



## ***Editorial Perspective – Questioning the Published: On the Unpublishability and (Therefore) the Importance of Invisible (Academic) Activism***

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The Special Issue that you are reading now is the outcome of a quite long and complex process, which started with a series of informal “social meets” of PaTHES members around the topic of academic activism, trying to collectively grasp what could it mean. At the end of this process, we are now setting out to provide you with a select few outcomes of that process – this is what is published, what is made public, and it hides a complex history and process.

Similarly, activism can often be an endeavour that is as goal-oriented as it is storied and stratified, with activists making public demands that might never materialise (as of yet), or that can materialise after whole generations, and in shapes that are very different from what was originally envisioned.<sup>1</sup> It’s also important to highlight how not all activism happens in public spaces, and to argue that would be to devalue its histories and roots – a notable example of this is how Rosa Parks’s refusal has often been framed as an individual act of public defiance, rather than being properly contextualised in her participation

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel R. George, Peter J. Whitehouse, and Dave Harris. “‘Occupy Nature’: Passing Activism across Generations,” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 60, no. 9 (2012): 1770–1.

in and planning of an explicitly political and collective movement.<sup>2</sup> It's often in those invisible, implicit, communal processes that happen *before* and *beside* public demands and the achievement of activist objectives that the possibility of a different future grows.

Tracing this parallel between activist histories and editorial processes, we therefore consider it extremely important to go beyond the merely published outcomes and provide a brief account of what happened along the way, of what was left out, and, as much as possible, of what was and is not visible. So, while none of the following of course detract from what is published, from what we can actually read in this Special Issue, in this introduction, with the privilege of hindsight, we have decided to look back and ask: what is it that couldn't be published (and why), but that we should still keep in mind if we are serious about academic activism? What about the silence? What about the unseen?

For all opportunities of exclusion, as both editors and academic activists, therefore holding relative positions of privilege, we need to ask ourselves: how are we complicit in this exclusion from a public/published space? In doing this, we need to consider first: what wasn't even submitted to this Special Issue, leaving aside the obvious constraints of our reach as a relatively young academic society?

Something that surely has to be foregrounded to try and address this question is the historical context of this Special Issue ("Always Historicise!", as Jameson warned<sup>3</sup>): the global pandemic has made it unavoidable to consider the impact of the broader context – it has in many ways pierced the bubble of academia, and has highlighted how historical patterns of exclusion are alive and well, even in a space that is often the object of facile assumptions of progressivism.<sup>4</sup> Manathunga's contribution to this special issue, for example, discusses at length the enduring gendered and racialised patterns of exhaustion that the pandemic made even more visible (looking, e.g., at publishing patterns in the last couple years<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Kohl, "The Politics of Children's Literature: The Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott," *Journal of Education* 173, no. 1 (1991): 35–50.

<sup>3</sup> Fredric Jameson, "The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act," in *The New Social Theory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2020), 101–07.

<sup>4</sup> Maria do Mar Pereira, "Researching Gender Inequalities in Academic Labor during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Avoiding Common Problems and Asking Different Questions," *Gender, Work & Organization* (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Eunji Kim and Shawn Patterson, "The Pandemic and Gender Inequality in Academia," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 55, no. 1 (2022): 109–16.

Others again might have not raised their voice for fear of direct repercussions. Like Kumar well articulates in his account from the very “frontline” of academic activism, academic freedom, as discussed within the Special Issue itself, is increasingly threatened in many countries, be it by management or by the government.<sup>6</sup> To be an activist, or even to write in support of activism, can therefore mean jeopardising one’s livelihood, if not even one’s physical safety.

More subtly, but no less insidiously, some possible authors maybe just didn’t feel “up to it”. But what is “it”? Freire discussed at length how a “culture of silence”<sup>7,8</sup> can permeate educational institutions so that those who are marginalised don’t feel like their voice is worth being heard. There is an inherently exclusive aspect to academia, that goes deeper than the discussion of “imposter syndrome”,<sup>9</sup> and that links to its “unreformability”, as discussed by Schwoerer and Murray in their contribution. This unreformability was very visible when, even among the contributions we received, the nature of current academic publishing demanded decisions where the line between “fair” and “absurd” became very thin.

Some contributions have been left out for not being considered sufficiently “unique”, while still representing radically ethical pedagogical approaches, which in turn highlights patterns of what we consider “normal” in academia: it is expected that academics in the humanities will be more political, while STEM will be more “neutral”, but this is also a simplistic assumption, and one that Howson and Mun articulate and critique at length in their discussion of activism in STEM. In a way some of the contributions were “too normal”, too close to those same disciplinary assumptions that we intend to disrupt, though also a norm that still isn’t widespread enough, and that actively prefigures other ways for academia to engage with the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Anne Corbett and Claire Gordon, “Academic Freedom in Europe: The Central European University Affair and the Wider Lessons,” *History of Education Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2018): 467–74.

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire, *Educação como prática da liberdade* (Editora Paz e Terra, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Camila Wolpato Loureiro and Thiago Ingrassia Pereira, “Seria possível uma epistemologia freireana decolonial? Da ‘Cultura do silêncio’ ao ‘Dizer a sua palavra’,” *Roteiro* 44, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Maddie Breeze, “Imposter Syndrome as a Public Feeling,” in *Feeling Academic in the Neoliberal University* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 191–219.

<sup>10</sup> Luca Morini, “The Anti-Ecological University: Competitive Higher Education as Ecological Catastrophe,” *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education* 2, no. 2 (2020): 45–66.

Some authors could not complete their submissions in the expected timeline because of the harsh (and very often deeply gendered and racialised) realities of caring for their communities and loved ones, particularly during a global pandemic.

Even the contributions that are indeed published here were not “safe” from the patterns of “unpublishing” inherent in current academia. A direct example is how Lockley’s (who coherently practises what she discusses in her article) might have been unable to be completed due to the authors’ active involvement in the struggle against the current, worsening working condition of workers in academia,<sup>11</sup> embodied by another wave of strikes during the autumn of 2021.

Many other authors also struggled (and are struggling as I write this piece) with their established timeline, squeezed by the competing demands of the current, desperately accelerated and outcome-oriented form of academia.<sup>12</sup>

More generally, more simplistically and also more insidiously, most of the contributions hereby published are also partially unpublished: they are indeed being substantially cut and shortened from their original version while I write this text, simply because they couldn’t fit the final, expected word count – a constraint which still partially reflects previous, stubborn modes of academic knowledge framing and distribution.<sup>13</sup>

All of the factors discussed above were well visible in the submissions we received, and shaped both their contents and the practicalities of their writing. Similarly, the editorial requirements of current forms of academic publishing forced us to make difficult decisions about what to include, what to exclude, what to cut and what to value. But aren’t all of the above as valuable forms of (academic) activism as what we have ultimately included, if by academic activism we also broadly mean a deeper ethos of care and inclusivity towards the actual, embodied and contextualised lives of those who participate in knowledge production? And how, as editors, can we do justice to them? How can we embody that deep care for the world that grounds activism, make it

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<sup>11</sup> Mollie Baker, “Beyond Binaries and before Becoming: Reconsidering Resistance in UK Higher Education,” *PRISM: Casting New Light on Learning, Theory and Practice* (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Filip Vostal, *Accelerating Academia: The Changing Structure of Academic Time* (New York: Springer, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Petar Jandrić and Sarah Hayes, “The Postdigital Challenge of Redefining Academic Publishing from the Margins,” *Learning, Media and Technology* 44, no. 3 (2019): 381–393.

inherent in our practices and processes, while still producing something that remains visible and valued by academia in its current form?

All of these questions might deserve each their own article or even special issue, and they are something for the reader to ponder.

Oliveira Andreotti et al.,<sup>14</sup> in their mapping of what coloniality means in higher education, discuss the different shapes of the academic “game”, and how it is not just rigged, but ultimately makes us more immature and forecloses opportunities for meaning-making. What we are trying to do in this introduction is, therefore, at the very least, to make the rules and the structure of the game more visible.<sup>15</sup> We hope that, if nothing else, by honestly acknowledging all the ways in which the labour of academic publishing and editing is paradoxical, we can move towards what Andreotti et al. call “hospicing”: a critique that is self-implicated and acknowledges we are part of the problem, but also that allows us to take responsibility and stay with the collapse of the current system, learning from its dying pains, grieve for it and ultimately make space for something new.

And be it grief, activism or scholarship, not all of it will be made public. But this doesn’t make it any less important.

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<sup>14</sup> Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, Sharon Stein, Cash Ahenakew, and Dallas Hunt. “Mapping Interpretations of Decolonization in the Context of Higher Education,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>15</sup> Luca Morini, “Research as a Game of Empire” (2019), <https://researchwhisperer.org/2019/10/22/research-as-a-game-of-empire/>

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