

THE CORPORATISATION OF EDUCATION: BUREAUCRACY, BOREDOM, AND TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract: In school and tertiary education sectors, the rise of accountability regimes parallels the growth in bureaucracy and marketisation of knowledge work. Increasing student numbers have not been matched by an increase in teaching staff, whilst new administrative positions in accounting, marketing, and legal services have ballooned. In this paper we are concerned to examine the impact of these institutional changes on the lived experiences of education professionals. In this context we are particularly interested in the potential rise of boredom among staff, and how boredom may work alongside other affects to generate both compliance and resistance to hyper-bureaucratic trends. Empirical studies on the intensification of ‘administrivia’ and ‘busy work’ in educational settings reveal among staff a perceived loss of intellectual integrity, longer work hours and impaired productivity, as well as diminished opportunities for interpersonal engagement. The collective feelings of anger, resentment, anxiety, and frustration that have accompanied these conditions have real potential to bottom out in feelings of disengagement and boredom among educators. Noting boredom’s role in sustaining hyper-bureaucratic structures within the education sector, we critically examine whether and to what extent it might also form part of shifting affective dynamics that can drive resistance to the proliferation of these structures.

Keywords: Higher Education, bureaucracy, boredom

INTRODUCTION

Across education sectors internationally, including schools and higher education, the rise of accountability regimes parallels the growth in bureaucracy and marketisation of knowledge work.¹ Increasing student numbers, particularly in higher education, have not been matched by an increase in teaching staff, whilst new administrative positions in accounting, marketing, and legal services have ballooned.² Expanding administrative processes for registration, accreditation, and data collection in the school sector have intensified pressure on teachers to work longer hours in order to maintain the teaching-focused activities they value.³ In countries such as Australia and New Zealand, where education contributes significantly to GDP, there is evidence that this pressure is being felt acutely. In this paper, we

1. Stephen Ball, ‘Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-spy guide to the neoliberal university’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60, 1, 2012, pp17-28 (Hereafter *I-Spy Guide*).

2. David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, London, Penguin Books, 2019. (Hereafter *Bullshit Jobs*).

3. Susan McGrath-Champ, Rachel Wilson, Meghan Stacey, and Scott Fitzgerald, *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning*, Sydney, New South Wales Teachers’ Federation, 2018.

4. We use the language of ‘affect’

examine the impact of these institutional changes on the lived experiences of educators, defined as those workers in institutions who are primarily responsible for providing learning experiences to students, including teaching, supervision, and other scholarly activities.

Attending to how institutional shifts are felt and experienced by educators *qua* institutional actors is central to understanding processes of institutional preservation and change. Institutions both require and produce certain kinds of subjectivities – with sets of interests, desires, and commitments – for their maintenance. We stress the central role of affect in modulating the agency of institutional actors and influencing patterns of adherence to institutional arrangements and procedures.⁴ We are particularly interested in the potential rise of boredom among educators, and how boredom may work alongside other affects to generate both compliance and resistance to hyper-bureaucratic trends.

Boredom, as we define it here, broadly consists in an unpleasant affective state or experience that is characterised by a lack of vivacity, enthusiasm, and stimulation,⁵ and from which individuals typically seek relief.⁶ This affective state may take the form of distinct phenomenological experiences that vary in nature and intensity: extending, for example, from feelings of restlessness to a debilitating sense of meaningless and purposelessness. In this sense, boredom may be more or less transient; more or less destructive. As will become clear, we are primarily interested in more pervasive forms of boredom among institutional actors that are linked to a perceived loss of agency and meaning in relation to the changing nature of their work.

Importantly, boredom, on our account, is not an individual, idiosyncratic phenomenon: rather, collectively shared feelings of boredom emerge against particular historical, social, and material environments.⁷ Boredom is thus particular and context-bound: there is the boredom of the housewife, the boredom of the factory worker, and the boredom of the educator.

Boredom has been under-theorised in the organisational studies literature, with theorists tending to narrowly focus on boredom in corporate workspaces.⁸ Relatively less attention has been paid to boredom in the sphere of education. Our account of educator boredom begins with a consideration of the acute challenges posed by bureaucratic regimes to the collective ways in which educators imagine their work. Shared imaginings of traditional educator identities and roles are deeply tied to (non-bureaucratic) values of autonomy, creativity, public service, and trust, and attract robust embodied investments (of, for example, pride and esteem). The challenges posed by bureaucratic imperatives to traditional educator subjectivities are registered in part through feelings of anxiety, anger, and frustration that are manifest in educator testimonies.

In this paper we take stock of the institutional conditions and pressures that may compel educators to engage in the management and suppression of affects like anger which might otherwise galvanise collective pushback

in this paper to refer to embodied relational dynamics and somatic states that bear on a person's capacities to act, and which are expressed through the materiality of actions, including language. These states vary in degrees of intentionality and have motivational force.

5. Michael Gardiner, 'The multitude strikes back? Boredom in an age of semiocapitalism', *New Formations*, 82, 2014, pp29-46 (Hereafter *Multitude Strikes Back*).

6. Maggie Koerth-Baker, 'Boredom gets interesting', *Nature*, 529, 2016, pp146-148.

7. Julian Jason Haladyn and Michael Gardiner, 'Monotonous splendour: An introduction to Boredom Studies', in M.E. Gardiner & J. J. Haladyn (eds), *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2017, pp3-17. See also Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, London, Reaktion Books, 2005, p15.

8. Lia Loukidou, John Loan-Clarke, and Kevin Daniels, 'Boredom in the workplace: More than monotonous tasks', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11, 4, 2009, p381.

9. Darren Webb, 'Boltholes and breathing spaces in the system: On forms of academic resistance (or, Can the University be

a site of utopian possibility?'), *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 40, 2, 2018, pp1-23. (Hereafter *Boltholes*)

10. Between 2009 and 2016, student to academic staff ratios in Australia grew from 20.05 to 21.37, and student to non-academic staff ratios grew from 12.35 to 13.29. See Australian Government, 'Higher Education Statistics', Department of Education and Training, 2019: <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics>. In place of full-time employment contracts, there has been a significant rise in temporary and casual teaching contracts.

11. For example, between 2009 and 2016, academic staff numbers in Australia grew by 6,773, whilst non-academic staff grew by 10,327. Among Australian universities, non-academic staff in 2016 outnumbered academic staff on a ratio of 1.6 to 1. See Australian Government, 'Higher Education Statistics', Department of Education and Training, 2019: <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics>.

12. Chris Shore and Susan Wright, 'Audit culture and anthropology: Neo-liberalism in British higher education', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 5, 4, 1999, pp557-575;

against hyper-bureaucratic trends.⁹ We argue that this coerced emotional self-management has the potential to compound an already diminished sense of agency among educators, with resistant agentic affects bottoming out in feelings of disengagement and boredom rather than in patterns of collective mobilisation and resistance.

Noting boredom's role in sustaining hyper-bureaucratic structures within the education sector, we critically examine whether, and to what extent, it might also form part of shifting affective dynamics that can drive resistance to the proliferation of these structures. This discussion reveals boredom to bear a complex relationship to struggles for emancipation from alienating and exploitative work practices: we reveal the ways in which boredom may function as both a resource and a liability for educators seeking to galvanise collective pushback against bureaucratic regimes. This paper concludes by counselling a cautious optimism with respect to the potential for educator boredom to revitalise engagement in resistive behaviours that are required to ensure that the primary focus of educational institutions remains on knowledge creation.

THE BUSINESS(IFICATION) OF EDUCATION

An increase in the buying and selling of education services worldwide, as educational institutions struggle to meet shortfalls resulting from government funding cuts, has led to widespread processes of marketisation within the education sector (*I-Spy Guide*, p18). Recruitment of international students to boost profit and funding for 'privatised' universities has increased student numbers and class sizes, without an accompanying and proportional employment of more full-time academic staff as well as front line administrative support for students.¹⁰ Furthermore, while jobs in recruitment proliferate, teaching jobs that would provide support for overseas students to study, learn, read, and write at an academic level in a foreign language are not increasing at the same rate.

Whilst student numbers rise and essential support services diminish, the number of non-academic positions within educational institutions has rapidly increased, especially within higher education.¹¹ A large portion of these non-academic positions comprise public relations roles, which are focused on showcasing university performance and ranking (*Bullshit Jobs*, p36). In addition, increased competition for grants and funding in the higher education sector has led to the introduction of training programs, necessitating the employment of administrative staff to facilitate trainings, and to implement and enforce mechanisms of accountability for academics who receive funding.¹² The growth of non-academic, administrative positions in higher education has imposed increased burdens on academic staff to rigorously document their research activities and update their research profiles, and to file reports on their research spending. These burdens are

compounded by new requirements for academics to develop and report against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and to demonstrate the public relevance of their research in order to maintain funding.¹³ This culture of robust auditing, surveillance, and assessment is also applied to teaching practices: lecturers are increasingly required to engage and respond to student surveys of course content and delivery. Part of what renders this practice problematic is that increasing student fees and a precarious job market have created a widely held expectation that educators should narrowly aim to produce ‘job-ready’ applicants and should only teach content that is directly relevant to key areas of employment.¹⁴

These heightened administrative loads are paralleled in the school sector. Teacher registration authorities, financed by government education funding, enforce accreditation for schoolteachers to ensure ‘teacher professionalism’ and ‘teacher quality’. As part of this process, teachers are obliged to complete and record a mandated number of hours of professional learning in order to maintain their current employment positions and apply for promotion. In addition, governments have sought to institute top-down measures designed to measure ‘teacher impact’ on student learning. International ‘edu-businesses’ continue to be contracted to formulate standardised testing instruments (for example, PISA, TIMMS, NAPLAN) for administration nationally and internationally, despite a lack of evidence demonstrating their effectiveness and utility.

Top-down systems of auditing, evaluation, assessment, and accreditation in education that are intended to improve the quality of educators’ work, to boost efficiency, and to reduce system costs are having precisely the opposite effect: spending has increased, and educators’ engagement and productivity with respect to teaching and research has been impaired. Recent research reveals that intensifying administrative tasks detract from possibilities for collaborative and collective work, and result in less time for research and for engagement with students and colleagues.¹⁵ Data collection for ‘school improvement’ and for evidence of ‘quality teaching’ has crowded out activities associated with planning, delivering and assessing activities designed to engage students in reflective learning practices.¹⁶ As Ball sums up the situation of modern educators: ‘we are required to spend increasing amounts of our time in making ourselves accountable, reporting on what we do rather than doing it’ (*I-Spy Guide*, p19).

The growing proliferation of bureaucratic positions and ever-increasing administrative burdens upon educators is explained in part by the structural and psychological phenomenon of what Graeber bluntly refers to as ‘bullshit jobs’.¹⁷ Such jobs represent a form of employment tied to neoliberal processes of marketisation ‘that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, and pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence.’ Yet, the employee is ‘obliged to pretend that this is not the case’ as part of their ‘conditions of employment’ (*Bullshit Jobs*, pp9-10).¹⁸ In order to justify and maintain their

Marilyn Strathern, *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*, London, Routledge, 2000.

13. Mark Murphy, ‘Bureaucracy and its limits: Accountability and rationality in higher education’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30, 6, 2009, pp683-695.

14. Paul Gibbs, ‘Higher education as a market: A problem or solution?’, *Studies in Higher Education*, 26, 1, 2001, pp85-94.

15. Susan McGrath-Champ, Rachel Wilson, Meghan Stacey and Scott Fitzgerald, *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning*, Sydney, New South Wales Teachers’ Federation, 2018.

16. Debra Talbot, ‘Evidence for no-one: Standards, accreditation and transformed teaching work’, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 58, 2016, pp80-89.

17. David Graeber, ‘On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs: A work rant’, *Strike! Magazine*, 3, 2013: <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>.

18. According to David Graeber, the jobs of educators cannot be considered wholly obsolete because, like nurses and garbage collectors, ‘were they to vanish... the results would be immediate and catastrophic’ (*Bullshit Jobs*, xix). Whilst

this paper does not endorse Graeber's deliberately provocative framing of bureaucratic jobs as 'bullshit,' it is sympathetic to his project of distinguishing this type of employment from essential public service roles, and to his concerns regarding the pressures that processes of marketisation are placing on those who take up these roles.

19. Eliane Glaser, 'Beyond bullshit jobs', *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, 57, 2014, pp82-94. (Hereafter *Beyond Bullshit Jobs*).

20. Mark Murphy, 'Bureaucracy and its limits: Accountability and rationality in higher education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30, 6, 2009, pp683-695; John Morrissey, 'Regimes of performance: Practices of the normalised self in the neoliberal university', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36, 4, 2015, pp614-634 (Hereafter *Regimes of Performance*). Alkis Kontos, 'The intellectual life', *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 1, 3, 1977, pp59-70.

21. Stephen Ball, 'Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-spy guide to the neoliberal university', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60, 1, 2012, p19.

22. Yancey Orr and Raymond Orr, 'The death of Socrates: Managerialism, metrics and

position, and to sustain a sense of pride and worth in their professional identity, those with bureaucratic roles implement and create further systems of evaluation and surveillance that create an ever-growing list of administrative tasks for educators to complete.¹⁹

THE PRODUCTION OF BUREAUCRATIC SUBJECTIVITIES

The commodification of education practices coupled with the rise of onerous and ineffective practices of top-down monitoring and assessment offers a marked challenge to traditional educator subjectivities.²⁰ The shared ways in which educators imagine their professional identity and role are deeply tied to non-bureaucratic values of autonomy, creativity, community, public service, and trust, and to the non-instrumental pursuit and sharing of knowledge. By contrast, as Morrissey notes, a common goal of contemporary universities is 'to fashion a new academic subjectivity defined by accountability and performance' in accordance with neoliberal values of 'individuality and competitiveness' (*Regimes of Performance*, p615). The traditional Socratic image of the academic who pursues knowledge for its intrinsic value rather than its instrumental value is increasingly substituted with an image of the 'enterprising academic'²¹ who treats knowledge production and transmission as a means-ends endeavour.²² The replacement of a system of 'horizontal self-government' in educational institutions with a 'vertical hierarchy of departmental heads and senior management'²³ challenges traditional visions of educators as trusted custodians of knowledge creation and dissemination, and works to undermine educators' collective self-perceptions as 'stewards of the university, apart from simply 'employees' of it'.²⁴

Bureaucratic structures and the neoliberal imperatives they reflect and sustain have meant that the ability of educators to be autonomous, innovative, and flexible in their professional practice has been significantly constrained (*I-Spy Guide*, p18).²⁵ As Gibbs writes, in higher education contexts, 'the compression of intrinsic educational goals to extrinsic market performance indicators' has transformed 'students into consumers,' and educators into 'service providers' who are expected to only teach those things that 'are instrumental to success in employment'.²⁶ The traditional image of the university as a site for the cultivation of moral, epistemic, and civic virtues has been increasingly replaced by a narrow image of the university as a site for producing employable subjects, whilst a vision of schools and secondary teachers as shaping healthy adolescent development is eroded in favour of a vision that privileges the achievement of high student scores on a narrow range of testing instruments.

In sum, the marketisation and corresponding bureaucratisation of education services are guided by values and imperatives that are significantly at odds with the intellectual and cultural values which have traditionally guided modern institutions of education; values that are overwhelmingly

oriented towards the (non-instrumentalist, trusted, free, and collaborative) creation of knowledge and its preservation.

THE 'IRON CAGE' OF EDUCATION BUREAUCRACY? ANALYSING AFFECTIVE RESISTANCES

Attending to the micro-level experiences of institutional actors is imperative for understanding the obstacles to, and resources for, resisting hyper-bureaucratic trends. As Hallett and Ventresca point out, 'actors are not simply the "carriers" of institutional forces; rather they are the shapers of those forces'.²⁷ Bureaucratic macro-logics 'are negotiated to create different meanings and lines of future action at the micro-level, actions that have consequences for the situation (or organisation) in question' (p231).

The desires, commitments, and behaviour of institutional actors are central to processes of institutional creation, maintenance, and change, and have consequences for the stability of bureaucratic regimes. In the existing literature, some theorists have attended to the micro-level experiences of those subjected to top-down bureaucratic shifts, and how such shifts are (re) negotiated and shifted across time.²⁸ Generally speaking, if bureaucratic orders are to survive and grow, new commitments to, and investments in these orders need to be created among institutional actors. On one view, attachments and allegiances to existing norms and conventions may function to impede the uptake of new systems and inspire active resistance.²⁹ By contrast, from a Weberian standpoint, bureaucratic structures work to produce subjectivities that reproduce these structures in perpetuity: bureaucracy is, overwhelmingly, 'a formal structure of oppressive conformity: the infamous "Iron Cage"' (*Inhabited Institutions*, p220).³⁰ For Weber, this conformity is enabled in part through the processes of affective elimination that accompany bureaucratic practices of rational calculation and instrumentalisation. On this view, 'bureaucracy develops more perfectly the more it is "dehumanised," the more completely it succeeds in eliminating ... all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation'.³¹ In this last, Weber suggests, it largely succeeds. Contemporary theorists agree: as Hamel and Zanini note, 'the bureaucratic ideal' of a 'passion-free workplace' is 'often achieved,' with significant implications for the possibility of collective pushback against encroaching bureaucratic structures.³² These observations lead to the following consideration: To what extent are worries about the 'Iron Cage' of bureaucracy justified with reference to the realm of education; especially with reference to the lived, affective impact of bureaucratic structures on educators?

Despite mounting challenges from bureaucratic forces, traditional visions of educators and educational institutions as dedicated to the creative and autonomous pursuit of knowledge remain embedded in the collective social imagination and serve to attract strong affective investments. Affective attachments – of, for example, pride, admiration, esteem – to traditional

bureaucratisation in universities', *Australian Universities Review*, 2 September 2016.

23. Eliane Glaser, 'Bureaucracy: Why won't scholars break their paper chains?', *Times Higher Education*, 21 May 2015.

24. Yancey Orr and Raymond Orr, 'The death of Socrates: Managerialism, metrics and bureaucratisation in universities', *Australian Universities Review*, 2 September 2016, p16.

25. Peter Carlson and Mark Fleisher, 'Shifting realities in higher education: Today's business model threatens our academic excellence', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 25, 9-10, 2002, pp1097-1111.

26. Paul Gibbs, 'Higher education as a market: A problem or solution?', *Studies in Higher Education*, 26, 1, 2001, p87.

27. Tim Hallett and Marc Ventresca, 'Inhabited institutions: Social interactions and organisational forms in Gouldner's patterns of industrial bureaucracy', *Theory and Society*, 35, 2, 2006, p228. (Hereafter *Inhabited Institutions*).

28. Paul Dimaggio, 'Interest and agency in institutional theory', in L. G. Zucker (ed), *Research on Institutional Patterns: Environment and Culture*, Cambridge, Ballinger Publishing, 1988, pp3-21.

Thomas Lawrence and Roy Suddaby, 'Institutions and institutional work', in S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T.B. Lawrence and W.R. Nord (eds), *Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, London, Sage, 2006, pp215-254.

29. Alvin Gouldner, *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, New York, Free Press, 1954.

30. The original German term used by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905) to describe this phenomenon is *stahlhartes Gehäuse* (literally 'shell as hard as steel'). The 'Iron Cage' in Weber's work forms part of his description of the increasing rationalisation that marks Western capitalist societies, whereby individuals become 'imprisoned' in bureaucratic systems orientated solely towards means-ends efficiency, rational calculation and control.

31. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, New York, Bedminster Press, 1922/1968, p975.

32. Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini, 'Want to bust bureaucracy? Get angry', *Management Innovation Exchange*, 20 December 2016: https://www.managementexchange.com/blog/want-bust-bureaucracy-get-angry_

educator identities are liable to elicit visceral reactions of anger, frustration, and resentment when these identities are perceived to be threatened or compromised. These reactions can be clearly witnessed in the language used by educators to describe their professional experience:

It's not about teaching any more ... We're all required to constantly complete menial tasks so that the person one level above us can tick pointless boxes that demonstrate accountability or implementation of policy 'x' or policy 'y'.³³

All staff are stressed, all productivity is down, jobs, programs and new ideas are all done with a minimum of reflection and are squeezed into an already overcrowded curriculum (p56).

We [teachers] are all about collecting data and evidence, ticking boxes. Our focus is on paperwork and WHS rather than the kids' educational, social and emotional needs ... Our (educational district) director is more like a politician, all he wants is data, but nothing changes in our schools except our increase in paperwork ... (p56)

I believe that the administrative demands ... and all the other useless busy work are detracting from the ability of school leaders and staff to engage creatively and be innovative in the delivery of teaching and learning (p27).

The increase in workload has affected my home-life balance and personal wellbeing. I find my workload intrudes on quality time with my family and I have very little time to care for myself or pursue personal interests or exercise ... (p37).

Thus, the challenges posed by bureaucratic structures to educator identities do not simply produce cognitive dissonance or tension; these challenges are registered at a somatic level. Collective experiences of anger and frustration arising from these challenges are likely to be compounded by institutional expectations that educators in schools and higher education be hyper-innovative and productive in relation to their teaching and research practices, in spite of bureaucratic regimes that place significant constraints on their time and creativity.

A consideration of these issues raises the question of whether and to what extent the affective reactions that are bound up with bureaucratic challenges to educator subjectivities are able to engender collective resistance to intensifying top-down bureaucratic practices. Among the lived experiences that appear to commonly prevail among educators, feelings of frustration and anger towards encroaching bureaucratic structures and neoliberal imperatives have the greatest potential to be collectively mobilised, and to galvanise pushback and

reform. In the popular literature, theorists have identified anger as a critical mechanism of resistance to hyper-bureaucracy.³⁴ As a response to perceived injury or wrongdoing, anger is bound up with desires for recognition and redress. ‘To be angry,’ Bailey writes, ‘is to make a claim on respect’.³⁵ Anger has a strongly motivating aspect that prompts agents to seek out new communities where their anger can be validated and their sense of self-worth restored. Angered subjects are typically motivated to seek out appropriate reparations and resolutions in those contexts where they perceive themselves to have been wronged. In this process of seeking redress and resolution, new possibilities and futures are created: as Ahmed writes, ‘being against something does not end with “that which one is against”’; this is because ‘being against something is also being *for* something’.³⁶

There is good reason to be pessimistic about the transformative potential of educator anger in bureaucratised spaces. Anger comes up against other robust affects (e.g., fear, guilt, shame, pride, and envy) that work to keep bureaucratic practices in place. For instance, individual feelings of anger and frustration are unlikely to be collectively mobilised in contexts where educators are increasingly competitive for positions, promotion, and funding. Fear and anxiety, as well as exhaustion, work to drive out, or encourage the suppression of anger among educators who are subject to an ever-encroaching ‘neoliberal culture of performativity and surveillance’ and a ‘climate of insecurity, individualisation, and of increasing competitiveness’.³⁷

Moreover, bureaucratised spaces and the implicit norms of emotional management particular to these spaces work to prohibit or constrain expressions of strong affect, particularly negative affect.³⁸ As Putnam and Murphy observe, emotion is perceived as inimical to the rational instrumentalisation that pervades and is promoted within bureaucracies, and is implicitly degraded as ‘inappropriate,’ ‘disruptive,’ and ‘weak’.³⁹ Being overcome by grief, anxiety, and frustration at work – especially in relation to one’s conditions of employment – is widely observed to have ramifications for one’s perceived professionalism and opportunities for career advancement.⁴⁰ Institutionalised norms against displays of negative affect are further reinforced by cultures of ‘performativity’ that have emerged from heightened demands for productivity and innovation in teaching and research.⁴¹ Against background conditions of increased competition for resources and promotion, such cultures encourage educators to engage in tactics of ‘presentation and inflation’ and to demonstrate an overt level of enthusiasm and zeal in relation to their work in order to gain a competitive edge (*I-Spy Guide*, p19).

Hence, feelings of anger and frustration rarely find an avenue for expression, validation, and meaningful uptake in bureaucratic settings that demand ‘cool’ professionalism and civility, and which promote positive affective investments in one’s work. Against this normative backdrop, strong negatively-valenced emotions attract disapproval, and elicit affects of shame and embarrassment. Institutional investments in maintaining norms

33. Susan McGrath-Champ, Rachel Wilson, Meghan Stacey, and Scott Fitzgerald, *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning*, Sydney, New South Wales Teachers’ Federation, 2018, p54.

34. Gary Hamel and Michelle Zanini, ‘Want to bust bureaucracy? Get angry’, *Management Innovation Exchange*, 20 December 2016.

35. Alison Bailey, ‘On anger, silence, and epistemic injustice’, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 84, 2018, p96. (Hereafter *On Anger, Silence*).

36. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p175.

37. Breda Luthar and Zdenka Sadl, ‘Communication and emotion in gendered organisations: The hidden transcripts of power in higher education’, in J. E. Canaan and W. Shumar (eds), *Structure and Agency in the Neoliberal University*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p238.

38. Airlie R. Hochschild, ‘Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 85, 3, 1979, pp551-75; Airlie R. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983.

39. Linda L. Putnam and D.K. Murphy, ‘Organizations, emotion and the myth of rationality’, in S. Fineman (ed), *Emotion*

in *Organizations*, Sage Publications, 1993, p36.

40. See Daphna Hacker, 'Crying on campus', in Y. Taylor and K. Lahad (eds), *Feeling Academic in the Neoliberal University*, London, Palgrave, 2018, pp281-299.

41. John Morrissey, 'Regimes of performance: Practices of the normalised self in the neoliberal university', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36, 4, 2015, pp614-34.

42. Eliane Glaser, 'Bureaucracy: Why won't scholars break their paper chains?' *Times Higher Education*, 21 May 2015.

43. Amanda Bell, Diana Rajendran, and Stephen Theiler, 'Job stress, wellbeing, work-life balance and work-life conflict among Australian academics', *Electronic Journal of Applied Psychology*, 8, 1, 2012, pp25-37; Gail Kinman, 'Doing more with less? Work and wellbeing in academics', *Somatechnics*, 4, 2, 2014, pp219-35.

44. Zack Walsh, 'Mindfulness under neoliberal governmentality: Critiquing the operation of biopower in corporate mindfulness and constructing queer alternatives', *Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion*, 15, 2, 2018, pp109-22.

45. Paul Flaxman, Julie Menard, Frank Bond, and Gail Kinman, 'Academics'

of civility and equanimity, and in promoting practices of emotional self-management among institutional actors, can lead to what Bailey describes as the 'neutralisation' of anger within institutional spaces. As she writes, in contexts where one's anger systematically fails to get uptake, it can gain a 'hard/heavy texture' as opposed to a 'hard/rebellious' texture; a heaviness that is 'burdensome, exhausting, laborious, strenuous, and fatiguing' (*On Anger, Silence*, p105). To avoid or cope with this debilitating spiral, academics may engage in the deliberate cultivation of hope; they may convince themselves that 'there will be just one more form, that bureaucracy cannot just carry on expanding'.⁴² This kind of self-protective measure ultimately comes at the cost of pushback against bloated and exploitative bureaucracies; it is, as Glaser notes, one of the ways in which 'productive anger is endlessly deflected and deferred'.

Longitudinal studies in both the United Kingdom and Australia have examined the changing nature of academic work as universities shift more towards managerial structures, and the corresponding impact on the mental health of academics.⁴³ The rise of the wellbeing industry has impacted educational spaces particularly in relation to shifting responsibility for wellbeing away from workplace practises and onto the individual.⁴⁴ Increasingly, Australian universities are partnering with business to supply counselling and coaching services, mindfulness training, yoga, and exercise classes at reduced cost to employees. Employees who express anger and dissatisfaction with their working conditions are strongly encouraged to avail themselves of the services on offer in order to mediate personal feelings of distress associated with their work conditions. Thus, the possibilities for mobilisation of collective anger are thwarted through a heightened institutional emphasis on individual 'responsibilisation'. These institutionally provided opportunities for respite have, moreover, been shown to have little positive effect on levels of emotional fatigue and anxiety for academics, who remain embedded in hyper-competitive, performance-oriented cultures and whose workloads continue to increase.⁴⁵

Aside from robust institutional pressures to engage in emotional self-management, there are further reasons to be pessimistic with regards to the potential for educator anger to be collectively mobilised against bureaucratic encroachment. A robust sense of community and collegiality among educators, coupled with bureaucratic cultures of guilt, resentment, and envy, may work to crowd out angry, resistant impulses and undercut the emergence of anti-bureaucratic solidarities grounded in shared passions and commitments. Graeber and Glaser document in their respective works how those with stimulating jobs and low administrative loads are often the targets of envy and resentment from those with bureaucratic jobs who are forced to engage in endless 'administrivia' and 'busy work'.⁴⁶ The latter are led to envy those with less 'dull' and more 'stimulating' jobs, and tend to 'foster a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable

social value'.⁴⁷ As the target of envy and resentment, the 'privileged few ... feel guilty'; a guilt that is liable to be compounded by a sense that it is one's responsibility to take on an equal and fair share of administrative work to one's colleagues. As Glaser writes, this sense of 'department collegiality' is 'recruited to the task of ensuring that everyone takes a good turn on the administrative treadmill'.⁴⁸ Alternatively, managerial cultures can create conditions where collegiality is replaced by bullying and other forms of incivility towards those seen to occupy a different position on the 'administrivia' ladder.⁴⁹

The dynamics of guilt, envy, pride and resentment serve to divide educators rather than to unite them against a common cause. This division is likely to be exacerbated by generational differences: early stage academics and teachers, accustomed to bloated bureaucracies, are unlikely to share equally in the sense of threat and loss that senior educators may experience in association with bureaucratic regimes.

HYPER-BUREAUCRACY AND BOREDOM: A RESOURCE FOR RESISTANCE?

If a degree of pessimism is called for with respect to the potential for anger to be a key source of affective resistance against intensifying bureaucratic structures, it is worth considering whether and to what extent a role exists for other affects in enabling educators to pushback against the 'Iron Cage' of bureaucracy. In this context we are particularly interested in the transformative potential of boredom.

Within the existing literature, boredom admits of no singular, precise definition. Rather, it presents as a complex, heterogeneous phenomenon, associated with an array of sensations and behaviours. Nevertheless, boredom is commonly and broadly conceived in terms of a mental and embodied state linked to 'emotional flatness' and a lack of vivacity, enthusiasm, and stimulation (*Multitude Strikes Back*, p30). An experience of boredom is characteristically unpleasant, and drives individuals to seek relief from it.⁵⁰ Although boredom bears a family resemblance to depression and apathy, it is marked by 'hopeful and agential' aspects (*Multitude Strikes Back*, p43). As Gardiner notes, boredom 'is a psychic disposition that points to a sense of inchoate lack, disaffection, or frustration *vis-à-vis* the world as it is currently present to us' (p43).⁵¹ Whilst anger tends to have a specific target or object – anger, to recall, is both 'against' and 'for something' – boredom lacks the same degree of direction and intentionality. Boredom 'is the aversive feeling associated with wanting to be engaged ... but not being able to find anything in that moment with which to become engaged'.⁵²

Theorists have distinguished between forms of boredom that are localised and transient, and more pervasive and enduring forms that are linked to a lived experience of meaninglessness and purposelessness.⁵³ Bureaucratic life, we suggest, can be linked to various species of boredom. Common antidotes

experiences of a respite from work: Effects of self-critical perfectionism and perseverative cognition on post-respite well-being', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97, 4, 2012, pp854-65.

46. Eliane Glaser, 'Bureaucracy: Why won't scholars break their paper chains?' *Times Higher Education*, 21 May 2015. David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, United Kingdom, Penguin Books, 2019.

47. David Graeber, 'On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant', *Strike! Magazine*, 3 August 2013; <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>.

48. Eliane Glaser, 'Bureaucracy: Why won't scholars break their paper chains?' *Times Higher Education*, 21 May 2015.

49. Gail Kinman, 'Doing more with less? Work and wellbeing in academics', *Somatechnics*, 4, 2, 2014, pp219-35; Al-Karim Samnani, Parbudyal Singh, and Souha Ezzedeen, 'Workplace bullying and employee performance: An attributional model', *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2013.

50. Maggie Koerth-Baker, 'Boredom gets interesting', *Nature*, 529, 2016, p147.

51. See also Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, London, Reaktion Books, 2005.

52. James Danckert, Jhotisha Mugon, Andriy Struk, and John Eastwood, 'Boredom: What Is It Good For?' in H.C. Lench (ed), *The Function of Emotions*, Springer ebooks, 2018, p94.

53. Elizabeth Goodstein, 'Between affect and history: The rhetoric of modern boredom', in M. Gardiner & J.J. Haldyn (eds), *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2017, pp21-37. Lia Loukidou, John Loan-Clarke and Kevin Daniels, 'Boredom in the workplace: More than monotonous tasks', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11, 4, 2009, pp381-405.

54. As possible evidence of this growing sense of estrangement and futility, recent empirical reports show that teachers harbour weakened aspirations seek school leadership roles. Susan McGrath-Champ, Rachel Wilson, Meghan Stacey, and Scott Fitzgerald, *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning*, 2018, p35.

55. Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2002, p7.

56. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in Hannah Arendt (ed), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, p91.

to boredom – free time, play, creativity, social engagement, unpredictability, and humour – are extinguished by and within bureaucratic structures. As Glaser notes, bureaucracy drains 'interest, thought, spontaneity, and joy from creative and professional work' (*Beyond Bullshit Jobs*, p88).

The institutionally-coerced self-suppression of resistant affects like anger and frustration, and the (likely persistent) failure of these affects to receive collective uptake, is liable to compound the lack of agency and powerlessness which educators may experience in being subjected to top-down accountability regimes and having to engage in endless administrative tasks. Emerging feelings of despair and estrangement among educators that may arise from a lack of conceivable avenues for resistance and change may readily coalesce into a stultifying mode of boredom, marked by an affective flatness and resignation to one's circumstances.⁵⁴

At first glance, the rise of boredom in this context signals the rise of the passionless, dehumanised workplace which, on a Weberian view, represents the perfection of bureaucracy and sustains its operation. Unlike angry educators, bored educators are neither strongly for nor against anything; thus, one might expect from them a greater degree of compliance and pliability. However, boredom has also been thought to contain within it the seeds for resistance and revolt. As Petro writes, boredom may, on the one hand, signal 'disinterest, and apathy – a resignation to the status quo'; yet, on the other hand, it has been associated with 'an uncomfortable yet creative self-consciousness' which might yield 'resistance and opposition'.⁵⁵

Various thinkers have espoused boredom's radical potential to open up space for critical self-reflection and the envisioning of new possibilities. Boredom, as described by Benjamin, is 'the dreambird that hatches the egg of experience';⁵⁶ a precursor of utopian possibility on a meaningful scale.⁵⁷ Kendall notes that for Benjamin as well as Kracauer and Heidegger, there exists a mode of boredom – a more 'radical' and 'profound' mode of boredom distinct from mere tedium – that is capable of interrupting the constant 'state of receptivity' demanded of modern subjects who remain exposed to myriad forms of stimulation and distraction, and which enables them 'to experience time in a different way'.⁵⁸ In doing so, this mode of boredom offers 'space for critical reflection, reverie or revolt' (p83).

Is it conceivable that educators may come to experience a mode of boredom that allows for the conceptualisation of utopian possibilities and revolt against the status quo? The dynamics of bureaucratic structures leave much room for doubt. Profound and radical forms of boredom that allow for 'a temporalised process of self-reflection' (p83) are unlikely to emerge among subjects embedded in modern cultures of anxiety and guilt surrounding 'time-wasting',⁵⁹ and collective attitudes of shame towards failing to be 'perpetually busy': attitudes upon which bureaucratic cultures of 'administrivia' and 'busy work' thrive, and which are satiated by ongoing participation in these cultures (*Beyond Bullshit Jobs*, p92). In other words, radical forms of boredom

and the reflective processes they may induce are unlikely to arise within modern bureaucratic cultures that work to keep subjects in a constant state of receptivity through the mobilisation of shame and guilt. This contributes to the possibility that ‘the opportunities for critical reflection or cultural resistance that were once delegated to boredom’ no longer widely exist (#BOREDWITHMEG, p83).⁶⁰

Yet, as the sense of ‘busy-ness’ offered by hyper-bureaucracies persist in failing to bring educators genuine relief, and in the absence of any meaningful attempt to create and maintain deep investments in bureaucratic logics and practices, the affective weight and lived meaninglessness of bureaucratic life is liable to become unbearable. As Gardiner notes, all ‘mechanisms of exploitation’ have their ‘limits’ (*Multitude Strikes Back*, p39). As a consequence, bored educators who are further and further estranged from the nature of their work may be drawn to look outside the sphere of their employment to recover a sense of joy, purpose, and meaning. Boredom, after all, is unlike apathy: it ‘acts as the impetus to find something to do that is more engaging’.⁶¹ The common turn towards film, literature, sports, theatre, and media in its various forms for sources of meaning and stimulation may not merely function to discharge and relieve feelings of work tedium: as Webb points out, these zones of activity may also function as ‘sites of public pedagogy’ (*Boltholes*, p13). Removed from the confines of measurable and commodified labour, and the temporalised, affective processes associated with this mode of labour, they comprise spaces ‘for experiments in knowledge production, radical imagination, subjectification, and concrete alternative-building’.⁶² The force of this point can be appreciated in light of the fact that imaginative self-horizons and affective investments are inescapably structured by wider socio-material settings and will invariably be shaped and reshaped against the backdrop of these settings.⁶³ If different institutional spaces and cultures form part of the wider backdrop that conditions the collective self-imaginings and affective experiences of social actors, then submersion in concrete spaces and cultures with distinct temporal, imaginative, and affective dynamics may facilitate embodied transformations that can exert pressure upon, and help to reimagine possibilities for action within, institutional spaces that cramp more authentic and satisfying ways of being in the world.

Institutional spaces that offer experiments in different modes of existence thus amount to crucial ‘spaces of resistance’ outside of educational institutions, which can assist to revitalise and reconceptualise avenues for pushback against one’s dysfunctional ‘institutional habitus’ (*Boltholes*, p13). Thus, processes of institutional change in the education sector may arise when bored educators pursue distractions outside the confines of bureaucratic life. To press this point is not simply to emphasise that leisure activities can offer actors a space for relief from the oppressive confines of bureaucratic life, and to reenergise resistance to these confines. Rather, it is to emphasise the importance of boredom in motivating educators to remain submerged

57. Julian Jason Haladyn and Michael Gardiner, ‘Monotonous splendour: An introduction to Boredom Studies’, in Michael Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn (eds), *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2017.

58. Tina Kendall, ‘#BOREDWITHMEG: Gendered boredom and networked media’, *New Formations*, 93, 2018, p83. (Hereafter #BOREDWITHMEG).

59. Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, (trans.) F. Cadel and G. Mecchia, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2009, p82.

60. While some studies in social psychology have relied upon quantitative research methods to ground the claim that boredom can be personally and socially mobilising there remains a lack of qualitative sociological research offering rich descriptions of educator boredom as giving rise to the realisation of Benjamin’s ‘dreambird’.

61. James Danckert, Jhotisha Mugon, Andriy Struk, John Eastwood, ‘Boredom: What is it good for?’ in H.C. Lench (ed), *The Function of Emotions*, Springer ebooks, 2018, p94.

62. Alex Khasnabish, ‘To walk questioning:

Zapatismo, the radical imagination, and a transnational pedagogy of liberation', in R. Haworth (ed), *Anarchist Pedagogies*, California, PM Press, 2012, p237.

63. Danielle Celermajer, Millicent Churcher, Moira Gatens, and Anna Hush, 'Institutional transformations', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 24, 4, 2019, pp3-21.

64. Melinda Cooper, 'Marx beyond Marx, Marx before Marx: Negri's lucretian critique of the Hegelian Marx', in M. R. Pierre Lamarche and D. Sherman (eds), *Reading Negri: Marxism in the Age of Empire*, Chicago, Open Court Publishing, 2011, pp127-47.

65. Writing groups are recognised as effective structures for engaging 'emotion, know-how, and identity', and represent a semi-subversive means of carving out creative time for like-minded educators to meet, discuss and create (see Jenny Cameron, Karen Nairn, Jane Higgins, 'Demystifying academic writing: Reflections on emotions, know-how and academic identity', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33, 2, 2009, p269).

66. See Michael Gardiner, 'A tale of two '68s: The "politics of boredom" in France and Italy', *Cultural Politics*, 15, 3, 2019, pp289-302.

in diverse institutional spaces and cultures, and to remain enmeshed in the distinct temporalities and affective ecologies that are characteristic of these spaces. Such embeddedness is vital for expanding imaginative self-horizons: it is crucial for recalling or reconceptualising what one is 'against' and what one is 'for,' and for recognising new possibilities or pathways for effectively realising these commitments within existing institutional realities.

To retain this embeddedness in distinct spheres is no easy feat, considering the encroachment of increasing bureaucratic workloads upon one's private life, and one's ability and motivation to pursue activities disconnected to one's work. This challenge is compounded by the institutional co-opting or 'recuperation' of activities like yoga classes and other wellness activities that usually take place outside of work and the embodied dynamics of the workplace.⁶⁴ This process of recuperation also extends to creative and embodied worker-led activities (for example, academic writing groups), which are all-too-readily replaced or crowded out by institutionally provided, compulsory opportunities (for example, structured 'writing retreats'), reinscribing a loss of agency and spontaneity among educators.⁶⁵ Given growing trends in the institutional co-option of those very activities that serve to revive a sense of meaning and agency among institutional actors, it is important to recognise that the disruptive effects of educator boredom for hyper-bureaucracies are likely to be slow, roundabout, and incremental, and unlikely to generate any immediate and drastic rupture in bureaucratic practices.⁶⁶

While there is a notable lack of empirical evidence on educator boredom and its connection to processes of institutional disruption, the link between boredom, resistance, and revolt has historical precedent. Hirvonen's reflections on the origins of punk music are particularly illuminating in this context. He documents how those embedded in the punk movement of the 1970s explicitly framed their aggressive, chaotic, and anarchistic musical style as a reaction to the boredom-inducing, orderly temporalities of modern bureaucratic life:

Punk was an absolute deviancy, which resisted the intolerable horror of apathy and the mediocrity of the mode of existence that was pure survival. Being bored out of one's head could be transformed into resistance, into the subversive rupture of the everyday practices of boredom. These spaces of interruptions were places of spontaneous action, subversive events, experiences, surprises, passion, risks, kicks, possibilities, revelations, explosions and shocks ...⁶⁷

Consistent with the emphasis in this paper on the importance of submersion within alternative institutional spaces for diversifying imaginative self-horizons and affective experiences, and for revitalising pushback against hegemonic institutional cultures, Hirvonen writes that the punk movement 'called for a

furiously passionate multidimensional life' and 'a radical transformation of one's way of being in the world' that involved a refusal to occupy the static subject position carved out for actors by modern bureaucratic structures. Punks, he continues, shared a commitment to shaping and re-shaping themselves 'in and through the shared experience of angst, nihilism, anarchy, fury, filth and resistance'.

Within the education sector, the transgressive politics of boredom is beginning to make its present felt in burgeoning 'Punkademic' and 'Edupunk' movements.⁶⁸ Such movements are guided by a commitment to an 'anti-institutional counter-culture' that promotes 'the rejection of mainstream cultural infrastructure' and 'an alternative education system, with its own artefacts, practices and foundational ideologies'.⁶⁹ 'Punkademics' represent those actors that embody and embed anarchistic logics within the space of educational institutions through engaging in everyday, embodied practices of resistance to oppressive institutional confines, and to institutionally circumscribed ways of being. Among other things, such practices of micro-resistance – or 'punk practices' – in schools and in the Academy are characterised by a rejection of the aggressive individualism, careerism, and disembodied, numbers-driven teaching practices that are encouraged by bureaucratic cultures. 'Gonzo' pedagogies, for example, strive to inject spontaneity, creativity, and passion back into the highly ordered, passionless, and detached spaces of research and learning that have become the hallmark of modern educational institutions. 'Gonzo' teachers and lecturers employ performative techniques such as 'personal narrative, exaggeration, and humour' in their teaching and research practices,⁷⁰ and establish more subjective forms of assessment that encourage students to reflect on what their personal lived experiences might have to say theoretically (*Being Punk*, p150). Such pedagogies comprise part of those activities that have been mobilised by Punkademics to assert and maintain more authentic ways of being in mainstream institutional cultures.

The subversive practices described above reflect how 'cultural (including subcultural) subjectivities that are, *prima facie*, external to the immediate academic context nonetheless participate in academics' identity formation, and thus impact upon their approaches to and experiences of academic practice' (p144). We have suggested that experiences of boredom among academics as well as teachers may serve to drive engagement with subcultures and immersion in alternative institutional spaces that offer these actors more satisfying ways of being in the world. The felt contradictions – or 'identity schisms' – that are generated and intensified through one's embeddedness in distinct institutional and cultural orders have the potential to draw greater awareness to the cramping of one's subjectivity within bureaucratic structures (p153). To resolve this contradiction, educators may seek creative ways of embedding countercultures in boring bureaucratic spaces. Thus, the close connection between boredom, bureaucracy, punk subjectivities, and 'punk

67. Ari Hirvonen, 'Punk, law, resistance...No future: Punk against the boredom of the law (3 of 3)', *Critical Legal Thinking*, 11 March 2011.

68. Amanda Heffernan, 'The "punk pock principal": A metaphor for rethinking educational leadership', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 51, 2, 2019, pp117-132. Zack Furness, *Punkademics: The Basement Show in the Ivory Tower*, Wivenhoe, Minor Compositions/Autonomea, 2012.

69. Tom Parkinson, 'Being punk in higher education: Subcultural strategies for academic practice', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22, 2, 2016, p144.

70. Charles Bladen, 'The Gonzo lecture: Counterculture in the classroom', *Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching at the University of Greenwich*, 1, 2010, p38.

practices' opens up the possibility that an unintended consequence of rising bureaucratic structures could be a rising proliferation of Punkademics in the education sector, borne in part out of collective experiences of (and collective desires to evade) stultifying and self-alienating modes of boredom. The demonstrated potential for boredom to be collectively reshaped by social actors as a possibility for action and for pushback against restrictive institutional structures provides support for the suggestion that collective desires among educators to seek relief from boredom may come to overwhelm collective concerns with professional self-advancement, and to galvanise support for resistive practices ('anything to break the boredom').

CONCLUSION

Given the reality of relentless bureaucratic expansion and increasingly circumscribed opportunities for institutional actors to push back against this expansion, this paper has examined the cluster of affects likely to either support and impede efforts to return educators' focus to the creation and sharing of knowledge. We have suggested that the imposition of hyper-bureaucracy and managerialism may give rise to a variety of affective responses, including boredom. On our account, boredom represents both a liability but also a potential resource for the ongoing work of knowledge creation, and for interrupting bureaucratic encroachment. This discussion has sought to trouble the idea that educator boredom may result in a resigned acquiescence among educators to intensifying bureaucratic regimes and exploitative workloads. Indeed, whilst boredom may be experienced as detachment from the central activities of knowledge creation and a growing sense of purposelessness, we have suggested that it may also serve to ultimately revitalise efforts to reclaim those activities.

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