

DO WHAT SUSTAINS YOU

Desire and the enterprise university

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DO WHAT SUSTAINS YOU PART I

early career researcher workshop
Strategic Capacity Building for Academic Career Development
eager for answers - the plan - the road map
here comes the advice . . .
lean in and listen closely

“Do what sustains you”

sustains me? Dear Google, what is?
sustain – 1. to strengthen or support, physically or mentally
2. to undergo or to suffer something unpleasant, especially an injury
I’ll take the first option, thanks

late capitalism, neoliberalism, humanism, modernity
we have made quite a mess of things
but surely someone will clean it up
if not us, then who?
if we can’t sustain our world
how can we hope to sustain ourselves?
Eomer warns: look to your friends
but do not look to hope, for it has forsaken these lands

what is this thing, the enterprise university?
who called it into being?
what does it produce?
how does it produce us, its subjects?
we are coded and striated
ranked and labelled and sorted

unrecognizable to ourselves
knowable as academics
produce more, produce faster, produce better
Quartile 1, Category 1
Rank File Sort Coded 1
1, 1, 1, 1...

desire, desiring machines, desiring production
do we really desire our own oppression?
fascism as a war machine
mobilising the desire for self-destruction

I lack a sense of certainty, a clarity, a finality
I fear the one who has the answer
to the thing
I'm not sure I even know what the thing is
where are the gaps
the breaks in the assemblage
the places for rupture and interruption?

LIVING THE ENTERPRISE UNIVERSITY

Peer-reviewer's comments on a paper:

It started off well, but it's like the author gave up halfway through

Academics live in strange times. Everywhere we are coded and constructed within the machine of the enterprise university to faithfully produce high quality research outputs and secure competitive external research funding grants. We are counted and graded, chopped up and classified, found to be acceptable (or otherwise) within the logical bounds of a system that rewards entrepreneurial and innovative research that secures large grants and is published in high-ranked research journals.

We are the new hyper-performers, outdoing ourselves and each other on each metric devised and implemented in local institutions and across nations. There are very real effects on the physical and mental health of academics who are unable or unwilling to reject the self-defeating logic of a system that appears determined to eat its young in a race to produce outputs in ever increasing speeds and intensities. It is little wonder that such an alarming situation has resulted in a widespread malaise of disaffection, anxiety and stress among academics (Petersen, 2011).

Researchers are formed as knowable subjects through the machine of the enterprise university. Individuals plug in and produce outputs in the service of the larger machines of institutional academia, connecting and disconnecting at various places and times, depending on the functions being fulfilled and the various flows of desire. Yet, we know that this is not necessarily how it

should be just because it *is* this way. The contemporary university might seem like no accident, yet it is a contingent effect of particular political, social and economic circumstances that might well be otherwise, should we desire it to be so. Along with Cupples and Pawson (2012), I desire “moments and spaces of tactical re-appropriation, in which it might be possible to imagine and construct alternative narratives” (p. 15) for our academic labours.

In this chapter I seek to engage with some advice that was given at an early career research workshop, where the presenter proposed a simple formula: *Do what sustains you*. Working with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983, 1987) notion of desire, I am interested in experimenting and playing within a space of strategic refusal, creative and affirming, in order to find a way that both works within and against the grain of the enterprise university. By tapping into the immanent forces and flows of an academic vitality, I suggest that we might meaningfully and collectively sustain ourselves through a slower, more care-full, creative and collaborative scholarship. At the same time, I am mindful of the dangers of desire, where we might find ourselves desiring our own oppression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) and behaving in ways that run counter to our ethical principles through a desire to be known as successful academic subjects (Petersen, 2009). As an early career researcher, I desire longevity as an academic and also to do work that is meaningful (not that I am sure I know what the measure of this might be), and to do work that sustains me. This is a challenge in the contemporary enterprise university.

Marginson and Considine (2000) describe the *enterprise university* as being characterised by a range of strategies designed to enhance institutional prestige and income, including: corporatized executive control and governance, enterprise culture and focus on entrepreneurship and the creation of pseudo-markets. A powerful effect of the enterprise mission is on academic subjectivities, which are “subordinated to the mission, marketing and strategic development of the institution and its leaders” (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 5). The past couple of decades have seen an intensification and acceleration of the enterprise university, evident in the manta of *constant change* and corporate-driven restructures across many universities in places such as Australia and the United Kingdom.

Additionally, individual academics themselves have become sites for acceleration in the enterprise university, both in therapeutic and entrepreneurial terms. At the same time, the structural relations of people, institutions and nature are often deliberately ignored. For example, in one day from my university, I took great satisfaction in deleting three official university emails that explained that the university was 1) forming a digital hub that would focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and digital lives; 2) exterminating native bees on the university campus, and 3) offering mindfulness workshops to help increase employee self-awareness and satisfaction. I cannot shake the feeling that the mindfulness workshops are a manoeuvre to ensure that *well-being* is maintained for a productive set of knowledge workers in the enterprise university. It makes good economic sense to have a happy, productive workforce if you want to maximize your outputs.

Kelly (2015) writes of a day in the life and death of the enterprise university, of fissures and slippages between dominant and subversive discourses. Perhaps in my deleting of the three emails I was being subversive, but perhaps their messaging had already filtered into my academic subjectivity, a small but significant part of the ongoing creeping permeation of the

performativity of the enterprise university...until one day I wake up and find that I myself have become the monster I most fear.

A long-time friend and musician (not an academic) recently suggested to me that the pinnacle of academic success would be having my portrait hung in a university boardroom. I laughed and said that if that ever happened to me, I would have gone horribly wrong somewhere along the way. But it does speak to my whispering uncertainty that while I think I might be doing scholarly work that goes against the grain of the enterprise university, such as this chapter, all the while I am drawn in deeper.

The enterprise university is an effect of a wider socio-political system of neoliberalism, which can be understood as a series of governmental techniques with particular social, economic and political formations. Ball (2012) describes how neoliberalism “gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others” (p. 18). These relations themselves become a factor in the knowledge production of universities, where innovation and agility become much more than glib words spoken by politicians. Lynch (2015) argues that there is a danger in the transactional and product-led set of relations, where “constant appraisal leads to the internalization of an actuarial and calculative mind set both at the individual and collective levels” (p. 199). It seeps not only into the behaviours of academics, but into their very being: an ontological becoming of the academic-entrepreneur.

Perhaps most concerning is that there appears to be an unquestioning acceptance of continuous appraisal and audit at the heart of the enterprise university. From annual performance reviews to promotion and tenure applications, competitive grant rounds, and the valorization of impact metrics such as citation counts, H-indices, publication quartiles and journal rankings, the work and worth of academics is reduced to what is knowable through such apparatuses. Davies and Bansel (2010) argue that these technologies of audit and appraisal work to “standardise and regularise expert knowledges so that they can be used to classify and diagnose populations of workers and the potential risks in managing them” (p. 7). If knowledge is the new capital, then knowledge workers are the new proletariat, a necessary source of labour for the knowledge-capital machine, but certainly not to be trusted. Shore (2008) argues that the disciplinary technologies of audit are not simply thrust upon academics, but that academics themselves are complicit in its shaping of academic subjects. A colleague from another university once showed me a shiny new *continuous improvement matrix* that they had designed for their university department. I could barely contain my horror.

The performative culture of the enterprise university that demands hyper-accountability from academics calls forth new skills of “presentation and of inflation, making the most of ourselves, making a spectacle of ourselves. As a consequence, we become transparent but empty, unrecognisable to ourselves” (Ball, 2012, p. 19). However, this is no matter, so long as there are growing research outputs matching an increasingly strict set of ‘quality’ requirements. I find the idea of becoming unrecognizable of particular interest, given the emphasis that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) give to the process of *becoming*, where the myriad constant formation of new multiplicities replaces the humanist ideal of the stable, rational subject. Why should it not be so with the academic subject, who is in a state of constant flux and always becoming-academic? I wonder then, what a circuit-breaker to the enterprise university might produce, or what might

happen if academics everywhere were to take up Bartleby's formula and say, "I prefer not to". I am not convinced that this is something that will happen any time soon. In the meantime, I will try to stick with the formula of doing work that sustains me.

Part of the normalizing effect of the enterprise university comes from its *responsibilization* of academic citizens (Ferguson, 2009), who are treated like miniature firms within a broader competitive network, incentivized to perform in ways that adhere to the university mission and research plan. It is worth noting that perhaps what is being produced through these efforts is "endless activity and innovation that may add up in accord with the university's metrics, but from a transformational perspective rarely adds to" (Meyerhoff, Johnson & Braun, 2011, p. 489). This begs the question; why do we do these activities?

Davies and Petersen (2005) ask us to consider how it has become normalized and viable for academics to "control, regulate and report on their own work and on the work of others" (p. 34) through the technologies of audit and appraisal that are so widespread in the enterprise university. It seems to be an important question, one that goes to the heart of this chapter's concern with the role of desire and the academic as a desiring-machine. Indeed, "we collaborate, we conspire, we accede, we encourage each other to produce ourselves as quantified" (Honan, Henderson & Loch, 2015, p. 47). Along with Petersen (2009), I wonder whether we are able to "not-further, to not-sanction, in word and action, the construction of the university and of academic life rolled into many of the rationalities, apparatuses and practices at work in the enterprise university" (p. 410). How might we do this? Is it even a desirable thing?

ACADEMICS AS DESIRINGMACHINES

A conversation with a colleague:

I would like to be a professor at some point in the next ten years or so

Why?

To prove that I can do it, I guess

Okay, but are going to need many more high-profile publications

I know

For Deleuze and Guattari (1983), the notion of desire is straightforward: "desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement—desiringmachines" (p. 296). Buchanan (2008) argues that Deleuze and Guattari's view of desire is an "affirmative notion of production, setting aside the standard negative notion of desire as lack or need" and that "desire does not need to be

stimulated by an exogenous force such as need or want, it is a stimulus in its own right” (p. 47). Deleuze and Guattari (1983) say:

To a certain degree, the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between *production* and *acquisition*. From the moment that we place desire on the side of acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object (p. 25).

Desire flows and produces modes of intensities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), a migratory and nomadic traversing of vibrations and flows. Perhaps Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of the *body without organs* comes closest to how I think a move towards knowing the academic as a desiringmachine. They say that the body without organs involves the “connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161). Indeed, the body without organs is desire itself: blocs of becoming, intensities, particles and fluxes (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002). It is not what desire means but what desire does that is important (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). How does the academic as desiringmachine work? What does it produce? What effect might the desiringmachine have on the enterprise university?

Colebrook (2014) describes how the micro-perceptions of sympathies, affects and desires work to produce us as social and political beings. She says that, “it is true that for the most part our desires follow the paths of least resistance, perhaps accepting what has always been deemed to be acceptable” (pp. 119-120). This might, in some way, explain how it is that academics might work in ways that run counter to their own sense of justice and purpose, in order to gain recognition, acceptance and reward within the enterprise university. It is hard to argue with an annual performance review proforma or promotion application after all.

Of course, we understand that “desire can be made to desire its own repression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 105). The very desire for success as an academic (whatever criteria might be employed to determine this) call forth a particular submission to the machinery of performativity and accountability that come with working in the enterprise university. But does that mean that we should simply accede to our desire for being seen as successful? I don’t think so. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) provide a further warning about desire:

Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination. Leftist organizations will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective (p. 215).

The turning of desire against itself in order to desire one’s own subjugation to the microfascisms of the enterprise university is a clear outcome of the academic as desiringmachine. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), much attention is given to molar fascism, while the real danger perhaps

comes from the microfascism of individuals themselves. In the enterprise university, molar fascisms might include the institutional policies and procedures of particular universities' research strategies or national research measurements such as the Research Excellence Framework in the United Kingdom and the Excellence in Research for Australia. While our attention might be focussed on the effects of these large exercises on academics' lives, less is given to the microfascist acts that come from self-interest and survival within the academy. As Petersen (2009) points out, the ultimate tyranny in the enterprise university is that "it is nice people who enforce monstrous policies" (p. 419).

There is a significant tension between practices of self-interest and survival, with the dual "discourses of individualisation and autonomy and de-individualisation and regularisation" (Davies & Bansel, 2010, p. 9) constantly at work on academic subjectivities. Bansel et. al (2008) remind us that academics engage in contradictory survival tactics of compliance and subversion in the enterprise university. It is a dangerous tightrope to walk, yet one that sits at the centre of the academic experience. What is it that we desire when we do so? Petersen (2009) asks how we become "complicit in upholding practices and desires that we also and otherwise reject. What does desire for promotion, for instance, make us vulnerable to? How are such desires produced and upheld, and how are they constituted as legitimate?" (p. 419).

Perhaps there is some hope in the notion that "desire is revolutionary because it always wants more connections and assemblages" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 79). If we are always seeking to make a bigger impact with research (however that might be measured in this particular research audit or that one), then perhaps that might open up productive circuits for research-creation that were not otherwise possible. At the same time, in the desire to become "calculable rather than memorable" (Ball, 2012, p. 17) through metrics and other performative devices, there is a decreasing number of acceptable forms of creative activities available to academics (Meyerhoff, Johnson & Braun, 2011). When the only thing that counts is that which is countable, other possible ways of acting on the world are foreclosed. This is a serious concern, given that there is a real pressure from appraisal and audit technologies in the university.

For example, Honan, Henderson and Loch (2015) argue that our institutional selves are constructed as lacking and our desire is mobilised to 'fill' that lack. They say, "We spend our days and nights, hours and hours, trying to plug up the holes, trying to stuff them with the cotton wool stuffing of appeasement, of reassurance, endlessly completing futile and empty tasks, searching for that moment of completeness, of success" (p. 47). It seems that the enterprise university relies on a Freudian-Lacanian desire of lack, where academics are required to perform ever-more contradictory and self-defeating microfascist acts of preservation in order to compete within the system and thus become complete.

While Deleuze and Guattari do not necessarily provide a 'way out' of the machine in which we find ourselves, their productive desire does allow for a more molecular understanding of the academic as a desiringmachine. By seeing the fascist within, perhaps we are then able to better negotiate the complex and contradictory sets of political, social and economic relations that form the assemblage of the enterprise university. Or maybe not. At the very least, we might seek for a more permissive and pleasurable approach to the performativities of producing ourselves as academics.

TOWARDS A SLOWER, MORE CARE-FULL ACADEMIC DESIRINGMACHINE

An annual performance review:

Do you want to be promoted to the next level?

Yes

You need a six-figure external research grant; otherwise, don't even bother

The pressure to be known as a productive academic is present across all aspects of the academic machine, but is especially pronounced in our desire for writing outputs. Things such as impact factors and H-indexes exist because we desire that we be “constituted and regulated through technologies of audit and writing” (Bansel et. al, 2008, p. 673). There is a certain sense of achievement and comfort provided from the quantified, ranked and sorted indices of audit technologies, which can be seductive to the unwary researcher. At the same time, there is promise in writing which breaks free, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) argue, “writing has a double function: to translate everything into assemblages and to dismantle the assemblages. The two are the same thing” (p. 47). Much like desire, this double function often sees academic *freedom* both found and lost, through the act of writing. Of course, all of this is unimportant. The only thing of interest for the enterprise university is that the writing *counts*.

Yet the focus on outputs and metrics as the measure of academic worth has an effect of configuring relationships in the enterprise university as a means to a particular end (Lynch, 2015), “the end being high performance and productivity that can be coded and marketed. This reduces first order social and moral values to second-order principles; trust, integrity, care and solidarity are subordinated to regulation, control and competition” (p. 195).

I wonder what a refusal of audit and accountability structures might produce. What would be the consequence of changing from a focus of accountability to responsibility (Cupples & Pawson, 2012), which involves a significant tactical shift of academic subjectivities? What might result from reversing the focus on regulation, control and competition back to trust, integrity, care and solidarity as first-order principles? As Ball (2012) argues, in the enterprise university the re-orientation of scholarly activities towards measurable performance outcomes is a first-order effect of performativity, and these deflect “attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value” (p. 20). What would happen if we were able to focus instead on the social and emotional aspects of academic labour?

There is a double-edge to the affective dimensions of the academic desiringmachine. For example, “one of the predominant emotions of the neo-liberal university is resentment rather than pleasure” (Meyerhoff, Johnson & Braun, 2011, p. 493). I would add envy and pride to this mix, which are powerful motivating agents in the individualized and competitive environment of the contemporary university. It is very nearly a Hobbesian state of affairs, where individual academics compete against others for tenure, promotion, grants, incentives and other accolades, while being produced as effective and efficient knowledge workers who are innovative and

entrepreneurial. Petersen (2009) describes the delicate balance of resistance and enrolment in the enterprise university. She says:

resistance to neoliberal rationalities and practices must consist of deliberate promotion and nurturing of counter-neoliberal rationalities and practices, in order to prevent neoliberal discourses from coagulating and becoming hegemonic. The deliberate promotion and nurturing must happen at both the collective and individual level; collective and persistent critique of the naturalisation of monstrous practices and desires will make individual courage increasingly possible and likely, but individual responsibility for upholding counter-neoliberal discourse should not be stalled in the meantime (p. 420).

Mountz and colleagues (2015) remind us that there is a “need amid the chaos to slow – things – down” (p. 1238). In the contemporary enterprise university, how might it be possible to decelerate...to just slow down? The call for a slower, collective and care-full scholarship seems particularly important, given the troubling effects of acceleration and compression of time-space of the enterprise university on academic lives (Davies and Bansel, 2005).

Ulmer (2016) calls for a slow ontology, which brings forth “modes of writing scholarly research that are not unproductive, but are differently productive” (p. 1) in the desire for more pleasurable forms of scholarly activity. Alongside a slower scholarship that provides for pleasurable academic work, I would place a more *care-full* scholarship (Mountz et al., 2015). Lynch (2015) argues that care is “not open to measurement in terms of quality, substance and form within a metric measurement system” (p. 201), with measurement, surveillance, control and regulation being at odds with the need for care. Working from an ethic of care requires a slower temporality, one that resists the auditability of the measured and instead gives rise to multiple academic and non-academic outcomes (Evans, 2016). At the same time, slow and care-full scholarship is not just about individual academics finding the cracks and spaces from which to create pleasure, but should form a bigger picture of remaking the university through “cultivating caring academic cultures and processes” (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1238). I wonder, what does a more caring university look like? Can it still be an enterprise university if we all resisted enrolment in its work intensification and instead practised care-full and slow scholarship that connected deeply to the rich veins of our individual and collective knowledges?

Refusal is also at the heart of a slower, care-full scholarship. Meyerhoff, Johnson and Braun (2011) consider the potential of events of individual and collective disruption and refusal, where the possibility of new subjectivities and temporalities arise. At the same time, I am cautious about simply replacing *ninja-like productivity* with an overly-simplified or regressive ethic of slowness (Vostal, 2014) as I am not sure what a more radical slowness might mean. It seems to me that there is promise in creating different refusal spaces where we might speak, think, write, create and play in different ways (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) that perhaps more expressively tap into our academic desiringmachines.

I fear the potential damage of a learned docility that results from constant appraisal and audit, the *being seen to be seen* of accountability and performativity regimes of the enterprise university. How is it possible to be radical, to be slow, to reconfigure the academic desiringmachine in a less fascist way? I am not sure that simply slowing down will be enough. No doubt a certain strategy and tendency to the tactical is necessary. I am reminded of the advice

to do work that sustains me and wonder whether it might be the way out of the bind of performativity in which the enterprise university places us.

Cupples and Pawson (2012) envisage an enterprise university that is inhabited by tactical AND responsible academics engaging in more critical and democratic citizenship. I am not entirely sure how to reconcile the notion of tactical playing-the-game alongside a care-full and caring scholarship, but it is intriguing nonetheless. Perhaps a commitment to resistance within a framework of general compliance is the only way to *survive* as an academic. Perhaps not. Along with Honan, Henderson and Loch (2015), I am seeking the moments “when desire is released from the restricted codes of the academy, when the transformative production of desire moves us beyond and away” (p. 52). What does it move us toward? I am not sure. That is why it is so exciting and terrifying.

DO WHAT SUSTAINS YOU PART II

music
coffee, whiskey, laughter
words sinuously stretching
time compresses a little and then wanders on . . .
- email - DING!
um, no thanks
alright, but then I will keep writing
what happened to the day?

words and then more words
choose them carefully, creatively, concisely
be quotable but not too much
seeking flow, cohesion, clarity, focus

I remember some advice = do what sustains me
...this sustains me...this does
not the crazy stuff that litters my working hours
all the thousand tiny things
instead, the pleasures of a writing project
or a cabal of renegade academics
who refuse to be simply coded and counted
as nothing more than the sum of their outputs

academic desiringmachines
desiring something other than what we've been told we must
doing something because it feels good
to work together
sharing a collective desire for wisdom
a slow, care-full refusal

This is what sustains me

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