Joseph K. This is a playful device in that I am clearly making literary reference to the work of Franz Kafka, and specifically to the main character in his novel ‘The Trial’ (Kafka 2008). This selection is deliberate in that the novel concerns the way Joseph K finds himself caught up in an absurd drama not unlike the way many of us are caught up in the performative culture of the neoliberal university. However, I am also making an obtuse reference to Kafka’s other novel ‘The Metamorphosis’ (Kafka 2008). This novel has a closer affinity to the transformative experience detailed in the first section of this paper (and with the experience of existential dislocation I explore). There is a third element to the use of this device. By referring to myself as a fictional character I highlight the way the techniques of management and the management of the self I explore do not treat us as persons, but objectify us. In making a feature of genre or the register of the authorial voice I am taking responsibility for my textual decisions and consequently for the truth claims I make through this article (Rhodes & Brown 2005).

Structure

The article is organized around two moves that mobilise the metaphor of visibility.

The first move concerns the ‘managed self’. This presents a phenomenological account of ‘crisis’ and how this crisis is imbricated in struggles for professional legitimacy and visibility. My purpose is one of giving an account of oneself in relation to ‘academic normativity’. The second move, my use of the ‘managed CV’, emphasises individuals’ struggles for institutional visibility and how this is instantiated in technologies of management that work upon the academic self, seeking to mould it to imagined institutional objectives. Our subjectivities are the site of policy struggles. I conclude, following Gill’s call above (Gill 2010), that there is a need to transform the private troubles of neoliberalism into public democratic issues (see Mills 2000 for an elaboration of this core sociological relationship between private troubles and public issues), to recognize the systemic cost of the way academics are being made and are making ourselves into neoliberal subjectivities. This is a call to think higher education otherwise, and therefore to think society otherwise.

The Managed (Academic) Self

Beginnings

The ‘crisis’ came after a busy weekend study school for educational professionals undertaking a professional doctorate on a part-time basis. In a way it was planned. That might sound strange but Joseph K was already aware enough that something was seriously wrong with him, that relationships, work, and thoughts, could not go on as they were, that something had to change. Joseph was a mid-career university lecturer,

on a permanent academic contract that therefore required that he contributed to the University's reputation through the production of specific academic outputs and attracting research funding as well as teaching and administration. He had already gone through the step, discussed by David Karp (1997) in his excellent book 'Speaking of Sadness', of redefining himself as 'depressed'. This new, powerful way of defining himself was to be his break with the past, the beginning of a new, frightening, Joseph. The change in him was unstoppable. So, he woke on that fateful Monday morning, tired but not feeling too bad. He drank his coffee in a relaxed state looking forward to an afternoon of social distraction, some actual 'time in lieu' for teaching over the weekend. But first (and isn't there always a 'but first...?') he wanted (needed?) to go into the office to deal with course administration following the study school. A few emails, a discussion with the course administrator, and then he could relax. The afternoon and evening would, however, escape any pretence at volition, of agency as a reflexive action in the world. Instead, a sense of existential crisis overtook Joseph K, and his decline into what would be medically labelled as a major depressive episode.

Karp (1997) notes that, while there might be crisis moments, depression tends to creep up on you. Thich Naht Hahn, the noted Zen Buddhist teacher, commenting on his own experience of 'crisis', said it approached him as if 'wearing silk slippers' (Hanh 2012). A similar kind of almost imperceptible change over Joseph K had been occurring over a period of time. This was how Joseph K's crisis emerged as 'depression', as a social category. As this personal story is reconstructed light can be turned on particular moments that seem pivotal in making sense of how things turned out for Joseph K. But in what sense can we say this is 'where it started', this 'is what

CAUSED it'? Instead a cluster of beginnings impacted upon Joseph K's mental health and the ensuing disintegration of 'self' will be described.

The Day Of Reckoning

Monday 13th February 2012

But, as with every day last week, and all through the conference and study school, I get up. I wash and dress. I have breakfast – well, a coffee and a piece of fruit – something resembling breakfast. I put on the mask and perform the competent academic and adult. Inside, though, I am dissolving. Each moment it is harder to maintain this fiction of calmness; of 'togetherness'...I am finding it harder and harder to rise out of bed. I want to disappear. I don't just want to hide from the world. I want to disappear.

Apparently, Joseph K had become a statistic, a number on a graph enumerating the rise of stress among academics. The rise of stress and stress related illness amongst academics has been noted in the UK and Australia (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, & Stough 2001; Kinman & Wray 2013; Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, & Ricketts 2005), with these phenomena paralleling the intensification of academic labour (Gill 2010; Marginson 2000). The research on academic stress identifies certain factors that appear to contribute to making academics unwell, including fiscal constraints, work overload, poor management practices, the rise of precarious employment, and insufficient recognition and reward. Given that academic identities can be experienced as complex and fragmented (Fanghanel & Trowler 2008) it is, perhaps, no surprise that the emergence of the neoliberal university should bring with it the

experience of carelessness, where institutions of higher education appear to both care less about their employees and have limited regard to the highly gendered nature of care relationships both within and outwith the institution (see Lynch 2010). The management of academic practice will be attended to in the next part of this paper, but for now I will simply state that an academic's caring responsibilities and ill health can convey a sense of unreliability or personal weakness in the masculinist performative culture of our universities.

As well as a statistic Joseph K was also an example of the many academics that seek to present a self that is competent, coping, and productive whilst, at the same time privately in anguish. Art Bochner (1997) captures this phenomenon well in his account of experiencing a divided self, of a sense of an opposition between the academic self who presents papers at conferences, has professional commitments, is a man of the mind; and his private self who is caught up in deep sadness at hearing of his father's death whilst attending a conference. Bochner recounts how he struggled with these two senses of self in the moment of receiving the bad news, and how for a few moments he wasn't sure which self would leave the room - the one who didn't want to let down his academic colleagues or the son who needed to go home. Bochner is clear about the awfulness of this divided self. Ruth Behar (1996) provides a similar account of being caught between different commitments, different investments in identity, her professional one and her deep love for her grandfather. She had hesitated to go away on a research trip when faced with her grandfather's ill health. On hearing of her grandfather's death whilst she was conducting fieldwork she is struck by the awful irony involved in her enactment of an academic persona

inquiring into the meaning of death in a Spanish village whilst her Cuban grandfather died in Miami.

The accounts provided by Bochner and Behar direct attention to a lived reality of academic stress that the numbers only hint at. As powerful as the statistics are they need to be accompanied by narratives that spell out the true costs of trying to deal with the divided self of academic life, of the personal impact of the careless academy. With this in mind I now turn to the way Joseph K's struggle between the academic and personal 'self' produced altered existential feelings, an altered relation to the world.

Stress as existential dislocation

Sunday 15th January 2012

I feel a bit overwhelmed by the maelstrom of emotions rushing through me.

What are my priorities? What might this mean for work? What might this mean for life with the family? Not for the first time I feel myself welling up, tears and desperate feelings of despair filling me. I struggle to prevent myself from jerking into a darkness that threatens to engulf me. This feeling is debilitating.

As the weeks progressed Joseph K often felt at odds with the world around him. He would find himself in a room for a meeting or a seminar and struggle to feel connected to the people, objects, and events around him. The simple act of walking across the carpeted floor to sit in a chair became a feat of endurance. His limbs would feel leaden, resistant to the desire to move them, as if nerves no longer connected

muscle or joint to brain. As his feet made contact with the floor they appeared to struggle to take purchase, the floor's surface trying to escape, shift, bend. He felt his whole body jerk, and thrust its way toward the chair. His body commanded Joseph K, not Joseph K his body. Similarly, the chair he aimed to reach no longer possessed its object-like features. It appeared to him as something far less solid than he remembered, and feared it would simply dissolve on touch. As he observed his arm reach out towards the chair Joseph K feared he would fall, pass through the spaces between atoms. Of course, his walk and gestures were not as awkward as Joseph felt them to be. There were no stares from colleagues or students. This did not stop him though from feeling utterly exposed, a spectacle (as discussed by Ratcliffe 2008 121-130). This sense of exposure enveloped him on the bus to and from work. As well as the exhaustion of struggling with a body that commanded itself, he had intense feelings of being gazed at. It was as if 'madness' was literally inscribed upon his forehead for all to see. He would sweat; feel the temperature rise through the pores of his skin. Eyes and judgement bore down on him, his breathing became erratic. Sometimes the palpitations would be such that he felt he would faint, and so would depart the bus and stand in the street, not really knowing where he was, waiting for this fear to disperse with the breeze, till he was capable of moving again, till he felt the gaze lift.

These were not a disjuncture between Joseph K and the floor, or Joseph and the chair, or Joseph and other people, nor even Joseph and his limbs. Rather, this state of being was a disjuncture, a missattunement, between Joseph's sense of 'self' and his sense of the world. Things had shifted from being 'to hand' to 'present-at-hand', as if he was apprehending them anew. This was quite literally an existential

disjuncture (Ratcliffe 2008). Joseph K had shifted from having bodily feelings ‘in the world’ to feeling as if he no longer belonged in the world (Ratcliffe 2008: 63). Normally, if we can use such a term, neither his body nor the floor or the chair would be objects of perception in any obvious way. They would simply be there, indistinguishable from the actions of walking or sitting. His limbs, the floor, the chair would be ‘to hand’ in the same way the keyboard used to type these words is ‘to hand’, indistinguishable for the most part from the act of typing, captured along with fingers, arms, and eyes as they flitter across the screen, the screen itself, and the algorithms that enact their magic. It is usually only when a word is misspelt or the communication between keyboard and computer breakdown that the separateness of the various elements present themselves to us. But these are temporary disruptions to the flow of events that make up our living in the world. They do not disrupt our sense of belonging to the world. The trouble Joseph K had walking across the floor or sitting in the chair were not normal disruptions to the flow of events, or momentary disruptions that were easily corrected and so almost imperceptibly re-enter the flow. He experienced instead a radical sense of not being quite sure that the limbs were his at all, that floors were no longer compliant surfaces, that chairs may be liquid.

Joseph K’s body had moved from being inconspicuous to being a ‘conspicuous body’ that represented a “change in the sense of belonging” (Ratcliffe 2008: 112). He was caught up in a hyper-reflexivity where his own body became an object in the world such that for him “the object-like consciousness of bodily feelings, thoughts and the like” was a change in his “existential orientation as a whole” (Ratcliffe 2008: 192). Joseph became, in a sense, detached from his own existence, observing himself as if from outside. Over time, in pursuit of recognition as an

academic, Joseph K had moved from being oblivious to how he was attuned to the world to being hyper-aware of the novelty and sometimes awkwardness of his presence in the world. Obliviousness was gradually and fundamentally replaced by distance, a chasm between himself and the world. He was left with a constant feeling of being lost-to-the-world. This propelled Joseph into an insistent attempt to consciously attune himself to the demands of academic normativity, to orchestrate his conduct, to manage his 'self'. And so it is now to matters of accounting for oneself and of managing conduct that we turn.

Conducting Oneself as an Academic

To introduce these personal stories is actually to deal with how Joseph K conducted himself in relation to both his inner turmoil and his public face, between private troubles and public problems as C. Wright Mills would phrase it (Mills 2000). So, my concern is with the conduct of the self. Looking back over this period of time leading up to his moment of crisis we can see two ways in which Joseph K was moulding his conduct, two particular kinds of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault & Rabinow 2000; Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton 1988). One was of longer duration and concerned Joseph K's attempt to work upon himself in order to be recognisably an academic. The second is on how he sought to manage his conduct in order to delay the moment of crisis, the moment of singularity. The first will be referred to in more detail in the next section of the paper where we attend to institutional rather than individual visibility. The second type of technology of the self is the focus of this current section.

The 'crisis' came after a busy weekend study school for people undertaking a professional doctorate. This was the beginning of the moment when Joseph K could no longer deny what was happening to him. In fact the whole of the previous week had been busy, busier than usual. It was a week that saw Joseph in performative mode, enacting a competent academic. Earlier in the week he had welcomed a colleague from a continental European university as part of an academic exchange programme. Joseph K was to begin teaching on another programme for full-time PhD students in another department as well as preparing for the weekend study school and a student conference preceding that. This final week of work captures all the elements of the contrast between Joseph K's inner turmoil as described above and his performance of a self that sought recognition as recognisably an 'academic'.

Monday 6 February 2012

Bad day.

Functioned – had to. (Doctoral training) started today so had to do that...of course have the student conference to organise – whole new programme (again) but it looks sorted now...My anxiety levels are sky high and not just because of all on this week. I know the weekend is fine. I know the conference will be fine – especially once final arrangements complete tomorrow. Would be better if didn't have [doctoral training] – stupid planning. But once away from people my heart is palpitating. On way home nearly couldn't keep tears back. Feeling shit. But have promised myself to get these next few weeks done.

Joseph K made a promise to himself to control the overwhelming existential crisis in order to 'get these next few weeks done', that is to perform as a competent academic.

He sought to manage his conduct so that it did not convey crisis or vulnerability or pain. The doctoral training programme, academic exchange, forthcoming study school and student conference required him to display himself as organised, busying himself with lists of presenters, coordinating the production of conference packs and delegates badges, sending out reminder emails, liaising with the study school and conference venue about rooms and equipment, meeting with his European colleague and ensuring her visit was productive. While mundane, this is the stuff of performativity; this is the enactment of responsibility and efficiency. Joseph K turned up on time each morning despite the growing sense of existential dislocation. This required propelling himself out of bed even though every atom resisted; going through the morning routine as if it was an act of validation – washing, dressing, a cup of coffee but food left untouched as his stomach cramped at the prospect of facing the continuous evaluative gaze that constituted Joseph’s sense of each day. This was Joseph K’s agency – to present himself as a competent academic rather than accepting the debilitating reality of his distress. He would arrive at work with that sense of a body out of synch with volition, of the liquid nature of once familiar objects. This was effort, intense, exhausting effort. He would present a smiling confident face to colleagues, aiming to ensure they saw him as competent, as organised, as productive, as responsible. Joseph smiled, chatted, conveyed (he hoped) authority. And then he would close his office door, curl up in the corner, and cry silently, only to get up again and present a competent self, day after day.

This conduct, this management of his public ‘self’ can be viewed as a way of Joseph K giving an account of himself as an academic. But as Judith Butler remarks, “An account of oneself is always given to another” (2005: 21). Who is this ‘other’?

His family, colleagues, institution as represented in its structures, processes and management? The 'other' to whom he was giving an account can be defined as academic normativity. For the moment we can understand it to be comprised of the network of inter and intrapersonal relations to individual colleagues, epistemic communities, students, and norms of academic practice that include both locally negotiated practices and the performative demands of auditing and metrics that characterise the neoliberal university. This means, according to Butler, that accounting for himself placed Joseph K in a relation of responsibility (88). This sense of responsibility to his colleagues and students featured in his diary entries,

Tuesday 7th February 2012

I do need time off. I don't think I can function anymore. I am just about keeping up with the most immediate things but other stuff is suffering. I know that this (going off) will cause my colleagues some hassle, but I need to get well. I worry about my students.

Despite the self-realisation that he was approaching a moment of crisis, Joseph's concern was directed at maintaining an external confidence in his capacity to perform competently, to not let people down, to live up to responsibilities. Academic normativity, in this sense, made an ethical demand on Joseph to conduct himself in particular ways (Butler 2005: 90). Faced by the impending moment of singularity his conduct of self took on a new urgency in order to avoid being (ir)responsible. The management of his conduct, and Joseph's performance as a recognisable academic, works, Stephen Ball notes (2003: 216), as a display of quality. But as Ball goes on to

state, these struggles to perform our 'selves' as worthwhile are individualised in the context of neoliberal reforms. In managing his conduct Joseph K sought not only to make himself visible but to be visibly auditable, a 'self, whose performance could be measured (225).

Even as the moment of singularity arrived, Joseph K's concern was still to perform adequately as a measurably competent academic. In the following extract we see him struggle between the knowledge that he cannot go on and a residual desire to sustain visibility as an academic,

Monday 13th February 2012

I am gripped by anxiety but (obviously) cognisant enough to know what is happening to me. I cooked my dinner. I wrote this diary entry. But in between I rock back and forth as the flood of energy rushes through my body. I pace up and down the living room unable to sit. As I eat my dinner I rocked back and forth. Yet, I plan to read in preparation for my [conference] paper. I probably will [read]. I don't want to give in completely to this depression...I am caught between anxiety and normality. Normality is increasingly unreal. Anxiety is increasingly normal. The idea of facing all of my colleagues tomorrow...God, I don't know. I MUST. I MUST. Just get through this week.

Joseph K didn't get through the week. He didn't get through the evening. No amount of management of conduct could allay the final moment of existential dislocation. Such existential dislocation might appear extreme. But it is only one point on a spectrum of individuals' responses to the intensification of academic work. Gill

(2010) above, remarks on shame and worry as some of the affective and psychological responses that individuals present in response to increased workloads and performative pressures. Kinman and Wray (2013) also point to the increase in stress related illness whereby temporary absence from work can be viewed as one kind of response to intensification. At a more extreme point on the spectrum is the case of the academic at Imperial College London whose suicide, in the face of aggressive management techniques, prompted an outcry of concern and review of managerial practice (Parr 2014). Below I discuss the concept of micro-resistances developed by Stephen Ball (Ball 2012; 2013; Ball & Olmedo 2013) that seeks to capture the many individualised strategies educators use to resist the full impact of the performative culture in schools, colleges and universities. It is in this context that Joseph K's existential dislocation can be seen as an extreme form of resistance. I suggest that depressive illness can be considered as a rational response to intolerable circumstances, circumstances that include feelings of inauthenticity as a result of the kind of managerial practices discussed in the next section.

While Joseph K sought to manage his conduct of self as a recognisable, and recognisably measurable, academic as a form of personal or private worry, this was always in relation to an 'other', that is academic normativity. The gap between the values of academic normativity and those that animated Joseph subjectively contributed powerfully to a growing sense of existential dislocation, and eventually dissolution. To individualise stress or existential disruption is to locate the 'problem' in the pathological brain of the individual. Instead, I propose a socialised view of (dis)stress and will argue in the next section that it arises from pathogenic experience - we are literally made mad.

The Managed CV

This section of the paper focuses on how academics are worked upon in order to be aligned to institutional objectives that are overdetermined by the global political economy of higher education. This discussion builds on the previous section that concentrated on how academics work on themselves, and how Joseph K did that in the face of existential dislocation. In that discussion the motif of visibility was utilised, how Joseph K worked upon himself in order to make himself visible as a particular kind of academic. Institutions can also be seen to engage in work of making themselves visible, and as Ball notes (2003), to make themselves visible as particular kinds of auditable entities. This motif of visibility will be used again in this section to organise the discussion.

Three moments where individual and institutional struggles over visibility came into tension with each other will be used as the organisational template. They relate to the over-determining presence of the REF, the currently dominant technology for auditing higher education performance in English universities.

Moment 1 - Invisibility On The Auditing Trail - What Is Really Valued?

Academic life is often experienced as a series of administrative moments, of forms that need to be filled in, facts and figures collected and submitted, all the accoutrements of the 'audit culture' bequeathed to us by decades of neoliberal reform. This administrative performance is heightened by the increased institutional activity

within the university to account for itself as a research-intensive university, and therefore worthy of the public funding it received. This intensified the hegemony of new public management, inviting more aggressive management of academic activity, and fracturing the assumed unity between teaching and research (Henkel 2000). More specifically we are referring to the measurement of academic performance in terms of 'workload'. This apparently harmless term 'workload' carries with it the struggle for internal visibility and as such is a management technique that works upon academic subjectivity. The workload form in front of Joseph K asked that he divide his effort into teaching, administration, and research activities, each given specific weightings that reflected institutional valuing of these activities. Joseph K spent time and effort in making sure he was as accurate as possible. However, the doctoral programme he had directed for the previous two years, and which had existed for 7 years, was missing from the list of programmes on the form. In other words the substantial effort he expended on a successful programme could not be officially accounted for. This could be seen as a simple administrative error. But the same 'error' had occurred the previous year, and Joseph K had drawn the departmental administrator's attention to the error then. Joseph K had been informed that the 'error' would be corrected in the following year's workload form. It was now the 'following' year and the 'error' was not corrected. Raising this with the relevant administrator he was informed that the 'error' would be corrected in the next year's iteration, in yet another year. Below is Joseph's response,

"Dear....

Thank you for the reply. I appreciate it might not have been in the notes passed on to you but I did highlight this with you earlier this academic year - but never mind.

I don't really have many options other than to include it as some kind of 'additional' rather than core activity. But I would like to register my disappointment that despite raising this issue, despite the income that the programme still brings into the Department, and despite the high recruitment [...] as a result of the reputation of the [...] programme, my directorship is again ignored. Another effect of this is that the time allocated to the directorship is not transparent and therefore open to consultation. I do not know, for instance, what time was allocated that role last year - if at all." (E-mail correspondence, 19th October 2011).

A major element of Joseph K's academic practice and institutionally defined identity was made invisible through administrative error. This annual ritual of making visible one's organisational contribution takes on the character of what Mats Alvesson (2013) calls a 'pseudo-event', one that includes the periodic production of institutional strategic plans, with their attendant processes of consultation, and various quality assurance exercises. Alvesson draws on Daniel Boorstin's (2012) book 'The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events In America'. Boorstin's argument is that these activities take on some of the characteristics of an 'event' in that they are designed to focus attention and bring things into a public gaze; in this case to make the individual academic's activity visible within the institution. But unlike other events that attract our attention, such as natural disasters, these are planned and require concerted effort. In that sense they are more like the 'events' that pepper the world of celebrity. And so, they are pseudo-events. It is not that the annual workload audit actually accounts for the real effort of academic staff.

The fabricated nature of the audit was made quite clear by the fact that it apparently didn't matter that a substantial portion of Joseph K's real effort was made invisible. But more importantly his personal investment in that role, in the quality of the programme, in the quality of the working relationships in the teaching team, and ultimately in the students, was, quite literally, of no account - they were relegated to "additional activities". Joseph never received a response to this email. It is at moments such as this that we can feel a fundamental disconnect between the institutionally defined values and those values and ideas that animate us as educators and researchers. It is at moments such as this that existential dislocation can assert itself and grow.

Moment 2 - Disinvestment

The second moment concerns a different kind of struggle over visibility and a different way of conceptualising 'workload'. Joseph K was approached by a senior member of the departmental management team to discuss his teaching workload, except it was not really about teaching at all. Instead he was asked to disinvest in his students, to disinvest in the amount of time he gave to supervision, to disinvest in the amount of effort expended on feedback to students. It was felt that Joseph was giving too much to students and subsequently not enough time to research and producing high quality publications. This pressure to disinvest in teaching in order to commit to research is not new in academia, though it is perhaps a significant feature of the current neoliberal moment. Henkel (2000) noted that in higher education,

...individuals who took all aspects of their job seriously felt that they were punished; that not only was there little recognition for good teaching and administration but that those who did these well found themselves carrying unequal burdens (132)

The identification with teaching was central to Joseph K's ethical orientation to academic work. He directed a successful doctoral programme that received consistently high ratings from students. He had configured his academic identity around being a committed teacher. As such, the 'feedback' that was now being questioned was research informed. In providing it, Joseph K sought to enact the kinds of formative dialogue with students that has been found to have positive correlations with high student performance (Bloxham & Boyd 2007; Boud & Falchikov 2007; Gibbs & Simpson 2004). It appeared that the pedagogically sound practices Joseph K was engaged in were not institutionally valued. As Alan Skelton, and Stephen Ball have noted, managerial critiques of professional conduct are also critiques of personal worth, of the value of our academic subjectivities (Ball 2012; 2013; Ball & Olmedo 2013; Skelton 2010). The request to spend less time on teaching and more on research was a technique of neoliberal governmentality that worked upon Joseph K's subjectivity, which sought to not just manage his conduct but to colonise his soul, where personal ethics and values are "sacrificed for impression and performance" (Ball 2003 p. 221).

This request to Joseph K to change his priorities came at a particular moment, that of sectorial preparation for the forthcoming 2014 REF. The REF forced individual institutions into a zero-sum game, a struggle for visibility, thus imposing a particular kind of moral economy on all academics. Consequently, if the institution was to improve or maintain its visibility externally then its composite units bore

responsibility for that, and so each individual academic had the moral responsibility to reconfigure their subjectivity in the service of this objective. It is at the moment of the request to Joseph K to change his priorities that neoliberalism “out there” meets neoliberalism “in here” (Peck & Tickell 2002). Peck and Tickell refer to neoliberalism “out there” as the “...extralocal regime of rules and routines, pressures and routines” (392), similar to the process of policy borrowing noted in the Introduction; whereas neoliberalism “in here” concerns the way it becomes manifest in national systems of higher education or specific reforms. I use neoliberalism “in here” more like Ball’s insistence that policy is played out on the surface of the subject; that neoliberal rationalities are modulated through the everyday practices of university managers and in the ways individual academics work on their academic subjectivities (Ball 2015; Ball & Olmedo 2013). The relationship between teaching and research was, in that act of asking Joseph K to disinvest in his teaching, constructed as a zero-sum game. Joseph K felt that to invest in good formative feedback was to disinvest in research; to invest in teaching was therefore to be irresponsible. The moral imperative was to make research visible and teaching invisible.

Moment 3 - Fabrication

As noted earlier, a defining characteristic of the political economy of higher education is that of status competition. Consequently, institutional managers are concerned with visibility within the status economy of higher education. In this sense, as Alvesson (2013: 50) suggests the knowledge work of academics becomes caught up in the dynamics of ‘product symbolism’, embroiled in the efforts managers exert to market

their institutions. This is how the distinction between knowledge work and marketing begin to blur, with academic publishing becoming a means by which institutions can market themselves and seek to improve their visibility within the status economy of higher education. The substantive content of research and writing becomes less important than the degree to which it can help improve institutional visibility.

This substance-less view of academic endeavour was brought home to Joseph K by another managerial request. As part of institutional preparation for the REF academics' intellectual outputs were assessed in terms of their 'REF-ability'. Again, this assessment of academic outputs carries much of the characteristic of a pseudo-event since these assessments of value are based on highly imperfect interpretations of what the REF panels might think (Sayer 2015). Joseph K was anticipating writing an article based on a qualitative study of non-traditional entrants to university and their phenomenological experience. A member of the department's senior management team asked what journal Joseph was thinking of submitting the paper to. Joseph responded that he hoped to submit to a well-regarded UK based higher education journal that published papers on similar topics and so would be a good venue for the research in that there would be a meaningful epistemic community among the journal's readership. Joseph was advised to reconsider this strategy, and instead submit to a North American journal because these were regarded as having a higher impact value. When he replied that those journals would be inappropriate because they did not welcome the kind of interpretive phenomenology he was engaged in, Joseph was asked, in all apparent seriousness, to manipulate the data so that it could be presented statistically.

Putting to one side the ethics of such a request it displayed an apparent unconcern with the substantive content of the research and how this aligned with

Joseph's academic subjectivity. The individual academic's labour is caught up in the constitution of an institutional rather than an individual brand identity. The measures taken to improve an institution's positional value are aimed at increasing its market visibility. It is only when institutional managers believe that an academic's choiceful activity might undermine institutional ambition that such activity becomes the focus for overt management. It was as if Joseph's commitment to interpretive methodologies was irresponsible. The emphasis of the manager's advice was on the output, and not on the substantive content of the research or the epistemic communities it related to. Mats Alvesson and Jörgen Sandberg (2013) argue that, although there has been a massive increase in the number of articles published in the field of management studies, for instance, there had been a decline in articles that impacted significantly on the field. Knowledge in the field appeared to stagnate just as there was an increase in academic output. The majority of papers were of an incremental nature, seeking to fill minute gaps in the field rather than demonstrating any theoretical or methodological ambition. Alvesson and Sandberg concluded that the dominance of research assessment regimes such as the REF, the status economy of contemporary higher education, and the natural conservatism of academic publishing produce a particular kind of game playing. Individual academics learn that getting on institutionally requires unadventurous research and scholarship aimed at increasing one's visibility in narrowly defined fields of study. It is this latter kind of activity that is rewarded by enhanced career progression, especially when it is seen to contribute to institutional ambition. This game playing affects academic identities so that "Identity constructions seem to be more about where and how much is being published rather than about original knowledge and unique contribution" (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013: 136).

In the managerial intervention Joseph K was being invited to construct an academic self based on “where” and “how much” rather than the value oriented “contribution”. Joseph K was being asked to fabricate or perform a different self; not the self that oriented his academic labour to certain questions and methodologies, to certain epistemic communities, but instead one conducive to measurement under the gaze of the REF.

Conclusion

If, as Gill (2010) proposed, we academics turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, upon the conditions of academic labour and production, what would we find? In this article I have sought to explore these conditions through a focus on my own experience as a my/our story; as a way of investigating how contemporary neoliberalism is simultaneously “out there” in structuring and disciplining systems and “in here”, in our very souls, in the ways we seek to make ourselves up. Central to my exploration is the idea that we see ourselves engaged in struggles for and over visibility - to be visible but also to define the terms on which we become visible. To become visible within our institutions we are faced with the way the political economy of higher education imposes only certain ways of being legitimately visible as an academic. To be a legitimately recognised academic can often mean being visible, where visibility is determined by the extent to which academic subjectivities are made amenable to measurement – that is neoliberalism “out there”. Neoliberalism “out there” becomes neoliberalism “in here”, in the sense of being “in” the institution, through the mundane practices of management. The three moments related to “The Managed CV” can be viewed as instances where neoliberalism “out there” enters both the

institution and the souls of Joseph K and university managers. We are all made up as particular subjects of the neoliberal university in such mundane, yet weighty, interactions. For university managers the institutional struggle for visibility places upon them an imperative to be recognisably a ‘good’ manager, where that means fabricating themselves as particular kinds of neoliberal subjects, caught up in a hierarchical, line managing, performance measuring mode of being. Similarly, as in the story of Joseph K, to be recognisably a ‘responsible’ academic, certain performances of self are required. But if, as Ball and Olmedo state (2013), there are costs to performing oneself otherwise, of engaging in micro-resistances to neoliberalism, there are also costs to performing the neoliberal subject. The struggle for personal visibility can make us up in ways that are inimical to one’s ethical sense of self, and which can contribute powerfully to an unravelling of a sense of oneself as somebody at all. These costs may manifest in the rise of academic stress, or in the kind of existential dislocation described above, or even in more fatal forms (Parr 2014).

It is in relation to these costs of performativity that Rosalind Gill (2010) asks of us all to speak truth to power, to bring out from the shadows of private anguish the human costs of performing ourselves as neoliberal subjects, and to narrate them for what they are, systemic violence and so public problems. The main point, I would argue, is not about reclaiming some mythical golden age of academia. Rather, as Jon Nixon and colleagues propose (Nixon 2001; Nixon, Marks, Rowland, & Walker 2001), it is about thinking higher education otherwise, in ways in which the costs of performing its subjectivities are not so toxic.

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