Stefanie v. Schnurbein

Keynote, Nordic Summer University, Iceland, July 2014

The Future Perfect of Academic Freedom.

How Do We Want to Have Worked – or How to Unfuck the University

Inhalt

In the last decade and a half, a lot has been written about structural changes at universities, their changed relation to state and economy in the age of globalization and neo-liberalism, the introduction of New Public Management and its repercussions on everything from research possibilities and curricula to administrative structures. I have read a lot of astute analyses of the absurd structures to which the humanities are subjected, because the knowledge that they generate, is not immediately applicable in a society dominated by this great fiction of the "free market". What I haven't found so far is work on changing practices at our concrete work-place, the university, the department. Attempts to change practices, to work well, do exist in many places. But they are rarely being shared or systematically investigated. I believe that it is important to engage critically with structural and political issues. However, it is equally vital to address individual suffering from or enjoyment within these structures.

My academic and my life practices have changed considerably in the last two years. As is so often the case, such changes are motivated by crises. For me, it was a thorough, burn-out like disillusionment with my work as a professor – a feeling of being stuck in structures and routines that didn't serve any rational purpose anymore. This alone, however, was not enough for me to break out of these structures. It took a personal crisis, and a year into this crisis and its resolution, a grave accident from which I needed another year to fully recover. All of this opened a space to ask questions that I hadn't asked in a very long time.

What I am interested in today is the costs for the individual in the current situation at universities and most of all in the humanities. I am interested in individual agency in this situation, and with individual I mean solitary activities and activities based on small groups, as I see the small group as the most efficient agent of concrete change – or subversion, if you will. I am also interested in a category or principle that has gone out of fashion in the academy: the principle of joy. I believe that a lack of joy in what we are doing contributes considerably to the misery at the university, and is responsible for our acquiescence with nonsensical, absurd structures.

My hope is that with telling my story, I will be able to seduce you into asking more questions about how we want to work, or rather, speaking in the grammatical form of future perfect: how, looking back from the future, we want to have worked. With Harald Welzer[1], a German social scientist, I think that asking questions in future perfect (Futur Zwei in German) gives us a

---

[1] Welzer, Harald: *Selber Denken*. Frankfurt am Main 2013.

clearer picture of our priorities. And it helps us to avoid thinking in too narrow ranges of immediate requirements and urgencies.

The Misery of the University

Obviously, the humanities are currently under pressure, and there are strong forces that are destroying their characteristic features and possibilities with regard to teaching, research, writing and organization.

Curricula are designed and teaching is organized in a standardized way that teachers and students alike rarely find conducive to true academic work. In Germany at least, and increasingly so in other countries, a high amount of teaching hours forces us to routinize our teaching even more and it forecloses the connection between research and teaching that we deem necessary for both.

In addition, we as teachers are often faced with students who expect us to somehow put knowledge into their heads, which they in turn can spit out to earn grades and degrees. But maybe it is us who put these expectations into their minds? Or is it the structures?

The problem with our education system is that it turns *Bildung/dannelse* into information and separates knowledge from thinking.[2]

The structural basis for work in the humanities has been systematically undermined in the last decade. Individual research is discouraged in favor of large collaborative projects. In Germany, we are evaluated according to the amount of external funds that we bring in instead of according to our output. But also elsewhere, the pressure to bring in external funding leads to a structure which resembles a pyramid game. Everybody scrambles for the funds that others previously have successfully accessed – without taking into account that their overall volume does not increase so that the chances of success decrease accordingly. More and more of us will not succeed but are left with a sense of academic debt. This also leads to unproductive competition and equally counterproductive mandatory "interdisciplinary" collaboration. No time is left for genuine research.

---

[2] Welzer: *Selber Denken*. S. 245.

There is another problem with these project proposals: in order to be successful, we have to pretend to know the outcome. We have to tell the reviewers and funders what we know and what we think they know.

This prevents the open search for new topics and truths, it prevents us from taking the position of not knowing, which is so important for any new step.

We scramble frantically to all achieve "excellence" without realizing that we are thus undermining the solid basis of mediocrity or average output which is needed for true excellence to emerge – often randomly and seemingly serendipitously. So, more often than not, we wave the flag "excellent" without quite knowing what it is that sets our work apart to deserve that label.

Where individual research is rewarded, we are put under pressure to produce pages instead of content. In Norway, this dynamic is currently gaining bizarre proportions with the nonsensical point system that you know so well. It also creates a sprawling system of peer reviews and evaluations, which take time away from research and writing, not to speak of thinking. Absurd efficiency criteria have created a virtual academic economy, empty bustle, mere busy-ness.

In his delightful and depressing polemic *Capitalist Realism* Mark Fisher describes astutely the trend within academia and other professional fields in which performance cannot be measured quantitatively: here, appearance and representation of achievements become more important than real output. He amasses examples from academia with its incessant bureaucratic evaluations. In such processes, targets become ends in themselves, not ways of measuring performance. Mark Fisher aptly calls this "Market Stalinism".[3]

The consequence: discouraged academics everywhere.

In this situation, I keep asking myself: Why do we acquiesce? My point of departure is this experience of lost agency at the university. A decade of frustration, depression, burn-out, cynicism, dwindling of enthusiasm. We are not designing projects, developing ideas because we burn to find answers, we do it to raise project money. We don't teach because we want to free up minds, wake up intellects. We teach to confer degrees and produce good statistics. We

---

[3] Fisher, Mark: *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?*. Winchester 2009.

are caught in the restraints of growing bureaucracies that lose any sense of what purpose they serve.

But maybe it is not just situational constraints that make us acquiesce. Maybe we don't really value ourselves, our activities? All too often, our work as humanists is not valued by society, but do we really value it ourselves? Have we not internalized the pressure to justify our work? It wouldn't be a big wonder. For decades now, we have been forced to orient our own research on models that work best for the natural and technical sciences; in large collaborative projects with clearly defined hypotheses and goals. All too often, our own passion for obscure objects seems suspicious and objectionable even to ourselves. We have started to blindly chase the chimera of productivity – at least the established ones amongst us have, otherwise we wouldn't hold the positions we do. Thus, we are both profiteers and sufferers. We have profited from our suffering and are suffering from our profit. A paradox and paralyzing situation. No wonder that we have disempowered ourselves.

A Norwegian colleague, an ambitious post-doc, mother of two, asked me recently: "But don't we have to play along if we want to be in the game?" And I ask myself: do we ever even ask ourselves this question in a way that is more than just rhetorical? Or do we just assume? And how does our "just assuming" relate to that which is our very specific task as humanists, as cultural theorists: the task of questioning common assumptions. I don't have the answer. But I know that I want to have the space, mental and public space, to ask this question. She continued by saying: "You might be able to do that in Germany, Maybe, it is different there. In Norway, this would be ridiculed publicly right away as "humanistprat" – humanities chatter. I can see her point. And yet I am wondering: is it just the others' reaction that we fear? Or did we internalize their contempt a long time ago. Do we think ourselves that our questions, our research, our interests, are of little consequence?

And I keep asking as before: why do we academics acquiesce? I understand it for those who still need to acquire a degree, attain a position. But in my tenured position at least I don't have to have the fear of losing my job. I have a much greater amount of both job-security and freedom than most other professions.

Part of the truth might be: on the rocky and risky way to a tenured position, we have internalized the fear of not measuring up to academic standards and expectations. We have gone through review after review, evaluation after evaluation in order to obtain one of those precious positions, never knowing whether or not we would reach the next stage successfully. Always

a bit unsure of ourselves and our performance. So once we are there, we just continue that way. We don't ask any more if what we have been doing and what we now impose on others is really meaningful. If it furthers what we think is good academic work. We don't even question the rather vague criteria for this chimera called academic work. In many ways, our thinking itself has become lazy, at least when it comes to thinking about our own working conditions, which we also impose on others.

Recently, I confronted some German colleagues with these ideas. One of them replied: "If I had time, I would think about my work too." This slightly absurd remark mirrors my own mixture of fear and contempt towards such questions.

But they became existential for me during my crisis and after my accident. I was tired, down, and burnt out – and this made me embarrassed. "How can I? I am privileged in so many ways: a well-paying, secure position. Status. More possibilities for engaging, self-directed work than in most other positions. I should be grateful, really, why do I feel down, increasingly overwhelmed? I have no right… "

Embarrassing too were my escapist fantasies: drop it all, live a life of pure creative unfolding. It rarely became more concrete than that. Dreams of an inheritance, of winning the lottery that I never play.

Here as well, reading Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* helped me to find system in my madness, or rather, in my depression, my burnout. He hearkens back to Frederic Jameson's famous observation that we can imagine the end of the world, but not the end of capitalism. He writes about students' "reflexive impotence", that is their knowledge that things are bad, but that they cannot do anything about it. This turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. He calls the resulting condition "depressive hedonia", "the inability to do anything else except pursue pleasure." Sometimes I think this "reflexive impotence" applies to professors as well, with the exception that they tend to pursue their misery.

Thus, my depression as well as my anxiety can be understood as reactions to the dysfunctionality of capitalism? It makes sense. But there is also a sense of resistance growing in me. I have become tired also of this self-defeating culture of complaint and of playing along. The German word for complain: *sich beschweren*, literally means to put a burden onto oneself. I wonder: what if we let go of this burden of complaint? What if we used some of the energy that we put into explaining why we have to play along into something else? For example into finding out what we would like to do, what we find genuinely meaningful? For example into

trying to identify these small spaces and cracks in the system and use them for our purposes, fill them with our meaning?

At some point I realize that I am in fact in a marvelous and rare position. I do have a remarkable freedom to act in my work without having to fear immediate negative consequences if I don't exactly follow every single requirement or imagined requirement. I will not lose my position if I don't publish anything in the next couple of years. I will not be fired, my pay won't be cut if I change a syllabus or use the classroom to create free spaces for both myself and my students. I will get frowns and might be put under pressure, but I won't suffer economic consequences if I don't become active in the next grand collaborative research project, PhD program, evaluation committee, peer review process. But, I think, don't I have the responsibility to fulfill these requirements? Slowly I start asking myself: what exactly is the responsibility that comes with such a position? For a long time, I have acted as if my responsibility was to prove that I am worth this privilege by adapting as good as possible to all these requirements. But is that really true? Step by step I realize that my responsibility might lie in using the privilege to rethink and re-form these requirements. I cannot wait until others in more vulnerable positions do so. If I feel that "the system" does not work as it should, it is up to me to use the space and freedom I have to experiment with alternatives, to use my own privileged safe space to create safe spaces for others, which allow them and me to experiment with change. If we who are in relatively secure positions don't dare to do so, who else will? Yes, I know, we all know, we have to act in certain ways, fulfill certain requirements so that our precariously funded departments don't vanish altogether.

But there is also that: If we really care about academia, the humanities, our field, independent thought, or whatever it is that brought us where we are, we better take action and work towards our goals and according to our values instead of fulfilling requirements in the hope to thus preserve our structures, positions, prestige, good appearance.

Against Theory – The Scary Attraction of Self-Help

I'll tell you more about the resulting attempts to change practices in a moment. Before I do so, I want to address another tiredness that arose in me as I started to install some changes in my personal life. It is scary to acknowledge, but my resistance turned to that which I thought I had desired most – against that which I thought I wanted to do all the time but didn't have time or energy to do: academic writing, academic theory.

Not only did I stop reading theory for a while. I also started to resent theorizing and I didn't see much sense in the theory classes I was teaching. Something in me didn't understand this theoretical reasoning anymore. This felt and still feels threatening. It undermines my academic identity. I felt shame and worry about my intellectual capabilities. Instead of either forcing myself back into theory or rationalizing the problem by selling this as an insight into the irrelevance of theory, I opted for what I thought of as a more academic approach. I willed myself to get curious about this sudden and unexpected aversion. I wanted to explore it and see where it wants to take me. After all, it is a feeling that I share with many of my students as well as with my younger self. I remembered what I kept telling these students: you only get a sense for theory, if you have burning questions and problems, an acute curiosity which can be answered or at least posed in a more precise way with the help of a theoretical approach.

I began to suspect that my current questions about my work, my desire for change, for intellectual freedom could not find resonance in the theoretical approaches that had become familiar paradigms in previous years. This type of deconstructivist, post-structuralist theory has become curriculum for me, fixed knowledge which I am teaching, void of the joy of discovery. I am sure, somewhere out there are theoretical approaches that are just waiting to respond to my current questions. Only by now, "being a theorist" and teaching theory has become such a big part of my identity as a professor, that it has become associated with all the negative aspects of this position: the stifling illusion of having to know it all, or at least having to know more than the students and at least as much as my colleagues. The notion of having to represent a certain type. And the irrational but powerful idea that I have to prove time and again, that I am worth being a professor.

In this situation, impulses from within academia proved rather useless. Instead, I first hesitantly, then gratefully received a number of impulses from realms quite far outside academia. My partner, who started to embark on a different journey out of a severe burn-out brought home books by the American Buddhist Pema Chödrön, and I started to experiment with meditation. Then Makka Kleist, a famous Greenlandic actress and story-teller warmly recommended an unlikely book – unlikely for me as a critical academic at least: Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* – a 1990s self-help classic for blocked artists.[4] I derived great pleasure from the child-like play once I let go of my resistance: drawing without ever having

---

[4] Cameron, Julia: *The Artist's Way. New York City 2016.*

known how to, singing, dancing, juggling, collaging – all just for fun. I felt more alive and real and yes, happy, than I had in many years.

This got really scary. Was I becoming one of those anti-intellectual fluffy bunnies whom I had criticized so frequently and thoroughly in most of my work? Instead of prohibiting these tendencies, I decided to explore them deeper, look at my experience, however vexed and difficult and maybe theoretically impossible it may have seemed.

After many months of just doing, playing, exploring, it dawned on me: what I want to do, or rather, what I am doing, is changing practices. I became more aware of the stifling, nonsensical practices outlined in the first part of my lecture, and I decided to experimentally modify them bit by bit. In this process, it was utterly unhelpful to theorize about what I was doing. Thinking with the help of theory all too often turns into these disturbing questions or suspicions: "What I am doing is unoriginal, trivial. It has been tried before, many times. Who am I to think that I actually can change something?" And of course it is true: what I am doing is not new.

But it does not help me to know that everything has been thought before. I need to "invent" things for myself, experiment with them, do them, in order for them to have an effect, in order for me to be able to act in the world. I am at a stage where method has blocked lived experience. I have to move to the other pole, that of practice, before I can return to theory; or rather, before I can return to the practice of theorizing and change it.

Changing Practices

Freiraum – Spielraum - Denkraum

The creative play I practice on my own and with no other purpose than the pure joy of the act in itself led me to the insight of how important it is to create space – not only in my personal life, but in my professional life as well. Space for creativity to unfold. *Spielraum* is what I want. *Spielraum* - this German term signifies a space to maneuver, a space for agency, but the literal translation is playroom, play space. "Freiraum – Spielraum – Denkraum" became 2013's motto: free space – play room – space to think. No new year's resolution which tends to put pressure on me, just an opening of space.

Gradually, this space of ostensibly useless fun was leaking over into my teaching. I started to discard tight syllabi and structured, but most often boring presentations by myself or my students. In the middle of the semester, I introduced little writing exercises into my theory class – exercises where students were supposed to write down their emotional reactions to theoretical

texts: their anger, frustration, joy, excitement, and then work with those emotions as points of departure. My classes became more lively – and more chaotic for sure.

I put another intention into place – a difficult one: To really listen to others, learn from them, not teach all the time. True listening is a vital part of opening up spaces. Having to find ways to manage exhaustion as well, my partner came with valuable advice which I started to listen to. Listen to your own tiredness, take it seriously, and ask the participants in weary situations how they felt about what was going on.

In the middle of the semester, I left a lecture class exhausted. Heeding my spouse's advice, I spontaneously set aside the next session and I consulted with the students asking them to identify which situations stimulate them, which exhaust them. I did the same thing, we compared notes and worked on a strategy to change the situation. The class turned out to be lively and productive – and I came out of it refreshed. And I realized, I get tired when I feel that I have to know and fix everything, control the class. And I am refreshed, when my ideas and the students' ideas flow freely. I cannot express it much better at this point. But it paid off to take exhaustion as an important sign, and not as something that is just a normal part of teaching.

Department Revolution

Gradually I realized, that exhaustion and demotivation had captured most of my department, not just me. I decided to go about this slightly more methodically – or rather: to turn enjoyment and play into a method. I started identifying wriggling spaces, for example, classes with less demands on fixed materials.

I decided to use a colloquium for advanced students and PhD candidates, my "Oberseminar", which is usually reserved for presentations of projects and discussions of theoretical texts for an experiment. Together with a few select co-conspirators, we decided to play hookie from these academic practices. For a whole semester, we played creative games, deliberately avoiding any immediate purpose or academic use. The games were mostly brought in by the students, and looking back, I sure learned a lot. The playing together where the distribution of expertise was put out of function served to flatten established hierarchies and brought a constructive, collaborative atmosphere to the class. Since then, this class is combining free play with regular academic work in a constructive, lively and caring atmosphere. This kind of creative methodology became a principle for my work here and in other classes. I grew aware of how enlightening a media shift, as I started calling it can be. Drawing, collaging, play-acting,

even singing around academic topics, our writing and thinking was not only fun and relaxing but started to yield insight as well. By now I encourage my students to take their own metaphors seriously. If you cannot find your voice, sing a song. If you cannot find the red thread, do some needlework. If you miss the overall picture, paint or collage.

In the same semester, I suggested a remedy for the mid-semester blues that seemed to befall the department on a regular basis. I have to admit that it was one of the scariest things I have ever done professionally, except maybe for this talk). I wanted to suspend regular classes for a day and arrange a get together for faculty, students and staff in an open space format instead. The idea was met with slight skepticism by some, some others jumped onto the wagon immediately and helped create a truly unique day for us all. I realized, the most important thing I can do is to open up these spaces. The rest seems to happen on its own, energy pours into me and all participants. By now the NI-Tag (Nordeuropa-Institut Day) has become an institution and is turning into a trade mark of the department.

Teaching from a place of ignorance

Encouraged by my good experiences with academic play, I took it a step further. I became interested in not knowing, in ignorance in the sense of Lord Byron's famous quote from *Manfred*:

Knowledge is not happiness, and science
But an exchange of ignorance for that
Which is another kind of ignorance

Harald Welzer, the one who wrote *Selber Denken* Thinking yourself says: All too often, we use our capability to reflect in order to declare matters as too complex, so that we do not have to act. "Knowledge can have the effect of being a hindrance to thinking".[5]

In order to do good academic work, we need a certain rigor, objectivity, critical detachment from our objects. However, we also have to learn to not know. Otherwise we are not able to ask questions. Or even worse: we stop asking questions and start to lecture, preach, proclaim. We don't <u>have</u> knowledge. We can only desire it. In this gap between the desire for knowledge and its acquisition, we can encounter something like freedom, unfolding. As academics, do we

---

[5] Welzer: *Selber Denken*. S. 240.

not want to look back and know that we have fostered the childlike curiosity that drives all true research?

The more we know the less we know – because the more we know, the more we know about what we don't know. This is what I want to have passed on to students (and remember myself) in an inspiring way. If we as teachers lose our curiosity for both the students and the material we are teaching, if we lose our passion, if we hide behind requirements that we cannot fulfill, we cannot pass on anything valuable.

I wonder if it is time to give up some of the narcissistic satisfaction that comes with our work: the knowledge to know and to be able to flaunt this knowledge in front of students and colleagues. I wonder if it is time to step down from the pedestal and let go of some of the power we have over others due to our position. I wonder if it is possible this way to create conditions in which we can empower ourselves and others to actively influence our own situation. I think we have to give up the attitude of knowing it all and develop or rather rediscover the ability to ask questions; alone, and together with others.

In other words: In order to be true and sustainable, my teaching has to come from this place of ignorance. Having a know-it-all stand in front of a class does not inspire curiosity. Only if my own questions are alive and genuine can I inspire students to ask questions and rejoice in them, rejoice in the process of finding answers and consequently asking more questions. I want to reward my own and others' desire to dig deeper, to marvel and wonder. So I have started to give myself permission to stop staring at what I assume is "the truth" that I have to teach. I try to give myself permission to open my mind to the vast realm of not knowing and to teach from there, teach myself and others.

As of yet, this remains a dream, a wish, a distant goal. More often than not I am caught in the having-to-know trap. I, the teacher, have to know. I expect that from myself, everybody does. If I don't know, I shirk my duties. And my students' expectations of course reinforce this fearful attitude. But at least I start to ask the question: Is that really how I want to have taught? Is that pressure really the legacy I want to have passed on? And whom will it have served?

Changing my writing

At first I thought: if only I had less teaching, less administration, if only I had time to write, all would be fine. I had always thought of writing as that which I would really like to do – my mission if you want to use this emphatic word. But as I created more time and space in my life, I seemed to tire of my writing as well. The gained openness made me ask uncomfortable

questions: "I am working in a small field. How many people have actually read my books and all those articles I have published in the last decades? Twenty? Ten? Five? Any at all but the peers or editors? Is it really worth putting in months of effort, of thinking and rethinking, formulating and reformulating? Whom does it serve? My career for sure. My department maybe. But is anybody actually interested? I know, writing for the praise of a greater public is not and should not be my goal. But yet – do I not want to have at least communicated something to someone? Is it not at least worth asking if there is another way to write? The combination of this feeling of tediousness, the strive to conform to current academic standards and the fact that there are very few readers was indeed tiring.

Having to revise a long book manuscript on modern Asatru offers an opportunity to experiment with free creative writing around an academic topic. I start the process by writing three pages every day with free associations around the book and its chapters – the pagan pages, I call them. Yes, it worked. The manuscript is done.

Then, my accident offered another unexpected opportunity, opened a door that I hadn't seen earlier. Knocked down as I was, I was forced to cancel all promises for publications for the remainder of the year. As I recovered, I started seeing that I had been given a great gift. I realized, if I didn't want to, I didn't have to take on new publications immediately. Rather, I started examining the uncomfortable questions I had already asked before. What if – I asked. What if I gave myself a year – or a life? – of pleasurable writing? If nobody reads my stuff anyway, why can't I at least have fun, take pleasure in my writing just for myself? Why not experiment with creative academic writing and just see what happens. If nothing more comes of it, I have at least had the pleasure of playing with language, and I might have become a more pleasant person, and thus teacher, partner, and colleague. I decided to go for it.

So, I have begun to change practices in my personal life, my teaching, my writing. Results became palpable in the department. I started getting unexpected but most welcome feedback. Several colleagues and staff have recently told me how much they enjoy the changed atmosphere that the open space day has created. My PhD students, skeptical as they initially were faced with unusually relaxed, free and playful forms of work have sent me encouraging feedback

So where do I go from here? And where do I want to go with this talk?

The Future Perfect of Our University

Future perfect is a grammatical form. What do we want to have been? What will we have been? What will our departments have been? What will the university have been? How do I want to have worked? What do I want to have been in and for the academy?

These are the questions waiting to be asked, if we want to orient our current actions towards a better future: but not alone…

The university is in danger – worldwide. As are other democratic institutions. Do we want to save the institution? And if yes, at what price? Or do we want to look at what we find important in the institution, in our work as <u>we</u> perceive it? And do we want to look for or create spaces where we can realize those? Can we do that without the institution? And who is "we" in the first place? Whom does it include, whom does it exclude? Whom do we want to include and exclude? Whom do we want to make such decisions?

The next question would be: how do we turn individual practices of change into the social and political engagement that is necessary to bring our ideas and ideals into the world? A first step, maybe, could be to share our tools. To practice these creative and contemplative activities together with others and thus create social spaces that can foster change agents. Isn't that what I am currently trying in my playful seminars? Play together – the rest will follow? But only if I learn at least as much as I teach. Only if I let go of the urge to create something specific.

I do believe that our society needs exactly the qualities, which academic work in the humanities requires, fosters and teaches. We need spaces free from competition and immediate economic utilization. We need spaces beyond the capitalist logic of surpassing each other ever more. I am convinced that these are the conditions under which work in the humanities can truly thrive. On the other hand, these are the conditions which the humanities have to offer a thoroughly economized capitalist society. As cultural theorists, we have the possibility and I think the duty to ask, how and where we want to develop a society beyond the frequently invoked forces of circumstance (Sachzwänge).

We could start fostering the self-oblivious, solitary immersion into a subject, into our own thought and writing – the contemplative and the creative aspect. And we could foster the open exchange about it, jointly asking questions about the future. We could cultivate joint experimentation, learning from mistakes, dissenting.

I want the university to have been a place of protection and unfolding also and especially for those who don't fit in. For stages of life when transitions happen and we don't know where we

are going. Space to find oneself. Contrary to common belief, I think society would profit from this, as talent will be awakened and nurtured.

I have spoken about changing practices and told my own story so far. It has been a story of identifying these small spaces and cracks in the system and using them for our own purposes, fill them with our meaning. This can only be achieved through individual practices. My meaningfulness might not be yours. The cracks and spaces that I find might not be the ones that you perceive and want to use for your purposes. Our institutions function in a similar but different way. Yet we might be able to form a somewhat anarchic or rhizomic movement of great darers within the academy. For social scientist Brené Brown[6], daring greatly means to not shy away from the vulnerability that is the precondition for all change. I would like to see great darers who are not only dissatisfied with their conditions, but who are dissatisfied with the culture of complaint as well. The ones who dare to change practices without quite knowing what they are doing– not a thing that comes easy to any of us academics who think they make a living of what they know. I want to have been a person who was not afraid to take the risk of looking unprofessional.

---

[6] Brown, Brené: *Daring Greatly*. New York City 2012.