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## The Slow University: Work, Time and Well-Being

Maggie O'Neill

**Key words:** slow university; audit culture; structures of feeling; anxiety; psycho-social research; biographical methods; participatory methods; fast academia; critical theory

**Abstract:** Applying the concept of *slow* to the university, in the context of increasing marketisation, managerialism and performance management, enables us to focus upon our experiences of work, time and well-being, the increasing pace and tempo of academic life and the very meaning of the university in current times. In this article, the possibilities for being slowly radical are examined through a critical theoretical and psycho-social lens. Drawing upon Isabel MENZIES LYTH (1988 [1959]) I argue that the success and indeed well-being of the modern university is intimately connected to techniques used to contain anxiety. Confronting anxiety materially, discursively and symbolically involves addressing issues of governance and well-being through providing opportunities for more dialogue and spaciousness. The final section of this article makes recommendations for taking forward sociological research in this area utilising critical, participatory, biographical and performative methodologies.

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### 1. Introduction

My engagement with the concept of *slow*<sup>1</sup> is sparked by a biographical trajectory that is anything but slow<sup>2</sup>. The socio-political context of increasing marketisation, managerialism and performance management in the audit and RAE/REF<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 In the Slow movement we find a focus upon a more reflective way of being, doing and living connected to addressing issues of well-being, the common good, connection and community. See O'NEILL, MARTELL, MENDICK and MÜLLER's Introduction to this thematic section.
  - 2 My experience in a career that began as an MPhil student and part-time lecturer in 1984 "includes unhasty time, decelerative and accelerative moments" VOSTAL (2014, p.16) and a commitment to the idea of the university as promoting critical thinking and praxis—social justice, democracy and cultural citizenship, this often plays out as periods of overworking and juggling teaching, research, administrative/management roles and life in general.
  - 3 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 1996-2008 sought to evaluate the quality of research undertaken by UK higher education institutions. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2013 is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. Both audit exercises directly inform the amount of research funding given to participating universities by UK higher education research funding bodies.

cultures has brought my attempts at work/free time<sup>4</sup> balance into high relief. A critical resistance to instrumental thinking, the fascination with measurement, alongside a commitment to higher education as a space for critical thinking, knowledge making and creativity (after ADORNO, 1978 [1951], 2005a [1969]; NUSSBAUM, 2009), indeed the very idea of the [University as a common good](#) underpins my personal and political approach to the purpose of the university and my role in it. The latter includes critical analysis of measurement as value, alongside addressing gender-based inequalities and expectations of relentless performativity (COLLIER, 2013a; THORNTON, 2011)<sup>5</sup>. [1]

Can an engagement with the idea of *slow* in relation to the university help us to think against the grain, engage in dialectical and creative thinking and unmask the reified consciousness<sup>6</sup> at play in the social construction of the university today? I will argue that *slow* is a catalyst for creative and critical thinking in relation to the university, for fostering a space between subjectivity and objectivity, the particular and the general, for thinking against the grain, for generating *spaciousness* (DOCHERTY, 2011, 2013; TREANOR, 2007) or "mental space" (YOUNG, 1994, 2005a). The application of the concept *slow* might open a space for being slowly radical (HALL, 2013). [2]

Important critiques of the slow university by MARTELL (this section) and MENDICK (this section) caution against fetishising *slow*, without thinking through the politics and meaning especially in relation to forces of conservatism and the social class differentials involved in who can afford to be *slow*, to do *slow*. Taking these on board and mindful of VOSTAL's (2014) point that there has to be a middle way between a conservative or regressive "ethic of slowness" on the one hand and "ninja-like productivity" on the other, I suggest that thinking through what *slow* might mean for the university is a good enough place to start to address issues of "fast academia". This is especially so in relation to negative managerialism, health and well-being (COLLIER, 2013a, 2013b; DOCHERTY, 2013; MÜLLER, this section; SPARKES, 2007, 2013) and the fact that containing anxiety in the contemporary university is becoming increasingly difficult, as a number of articles, on health and mental health in particular, report. [3]

A recent *Guardian* newspaper survey evidenced that heavy workloads are to blame for mental health problems among academics (SHAW, 2014). CRAIG, AMERNIC and TOURISH (2014) reinforce this message, that academics are subject to increased social and psychological risk and stress-related illness, with strong pressure to comply with accountability metrics and increased busyness,

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4 See ADORNO's (2005b [1963]) essay "Free Time".

5 Richard COLLIER explores "the relationship between the neoliberal corporatization of universities, gender and questions of wellbeing in law" (2014, p.3). He conducts research on masculinities and work-life balance in large law firms (2013a); see his review article (2013b) "Privatizing the University and the New Political Economy of Socio-Legal Studies: Remaking the (Legal) Academic Subject". Margaret THORNTON's book "Privatizing the Public University: The Case of Law" was published in 2011.

6 By reified consciousness I draw upon ADORNO as meaning one that is "blinded to all historical past, all insight into one's own conditions, and [that] posits as absolute what exists contingently" (ADORNO, 2005c [1963], p.200).

which removes the opportunity to speak and gather, leading to more reliance on e-mail communication and potential isolation. [4]

Drawing upon the work of MENZIES-LYTH (1988 [1959]) who was influenced by psychoanalysts KLEIN (1948), BION (1952) and JAQUES (1955) and in the spirit of CRAIG et al.'s article (2014)<sup>7</sup>, I will argue that the success and indeed well-being of the modern university is intimately connected to the techniques used to contain anxiety. Confronting anxiety materially, socially and symbolically involves addressing issues of governance and well-being through providing opportunities for more dialogue and spaciousness. We need to re-connect with the idea of the university as a centre for "dialogical learning, critical inquiry, and creative exploration ... and human flourishing" (ZUIDERVAART, 2011, n.p.). But more than this, the university as a place of imagination, creativity, democratisation and praxis is important for academics, students *and* societal well-being. [5]

It is time to pause, reflect upon and resist the relentless performativity and the "co-construction of academic life through myriad measures" that are "recursively defining the practices and subjects of university life" (KELLY & BURROWS 2012, p.130) and re-orient ourselves to what ZUIDERVAART (2011, n.p.) calls "ethical scholarship for the common good". By this he means "teaching and research that consciously pursue social responsibility and continually orient themselves to the common good, to connection and community" (ibid.). [6]

In her defence of a liberal arts education NUSSBAUM (2009) states that

"responsible democratic citizens who cultivate their humanity need an ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group but also and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (n.p.). [7]

Universities based mainly on profit in the global market will produce "a greedy obtuseness and a technically trained docility that threaten the very life of democracy itself, and that certainly impede the creation of a decent world culture" (ibid.). [8]

Following a discussion of what constitutes fast academia and analysis of affect, well-being, the shift in "structures of feeling" (WILLIAMS, 1977) for academics in Higher Education, and the importance of containing anxiety in the university organisation, the final section of this article will make recommendations for taking forward psycho-social research in this area. Possibilities for being radically slow will be suggested utilising critical, participatory, biographical and performative methodologies. This is necessarily a political project that must connect with the governance of the university, the wider socio-political, historical context and re-

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7 CRAIG et al. (2014, p.15) argue that "an audit culture ... induces a psychosis in modern public universities ... A psychotic university would likely conceive an audit culture as a mechanism for coping with anxiety and the sullyng of its reputation—thereby possibly reflecting a paranoid-schizoid position."

think our approach to academic labour and the shifts in "structures of feeling" in relation to marketisation and the audit culture. [9]

WILLIAMS (1977) defines "structures of feeling" as "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations. We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships" (p.132). Jenny BOURNE-TAYLOR (1997, n.p.) defines "structures of feeling" as "a common set of perceptions and values shared by a particular generation ... as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities". In the current climate of higher education, it is clear that the border between academic work and free time "perpetuates the forms of societal life organized according to the system of profit" (ADORNO, 2005b [1969], p.169) that the economic imperative is primary (MARTELL, 2013), the impact is structural, cultural and affective and our lives as academics are speeding up. [10]

## 2. Fast Academia

What is clear in the growing literature on the pace of Higher Education is that the impact of marketisation, new public management (NPM<sup>8</sup>) and neo-liberalism as well as digital technology is central to the experience of academics across the career spectrum, and not only in the UK and North America (CRAIG et al., 2014; MÜLLER, this section; SPARKES, 2013; VOSTAL, 2014). We are, "internationally, living in a new 'era'" (COLLIER, 2013b, p.452). A variety of research, books, blogs and reports raise awareness and question the changes to higher education in the UK in recent years, and especially the development of a business model that ushers in the marketisation of our universities and the decline of the university as a public good (BURROWS, 2012; COLLIER, 2013b, 2014; COLLINI, 2012; DEEM, HILLYARD & REED, 2007; DOCHERTY, 2011, 2013; GILL, 2009; HOLMWOOD, 2011, 2013; MARTELL, 2013; McGETTIGAN 2013; MORRISH, 2014; MÜLLER, 2012, this section). [11]

HOLMWOOD (2013, n.p.) writes that like "many other countries, higher education in the UK has been subject to various measures designed to increase transparency and replace collegial decision-making with managerial hierarchies and market-based performance indicators". HOLMWOOD (2011, n.p.) argues that until the *Browne Review* (2010)<sup>9</sup> the core philosophy of higher education

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8 New public management (NPM) expresses the idea that there has been a "managerial reform movement' in the public sector" (BARRY, DENT & O'NEILL, 2007 [2003], p.1) over the last twenty or so years especially in countries of the North and especially in relation to "new right politics' and the introduction of managerialism and markets into public services" (NEWMAN, 2007, p.19); see also DEEM et al. (2007).

9 The UK Coalition government's Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, published its report [Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education. An Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance](#) in October 2010. The review was chaired by [Lord Browne of Madingley](#), hence the report is also known as the "Browne Review". The report recommended the withdrawal of the annual block grant paid by government to universities, a rise in student fees and the essentially a shift from the university as a public good to be underwritten, in part, by the state, to the university sector as lightly regulated businesses in a competitive marketplace. I am drawing here upon Stefan COLLINI's (2010) "Browne's Gamble".

policy was an inclusive focus on the importance of higher education to democratic citizenship (see also NUSSBAUM, 2009) and principles of equal access "to the full range of human knowledge, understanding and creativity ... regardless of family wealth". Yet now, higher education is "represented solely in terms of a private interest in the investment in human capital" and "the removal of direct public funding and its replacement by student fees is justified on the argument that the beneficiary should pay, and that beneficiary is the private individual, albeit one who will have access to publicly supported loans" (HOLMWOOD, 2011, n.p.). [12]

Alongside this growing body of literature, campaigns have emerged such as the [Council for the Defence of British Universities](#) (CDBU) and the [Campaign for the Public University](#) (CPU). The bottom line expressed across both is anxiety about the future of British universities (THOMAS, 2011) and that behind fast academia is a business model that has ushered in: the introduction of high student fees; the incursion of private providers; changing styles of management embedded in NPM (McGETTIGAN, 2013; PARKER, 2011; SPARKES, 2013); a focus on quantity over quality and the implications of new funding mechanisms for higher education around the increase in student loans and the likely poor return on these. McGETTIGAN (2013, n.p.) documents that over £10 billion in new loans are issued each year with a likely return of around £5.5 billion in repayments. He states that all this adds up to "increase the financial fragility of academic institutions". [13]

Anxiety caused by the precariousness of the finances of the university sector is matched by increasing anxiety of academics around the purpose of the university, from the impact of tuition fees to what BURROWS (2012) terms, in his analysis of the H index, "metricisation": "One can observe it all around; a deep, affective, somatic crisis threatens to overwhelm us" (BURROWS, 2012, p.355). [14]

BURROWS (ibid.) urges us to

"obtain some sort of critical distance from the specificities of the events that are engulfing us, and find some way to reaffirm the importance of the use-values that once differentiated our practices before they are all subsumed by market economic imperatives". [15]

His analysis, in part, outlines the relationship between "metricisation" and the shift in the "structures of feeling" "that have come to increasingly define contemporary academic life" (p.357). He writes that "structures of feeling" have fundamentally altered in the context of the relationship between measurement and value "enacted via code, software and algorithmic forms of power" (p.358). The enactment of the relationship between measurement and value is also represented in "individual level workload planning attempts to "flatten" the academic labour process to a common set of metrics" and, "university league tables [that] do much the same thing at an institutional level" (p.367). [16]

How the pace of academic life, marked by anxiety, metrics, measurement and marketisation, is interpreted and received at the level of feelings and affect is

important—especially given the current socio-political context and the economic imperative. It is to affect and well-being that we now turn. [17]

### 3. Affect, Embodiment and Well-Being

Using his skills for narrative research and storytelling SPARKES (2007, p.521) shares the "embodied struggles of an academic at a university that is permeated by audit culture based upon informal interviews with academics at various universities in England and selected personal experiences." Jim, is a "composite and mythical (perhaps?) academic at an imaginary (perhaps?) university in England" (p.522). In this paper, SPARKES gives voice to aspects of contemporary "structures of feeling" in narrating the story of Jim, a reflexive, human and beleaguered Director of Research at the University of Wannabee Academic (UWA) intent on buffering his department, especially younger early career staff, from the worst excesses of the audit culture and the mantra "grants in—papers out" (p.532). Feeling the deeply entrenched and reified consciousness of the audit culture expressed in the measurement of colleagues value, and their disposal if they don't meet the submission criteria for the REF, Jim feels shame and humiliation through being implicated, but also on behalf of those who are not measuring up and who are defined as: "at risk" and "vulnerable". This leads to overwhelming anxiety for him, in this role.

"As he walked back to his office, he went through a range of emotions—anger, disappointment, fear, helplessness, confusion, shame, insecurity, anxiety, determination, and hostility. There was also a little bit of pride for a job 'well done', in that he had managed to get most of his staff successfully through the process for another year. But then he felt complicit, tainted by management speak and their business world ideology" (p.528). [18]

Academics experience, to varying degrees, the *measuring up* process through RAE and REF, and may have been labelled and categorised through a variety of intra departmental or university symbolism—such as traffic lights [green—ok to excellent, amber-borderline, red—at risk and vulnerable] or departmental information boards displaying grants in, pending, and gained. Experiencing anxiety, work overload and the dissonance of the reality of the situation, Jim bears the weight of the lie on the materiality of his body and his consciousness. He reflects that he and his colleagues are more than that defined by their CVs, but he is expected to collude, to act "as if"<sup>10</sup> (CARLEN, 2008) they *are* their CVs. He sees the reification,<sup>11</sup> that the emperor really has no clothes. Many others, from the head of the university, the Vice Chancellor (VC) to his peers and PhD

10 Liz MORRISH (2014) captures CARLEN's (2008) concept of "as if" well in her analysis of the ideology of institutional discourse and the culture of managerialism. CARLEN discusses the ways in which "a new prison had recently modified the goals that staff were being asked to attain. Staff knew these goals were unachievable, but all understood they were required to act as if they were unproblematic. Furthermore, there was a requirement to provide auditable evidence that the goals were being achieved. Despite widespread knowledge that 'everybody knows' and recognises the unreality the demands of the imaginary were allowed to displace any possibility of managing the reality effectively" (MORRISH, 2014, n.p.).

11 For example, treating the relations between people as if they were relations between things.

students, appear to act "as if" the hyper-performing academic terrain is normal and naturalised, despite the fact that it is reified through *measurement as value*.<sup>12</sup> Jim seeks support from his doctor and is prescribed anti-depressants.

"Standing there, Jim felt slightly disorientated. His emotions had swung from intense hostility to intense guilt in the space of a few moments. And now raw anger was seeping into the corporeal mix. Anger with a system that made him feel these emotions so often in his daily life. Each in their own way drained him, diminished him, eroded him, dehumanized him" (SPARKES, 2007, p.533). [19]

Responses from reviewers and readers are published in the final section of SPARKES' (2007) paper and read alongside the paper express the emotion, recognition, reflection and sadness at the changes taking place in Higher Education in the UK. From the reified "as if" world of high performance and fast academia to the deep affective crisis marked by an ever present undercurrent of anxiety, shame and humiliation—at not keeping up or measuring up—or indeed the opposite a satisfaction at *making it* and the anxiety evoked in sustaining this. The impact on corporeality, embodiment, feeling and well-being is made clear in SPARKES' (2007) paper as it is in other research literature (COLLIER, 2013a; COLLIER, 2013b, 2014; GILL, 2009; MÜLLER, 2013; MULLER, 2012a, 2012b). [20]

GILL (2009) also highlights contemporary "structures of feeling" (WILLIAMS, 1977) in her chapter on "Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of the Neoliberal University". GILL gathered conversations and memos over a period of one year as part of speaking the secrecy and silences, as an act of resistance and narration, towards a psychosocial examination of the hidden injuries of academia in an age of neo-liberalism. Experiences include anxiety and stress, fear of failing, rejection, the impossibility of juggling family life, the impact of this upon families, and—the lack of space. She opens her chapter as follows:

"How are you?"

I am totally stressed at the moment, to be honest. Work is piling up and I'm just drowning. I don't know when I'm going to have time to start on that secrecy and silence book chapter—I'm so, so late with it now, and I feel really bad that I'm letting Roisin<sup>13</sup> down, but I literally never have a second.

I know, I know exactly what you mean.

I mean, I had 115 e-mails yesterday and they all needed answering. I'm doing 16 hour days just trying to keep on top of it. I feel like I'm always late with everything, and my 'to do' list grows faster than I can cross things off it. It's like one of those fungi in a horror movie that doubles in size every few hours! (Laughter) And I never ever have chance to do any of my own work. I'm sleeping really badly and it all just feels completely out of control ...

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<sup>12</sup> See a collection of essays edited by Lisa ADKINS and Celia LURY (2012) on "Measure and Value", specifically the articles by Nicholas GANE; Aiden KELLY and Roger BURROWS.

<sup>13</sup> Roisin is the name of the woman whom Rosalind GILL feels she is letting down. Roisin FLOOD is GILL's co-editor on the book "Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections" (2009).

It's the same for me. Reading? What that? Thinking? No chance! And you feel awful, don't you. With me I feel like I'm constantly stealing time from the kids too- I'll go off to check messages in the middle of a game of Monopoly or something. Sometimes I just feel like quitting.

Yeah I know. It just gets worse. Still hoping to win the lottery, then? (Laughter)

But how are you?

Do you really want to know?! (Laughter) (Yeh) well, awful actually. I'm really fed up. I heard yesterday that my article for x journal was turned down. (Oh no!) You know, the one I worked on for ages and ages. I poured so much of myself into that piece (I know). And one of the referee's comments was vile—it said something like 'my first year undergraduates have a better understanding of the field than this author does—why are they wasting all of our time.' When I read it it was like a slap in the face, Ros<sup>14</sup>. It was all I could do not to burst out crying in the postroom, but I had a lecture right afterwards so I somehow managed to pull myself together and go and do that. But last night, I just didn't sleep (poor you) I just kept on going over and over with all these negative comments ringing round my head. And you know the worst thing is, they are right: I am useless (no you're not), I'm a complete fraud, and I should have realized that I was going to be found out if I sent my work to a top journal like that (p.228). [21]

This is a transcript of a conversation with a colleague and friend. She describes both women as white, on continuing contracts and so marked by privilege. The exchange around "affective, embodied experiences" speaks of "exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, anxiety, shame, aggression, hurt, guilt and feelings of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear of exposure within the contemporary academy" (ibid.). Yet as she goes on to discuss and unpack these feelings in the chapter she describes how they "remain largely secret and silenced in the public spaces of the academy" (ibid.). [22]

The narratives above by GILL (2009) and SPARKES (2007) are mirrored in Nadine MULLER's (2012a) blog [The New Academic](#) aimed at early career researchers and post-doctoral academics. In a project which collates advice and experience about the increasingly demanding and complex challenges of academia, a major focus on the blog is mental health in academia, a culture of acceptance and a culture of silence, alongside the relentless pressure and the expectations on post doctoral researchers to work punishing hours to get by and get promoted. MULLER blogs about her own experiences of anxiety and the impact on work and life: "Academia can be a tough environment. The current neo-liberal structures that dictate its activities and processes make it more competitive, less friendly, and often isolating" (2012b, n.p.). [23]

Together with VOSTAL's (2014) research on the experiences of academic speed in twenty interviews with senior British academics, there are a number of emerging themes across this literature. The increasing *precariousness* for academic staff (and especially for catering and cleaning/portering staff, with some on zero hours contracts, see MARTELL, this section, and MENDICK, this

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14 Ros refers to the first name of the author, Rosalind GILL, who is narrating this conversation.

section). The intensification and *speeding* up of academia, for example, GILL (2009) received an e-mail requesting that staff be REF ready even before the terms of the REF were announced. She describes staff working long hours and at weekends in excess of the [EU Working Time Directive](#) and yet are unable to log these extra hours on the annual Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC)<sup>15</sup> return. This involves us being "always on" (GILL, 2009, p.238): "Competing and 'racing' comprise a new realm of necessity, and ... these principles contain strong regulative potential" (VOSTAL, 2014, n.p.). [24]

The need for *space* is a common theme across the work cited here. Jim tells his PhD student he was waiting for a clear space to reply to her e-mail, and space is equated with time as well as space to be, and to be fostered and protected (SPARKES, 2007, p.532). "Mental space", according to psychoanalyst Robert YOUNG (1994, 2005a), is the space for reflection, for feeling, for relating to others, for being open to experience. Mental space is diminished for those in SPARKES (2007) and GILL's (2009) narratives and for some of the academics interviewed by VOSTAL (2014). [25]

*Anxiety* is a common theme expressed across this research. GILL (2009, p.238) identifies experiencing and feeling "toxic shame". VOSTAL (2014) identifies shame and especially guilt at not managing to meet all the requirements, as an overwhelming affect of fast academia that provokes anxiety: "We all feel guilty, because we have not met the expectations" (n.p.). GILL (2009) and SPARKES (2007) highlight the internalising of shame and humiliation in not measuring up and the anxiety this leads to.

"When did it become acceptable to write of a colleague's work 'this is self-indulgent crap' or 'put this manuscript in a drawer and don't ever bother to come back to it'—both comments I have read in the last year on colleagues' work. What are the psychosocial processes that produce this kind of practice? I would argue that this ... is produced by the peculiarly toxic conditions of neoliberal academia" (GILL, 2009, p.239). [26]

Anxiety is intimately connected to well-being. GILL (2009), MULLER (2012a), SPARKES (2007) and VOSTAL (2013, 2014) all write about the *pleasures* of being academics.

"We are, as academics, deeply invested in and usually passionate about our work and derive pleasure from it and the relative autonomy it once, and for some still, affords us ... Indeed, we often draw no distinction between our work and ourselves" (GILL, 2009, p.240). [27]

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15 "The Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) is an activity-based costing approach designed with and for the UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It supports the understanding and management of financial sustainability of higher education, and helps provide accountability for the public support provided to HEIs. It provides cost information for HEIs' own use, including for benchmarking purposes" (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2012/news75809.html> [Date of access: June 15, 2014].

The fulfilment and satisfaction of teaching and facilitating, the creativity this affords and (when we have time) the possibilities for research and interventions, for connecting and problem solving are both a pleasure and fulfilling. The final theme is the tangible shift in "structures of feeling" (WILLIAMS, 1977) clearly identified in the narratives, literature and blogs. The various kinds of temporal regulations that structure our lives as academics (VOSTAL, 2014) all facilitate the development of techniques of the self, such as self-monitoring, increasing disciplinary processes, responsabilising, and ultimately internalisation of the new academic "structures of feeling". [28]

Academia, for GILL (2009) provides an excellent example of the neo-liberalism of the workplace and academics predispositions to "'work hard' and 'do well' meshed perfectly with its demands for autonomous, self-motivating, responsabilised subjects. This is gendered, racialised and classed, too" (p.241). She argues that the lack of resistance in universities is a result of divisive and individualising practices. Indeed, universities rely on a workforce whose flexibility comes from fear, insecurity and an absence of ethos (SPARKES, 2013, p.446). Anxiety thus becomes embedded and embodied in "structures of feeling". [29]

Anxiety, stress, and the apparent replacement of scholarship as value with metrics and measurement in a growing marketised university sector gives rise to more anxiety. The pressure is also on research and department managers, faculty heads and leaders to manage and contain anxiety, to do the important work of good governance in precarious and fragile times, to attend to well-being and possibly, needing to keep up their own "outputs". [30]

Outside the higher education sector, there is a growing concern with restructuring our working lives and attending to well-being. Indeed, as COLLIER (2014) states "well-being appears increasingly a 'hot politics' across a range of policy and disciplinary fields" (p.6). A major focus of the UK coalition government and the Home Office is on well-being and even happiness. Work and well-being is the subject of a report published by the New Economic Foundation "21 Hours" advocating a twenty one hour working week, a shorter working week to address a range of urgent social problems: "overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life" (COOTE & FRANKLIN, 2010, p.2). However, alongside the focus on well-being, is a deeper focus upon productivity and the importance of measurement, of measuring value, not just for getting a more accurate picture, but for harnessing knowledge to improve wealth. This is deeply linked to the underpinning economic and behavioural politics involved in state and citizen relations in neo-liberalism (see JONES, WHITEHEAD & PYKETT, 2014 and LEGGETT, 2014). [31]

What is clear is that the role of insecurity, precariousness and anxiety are embedded in the literature, in experience, in the narratives and research discussed above and in academia's contemporary "structures of feeling". So, looking a little closer, through a psychosocial lens, might help us to better understand and map the complexities of relationships between work, time and

well-being, linked to expectations of the neo-liberal subject in the context of increasingly neo-liberal universities. [32]

#### 4. Containing Anxiety in the University

Taking up the concern with well-being in the contemporary university I want to draw upon MENZIES-LYTH's (1988 [1959]) focus upon anxiety and containing anxiety in organisations, reflecting back on the critical scholarship discussed above, the campaigns against neo-liberal processes and change (CDBU, CPU) and the voices of academics and early career researchers through blogs such as Nadine MULLER's (2012a) and Ruth MÜLLER's research (this section). [33]

Isabel MENZIES-LYTH (1988 [1959]) wrote a critical and pioneering paper on "containing anxiety in institutions". In it she maintains that the individual is engaged in life-long management of primitive anxiety; the study of anxiety is at the heart of psychoanalysis.

"In developing a structure, culture and mode of functioning, a social organization is influenced by a number of interacting factors, crucial among which are its primary task, including such environmental relationships and pleasures as that involves; the technologies available for performing the task and the needs of the members of the organization for social and psychological satisfaction and, above all, for support in the task of dealing with anxiety" (p.50). [34]

In the university the primary tasks are education, teaching and learning and research. The environmental relationships and pleasures include the relative autonomy of academic life, connection and communication with students, peers and networks, the creativity, community and self-development that can take place, as well as making a difference, developing interventions in theory, practice and policy. This interventionary work often involves social science academics taking the role of interpreter (BAUMANN, 1992) not legitimator,<sup>16</sup> but increasingly the audit culture expects us to serve a more legitimating function, driven by managerialist business interests over critical pedagogy. The technologies available for performing our tasks are increasingly more digital and mobile and although of great value are also involved in driving the pace of fast academia. The needs of the members of the organisation for social and psychological satisfaction and, above all, for support in the task of dealing with anxiety become increasingly fragile in the context of the neo-liberal university, as evidenced by the research discussed above. [35]

In the functioning of the university as a defence against anxiety, the characteristic feature of the social defence system is "their orientations to helping the individual avoid the experience of anxiety, guilt, doubt and uncertainty" (MENZIES-LYTH, 1988 [1959], p.63). MENZIES-LYTH (p.51) writes that the social defence system

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<sup>16</sup> BAUMAN (1992) highlights the role of the sociologist as interpreter rather than as legislator or serving a legitimating function for the state. BAUMAN's point is that academics have an obligation to act as interlocutors and interpreters: as public intellectuals not legitimators or legislators.

develops over time "as the result of collusive interaction and agreement, often unconscious, between members of the organization as to what form it shall take" within the context of wider social, cultural and political structures and processes, i.e. in the case of the contemporary university—values of scholarship and the common good are taken over by capital, finance and business. However, as YOUNG (2005a, 2005b) documents when people cannot bear the way situations make them feel they switch off, "they withdraw their sensitive and tender feelings and protect themselves from being overwhelmed by threatening feelings" (YOUNG, 2005b, n.p.). This is illustrated in GILL (2009), MÜLLER (2013 and in this issue), SPARKES (2007, 2013) and some of the entries in MULLER's (2012a, 2012b) blog. [36]

In the contemporary context, what is on the rise are defensive techniques to quell anxiety, but defensive techniques such as measurement and even stronger modes of accountability serve only to increase anxiety, detachment and denial of feelings.

"Ironically, an audit culture is often implemented to enhance accountability and ultimately trust (both within the university and without). Despite this, the paraphernalia of an audit culture (such as accounting-based performance management schemes) tend to diminish trust and alter the nature of the university institution" (CRAIG et al., 2014, p.9). [37]

In conditions of increasing accountability, measurement and anxiety, colleagues are labelled and categorised as excellent, adequate, at risk or vulnerable, which provoke certain defences. Labelling enables a distancing and removal from the actual person, who instead becomes synonymous with standardised task performance. There is, as SPARKES (2007) identifies in Jim's experience, a collusive denial, splitting and projection to ensure the individual and indeed the organisation are measuring up. What also becomes clear is there is a withdrawal or "abandonment of the more mature methods for dealing with anxiety" and a "regression to the more primitive methods of defence" (MENZIES-LYTH, 1988, p.64). [38]

The opportunity to work over anxieties, to do the work of worrying, the work of mourning (for FREUD) is denied. This process is in part, undertaken in papers and articles and blogs about managerialism and marketisation; and is also reflected in this special section of *FQS*. Instead precariousness and anxiety lead to defensive psychological detachment where processes and practices of collegiality are undermined by a focus upon the individual as measuring up and measured against. This in turn reduces collective responsibility, care, support, conviviality and collegiality that then reduces the possibility of satisfaction and well-being. In this scenario "anxiety tends to remain permanently at a level determined by phantasies rather than reality" (MENZIES-LYTH, 1988, p.44), which interferes with the capacity for creative, symbolic abstract thought that would enable reality to be handled and pathological anxiety to be mastered. Instead the individual may feel helpless in the face of the situation, which can inhibit self-knowledge and realistic assessment of performance. This closing off

of spaces for critical reflection is also reflected in the blogs and the fears and anxieties expressed and resistance to normalisation of metricisation and the new "structures of feeling". [39]

Typical of the paranoid-schizoid defence systems is that they "prevent true insight into the nature of the problems and realistic appreciation of their seriousness. Thus, only too often, no action can be taken until a crisis is very near or has actually occurred" (pp.79-81). A paranoid-schizoid position

"arises from the university 'splitting' an 'object' (its reputation for research) into a good category (which is idealised) and a bad category (which is despised). However, an audit culture provides a defence mechanism for the university: it keeps the good and bad separated and controlled. It helps avoid anxiety situations by retreating into bureaucratic quantitative processes "(CRAIG et al., 2014, p.15). [40]

In SPARKES' (2007) paper, Jim was conscious of the reified, collusive interaction that increased his anxiety—yet, when tasked with letting a younger colleague know he was now in REF terms "at risk" and "vulnerable"—he did—but Jim also recognised reification and reified consciousness in action. The *measurement as value* approach taken by senior managers and the VC, led to him feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, with no space to think or process, to do the work of mourning or worrying, he repeats obsessively "I am more than my CV" and seeks support from his doctor. [41]

Organisations such as the university operate a holding function, and are expected to attend to the well-being of their members. In BOURDIEU et al.'s (1999 [1993]) terms the power dynamics, status differences, the environment and the way that the "rules" are set up all impact on the kind of communication and narrative elicited in organisations. The aim should be for "non-violent" communication (p.608). [42]

The changes currently taking place in the contemporary British university, marked by fast academia, growing neo-liberalism, metricisation and a lack of spaciousness, mental space, dialogue and reflexivity, reduce the possibilities for critical analysis amidst growing bureaucratisation and measurement, in a sector already deeply problematic, especially when it comes to gender, diversity and equality issues. A common theme across the research and papers examined for this article, is the need for interpretation, the space for critique and analysis; indeed a radical democratic space for resistance, recognition, dialogue and reflection. As GILL (2009) states it has never been more important to turn our gaze upon our own feelings, practices and organisations. [43]

How we do this is important and a critical, dialectical and psychosocial (biographical/narrative) approach will be very helpful in writing the hidden histories of academia, in generating reflection and understanding within the context of wider, historical and comparative research and understanding. [44]

In the Canadian context, ZUIDERVAART's (2011) inaugural address "Living at the Crossroads" states that the university is at a major crossroads and its location remains unsettled for three major reasons "muddled missions, external pressures, and entrenched patterns" (n.p.). With an increasing demand for measuring outcomes, success and impact the kinds and types of learning permitted or encouraged are circumscribed. He asks, what then are the pedagogical implications? [45]

In thinking against the grain, thinking dialectally, *slow* might offer a way of thinking and practicing a different way of being, of resisting "being on all the time" and creating mental space, spaciousness, to think and reflect, especially about the kind of organisation and university we want, for all our futures. The creation of mental space "as available for containment, a place where one can bear experience, hold it and be able to ruminate it, metabolise it, reflect upon it, savour it" (YOUNG, 2005a, n.p.), is vitally important for the university today, for challenging reification and containing anxiety. [46]

In a paper on "Education after Auschwitz", ADORNO (2005c [1969], p.198) states that

"education must take seriously an idea in no way unfamiliar to philosophy: that anxiety must not be repressed. When anxiety is not repressed, when one permits oneself to have, in fact, all the anxiety that this really warrants, then precisely by doing that, much of the destructive effects of unconsciousness and displaced anxiety will probably disappear". [47]

The contemporary university is not able, under the terms of the current conditions to contain anxiety in a way that is productive to well-being. [48]

Instead, fast academia is fetishised and anxiety is part of the current "structures of feeling" connected to increasingly economic, marketised and monetised organisations. Unable to contain anxiety, the measuring of the value of scholarship against the various metrics leads to increased anxiety, withdrawal, shame and humiliation (for some) and loss of well-being. Psycho-social analysis is vital for understanding the "societal play of forces that operates beneath the surface of political forms" (p.203). Could a consideration of *slow* disrupt the normative and usher in the space to think, feel, critique and change? [49]

#### **4. Slow University: Critically Slow/Slowly Radical?**

In a recent talk at Durham University, Carl HONORÉ (2004, 2014) said that engaging with the Slow movement does not mean stopping, there is no need to fetishise *slow*, but rather we could be doing things at the appropriate pace. HONORÉ gave us three tenets for the slow university: *measure less, think slowly and unplug*. This issue of pace is raised by VOSTAL (2014) who calls for accommodating "the dialectic between the need for the slow tempo of contemplation and reflection and the faster energetic rhythms of discovery and (re)search" (n.p.) in academic life. Calling for "unhasty time" as opposed to slow

—he seeks the explicit and categorical politicisation of time. Time is a complex phenomenon in higher education and calling for a blanket slow down is not sufficient. Our lives are marked by accelerative and decelerative moments and speed can sometimes be necessary (see MENDICK, this section, and MÜLLER, this section). [50]

Brian TREANOR's [Slow University: A Manifesto](#), written in the summer of 2007, calls for others to join him in the development of *slow*, posting "slow hours" in his schedule, of one hour per day (11.00-12.00 or 12.00-13.00) and all day Sunday, where he does not write for teaching or publication, answer the telephone, grade papers, respond to e-mails or attend meetings. Thus he creates spaciousness, mental or creative space, so crucial to enable critical, dialectical thinking. But as MARTELL (this section) reminds us, this approach focuses upon the subject, the individual to carve a space within current structural and governance arrangements. As LEUNG, De KLOET and CHOW (2010, n.p.) write, no "individual strategy can overhaul the structural causes ... that have transformed the modern university into its workforce of precarious lives". Critical theorist Theodor W. ADORNO (2005a [1969]), established priority of the object and mediation of the subject-object arguing that change can only be brought about socially by changing society, not the individual. A focus upon individual strategies for introducing *slow* will only take us so far. [51]

The patterns of neo-liberal incorporation notwithstanding and mindful of the critiques of *slow* by MARTELL, MENDICK and MÜLLER (this section) there could be, in dialectically thinking about *slow*, the creation of a radical space and potential for disrupting, for reflecting on the personal, political, structural and economic rationality of fast academia and the future of the contemporary university. This connects with VOSTAL's (2014, n.p.) call for "unhasty" time as "an explicit political demand and ethical principle". [52]

Borrowing ADORNO's (1978 [1951]) concept of "micrology" we need more research that looks at our experiences as academics in conditions of fast academia that uncovers and interrogates the "structures of feeling". Thinking against the grain using "non-identity thinking", ADORNO famously said, "the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass" (p.50). This statement encourages us to focus upon what is ordinarily overlooked, the small scale, the minutiae in an attempt to understand broader social structures and processes. For ADORNO, it is only by trying to say the unsayable, the outside of language, the mimetic, the sensual, the non-conceptual that we can approach a "politics" which undercuts identity thinking, criss crosses binary thinking and resists appropriation. According to him, critical theory as well as art provides the change-causing gesture. Critical theory is one way in which the sociology of knowledge work gets done. [53]

Taking up GILL's (2009) challenge we need to turn our lens upon our own labour processes, organisational governance and conditions of production, how we make links between macro-organisational and institutional practices on the one

hand, and experiences and affective states on the other and the ways these are gendered, racialised and classed. She asks,

"how might we engage critically with the multiple moments in which individuals report being at breaking point, say 'my work is crap' or 'I'm going to be found out'—as well as those moments of gratuitous attack and cruelty, so often seen— for example—in anonymised referee processes (yet rarely challenged<sup>17</sup>)—and connect these feelings with neo-liberal practices of power in the Western University? In short, how might we begin to understand the secrets and silences within our own workplaces, and the different ways in which they matter?" (p.229). [54]

## 5. Conclusion

I propose that we engage in critical analysis, conduct a micrology of fast academia and reflect dialectically, critically and pedagogically on the potential for being slowly radical, for transformative change in the contemporary university. [55]

The first step must be to slow down, to create space, spaciousness and mental space, to critically reflect upon the ongoing reification and deepening anxiety psycho-socially. We also need to think through the structures of feeling that have emerged across the sector and to work on containing anxiety in the system and indeed consider the potential of *slow* radicalism, as a counter approach to the fast university and its impact on work, time and well-being. [56]

In this sense *slow* is a catalyst for conducting inter-disciplinary conversations and critical research that may disrupt, lead us to think deeply and critically<sup>18</sup>. There is something in the idea of *slow* that is a call to thinking otherwise, for thinking dialectically. Conducting biographical, visual and performative methods could help to write our hidden histories, especially around work, time and well-being and develop praxis as purposeful knowledge, to reclaim space for scholarship and the common good. SPARKES (2013) suggests moving forward in collaboration across the binaries of management/academia to develop different ways of thinking, working and doing accountability that involve restoring trust and autonomy and that are based upon public dialogue. Vital too to consult and create the kind of environments conducive to and supportive of early career academics (see MÜLLER, this section). [57]

The project of critical theory involves public intellectuals [individually and collectively] uncovering reification and identitarian thinking, through critical analysis, acting as interpreters not legitimators (BAUMAN, 1992) and recognising the objective mediation of subjects and subjectivity, and the vital importance of examining societal conditions, social structures and of reading these against

17 See [On being rejected](#) at Celebrity Youth Blog for an example of resistance and challenge to rude refer comments [Date of access: July 16, 2014].

18 This would involve engaging in dialogue and debate, opening and keeping open critical spaces by undertaking a programme of inter-disciplinary seminars, invite artists to join us, join the campaigns for the public university, support unionisation, develop chains of equivalence across universities and disciplines, academic and non academic career structures, and with strategists and governing bodies. Not all managers want fast academia.

appearance, against the grain, to not only expose conflicts and antagonisms but to envision a radical democratic imaginary for the future of the university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [58]

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## Author

*Maggie O'NEILL* is a sociologist and professor in criminology in the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. She co-directs the Centre for Sex, Gender and Sexualities at Durham University. Her most recent book is "Transgressive Imaginations: Crime, Deviance and Culture".

Contact:

Maggie O'Neill

Applied Social Sciences  
Durham University  
32 Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3BU  
UK

Tel.: +44 (0)191 33 46823

E-mail: [Maggie.o'neill@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Maggie.o'neill@durham.ac.uk)

URL: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/sass/staff/profile/?id=8314>

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