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On the verge of a nervous breakthrough: neoliberal subjectivities and precarious resistance in the contemporary South African university

Academics today labour under conditions of neoliberalism, and universities increasingly operate like businesses where value is determined almost solely in terms of profitability and productivity. This reduction of the human condition to human capital (Valero, Mølbjerg Jørgensen, & Brunila 2019) is an important aspect of both Judith Butler's (2004, 2015) analysis of precarious life, as well as Isabel Lorey's (2016) understanding of precarity and precarisation as dimensions of neoliberal governmentality. For Butler in particular, precariousness refers to the vulnerability and interrelatedness of bodies. Our bodies are exposed to the possibility of violence, death and pain, and life is not sustainable without security, care and love (Taylor & Underwood 2019). Some bodies, though, are rendered more precarious and vulnerable than others through

processes of social hierarchisation. In the neoliberal university context, precarity manifests in managerial regimes, characterised by a paradoxical style of governance: governing the social through material and subjective insecurity (Pérez & Montoya 2018). A work environment characterised by affects of insufficiency, non-relationality, competitiveness, individualism, isolation and very often anxiety, such as found in the contemporary South African university, results in a process of affective subjectivation suitable for neoliberal managerialism to function optimally. The neoliberal machine hence operates with and through precarity (Pérez & Montoya 2018), creating non-relational subjectivities always on the verge of a collective nervous breakdown. Against this background, we argue that the task of critical theory today is to think beyond diagnostic terms, towards possible forms of resistance that don't only exist outside of the neoliberal context, but that are perhaps made possible by the neoliberal ethos itself. This paper, a performative text, takes the form of a dialogue located in the authors' experiences at two South African university campuses. Thinking with rather than just against precarity, we experiment performatively, exploring the everyday contradictions and fault lines from where resistant forms of subjectivity might emerge, or from where an undoing of neoliberal governmentality might be imagined. Even if just as a slightly nervous breakthrough.

Keywords: higher education, neoliberalism, governmentality, performativity, Guattari, Foucault

Dear Desmond,

I checked how much money I will lose if I have to cancel my flight to Durban for the conference, and it seems to be quite a lot. I decided to push through. Not sure if my postdoc contract will be renewed for next year, so no money can go to waste now.

Our deadline was this morning. Will you still be able to send something? I will be writing on Guattari's notion of institutional reform and transversality (Guattari 2015). I also think using a non-representational methodology will work best for our paper and its purpose; we can write a performative text, a dialogue between the two of us, discussing ideas of precarious resistance. This will take an experimental form, and our performative text will explore the affective intensities and aspects of our situated, everyday lives that so often escape academic texts. Similarly, our conversational writing style will be a "performance of ourselves through available repertoires of meaning-making, through which we 'make sense' … or fail to make sense" (Bansel, Davies, Gannon, & Linnell 2008: 674) of our roles as educators in precarious times (Davies & Gannon 2012: 366). Highlighting

our performative entanglement with our institutional environment and others surrounding us, we are arguing – and demonstrating – for an understanding of ontology and subjectivity as emergent and relational (Deleuze & Guattari 2008).

Our methodology hence aligns with Butler's notion of performativity (1997). She asserts that we do not perform already existing, static selves; only through the process of performativity, do we come into existence. A performative text will consequently highlight the process of subjectification, as it emerges by virtue of its entanglements with human and non-human others (read: our colleagues, institutional spaces, airlines, funding, viruses, the laptops we use to write this paper, fear, hope, etc). Why is this important? Well, we are faced with the rise of antidemocratic politics and the far right, as well as increasing economic and social uncertainty as from 2020; if we want to resist the present (Braidotti 2011), we have to understand how we got here, and how these subjectivities (and their coordinates) emerged. Similarly, we must understand our own subjectivities and their entanglement with and emergence through 'the other' (Brown 2019). Through a relational ontology – and its performance – we might gain insight into "how we are collectively constituted" (Gannon & Gonick 2019: 223).

Besides, seeing that this will be a less than perfect, precarious paper, our performative inquiry can co-assist in creating meaning, rather than to pretend that meaning is something static that can be 'found' (Lorimer 2005; Thrift 2008; Vannini 2015). A performative text will also allow us to creatively explore and experiment with different notions of precarious resistance (Dick, Kruger, Müller & Mockie 2019). So let's embrace the limitations of our situated realities for a change; by exploring our situated knowledge-productions and processes of becoming, albeit "partial, situated, subjective and power imbued", we can ethically and honestly contribute to and understand who we are, and how we became who we are (Gannon & Gonick 2019: 210).

So yes, let's explore this experimental writing style and see where this leads us.

Let me know what you think.

Best wishes
Liezl

Dear Liezl

I totally understand that you're getting a little nervous about this conference. Time is running out and we have nothing on paper yet… I also understand that you do indeed want something on paper instead of just 'winging it' – although, as an aside, ha-ha, would it not be cool if we could write some kind of contra-manifesto

for the decolonial university called 'Nothing on paper'. We could ironically re-route the contemporary African institution to a set of intellectual practices, roles and relationships, no less real than the Socratic tradition but no less imaginary either, centred on a different notion of the precarious; on the precariousness of thought itself, its open-endedness, its instability, its transmutability, its ability to draw blood and to hide from view, to transform itself, to regroup, to draw blood again... and so on. In the Western tradition, perhaps Socrates, in life and dying, embodies the power and precariousness of thought, the powerful precariousness of thought, of thinking, of dialogue, more than anyone else (Derrida 1987). Plato, after all, was a professor. It's a shame that I don't know who to invoke in African traditions of thought, to make a similar point. 'Nothing on paper ...' I should give this more thought. Should we play with this idea? Perhaps another day.

In fact, also as an aside, perhaps we can say something in the eventual paper on the logic and place of 'winging it' in the classroom and the conference venue, beyond the objective condition of time pressure and subjective conditions of opportunism, laziness, or whatever – both of which are too reductive as explanations (Barthes 1985; Christiaens 2018). There must be something about this mode of functioning that is not just adaptive, but reflective of a deeper logic of production and reproduction in the academic field today. 'Winging it' as symptom (but a symptom of what exactly?) and as a form of resistance (but resistance to what exactly?). We should orient ourselves deliberately, I think, to an almost mythic notion of the lazy academic, unfit for life in the 'real world' of work, slow, esoteric, outside time rather than frantically out of time, in order to register what the contemporary neoliberal university is doing to us, and how we are colluding with it. This is a critical condition, a nervous condition, often hidden away in critical theory. Don't you think? Anyway, I like your idea of a performative text very much. Perhaps by simply exposing some of the conditions of impossibility of academic work, as we experience it, precisely in its awkward mundanity, we are moving towards forms of resistance. However precarious.

Liezl, I just reminded myself, I don't have a copy of the abstract you submitted. I must say, this conference sounded like a great idea initially (getting away from Stellenbosch, a weekend in Durban), but November is a terrible month to do this kind of thing. The academic year is coming to a head and there are so many demands on my time and attention right now. This year was supposed to be better than last year, but I guess this has simply become one of those things academics tell themselves... Maybe it's just me, but I don't think so. Judging by what my academic friends share on Facebook, and I have been fascinated by this, it is clear that there is a growing body of reflection, in both formal scholarship and in the popular press, on the emotional and even mental health costs of academic life today. Overwork, burnout, depression. What 'currently' means, of

course, is precisely the business of critical theory to diagnose and describe, but we can get to that later. Or, at least, I think we will need to specify this: what is the 'now' we are talking about? What is the 'current' we are plugging in to? Is 'neoliberal' a sufficient concept for us to use? The neoliberal university, the corporate university, the managerial university, all of these terms seem pretty useful to me, but also lacking at times. In any case, I could source a selection of articles, I think we can just focus on stuff published in Times Higher Education and The Guardian even, and then we can reference them in the final paper (e.g., Gorczynski 2018; Shaw & Ward 2014). I do think it is important, the realisation that the contemporary university does not stand outside the transformations we are talking about when we critique 'neoliberalism', or whatever, but that it offers us a good vantage point for analysis and critique. That we are willing participants, also, and no less so because we do 'critical theory'.

In what I recall about the abstract (please send it to me again) we raise the notion of 'precariousness' to capture something of how university life has become regimented around new logics of financial and human resource management; how, in fact, a 'neoliberal' logic has inserted itself into the heart of the contemporary university. Do we want to stick with it? And if we do, what do we want to do with it? I am very aware that your condition, the nature of your contractual attachment to the university and your academic livelihood as a postdoc, is very different from mine as a fully employed Ass Prof of psychology at Stellenbosch University. I think it is important to note and explore this; the university is not one thing, we can't generalise. I do still find myself in a kind of sheltered employment which cannot in good faith be referred to as 'precarious'. Also, South African universities are also simultaneously spaces of tumultuous change and institutions very resistant to change. You have written extensively about the challenges of political change on your campus, at the University of the Free State (Dick, Kruger, Muller & Mockie 2018; Dick 2016).

I am losing my train of thought here. My questions are: How much do we want to rely on the notion of precariousness? What is named by it in relation to the contemporary South African university? Do we load precariousness with a wholly negative value (in other words, is the point to critique our precarious working conditions?), or is there a kind of dialectic possible here in which precariousness also loosens us up, somewhat, to rethink the university in South Africa and our work and lives as academics here, and as practitioners of 'critical theory'? Nothing on paper. Winging it. Socrates. Contra-manifestos. Lazy life. We could hashtag all of these, ha-ha!

Let me put it differently. I would like the idea, even if it is just playful, a kind of experimental existentialisation (Oh lord …) of a concept, to think with

precariousness and not just against it. It seems very easy to cast any kind of reflective engagement with my life as an academic in the form of a lament. The university, indeed, isn't what it used to be. But what do we want it to be? OK, I think this question is posed way too broadly. I think what we should be reflecting on, is the possibility and role of critical theory in this changing university landscape. Where would we like critical theory to exist in the university and what should its functions be? And how does it define itself and operate in relation to 'precariousness', however we decide to define or demarcate it.

As it happens, Facebook's memory function just reminded me of two quotes by Foucault I posted exactly a year ago: The first one is: "My optimism would consist in saying, 'So many things can be changed, being as fragile as they are, tied more to contingencies than to necessities, more to what is arbitrary than to what is rationally established, more to complex but transitory historical contingencies than to inevitable anthropological constants …'"

The second: "At Berkeley they call me Mike."

Cheers,

Desmond

PS. If you think we should use the Foucault quotes, the first one is Foucault (2002). The second I don't know, it may well be apocryphal. Can we use it in any case? I like the way Foucault's private life intrudes upon and even challenges how we read him.

Dear Desmond,

Thank you for your email, very thought provoking (note intended pun). I was just wondering, do you think the reviewers will suggest that we remove the large amount of asides you introduce? I can image a reviewer saying "The e-mail chain needs to be edited somewhat to remove the large amount of asides – while these asides are reflective of the performative approach that the authors have chosen, such asides serve to limit the coherence of the article and detract from the logical development of the argument. While it might seem contra the performative intentions of the article to mould and edit the conversation a bit more, the argumentative clarity and development should be considered centrally." Although I can understand this concern, I do not however agree that argumentative clarity and development should be central in our paper. By writing performatively, we both demonstrate and comment on the processes of subjectification that determine our being and becoming at a university, where these processes, intensities and flows are constituted by the affective, 'everyday' encounters with

the world. Encounters, I might add, that are often considered as less important, non-academic 'asides'. We could argue that in line with Guattari's notion of the self as more than just a rational and centred individual, our paper challenges the reader to engage the non-causal and non-linear dimension of subjectification, as an exercise in becoming-with-the-paper, affectively (Deleuze 2015: 7).

But for now, I will put those concerns aside. I really like the idea of thinking with precariousness; to flow with it and use it as a conceptual tool to loosen us up, in an attempt to rethink the university in South Africa and our work and lives as academics. In the words of Tsing (2015: 3):

> To live with precarity requires more than railing at those who put us here (although that seems useful too, and I'm not against it). We might look around to notice this strange new world, and we might stretch our imaginations to grasp its contours.

I wonder if Guattari's notion of transversality could be helpful to think through or think with precariousness, towards creative alternatives. In a sense, Guattari implicitly suggests that the only way to mobilise against precarity is to embrace precarity/precariousness in an institution, and to become more vulnerable to and open to others. In fact, our becomings depend on being and staying open to the otherness of the other.

So let me try to explain: As part of a larger project where he criticises the institution of psychoanalysis, Guattari takes the therapeutic process out of the psychologist's office and moves it to the social sphere of the psychiatric clinic. This is in line with his critique of the self as a rational, centred individual; for him "the self is rather one more thing we ought to dissolve, under the combined assault of political and analytical forces" (Deleuze 2015: 7). In working towards a notion of a group subjectivity that is collective, finite, "divisible, manifold and permeable" (Deleuze 2015: 7), Guattari envisions a 'good' group as one that "plugs itself into an outside that confronts the group with its own possibilities of non-sense, death and dispersal 'precisely as a result of its opening up to other groups'" (Deleuze 2015: 7).

So what does Guattari suggest? Guattari is critical of the fixed, rigid and territorialised transference that happens in institutions (Guattari 2015: 109-111). Why? Because this keeps power structures in place and keeps social relations and material conditions from changing. By implication, the flow of desire in an institution is controlled by those in power (Guattari 2015: 110-113), and consequently the becoming of subjectivities is limited, regulated and controlled. He wants to replace institutional transference with transversality. Criticising the power hierarchy in the psychiatric institution, Guattari (2015: 111) writes:

> A fixed transference, a rigid mechanism, like the relationship
> of nurses and patients with the doctor, an obligatory,
> predetermined, "territorialized" transference on to a particular
> role or stereotype, is worse than a resistance to analysis: it is
> a way of interiorizing bourgeois repression by the repetitive,
> archaic and artificial re-emergence of the phenomena of caste,
> with all the spellbinding and reactionary group phantasies they
> bring in their train.

Caught up in fixed territorialised institutional transference, subjugated group subjectivities cannot speak for themselves; they are a closed, rigid grouping fixated on identity and the continuation of existence. They are unable to take up praxis and are disempowered by inertia (Thornton 2018: 90; Guattari 2015). These modes of existence are upheld by the verticality of the power hierarchies in an institution.

Guattari then proceeds to introduce the notion of transversality as a) an analytical tool to interrogate the flow of desire in an institution and b) to generate subjective possibilities of working with the circulation of desire in an institution (Goffey 2016: 43). (Desire, remember, is not a lack for Guattari, as it is for Lacan and Freud. Desire, according to Guattari and Deleuze, is productive, machinic and affirmative (Deleuze & Guattari 2008). It is a positive force that can potentially make new affective connections, becomings and hence new subjectivities possible.)

Transversality challenges the verticality and horizontality in organisations; the coefficient of transversality makes possible better communication across different groups in the institution. To explain how transversality works, Guatarri uses the metaphor of horses with adjustable blinkers gathered in a field with a fence. The adjustment of the blinkers is the coefficient of transversality. Say the horses are blinded by the blinkers, a certain form of trauma will occur when they engage with other horses. If the blinkers are however opened gradually, the horses can move around with increasing ease. Guattari suggests that people engage with one another in an affective and similar way. The coefficient of transversality is hence the degree of blindness of people in an institution. The more transversality present, the better communication and communal meaning making can take place. In the context of a university, this will imply that meaning making will emerge through interaction, conversations, insight into otherness and affective comprehension between academic staff and cleaning staff, or between top management and junior research assistants and support staff.

Subjugated, isolated and disempowered groups can now become subject groups, i.e. groups who speak for themselves, who are guided by a vocation (Guattari 2015: 64), who can control their own behaviour (Guattari 2015: 107) and

who are part of institutional creation (Deleuze 2015: 14). Subject groups are open to the outside and the otherness of the other, and in this process, they embrace their own finitude and their own death (15). It is important to mention that subjugated groups and subject groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive groups, but refers to functions within groups. The higher the coefficient of transversality, the more openness to otherness, affective understanding and insight, and open communication exist. The effect of this? Subjectivities are transformed through the dynamics of transversality, and their effect on the unconscious (Goffey 2016: 46). And this can only happen if a group can let go of its identity, of its existence as group and embrace its death and non-sense.

The next move would be to figure out how this can be done in a practical, local way at my institution, I guess. But I foresee challenges. Guattari himself admits that these transversal interventions should come from above (Guattari 2015: 112), from the CEO, rector or vice-chancellor or top management, as they have the powers to effectuate transversality in an institution. But Guattari (2015: 115) also wrote the following:

> In an institution, the effective, that is unconscious, source of power, the holder of the real power, is neither permanent nor obvious. It has to be flushed out, so to say, by an analytic search that at times involves huge detours by way of the crucial problems of our time.

It makes me wonder. But I am more of a pragmatist than a theorist. Informed by theory, I want to think with precariousness towards creative solutions for the practical impasse of power hierarchies and subjugation in my institution. Also, it brings us back to the kind of subjectivities that we are producing at our universities, and how our becomings are limited by a lack of transversality. To understand a university in terms of its group practices rather than as a (linguistic) structure (Goffey 2016: 45-46), provides us with insight into how groups can function differently. What Guattari's institutional analysis however also highlights is that we are precarious, irrespective of whether we find ourselves in a subjugated group function or a subject group function. The latter, though, makes an existence with the outside possible; it proliferates openness and meaning-making practices in group interaction, while the former prevents creative becomings altogether. And this is what I want to highlight for the Durban paper.

It's late and I am tired. It was a long week and I am in need of a holiday. I am going to sign off, write this up tomorrow. By the way, I saw our session will be 40 minutes long; 20 minutes presentation, 20 minutes discussion time, or what do you think? Wonder if SAA will fly to Durban next week, or if a tornado will prevent us all from gathering.

Talk soon,
Liezl

Hi Liezl,

I bought my tickets yesterday and booked a car and a hotel. It seems the SAA strike won't impact on my trip; I can't vouch for the weather though. I've never been to Durban in summer, I don't know what to expect. I'm looking forwards though, although I am now quite nervous about having to 'perform' something. I like your idea of a performative text though; I have never done such a thing. I am usually neatly tucked away and hidden from view in the academic texts I produce.

I really like the way you linked my ramblings to something conceptually coherent and politically almost programmatic. I don't know Guattari's work well at all, but the notion of transversality as you describe it seems to be a productive one. I am not so sure about the distinction you draw between being a pragmatist and a theorist, though. I think this is exactly the sort of thing you should challenge in your part of the presentation; the idea of critical theory as a readymade and reified thing that can and should be applied in a top down way.

I think what is most interesting for me about the institutional work you've been doing is not the 'application' of theory, but putting concepts to work in the context of struggling for change and meaning. Facebook is helping us again, would you believe it. Its memory function sent me another Foucault quote this morning. Foucault writes (as cited in Eribon 1991): "We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them."

I think this is why the Fallist movements of 2015 and 2016 occupied us so thoroughly. Not simply as another thing to be explained on our existing critical terms, or even just as a challenge to the content of our teaching; the decolonisation of the curriculum, or whatever. In any case, this too, the classroom interruption, the questioning voice, has already been co-opted by the university; at least, this is the case at my university. "Decolonising the curriculum" quickly became a matter of committees and subcommittees, of checklists and official feedback forms, a managerial dictate, not an ongoing dialogue between teacher and student, between curriculum and context. I think instead the student protests invited us to reimagine the university in quite a fundamental way, and for a moment the transversality you write about seemed possible. As a kind of utopian horizon. More importantly, it forced and still compels us to rethink what critical theory is, how it functions, where it is produced, by whom and for whom. I'm

going to read the audience another quote by Foucault (2000: 449), if you don't think it's too much:

> People do revolt, that is a fact. And that is how subjectivity…
> is brought into history, breathing life into it. A convict risks his
> life to protest unjust punishment; a madman can no longer bear
> being confined and humiliated; a people refuses the regime that
> oppresses it. That doesn't make the first innocent, doesn't cure
> the second, and doesn't secure for the third the tomorrow it was
> promised. Moreover, no one is obliged to stand in solidarity with
> them… It is enough that they exist and that they have against
> them everything that is dead set on shutting them up for there to
> be a reason to listen to them and to see what they have to say.

Anyway, I started by saying I don't agree with your splitting theory from engagement, so I think it would be great if you could elaborate a bit on how you could concretise Guattari's ideas in the context of your work. I think it will be in that kind of detail that it will become more possible to think about where critical theory is located at the contemporary university, and how it relates to "subjectivity".

Talk later,

Desmond

Hi Desmond,

Glad you could sort out the logistics for the trip! And don't worry about the performance aspect of the performative paper. Just imagine yourself as Bruce Springsteen, and sing your favourite song in your head while we present.

Anyway, to answer your question: how can Guattari's ideas concretise in a very specific and practical way in my work? Good question. In fact, this is the ultimate question. To be honest, as a post doc one does not really have any institutional influence or power. But if I could turn back time, I would've experimented with transversality in the residence where I was a residence manager for six years. Managing a hostel with 180 girls was no easy job, but it was probably my favourite job thus far. The research I had done on racial integration in the residence indicated that it was very difficult to facilitate racial integration in a residence if the institutional culture and social dynamics of the wider community were still hierarchical and run by the patriarchy (Dick 2016). Line managers and the top management of the university expected, for example, residence students to let go of power hierarchies, while these people in positions of power performed and perpetuated these power hierarchies daily. I mean, what a joke! As the

highest position of authority in the residence, I was expected to follow orders and asked to comply and stop asking too many questions. I was also expected to keep the students subordinate through the execution of my disciplinary powers. If I could do it all over again, I would allow myself to be much more vulnerable with the students. I would share my frustration regarding the institution more openly and often with students, while explaining to them the incompetence of the maintenance system for example, or take one student with me to every residence heads meeting, in the spirit of transparency. Power hierarchies stay put due to secrecy. "Confidentiality" might be the biggest enemy of transversality. I probably would have been fired sooner than later, had I employed a transversal managerial style. And that I could not afford. Makes one think, the things we do for money.

But on the other hand, the interventions of transformation that the residence committee and I had to implement revealed a lot about the extent to which power and hierarchies (and racialised identities) were internalised by the youth. Seniority and privilege were notions that were difficult to separate. Seniors expected juniors to 'respect' them for no reason whatsoever, apart from the fact that they were 'seniors'. First-years were forced to wear residence uniforms, do first-year duties, etc. And I can go on. Challenging these hierarchies was difficult, especially because I upheld the power hierarchy to a certain extent. I wonder if the students would have experienced a transversal management style as beneficial. I believe they would have, as they would have had more ownership and input in the creation of their community. Consequently, they would have had more responsibilities as well. We all would've worked much harder, but we could've potentially had more freedom. The whole communal structure would have been contra-institutional. Realistically, one should be very strategic when you want to implement a transversal managerial style. Cunning, almost. To beat the system from within, you have to outsmart the system.

My current position as postdoc however does not allow for such tricks of transversal resistance. I had a conversation yesterday with a colleague and we discussed the impact of neoliberal processes and how this affects the situation of postdocs. This colleague has been working as a postdoctoral researcher for a while now, and has taught tens of modules on temporary contracts over the past 10 years. Despite all this, she currently finds herself to be unemployed, with all the related stresses and uncertainty. What a frustrating position to be in. We concluded that the fate of postdocs (both locally and internationally) is becoming increasingly precarious due to processes of neoliberal management. Examples would be the way in which postdocs are used as publication 'cows' by universities to improve their global rankings and by departments to prove that they are 'competitive'. Or, the way in which postdoctoral researchers are often

used by increasingly understaffed departments in order to be able to perform some of their traditional academic functions such as research, publishing, and conference organising. We are highly qualified, super-experienced, but the system feeds on our precariousness. And it takes its toll on our mental health and general well-being.

So, to get back to your question. When I find myself in a position of (relative) power, or in a power hierarchy again, I will take these lessons and experiences learned from the residence job, and use these to strategically implement principles of transversality – open communication and a fair and non-hierarchical distribution of division of labour. Transversality is, after all, beneficial to the whole of the institution – if you prefer communal health to individual wealth and power, that is.

Okay, I believe that's it for today.

See you in Durban soon! I wanted to ask if you could pick me up on Friday morning? I am in a guest house close to the university. Safe travels!

Liezl

Dear Liezl,

This is great. We can work with it, certainly. I was just thinking, precariousness becomes a bit of a loosely defined, catchall term in our discussion. Is this a problem? Probably not, but maybe there is something ambiguously useful about the concept we can just mention briefly in the presentation. On the one hand, the student activists at my university and elsewhere, in a movement of solidarity, mobilised against precariousness – the precariousness of outsourced labour, specifically. They recognised the uncertainty and insecurity, in terms of jobs and finances, that neoliberalism trades on; and in moments like these the 'precariat' as collective historical agent became visible and heard. The call was for an insourcing of labour. On the other hand, student activists reminded us of a deeper sense in which we are precarious. One of the meanings of this word, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is "not securely held or in position; dangerously likely to fall or collapse". Precariousness is not just a phenomenon we need to recognise and theorise. It really is the ground of our theoretical encounter with the world. It is central to the open-endedness and becomings you've written about in your emails.

Last thought: At the height of the Fallist moment, late in 2015, I arrived at the building I work in one morning and not only was it occupied, but the student occupiers had also informally renamed it. The university has since responded

to the demand, but 'insourced' the process: the naming committee, and I don't really know what their name is, is now taking the matter further. Four years later, I work in a building still named after psychologist and apartheid apologist RW Wilcocks … You know universities, they take their time.

See you Friday,
Desmond

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