



Come to the cabaret: Voices from the modern university

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Abstract

This article creates and curates a sequence of cabaret songs to represent recognizable characters or types from the scholarship and literature of the modern, neoliberalised university. Using poetic enquiry as an ethnographic technique, I stand at the border of practice-based qualitative and performative research paradigms and re-imagine such figures as the ninja, the nervous wreck, the precariat, the zombie and the activist as characters in the cabaret of the modern university. The enquiry has two primary groundings: the comprehensive literature of the increasingly toxic modern university and a sociocultural critique of the *Kabarett*, the underground cabarets of the Weimar Republic of the 1920s and early '30s. The art of the cabaret involved writing and performing satirical portraits of familiar types seen in society and the world.

The expressionistic era of the *Kabarett* was a time of decadent creativity and unashamed freedom of voice, an era that reached eventual termination after the rise of Nazism. Foregrounded by an exploration of the features of the modern university, including its corporatism, its performative audit culture, its governmentalised hegemonic regimes of truth and its climate of anxiety and fear, the study traces the origins of its types and aims to replicate aspects of their identities. The research examines both the origin stories of ninjas, nervous wrecks, zombies, precariats and activists and interprets their identities in the satiric form of subversive *Kabarett* songs. The findings of this study can literally be performed. The study also reaches back to medieval and Renaissance drama to examine and critique my dramatic narrative voice. The ironic eye with which I view this cabaret aligns with that of Puck/Robin Goodfellow in Shakespeare's *A midsummer night's dream*. This ironic eye examines the denizens of the neoliberalised universities and declares, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

Keywords: Academic identity; cabaret; free speech; neoliberalism; performative research; poetic enquiry; satire.

Introduction

This study originates from my deep immersion in the literature of the 'modern' university with its roots in German exchange (Levine, 2021), the 'university' itself, of course, dating back to 11th century Bologna and grounded in law and, later, theology. The 'modern university' is known by other names: the 'modernized' (i.e. messed around with) university (Soares, 2002), the neoliberalised university with its audit culture (Sparkes, 2007), zombie economics (Quiggan, 2010) and capitalistic cult of performance (Micali, 2010); the university in ruins (Readings, 1996); the multiverse 'schizophrenic university' (Shore, 2010); the 'toxic university' (Smythe, 2017); 'dark academia' (Fleming, 2021), 'dystopia' (McBride, 2022), 'the troubled university' (Hil, 2012) and most comical of all, 'whackademia' (Hil, 2012). The latter is close to the university depicted in David Lodge's satirical trilogy of astute campus novels such as *Nice Work* (1988, subtitled *An academic romance*), presciently played out against the Thatcherite corporate cost-cutting that we still experience today (Blackham, 2020; Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023). Before I invite you to come to the cabaret to meet the characters of the modern university, I will, in lieu of the literature review of ordinary research, take you on an artistic audit (Hasemann, 2006) of the terrain.

Artistic audit

The modern university

Reviving the term 'modern university', Levine has a current project entitled *Rehabilitating the university as a public good* (Stanford, 2021), arguing that leaders of the modern university need a chameleonic entrepreneurial self that encompasses the scholarly, the social and both the political and the economic. Such a protean figure may not yet exist in the *dramatis personae* of the modern university, but it is a pleasing thought to imagine a return to the fruitful utopia of academia, where the key figures were the professor and the student; where there may be a theoretical space for the 'ethical academic' (Barrow & Xu, 2021) and where the 'pipeline' from academic to professor (Spina et al., 2022) might exist if the path were not littered with human and

technocratic obstacles.

However, regardless of how we negotiate conflicting discourses, frame our agency and leverage entrepreneurial technologies of the self (Barker, 2017; Barrow & Xu, 2021; Varea et al., 2021) or care of the self (Foucault, 1986; see also Ball & Olmedo, 2012), make no mistake: this is a *war* on higher education (Giroux, 2019). Put bluntly, universities are increasingly managed and neoliberalised, corporatising and commercialising universities and bringing with it corporate cost-cutting (Blackham, 2020) and building real estate empires instead of funding academic positions (Andrew, 2023). Baumann (1999) taught us that climates of fear and uncertainty are not inevitable results of time cycles but creations of human power. Foucault (1980) taught us about a society's regimes of truth: the mechanisms determining and sanctioning truth and falsehood depend on the degree of privilege and status of those "charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Andrew's (2023) case study of a neoliberalised university in New Zealand suggests multiple stakeholders close to the university have vested interests in the full truth remaining hidden. As Spina et al. (2022) wrote in their analysis of the subaltern precariat: "discourses privilege certain perspectives, while creating discursive prohibitions around other points of view in specific times and places" (p. 535). It is with these discourses and perspectives that I play, inviting you to the cabaret.

Types of the modern university

Scholars within the subgenre of university critique have developed their own *dramatis personae*, a list of types who dwell in the fictional domain of *Academe*, a term which itself evokes that quaint and nostalgic sense of an Arcadian past. Despite ultimately being a story of agency and self-governance, Parker's 2017 article "Ninjas, zombies and nervous wrecks?" in particular offers three clearly recognizable types of the modernized university. Indicating the two main interpretations of the zombie, Ryan (2012) had already asked whether academic zombies are a failure of resistance or a means of survival. Acquiescent, they push on because they need the work, conforming with compliance and audit. The human anxieties embodied in the zombie are globalisation anxieties and fear of mass control. This is because, as Molpeceres (2017) wrote, "the zombie is a brainless being unable to understand, explain or judge the surrounding world" (p. 161). As Deslandes and Adamson (2013) note, the zombie in the literature of the modern university represents the deadly hand of capitalism and the "life sucking practices of institutional bureaucracy" (p. 69) but remains cognizant. Zombiedom infuses all aspects of the modern university (Whelan et al., 2013). Like all the types in the cabaret, zombies evoke "myths [that] appeal to our unconscious cognitive frames" (Molpeceres, 2014, p. 86). Similarly, the jaded nervous wreck is a composite of the figures described in the literature of increasingly serious sickness (Gill, 2009; Fanghanel, 2012; Acton & Glasgow, 2015), even death and suicide (Fleming, 2021; Treagar et al., 2022). Literature also describes those in the third space, more professional than academic but synergetic just the same (Whitchurch, 2013) and also often precariat. Academic developers, digital education specialists and student support

are increasingly shoehorned in this subaltern space.

Speaking of the subaltern, literature characterizes the impermanent, insecure, powerless, precariat (Standing, 2011; Blackham, 2020), doing the 'housework' and always on the edge of obtaining or losing tenure or work itself (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023). They are typically "undervalued, overused, and stigmatized" (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023). Barcan (2013) and Spina et al. (2022) suggest that the disillusioned mid-career precariat may be more impacted by a neoliberalist ethos than a more entrepreneurial 2020s post-doctorate precariat. Precarity was once a stepping stone to academia, but latterly it has become a prison (Spina et al., 2022) with sessionals "a legion of lost souls" (Whelan et al., 2013, p. 69). The young precariats, the new graduates with one foot on the ladder, are still driven, enticed and aspirational, even hungry for tenure. They are given titles like 'Teaching Fellow' and they still negotiate, even embrace the challenges and contradictions (Barrow & Xu, 2021; Varea, et al., 2021). Some of these early career researchers are characterized as superheroes like the Powderpuff Girls with their 'liquid' subjectivities (Varea et al., 2021) – at least in nations such as Argentina, where such agency might still exist. They are agile bodies, "robust, resilient, responsive, flexible, innovative, and adaptable" (Gillies, 2011, p. 210). Such young precariats need to be extraordinary to secure ongoing work. Such academics are 'superheroes' (Pitt & Mewburn, 2016) or 'rockstars' (Smyth, 2017) but still types of the toxic university.

Types

Carl Jung (1970) saw archetypes as personages who embody the universal traits of readily identifiable characters. He initially identified a group of four, which I present here with how I realise them in parentheses: the persona (*our mask, how we present ourselves to the world*), the shadow (*our repressions such as secret desires and weaknesses and our instincts and orientations*), the anima/animus (*our projected – and gendered – self and our gateway to collective consciousness*), and the self (*the individuated site of the unification of our unconscious and conscious where the ego meets the personality*). Jung famously declared that all the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes (Jung, 1970). The modern university has its fair share of these: the fastidious micromanager, marked by an inward deep feel of failure; the tweedy professor, spurring forth either archaic or arcane discourse in words of no fewer than four syllables; the owl-like office administrator, characterized by a hawkish eye for detail and a marked efficiency shown in their clipped voice. I just made these examples up out of thin air, except it is not thin air, but from our shared experience of people seen in the modernized university.

Situated at the intersection of the mystic and the pseudoscientific, I need to go no closer to illustrating the legitimacy of the concepts of collective unconscious and the archetype. These types are memories from my own personal unconscious, grounded in my own experience. They are products of my experiential learning, presented as personages in an evocative autoethnography. In Jungian terms, my own consciousness recognizes and represents

figures from the external world into visible reality. Those specific but overlapping and unfixed figures identified by Jung may be listed as Ruler, Creator/artist, Sage, Innocent, Explorer, Rebel, Hero, Wizard, Jester, Everyman, Lover and Caregiver. Molpeceres (2017) links Jungian types and myth: "If... myths and archetypes are activated when needed in a particular society, then the study of myths will allow us to discover and understand the fears, worries, desires, and aspirations of that society" (p. 152). For Jung, an individual's goal was to achieve a cohesive self, similar to Maslow's 1943 needs-based concept of self-actualization. Late-era Maslow (1987) emphasized that human behaviour has multiple motivation points: "any behavior tends to be determined by several of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them" (p. 71). The characters in my cabaret actualize themselves, and perhaps their multiple needs, through their songs, but I intend them to be recognizable as types of the modern university, made up, perhaps, of parts of any of the above, and all with penetrable personae, animus, shadows and selves.

Drama and irony

The 15th century medieval morality play, epitomised by *Everyman*, predates Jung by centuries but contains a trope that informs how the characters of my cabaret represent themselves. In *Mankind*, for instance, there appear Mercy, Mischief, Nought, New Guise, Nowadays, Mankind, and Titivillus (the devil). By way of both characterization and exposition, characters typical of vices and virtues soliloquise their identities to an audience already literate in the tropes and typologies of the drama. Collective literacy enables audiences not only to recognize the physical and rhetorical characteristics of types but also to understand the drama as an allegory; that is, they are invited to see themselves in *Everyman* as he comes to understand the death and fate of his human soul (cue Ball, 2003). *Everyman* is torn between the Seven Deadly Sins pulling him one way and the Four Daughters of God (Mercy, Justice, Temperance, and Truth) pulling him the other. It says much about the world today that few of us could name God's imagined daughters, but most could muster the seven deadly sins, largely due to our uncanny familiarity with the 1995 David Fincher film *Se7en*. The moral trait of moderation, the key message of many morality plays, is followed by few in our age of the neoliberalised university, powered by corporate greed and populated by academics vainly seeking to publish, not perish, and vice chancellors coveting another university's position on the league table or more acquisition of real estate (Baldwin, 2021; Andrew, 2023).

Of the many vernacular morality plays known to have existed in English, few survive, and today what we chiefly know are the Seven Deadly Sins and Faust. The Faust story, allegorized in the literature of the modernized university as the scholar's sacrifice to business greed (Ball, 2003; Shore, 2010), remains the best-known morality, stimulating generations of audiences, including Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604). *Mephistopheles* in Goethe's *Faust* (trans. George Madison) disguises himself as a starveling and embarks on a moral tale about greed. Before it turns into a misogynistic tale, the Starveling speaks like the stock character of Greed (*Avaritia*):

When hearth and home were women's zone,
As *Avaritia* I was known.
Then did our household thrive throughout,
For much came in and naught went out!
Zealous was I for chest and bin;
'Twas even said my zeal was sin.
(*Faust*, II.iv)

In drawing on the morality play, I return to a dark place in academia visited previously (Andrew, 2019), where I use the tropes of the morality play *The castle of perseverance* as a method of presenting my autoethnography and the metaphor of the post-mortem as a forensic method of analysing findings like entrails. I used a *Hamlet-like* persona to evoke the ills of the ruined university. A different Shakespearean persona is at play in the present article. In 1595/6's *A midsummer night's dream* (III.ii), Puck, the play's narrator, a sprite-cum-henchman for Oberon, King of the Fairies, observes the romantic confusions of two bickering pairs of human lovers and declares, "Lord, what fools those mortals be!" (I.117). Like a morality play figure, Puck is also known as Robin Goodfellow, so his basic goodness, despite his playfulness, is signalled to the audience early on. Yet his status as a supernatural is shown in his eye-of-God envisioning of the stupid humans from an otherworldly domain, resulting in a good-natured satire. Like King Lear's fool, we know he is the speaker of truths, both jester and sage. Channelling mischievous Puck, but not leaving Hamlet entirely behind, I invite you to come to the cabaret.

The all-knowing Master of Ceremonies of *Cabaret* (such as Fosse's 1972 film) curates the presentation of the show, just as I, as a researcher, present a sequence of the types of the modernized university, playing chess with the protagonists. The metaphor of the chess game as an allegory for action playing out for protagonists is a recognizable trope of allegory in popular culture. The credits for the television series *The Aphrodite inheritance* (Bird, 1979) showed somehow omniscient hands moving chess pieces, hinting that the three protagonists are types of Greek gods. The trope had been cleverly used by Thomas Middleton in both *A game at chess* (1624) and the Jacobean tragedy, *Women beware women* (1621/1657; II.ii) as an allegory of the battle of virtue and vice in the character of Bianca, who turns out not to be so white. At the time of encountering revenge tragedy, I was well into a combined arts and social sciences degree. An inverted *Midsummer night's dream*, where the masque had been a celebration of the normalizing power of marriage, *Women beware women* contains a marital anti-masque of mass murder where the lustful and borderline incestuous Hippolito is shot by cupids bearing poisoned arrows before falling on his own sword. The character's name recalls Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons in *A midsummer night's dream*, and the sinister cupids seem like blackly comical parodies of Puck. All is not as it may seem in these human chess games, so come to the cabaret.

Das Kabarett

Das Kabarett, cabaret, was an expressionistic place for subversive identities in the Weimar Republic of 1920s Germany (Wouilloz-Boutrois, 2021). The late '20s Weimar

was a rare moment in time and place where glimpses of real people could be had, in this case, in lyrical underground satires. This was an era of unprecedented freedom of expression and speech, but it was very place-specific. The epicentre of this Bohemian cliqué was the monocled lyricist Marcellus Schiffer who “targeted the snobbish, upper-class bourgeois, whose weaknesses he revealed bluntly and humorously with wicked charm” (Wieland, 2011, p. 71) but not ideology. The fact that these kinds of freedoms are under threat as the 2020s cave in serves as a reminder to us that 100 years on, we have learned precisely nothing (Cantu & Lambert, 2023).

Simultaneous with the Kabarett, but in a slightly parallel universe, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill were collaborating on theatrically innovative socio-political satires like *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928, *The Threepenny Opera*). Socio-political satire, represented with vivid expressionism and Lotte Lenya, was a powerful mix. By 1933, Friedrich Hollaender, one of several masters of the Kabarett, was one of the many Jewish artists of the period who fled Germany to write songs for Hollywood films. Austrian Jew Max Reinhardt, director of the satiric cabaret revue *Schall und Rauch* (*Sound and smoke*, 1929) and of annual productions of *Everyman*, fled too, making his renowned *A midsummer night's dream* (1927, 1934) into a film (1935). Another fled Jew, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, composed the score. Mickey Rooney was Puck, wondering at what fools these mortals be.

As the roaring 20s depressed their way into the 30s, we now can hear the imminent danger of Nazism in increasingly allegorical songs like Frederick Hollaender's terrifying composed lyric “Münchhausen” (1931), which captures the transition from days of freedom to the coming of the swastika. In strophes, it relates anecdotes about the impact of an authoritarian culture steeped in lies on ordinary people. Narratively, this elegiac song epitomises one key feature of the cabaret songs of this period: the use of first-person personae (“I” and “we”) to record experiences and impressions and to capture identities.

Singer (2000) reflects that for a brief window in '20s Berlin, you could enter Kurt Robischek's Cabaret of Comedians (*Kabarett der Komiker*, *The Comedian Cabaret*, popularly called *KadeKo*). It was the embodiment of big-city attitudes towards life (Wieland, 2011), and Schöneberg's queer district still dominates today. Lareau (2011) writes that it embodied the cosmopolitan spirit of the Kurfürstendamm, with a whiff of Viennese elegance. Here, the music of Mischa Spoliansky rang out in clever collaborations with the scriptwriter and lyricist Schiffer (Wouilloz-Boutrois, 2021). Song after song satirised, often in *Sprechstimme* (*spoken voice*), identity-unfurling first person soliloquies, often mocking super cool Berlinites and members of the smart set of the Spoliansky song “(Das) Gesellschaftslied” (“The social song”/ “The smart set”). A satirical lyric soliloquy, Spoliansky's “Ich bin ein Vamp!” (“I'm a vamp!”) satirises the movie-struck fantasies of an average young woman who aspires to be like Theda Bara, while “Sex appeal” (no translation needed) does the same for a Garbo aspirant.

Spoliansky's remarkable “Das lila Lied”/ “The lavender song” (lyrics: Kurt Schwabach), steeped in joyful defiance, is a '20s version of a gay pride march/anthem: “Und dennoch sind die Meisten stolz, daß sie von ander'm Holz!” (“And most of us are nevertheless proud to be cut from different cloth”). The story of such jazz clubs, their artists, such as the Weintraub Syncopators (who appeared in the 1930 Dietrich film *The blue angel*) and their denizens (including the Nazi Ernst Röhm, whose queerness was an open secret initially tolerated by Hitler) is told in the 2023 documentary *Eldorado* (Cantu & Lambert, 2023). Hitler encouraged Röhm to commit suicide. Refusing, he was executed in a Munich cell. In 1933, Hanns Eisler and Bertolt Brecht briefly curated *Cabaret in the exile*, in non-Nazi occupied territories. It is amazing that much of the *Entartete Musik* (*forbidden music*), utterly outlawed by 1934, survived, most of the operatic revues having been consumed in the fires of Nazism (Lareau, 2011).

Singer (2000) also writes that lyric writers like Schiffer and Kurt Tucholsky, Walter Mehring and Erich Kästner were word-perfect social critics. Their persona-based songs were interpreted by sometimes cross-dressing artists like Max Hansen, Trude Hesterberg, Curt Bois, Kurt Geron, Eva Busch and, momentarily, Dietrich. Nowhere is the gender-bending clearer than in the Spoliansky song “Maskulinum-Femininum”, and those seeking evidence of pro-queer discourse look to “Wenn die beste Freundin” (“When the special girlfriend”) as well as “Das lila Lied” (“The Lavender Song”). “Wenn die beste Freundin” was Dietrich's duet with pencil-thin Margot Lion, Schiffer's lover, and seems to use the female propensity for shopping to mask a lesbian relationship from the ‘sweet little man’, played by Oscar Karlweiss in the song's 1928 debut in the revue *Es liegt in der Luft/ It's in the air* set in a department store. Wieland (2011) writes that Spoliansky claimed he was satirising the Dolly Sisters and their materialism and engagement with Mr Selfridge, hence the department store. If that is the case, he would be referencing a 1925 incident, old hat by 1928 when the gambling Dollies were in decline. Wieland (2011) claims that sexual references were added by later biographers, an issue of retrospective denialist erasure.

Repopularising the forbidden music of the Weimar Republic in the collection “Berlin Cabaret Songs” (1996, from translations by Alan Lareau and Kathleen Komar and arranged by Robert Ziegler English version 1997, translated by Jeremy Lawrence, in Decca's *Entartete Musik*, degenerate music, series), Ute Lemper became the modern empress of Kabarett. Her work not only brought back these underground songs; it also interpreted and winkingly recontextualised them for modern audiences. She said in an interview: “this is cabaret, political satire, where you deal directly with the audience. You give a message about society” (Clarke, 1997, p. 32). Nearly 30 years on, Lemper continues to re-present this restored repertoire for audiences, drawing ever more pertinent parallels between Nazism and Trumpist populism. The German 20s/30s oeuvre, which Lemper makes her own, also has a strong morality play element, as I indicated in Korngold's love of *Everyman*. Kurt Weill's hybrid ballet-vocal score *Die sieben Todsünden/ The seven deadly sins* (1933), which she recorded in 1991, channels Kabarett tropes to create a lyrically bizarre but harmonically expansive modern morality play. There is something in Lemper's interpretations

that taps into a Jungian universalism, perhaps because, as she points out, everything is about telling a story (Clarke, 1997).

There is one more important fact about Lemper. Along with Liza Minnelli in the 1972 Bob Fosse film, she embodies Kit Kat Kabarett chanteuse Sally Bowles, the protagonist of *Cabaret* (music John Kander; lyrics Fred Ebb' book by Joe Masteroff, based in turn on Christopher Isherwood's semi-autobiographies including *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1938, featuring Sally). Lemper was a celebrated Sally in Paris in 1997. *Cabaret* is set in 1929/30 Berlin during the twilight of the Jazz Age as the Nazis are ascending to power. Of this period, Lemper said in an article entitled 'The corrupt world of then, so similar to now', today's Germany is "almost without any memory" (Holden, 2017). Works like *Eldorado*, along with Lemper's work, reveal the fools. Scholars write about the modernized university to ensure this does not happen to our own personal apocalypse.

Methodological notes

My methodological approach owes a debt to the poetic contributors to volume 41 of the journal *Social Alternatives* (2022), subtitled *It's time: the re-form of Australian public university*. Here, the poetic voice is an evocatively autoethnographic one where the activist purpose of the research can be captured best or only by poetic form. Standing at the borderline of qualitative and performative research paradigms, I re-imagine the types who populate the modern university, all of whom originate in existing scholarship, in many cases utilising the device of rescued speech where fragments remembered verbatim appear in my lyrics (Butler-Kisber, 2020). Both found/remembered and practice-led poetry may be either narrative (story-telling), or lyrical, emphasizing subjective feeling and emotion (Butler-Kisber, 2020).

Poetic enquiry is a powerful ethnographic technique (Galvin & Prendergast, 2012) and a practice for engaging in and with the world (Rapport & Hartill, 2012). Viewing such poetics as inductive and iterative creative analytic practice (Richardson, 2000) and "ways of being" (Wiebe, 2015, p. 155) rather than tools or methods, I also wonder "what can be learned from the poet's fierce/mischievous openness to the aesthetic qualities of human experience?" (Wiebe, 2015, p. 153). I wonder this in the context of presenting the types of the modern university as lyrical characters in a cabaret. In the spirit of Rapport and Hartill (2012), my mischievous/ fierce/ tender cabaret attempts to present the human experience I know more deeply. I write, then, "in a blend of fierce/ tender, attending to the humanness of the participants and holding firm the intention to consider how their words are not just findings but "disclosure[s] of the individual" (Rapport & Hartill, 2012, p. 18). Having called my subject matter "our own personal apocalypse" above, I am conscious of my Jacobean horrid laughter both dealing with and reimagining things traumatic. Rapport and Hartill (2012) considered the use of personal testimony of the Holocaust narrative in poetic enquiry and the potential to retraumatise. In light of this, with Wiebe (2015, p. 157), I believe that "balanced by tenderness, a poetic inquiry that is fierce [should] not fall

into being ferocious or intimidating".

Hasemann (2006, p. 3) sees the need for a performative paradigm because practice-led researchers "do not commence a research project with a sense of 'a problem'. Indeed they may be led by what is best described as 'an enthusiasm of practice': something which is exciting, something which may be unruly". The research I present here does not originate from a problem which leads to a question; it is rather a way of using poetic enquiry in much the same way as narrative enquiry is often used: to tell stories elucidating a phenomenon or a range of experiences, impressions and perceptions (Butler-Kisber, 2020). This paper is ethnographic, grounded in both experience and data, but re-presents its data in an alternative form or text; in this case, cabaret songs. I exemplify the performance turn in qualitative research, multi-method led by embodied autoethnographic practice (Sparkes, 2007), using material forms of practice in place of 'findings' and an 'artistic audit' in place of a literature review (Hasemann, 2006).

My multiple roles as cultural historian, university academic and lyricist can, hence, blend in a research-informed performative text. I intend readers to pry below the surface to see, for instance, the hidden ego behind the projected personality. Though any resemblance to people living or dead may be purely coincidental, I believe that this approach places the reader in a triangulatory epistemological place. If you see anything familiar in these portraits, it is your recognition that validates my portraits into a liminal place between fiction and knowledge. Who do you recognize? I invite you to come to the cabaret.

Willkommen

The researcher turns Master of Ceremonies to introduce our cast of characters, types from the decadent modernized university. He functions as the Perlocutor in morality plays, laying out the play to lords and ladies. You may see me, at this juncture as Joel Gray as the Emcee in *Cabaret*, presenting "Willkommen."

Willkommen! And bienvenue! Welcome! Fremder, étranger, stranger. You are welcomed to this darkened once hallowed halls of the modernized university. Here in this place of fallen ivory we meet the powerful and the disempowered, the enterprising and the neurotic, the defiantly conformist and the equally defiant non-conformist. In the midst, we find the denizen of the third space, neither fully professional nor fully academic, and the sessional precariat, willing even to betray colleagues with tenure in order to get their teeth on the ladder. Here, ladies and gentlemen, we give you the types of the modernized university. But wait, here comes a man in an expensive suit, and who is the person in Birkenstocks trailing behind him? Ladies and gentlemen, I give you, your manager!

The manager (A tango duet with a staff member)

I'm the greatest manager
My skill is mystic
You micromanage meanly
Narcissistic

I've risen to the top now
Dressed in Prada
*But what have you achieved here?
Precisely nada.*

They chose me from the hundreds
I'm an idol
*You silence the department
With a bridle*

I audit your performance
And survey you
*And all my loyal colleagues
Want to slay you*

I even own your soul now,
My possession
*Keep your evil for your priest now
In confession.*

But even though my powers take me far beyond the top
We're sure your boundless ego will not tell you when to stop
I'll get the best of all of you and measure and observe you
Assaulting all the women staff, you disgusting perve, you
The women all adore me, fawning, seeking my approval
They fear and hate the sight of you, demanding your removal
I'll get the very best of you, you'll toil till you're tired
And we will not give up our fight. Until. You. Are. Fired.

Stand clear now, ladies and gentlemen, as the ruthless, all-taking wannabe alpha researcher, the ninja approaches, an agile body, arms akimbo, energies effervescent. Stand clear please.

The ninja (*Staccato, dagger-stiletto rhythms*)

I'll cut out your eyes if you stand in my way
Out-publishing you, I'm out-citing, you're brooding.
Soaring my scoring, outplaying your plays
Outsourcing my data and yours I'm excluding.

I'm burning the candle out at either end
Hiding my rivals, my colleagues as friends,
Sweating on studies, on chapters, and then
Excising their authorship when they pretend
My work was their work and if they contend
My credits are theirs, then I'll always depend
On my dean or Vice Chancellor bound to extend (*vile laughter*)
Disciplinary warnings. They count as my friends
Whom I cite without end.

People trust to my face never seeing my stealth
And nobody knows me, just my achievements,
My prize-winning papers, much cited; my wealth's
My own. You can have your bereavements,
Failed promotions, grants always declined,

And abstracts rejected. Reviewers are blind
But not as blind as you, my friends.
A word from me and your career (*horrid laughter*) ends.

Our university is people with both big winners and, sadly with those consumed by the system, and, on that note, here comes the nervous wreck.

The nervous wreck (*Attuned to Leonard Bernstein's America from West Side Story*)

I want to sleep but I just can't rest
Doctors say diazepam is best
I think that I wake but I'm still so stressed
I can't catch a breath and my work's regressed

Staff glare at me like my name is mud
My managers think I'm a dreadful dud
My career has crashed with a thunderous thud
And all they want is my sweat and blood

All of the technocrats think I shirk
Yet all that I do counts as admin work
Performance assessors lie in wait and lurk
I can't research while I'm just a clerk

My analyst tells me I can't survive
Yet every day all I do is give
I've forsaken my soul and my mind's a sieve
All of those pricks have no right to live

It's so unfair that those bastards gain
I attend every day but it's all in vain
My resources, my soul and my spirits all drain
All I want is my sleep and release for my brain.

Brain rest is not on the mind of our next character, our wide-eyed zombie, aware of immortality but moving endlessly onward out of fear or economic need. This zombie sings a grunty metallic horror song.

The Zombie

I have survived the apocalypse,
You all lost your jobs and I endured.
Every 'YES' defiles my lips;
You hope someday I might be cured
From comfortable conformity
And realise things that I've denied—
The grossness and enormity.
And times I've lied, or have I died?

I walk the darkened corridors
Of the exploded college walls
Finding my survival horrid or
Vile, while what's left of my spirit calls
Me to recall when we all thrived
And lived in close collegiality
Before mad management thieved
Our souls, replaced them with banality:

Forms, spreadsheets, applications
Documents, pointless white papers:
Critical thought's above our stations;

Research burned to smoke and vapour.
No politics can eat my brain
Resistance frightens every cell
Of my being; I've much to gain
From management, though it be hell.

Our corridors are also populated with third space academics, professional staff who are stuck in a rut and who often harbour less than secret desires to join the faculty. More fool them. Here's one now.

The third space precariat (*Fast, spiky, shaky rhythms*)

And I sit in my office partitioned by glass
Dreaming my days as a lackey will pass
I mentor the students and sit on my ass
And wait to become a full member of staff

I'm not just a starlet, I shine like Lee Remick
I'm called a professional, not academic
I supported IT throughout the pandemic
I've been here so long that they think I'm endemic

I don't sit in the limelight and I deserve better
Hidden, forgotten, a pathetic regretter
(*Whimpering*) Lost in the post like my employment
letter
Overlooked, I'm never going to be a go-getter.

I've completed my doctorate, worked here for years
Assisted and proofread, massaged egos and fears
Made myself indispensable, at least somewhere near
And yet they still treat me as if I'm a spare

Another minion seeking belonging but not finding it is our early-career precariat. This precariat is an urgently wannabe mini-professor, keeping their dagger behind them, casting eyeballs on the jobs of others. We meet our precariat having another job interview with a panel.

The early career precariat (Antiphon)

I am new to this place but I'm keen and I'm clever
(*They are new to this job but they're keen and they're clever*)

I do not have a contract but I'll never say never
(*They do not have a contract but they never say never*)
(*Ritornello*)

I'll conform and comply and obey
(*They'll conform and comply, they'll obey*)
I will do what my managers say
(*They will do what their managers say*)
(*Ritornello*)

If you authorize me, I'll make life hell for the tenured
(*If we authorize them, they'll make hell for the tenured*)
Experience comes when you put in trust in go-getters
(*They're experience comes since they're trusty go-getters*)
(*Ritornello*)

I don't care what they say to my face
(*Losing rhythm*)(*They've no care what staff say to their face*)
For its them that I aim to replace

(*Finally disgusted*) (*This little c*** doesn't have any grace*)
(*Ritornello*)

Loudly, now, approaches the activist, surrounded by other activists, marching with placards and protesting cuts. Their march is a brassy unionist's anthem.

The activist (tribute to Jeremy Lawrence's translation of Spoliansky's "Das lila Lied"; Sprechstimme)

What makes them think they have the right
To set us tasks from dawn to night?
What makes them think they have the right
To pustulate our academic paradise?
They make our lives hell underground
Forcing us to comply with still more cuts
If we resist, sacking awaits
We know that what they say is total nuts
The crime's to conform to compliance,
Together we're an underground alliance.

Refrain

We're not afraid to resist and suffer
If that means hell then hell we'll take the chance
They're all so straight, uptight, upright and rigid,
Standing together, we'll maintain our stance.
We can see a world of hopeful education
All they can see is sheer banality
We stand for the future and Treaty integration
Resolved to reclaim the university!

Round us all up, make us redundant,
That's what you'd really like to do
But we're too strong, proud, and abundant,
In fact we defy and pity you
You act from fear, why should that be?
What is it that you're frightened of?
A huge drop in pay? A power decline?
The fact we fight for every student's rights?
We're going to win our fight
To work by day and sleep by night

(Repeat refrain)

Encore

Butler-Kisber (2020) sees poetic enquiry as inductive, leading to questions rather than emanating from them. The key question is, however did we come to this juncture? However did it happen that the lunatics took over the asylum? How did corporatisation colonize the place of learning and create the narcissistic faculty manager or the real estate-greedy financial manager? These people are far from being leaders by any measure. What affordances of neoliberalism led some academics to conformist zombiedom, desperate wretchedness or underground resistance? What affordances led others to leverage their technologies of the self and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1982) and thrive as ninjas or alphas and potentially as powderpuff girls: homo oeconomicus. What facets of the modern university generate the perpetual precariat and kept aspirational third-space academics downtrodden? I might ask, with Spina et al. (2022, p. 546), "what are the costs, to academia and to

society, of the career patterns we identified in this paper?" It is true that "discourses privilege certain perspectives while creating discursive prohibitions around other points of view in specific times and places" (Spina et al., 2022, p. 535). *Lord, what fools these mortals be!*

I have used my typical characterizations as figures in an ever-evolving landscape or map of resistance. In 2005, we felt a strong feeling of being absolutely forestalled (Davies & Petersen (2005). With more understanding of how neoliberalist ideology from corporatism is operationalized, we developed resolved sites of resistance (Anderson, 2008; Peleas & Peleas, 2011; Mountz et al., 2015; Tett & Hamilton, 2021). These sites might lead us back to self-care and hope (Giroux, 2003; hooks, 2003) and even, perhaps, re-formation (Stanford, 2021; Hil et al., 2023).

Our cabaret opened with a responsory tango duet between a manager and a staff member, and, as with all of these songs, any genders you imagine are unintended, for these people might be anyone or no-one. This is an enactment of regimes of truth. The arrogant self-aggrandisement of the manager, delighting in performative and audit control over subaltern bodies, is sadistic in its cruelty, and there is more than an undertone of sexual harassment to extend the theme of bullying. This is imagined as having the bitter passion of Jenny and Macheath's "Zuhälterballade"/ "Tango ballad" in *The Threepenny Opera*, a sex worker managed by her pimp. We then met the all-focussed ninja, publishing, not perishing, stealing others' work and opportunities and taking all the credit, allying with those corruptibly in power to leverage self-support strategies and ensure hypercitation and impact. Such ninjas share the sociopathy of the manager and will knife a colleague in the back at any remove: the Mack the Knife of the modernized university.

We move, then, to victims of the neoliberalised university. The nervous wreck is imagined fluttering to the hemiola-rich, huapango-based dance. As in Bernstein's *America from West-side story* (1957, lyrics: Stephen Sondheim), there is a disjuncture between the content and the metrical order with which it is presented and the sustained rhymes and consonances. The result is a portrayal of anxious, dispelled energy. Through the song, the nervous wreck's desperation and forced actions are revealed, as a cabaret character reveals themselves to the audience with dramatic irony. The zombie is also self-revelatory and shows a shadowy knowledge of who they have been forced to become in a world of blind number-crunching and compliance in the name of quality. Their disjuncted identity is shown in the frequent enjambment and caesurae.

The super-hard-working third space academic is loyal, conscientious and competent. This person longs for a break and thinks of being stellar like Lee Remick (1935-1991). The reference to Hollywood evokes the Berliner types with their Garbo and vamp aspirations as well as offering a rhyme for 'academic'. The degenerating metrics characterize their sadness. As a modulated construction of university power, Giroux (2014) wrote, precarity defeats dissent by keeping workers preoccupied with the fear of redundancy or loss of identity. Features of the mid-career precariat appear in this character, too, while the early career precariat is a

ninja in the making, interviewed promisingly by a job panel until their ruthlessness becomes apparent. The use of the choric, antiphonic responses and playful *ritornelli* between stanzas evokes the Byzantine jazz songs of '50s Greece while paying tribute to the playful and satirical dialogues of Berlin cabaret. The euphony masks a selfish personality, another trope of the cabaret.

The Kabarett spirit is evocative in the parody, 'The Activist', recognizable as 'Das lila Lied.' The proud sexual underground of Berlin become the proud activist underground of the modern university, vowing to save the university as they know it, which is, of course, impossible; but the world needs ardent and honest idealists to remind us of the world we have lost and the compensatory actions we take (Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019). Public displays of intellectualism in the form of resistance are, in the populist world, likely to be seen themselves as zombification (Deslandes & Adamson, 2013). Everyone is someone else's zombie (Whelan et al., 2013). Ball and Olmedo (2012) remind us that we can practice passive resistance: re-imagine power, invalidate audit metrics, redefine productivity and value, and esteem being human. Rebuild a public domain (McBride, 2022). Yet, still, our characters suffer under the authoritarian eyes of Foucault's panopticon (Lorenz, 2012) and performativity (Roberts, 2007; Sparkes, 2008; Ball, 2003, 2012; Craig et al., 2014). Even for the entrepreneurial self, Bröckling (2016) identified just three options: exhaustion, irony or *passive* resistance. In this light (or is it darkness?), the goal of the neoliberalised university is transforming faculty into "an army of temporary subaltern labour" (Giroux, 2014, p. 38). Another army. Another war. Welcome to the cabaret.

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