



# **For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University**

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### **Abstract**

The neoliberal university requires high productivity in compressed time frames. Though the neoliberal transformation of the university is well documented, the isolating effects and embodied work conditions of such increasing demands are too rarely discussed. In this article, we develop a feminist ethics of care that challenges these working conditions. Our politics foreground collective action and the contention that good scholarship requires time to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, organize, and resist the growing administrative and professional demands that disrupt these crucial processes of intellectual growth and personal freedom. This collectively written article explores alternatives to the fast-paced, metric-oriented neoliberal university through a slow-moving conversation on ways to slow down and claim time for slow scholarship and collective action informed by feminist politics. We examine temporal regimes of the neoliberal university and their embodied effects. We then consider strategies for slowing scholarship with the objective of contributing to the slow scholarship movement. This slowing down

represents both a commitment to good scholarship, teaching, and service and a collective feminist ethics of care that challenges the accelerated time and elitism of the neoliberal university. Above all, we argue in favor of the slow scholarship movement and contribute some resistance strategies that foreground collaborative, collective, communal ways forward.

## **Introduction**

Everyone has a paper tucked away somewhere that she has been working on for years. Given the chance to marinate, ideas ripen, often resulting in some of our most thoughtful, provocative, and important work. Good scholarship requires time: time to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, and collaborate. High quality instruction and service also require time: time to engage, innovate, experiment, organize, evaluate, and inspire. This kind of slow work both defies and is threatened by the myriad demands on our time as academic laborers.

Our concern is not the difficulty juggling the standard academic triad of research, teaching, and service; we recognize not only that different institutions prioritize these differently, but that they need not be mutually exclusive. Rather, our concern involves the ever-increasing demands of academic life: the acceleration of time in which we are expected to do more and more. The “more” includes big tasks, such as teaching larger classes, competing for dwindling publicly funded grants that also bring operating money to our universities, or sitting on innumerable university administrative committees. It also includes the constant stream of smaller requests demanding timely responses, such as quarterly updates to funding agencies, annual institutional review exercises, and pressure on us as knowledge workers to stay on constant alert through the demands of social media.

We find that these often overwhelming demands exact an isolating psychic and physical toll that is neither reasonable nor sustainable. This toll is not just individual, but is instead part of the ongoing restructuring of the neoliberal university (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2000), comprising reduced state funding, increased contingent labor, and the elimination of programs. This restructuring mirrors that of the global economy, a primary goal of which is to reduce the power of labor. In fact, as we make final revisions to this article, some of us are in the midst of a multi-week strike against the dire working conditions and punishing agendas imposed by the neoliberal university, while others of us are organizing against yet more budget cuts and assaults on the power of faculty to shape the mission of the university. Thus, we write in support of our colleagues and students walking the picket-lines, organizing, and speaking out for better working and learning conditions so that we may collectively build a socially just university.

Given this context, we find a need amid the chaos to slow – things – down. In this collaborative article we explore the isolating, embodied effects of neoliberal<sup>2</sup> temporal regimes, and we propose collective forms of resistance: strategies to work together to slow scholarship down as part of challenging the growing inequities in higher education. Our central point is that this slowing down represents both a commitment to good scholarship *and* a feminist politics of resistance to the accelerated timelines of the neoliberal university (see Halberstam, 2011; Meyerhoff, Johnson & Braun, 2011). We join others in a call for slow scholarship (McCabe, 2012; Garey, Hertz & Nelson, 2014; Martell, 2014; O’Neill, 2014). This nascent movement questions the ever-increasing demands of academic life, placing them broadly within wider tendencies toward neoliberal university governance (Hartman and Darab, 2012). Strands of this emergent field also promote slowly and deliberately engaging with an object, text, or field (Hines, 2014; Kuus, forthcoming); reengaging with other academics and their ideas, within and across the natural and social sciences (Slow Science Manifesto, nd; Lutz, 2012); the importance of improving the quality of published research and writing (Cronin, 2012); and the benefits of unexpected “disruptions” in the research and writing process (Nelson & Hertz, 2014).

Our contribution is to cultivate an explicitly *feminist* and collective model of slow scholarship. Feminist scholarship provides important insights into uneven power relations and the gendered contexts of university policy and environments (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). As such, we support Martell’s (2014) observation that the ‘slow’ in slow scholarship is not just about time, but about structures of power and inequality. This means that slow scholarship cannot just be about making individual lives better, but must also be about re-making the university. Our call for slow scholarship is therefore about cultivating caring academic cultures and processes. We are inspired by Vicky Lawson’s question: “Instead of radical geography, how about caring geography?” (2009, 201, see also Lawson, 2007). She writes about her administrative leadership: “I have learned that service involves trying to build a ‘culture of possibilities’ that allows creative people to do their best work” (2014, 201). We build on Lawson’s ethics of care – of bringing attention to *how* we work and interact with one another – as necessary for creating possibilities for a more just university.

Care work is work. It is not self-indulgent; it is radical and necessary (Federici, 2012; Ahmed, 2014). Care, moreover, is risky, imposing a burden on those who undertake care work (Tronto, 1989). Systematically marginalizing care “furthers the myth that our successes are achieved as autonomous individuals and, as such, we have no responsibility to share the fruits of our success with others or

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<sup>2</sup> Neoliberalism, for the purpose of this article, is defined as “a contextually contingent articulation of free market governmental practices with varied and often quite illiberal forms of social and political rule” (Sparke, 2006: 153).

to dedicate public resources to the work of care” (Lawson 2007, 5). Drawing explicitly on these ideas, we inject a feminist ethics of care into the notion of slow scholarship, and do so as a means to promote collective action to resist neoliberal and elitist pressures within the academy.

This project emerged from a workshop in Ontario in May 2013, the goal of which was to build a cross-border, regional network of feminist geographers (subsequently named the Great Lakes Feminist Geography Collective). When twenty-five women arrived at the workshop from various locations, many felt exhausted, frazzled and spent as we reached the end of another academic year. Among other things, what emerged was a need to change our work and work environs and to slow things down. This article was written in response to this need and represents an example of the collaborative, slow scholarship we advocate.

Early iterations of the manuscript had many uses of the term “I” as we shared individual stories with one another. As our writing progressed, we moved together from the isolating effects of the work conditions analyzed here (paralysis, guilt, shame, distress) to a more collective form of response and action. What emerged was not a singular, universal voice, but experiences that cut across multiple trajectories representing different times in our lives. Our experiences of the neoliberal university as students, contingent faculty, probationary faculty, and tenured professors are both unique and noticeably consistent. We see the themes emerging from our narratives not as universal but ubiquitous.

We develop a feminist care ethics that – in the tradition of Audre Lorde (1988) and the words of Sara Ahmed (2014) – views “self-care as warfare.” That is, cultivating space to care for ourselves, our colleagues, and our students is, in fact, a political activity when we are situated in institutions that devalue and militate against such relations and practices. Reflecting on our experiences in the neoliberal university is, therefore, not just about looking after ourselves as academics, but rather about building a broader sense of care. We situate slow scholarship within a feminist praxis that positions self-care and the creation of caring communities as a means of “finding ways to exist in a world that is diminishing” (Ahmed, 2014).

To produce a collective vision while still maintaining the richness of individual experience, we include individual stories and collective responses. The personal accounts (italicized below) speak to the individual emotional and embodied effects of the neoliberal university that are often overlooked or deemed insignificant (Ahmed, 2014). Collective authorship and the decision not to identify individuals by name or otherwise represent a feminist politics: a commitment to working together to resist and challenge neoliberal regimes of time and the difficult, depoliticizing conditions they impose on work and life for all of us. This is our version of refusal, our attempt to act in-against-and-beyond the university (Radice, 2013).

We acknowledge the painful differences and silences involved in our workshop and this authorship collective. Indeed, the reflections represented here, personal and collective, come from positions of relative privilege within the academy. All authors are currently in tenure track positions in research and teaching institutions, five located in Canada and six in the United States. Two of the authors are full professors, six are associate professors, and three are assistant professors. All but one of us work at publicly funded research universities, and, with the exception of one author, all are housed in geography departments (although some of us are cross-appointed). As such, all of the quotes throughout the article represent the experiences of faculty who are similarly situated within the academy, an important consideration in the contextualization of our voices and experiences.

It is our responsibility from these relatively privileged positions to push back by also acknowledging those who are missing from the academy (Wu, 2015). We recognize those who have been pushed out or who never gained admission due to gendered, racialized, classed, heteronormative, and ableist structures and daily practices in the academy. Slow scholarship from a feminist ethics of care, then, cultivates collective challenges to such elitist exclusions. For us, slow scholarship is about making the university a place where many people – professors and students, from multiple places of privilege or marginalization – can collectively and collaboratively thrive.

### **Counting time in the neoliberal university**

*As I was hoping to “make time” to work on this paper, I was instead performing the annual ritual of compiling an account of my work over the past year for my department’s merit and review committee. Rather than writing a narrative to describe what I have been doing which would allow me to contemplate both what I have realized in the last year as well as the “silences” in my research, teaching and writing (Nussbaum, 2010), I must fit these narratives into the platform my university now employs called “Digital Measures.” This, according to the company’s website, is a “web-based faculty activity reporting solution that transforms the way you leverage your faculty’s activities and accomplishments.” This system divides faculty activities into seemingly discreet, but really not-so-tidy compartments (including “non-credit instruction taught,” “scholarly and intellectual contributions,” and “academic advising”). We must indicate the number of hours per year spent on each activity. I reviewed a journal manuscript: I estimate seven hours. I advised a graduate student to completion of the thesis... In my inability to estimate, I leave the box blank, much to the frustration of my colleagues on the merit and evaluation committee.*

Digital Measures is but one example of metric-based accounting regimes.<sup>3</sup> Two of our institutions recently implemented new neoliberal metrics regimes: The Program Prioritization Process (Dickeson, 2010) and Integrated Research Planning Management, both imported from the US to Canada. These programs determine the allocation of resources through annual reviews and require participation of staff, faculty, and students on committees and in review processes. This process adds yet another significant layer of work to participate in our own down-sizing.

Öhman (2012, 28) characterizes such phenomena as a part of the “utilitarian turn” connected to the neoliberalization of the Western university, arguing that they represent a shift from “*content* to *counting*.” In the spirit of the corporatized university in which efficiency, productivity, and excellence are the guiding principles (Hartman & Darab, 2012), we are asked to report “marketable outputs of a quantifiable nature” (Nussbaum, 2010; see also Suspitsyna, 2012). Öhman asks how the need to count our outputs actually changes the nature of those “outputs” themselves. Writing becomes an instrumental skill rather than an epistemological experience: in the pressure to count, we become guided by “the ever-deceptive promise of *one size fits all*” (Öhman, 2012, 29). The risk, as Pain (2014) recognizes, is that the overzealous production of research for audit damages the production of research that actually makes a difference.

This counting imperative pervades our teaching as well, where time has been artificially accelerated so that our “customers” get more regular and timely feedback. At one of our teaching-intensive universities, faculty are now required to have one “low-stakes assignment” graded and returned to students by the end of the third week of term. Additionally, with increasingly larger class sizes and fewer teaching assistant hours, there is incentive to standardize assignments to reduce grading time. This may hinder student creativity and curiosity and diminishes opportunities for meaningful feedback.

Neoliberal university time as imagined by these metrics-based regimes is compressed and all-encompassing. It is also fictitious, claiming to account for things that cannot be measured and ignoring other scholarship. “Quintessentially,” Judith Walker writes, “academic capitalism is premised on faculty and students both justifying their use of time and seeking to outsmart it” (in Shahjahan, 2014, 2). We all engage in a range of professional activities, customarily divided into three apparently discrete categories of teaching, research, and service. Yet each of us manages these categories differently, depending on our pedagogical approaches, research agendas, personal lives, interests, abilities, institutional context, and career stage. These accounting practices, however, neither acknowledge this fluidity, nor how these categories and accounting expectations are gendered, classed, and racialized (Gutiérrez y Muhs & Niemann, 2012). For example, at one of our

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<sup>3</sup> In Britain, many have written about what was once called the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), now the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and its detrimental effects (Lipsett, 2011; Pain et al., 2012).

institutions, each class (regardless of student enrollment or course level) counts as 11.1% of your time. At this teaching-intensive institution, one is to report that time is spent as follows: 66.6% on teaching, 22.2% on research, and 11.1% on service. The goal, as Butterwick and Dawson (2005, 55) suggest, is to “document everything, reveal nothing” in remaking ourselves as “calculable rather than memorable” (Ball, 2012, 17). This makes a mockery of every aspect of the job. Adjunct or sessional instructors might teach nine classes, accounting for 99.9% of their time in the teaching category, and still be compelled to maintain a research program if they seek a tenure track job. They are literally *making* time. In this way, fictitious neoliberal university time requires real sacrifice of personal time.

By masking work that does not fit prescribed categories and discounting work that takes time, this accounting imperative feeds the trope of the “unproductive scholar” in much the same way that changes to census categories in the US, UK and elsewhere created the category of the “unproductive housewife” (Folbre, 1991). As Folbre (1991, 464) explains, “In 1800, women whose work consisted largely of caring for their families were considered productive workers. By 1900, they had been formally relegated to the census category of ‘dependents.’” The newly “dependent” housewife mirrors the myths of the “unproductive” and “entitled” professor, fictions created by new accounting measures, and advanced by administrators and government officials to turn all but a few elite universities into job-training sites.

Folbre and other feminist theorists (Federici, 2012; Jaggar, 2013) have shed light on how “women’s time” has historically been both “directed to the care of others” and “to the service and maintenance of the public world of production” (Youngs, 2001, 22). This relational “women’s time” (also known as social reproduction) is distinguished from the masculine domain of true creativity, innovation, and invention – i.e. valorized production and productivity – that “requires, in important respects, an internal focus on the legitimate use of time for one’s own purposes, and some perception, at times, that this freedom from external distraction is within one’s control and can be extended, at least to some degree, at one’s desire” (Youngs, 2001, 23).

The managerial regimes of the neoliberal university remake and reinforce academic subjectivities to serve institutional productivity in a way that entrenches the hierarchical valuation of “women’s time.” For Shahjahan (2014, 3), these neoliberal logics are “hyper extensions of colonial time” that have been used to “sort individuals into opposing categories such as intelligent/slow, lazy/industrious, saved/unsaved, believer/heathen, developed/undeveloped, and civilized/primitive.” Indeed, women and faculty of color especially are overburdened by service to ensure “diversity” (Pyke, 2011), even as this work is devalued.

As academics, we variously interpolate ourselves into the metric framework, so that “the ambitions of government become a technology of the self” (Davies & Bansel 2010, 9; Suspitsyna, 2012). Audit culture, with its feedback mechanisms



and ostensible goal of “continuous quality improvement,” is designed to elicit compliance without resistance. While we dutifully count and upload our “progress”, this counting imperative simultaneously informs our identities and interactions, both scholarly and personal. Counting culture leads to intense, insidious forms of institutional shaming, subject-making, and self-surveillance. It compels us to enumerate and self-audit, rather than listen and converse, engage with colleagues, students, friends and family, or involve ourselves in the meaningful and time-consuming work that supports and engages our research and broader communities (Pain, 2014; Schulte, 2014).

While we lament the pervasiveness of these neoliberal logics and technologies, we are also inspired by feminist political economists who challenge us to represent “societies and economies as non-hegemonic formations” (Gibson-Graham, 1996, ix). What if we counted differently? Instead of articles published or grants applied for, what if we accounted for thank you notes received, friendships formed, collaborations forged? One reviewer of this article, Sara Kindon, shared a compelling alternative to the potentially destructive and divisive nature of counting.<sup>4</sup> She described a process wherein professors in her programme group converted the process of individual portfolio production into a collective, community-building activity. The faculty went on a day-long retreat to one professor's home where they workshopped portfolios, shared food, and then stayed on for more food, wine, and music. They assisted and supported each other by developing the best ways to present their work, while also learning about each other's work. This process involved mentoring and collective critical reflection on how to measure and frame productivity, enhancing collective identity and reducing the anxiety of the review process. For the participants, this was a deliberate move away from an individualizing, hidden, and competitive exercise to a transparent and collective process, a move that has been followed elsewhere by other faculty in Geography (Moss et al., 1999).

### **Experiencing time in the neoliberal university**

*I have a book project from a decade ago that still needs to be revised and resubmitted, and a few papers still sitting in my drawer awaiting edits. Yet the paralysis that took over for me meant that these works most close to my heart that brought me joy got abandoned first as they required much slower scholarship and my psychological commitment. Instead, I filled the time (probably purposely) with tasks that were faster to complete, easier to account for, and primarily not my own.*

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Kindon works in Geography at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. We are grateful to her for granting permission to share this story.

The business enterprise of academic life in the neoliberal university produces a work rhythm that is rushed, riddled with anxiety and pressure to be ever-present. Sometimes life gets in the way. Overwhelming pressures can lead to paralysis, and scholarship can come to a complete halt. Collective commitments to slow scholarship, fostered by academic alliances and friendships, can help us to come out of moments of depression or exhaustion, lest we drown in shame, loss, and discontentment.

What if we could re-valorize feelings of satisfaction for the dedication, persistence, and sustained energy devoted to creative works that may be years in the making? What if we were to follow Halberstam's (2011) lead and celebrate failure and its companion in neoliberal times - slowness - as essential components of good scholarship? For Halberstam (2011, 3) "Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world." The very failure of our individual strategies of professional advancement and survival is the possibility of our collectively remaking the university. Undoing counting culture becomes part of a broader project of decolonizing knowledge.

Slowness has many variants. This article was written in a relatively short time frame, but the effort we collectively invested made the process rich, enjoyable, and rewarding rather than stressful or harmful. In other cases, slowness can be found before the writing even begins, in research design, community engagement, and the pursuit of personally and politically meaningful work.

There are continual reminders that this careful approach, which denotes slowness, is worth less in the neoliberal university:

*My institution has also used the Digital Measures annual reporting system described above to track annual "progress," and, as with most standard academic CV formats, there is no subheading for the research process, only products (i.e. publications) and profits (i.e. external grants). The impatience with care-full work, with time spent, is continuously reinforced by each request for how a small grant or leave has been translated into products that 'count.' And the rewards for being a 'first mover' on a topic are visible as you see others rack up citation numbers while you are still mired in the field.*

Some argue that this dual track is simply the nature of scholarship. According to Benoit-Antoine Bacon, then Dean of Arts and Science at Bishop's University in Canada, "I see more and more scientists resolving the issue [of time and pressure for deliverables] by having a two-speed research program: a safer and more productive research program that will guarantee the renewal of their research funding, and in parallel, a slower, more thoughtful, quality-focused approach where they can do their best work over long periods of time" (Bacon in McCabe, 2012).

While there is nothing wrong with balancing short- and long-term research projects *per se*, this individual strategy does become a problem when the short-term projects are designed to appease managerial and productivist demands that colonize our time (Shahjahan, 2014). Clearly, there is a disjuncture between our role as critical thinkers and our acquiescence to productivity measures (Pain, 2014). What if we accounted for planning and engagement, for following through rather than moving on? Care-full scholarship is also about engaging different publics (not least our own research subjects), refining or even rejecting earlier ideas, engaging in activism and advocacy, and generally amplifying the potential impact of our scholarship rather than moving on to the next product that “counts” to administrators.

### **The embodied effects of working in a neoliberal university**

*This is my second attempt to write a few words on slow scholarship. The usual deterrents took precedence over any kind of work and writing I was more eager to invest in. Reluctantly, I most recently abandoned a paper I had set my mind to write as part of an essay collection, as I found it impossible to juggle other administrative commitments. It is partly my own fault for not learning the art of saying no or being able to withdraw from unnecessary and sometimes superfluous demands on my time, but with every new year's resolution I promise myself to at least try.*

While many scholars have critiqued the neoliberal university (Butterwick & Dawson, 2005; Meyerhoff, Johnson & Braun, 2011; Suspitsyna, 2012), the embodied realities of this workplace and worktime are rarely discussed (for exceptions, see *Feminist Wire*, 2012; Gutiérrez y Muhs & Niemann, 2012; Shahjahan, 2014; Peake, 2015). All of us in the academy have experienced, albeit in distinct ways, the effects of pressures on mental and physical health. Globally, women are more likely than men to report chronic stress and the feeling that life is out of control because their time is “contaminated” by multiple and conflicting responsibilities (Schulte, 2014). Research on the physical manifestations of stress shows that individuals internalize these pressures, which are felt more by some bodies than others, tracking broader power structures within and outside of the academy (Gutiérrez y Muhs & Niemann, 2012; Hawkins, Manzi & Ojeda, 2014).

And so the effects of the neoliberal university are written on the body. One non-tenure track full-time lecturer teaches seven classes and directs an interdisciplinary program. During a recent conversation, she reported that she had not slept in three days, and as a result of her heavy schedule had stopped doing all volunteer work and physical activities with which she had previously been involved. On this particular day, she had 117 essay exams waiting to be graded (without the work of a teaching assistant). This abuse of time and physical well-being is dangerous not just for individual academics, but for the larger academic

project, undermining the quality of all that we do and discouraging many from pursuing careers in the academy.

Many of us look for outside help, from psychotherapy to substance abuse that fuels the problem of addiction too rarely discussed. We all know colleagues who take Xanax before faculty meetings, relying on anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications either regularly or situationally. Colleagues have shared strategies for grading which require half a Vicodin and/or a reliable supply of alcohol.

Some among us have fallen ill, gone on sick leave, and disappeared from the academy altogether for shorter or longer periods of time (Shields, McGinn, Manley-Casimir & Fenton, 2012). These experiences have been paralyzing, literally stopping us and confining us to home. The *Feminist Wire* (2012) reminds us that the academy has been deadly for legendary Black women like Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Barbara Christian, and Toni Cade Bambara. For those of us who are able to return to the workplace after sickness, these experiences have been politicizing, compelling us to return with even stronger commitments to changing the academic culture of our institutions. They are also moments for trying to support individual and collective self-care (*Feminist Wire*, 2012), practices we seek to expand in our calls for a politics of slow scholarship.

### **Time and the slow scholarship movement**

The stupefying modern obsession with productivity denies the whimsy and the freedom that living fully demands. We must dare to relax our grip on time for a day, or even for an hour, throwing clocks, watches and iPhones over the housetops, untethering ourselves solely for the thrill of not knowing what happens next (Jenkins, 2013).

Many slow movements exist. The slow food movement is perhaps the best known. It emerged in Italy out of “little c” communist practice, namely out of the desire and demand to change the pace and organization of work and everyday life so that time could be spent together (Andrews, 2008). Such an imagination of the “good life” is important for three reasons. First, this demand for time is a distinct break from histories of class struggle being about material goods, centering socially reproductive activities. Second, advancing collective liveliness and flourishing advances feminist ideas of what it might mean to radically transform social reproduction. Finally, rather than rooting radical transformation of daily life in grim austerity, slow food offers a more sensuous path. It rejects alienation and embraces gathering to do the serious work of thinking and planning and the seriously human endeavors of dreaming, imagining, and playing.

These tenets apply easily beyond food where the notion of slowing down as political practice works across arenas from work to medicine, urban design, and child rearing (Honoré, 2005). The intention to slow down aims to undo some of the consequences of the frenetic pace of many of our lives. According to Honoré (2005, 14), “Fast and Slow do more than just describe a rate of change;” rather,

they are “ways of being, or philosophies of life ...It is about making real and meaningful connections – with people, culture, work, food, everything. The paradox is that Slow does not always mean slow” (Honoré, 2005, 14-15).

But what does it mean to bring the slow movement to scholarship? Hartman and Darab (2012) call for slow scholarship as a response to the acceleration of academic work, discussing in particular the implications of this intensification for pedagogy. They frame intellectual freedom as the “freedom to think” (Hartman & Darab, 2012, 53), a reconceptualization that they note requires the space, time, and other resources curtailed with the escalation of corporate approaches to teaching and university management.

By slowing down – to listen and read what others have to say, to expand our experiences by getting out of offices and classrooms – we can do our best scholarship, teaching, and mentoring (Moss, DeBres, Cravey, Hyndman, Hirschboeck & Masucci, 1999). We learn by living. Since starting this article, members of this collective have coped with the birth of a child, the loss of a child from miscarriage, divorce, the death of parents, caring for parents with declining health, and other life-changing experiences that have made us unplanned experts in everything from childcare policy to urban transportation and Medicare coverage. These and other experiences have taught us to be compassionate to one another (and to our scholarship) as we navigate the difficult realities of daily life with the support of our colleagues. As Lawson (2007) argues, we all require care and care for others, yet this caring happens in private spaces under neoliberalism. Living in the world reveals the institutions and policies we need to change and how. Living with and responding to the needs of others keeps us relevant (and human) in ways that no metric can measure. This caring needs to come out of hiding in private times and spaces.

How do we make this time? Meyerhoff, Johnson, and Braun (2011) argue that in a time-starved neoliberal university setting ‘making more time’ for our work is not in fact the goal; instead we need to *change* time. Inspired by Agamben (1993), Negri (2003), and Casarino (2008), they state that “what we ought to be seeking is not more time, as important as that is, but rather eventful time; not just more hours to work within the linear time of capitalist development, but rather conditions in which our work – individually and collectively – can become its own productive, self-positing and self-differentiating movement” (487). This allows for the “joyful expansion of our collective capacities” (488); to that end, they call for “collective experiments in ... labor organizing, governance, and pedagogy” (485) that promote the shared pleasure of learning in the reshaping of the university and parasitic, colonizing time.

## The labor politics of slow scholarship

Does taking, making, and transforming time become just another thing on the to-do list, devolving responsibility to the individual and away from structures of power?

*I'm thinking of another effort to get people to take time for their scholarship. This organization encourages people to put their writing first, above all the other academic demands, especially during the tenure years, and it provides strategies for doing that. This organization is specifically focused on diversity, and so acknowledges the difficulty for women, people of color, and anyone in other under-represented groups (e.g. who are often subjected to extra service demands to represent that under-represented group!). But, the approach is focused on the individual; it's about personal empowerment, what one can do: prioritize, say no, make plans, create structures of accountability (e.g. in writing groups), and so on, so that you can write for 30-60 minutes every single work day. On the one hand, these strategies seem great. On the other hand, I often come away from the weekly "motivator" emails with a sense of panic that I am a failure for not writing every day; I have to do more to become super-woman-academic and do it all (and I'm a full professor, with demonstrable evidence that whatever I've done so far has worked for me!).*

While these types of individualized strategies offer attempts to step back from the fast pace of the neoliberal university, it is possible that creating *more work and less time* is inherent in these strategies. With the focus on changing behaviors (e.g., to achieve life-work balance), no emphasis is given to making demands on our institutions for a different organization of learning, teaching, writing, and working. This individualized trend is one that we take issue with in our own push towards slowness.

We argue for a fundamental restructuring of the university as a workplace and learning environment, within and across institutions. Our goal is to move from individualized experiences of neoliberal time to collective action, precisely to resist intensified pressures to do it all and/or intensify elitist structures that make 'slowness' possible for some while leaving others slogging in the trenches. "So the issue," writes Martell (2014, 40), "is not speed, but control over speed. This [distinction] is important because it changes the crux of the matter from slow to self-determination over being able to go slow". As a collective, we are interested in how we develop not just personal, but institutional, structural resistance.

Recent research shows that a supportive work environment makes people less susceptible to the most dangerous, negative effects of overwork (Westring, 2014). The most important factors are recognition and appreciation of the non-work aspects of life, where employees are able to bring their authentic selves to the

workplace, and seek and gain support for work-life challenges (Westring, 2014; Wu, 2015). Some of us are in a position to do this and affect the way in which the work environment is structured; we have the responsibility to extend to others in our personal and professional lives the ability to slow down. Slow scholarship can grapple with intersectional questions of social reproduction, of racialized, ableist, and class hierarchies imagined collectively; it has political potential. “In effect what slow is reintroducing is being human and well-being. Slowness is part of this but the bigger issue is autonomy” (Martell, 2014, 41). Our aim is to create living and working environments where slow, self-determined work lives become possible for *everyone*.

The Great Lakes Feminist Geography Collective is but one attempt to reflect on these many challenges and to imagine and suggest alternative strategies for change. Our collective is part of the broader movement to reframe work in the university and beyond, from the protests in Amsterdam (Roos, 2015) and picket lines at our own universities (Chiose, 2015), to the Fight for \$15 hourly wage in fast food restaurants (<http://fightfor15.org/>), to the \$15,000 salary per class being pushed by Adjunct Action (<http://adjunctaction.org>). As these labor movements suggest, the time is ripe for radical change not just in our universities, but in creating solidarity among these different sectors and struggles across the globe.

### **Feminist strategies for slow scholarship as collective action**

The process of discussing and writing this article brought forward a desire to respond to the isolation felt by shouldering burdens alone and instead consciously create collective ways to alter work conditions. Collective modes of action can challenge the individualization of faculty (and graduate students) and the competition and hierarchies of the neoliberal university, as evidenced by increasing expressions of dissent and labor unrest. Such actions involve not only rethinking our own temporality, but also supporting – and facilitating, where possible – slowness among our students and tenured, untenured, and contingent colleagues. Collaborative, collective models of community and solidarity work can resist neoliberal regimes and their framings of our daily lives.

In this section, we outline strategies to resist the compressed temporal regimes of the neoliberal university. These strategies facilitate slowness, acknowledging that the ways one might engage with such strategies depend upon a range of factors, including employment status and career and life stages. The strategies are at once individual *and* collective. Each strategy requires the active participation of the individual and a broader collective to recognize and make a new imagination and calibration of work both desirable and possible. This work requires us - at different moments in our days – to stop, reflect, reject, resist, subvert, and collaborate to cultivate different, more reflexive academic cultures.

**1. Talk about and support slow strategies.** Part of the stress of the neoliberal university is the notion that everyone else is working harder and longer than you – or is more successful at managing time. We urge recognition of the challenges within our own and others’ work/lives: the times when the demands of academic work shift us away from slow scholarship, when the demands of teaching, advising, and administrative labor make slow times and quiet spaces nearly impossible to locate.

The relentless acceleration of work will continue until we say “no” to wildly outsized expectations of productivity. Those of us in more senior positions have the responsibility to share these strategies with and support the slowness of our students and earlier career colleagues. We seek slowness not only for ourselves, but as an attempt to change the academic cultures of our discipline and work places.

**2. Count what others don’t.** We can push back against narrow quantitative evaluations of academic work, in part by making a wider range of work “count” in decisions about graduate student advancement, hiring, raises, and tenure and promotion. When we act as tenure, grant, or manuscript reviewers, we can applaud care-full work, time spent, and quality over quantity. We should take time to seek out unfamiliar names that may be attached to high quality, original work, names we do not recognize because they have been mapped as marginal to the field by gendered, racialized, classed, heteronormative, and ableist power relations. We *can* recognize the value of collective authorship, mentorship, collaboration, community building, and activist work in the germination and sharing of ideas.

**3. Organize.** Change will not happen unless we start now by speaking, writing, and sharing ideas. We need to engage at every level to accomplish a reconceptualization of university time. Creating spaces for new modes of scholarship and intentional communities helps us to move from individually-focused solutions to solutions with potential to create institutional and structural changes that nourish and support slow scholarship. These spaces can be reading and writing groups, office “break” rooms, conference panels that take an unconventional form, or even regional workshops of likeminded colleagues that last anywhere from one afternoon to a weekend.<sup>5</sup>

Those of us who can must also engage with administrators and other university leaders who construct or reinforce time as we know it. This is incredibly difficult in the current austere environment, but those of us who can need to organize for far more transparency and self-determination within our institutions. Slow scholarship also must be tied to labor-

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Great Lakes Feminist Geography Workshop functioned as this type of space for us!



organizing efforts among university staff, students, and contingent faculty and to student organizing for affordable and meaningful educations such as the Really Open University in Leeds (Pusey & Sealey-Huggins, 2013) and the Provisional University in Dublin (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2015).

- 4. Take care.** A feminist ethics of care is personal and political, individual and collective. We must take care of ourselves before we can take care of others. *But we must take care of others.* Find concrete ways to support and find support in someone else who might be struggling to move a project forward or just wants to talk through ideas. Take time to meet with a colleague to discuss ideas, slow work, projects that have been relegated to the back burner but are burning to come to the fore. Do not shy away from talking about life and how intertwined life and work are. We need and want to be able to do this with our students as well. Taking care may also involve working with, and on behalf of, our research communities as feminists committed to participatory, activist work. This scholarship raises the question of what counts and for whom and expands our community of care beyond those in the academy. Ensuring that our scholarship is taking care of others may also help us to engage in different ways of experiencing and valuing time.
- 5. Write fewer emails.** This can be a political statement. Sometimes members of our collective just do not respond to email. Often unintentional, this is the outcome of the fact that one just cannot do everything and keep up with the volume of daily traffic that fills our inboxes. Writing less email may, in fact, allow us more time to think, read, and write more clearly and carefully. An example of how this strategy might move beyond the individual is demonstrated by a colleague who includes in her email signature an invitation to “Please read about the email charter: <http://emailcharter.org/>.” The charter includes “10 rules to reverse the email spiral” by offering responsible email practices as concrete ways to deny email the ability to colonize every waking minute.
- 6. Turn off email.** This strategy embraces a conscious “time out” from the ever-present demands of email. Feminist modes of resistance might include switching off email during the evenings and weekends. Many of us have found that we could do it no other way while caring for young children and aging parents. Caring for ourselves and others extracts both tolls and joys in the everyday. By refusing to respond to email at all hours, we believe a valuable message is communicated to students and colleagues: our lives and time involve more than our work. It is particularly important that those with the most power, not only those who are most vulnerable, embrace strategies such as email time-outs. In other words, what might be a vulnerability-generating act at the individual scale – i.e. new parents, new to the tenure track – becomes a culture-shifting activity if undertaken collectively.

- 7. Make time to think.** While a hallmark of academic life involves the daily juggling of multiple responsibilities, this requirement is taxing. We might instead embrace “irresponsibility” and prioritize time to think (whether that involves reading and writing or not!). These moments of “irresponsibility”, in which we let tasks slide, have the potential to reinvigorate ourselves, energize projects, and emphasize aspects of our work that often become submerged in the accounting, report writing, meetings, and administrative tasks that increasingly dominate academic life. Cultivating time to “just think” in the era of smart phones, tablets, and other “electronic leashes” can be challenging, but we have found it extremely rewarding to unplug for at least a week each year (preferably more often!). Some of our most creative ideas are born from “doing nothing.”
- 8. Make time to write (differently).** Writing is both process and product. One member of our collective recently worked on a paper with three other women. When they were ready to submit the paper, she felt excited to press send and remove it from her to-do list. However, her collaborators insisted that there be one last (virtual) meeting to go over the paper line by line to consider word choices. In particular, the collective looked for and removed militaristic and ableist language. Slowing down the writing process and talking about words in the paper with collaborators turned out to be a calming and grounding experience with political meaning. As with our other strategies and this article, writing is both personal and collective; what we say and how we say it matters. Writing is a fundamental mark we make in the world as academics and should reflect values inherent in the life of the mind: rigor, engagement, nuance, critique, making a difference.
- 9. Say no. Say yes.** Many of us have been inspired or encouraged by mentors and senior colleagues to say no. Recognizing that our time is not infinitely elastic gives us permission to say no to the various requests (e.g. committee work, committee work, and more committee work) that bombard us on a daily basis. While easier said than done, especially before tenure, we advocate developing and sharing strategies of refusal in order to mitigate the pressure to say yes to tasks that further limit time to write and think. Following Pyke (2011), we recognize the need to move beyond the individual strategy of “just say no” to institutional changes so that they “just don’t ask” for unreasonable levels of service. Along with saying “no” when necessary, we also encourage those in positions of power (however limited), to say “yes” when they encounter opportunities for slow scholarship collaborations. For instance, knowing that you can be the careful tenure evaluator or recommendation writer, take the opportunity to make change one case and decision at a time. As Butterwick and Dawson (2005, 56) write, “I never wanted to be someone who takes a ‘no’ stance to the world. I want to be a person who says ‘yes!’ But to whom? To what?”.

**10. Reach for the minimum (i.e. good enough is the new perfect).** Rather than getting caught up in measuring worth by the number of peer-reviewed journal articles published or grant dollars procured, reach instead for the minimum numbers necessary to achieve important benchmarks (such as tenure and promotion). Reaching for the minimum allows for a focus on quality – rather than quantity – and acknowledges the need for balance. Imagine, too, an alternate CV or annual report with all of the other items of life included: relationships tended to, illnesses overcome, loved ones cared for, hobbies cultivated. Be unwilling to be undermined or belittled for not conforming to hegemonic agendas that are devoid of the responsibilities and joys of life beyond the ivory tower.

This list is a starting point, born of collective experiences as tenure track and tenured faculty at various stages in our careers. We intend to foster a conversation about our collective responsibility to re-imagine academic work from a feminist perspective. The conversation has already begun as we have presented these ideas at conferences and received feedback from readers and audience members. While there has been enthusiastic support from many corners, there has also been a reaction against what some see as our attempts to emulate the “dear old chaps” (who sometimes are disparaged as “dead weight” in a department). This reaction seems to exemplify the concern that slow scholarship is an entitlement for a privileged few, and one that universities cannot afford. To us, this response represents a failure of imagination rather than mere practicality. We need to find ways to shift the culture, not back to an elitist, exclusionary university but towards a more care-full future of rich and creative research and teaching.

### **Conclusions: moving deliberately through a fast world**

Some critics equate the call for slow scholarship with luddism, a nostalgic yearning for a lost moment when academia was protected from the hurly burly of economic and political life (Vostal, 2013). As Meyerhoff, Johnson, and Braun (2011, 492) make clear, however, the ideal in the United States of ‘shared governance’ (now being undermined) is itself the result of a class compromise made in the early twentieth century that constrained the power of faculty to determine the scope of the university. For them, reclaiming time in the process and pleasure of collective learning is actually a claim for autonomy in scholarship (along the lines that Vostal himself suggests) and against the dictates of corporatist university administrations and futures (Newson, Polster & Woodhouse, 2012; Turk, 2014).

Slowing down involves resisting neoliberal regimes of harried time by working with care while also *caring for ourselves and others*. A feminist mode of slow scholarship works for deep reflexive thought, engaged research, joy in writing and working with concepts and ideas driven by our passions. As a feminist intervention, slow scholarship enables a feminist ethics of care that allows us to claim some time as our own, build shared time into everyday life, and help buffer

each other from unrealistic and counterproductive norms that have become standard expectations. Slow scholarship has value in itself, in the quality of research and writing produced, and also enables us to create a humane and sustainable work environment and professional community that allows more of us to thrive within academia and beyond.

As feminists who have commitments to antiracism and social justice, we have no nostalgia for a university that excludes women and people of color. Our call to support slow scholarship is part of the struggle for accessible higher education and for the decolonization of knowledge, in which experimentation, creativity, different epistemologies, and dissidence are all valued and encouraged. Our advocacy of slow scholarship recalls the position that Virginia Woolf (1938) took when she showed how the autonomy of women's political voices as writers was contingent not only on higher education, but on transforming the university's hierarchical, martial, and patriarchal values. Within this vexed knot of power, Woolf, nonetheless, insisted on writing. She focused her attention on middle class women who were similarly positioned as "daughters of educated men," recognizing a different kind of class power for working class women.

While we bristle at Woolf's elitist horizon for university education, her provocation nonetheless remains useful. She insisted on understanding the class relations of access to and work within the university as it is formed in and through patriarchal, imperial, and militarist power. We aim to advance that transformation. Slow scholarship can help create the space for writing and organizing against gendered and sexual violence, empire, settler colonialism, and war. At the same time, calls for slow scholarship must be tied to an understanding of labor and class within the university and struggles over the terms of academic work. As feminists, we emphasize the ability of slow scholarship to challenge neoliberalism's metrics and efficiencies, and instead recalibrate and change academic culture. Our call is about more than simply making time for ourselves and our own scholarship; it is about collective action – big and small – in which we attend to the interpersonal and collective conditions that underpin knowledge production conducted with care.

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