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CULTURE REVIEW

Worktime

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My former PhD supervisor tells me that the first five years are the hardest. I go interstate to take my first permanent academic job. Good thing I have a horizon of difficulty because before many of those 1,825 days are done my job becomes full time politics. Ten weeks in, there is a proposal to restructure that includes de-profiling the Women's Studies position. We learn a new word: when I leave the position ceases to exist, it is de-profiled. I have moved south with my girlfriend, our three cats, two dogs, two ducks and our stuff. I organise a political campaign.¹ The de-profiling plan comes to nothing and I stay for the five hardest plus two. These things are learned: Women's Studies is constitutionally vulnerable to attack; an angry woman in the university has a short use-by date.

A group of us call a meeting at the end of 2015 to see whether there is consensus among interested folk to start a campaign to decriminalise abortion in South Australia. We form the SA Abortion Action Coalition, I am co-convenor. The campaign for decriminalisation in Victoria took four years, other campaigns have taken longer, some shorter. I file 'four years' in the back of my mind. At the end of 2019 we are on track for some kind of law reform.

People who need an abortion don't have four years. In SA, where we have the best abortion services in the country—nearly all done in the public sector, for free—we are concerned about poor access to abortion services for people who live outside Adelaide, for those who do not meet the two month residency requirement, and for those who are more than 20 weeks pregnant. The current law causes problems, obstructions, delays. Pregnancy time and political time are worlds apart.

I see this campaigning as part of my work. I do it in work time. At the interview for my own job I say to the assembled panel of senior management that I feel like my nearly 30 years of research into abortion has prepared me for this moment, speaking to politicians and others about decriminalisation.

I am interviewed for my own job because in November 2018 the university announces a restructure of the academic workforce. Our professional colleagues have already been

re-structured. So has the organisational structure of the university. I keep my job, my two Women's Studies colleagues do not.

A lotta shit goes down. What is this shit? A shit-storm. I lose my shit. Shit shit shit. If I write this word enough will it have the cathartic effect that I experience when US performer queer icon Lea Delaria says 'Fuck Mike Pence' on stage during her 2018 Adelaide concert. She says it twenty times, possibly thirty, forty. We laugh hysterically, we are free. Fuck Mike Pence. Shit.

What time is this?

Tanganekald, Meintangk Boandik First Nations scholar Irene Watson writes 'Far from an end to colonialism we find there has been no end.' Watson asks, 'To what extent does colonialism remain the future of this country and what could constitute an act of de-colonisation?' Decolonisation has been 'dreamed and visioned' and the dream has been realised before. 'The question is, does that time belong any more to the future?'ⁱⁱ

The authors of an article about women in the academic workplace investigate 'the neoliberal/new managerialist demand for personal control of and responsibility for the self, which may seem liberating but is also dangerous in that the self is compelled never to rest.' Ain't that the truth. A woman in their project wonders 'if I could do my teeth and shower and have a wee at the same time'.ⁱⁱⁱ I do this. I also regularly stand under the shower for twenty minutes, enjoying myself, wasting time, postponing. Am I resisting neoliberal time, indulging bodily pleasure, or just wasting water?

A friend, a colleague for over thirty years, is facing mortality. In an email she asks will I come and talk astrology with her, as we used to do. We have fun talking about the cycles of the planets. She has been experiencing a Saturn transit, which relates to the period fourteen years ago. This all makes sense.

Irene Watson urges us 'to resist attempts by the universities and the state to remove critical studies from the university learning experience'.^{iv} I am resisting. I'll call it an LT5, the form I must fill out to propose a new subject about activism. I must also fill out an LT4. I've been let off the LT3. The forms are written in a language I don't understand; are you with me? I need to give evidence on the LT5 that the five academics with responsibilities for the courses in which the Women's Studies major is an option have given approval. There is a deadline. I email them all at once and within 58 minutes, no kidding, all five have replied with approval. Comrades! Solidarity! The resistance!

Or just Pavlov's dogs on email? Smiley face.

An interstate colleague tells me that he related my academic restructure story to a senior academic manager and she says, 'that's terrible, it takes three or four years to get over that kind of thing'. I take comfort from this - her sympathy, his relay and the possibility of relief in the cycle of change. I am comforted when an email about climate change states that 'Fortunately, many courageous and dedicated people have spent decades chipping away at the persistent problems that plague us'.^v

i. Baird, Barbara. 'Ambivalent optimism: Women's and gender studies in Australian universities.' *Feminist Review* 95.1 (2010): 111-126.

ii. Watson, Irene. 'Aboriginal sovereignties: Past, present and future (im) possibilities.' *Our Patch: Enacting Australian Sovereignty Post-2001*, Ed. Suvendrini Perera, API Network, Perth (2007): 41, 40, 34.



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- iii. Davies, B., Browne, J., Gannon, S., Honan, E., & Somerville, M. 'Embodied women at work in neoliberal times and places'. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 12.4 (2005): 351.
- iv. Watson, 41.
- v. Email from **Madeleine De Gabriele** Deputy Editor: Energy + Environment, *The Conversation*, 21 September 2019