Beyond binaries and before becoming: the affective dimensions of academic-level resistance.

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Abstract

Drawing from the tensions within non-representational and human practice perspectives on affect, this paper continues the task of re-conceptualising academic-level resistance in the context of UK higher education. Such re-conceptualisation is underpinned by the belief that illustrating the breadth of resistant possibility within and between universities can assist in the development of action against the competitive and for-profit imperatives currently overwhelming this educational sphere. Indeed, while resistance research is increasingly interested in the (dis)connections between overt and "everyday" (Scott, 1985) forms of action (e.g. Contu, 2008; Zembylas, 2019), HE researchers have paid little attention to the latter. Consequently, academic-level resistance remains normatively portrayed as exceptional, novel and less influential than that it rejects. For the sake of contributing a counternarrative, this paper employs a diffractive methodology to examine the affective roles of emotion, meaning making practices and pre-personal factors. By speculating how academic-level resistance derives from not only consciously undertaken cost-benefit analyses but from the entanglement of material and non-material elements, this discussion emphasises the notion of "becoming" and so problematises reductive binaries of overt/covert, high-cost/low-cost, resister/complier. Irrespective of the resounding difficulties that accompany efforts to exploit the affective dimensions of resistance, this emphasis nevertheless situates possibility at the heart of UK higher education and the actions pushing against its neoliberal form.

Keywords: resistance, affect, higher education, poststructural, binaries

1. Introduction

> Discourses on student voice are premised on the assumption of a fully conscious, fully speaking, "unique, fixed and coherent" self … no attention is given to the multiple social positions, multiple voices, conscious and unconscious pleasures, tensions, desires, and contradictions which are present in all subjects (Orner, 1992, p.79).

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For Orner, critical theory can be as oppressive as the educational systems it seeks to disrupt. By emphasising the role of the "liberatory" teacher in facilitating "authentic student voice", critical theorists preserve reductive dualisms of silence/voice and oppressor/liberator. In response to this, Orner draws from the feminist poststructural practice of problematising the categories of understanding that have developed from humanism's reliance on "grids of intelligibility … that reward identity and punish difference" (St. Pierre, 2000, p.480). By rejecting these superficial classes of understanding, a feminist poststructural approach seeks to highlight the messy-in-betweens that have been obfuscated from view (Lather, 1991). Applying this approach to student voice therefore appreciates how a student can be silent in one space but vocal in another. They are neither one nor the other; they can be, and can alternate between, both (Orner, 1992).

Though the topic of Orner's work differs from this paper's concern with resistance in UK higher education (HE), her criticisms offer a starting point for reconsidering the logics of action in this context. In the last fifty years, UK HE has undergone radical alteration, with the injection of more students and more universities accompanied by an everincreasing emphasis on creating competitive states of play between institutions and the actors within them (Bacevic, 2019a). Although such policy agendas receive ongoing and extensive criticism, HE research has theorised academic-level action against the neoliberal environment according to binary perspectives of agentic/passive and overt/covert.

Moreover, as little empirical attention has been paid to the influence social and institutional context have on resistant engagement, such limiting theorisations cloud the "multiple social positions" and "conscious and unconscious" (Orner, 1992, p.79) actions of academic staff, equating inaction with silence and complicitness. Using diffractive and feminist poststructural methodologies to draw attention to the affective dimensions of action, this paper speculates that academic-level resistance derives from not only consciously undertaken cost-benefit analyses but from the entanglement of material and non-material, known and unknown elements. Aside from theoretically situating resistant "becomings" at the heart of UK HE, this discussion supports a pathway for future research as well as the development and manipulation of resistant possibility to the benefit of those currently exploited by the way things are.

The paper is structured as follows: section one draws together – and apart – theories of diffraction and feminist poststructuralism. Sections two and three develop this discussion by first interrogating the limitations that come with categorising resistance and second examining the (dis)connections between non-representational and human practice theories of affect. Drawing from the preceding discussions, section four reconsiders the ways in which resistant behaviours in HE can be interpreted before exploring the opportunities for future practice that emerge from diffractive and affect theory perspectives.

2. Diffractive feminist poststructuralism

To foreground the affective dimensions of resistant behaviours, this paper employs a diffractive methodology to consider the affective entanglement of material and non-material, observable and unobservable elements, such as bodies, technologies, discourses, cultures and affective histories. The idea that there is something excessive about experience – something that evades the realm of the tangible and the immediately recognisable – frames resistance as unpredictable and perpetually in construction (Hynes, 2013). The onto-epistemological position from which the following arguments develop is hence somewhat Deleuzian in its rejection of:

> a binary logic in favor of a logic of connection, a logic of the and (this and this and this and …), of becoming. The verb, to be, is, is anathema in Deleuzian ontology because it stops thought. Once equilibrium and identity are established – I am a woman – becoming and difference are impossible (St.Pierre, 2013, p.652-653).

At the same time, the specific interest in resistance necessitates a binary logic between compliance and non-compliance. This contradiction is similar to the bind negotiated by feminist poststructuralists. As the

feminist poststructural rejection of categorisations denies that anything – even feminist poststructural orientations – can be purely *this* or *that*, research within this tradition inevitably crosses into deemed "humanist" territory. Still, while attempts to "trouble it [humanism]" are inevitably thwarted by a sort of "doing it" (Lather, 1996, cited in St.Pierre, 2000, p.471), humanism is still problematised more than if it were not troubled at all. Within this in mind, this paper centres resistance for purpose of critiquing, rather than bolstering, the distinction between resistance and compliance, action and inaction.

Just as the described onto-epistemological position rejects binary logics for the sake of uncovering currently obfuscated possibilities, Barad's (2014) diffraction as methodology examines of the role of difference in producing and reproducing power relations, exploring not only how differences get made but the effects and affects of this difference. Hein (2016) nevertheless distinguishes Barad's alignment with identity from Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, thereby rendering these two lines of thought philosophically incompatible. However, a diffractive reading of these thinkers can lean them into rather than away from one another. For one, feminist poststructuralists, Deleuzians and those working with diffraction are all, in some way, occupied with the idea of becoming – the idea that everything is in a continual process of change and development. Deleuze & Guattari (1987) discuss becoming as: "what is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (p.238). In and of itself, becoming is brought into being by interweaving "multiplicities" of the "virtual" (an openness to change) and "actual" (embodied in situations) kinds. While this remains invested in immanence rather than identity, Roffe (2010) observes how "the changes in actual situations also effect changes in the virtual multiplicity" (p.182), indicating how multiplicities are defined through their relationship with each other. Further, Deleuze & Guattari (1972) maintain: "There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together" (cited in Mazzei, 2014, p.745). For Mazzei, the pairing are – like Barad – referring to the entanglement of the material and discursive, within which discursive practices and material phenomena are mutually reliant.

While such entanglement can be used to broaden ideas about what resistant-becomings can look like, further discrepancies arise when considering how to convey and empirically examine these possibilities. Feminist poststructural thinking draws from Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) argument that language "consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you" (p.85). Language is thus merely a signifier, with the misuse of this signifier functioning to recreate inequalities. Yet critics of poststructuralism suggest that such critiques of language afford the matter too much power. Callus & Herbrechter (2012) point towards the use of "code" rather than language, arguing that a divergence from "human-only language" recognises the non-human forms of communication that exceed cognition and comprehension, such as those associated with technology, artificial intelligence and non-human beings. Questions persist as to how aspects of these communications, including resistant inclinations, can be interrogated within academic discourse, which centres primarily around consciously selected verbal or written language. To this we can return to feminist poststructuralists, who have taken to perceiving language as a form of thinking rather than representation (as per Hanley, 2019; Honan, 2007; St. Pierre, 2016). By viewing language as a (constrained) means to the end of sharing ideas, language's power is framed as contingent rather than "trustworthy" (Barad, 2003, P.801).

Despite being fundamentally ill-equipped to capture the breadth of the complexities, influences and developments within resistant behaviours, academic discourse can draw from feminist poststructural and diffractive approaches to bring to the attention of readers the myriad of possible becomings for resistance. Further, by treating resistance as a derivative of an "assemblage" of converging, contradictory and non-linear material and non-material elements and moments (Strom, 2015), researcher interest pulls towards the affective, thereby interrogating the misrepresentations that

have been taken for granted in both resistance theory and HE research.

3. Problematising categories of resistance

One particularly limiting aspect of resistance research is the idea that action can be observed according to a series of classifications and distinctions (e.g. activism/slacktivism, real/decaf, high-cost/lost, collective/individual). As noted, researchers perhaps inevitably work within definitional boundaries by distinguishing transgression from non-transgressive behaviours. However, the tendency to situate resistance within stable categorisations forges misleading conceptions by refusing to acknowledge the behaviours and power dynamics that sit somewhere between *this* form of resistance and *that* supposed form in-action. As diffractive work means "to break apart in different directions" (Barad, 2014, p. 168), attention now turns towards disrupting just some of the binaries informing sociological conceptions resistant behaviours.

At first glance, the literature portrays resistance as ubiquitous. Observed across and between all forms of social life and governance, resistance has been associated with not only protest but internet videos and viral trends (Boone, Secci and Gallant, 2017), "everyday" actions (Scott, 1985) and even existence (Butler, 2016). Having argued that definitional inconsistencies make it difficult to draw connections between resistance research, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) conducted a cross-disciplinary review of the uses of resistance within "several hundred" articles. In almost every article, resistance was related to two senses: opposition and action. Despite seeming obvious in some ways, the oppositional stance can be disempowering it its placement of resistance against presumed greater forces. Rose (2002), for instance, states: "resistance theory has developed as a response to an overemphasis on the hegemonic system … however, the literature establishes the dominance of the system even more firmly" (p.389). Even if it is argued that exposing resistance destabilises the authority of the system by demonstrating how the system is not entirely dominating, the threat this resistance poses is neutralised upon being portrayed, even inadvertently, as less influential than that it rejects.

Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) observations also led to the development of a typological framework of action, which detailed and thus separated behaviours such as witting and unwitting forms of resistance. The creation of such typologies has been criticised by Johansson & Vinthagen (2016) for struggling to account for the ways in which social relationships as well as spatial and temporal contexts converge with intersections of power in mobilising and immobilising ways. Yet the pair reiterate this point by focusing on the dynamics that facilitate engagement with informal and non-organised actions. They therefore operate on the assumption that the enabling factors for these behaviours are consistent and distinct from those which inspire more overt engagements. With that said, researchers have long questioned whether those who engage in inobtrusive actions do so because they consider it impossible or dangerous to engage in more obvious confrontations, with a clear divide frequently drawn between overt and covert behaviours (e.g. Goldfarb, 2008; Scott, 1985; Zembylas, 2019).

One implication of perceiving everything, including action and organisations, to be in a process of becoming is that the cultures, norms and expectations within organisations are contingent. Such norms can hence be informed and changed by subtly resistant behaviours, such as working slowly and denying any "surplus obedience" (Gros, 2020). Against this, Fleming and Spicer (2008) maintain that: "Now that even 'organizational farting' or 'bitching' might be legitimately considered resistance, there is a risk of reducing resistance to the most banal and innocuous actions" (p.303). For Contu (2008), assigning significance to everyday resistance restricts the potential for societal transformation by discouraging "risky" forms of action. Drawing a distinction between "real" behaviours which seek to revolutionise the status quo, and everyday "decaf" transgressions, Contu argues that: "just as decaf coffee, makes it possible for us to enjoy without the costs … [it] is a softer resistance, a resistance without the acid that can destroy the machine of power" (p.374). Contu's hierarchy of action is grounded in the idea that transformation is the logical end point of resistance. Though this supposition appears sensical, the real/decaf dualism undermines the influence of

contextual factors on resistant engagement. Even if change is equally desired, inequalities of opportunity and outcome mean the risk associated with action will differ per participant. Further, and having examined the "ceremony" of union-supported strikes in a UK HEI, McCabe (2019) claims that even overt forms of resistance can seek for a return to, rather than an overturning of, prior conditions.

Yet it is simply not the case that only overt forms of resistance can challenge the status quo. For one, a number of authors assert that all forms of resistance, even subtle ones, operate as a reminder that power is never totalising (Goldstein, 2017; McCabe, 2019; Wetherell, McConville and McCreaner, 2020; Zembylas, 2019). Moreover, an observation made during Goldfarb's (2008) observation of checkpoint workers throughout Palestinian-occupied territories alludes to the ways covertly enacted actions both preserve a sense of possibility and push the boundaries of the current norm:

Checkpoint workers constantly subverted physical boundaries: at night they stealthily pushed concrete blocks a few more inches apart … they reclaimed the space of the checkpoint from being purely a site of oppression and brutality into one where livelihood … could be recovered (p.1824). By attempting to box the matter, binaries and categorisations of resistance therefore fail to account for the multidirectional nature of resistant behaviours, meaning the resulting observations are misrepresentative and capable of offering minimal guidance for future action.

4. Affect, excess and meaning making

Acknowledging the affective dimensions of resistance privileges non-linear and non-conscious forms of action. For Ahmed (2010), affect constitutes an evaluation of an event or affective intensity, with these evaluations "expressed in how bodies turn toward things" (p.23). Hence, "to experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object but to what is around that object … the conditions of its arrival" (p.25). Since these conditions depend on an individual's affective history, what motivates one person to participate in resistance may struggle to motivate another and what one individual considers to be a resistant engagement may be considered by another as compliant. Conceptions of affect are competing, however. Critical and cultural theorists have focused on the circuit from affect to emotion, implying the orientation towards resistance occurs when affectively-incurred emotions, such as anger, are translated into action. For Clough (2008), these theorists portray the "subject as the subject of emotion" (p.1). In assuming that anger leads to action, the circumstances in which anger leads to non-action or where action is preceded by indifference are ignored. Ahmed (2010) argues that "to be affected 'in a good way' involves an orientation toward something as being good" (p.24). To be affected towards resistance involves an orientation towards resistance as good. This is not to uphold a resistance = "good"/that being resisted = "bad" dichotomy, but to suggest that an orientation towards resistance as "good" may involve viewing resistance as favourable, possible, hopeful, affirming, necessary, risky but worthwhile.

In HE, management emphasis on competition and steadfast reliance on precarious work incur affective "byproducts" (Whitney, 2018) that compel workers to supress unprofitable feelings (Veldstra, 2020). By stressing the importance of conformity and the vulnerability of resistance, these byproducts forge systems of constraint that "construct prudent subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act." (Lemke, 2001, p.201). Although this goes some way to explaining compliance, Foucault (1997) asserts the possibility of resistance exists within all power relations. Yet this position frames resistance as a derivative of a deliberately undertaken cost-benefit analysis. Competing with this is the Spinozian perspective that the subject's capacity to affect and be affected stems from matters that exceed the "illusions" of consciousness (Deleuze, 1988). Consequently, "the emergence of action is never a mere realization of a preceding set of possibilities but reflects a dynamic and open situation" (Hynes, 2013, p.567). For human practice theorists, such pre-personal takes struggle to consider how affect is performed and revised through emotion and meaning making. By conceptualising affective intensities as

working on the levels of energies and intensities, the body is merely:

> Assailed by events, by smells, the social relations organizing spaces, material objects and global economic forces. The person becomes a kind of semi-intelligent, hormonal ape … non-consciously reacting, their preconscious doing most of the work; rarely, it seems, talking to each other or negotiating. (Wetherell, 2008, p.236). Human practice thinkers thus re-entangle the pre-personal with deliberation, portraying social actors and their affective capacities as neither fully self-governing nor entirely driven by social forces (Mazzeralla, 2012).

In human practice terms, resisters are neither "fully conscious" (Orner, 1992) nor completely transgressive. Instead, resistant actions are always under construction, constantly becoming. In terms of HE, this understanding dictates that actors within universities are intentionally and unintentionally navigating the by-products emerging from an assemblage of material and discursive elements, such as images (marketing, branding), discourses (research output, teaching staff, alumni, assumed prestige), assets (resources, buildings, endowments, possessions, gifts), bodies, subjectivities and emotion (Charteris et al, 2019). Crucially, this assemblage not only affects bodies (human and non-human) but are affected by them, thereby reiterating how even so-called "decaf" (Contu, 2008) resistance is transformative, with the undertaking of "everyday" actions coinciding with the HE assemblage so to inform that which the sector is becoming. Of course, it should not be assumed that the transition from everyday resistance to (favourable) change is linear or automatic. As the next section describes, the neoliberal nature of contemporary HE not only withstands repeated critiques but does so while consolidating its stronghold (see Bacevic, 2019b). At the same time, viewing resistance according to these varying perspectives on affect means resistance cannot be so easily observed. In a context which prioritises that which can be measured and compared, this is itself a transgressive act.

5. Neoliberalism, higher education and resistance

<u>Neoliberalism and academic staff</u>

The emergence of neoliberal ideology is often attributed to twentieth century political theorists Friedman (2002 [1962]), Hayek (1996 [1949]) and Polanyi (2001 [1944]). Responding to a perceived growth in socialism, these thinkers developed liberal values concerning individual freedom and limited government, aligning the former with participation in the free market as opposed to the innate ability for autonomous thought (Turner, 2007). This particular ideal has been adopted by subsequent UK governments, who for the last 40 years have introduced competitive states of play into more and more aspects of human life both by emphasising the role of personal responsibility and opening up public sectors to private forces (O'Regan & Gray, 2018). In UK HE, expansion of the sector and attempts to improve the provision of teaching and research have been enacted through metrics that require institutions and the actors within them to perpetually vie for reputation, student fees and funding (see DBIS, 2010). With the supposedly contestable outcomes of these metrics determining income, university finances are presented as unreliable. Consequently, the employment of permanent academic staff has become regarded as financially and reputationally risky (Macfarlane, 2019). Insecure contracts, including fixed term, zero hour and outsourced ones, are hence a normative condition of HE (HESA, 2020), with such contracts disproportionately held by women and Black and minority ethnic staff (Megoran & Mason, 2020). Though precariousness is by no means unique to HE (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008), the toxicity of academic precarity is exacerbated by the notion that this work is a "rite of passage" (Lopes & Dewan, 2015).

Although HE researchers and practitioners have long expressed a discontent with competitively inclined policies, resistance remains simultaneously immanent and elusive. For Leathwood & Read (2013), heightened levels of vulnerability and scrutiny frame academic-level resistance as a threat to current and future job security, leaving academics with "no

choice" (p.1172) but to comply with the demands of outcome-focussed management. Corroborating this assertion, findings from interviews with 44 UK-based academics on fixed term contracts suggest that job-related anxiety is not only effective (by way of producing results) but affective (through creating an obedient employee) (Loveday, 2018). Although it seems a gulf exists between what academics feel and what they do, there is also some evidence of minor resistance taking place behind a facade of commitment. Anderson (2008), for instance, notes that academics in Australia frequently opt to "ignore particular managerial requests" (P.262) or comply only with demands in "minimal, pragmatic, or strategic ways" (p.264). Similarly, while UK participants in Raaper's (2016) study of assessment regulations refrained from overt "practices of freedom", they nonetheless sought to act in discreetly transgressive ways.

If affective responses are automatic and driven by forces beyond consciousness, then the affect of neoliberalism must also exceed notions of personal responsibility discourses and choice. Indeed, the dispersion of competition and insecurity into more and more aspects of everyday life has led to neoliberalism being likened to common sense (Torres, 2011), the implication being the willing and unwilling construction of the competitive subject. For academics, neoliberal participation is therefore inevitable. Archer's (2008) investigation into the perceptions of academics born in the 1980's found that criticisms of neoliberalism could only go so far, with one participant stating: "I keep on pushing myself and challenging myself and sometimes that doesn't feel very nice. But I can't imagine doing it any other way" (p.282). While this inability to articulate neoliberalism's hold over behaviour suggests that the embodiment of neoliberal values is not entirely conscious, it also raises the question as to whether resistance is an entirely conscious matter: Can resistant engagement also creep, knowingly and unknowingly, into one's actions?

In accordance with the onto-epistemological position described at the outset of the report, neoliberalism, while pervasive, cannot be not the stable "foundational structure" (St. Pierre, 2016) through which everything passes. Neoliberal values and policies must be mediated, manipulated, as well as enacted by and through the entanglement of the material and discursive. As a result of this "ongoing reconstitution" (Springer, 2012, p.142), the way subjectification is attempted and experienced is changeable, contingent and uncertain, meaning attitudes, ideas and actions can shift in ways that equally consolidate and problematise neoliberalism's power and influence. While this discussion resonates with a human practice perspective, it does not deny the affective dimension of resistant behaviour. Certainly, it is the acknowledgement of this dimension that can broaden conceptualisations of action as well as avenues for participation and research. With this in mind, the following discussion examines the complexities of participation and inaction in relation to the methods of strike action and action short of strike (ASOS). What ensues does not intend to undermine the use of these methods, or the affirmative power that they hold. Instead, intention is to explore possibilities for the utilisation of resistance's affective elements, possibilities which – in recognising the intricate power relations that pervade all actions – could, hopefully, possibly, maybe work in a collaborative fashion to push the becomings of HE into a more equitable direction.

<u>Dimensions of action</u>

Since 2018, the University College Union (UCU) have led three sets of strike action, with the corresponding ballots responding to detrimental changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and untenable working conditions (UCU, 2020a). To orient a sense of strike action as good, the motivations informing such action were associated with a broad sense of injustice. During the October 2019 ballot, Jo Grady, UCU General Secretary, stated:

> If employers close USS they will be able to play staff off against each other ... What used to be a common standard for the whole sector will become the preserve of a privileged few, while most staff will see their benefits reduced. And if the gender and race pay gaps are anything to go by, women and BME staff will suffer disproportionately. (UCU, 2019)

As noted, the circuit from affect to emotion to action is not linear; feeling as though something is important is not in itself enough to encourage participation. From a human practice orientation, meaning making revises the affective elements of emotional states. Some individuals may certainly be motivated to act by both positive emotions towards action and negative feelings towards the way things are, as well as their connection to networks of participation and "activist advocates" (Hensby, 2017). At the same time, others may be susceptible to counter-grievances. Shared by unsupportive members of management or colleagues, these grievances may then be affective in dissuading rather than facilitating participation. What is more, the 2019 and 2020 strikes comprised of 22 days of action within the space of three months, with strikers not paid for these days. Though pay deductions would already have been felt more harshly by those in low-income households, some universities chose to take strike deductions from a single pay cheque (e.g. University of Nottingham, 2020) rather than across a number of months (e.g. University of Exeter, 2020). As a result, participation in the strikes required staff to sacrifice that which already deemed insufficient enough to warrant resistance.

It is a similar case with ASOS, which required participants to work "exactly to the minimum required by your own contract. Your contract stipulates working hours; it allows you a lunch break and allows most of us a weekend … do exactly that" (UCU, 2020b). Responses to a workload survey distributed by the UCU in 2016 reveal that academic staff work an average of 50.9 hours a week. Illustrating just how reliant universities have become on goodwill, overtime and unpaid labour, some institutions argued that contracted tasks would not be completed under ASOS conditions and so threatened to deduct the pay of those participating (e.g. Warwick UCU, 2020). For those dependent on contract renewal, an inability to complete the same number of duties as usual arguably becomes a competitive disadvantage should management hold unsympathetic orientations on ASOS or should colleagues be continuing as normal. Thus, and irrespective of laws protecting strikers from negative consequences following industrial action, concerns regarding financial and employment security blur the lines between resistance and compliance. An additional example of this blurring occurring during the 2018 strikes, when union members on tier 2 visas were required to return to work over concerns relating to unauthorised absences and deportation (Denmead, 2019).

On the surface, equating industrial action with resistance maintains a superficial distinction between what resistance is and is not. Beneath the binary of striker/non-striker, industrial action initiates resistance around as well as within official actions. Encouraged by striking staff, those unable or unwilling to participate in strikes and ASOS may have written a letter to the Vice-Chancellor, moved classes to non-picketed sites, set up temporary offices (e.g. Denmead, 2019) or used a management position to leverage for better working conditions. To demonstrate how resistance occurs in more than one direction, some of those absent from the picket lines may also be resisting resistance deemed to disproportionately affect students, precarious staff and those with low income.

The above actions are, however, temporally limited. In contrast, the notion of becoming suggests that transformation of the status quo exists in daily behaviours also – ones that slowly change what a job role means, those that challenge previously and currently held expectations. In some ways, this idea supports the development of actions that are not only collective but continuous and subtly so. Of course, one resounding issue with exploiting everyday resistance is that, upon being a purposeful activity, such resistance becomes less "everyday", with the risks associated with these behaviours arguably becoming more severe than when undertaken individually. Though, in theory, such actions may function in ways that are simultaneously affective and effective, unions are accountable to disempowering restrictions (discussed by Umney, 2018). By demanding that employers are given detailed notice of action at least 7 days before the commencement of such action, these laws prevent the gradual and discreet overthrow of the status quo. Organised action is thus caught in a bind; through being legally required to remain overt, rare and "ceremonial"

(McCabe, 2019), such action works unintentionally and unwillingly in favour of exploitative employers. Though there is perhaps an argument that underground networks – networks which are not legally obliged to inform employers of actions being taken against them – may be preferable to that which is unionised. By not being protected, this form of resistance nevertheless exacerbates the vulnerabilities already described. More will once again be asked of those in insecure and unaccommodating positions.

The above discussion still reduces resistance to a series of intentionally undertaken deliberations. Having described Oswald Drucot's metaphor of the bull in a field, Massumi (2015) likens affect to the unconscious action of running away: "before you have had time to think, you have already sized up the mood of the bull" (p.194). To run away from the bull hence requires an acquired understanding of the danger it can pose; the sense to move and to move quickly. Upon replacing the image of the bull with the image of the neoliberal university, it might be wondered whether, in order for the individual's affective response to be that of avoidance, competition and precarity must also be viewed as unjust and dangerous. What repetitive critiques tell us, however, is that neoliberal HE is already perceived as such. As such, the minimal, pragmatic and strategic resistant behaviours observed by Anderson (2008) are likely prevalent in ways that UK-based research has not fully considered.

At the same time, it can be postulated whether Massumi's person runs from the bull because they believe escape is possible. They are not merely being "assailed" (Wetherell et al, 2008) by the sense of danger but that have previously made meaning of the danger being posed. Even though this paper has maintained that neoliberalism is not a totalising entity, this orientation cannot be taken for granted. Research – like that of Archer's (2008) – suggests that the sense of danger is, for some, ineluctable. The presumed unavoidability of neoliberal HE may, then, dissuade affectively resistant becomings by framing such practice as destined to fail. Conversely, should an academic believe that resistance *can* be significant, then more of their automatic responses may be transgressive in nature. Of course, this is not to assume that an inclination towards resistance will incur the same outcome for all who hold it. Affective history, alongside disparities of employment, social status and resistant capital (Crew, 2020; Yosso, 2005) will continue to inform inequalities of perception and embodiment. Moreover, affective capacities and inclinations fluctuate. As resistance becomes, so too does counter-resistance. Consequently, while transgression can become in some ways, compliance may become in others.

Upon immediate reflection, the author might think the ties between neoliberalism and academic are too powerful to overcome. Philosophically, the notion of becoming reminds us that change is possible and immanent; the way things are are not the way things have to be. While a way through is difficult to comprehend, researchers have yet to pay extensive empirical attention to everyday resistance in the context of UK HE; the varying ways in which academics perceive neoliberal policy and resistance against it; and the presence – or absence – of actions that are undertaken instinctively. By focussing not on what resistance *is* but on the potential avenues for resistant *becomings*, further investigation could yield insights into affect that can then be exploited so to foster collaborative, multi-level forms of action. Still, there are further questions that theoretical work should look to consider. How, for instance, could such research be conveyed and published without letting institutions, management and policy-makers into the secret? How could such research be conducted and shared without jeopardising the resistance already happening beneath the surface of inaction? And in what ways, if any, does observing affect remove its affective power?

6. Concluding remarks

By centring that which has been suppressed in discourse, including that which exceeds consciousness, the take home message from this paper is that the affective dimensions of action are currently underutilised in academic-level resistance. This argument somewhat belies itself, assuming that these affective dimensions can be consciously observed. Such a theoretical contradiction is not minor or insignificant. Still, and according to the

feminist poststructural position underpinning this paper, pathways for future research have not been proposed for the sake of *knowing* resistance but for the sake of expanding current conceptualisations and practices. Indeed, retheorising resistance in view of non-representational and human practice theories accepts that resisters and non-resisters do not participate or refuse in a vacuum but are responding to interminably developing circumstances. This, then, problematises the dualisms of overt/covert and real/decaf by highlighting the "multiple social positions, multiple voices, conscious and unconscious pleasures, tensions, desires, and contradictions" (Orner, 1992, p.79) of resistance.

Further action against the forces driving UK HE is both a pressing and immanent question. Following the last set of UCU strikes in March 2020, universities responded to financial uncertainty during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic by making thousands of precarious staff redundant (Staton, 2020). This unjust redundancy project has continued into 2021, with a number of universities, including Leicester and Liverpool, announcing redundancies – or the threat of (Fazakerley, 2021; University of Leicester UCU, 2021). What is evidence is that HE is an increasingly volatile and precarious sector for all – the urgency for new becomings has never been greater.

7. Disclosure statement

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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9. References

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