

Living in an (im)material world?: higher education enclosure and digital dispossession.

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The proliferation of digital solutions in higher education has accompanied the raising of fees in exacerbating marketplace developments, with a mainstreaming of digital provision through MOOCs, online equivalencies, and short courses. Digital strategies, in aiming to increase student numbers and retention in cost-effective ways are provoking competitive and mimetic behaviours in higher education institutions; whilst management logics and policy around digital ideas have been operated towards normative aspects of digital, narrowing debate about benefits of differing and complementary approaches for students. This raises important questions about control in general and the obscuration of control in an online environment, (see Andrejevic, 2007). This accompanies changing roles of managers, and the effect upon the staff that inhabit this workspace. This paper considers that certain aspects of higher education teaching in the UK are therefore undergoing a process of digital 'enclosure' facilitated by, and in turn, helping to legitimise neoliberalistic outlooks of governance and meritocracy (see Littler, 2013).

The need then for critical examination of digital HE futures is key, as explored by Hall (2013: 54), whose paper discusses the reshaping of "deterministic, socio-economic discourses of efficiency, personalisation and networked individualism that underpin the technologically-mediated University". Till and Gregory (2018) refer to the need to challenge individualised pictures of digital technologies and platforms which are often claimed to enable personal empowerment as our work leads in digital directions. They argue for contextualisation of digitisation discourses, discussing the perception that digital teaching saves academic time, when in practice the administrative burden is much greater. Moore (2017) raise similar points when discussing data protection and privacy in the digital arena and the important question that these developments can also be fundamental contradictions when we consider the dignity of work asking if by quantifying the precarious self we are engaging in a repressive form of discipline. These new technologies (see Wajcman, 2015) permit an intensification of the workplace, and although they support an increase in connectivity and flexibility they also create stress and insecurity.

We discuss the outcomes of possible feelings of stigmatisation and future tiering in relation to academic identities and their impact on the sector, with particular reference to burgeoning precarity in a digital academic life, (e.g. Glover et al, 2018). We undertook empirical data collection via ethnography, complemented by traditional in-depth interviews. Our research design uses images taken by digital teachers through photographic ethnography and in-depth interviewing as material artefacts to make sense of this digital and immaterial labour and its contributions. Whilst some respondents considered their work literally, depicting themselves at their computers, or pictures of their desks, others depicted office posters and other organisational symbols such as university logo as more tangible evidence of academic existence.. We looked to gain insight into discourses of alienation from the academy, senses of liminality in an immaterial workplace (Beech, 2011) and digital enclosure where the latter raises explicit concerns about dependencies, ownership, surveillance and control (Andrejevic, 2007) from marginalised groups.