

# Embodied Women at Work in Neoliberal Times and Places

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In this article five women explore (female) embodiment in academic work in current workplaces. In a week-long collective biography workshop they produced written memories of themselves in their various workplaces and memories of themselves as children and as students. These memories then became the texts out of which the analysis was generated. The authors examine the constitutive and seductive effects of neoliberal discourses and practices, and in particular, the assembling of academic bodies as particular kinds of working bodies. They use the concept of chiasma, or crossing over, to trouble some aspects of binary thinking about bodies and about the relations between bodies and discourses. They examine the way that we simultaneously resist and appropriate, and are seduced by and appropriated within, neoliberal discourses and practices.

*Keywords:* neoliberal managerialism, collective biography, academic work, feminist theory, poststructural theory

## Embodied women at work in neoliberal times and places

In this article we explore our embodiment as women engaged in academic work with a particular focus on how our working bodies are constituted in neoliberal workplaces and through neoliberal discourses and relations of power.<sup>1</sup> To this end we gathered together to engage in a week-long collective biography workshop where we produced written memories of ourselves in our workplaces and related memories of our embodied selves as students and as small children. These memories are the texts out of which we generated our analysis. Collective biography as a feminist practice is derived from the work of Haug *et al.* (1987). It also draws on the idea articulated by Cixous

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(in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997) that memory is stored as language on the deep surfaces in/on the body, and that memory is embodied language. We take up collective biography here, as we have in previous corporeal configurations (Davies *et al.* 1997; 2001; 2002; 2004), to work, reflexively and collectively, at making visible (some of) the discursive nets within which we live and make sense of our embodied selves at work.

Ziarek (2001, p. 3) observes a tendency in those who analyse the relations between discourse, power and embodiment to lose sight of the embodied subject as an agent, and as a site of revolt and of ethical responsibility:

Certainly one of the most significant challenges to the imperialism of the autonomous, 'unencumbered' modern subjectivity has been issued by the historical examination of the constitution of bodies in the matrix of power/discourse. Yet, such an analysis all too frequently shifts the emphasis from the subjective to the disciplinary, institutional mechanisms of control and thus fails to interpret the embodiment as a possible locus of revolt or ethical responsibility.

In the analysis that follows we work to hold both these directions open — to make visible the constitutive power of neoliberal discourse, and to explore both our taking-up of this discourse as our own, to work with, *and* as a force to be worked against in ethically responsible (and sometimes surprising) ways. If the directions are held in binary opposition, we suggest, it is not possible to make sense of this double directionality.

## Neoliberalism in the workplace

Neoliberalism is characterized by the removal of the locus of power from the knowledge of practising professionals to auditors, policymakers and statisticians, none of whom need know anything about the profession in question (Rose, 1999). As Hammersley (2001, p. 9) points out: '[D]emands for "transparent" accountability' (along with many other managerialist terms), are made into imperatives that are in turn justified as a response to severely limited financial resources. Neoliberalism is characterized by the 'death of society' and the rise of 'individuals' who are in need of a new kind of management, surveillance and control. To this end universities have been restructured, old patterns of work and knowledge have been broken up and managers have been allocated far greater powers and financial rewards for their part in overseeing the breakdown of old structures, knowledge and loyalties.

The new panopticism in the new managerialist worksites works more or less invisibly through multiple eyes at every level — eyes whose gazes are finely tuned to the inflow and outflow of funding and to the multitude of mechanisms that have been generated to manipulate those flows. This

multiplied gaze (which includes our own) works in such a way that it seems natural and makes us blind to its effects (Schmelzer, 1993).

Within the terms of the new system individuals are presented with an (often overwhelming) range of pressing choices and administrative tasks for which they are responsible and, having learned to be one of the pairs of eyes that watches and calculates value in terms of the budget, we 'responsibly' gaze on our own acts and the acts of others. And we shape ourselves (or try to) as the ones who do have (a monetary) value to the organisations we work in. At the same time any questioning of the system itself is silenced or trivialized (Davies and Petersen, 2005). The system is, at the same time, and as part of that trivialization, characterized as both natural and inevitable (Fairclough, 2000).

Winefield *et al.* (2002, p. 9) have found in a survey of academic staff that 'approximately 50 per cent of the Australian university staff taking part in the study were at risk of psychological illness, compared with only 19 per cent of the Australian population overall.' The study of 8732 university staff found that:

- Most academic staff were dissatisfied with five aspects of their job: the university management, their hours of work, industrial relations, their chance of promotion and the rate of pay.
- At the individual level, the organizational factors that best predicted psychological strain were job insecurity and work demands. The best predictors of job satisfaction were procedural fairness, trust in heads, trust in senior management and autonomy.
- Trust in senior management and perceptions of procedural fairness, (both predictors of job satisfaction) were both low (Winefield *et al.*, 2002, p. 9).

Although Winefield *et al.* do not discuss neoliberalism as such, the problems with the intensification of work, increased vulnerability and alienation from management, all hallmarks of neoliberal forms of organization, are evident in their findings.

## Chiasma

We draw on the concept of chiasma in this article to explore the multiple and continuing crossings over between being constituted and being constitutive, between embodiment and discourse, between one discourse and another. The concept of chiasma, or crossing over, is drawn from a biological process that may occur during meiosis, when two chromosomes of a homologous pair, one being of maternal origin and the other of paternal origin, cross over, and in that process exchange equivalent segments with each other, each thus becoming, in part, the other.

Our focus, then, on the embodied subject, is similar to that which Ziarek (2001, p. 5) describes, when she points out that the chiasma, or crossing over, of 'the constituted and the constituting character of the "living flesh" means that embodiment cannot be confused with the biological body'. Drawing on the work of Levinas and Fanon, Ziarek (2001, p. 5) elaborates her notion of this crossing over of constituting and constituted bodies using the concept of chiasma:

The ambiguity and anachronism of constitution cannot be resolved into the classical oppositions of nature and history, body and language, passivity activity, matter and form . . . but makes both sides of these oppositions undecidable. Instead of privileging one set of binaries over the other Levinas and Fanon elaborate their chiasmic reversibility: the obverse side of the linguistic constitution of the body is the incarnation of language, which renders this constitution incomplete, indeterminate, and thus not only open to transformation but also exposed to radical exteriority.

It is that exposure to radical exteriority, in part, that makes us vulnerable to taking up aspects of new workplace discourses such as neoliberalism, even when we regard them as monstrous, laughable and at times antithetical to ethical practice. But we are not idle victims here and nor are we confined to only one discourse, even when that discourse has become dominant and capable of diminishing and dismissing critical and contrary discourses (Davies and Petersen, 2005).

In relation to bodies at work, Wallace (1999) suggests that gender and sexuality are embedded in organizations and inscribed on and lived through bodies. Organizations, she claims, permit certain 'styles of flesh' and banish others (Wallace, 1999, p. 43, as cited in Somerville and Bernoth, 2001). In the organization of our workshop we made possible a 'style of flesh' that was different from our every-other-day working selves, that offered, as one of us wrote later, 'a wellspring of life and energy with a primitive rhythm far beyond the time pressure recently experienced at work'. From that life-space, which was unequivocally also a workspace, we explored the tangled skeins of regulatory practices by which we are made (and by which we make ourselves) docile bodies in workplaces suffused with the doctrines of neoliberal managerialism. And parallel to this exploration, and crossing over with it, is the exploration of ourselves, in the workshop in particular, but also in other workspaces, as working to create an embodiment that might also be described as a responsible 'locus of revolt' (Ziarek, 2001, p. 3).

Another way of describing bodies that are formed out of these multiple crossings over are as assemblages. As Probyn (2000, pp. 17–18) says: 'bodies are assemblages: bits of past and present practice, openings, attachments to parts of the social, closings and aversions to other parts'. Out of the possible discourses through which we might constitute and be constituted, we are, to use Probyn's image, most open and attached to poststructural and feminist

theory for the feminine lines of flight they open up. As Gargett (2002, p. 36) writes in an exploration of Deleuze's contemplation of the feminine:<sup>2</sup>

Becoming-woman disengages the segments/constraints of the molar identity<sup>3</sup> in order to reinvent and be able to use other particles, flows, speeds and intensities. Becoming-woman involves a series of processes/movements, outside/beyond the fixity of subjectivity and the structure of stable unities, it means going beyond identity and subjectivity, fragmenting and freeing up lines of flight, releasing multiple sexes that identity has subsumed under the One.

In stark contrast, we find that neoliberalism does not open up such creative lines of flight, though it does set its subjects in motion and claim to free them from old patterns of governance (Martin, 1997). The difference between creative lines of flight and constant motion, we will show, is not always possible to tease out, since they can cross over and become one another. It is not always as easy to separate out neoliberal discourse from poststructural discourses as one might think. It would be possible, for example, to create a homologous text to the quote from Gargett above, but this time in neoliberalese:

In order to become an efficient worker *disengage* from old work habits and *identities*. Reinvent yourself as both flexible and responsible so you can *move* with the new *flows, speeds and intensities* of the market. Become aware of and responsive to movements outside and *beyond* your old *fixed self* and the old *fixed structures* of thought . . .

In neoliberal discourse primacy is given to the flexible individual who acts 'responsibly' in relation to the market and who is valued in market terms. Individuals must respond to the market and also anticipate it, and must always be ready to be rejected as relevant players if they are no longer of any (monetary) value. Though it is true that the narrative of neoliberalism as an external monster can (already) be read as a narrative in our text, in what follows we will avoid giving an innocent 'merely theoretical' role to poststructural and feminist discourses, or situating neoliberalism as entirely outside ourselves and as wholly malign and coercive. Though we are practiced at separating out one discourse from another, part of our task in this article is to show the possible leakage of one discourse into another. It is easy to say that one discourse is good and liberating and another bad and oppressive: our analysis shows this to be a fictional and misleading binary.

## Percepts and concepts

The writing of the collective biography memories, the texts out of which we generate our analysis, was undertaken using strategies of writing that aim at

the generation of moments that any reader can enter into, not through explanation but through an immediacy of telling that is self-consciously devoid of clichés and explanations. Although the resulting stories are not fictional (in the sense that they are generated through memory rather than imagination), they tap into the art of fiction-writing to the extent that they attempt to work with percepts rather than concepts. Muecke distinguishes between these terms, noting that they are fundamental to the traditional (and, he points out, no longer sustainable) difference between literary criticism and literature, where literary criticism is seen as 'unmask[ing] the secrets of art' and literature as 'always there re-enchanting the world by putting on the beautiful masks again and again' (Muecke, 2002, p. 108). Muecke goes on:

Criticism uses concepts and fiction percepts. Philosophy, according to Deleuze, is about the invention of new concepts which have the abstraction and flexibility to be taken up by others and used. Art, on the other hand, invents percepts, monumental perceptions if you like, which are just there, either they work or they don't. They can stand alone. You can use someone else's percept, but it will be an imitation. And percepts and concepts chase each other around successively masking and unmasking. (2002, p. 109)

We could describe our collective biography story-writing and subsequent analysis as just that: 'percepts and concepts chas[ing] each other around successively masking and unmasking'. Our remembered stories are attempts to create the enchantment, though not by an intentional masking, but by making them perceptually as true and as vivid as our memory and writing skill will allow. Yet to the extent that memory is flimsy, and lived experience impossibly complex, and to the extent that our stories do achieve that enchanting quality that simply draws the reader in uncritically, we are creating fictions of life through which we (and you, as reader) can put 'on the beautiful masks again and again' (Muecke, 2002, p. 108). At the same time, our analytic writing is influenced by our memory writing — we seek to tell a tale (as any good writer does) that you will be taken in by. Analytic and creative writing thus cross over with each other, and what is mask and what is reality cross imperceptibly, each taking on features of the other.

## Collective biography at work

In order to engage in this collective biography on embodiment at work, we took a week away from our every-other-day workplaces to bring our bodies together in a particular time and space (Magnetic Island, off the far north coast of Queensland, Australia). We came together in this quite different space/time in order to examine the bodies we had, in some sense, left behind in those workplaces in five different cities in Australia. During the week we relaxed, we laughed, we talked and we wrote — and we took care of our

bodies. We took a break from the often lonely nature of academic work to face each other around the table as embodied women. We set out, in this process, to extend our understanding of poststructuralist concepts, using them in our talk with each other, to make sense of and *through* that talk, and to make sense of our written memories. We re-membered stories from that other kind of workplace — the official university, and of ourselves at home, alone, writing, and of ourselves as children and as students. But we were also and at the same time writing in and of that other workshop space, the possibilities of which crossed over with what it was we wanted to say about our every-other-day workplaces.

Across the five days of our workshop, each of us took responsibility for a discrete half-day session. This included selecting an aspect of embodiment at work to focus on, finding and circulating pre-readings, choosing the particular memory question to work on, designing and conducting the session and participating in the collective writing that followed the workshop. These sessions included: the bodies that we most want to be and do not want to be in the workplace (Bronwyn); the ideal teacher (Eileen); flexible bodies in neoliberal organizations (Sue); the labour of producing stillness (Margaret) and time and embodiment in the workplace (Jenny). We each chose a specific strategy for drawing our own attention to our bodies in these sessions. These included: a guided yoga *nidra*, voice work, foot massage and a guided visualization. While these strategies were initially conceived of as a way to take care of our bodies alongside our academic work, they also provided a way to keep the body in central focus in our academic work. Sometimes the body work was used in a direct sense to elicit memory stories, such as a guided visualization through all the clocks we have known. Sometimes the body work provoked memory stories more tangentially, in that, for example, a feeling of relaxation after a massage highlighted the contrasting tensions we talked about in our bodies at our usual workplaces, or the body session on voice led to a flood of memories of highly politicized moments of speaking (or silence) at our workplaces. Other methods that we used to elicit stories included choosing and describing postcard images of bodies, drawing pictures of teachers, reading extracts from fiction and constructing a *bricolage* of found objects. In a session conducted for us by a visiting artist, Gay Hawkes, we constructed images of childhood landscapes and made paper dolls that linked with our memory-work on embodied subjectivity, as did sharing food, wine, walking, swimming and working together on Magnetic Island.

## The feminine body in social science

Prior to the last three decades the specific, enfolded body was, academically speaking, the province of the biological sciences. Social scientists were more concerned with the social and political body, abstracted from its fleshy



specificity — a fleshy specificity that could be, at least as far as academic work was concerned, both taken-for-granted and ignored. At the same time it was also constructed as:

the primal possession of the subject . . . [T]he ideals of the possession and the preservation of the body form[ing] the basis of the liberal notions of private property, social contract and moral philosophy. (Ziarek, 2001, p. 3)

That imagined normative social/political body enabled social scientists to ignore bodily difference and specificity, and the white male body, by default, was constituted via liberal discourses 'as the invisible somatic norm of political power and moral value' (Ziarek, 2001, p. 3). The constitution of the embodied self through the ideas and ideals of (white, male) social and political scientists achieved (with very little reflexive awareness, and perhaps even without malicious intent) not only women's exclusion (from rationality, from political life, for example) but also a meaning structure in which rationality and citizenship themselves 'were defined against the feminine and traditional female roles' (Gatens, 1996, p. 60). Because the social and political body constituted through academic texts was an abstracted, generic, idealized collective body, its inherent masculinity and its reliance on the negation of the feminine to make sense of itself were not immediately recognized, even by the women some of us were back then in the 1970s, who worked with such (masculine) texts (Davies, 1987).

Inevitably, then, making the feminine body visible and relevant has been central to the feminist struggle. As Gargett (2002, p. 32) observes:

The body or the embodiment of the subject, is a key component in the feminist struggle for a redefinition of subjectivity; it is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material conditions.

## The tightrope of working life

In focusing on ourselves now, as embodied women at work, we found and were inspired by the trope of the 'tightrope walker' in a photograph of 'The Sky Boy' (reproduced in Wolkowitz, 2001, p. 99), and also as a metaphor in Martin's (1997) work on (immune) systems and contemporary work practices. In the 1931 photograph, a worker dressed in overalls balances on a line attached to the top of the Empire State Building. We see the worker putting his life on the line with no safety net. His body, silhouetted against the skyline of the city is taut and strong and in control of itself. He is suspended on a potentially lethal 'tightrope' but he also has a 'transcendent' look about him, and he is thus simultaneously, in Wolkowitz's words, 'almost a flying angel' (2001, p. 98).



Martin's tightrope is a metaphor she develops to explore 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. The controlled self must always be flexible, propelling itself into the ever-reinvented demands of the institution: '... to move gracefully as an agile, dancing, flexible worker/person/body feels like a liberation, even if one is moving across a tightrope' (Martin, 1997, p. 360). Martin's worker, like the Sky Boy, finds her apparent freedom exhilarating as she dances flexibly through the constantly changing spaces in which she works. Martin finds danger crossing over with apparent freedom in her image of the tightrope walker. She asks us to realize simultaneously 'that the new flexible bodies are also highly constrained' (Martin, 1997, p. 360). She points out that '[t]hey cannot stop moving, they cannot stabilize or rest, or they will fall off the "tightrope" of life and die' (Martin, 1997, p. 360). In our own experience the demand for constant work and constant movement has also been dangerous. We have had, for example, repetitive strain injury related to stress and crippling arthritis that is also, apparently, related to stress. And yet we continue to push ourselves and demand more. 'At the end of last semester' one of us wrote, for example, 'I can remember days starting at 4 a.m., trying to make time stretch because I cannot stand deadlines. Dead lines. Dead in a line. Wondering if I could do my teeth and shower and have a wee at the same time. Even simple body care erased in busyness'.

She contrasts this with the work we did at the workshop:

Tapping into this other sense of time was part of the safe place of the workshop, what each woman offered and the unfolding of the week. Making conversation, making memories and making stories, making dolls, connecting with landscapes. This making requires a totally different experience of time but also makes time different.

In that different space, and particularly in the art session, the usually difficult exposure of self became not so difficult, and became the very thing that could, in a collective sense, be loved best:

I find it quite difficult to make anything with an audience because I feel conscious of censorship, both my own and others when working in a group. On the other hand, I loved best of all seeing the cut out dolls appear on the wall in a group and the sculptured dollies hanging on the veranda. The landscape panorama was fun because shining through the landscape of trees and bush was the same sort of golden light that I experienced being down in and under the bush as a kid. Especially as it was made from beer carton gold because it was a pretty scrappy, urban, 'lurky' place, our bush. I loved watching the dolls moving in the breeze because the thing I was trying to achieve with my doll was mobility. When the breeze came up she danced with her bits of lurid pink skirt fluttering

and her red shoes dancing. She was dancing so much that I had trouble getting a photo of her.

There is a difference here between the worker in the too busy workplace who constrains herself in so many ways in order to be in constant motion, and the dollies dancing in the breeze, or the flying angel who is poised to soar into the unknown, in an emergent, unfolding, non-linear time. Yet these images can inhabit the same body, even in the same moment, or in the same thought. This complex dual image, organized around the Sky Boy, created a thread that ran through our workshop and brought us again and again to the twin themes of constraint and movement in our working bodies. In the trope of the Sky Boy there is a crossing over of responsible neoliberal workers with their eye on their own and others' (monetary) value and on linear time, with workers who yearn for the enchantment of the not-yet-known, for a flowing, unfolding sense of time, for the joy that comes from an increased capacity to act on work that we are passionate about.

Deleuze associates a diminution of the power to act with sadness (Muecke, 2002, p. 109). Our stories contain both sadness and joy: 'Sadness will be any passion whatsoever which involves a diminution of my power of acting, and joy will be any passion involving an increase in my power of acting' (Deleuze on Spinoza in his 1978 lecture, cited in Muecke, 2002, p. 109).

What we find when we examine our stories, however, is that it is not so easy to separate out sadness from joy, or (too much) movement from flight. Our following story is clearly one of sadness, and yet the sadness is associated with too much movement, too much will to act. The story gives us the percept of a weeping body, a body that has stretched itself beyond its own limits to meet the demands of work — her own demands of her work. The worker remembers, in this moment of sadness, herself as a helpless child who could not move her body appropriately according to the linear time everyone else was working to:

The students are struggling. The system hurts them. They organize a dinner and I am tired but I go because I know they want to be connected to someone who helps it make sense. I go because my body needs them to make my work make sense. We share food, wine, stories, meet partners. This morning as I type, I cry. The students are not sad, but I am. I wonder if I will be sorry at the end that this is what I did. I am remembering the busy dailyness of my childhood, the impossibility of being ready on time to get in the car so the car could meet the bus. I remember Dad chasing the school bus, furious at me, again, because I can't be ready on time. How is it that I feel like I am chasing the bus now?

She tells us here that she freely chose to go to dinner with her students. She governed her body to do what she believed was good for her students, and for her — to make her work make sense. The job is flexible — she can choose

to go out with her students or not. She goes because she conducts her own conduct according to a specific set of values that require her to go, not because it has (a monetary) value to the university, but because she is committed to her own and her students' struggle to understand. Now, as she types, she weeps from exhaustion, and she wonders about the value of what she does. She remembers, as a child, being inappropriate — not yet adequately appropriated — within her family. And that is how she feels now, unable to be the appropriate subject required by her workplace. Her sadness suggests a diminution of the power to act, at the same time as she goes on compelling her body to work.

As Butler (1997a, p. 116) points out in her analysis of Althusser's thought, the more we master the dominant ideologies or discourses, their rules and laws, 'the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and this paradoxical simultaneity constitutes the ambivalence of subjection'. There is a particular satisfaction to be had, perhaps particularly for academic women, who have been so recently excluded from academic discourse, in becoming appropriate subjects and in doing so experiencing the deep satisfaction of belonging (Davies, 2000). In the case of neoliberal forms of organization, we drive ourselves to produce the embodied self who produces what that dominant ideology, that discourse, requires of it. At the same time we attempt to find in its interstices and in amongst the constant movement, moments of joy, moments so pleasurable that we will intensify our subjection in neoliberal terms, in order to clear the spaces in which those unpredictable moments of joy will be possible. We illustrate this with a story one of us wrote about a staff meeting in her new workplace. Fearless at first, she defines her new workplace as enabling thought, as one in which she can take pleasure in critique, in an ethical act of revolt. But her colleagues' (non) reaction makes her fearful. Just remembering the moment makes her nauseous:

Queasy stomach — I remember.

Sitting in a group — all of us talking about the infiltration of new managerialist discourses into our documents, our programmes, our talk.

Others arrive, and the official meeting begins. A colleague presents a document on changes to our programmes. When questions and comments are invited I speak.

I point out the new managerialist discourses in the document, point to this document as evidence of our earlier conversation. I am amused by the overtness, the extremeness of the visibility of these discourses.

Others in the group join me while others are silent.

The chair steers the talk onto safer ground — away from critique towards praise of our colleague's hard work.

All weekend I replay this meeting — remembering unseen glances between colleagues, averted eyes.

On Monday I meet a 'mentor'.

I ask her: Did I embarrass myself?

Was I too critical?

She says: Be careful.

Remember you're new.

Remember others here don't know you.

Remember to think about where you are and who is there when  
you speak.

Be careful.

I ask: Have I crossed the line?

Not yet, she says.

But be careful.

As Martin points out, there are many 'disturbing implications' in the new, flexible, change-oriented workplaces, notably what she describes as 'the propensity to extol harmony within the system and reliance on the group, while paradoxically (and distractingly) allotting individuals a dynamic, ever-changing, flexible role' (1997, p. 93). The role of this new 'knowledge-industry' worker is not, as she might have anticipated, to apply the critical intelligence that may have secured her the position in the first place in her new workplace. Her critical intelligence must be put on hold until some unspecified future — it must find its own (appropriate and appropriated) spaces. In contrast, the silencing of dissent is fundamental to the adoption and infusion of new managerialism into our workplaces. The 'flexibility' of new work practices depends upon it.

When we imagined the person we would most like to be in the workplace, choosing amongst pictures of bodies to facilitate that imagining, our ideals were redolent with images of flying. Describing the images we chose of our ideal selves at work one of us wrote of the image she chose:

He is strong, his body is perfect, muscular, balanced, poised. He is still, but about to take flight. He is grounded—but his wings are raised for flight—he is about to take off into the not-yet-known—to go where his wings will carry him—he can enter a new medium—he is not trapped in the already known. He stands at the liminal space of sea and land and gazes up and out.

Another of us wrote of the image she chose:

She's on a flying carpet ride, exhilarated, holding on to her hat, her mouth wide open with joy and surprise. She doesn't know where the ride is taking her but she trusts it will be fantastic and the feeling will stay with her. She's not alone on her flight. She's experiencing all this with someone else who's with her, who trusts her and who she can trust and who also trusts the benevolence of the journey, and there may be more of them all on their own fantastic adventure but together at the same time. She's flying over the

mundane landscape that she knows well and that was her life and when she lands even if it's in the same place it will be transformed for her because she is. She's open to everything and though perhaps she should be scared she's not. She's clever and she's lucky. She's elegant, neat and professional and bodily competent but she's still able to fly.

Neither of these exhilarating (imagined) flights has a particular destination. They are both flights of discovery, of surprise, of adventure. They are, in that sense, *becoming-woman* stories: 'Becoming-woman . . . means going beyond identity and subjectivity, fragmenting and freeing up lines of flight' (Gargett, 2002, p. 36). In these images and the memory stories that we wrote in relation to them, flying represents the desired sense of embodied academic self. This desired moment of working selves takes place in places other than institutional workplaces, in home spaces, which are coterminous with the surrounding landscapes. Our writing-flying bodies are in a productive synergy with sunbirds, blue butterflies, bougainvillea and the sea:

Sitting in my study at the computer, looking out to the veranda and to the sea, shifting the boundaries of myself/my thought, as I contemplate the sunbird building its house on my veranda. Reading the words of others, writing and rewriting, a line of flight, experiencing my body in connection with the veranda, the sea, and the sunbird — powerful, beautiful words on the page.

Flying, when I'm working well and the words flow out like a thread that I'm just hanging on to and following. I'm high in my treehouse and looking at blue butterflies, bougainvillea and birds. I don't know where I'm going, where these words are taking me but I know I'd rather be here, hanging on and flying, than anywhere else.

Time is irrelevant here, as is the (monetary) value of what we write. We are unequivocally in a state of joy, even bliss — our capacity to act is intensified and the possibility of going beyond the already-known lures us on. Given the intense pleasure we perceived in our moments of flight, how is it that we cross over, seamlessly, into the stressed-out bodies we so often are at work? The writer who gazed out at the veranda and the sunbird, tells of such a crossing over — not as an imposition or an act of choice, but as a shift in her desire for another set of competencies. The long morning of pleasure in her work is broken into by the realization that she is running out of the time that she has allocated to the task. The days and weeks that stretch ahead already have other tasks allocated to them. She desires completion. She has set herself a time limit, and so she crosses over to becoming an efficient worker:

She wanted so much to get to the point of completion that she had looked forward to. She began to work fast, pressing herself to go quickly, no longer savouring the sentences, no longer fully attending to their meaning, relying on gut instinct to know what to cut and what to change. Her back and

neck were in tight spasms, her breathing was shallow, her face screwed up with anxiety and concentration. She watched the clock with one eye, pacing herself, dividing up the task according to the time left, becoming more stressed as the time grew shorter.

Our story of crossing over from one kind of writing to another encapsulates the chiasma of our bodies at work. It is writing — which can cause our muscles to spasm and our faces to grimace — that is both the source of our greatest pleasures in academic work and the source of this pain. At first the writer had been writing with pleasure. Then she turns her eyes to the clock — not because someone tells her to, but because she desires the pleasure of achieving the end point before the other tasks begin. She is no longer in flight, no longer on the liminal edge between the known and the unknown, but a tightly constrained machine. Her will governs her body to work to the clock — she makes it work for her and does not register its increasing pain. In mastering academic work she takes as her own the desire to complete (yet another) paper. Her body both will and will not do what she wants of it. Our bodies carry the marks of the diverse constraints within which we labour and they also contribute to the misery of work through their very corporeal enfolded materiality, *and* through their susceptibility to desiring marks of achievement and to meeting goals.

How is it that we enter so readily into the self-punitive time-driven destruction of the pleasure of our writing? In the assembling of our embodied selves, is it not possible to choose to be the body in flight and to stay there, exploring as long as we can the new spaces (and times) that we have entered? How is it that we take on as our own the measurement of linear time and the eye that controls accordingly? The writer of this story says that she hates these controlling eyes, especially when they are her own and she rejects them. But they lurk at the edge of consciousness. And time, we found, cannot be so simply cast as an external master that should be resisted. In our first story of sadness, the small child had not yet mastered time. We found when we examined childhood stories of clocks that our relation to clocks and time was integral to a sense of connectedness to and competence in the world. Subjection and mastery constitute the subject in the same act (Butler, 1997a, p. 116). In one memory story the earliest remembered clock is located as a deeply embodied, pleasurable connectedness to her grandmother's presence:

... the first clock she can remember, she travels down a long passage to the dark warmth of her grandmother's house. She is only six months old. She cannot get a picture of her grandmother's clock but she can feel the chimes in the place in her chest where she would feel a heart beating when she was held close against someone who loved her. Then she can feel her grandmother's skin against her cheek. Soft like crinkled silk. The smell is her grandmother's smell but permeating the dark of the room is

the smell of coke burning in the old Kosi stove and the red glow of its warmth.

Another remembers, as a small child, mastering time by actively lodging the knowledge of it in her body, thus making herself competent and connected in the familiar space of her mother's kitchen:

The electric clock in the kitchen, up high on the cupboard, had a large round white face with small ornate black hands, and a long thin second hand. Its surround was painted green — kitchen green, the same as the kitchen. She loved to sit at the wooden table and watch the second hand sweeping around the clock in its series of small perfectly regular movements from one second to the next. She taught herself to count seconds by feeling in her body the rhythm and speed of its movement from one small black line to the next. Four small lines between each number, the fifth being the new number. She practiced with her eyes open, watching the movement, listening to the faint sound, then with her eyes shut. She could count five perfectly, then ten, and eventually a whole minute. She could feel the seconds in her body with her eyes shut as she counted from one to 60, opening her eyes quickly as she reached '60' to find the long thin black hand sweeping onto the twelve. Later she enjoyed the fact that she could keep her eye on this clock and know precisely at what point she had to run downstairs and jump on her bike to get to school on time.

This pleasure in acquiring competence and efficiency in relation to time stays with us. It is integral to our subjection. It is also a source of inordinate anxiety as the work expands in such a way that it simply cannot fit inside the linear hours and days and weeks and years of our working lives. It seems with linear time that we can enjoy having competence in relation to it, *and* feel totally oppressed by it. Our attempts to master it put at risk the kinds of open spaces and creative possibilities opened up in the workshop or in the spaces we set aside for writing, or in the pleasurable critique and revolt against it.

Crossing over with the linear time, then, is that time that is associated with the angel's line of flight, a time that expands and is expansive, and that holds a strong sense of embodiment rather than the denial and disciplining of the body.

We cannot separate out, entirely, linear time from those moments of creative flight. One of us, working against a very tight timeline for the completion of her Ph.D. during the process of writing this article, caught perfectly the crossing over of flight and the intense pressure of linear time when she wrote in an e-mail:

My nose is bleeding from the grindstone I have it pushed against. How do I make sure they're the right words? Let me tell you it doesn't feel like



flying right at the moment but I'm near. . . . Love to you all and hope you're having fun (I am actually).

But perhaps we have gone too far in this play of chiasmas. The demands and limitations of neoliberalism must be critiqued, and revolt against it could be said to be the only possible ethical line of action. We must hold the tension between the chiasma of our neoliberal selves and ourselves engaged in creative flight, outside its controls, at the same time as we make visible what this dominant discourse is and how it works on us and through us to push our bodies to the limits. Our critique of it in this analysis is accompanied by an analysis of the ways in which we are drawn into it and seduced by it. The pressures it creates in linear time, for example, make us particularly susceptible to rationalities of efficiency. Increases in efficiency are seductive. They are experienced as desirable, even pleasurable, at the same time as they are harmful to our embodied and emotional selves, catapulting us into a loss of joy and loss of capacity to act on the very work we are passionate about.

One of the rationalities we have used to justify the growing dominance of technology in our professional lives, for example, is the pleasurable increase in efficiency that it can afford us. We can communicate, using e-mail, with so many more people in any one day, we can write so many more papers now we have computers and we can communicate with people at a distance. It is seductive precisely because it taps into already embodied commitments and desires and competencies. But technology, like time, can also dominate in ways that are harmful. Its seductive efficiencies can lead us to put our hard-working bodies into the background — even inviting them to disappear. As Guertin, (1999, p. 5) observes: '[t]he rhetoric surrounding virtual reality . . . argues not for the disappearance of technology, but for a disappearance of the body in favour of existence as a state of pure information'.

'Flexible learning' as a substitute for real bodies in real spaces is to be found everywhere in academic teaching. Increasingly, units of study are being designed as modules that can be packaged and delivered 'on line' with what seems to be very little involvement (or investment in) teaching. There has been, as McWilliam notes, 'a bifurcation of teaching into "design and delivery" wherein the "embodied teacher is unnecessary, even problematic"' (1999, p. 128). Yet the embodied teacher, as the following story shows, experiences this in her body despite the removal of her students and of her own body from more conventional teaching-learning contexts. Her body almost disappears from the story itself, even though we know she suffers intense pain from repetitive strain injury. Competence in information and communications technology is one of the generic skills on 'the list' of what students must be taught. In order to tick off this skill, the lecturer for whom the storyteller is tutoring shifts the usual, on-campus, en fleshed tutorials online for approximately one-third of each semester. Not only is it a generic skill, but the university is committed to 'flexible delivery' because it reaches

more students, and because it is cheaper. 'Flexibility' is the new ideal when the pace of change is so rapid. But, as Martin says, flexibility is achieved through an impossible combination of fearlessness and docility. Workers must be 'able to risk the unknown and tolerate fear, willing to explore unknown territories, adrift in space, but simultaneously able to accept their dependence on the help and support of their co-workers' (Martin, 1997, p. 83). In our story this 'flexibility' becomes an (in)flexibility written on the body of the teacher (and of the students):

The virtual tutorial took much more time and energy than the real tutorial had and her hands hurt after working through hundreds of entries across two subjects. Several students contacted her about problems they had with the technology. They asked if they could come in to her for a special face-to-face session with her instead but she felt that this would let down the groups more as some of them were quite small to begin with. She spoke to the lecturer about the problems students were having and the flatness of the discussions online but he said it was just too bad. They have to learn to be more flexible, he said.

The students must embody the new workplace rhetoric and so must she. They must make it their own, no matter whether it might be counterproductive in terms of learning or in terms of the stresses on their bodies. She must take risks, move fearlessly towards the unknown. And however successfully we disappear our bodies, or become flexible, fearless bodies, heedless of what the new order might be, we still are bodies and we go home exhausted, agonizing about how to make ourselves strong enough or competent enough or clever enough or healthy enough to do this job well. We demand (because our workplaces demand) that our bodies be flexible enough to accommodate the new time pressures, the discourses of flexible learning, marking moderation, teaching evaluation, generic skills, accountability and funding constraints. Our material bodies produce the effect that is our performing selves and they produce, collaboratively, the contexts we inhabit. *And* they are, at the same time, effected, or brought into being, in these performances, in these contexts, as specific individual bodies — not automata, not bodies that simply carry the meanings of the institutions we work in (though they do this, too). Each individual works in an ongoing way to be able to be, and to continue to materialize herself as, the appropriate body/subject in her workplace and in doing so achieves a recognizable identity. But more than that, she works to achieve the body that is passionate about its work, which is also the body that can act strongly and is full of joyful energy. As Butler says:

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities.

One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors or successors as well. (Butler, 1997b, p. 404)

## And so . . .

What we have explored here is the crossing over that occurs in the discursively constituted and constituting body. This means that what it is that materializes is not the result of a rational choice to engage now one discourse and now another. The discourses and related practices cross over in such a way that they are lived as something new, something that is not one or the other, something that is linked with multiple desires formed in relation to being an appropriate and appropriated worker, to being one who survives and is safe, to being one who is fluid and in movement, to being one who goes dangerously and pleasurably beyond the already known. These desires cannot easily be separated out or clearly attached to one or another discourse and set of practices. The discourses themselves cross over; they mutate, form new possibilities, carry with them burdens from other forms they have crossed with. We find ourselves again and again seduced by the discourse and practices of neoliberalism, caught up in and approving of newly appropriate patterns of desire, struggling to keep open the spaces of revolt and of flight, by becoming, ironically, ever more appropriate(d) subjects of neoliberal discourses — discourses that can also be read as anti-intellectual, exploitative and controlling.

## Notes

1. New managerialism, which is also referred to as neoliberalism in the United Kingdom and Total Quality Management in the United States, is a system of the government of individuals invented during the Thatcher and Reagan years. It is analysed in detail by Rose (1999) and Dean (1999).
2. Which he did not see as only the province of people categorized as female.
3. A molar line of segmentation is, for example, the division or binary opposition between the sexes.

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