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Academic temporalities: Apprehending micro-worlds of academic work through a photo-serial methodology

## **Abstract**

This article focuses on academic temporalities to consider the rhythms, repetitions and discontinuities of academic work. Using a photo-serial methodology which generated an archive of images taken at the same time of day for a fortnight, we take up material and affective theories to rethink academic work as assemblages or micro-worlds that emerge through happenstance at particular moments. Our nonrepresentational, new materialist approach shifts away from discursive analyses of accounts of academic labour, and from assumptions of visual methods as ‘documentary’ representations of the world. We adopt an emergent, processual and experimental mode of inquiry that works against linearity, and an analytical approach that attends to the ‘punctum’ of images through glimpses, tangents and elusive details. The contributions of this paper lie in its mobilization of images to think differently about the ubiquity and ‘throwntogetherness’ of academic labour, and its theoretical reframing of academic temporalities as composed of affective and material entanglements of events, relations, doings, objects, and spaces of all kinds.

## **Introduction**

As we worked on required revisions for this paper, along with all other elements of daily life, academic labour was thrown into chaos by the need for physical distancing under pandemic conditions where the threat to human life seemed to override all other considerations. Our study preceded the disruption that COVID 19 has forced upon everyone, everywhere, changing (temporarily or not, who knows?) how teaching, learning, research and higher education more broadly are being done, and exacerbating existing fault-lines and fractures in the neoliberal university. Images of academic working lives at home flooded social media (cats on keyboards, happy hour cocktails, backgrounds of exotic landscapes, bookshelves or storage boxes, fleeting children, earnest anxious faces, more or less disheveled professors, and the bodily sag of online meeting after online meeting). Our small experiment in systematically documenting academic life through images provides entry points for the radical rethinking of academic work that has been forced upon us. What the strangely full half-life of COVID 19 lockdown reinforced for us is the relevance of apprehending academic

labour as a dynamic and continuous assembling of affects and materialities, habits and microworlds that are temporally and spatially extensive.

Academic work is understood by universities as entailing particular components that are differentially allocated by seniority, tenure and responsibilities. Time is calculated and distributed across categories of research, teaching, administration/governance/service. Time is disciplined by various workload models, procedures, processes, policies, practices and tools. The underpinning assumptions – that time is quantifiable, standardized and linear – imply that measuring time is not only possible and desirable, but is an essential part of what makes the neoliberal university ‘tick’. Such mechanistic time-distribution processes are established through negotiations with unions, supervisors, faculties and employers, although their supposed equitability is contestable.

While fictions of quantification are sustained through practices of temporal regulation, at the same time academic work has sometimes seemed vague, elusive and difficult to recognize as ‘work’. In usual times, coffee with colleagues or a doctoral student at which bids or research outputs are discussed easily transgress boundaries between ‘work’ and ‘non-work’. End-point metrics are blind to the ‘backstage’ labour involved in achieving publication outputs, grant successes, and doctoral completions. Our research questions arose in the midst of these paradoxes: How and when is academic work experienced? What does it look like, sound like and feel like? What are its habits and practices? What are the temporalities of academic labour? We have previously examined academic labour through narrative accounts, including collective biography (Gannon et al., 2015, 2018, 2019; Taylor et al., 2020), and new materialist frames which decentre the human thereby better to attend to affective flows, forces and intensities and the entangled co-constitution of bodies, spaces, objects and relations (Taylor & Gannon, 2018). This paper extends these directions to find a way to glimpse academic work in the moment, to catch what might have been already in plain sight, but fleeting and easy to overlook. We designed an experiment in apprehending academic work that could address its slippery temporality and paradoxical qualities. This experiment preceded COVID-19 but the paradoxes we explore have only been exacerbated by our changed conditions.

We begin with an overview of academic temporality in higher education scholarship. We identify emerging theories of non-linear temporalities, influenced by affective and cultural

geographies and new materialist thinking. We move to the visual methodology of photo-seriality that we developed to investigate temporal dimensions of academia. We turn then to analyses of images from our experiment that suggest academic temporalities as emergent, temporary assemblages of academic work comprising events, relations, doings, objects, affects, and spaces of all kinds. Finally, we elaborate the contributions the paper makes to studies of academic work. In accordance with our emergent, processual orientation to inquiry, we bring in conceptual resources from geographers, philosophers and higher education researchers at different points through the paper, as and when they are needed.

### **Academic temporalities**

Academic work is porous and many sociologists have noted its seepage into all sorts of times and spaces. It is notoriously impossible to regulate, and the speed and volume of academic work has accelerated within neoliberal discourses of performativity and productivity (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Davies & Bansel, 2010; Hartman & Darab, 2012; Leathwood & Read, 2020; Menzies & Newson, 2007; Noonan, 2015; Vostal, 2016). Conditions precipitated by COVID-19 have extended these tendencies further into our homes and ‘away from work’ lives, and existing pressures have increased. Academics are required to become responsabilised, self-regulating subjects who must manage their time, work spaces, bodies, thoughts and work practices in order to be successful or even survive. Watermeyer’s (2019) notion of ‘competitive accountability’ suggests that the entrepreneurial and performance management regimes of ‘fast’ academia have reshaped academic subjectivities. For precariously-employed academics, these pressures are even more powerfully influenced by what Leathwood and Read call ‘short-termism’ or ‘last minute modality’ (2020).

Academic time does not conform to ‘clock’ or chronological time, regardless of institutional assumptions about its measurement. Academic work is shaped by broader trends towards ‘timeless time’ (Castells, 1996, cited by Hartman & Darab, 2012, p. 52), producing always available, technologically enabled, endlessly flexible workers. In contemporary universities, time is deployed in ways that facilitate productivity – speeding up, slowing down and compressing tasks – requiring self-reliant ‘time management’ workers (Hartman & Darab, 2012, pp. 52-53). Nonlinear academic temporalities are implied in manifestos calling for ‘slow’ scholarship and recognition of academic lives in the ‘fast lane’ (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Mountz et al., 2015). A lack of ‘time to think’ is seen as destroying teaching and research

capacity and is often juxtaposed with a sense of mourning for what has been lost (Menzies & Newson, 2007). Specifically, ‘thought-time’ has been displaced by what Noonan (2015) calls ‘money-time’ driven by the priorities of capital with deleterious effects on academic freedom and the value of teaching, learning and researching for their intrinsic and life-enhancing effects.

Despite the popularity of calls to return to some version of slower academic time, researchers have also sought more complex ways to think about academic temporality. Reconceiving time beyond metric measures and distributive algorithms has required new concepts. Space is always imbricated with time, producing what Massey (2005, p. 140) calls the ‘throwntogetherness’ of the ‘event’, entailing countless negotiations of here and now, and human and non-human. Adam introduced the notion of ‘timescapes’ to emphasise that time, space and matter are ‘inseparable’ and nuanced by context (Adam, 2004, p. 143), a point taken up by Guzman-Valenzuela and Barnett (2013, p. 1122), who characterize the timescapes of academic work as ‘discontinuous, fractured and irregular’, in that simultaneous activities with different timeframes are always underway. There is both a contraction and expansion of time as tasks proliferate and fragment, contributing to a ‘continuous sensation of *incomplete time*’ (Guzman-Valenzuela & Barnett 2013, p. 1126). Similarly, Leathwood and Read (2020) examine timescapes of academic work as embodied, spatial, material, multidimensional, fragmented and discontinuous. Manathunga (2019) outlines doctoral timescapes as multidirectional non-chronological flows. For Vostal, the concept of academic ‘acceleration’ suggests a complex ‘fast forward’ temporality which is multi-faceted, heterogenous and ambiguous. Calls for slow scholarship, Vostal (2016, p. 118) argues, underestimate the ‘subjective subtlety and temporal resourcefulness’ of academic workers who find pleasure and degrees of autonomy within complex modes of acceleration. For Dakka and Wade (2019), the temporalities of academic writing – requiring time and space for reading, thinking and writing - are ‘arrhythmic’ in relation to neoliberal demands for production and publication. While these scholars suggest that academic time is marked by various discontinuities, others note that it also comprises routine repetitive tasks as neoliberal governmentality both expands centralized audit and devolves administrative responsibilities (Davies & Bansel, 2010). The urgency of moving teaching and research online and at home, beyond the physical walls of the university in COVID-19 conditions, has exacerbated these competing pressures and increased academics’ anxiety exponentially.

The affective dimensions of academic time weave through published accounts of academic workers as they juggle tasks, aim to meet the needs of students and the institution, seek the fantasy of ‘work-life balance,’ cope with the demands of digital reputation management, experience shame and fears about futures, and carry the impacts on their bodies (Breeze, Taylor & Costa, 2019; Davies & Bansel, 2010; Shahjahan, 2019). As academics flipped suddenly into online offsite labour, these affective intensities have increased. Most previous studies of the shifting contours of academic labour and its role in the formation of academic subjects emphasise discursivity, that is how academics speak or write about their efforts to manage or to get ahead in academia. Interviews are the preferred mode of data collection and the understandings produced are generated through various modes of discourse analysis.

Drawing on the concept of ‘habit geographies’ in this paper, we turn to the intimacies of how time and space form academic micro-worlds and micro-moments. Given the repeated circulation of advice on establishing habits for working effectively at home that all universities sent their staff at the beginning of the pandemic, this concept seems particularly apt – and will no doubt be even more so as we continue to adjust and habituate ourselves and our students to ongoing hybrid and blended (offline and online) home-university working conditions. As Dewsbury and Bissell (2015, p. 21) point out, the world is made again each day through practices, and ‘habit’ represents all the ‘countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects’. Habits are entirely mundane and material (they occur every day in our academic routines) and elusive (their very reiteration renders them unnoticeable). For Dewsbury and Bissell, ‘habit contracts the past’ and ‘extends the present’ (2015, p. 22). Thinking academic temporalities via habit is analytically productive because habit stands at the ‘necessary threshold of the future breathing down our neck’, and requires us to ask ‘can you do the same thing tomorrow when you can never do exactly the same things twice?’ (Dewsbury & Bissell, 2015, p. 22). The approach we developed to visually apprehend the everyday temporalities of (our) academic work endeavored to work into this paradox. In the following section, we outline the histories of visual methodologies for investigating conditions of labour, before turning to our method of photo-seriality.

### **Photo-seriality as a visual methodology**

Images have long been used in studies of working lives and practices with photography central in early approaches to improving labour efficiency and productivity. A century ago, Frank and Lilian Gilbreth developed elaborate visual apparatuses to document bodily movement with the aim of improving routinized work in factories, worksites and domestic spaces (Cresswell, 2006). These early photographic endeavors explored how worker bodies in motion could be reconfigured and realigned to the needs of the workplace to increase profit, and simultaneously minimise worker fatigue. Time and space came together in this approach as habitual behaviours and movements were documented, analysed and reconstructed for the betterment of industry. Our use of photo-seriality to explore academic working life gestures, on the one hand, towards this early photographic work that documented spatial and temporal aspects of work in order to rearrange bodily mobilities in the service of capital and, on the other, to more recent adaptations of visual methodologies to represent and contest academic work (Manathunga, Selkrig, Sadler & Keamy, 2017; Metcalfe & Blanco, 2019).

The method of photo-seriality that we developed – documenting habits and practices of academic life through periodic visual accounts of what appears to be happening at particular moments – can be located in a tangential line with that early work. Rather than an objective scientific gaze on worker bodies, the images we took are our own, with the ubiquitous mobile phone camera operating as a sort of prosthesis for our eyes. Rather than being the subjects of the camera's gaze, our bodies are strikingly absent in the images we took. While our project could be considered as a type of visual ethnography, it is important to note that we do not see our images as faithful mirrors of physical reality, nor do we think that everything that matters can be apprehended through an ocular sensibility. Instead, our photo-serial method, in attending to the material and affective dimensions of quotidian habits, brings into sharper focus the intimate and localized ‘micro-worlds’ and ‘micro-moments’ of academic work.

We selected a October fortnight, when neither of us was away at a conference or on leave, and a time when neither of us would be teaching, and took a snapshot at 11 am each day. This was a mundane and unspectacular time of day, when we each expected to be part way through an activity. We included weekends as well as designated working days. We set alarms, snapped what was directly in front of us, and uploaded our images daily to Dropbox. The instant nature of the practice bypassed any inclination to design the image, and its instantaneous nature meant that we could not attend to duration. Ironically, what we initially

considered to be a ‘low tech’ method relied entirely on sophisticated contemporary technologies enabling high resolution smartphone cameras, digital cloud storage and instant global synchronization, and was contingent on our imbrication within circuits of global capital with our credit cards having paid for extra storage in the bulging Dropbox accounts that we had come to find essential for collaborations. Later we added fieldnotes, contextualizing and elaborating each of the micro-moments in the images.

As noted above, in developing our photo-serial visual method to explore everyday academic life, we were mindful of the risk of reducing images to mere ‘*illustrative* status’ and were committed to a theoretical stance that refused to ‘apply’ an argument that is elaborated outside and in advance of the image to the image (Traue, Blanc & Cambre, 2019, p. 327). That does not mean we consider the image as a frozen slice of time or an unmediated capture of reality. Rather, our methodology was an attempt to ‘stop, pause and snap’ so that we might apprehend a moment in a way that interrupts the relentless speed and acceleration of academic timescapes. We are, therefore, interested in questions of what the images elicit, what they provoke, what thoughts they produce. In a non-representationalist aesthetic, visibility can be thought of as ‘topological’ or ‘knot-like’ as ‘its surface both reveals and conceals itself’ (Cambre, 2016, cited by Traue et al., 2019, p. 329). As well as accounting for the materiality of the image, including what is seen, how it is framed and focused, the angle and intent, mise-en-scene, mood and saturation, depths and surfaces, the image is oriented to excess. This ‘excess’ is what Roland Barthes seemed to be getting at with his notion of the punctum. Barthes (1980) speaks of the ‘punctum’ of the photograph as the point of an image which jumps out at the viewer and unintentionally fills the whole scene: the punctum ‘pricks’, disturbs or ‘bruises’ our sense but is also something that cannot be pinned down easily, named, coded and ‘solved’. The punctum retains an aberrant quality – its affective entanglements hover at the edge of our knowing. They exceed obvious, rational, visible representations. Given the habitual dynamics which entangle bodies, spaces and time in academic working lives, we thought that attending to how our images disturb us – the ‘punctum’ of our images – offered a useful way forward in investigating the rhythmic, affective and embodied nature of variegated academic temporalities. Although Barthes was interested in the spectacle of the family album, we were interested in the decidedly unspectacular phenomenon of the experience of academic work micro-worlds.



We wanted to take into account both the ‘singularity and the seriality’ of the image (Traue et al., 2019, p. 329). The images were already a series, or two interconnecting series, neither separate from the other through the daily upload and always visible to both of us. We have explored elsewhere how we developed a playful analytic diffractive intervention (Taylor & Gannon, 2018), however here we return to the images themselves to consider what they provoke in relation to academic temporalities. This analytic mode requires us to linger with the images, ask what more can we see, and not see, in and beyond them, and how are we (still) entangled with them now at a temporal distance.

Thus, while photographs are deployed as provocative data points for thinking about academic life, they are not positioned as ‘evidence’ of a time/world that ‘was’ in a realist ontology. Rather, they are happenstance moments that appeared in front of our lenses, moments that emerged, and materialised virtually on our computer screens. This non-representational approach enables us to focus on how the images hint at connections and relations, feelings, affects, atmospheres, sensations, intensities and off-frame elements of what might be happening. While it may seem paradoxical to deploy images (considered as resolutely representational objects in much research) in a non-representational mode of inquiry, this methodological/theoretical line is consistent with our previous work which has sought new approaches and new ways of thinking, sensing and apprehending the world (Taylor & Hughes, 2015; Taylor & Gannon, 2018; Taylor, 2018).

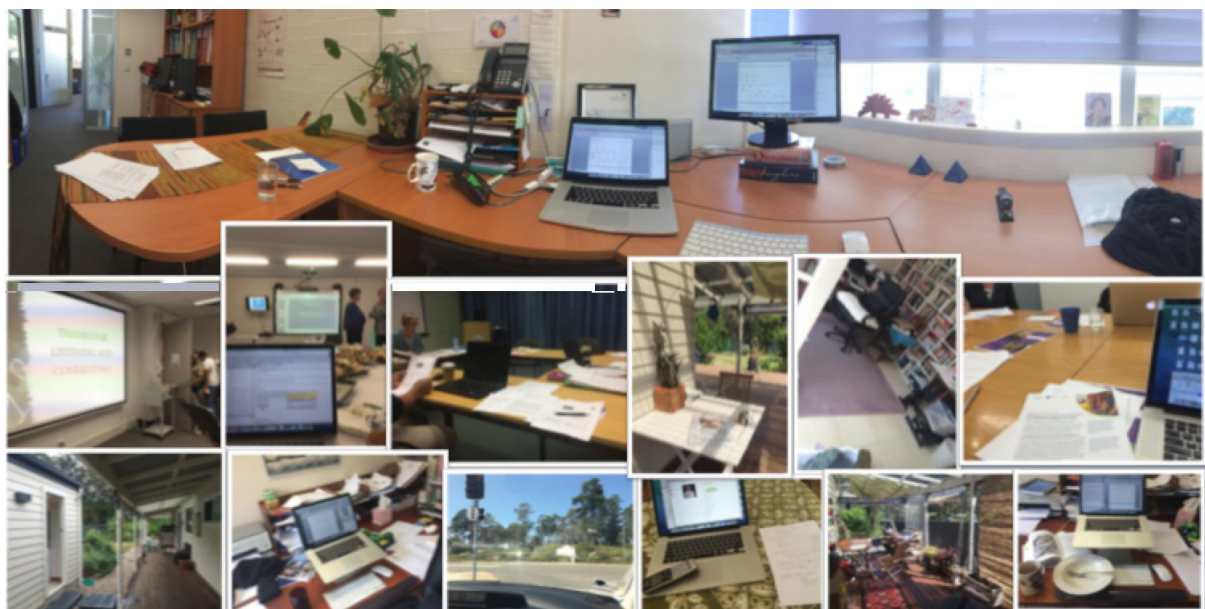
In the following section, we mobilise images to foreground the temporal entanglements and relations of events, actions and doings that are integral to the ordinary everyday of academic life. We consider how the images serve as punctum, to ‘prick’ and ‘disturb’ us, how those disturbances shift beyond the limits of the frame in time and space, how what is ‘there’ is attuned to the ephemeral, to affective flows and intensities, and how these provoke us to attend to the ‘happenstance’ of what is thrown together (Massey, 2005, p. 39). Such moments help us pursue questions including: What academic habits do the images trace? What bodily practices do they portend? What temporal and spatial trails and patterns of academic life do they weave us into?

### **Micro-worlds of academic work**

In this section, we approach the images first as composites, that is, as temporal assemblages suggesting the accretions of academic labour apparently in process at a mid-morning point in time. This approach allows us to consider resonances within the groups of images. We then move to individual images, selecting an image from each set to consider how images trace and portend habits, relations, processes, attunements and atmospheres. As previously noted, we do not use images as a realist ‘demonstration’ of definitive ‘meaning’ but for what they encourage us to attend to and what they provoke about how time is enacted, distributed and performed in the busy rhythms of academic working lives.

*Temporal academic assemblages: Lives of throwntogetherness*

The images in this section are compositions of each set of images gathered over the fortnight. Their arrangement is dictated by the orientation of images, the order of their capture, and how they best fit together spatially. These two compositions suggest the multiple micro-moments of throwntogether academic life, incorporating continuous negotiations between ‘here-and-now’ of the images, and between human and nonhuman (Massey, 2005, p. 140).

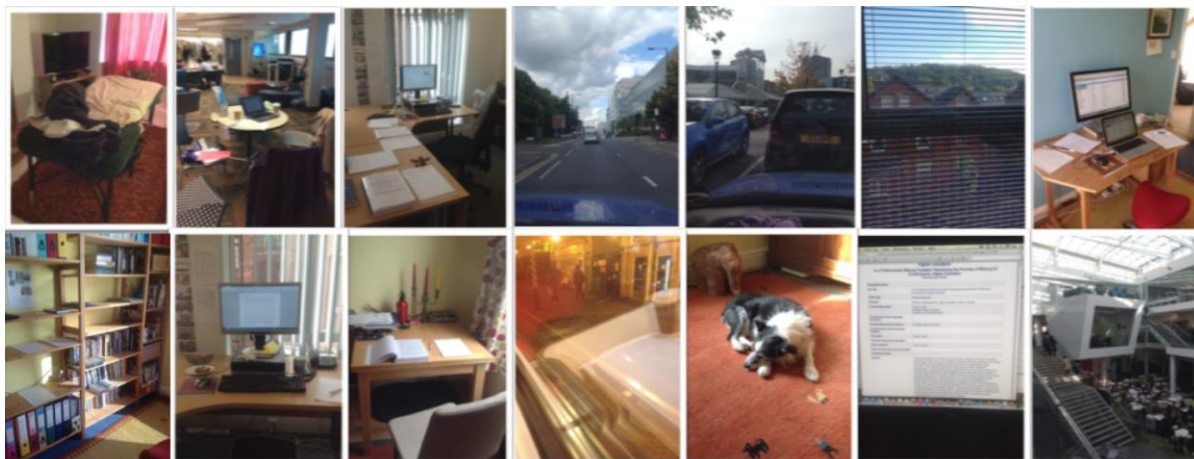


*Figure 1: Author 1's images*

Figure 1 presents a distorted perspective of curves, irregularities of size, angle and alignment. Screens are duplicated across and between images, yet so are wooden surfaces and patches of

sky and light. The image is dominated by the sole panoramic image of the set – an elaborate workplace office desk of different components and extensions with personal objects arrayed across it and on the windowsill. A mug to the left, a hat to the right, and a drooping plant provide signs of non-electronic life. Although paper is evident at the extremities of the desk, the workstation centres on a wireless keyboard and mouse with a laptop, and a desktop monitor mirroring the laptop screen. The impression is of a neat, clean and spacious largely electronic workspace, though in later images – away from the office, at home or in various meeting spaces – surfaces near screens are littered with paper and other objects. There is a body implied here but in absentia, a virtual body lined up with computers, keyboard and mouse – and we sense a body stepped straight back from its workstation recording the image. This is a static scene of how an academic life might be ‘fixed’ in place. Disturbingly, viewing the image again ‘now’ in radically different circumstances and at a temporal distance, that intentional ergonomic office workspace is now locked in to university premises that are vacant and locked down by the pandemic.

Other images in the composition suggest movement, action, processes and relations. Bodies and objects collide and momentarily assemble with the histories, processes, affects and feelings that are out of sight beyond the image’s edges. The second row shows three group meetings, with projector displays, and multiple laptops arrayed on tables, glimpses of bodies between devices. This is a strange together-apartness: while bodies come together in a material space, the laptops are individualised and differentiated portals beyond that space, tethering each participant in a meeting to elsewhere that come at them through emails and browsers, producing only partial attention to the present and the here and now. Despite the contemporary ideal of a paperless office, and the affordances of the laptops, there is paper everywhere: papers, print-outs, handouts, drafts, handwritten notes, walls of books, even newspapers. We wonder is it possible to think academically – that is to read and write at the level that is required of us – without the physical props and tools of words on paper. We notice how the fragmented, discontinuous timescapes suggested by the images include futures to be secured (e.g. draft grant applications, papers-in-process, presentations from PhDs to be) that carry pasts within them (e.g. data collection, budget projections). The material and ephemeral artefacts and apparatus imply all sorts of other unremarked movements, narratives and temporalities. Academic working life comprises these continuously forming and falling away assemblages of events, objects, doings, feelings and spaces.



*Figure 2: Author 2's images*

Figure 2 comprises images that are more regular in size, shape and arrangement. But they include a massage table in the first image and a dog in image 12, implying bodies in pain, in movement, and in relation with other sentient bodies. The massage table provokes the question ‘why’ which brings into its orbit traces of an absent body in the crease of a sheet and crush of a blanket, traces of pain that make us cringe and stretch our shoulders and necks, signaling how the physical pain of academic life – the toil of sitting still at the computer – is enfolded into our muscles and sinews. As in Figure 1, screens, monitors and papers are evident, with the final images foregrounding the dominance of surveillance technologies in academic buildings and workplaces. The penultimate image comprises a close-up of a document on a screen, a focal point indicating what matters in this moment. Also in view is filtered light through blinds giving onto houses and treetops in the distance, curtains and windows. These are the space-times of enclosure, space-times in which the immobile academic body is conditioned by interior air and regulated temperatures. This is in contrast with the image of blue sky and cloud – an image through and of a windscreen, signaling to another invisible enclosure behind it, that of the capsule of the car which, like image 11 and its indeterminate swipe of light and motion, offers bodily memories of motion, movement and travel. These movements stand in opposition to the stillness of the working body and the sleeping dog. Like Figure 1, this series contains multiple images of the technological paraphernalia central to academic life: computer screen and mouse, with worktable and chair positioned directly in front of them to ‘fix’ a body to screentime and worktime.

These two composite figures, generated by the image archives of our photo-series methodology, produce recognition of the ‘throwntogetherness’ of our particular here-and-nows (with their legacies of other ‘thens and theres’) in a particular temporal academic assemblage. Massey (2005, p. 39) refers to such ‘happenstance’ as an ‘arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other, of previously unconnected narratives/ temporalities’. Any other sampling of academic temporalities, of our own in a different fortnight, or by any other academic, would produce different space-time choreographies of bodies, objects, spaces, memories, and affects, that would also resonate and be recognisable *of* and *as* academic life. Thus, the specificities of ‘our’ photo-series temporal assemblage intersects with other potential assemblages and points to a need to recognise time and space as processes and entanglements that enact continuous becomings.

What is striking in these images, taken at 11 am across a fortnight of academic life, is that few (image 1 of Figure 1, and only images 3 and 9 of Figure 2) are located at official workstations. As mobile workers, we were already required to drive (image 10 in Fig 1, image 4 in Figure 2) to many other locations in our multi-campus institutions for meetings with research students and colleagues (image 2, 3, 4 in Figure 1, image 2 in Figure 2). We have long had the privilege of working off site, a privilege that some academics have considered a ‘right’ deriving from the professional status of a still-elite occupation, others a boon borne of the flexible time economy of contemporary academia which displaces home/work/leisure boundaries, others a temporal tyranny for the same reason. As an academic continuous availability has become a COVID 19 imperative. However as images from our weekends in pre-coronavirus times, official non-working days also attest to the temporal extensiveness of academic labour. At 11 am on both Sundays we are each ensconced in home workspaces: image 6 in Figure 1 taken through a doorway suggests entry into the home office to start work on Sunday morning, while image 6 in Figure 2 is a view of park and roofs through the home office blinds. Likewise, both 13s suggest subjects in the midst of academic writing projects on weekends.

These two image composites indicate how academic temporalities manifest as ‘habit geographies’: in bodily stillness tied to technology; in movement patterns hustling bodies between known and unknown academic spaces; and in non-work arrangements (massage) that do not simply support but enable academic bodies to be bent into the predictable shapes required by contemporary forms of academic labour.

*Temporal folds: the crumpled time/space rhythms of academic labour*

We turn here to close analysis of two individual images, each of them image 13 in the respective sets of images. In this second pass through the ‘data’ of our project, we take up Deleuze to think about academic temporality as a folding of time and space. Deleuze’s notion of the fold enables another means to apprehend the crumpled time-space rhythms of academic work. The two images we have selected reference academic writing practices and invite consideration of the ways in which academic temporalities work to condense, contract and expand events, relations and affective investments. For Deleuze (2006), the fold was a means to think outside dualisms, for example, of time and space, body and mind, inside and outside, intensive and extensive. Folds disrupt dualisms by enfolding ‘separate’ qualities into ‘continually differentiating relation through their continual movements, mixings and morphings’ (Taylor, 2019, pp. 1-2). With respect to academic temporalities, the fold, folds, and folding, help us conceptualise the ways in which the intensive time of now (‘now’ as micro-moment) is enfolded with larger, longer, faster and slower scales that produce academic work as a form of ‘scrumpled geography’, which is Doel’s (1996) phrase for timescapes which entail patterns of disjunction and disadjustment. Thinking of time via folds complicates easy presumptions of time as linear, of academic careers as uni-directional, and of academic work as on a forward conveyor belt of onward progression. We explore the folds of time – how academic temporalities are heterogeneously folded – in the scrumpled timescapes which emanate from the two following images.

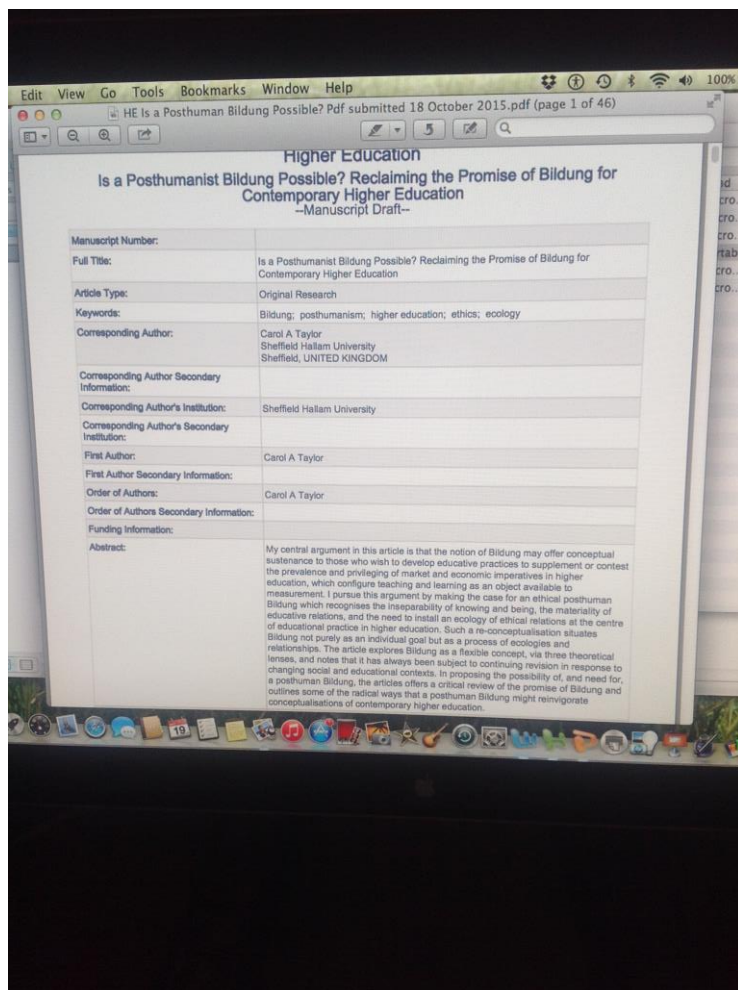


Figure 3

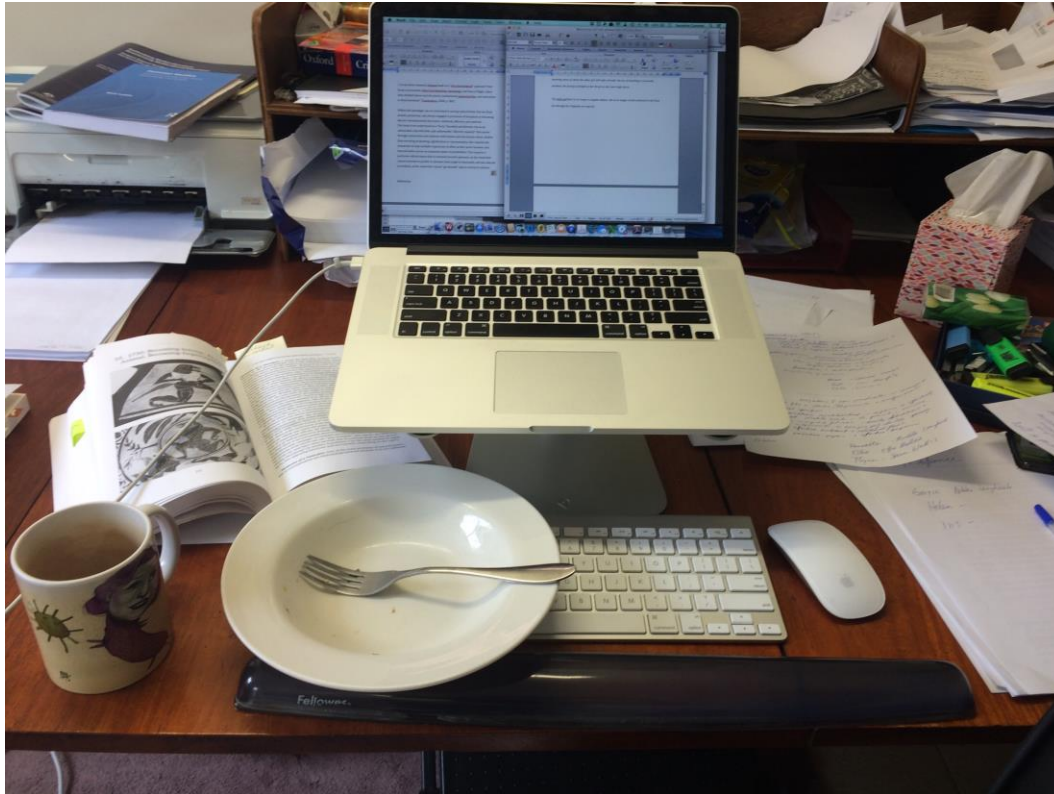
Figure 3 (figure 13 in composite image 2) is an image of a computer screen showing the pdf version of a just submitted academic paper. It suggests one of the joys of academic labour, a micro-moment of completion as a text is submitted to a journal and the academic worker takes a shorter breather before moving on to other priorities. As an event in one's academic temporal landscape, that particular moment of pressing 'submit' is an affectively intensive 'now' – a moment in which joy (it's gone!) mingles with relief (thank goodness it's sent) mingles with exhaustion (phew, I can relax after that mad rush to finish it) mingles with worry (Is it good? Is it good enough? What will others think of it?) mingles with anticipation (how long will it be before I hear back?) mingles with the mundane materialities of the return to routine (putting books back on the shelf, tidying the desk, taking cups and plates down to wash, disposing of chocolate wrappers). This momentary *now* – experienced after the time-consuming and finicky labour of checking that all aspects of the paper are fine (References? Keywords? Topic sentences? Argument? Spelling? Correct length? Abstract?), and all the



information needed for submission is to hand (Bio? Grant information?) – has a quality of haecceity about it. As Gale (2018, p. 35) explains, this concept from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) ‘designates a unique assemblage of moments and movements that come together as a set of relationalities’. Thus, the author enters into relations at a distance, mediated by the text of the article itself, with all sorts of human and non-human others. These include relations with the technologies of submission portals, algorithms suggesting potential reviewers, longer term metrics such as citations and impact factors, and commercial arrangements with the corporations who own these products of academic labour. They also include anonymous relations with other humans, including editors and reviewers, and the heterogeneous processes of time itself. In this image – this ‘now’ – all of these relationalities beyond the computer screen are a black void as, in some ways, is the time of academic writing itself. Such time has a different modality, manifesting as event-ful or kairotic time, materializing as a momentary haecceity rather than a linear chronological sequence.

Kairotic time spools out simultaneously in multiple directions forging novel, unforeseen and ephemeral relationalities. Writing is impossible to predict, we don’t ever really know where ideas will ‘take’ us even if we have a plan and, in the writing, in the process of seeking publication, in the multiple phases of rewriting and resubmission, submission elsewhere, or even abandonment of the paper, other haecceities can and do ensue. Writing is a particularly central component of academic work and is enfolded with how time expands and contracts unexpectedly. Writing time always exceeds and escapes the linearities of clock time although neoliberal technologies (such as the UK Research Excellence Framework and the Australian Education Research Assessment) insist that we produce x number of outputs in a given timeframe that can be demonstrably measured as ‘high quality’. In the instance of writing on screen in Image 3, the paper took 7 months to write, was submitted in October 2015, appeared online ahead of print 5 months later in March 2016, and was allocated to an issue in September 2017 almost two years after submission. In the nonhuman-human technological time-space enfolding since then, it has gone on to generate its own virtual ‘achievements’ on Research Gate via recommendations, citations and downloads. The point to be made, then, is that the moment of ‘submit’ is but one ephemeral instance, albeit a joyful moment of frisson, folded into the ever-new but habitually-known temporal assemblages and scrumpled geographies of academic routine.





*Figure 4*

Figure 4 (figure 13 in composite image 1) also shows a computer screen and a writing project. The laptop hovers on a stand over a mess of papers, books, keyboard, mouse, gel wrist rest, tissues, pens and dirty crockery. Multiple documents are open on the screen simultaneously. The wooden table that serves as an office desk is crowded with printer and various stacks of paper. The implied body that extends outwards from this image has bodily needs and failings. The intellectual work of articulating and organising ideas is inherently messy. Although the text on the screen is not discernible, the open book on the left is Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* open at the beginning of 'Plateau 10: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible'. The image implies that the academic writer is in the middle, working with screen, keyboard, hand-written notes and partially written document, struggling to bring disparate ideas together. This image signals that academic stories are always composites where theory (some theory, which theory?) comes in to frame accounts that otherwise might risk being considered too straightforward, simple or naïve.

The 'now' of this Sunday morning anticipates an impending conference ten days away, co-organized by the author. Rather than performing a well-rehearsed presentation or presenting from an already published paper, the author struggles to get a new text ready, taking a new

pass through interview data, looking for form and logic and a way to get a new purchase on the phenomenon of interest – the affective intensities of beginning teaching in high poverty and increasingly residualised public schools. The image is infused with intercorporeal intensities and saturated with affects, including anxiety and shame if the paper is not ready or not good enough. Relations extend to those teachers who shared their trajectories into (and often out of) the teaching profession, to peers in her own university and scholars from other universities who are anticipated as an audience for always risky academic performances. The life of this nascent text extends beyond this moment and the imminent conference to a chapter in a book proposal that traversed continents, reviewers, other authors, editors, commissioning editor and commercial publisher, that mutated in form and argument through multiple drafts and revisions, until finally, it was ‘delivered’ as a book manuscript in December 2017, more than two years later, for 2018 publication. Academic writing is a labour of body, mind, imagination, desire, patience and persistence. The relatively smooth moment of ‘submit’ masks the messy labour entailed in producing that which can be submitted, and ultimately published, and the disparate resources that are required for this. These include uninterrupted Sunday mornings and a room of one’s own in which to undertake this messy work of writing, and the leap of faith into the future that makes academic labour in the present bearable.

## **Conclusion**

We have argued that the approach of photo-seriality, developed as a bespoke methodology for our project on the micro-worlds of academic work, produces some keen insights into how academics are imbricated moment to moment in the accelerated timescapes of neoliberal universities. This visual approach offered an opportunity – a ‘punctum’ in Barthes’ terms – to pause the relentless onrush of performative time, to consider what ‘time-management’ requires of academic subjects, and to glimpse how nonlinear temporalities structure our work. Moments such as pressing ‘submit’ on a journal portal or drafting a conference paper on a Sunday morning expand and extend beyond the chronological moment in uneven and unpredictable temporal enfoldings. We suggest that images offer a different way to draw attention to the significance, ubiquity and banality of everyday academic work, to its habit geographies. They show how we produce and are produced as academics by the space-time patchiness of academic life. While academic work seems to happen everywhere and all the time, alongside the pressure and compulsion to produce, our archive of images also suggests

degrees of autonomy and perhaps even pleasure that are sometimes available to (some) academics. However, in the stratified academic workforce, such work often goes unacknowledged, unrewarded or unrecognized as crude approaches to measurement take precedence, and the small joys of academic life are further eroded by precarious and performance-based contracts.

Now, along with all else in human lives as we have known them, academic work has been upended by COVID 19. From 'here' and 'now', our images also suggest the privilege of having spaces in which we can work, and habits that set us up well for working from home. In the anxieties and pressures of what at least for the foreseeable future looks like it will be the 'new normal', our screens are more likely to be populated by the talking heads of colleagues and students on Zoom than they were 'then'. This renders the disjointed, excessive timescapes of academic work that we were interested in when we began this project even more pertinent. In the time-space of pandemic, we keep on as best we can revising papers, meeting deadlines, 'attending' meetings, speaking to students, and imagining a distant zone when academic activities that meant something when we began our inquiry – writing grant proposals, drafting papers – might be possible and perhaps even meaningful again.

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