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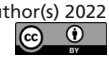

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# Affective academic time management in the neoliberal university: From timeliness to timelessness

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## Abstract

In this article, we discuss affective time management discourses in academia. Drawing on our experiences of time management and brain fitness trainings at a Finnish university, we examine how the use and control of time are increasingly pressing societal and political matters affecting academic work globally. Time management training resources, such as guidebooks, websites and neuroscience-inspired staff training sessions, are seen as potentially fostering harmful productivity imperatives arising from the legacy of scientific work management doctrines. We argue that time-related affects, such as guilt and time poverty, need to be taken seriously to find the sustenance, such as a sense of collectivity, to persist through these counterproductive scenarios created by neoliberalist academic management styles.

## Keywords

Academia, academic work, affect, affectivity, neuromanagement, time, time management

‘The quarter of science is twenty-five years and not the business world’s three months’, quips Finnish Professor Emeritus of Cosmology, Kari Enqvist, in a 29 September 2021 column for YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company. Enqvist (2021) lays bare the

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conundrum examined in this article: all academic work – thinking, reading, writing, learning and teaching – requires and consumes time. It takes months, years and even lifetimes. This fundamental incompatibility between the academic and business timescapes described by Enqvist (2021) lies at the focus of this article, scrutinising academic time management discourses within a framework of feminist and cultural studies.

The cultural and political history of time management is rooted in the ideal of a worker whose measure of success is not to waste time. To succeed in work – and life itself – everything needs to be optimised and improved towards perfection. Contemporary academia manifests these entrepreneurial ideals, but it is questionable whether they increase productivity. Instead, they give rise to 'a psychosocial and somatic crisis' (Gill and Donaghue, 2016: 91) among academics, resulting in chronic stress, anxiety and exhaustion. These experiences are often related to time and the (im)possibility of time management: academics do not have time to do real work at work, so they tend to sacrifice all hours possible for work. While the taxing, fast-paced nature of academic work and its consequences for work-life balance are well documented (e.g. Mannevuo, 2016; Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013; Solomon, 2011), 'always-on' work cultures and resources targeted towards their management seem to intensify these problems without offering long-term solutions. Accelerating change and increasing demands leave academics 'stretched to breaking point' (Gill and Donaghue, 2016: 91). Considering the kinds of selves forged by these demands, Loveday (2018: 161–163) proposes the figure of the 'neurotic academic' to depict how academic working subjectivities are predicated upon anxiety, giving our work a profoundly affective base.

This article joins the many critics characterising today's academia as fast paced (Cannizzo and Osbaldiston, 2019; Vostal, 2015), managerialist (Anderson, 2006; Guzmán-Valenzuela and Di Napoli, 2015), entrepreneurial (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett, 2013) and performative (Morrissey, 2015). These studies, among others, show that academics are painfully aware of their (un)productive time use, all the time. Although time is laden with emotions and affective dimensions, the notion of time as an affective commodity has gained less attention. Inspired by our (two Finnish feminist scholars) own experiences of time management and brain fitness training at a self-proclaimed entrepreneurial university in Finland, this article explores the different and often conflicting notions of time emerging in academic discourses or 'tendencies' on time (Sedgwick, 1993)[1]. These tendencies manifest both in our own examples of how academic time is privatised as an individual's own problem that requires training, and in feminist and cultural studies on fast-paced academia and academics. Based on our overview of these two instances, time management in practice and in theory, we argue that academic time management is profoundly political and affective as it encompasses all rhythms of life. Furthermore, we envision a feminist mode of time management, which is collective and slow paced rather than individualised and fast paced. With such a mode, we can move from the persistence of timeliness to a feminist vision of self-paced timelessness in academic work.

We situate academic time management tendencies within current trends combining productivity imperatives and executive athleticism (Gregg, 2018) with neuro-inspired ideas of time management (Guyard and Kaun, 2018; Pykett, 2017). This training has gained acceptance in neoliberal academia operating with an entrepreneurial spirit:

academics must fulfil expectations to act as 'investors in their own human capital' and 'managers of a portfolio of conducts pertaining to all aspects of their lives' (Feher, 2009: 30). *Neoliberal academia* refers to the idea of a promotional university that cultivates 'individualistic, competitive, acquisitive and entrepreneurial behaviour' (Gilbert, 2013: 9) and the ideal of a worker equipped with skills and capacities to productively use time – which implies not wasting time. In sum, this article focuses on two interrelated issues: the rise of the fast-paced, promotional, neoliberal, entrepreneurial university and the ways academics can engage, disengage, support or resist the transformations in the academic work setting.

Neoliberalism is not a singular idea but a set of ideas with many shapes, variants and modifications (Hall, 2011). Our experience of the neoliberal university is located in the Finnish academic setting, but experiences of neoliberalised university life resonate across a wide variety of countries and contexts, such as Chile (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett, 2013), Iceland (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013), the United Kingdom (Loveday, 2018; Vostal, 2015), Ireland (Morrissey, 2015), the United States (Solomon, 2011, Portugal (Pereira, 2017), Austria (Müller, 2019) and Australia (Anderson, 2006). We think that our experiences contribute to the study of time management perspectives across global academia because from our geographically peripheral location, we can observe 'the trickle down of policies, politics and rhetoric into peripheral developed nations within global academic labour' (Cannizzo and Osbaldiston, 2019: 2). Although we feel that Finland has not yet experienced the worst, a neoliberal *modus operandi* seems to have been pushed through hastily and forcefully precisely because, to some extent, we have retained 'good, old' policies for so (read: too) long.[2] Current Finnish university politics evidence neoliberalisation. Since university legislation changes in 2010[3], universities in Finland have adopted more business-like structures, governance and policymaking, introducing third-sector-majority university boards and stressing external corporate funding and a rector-centred division of power (Mannevuo and Valovirta, 2019). The past 10 years of greater autonomy from state government for universities have shown us that this new freedom does not trickle down to employees' experience.

Before delving deeper into academic time, we locate time management within its historical development from blue-collar work on the factory assembly line to academic knowledge work. The history of time management also includes domestic work performed by women, so we can see the gendered nature of this phenomenon from its initial premises – including in the current context of academic work time, where some (women) experience tighter time constraints than others (men). After localising and globalising gendered academic time to Finland and the Nordic countries (along with some other examples), we contextualise our location, Finland, within the curious concept of entrepreneurial universities. Exemplified by our alma mater Turku University, this concept has time- and speed-related implications when we invest in the future with an entrepreneurial attitude. While this is not an empirical article per se, we present examples of time-related affectivity by probing our experiences at two time management training events we attended in recent years. Their innocent aim was to help academic timekeepers manage their time more productively (read: profitably), but perhaps more nefarious matters were at stake. Finally, we propose ideas we could use to re-envision time

in academia; tentative alternatives to tackle the problems at hand include slowness, resistance to timeliness imperatives, disobedience of forces and structures managing our time from above, and a collective instead of privatised understanding of affects such as guilt and exhaustion. These factors could potentially prove more democratic, collective and emancipatory than the strategic, neoliberalist management of time, which we next critique.

## Time management in the neoliberal, promotional academia

The contemporary, didactic time management genre takes various shapes and sizes from guidebooks to staff training sessions and universities' web resources[4]. Scrutinising scientific management and its myths, Gregg (2018) notes that – in contrast to contemporary assumptions – time management is not a recent phenomenon. In the 19th century, the growing middle class struggled with the productive use of time. Guidebooks for housewives, for instance, 'addressed a range of time management problems', such as needy children, husbands and various distractions (Gregg, 2018: 23). Unlike Adam Smith and Karl Marx who counted domestic work as 'non-work' (Steedman, 2009: 16), these time–motion evangelists thought that all work – and life itself – could be optimised and improved towards perfection. This optimising includes the early 1900s' Taylorism, often misunderstood as a managerial theory aimed at bypassing the worker as a subject; instead, the purpose was to convert the 'subject into [an] object' (Salzinger, 2003: 19). Taylor (1911: 19) stated that the purpose of time–motion studies is 'to develop each individual man to his highest stage of efficiency and prosperity'. Unsurprisingly, time management ideas, the offspring of Taylorism, flourish in the neoliberal university that embraces human capital and scholars as entrepreneurs in a competitive work culture.

In the neoliberal university, academic success comes from performative strategies and repetition of acts that display productivity and future potentiality (Pereira, 2017: 74). These strategies require selective time management and constant decision-making regarding which tasks one should take care of and in what order. Consequently, Breeze and Taylor (2020: 51) characterise the neoliberal university as 'care-less; an institution in which caring is an unwelcome interruption to the avowedly rational–intellectual character of academic endeavor'. These criticisms emphasise the costs of the ideal, 'care-free', performative academic subject (Lynch, 2010: 60): a free agent with time to write, travel, network and concentrate on self-promotion without interference from others. This ideal subject is obviously gendered. As demonstrated by the case of Iceland, which has the highest fertility rate among the Nordic countries, male academics with children have more autonomy and power to determine their time use than their female counterparts (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013). The expression *time poverty* aptly describes women's experience of academic time; they lack personal time amid long working hours and family obligations (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013: 289). Indeed, time is a commodity; it can be owned, traded, optimised and rationalised.

The lack of time arises from more than research demands: the neoliberal university carries increasing requirements for promotional practices, such as branding and individualised self-promotion. These trends in science communication are often referred to

as a new form of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), intensified by expectations that scholars should promote themselves across social media platforms (Duffy and Pooley, 2017; Väliverronen, 2021). Naturally, the use of time for self-promotion often conflicts with academics' subjective notions that productive time use should focus on doing research rather than stating what one would do if one had the time. Precarious academics, especially those with dependents, already experience what Hochschild (2005: 277–278) calls the 'time bind': the time owed to family and fantasies of becoming a better, 'more caring person if one had the time'. Self-promotion may help build an academic career but can simultaneously elicit shame and guilt about things that should have been done.

While self-promoting individuals support the neoliberal university, its success also relies on the logic of national and international competition between institutions. Increasing the university's brand value – not merely *a* university – requires much reproducing, modifying and rebranding (Wernick, 2006: 566). A promotional team, not academics, often lead the branding process. For instance, our own alma mater and current employer, the University of Turku in Finland, dubbed itself an 'entrepreneurial university' in 2016. On its public website, Turku's mission statement declares that as an entrepreneurial university, it encompasses more than entrepreneurship education but also a whole worldview and ideology: 'being entrepreneurial'. According to the university's webpage with the mission statement, that ontological stance incorporates a wide range of actions:

> interaction, innovation, change, discovering and seizing opportunities, engagement, commitment, open-mindedness, criticality, questioning, problem solving, giving and receiving feedback, knowledge management, project management competence, teamwork, autonomy, as well as recognising and utilising your own skills. (Yrittäjyysyliopisto, 2019)

This promotional discourse of the entrepreneurial university abounds with temporal rhetoric – expressions such as up-to-date, timeliness and seizing opportunities – as it expects entrepreneurial subjects to be prolific and productive in their quest to deliver more output, amass capital and fervently innovate. The accompanying promotional video (disseminated before and after the launch of Turku University as an entrepreneurial university), endorses 'the university that never sleeps' (Turku University channel on YouTube, 2021). This scenario presents scholars as highly innovative workers 'always on the run' (Müller, 2019: 167–168) and never short of ideas (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 110). We have a concern that the sales pitch for the fast-paced temporality of the entrepreneurial university, including our own employer, may act as a smoke screen, blinding us from the realities of academic time use and management: every year, we have less but are expected to do more, including new time-consuming forms of self-promotion.

The motivated, innovative entrepreneurial time associated with research going well can be characterised as 'timeless time' or 'flow' (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett, 2013: 1126; for the original coinage of timeless time, see Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003). Who would not wish to work in such a dynamic? However, the drawbacks of timeless time in academia are the various other time experiences in our work. If we want to do our job well, we cannot be careless; teaching, writing reviews, writing research applications and

commenting on papers take time but often appear invisible – as if nothing has happened. Although under-recognised in (self-)promotional practises, these tasks are necessary for academia to function. Investing in academic timescapes, however, does not yield a return of profit in lived experience but, instead, engenders affective responses fraught with guilt, frustration and other emotions.

## Affective encounters with time management

Within the idea of the entrepreneurial university based on temporal flexibility (to wit, 'the campus that never sleeps'), those with restricted time and mobility often find themselves in an uneasy position. Unsurprisingly, anxiety over productive time use amid the fast tempo of academic life is often characterised as 'time shortage and "hurry sickness"' (Vostal, 2015: 72). These experiences taint academic time use with negative connotations in contrast to the positive flow previously described and associated with timeless time. In these anxiety-laden scenarios, the feeling of guilt arises as the central affect of time management, doomed to fail yet increasingly offered as an antidote to time poverty and temporal pressure. The privatisation of time management problems, therefore, demands recognising them as a structural, political and policy issue so as to enable academics to experience the 'unhasty time' (Vostal, 2015: 90) at the heart of true scholarly and scientific development and depth.

Today, universities operate in crisis mode, and working at the brink of breakdown is considered to be normal (Gill and Donaghue, 2016). In this scenario, time results from panicked speech and is frequently verbalised through a crisis discourse in which time needs management and assumes meanings related to lack, pressure and poverty. Studying mobile applications for harnessing unruly time, Gill and Donaghue (2016: 92) note that these 'technologies of self' rarely challenge the underlying 'power relations and structural contradictions of the neoliberal university'; instead, they reinforce the idea of the 'responsibilised' subject who manages time and practices mindfulness to manage stress. However, these technologies do not liberate busy professionals from work; rather, they 'celebrate, perversely, the freedom to work' (Gregg, 2018: 93), often by liberating oneself from others' needs. These technologies seem to assume that people need to exercise more self-discipline and remove themselves from the demands of their social lives.

To highlight the collision between time management discourses and academics' views of their time, we consider examples from our experiences of time management training workshops that told a different story than freedom to work. In three small group discussions organised as part of departmental time management training in which Elina (Author 1) participated in the autumn of 2019[5], the grievances voiced effectively established common grounds for approaching time management as a mixed blessing. Elina noticed that the problems associated with time shared during the training sessions did not solely concern the individuals in question. Most participants (the majority of whom were female) explicitly considered themselves to be strong at self-regulating and self-directing their time and work – they could not have academic careers without such work skills. Instead, most problems they reported were related to larger structural issues, such as the expected disciplinary tradition of writing lengthy, comprehensive articles, which

extended the PhD process. In another case, the participant felt increasing stress to complete all their work before an impending sick leave for a major operation when no substitute workforce was available to take their place during that absence. It is difficult to think that a smart phone application could remedy the situation.

Paradoxically, these staff training sessions were not necessarily useful for learning the time management strategies taught, but potentially offered space and opportunity to discuss and vent with like-minded individuals. The small group discussions rarely centred on the techniques of academic time management but, instead, on the affective side of academic time management, especially the overwhelming force of guilt plaguing all the participants (see,for example, Anderson, 2006: 583; Gill and Donaghue, 2016: 96; Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013: 29; Solomon, 2011: 340; Vostal, 2015: 73, 79). It was as if they did not allow themselves (or were not allowed) to have a clear conscience about their work, often a source of strong self-identification for academics. Academic time management is indeed a form of 'affective capitalism' (Karppi et al., 2016): it modulates the infrastructures where it moves, persuades people, activates crowds and produces atmospheres of anxiety and guilt. In academic work, these incompatible needs merge with the language of love, dedication and aspiration (Mannevuo, 2016), giving them names such as calling and vocation (Cannizzo and Osbaldiston, 2019: 4). No wonder then that anxiety is *the* affect of neoliberal academia.

Anxiety, as Loveday (2018: 159) states, is a symptom of neoliberal academia's inability to provide job security for its employees. Anxiety as an affect circulates among those in constant flux: in academia, temporary contracts, often held by women, correlate with higher anxiety levels (Loveday, 2018: 155). In this sense, anxiety is performative; it is an affect that does things and works through academics competing for an ideal self and job security – something akin to a future. Anxiety about time and its lack thus 'is both produced and productive, it is both an effect and affective' (Loveday 2018, 163). As Loveday (2018: 161) states, anxiety drives competition as we strive to be better in all areas of life. In the precarious present, a good worker is 'an anxious one' (Berlant, 2011: 206).

The writers of this piece, friends and colleagues for numerous years, know this conundrum of anxiety all too well. Anxiety lessens after gaining a permanent contract, but without job security, it intensifies with each passing year. Age, thus, is related to work time and future, increasing alienation, marginalisation and anxiety. Moreover, this waxing and waning of anxiety by career stage shows how temporality dictates our careers (see, for example, Müller, 2019: 172, on the temporality of the post-doc stage in the life sciences). Academics never control their time but are always waiting – for admission results, reviews, a future holiday or time to write during the next term.

## Affective encounters with neuromanagement

In trying to govern neurotic academics, universities adopt wellbeing strategies that can be defined as interventions focused on resilience (Gill and Donaghue, 2016: 97). It is doubtful whether academics participating in these training events adopt or even acknowledge their managerial undertones and imperatives. Academics may even experience these events as disrespectful amid impossible workloads and unfair work distribution (Kalfa et al., 2018: 284). The neoliberal university expects academics to become

entrepreneurs (and entrepreneurs of themselves), but it fails to produce subjects who are easily governed, mindless dupes harnessed for business purposes.

Despite the pervasive culture of scientific management and productivity imperatives, working bodies have their own rhythms, which do not necessarily follow the ideals of the entrepreneurial university. A body without fatigue is an industrial utopia, which has never actually materialised (Rabinbach, 1992); exhaustion also persists in post-industrial societies. Recent studies have suggested that one in four Finns, especially young women, suffers from some degree of work exhaustion, and academia is no exception.[6] The burnout epidemic requires that employers – including our, the authors', university – find solutions to work-related anxieties and depression. These contemporary 'happiness-based solutions in times of austerity' (Pykett, 2017: 157) often connect neurobiology of positive affects with neuroeconomics, a field that elegantly moves from organisational science to economics and experimental social psychology.

Organisational neuroscience might seem distant to academics' everyday experiences, but to our surprise, we encountered neuromanagement at our university. The human resources department hired a leadership and brain training professional qualified by the Neuroleadership Institute to equip us with tools for self-management and time management. Mona (Author 2) participated in two neurotraining events in 2017. The first presented brain fitness and neuroplasticity as 'nature's invention to overcome the limitations of the genome and respond to the demands of a rapidly changing world' (borrowed from the consultant's PowerPoint presentation with permission). The second training drew on the idea of the 'healthy mind platter' (Rock, 2011) to understand how a healthy lifestyle and 'mental nutrients' (or a healthy diet) are keys to optimising brain function and thus managing time more productively.

The healthy mind platter advocated in Mona's second training session was developed by David Rock, executive director of the NeuroLeadership Institute, and Daniel Siegel, executive director of the Mindsight Institute and clinical professor at the UCLA School of Medicine. The daily mental activities recommended for optimum mental health ('focus time', 'play time' and 'physical time') all intentionally develop the brain, for instance, through creative tasks, physical exercise and sleep (Rock, 2011). These suggestions seem ideal to promote success in the entrepreneurial university, but on whose time? Neuromanagement was developed by a group of successful American (male) consultants, who seemingly had the money, time and resources to follow the rules of the healthy mind platter. Unsurprisingly, the idea of neuromanagement was first introduced to Finland to a group of high-profile executives at the self-proclaimed top university, Aalto University, in 2012 (for more on Aalto as a flagship of managerialism, Poutanen et al., 2020: 8). Neuromanagement was brought to Aalto by Jeffrey Schwartz, a management consultant and UCLA research psychiatrist (Thurman, 2012). The new neuroscientific findings and their impacts on productivity move down from the top, from executives to workers, often via human resources and occupational health, and medicalise the working subject through diet and (mental) exercise procedures.

Neuro-inspired occupational psychology can be seen as a continuum of psy-sciences, which, throughout industrial history, has helped us govern ourselves in our fight against exhaustion and maladjustment (see also Rose and Abi-Rached, 2013). However, in

fast-paced academia, we do not need guidance to improve ourselves and become more productive. We need practical, structural solutions to help us cope with multitasking, fragmented attention and mental overload amid precarious employment conditions. In this scenario, improving oneself cannot be the only solution to time management issues. The brain fitness concept developed by the Neuroleadership Institute resonates with other brain-focused innovations, such as Workfulness, developed by the Scandinavian telecommunication company Telenor in 2015. The Workfulness programme is aimed at regulating the unfocused, digitally connected brain by creating a healthy digital working environment through digital detox and healthy behaviour interventions, such as technology-free meetings (Guyard and Kaun, 2018). These interventions train the brain through healthy behaviours, turning the gaze from character to our neurobiological bodies, implying that they are our true problems.

Academics realise that workaholism is a risk for mental health, but the entrepreneurial university still promotes the lifestyle of limitless work. The university is a working community with its own affective atmospheres, which may be individualised but are not solitary, as we the academic workers constantly gauge others' responses and atmospheres (Berlant, 2011: 15). Academics in the promotional university are already self-disciplined, but as we experienced in the workshops, these entrepreneurs of themselves are exhausted from solving work-related problems by themselves – or with self-help books and digital mindfulness apps. Consequently, these workshops had a friendly, communicative atmosphere; the consultant felt sympathy for the participants as she mentioned feeling exhausted from running a consultant business. Academics thus may find such personnel training events useful not as they help regulate unruly time management habits, or a lack of resilience and self-restraint, but as they create a safe space for collectively sharing grievances (see also Gill and Donaghue, 2016: 97).

## Academics experiencing time: from timeliness to timelessness?

Although organisations understandably try to solve exhaustion and time management problems with brain training and mindfulness applications, these technocratic solutions will not solve the problems of individualised, fast-paced competitive work cultures, as in academia (Anderson, 2006; Vostal, 2015). The precarity, uncertainty and lack of boundaries characterising academic work today eat away at resources that should be spent setting boundaries for work time. The self-help genre of time management maestros may fail to offer solutions to these structural issues as it often is based on 'skills that ensure professional ascent and glory while others are left behind' (Gregg, 2018: 54). Consultants' time management tips may even reinforce academics' anxieties experienced precisely because of the competitive and individualised 'academic game' (Kalfa et al., 2018: 282). For instance, the healthy mind platter encourages playing, communicating and letting the mind wander – but efficiently; plastic brains are amazing as they can be trained, developed, improved and optimised to reach success.

It is important to explore the managerialist discourses in this genre, although they may benefit many academic timekeepers. In business history, time management has developed alongside a predominantly individualised, entrepreneurial discourse of

excellence aimed not at forming collegial bonds or strong communities but at building competitive institutions that 'celebrate excellence and talent' (Ekman, 2019: 143) to the detriment of the less excellent and talented. To illustrate this point, Ekman (2019) analyses the innovative male consultant Clark, who is difficult to rein in and costs his company social capital but increases revenue. In the analysis, Clark represents an extreme case of an entrepreneur of himself; he embodies excellence-seeking (male) workplace behaviour and simply has no time or interest in lengthy decision-making processes or negotiations (Ekman, 2019). Self-aggrandising individualism and disruptive behaviour become celebrated signs of excellence. Time, in this scenario, weighs heavily, pushing urgency, ad hoc decision-making and fast-paced, unpredictable turns of events. The time of excellence thus presents itself as ungovernable and thus needing governance.

Rivalry and competition for excellence in and between universities has flourished since the academy's classical and medieval origins, and reputation has always held importance (Wernick, 2006: 566). The key difference between these older universities and the neoliberal university is that the latter celebrates and cultivates individualistic, competitive, acquisitive and entrepreneurial behaviour, which transforms corporate selfishness into an expression of excellence (see also Gilbert, 2013: 9). Academia, though, is not a technology company, and academics rarely desire to be an entrepreneurial, winning man like Clark. Nonetheless, academics are keen on self-development, and a vast variety of sources aims to guide academics to manage their time use. Academics, however, seem to read these books not to reach more success but to meet a need for help, as if they are amoeba-like, unstructured beings needing temporal boundaries to be productive. While successful consultants and executives may have things in order – possibly with help from assistants – ordinary academics are suffocating under the increasing workload and growing demands. Constantly fighting for scarce jobs and resources, academics pliantly obey and mould themselves to the time management system yet also find ways to work outside it – at the risk of running out of time and health.

This managerialist turn to excellence similarly manifests at the university level in our altered relationships to time, an issue that arose in interviews with Australian academics by Anderson (2006: 582). Her participants experienced academic work time as fluid and in need of protection, especially in relation to research. Time thus was viewed as precious and precarious but difficult to control and manage. Paradoxically, avoiding the workplace and taking time off work were seen by Anderson's interviewees as the most efficient methods to dedicate time to research, frequently verbalised in possessive rhetoric as one's 'own work' and 'own time' (Anderson, 2006: 587).[7] These formulations position research as personal and private work time needing protection (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Di Napoli, 2015: 159) in opposition to administration, service and teaching, which achieve the status of actual or real work. Academics do not see their work as tied to a certain time or place, like the nine-to-five workday or the university office. Herein lies a problem worth scrutiny: when we respond to the intensifying demands of academia by opting to work in times and places better suited to achieve maximum effort, we also need to consider how such adjustments affect our own wellbeing. Something has got to give.

Slowness has gained new value as an antidote and an act of resistance to the fast-paced demands of academic labour today. Müller (2019: 163) writes that operating under

the notion of 'slow science' has allowed resistance to the rhetoric of speed in academia. Concurrent with Müller and her like-minded colleagues' adoption of the slow science rhetoric (Müller, 2019: 163), a rhetoric of slowness has emerged. The article 'Slow University' (O'Neill, 2014), the guide *The Slow Professor* (Berg and Seeber, 2016) and the *Slow Academic* blog (Bosanquet, 2016) stand as examples of how one can respond critically to the ever-quickening pace of our work by embracing slowness as an intrinsic value. While revealing the unmarked privilege of speed and being fast is important, we also need to consider the ramifications of this countermovement. Are we damaging our own careers by resisting a fast pace?

While the lure of timeliness persists, perhaps pacing oneself is a better option, as delightful as the slowness campaign seems. Very few academics can afford to be slow and to '"relax" about academic hierarchies' (Breeze and Taylor, 2020: 70). However, we all can more proactively assess our speed. Sometimes, we must do so despite our wishes when forced by circumstances, such as the shifting temporality imposed on academics by the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onwards. Forced to transition to remote working and teaching from home with little notice, academics had no time to embrace the admirable tenets of slow science when they needed to accommodate the immediate demands of altered working and learning. Soon after global lockdowns began, reports on diminishing submission rates for papers written by women began to circulate on academic social media (see Minnello, 2020; Viglione, 2020). Research output all but ended among female academics responsible for their own classes and their children's remote schooling in isolation (for a systematic study on the negative impacts of COVID-19 on women scientists' careers, see Higginbotham and Dahlberg, 2021).

Even as we lament COVID-19's theft of time from our work, the timeliness needs of research swiftly arise: is there something here for me to take to task? The timescape of mid- to post-COVID-19 academia calls for utilitarian action; we must be able to do something to help, even if it is to think things differently. Another option, which we take here, is to opt out. At turns of events, research often takes different paths, but we must strategically resist the lure of timeliness at the cost of missing a lucrative (business) opportunity. Further addressing COVID-19 concerns in this article would transform an opportunity into opportunism counterproductive to our quest for more sustainable, feminist time management visions. Keeping to the task at hand also means self-governing our research paths in an empowering manner. Effort put into scholarship and science should be about not only timeliness but also timelessness: we want our effort to stand the long-term test of time.

## Conclusion: feminist time management?

This article began with a consideration of the normality of widespread anxiety in neoliberal academia and the university's solution to this psychosocial crisis through workshops on ways to cope with piled-on responsibilities – often increasing time management to secure one's position in a competitive work culture. We have also argued that although long hours are generally considered to indicate workaholism, research shows that working long hours is not only appreciated but is the norm in academia. Work-centred academics are expected to desire to work everywhere and all the time – while setting

boundaries on work is as simple as following the advice of self-help guides and time management websites. Most of us, though, simply cannot afford to set boundaries on our time use, resulting in a conundrum: we feel guilty for working all the time, read guides telling us how to do better with less (time, money and resources) and run in circles trying to find our heads.

Time management discourses enforce rather than redefine traditional hierarchies. Davies (2016: 134–137) thus dubs the new 'mental resilience' training 'Taylor's revenge': although they seem to promote freedom, communication and decentralisation of power, they individualise and manipulate workers' emotions via digital monitoring aimed at increasing productivity. Time management training, therefore, likely cannot be a solution, especially for academic work pressures created by classed and gendered hierarchies. As experienced by the authors of this article in the Finnish context, the time management genre is problematically rooted in a self-help discourse in which the therapeutic discourse speaks benevolently but powerfully to the responsible individual who works on the self. Time management is affective: it relies on and circulates Puritan work ethics by emphasising classic Christian ideals of 'confession, abstinence, and salvation', which grant work a religious status (Gregg, 2018: 87). In Lutheran tradition, 'idleness is an unnatural and evil evasion' (Mills, 2002: 216), and compulsive work arises from guilt at not working, that is, wasting time. Mills' words ring true in Finland, a predominantly secular, Lutheran nation that self-identifies with a strong work ethic and *sisu*, (mental and physical) perseverance that is the Nordic counterpart to the British stiff upper lip.

Academics complain about the neediness of the performative university, the brutality of academic competition and exhaustion from top-down managerial imperatives. So far, however, this criticism has not led to widescale collective resistance, partly as academics feel that they have to participate in the 'academic game' based on the survival of the fittest (Kalfa et al., 2018). The neoliberal university, however, is not a sovereign with coherent intentions; academics' own actions count (Kalfa et al., 2018: 286). Taking back our most precious property – time – then seems to be the logical next step. What, though, is our understanding of productive time use? Is it different to that offered in guidebooks and training, which originated in the business world? Time management initially applied to top executives pursuing self-development and productive, highly individualistic lifestyles. These guides and trainings focus on dealing with the inconveniences of others and liberating oneself from unrewarding labour others can do for you (Gregg, 2018: 93). They are a make-do, not the makeover we need.

To maintain employment, many academics see no option but to comply with the rules of the entrepreneurial university. However, mundane decisions, especially related to productive time use, always offer possibilities to bend these rules. We realise that promoting slow academia may counter feminist calls for self-advocating, go-getting and determined behaviour – indeed, feminists face accusations of doing too much, too fast and too loudly (Breeze and Taylor, 2020: 123). However, we propose that transforming the rules of the game does not necessarily mean diminishing our feminist commitment. Setting a more sustainable pace to advance research is, in our view, de-facto feminist time activism. The solutions for more sustainable, feminist time management visions may not be found in managerial wisdom or empty discourses of excellence but on the margins, in our own self-organising communities near the ivory tower (Joseph, 2014: 123–125).

A growing sense of collectivity is a powerful antidote to the ailments of the neoliberal university, but we also need to turn our gaze to our academic habits. Are we 'learning to write badly' (Billig, 2013) in order to survive in the highly competitive era of mass publication? Instead of disrupting the hegemony of excellence by behaving as self-centred entrepreneurs, as the management discourse suggests, we should ask the core questions of feminist cultural studies: Why are we so anxious about our productivity? What are the structural reasons for our experiences of time poverty? What possibilities do we have to change these (feeling) structures from within? How can we do so at a pace that is not too slow or too fast but is better suited for our own lives?

Trivial and mundane matters such as time management and resilience training can become critical battlegrounds between fast-paced, top-down scientific management and self-organising academic communities. Governmentality and governance theories often overlook the different affective meanings of the self-disciplinary aspects of time management. The history of time management shows that the literature is directed to professionals presumed to have the possibility of selecting to select which tasks they want to perform, how and in what order. The rest scramble for resources to survive, but as we hope to have demonstrated, opportunities for recuperation and rejuvenation through healthier work conditions lie not necessarily in corporate time management doctrines but in our own organically grown, collective and thus far subterranean modes of sustenance.[8] As the writers of *The Slow Professor* confirm, time-tested feminist practices, such as open conversation, trust, shared experiences and collaboration, certainly have their place here (Berg and Seeber, 2016). Optimising our time use according to this approach means thinking about time as a structural and collective matter rather than an individual's private property. It, therefore, is time to raise awareness about feminist time activism as a collective effort and to speak openly around the coffee table and in the department corridors about the injustices of the fast pace, competition and time poverty in academia. Taking time to talk about time critically is not a panacea but is a good start. Indeed, 'the conviviality of thinking together' (Berg and Seeber, 2016: 89) helps foster means to tackle the times at hand and ahead.

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## Notes

1. We borrow the term 'tendencies' from Sedgwick's (1993) collection of essays, poetry and prose *Tendencies*. While on the surface, this collection has little to do with academic time, she discusses her academic work in its introduction. Similarly, the term 'tendencies' is little used in the book, but in the context of this article, it is an apt expression capturing the subtle meanings and leanings associated with time management in academia. 'Tendencies' here is shorthand for ideologies that are barely detectable or not yet strong enough to warrant that name.

2. Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) observed the acceleration of deliberate temporal structuring of academic work in Finland around 2003. At that time, managerialist management patterns forcefully emerged, and in the years since, the notion of time as a resource to be managed, surveilled and controlled has dominated as the way to manage university work in Finland.
3. Previously governmental agencies, the new Universities Act taking effect in 2010 made Finnish universities corporate-like institutions with centralised government and for-profit ability. For a coherent summary of the effects, see Poutanen et al. (2020).
4. Few top universities in the world do not have their own time management websites. While this article does not systematically investigate these resources, we encourage readers to review their organisations' websites and assess whether they resonate with any of the points we raise here.
5. Critiquing one's employer's well-intentioned and potentially earnest efforts to help workers manage their time more productively raises many ethical questions we want to acknowledge. Time management help (whether employer-funded training, self-help books or online resources) can benefit many individuals, but the subtle ideological tendencies within these self-help discourses potentially reveal forces related to controlling and surveilling the neoliberal working subject. At the risk of biting the hand that feeds us, therefore, we find it appropriate to question some practices offered in our contracts as perhaps too much of a given.
6. See, for example, news reports identifying mental disorders as one of the main causes for disability pensions (Yle News, 2020) and as the most common reason for sick days in Finland (Kela, 2019).
7. In a private conversation with Elina (Author 1), a renowned professor in their field disclosed that they preferred to work on a 50 percent contract to have time for research and writing. The scenario is extremely worrisome: a tenured professor needs a reduced contract and thus lower pay to be able to do core tasks – in other words, to work more profitably. While we take no issue with personal decisions (and what look to be excellent survival skills), the paradox is clear.
8. To be fair, academic workers in Finland are also strongly unionised. Shop stewards participate in all collective agreement and salary negotiations with the university employer sector, and labour unions, such as the Finnish Union for University Researchers and Teachers (to which the present authors belong), provide a strong support system.

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