

Drift and desire: defamiliarizing academic subjectivities

Susan Cannon¹ and Maureen A. Flint²

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art,
philosophy and psycho-analysis –
<https://inscriptions.tankebanen.no/>

Copyright © 2021 Cannon and Flint.

Correspondence: Susan Cannon and
Maureen A. Flint, e:

cannon_so@mercer.edu.

Received: 15 October 2020.

Accepted: 19 November 2020.

Published: 28 January 2021.

How to cite: Cannon, Susan, and Maureen A. Flint. “Drift and Desire: defamiliarizing academic subjectivities.” *Inscriptions* 4, no. 1 (January 2021): 89.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Our algorithmic academic identities are multiple, multiplying, multiplicitous. We are fractured across online academic communities: ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Google Scholar. Within and among these sites, citation counts proliferate, reads accumulate, and downloads accrue. Susan Cannon, S. Cannon, S. O. Cannon, what other productions are possible? Caught up in the web of these counting systems, we find ourselves trying to be good, reaching for the super scholar, to live the good life of academia. The good life as defined by these systems promises stability, security, and success. If you just follow this path, make these moves, adhere to these rules, you will reach the good life. These promises are sung to us by online academic platforms – R-scores and metrics and citation counts that add up to produce a good scholar, a good life. These refrains encourage productivity, they privilege ever increasing counts, clicks, and connections. And yet, embedded in these systems, the promises of the good life remain elusive, always just a few steps ahead, just out of vision around the corner. Through promising a future that is always just out of reach, the vision of good life promised by academic platforms regulates and contains. Thus, we seek to pull away, resist the oppressive and neoliberal logics of production and increase of that good life. Resist the pull of the upward curve, resist the melody of the good life sung to us by academic platforms—“invite your co-authors,” “upload your full text,” “you have new readers.”

In response to the push and pulls of desire and resistance that echo in these refrains, we seek an affirmative orientation to the pulls of algorithmic academic identities³ – an orientation not to dismantle but to reimagine and proliferate possibilities of self and other versions of the good life. In order to orient differently, we defamiliarize ourselves from the good life promised by the platforms and the algorithmic identity associated

¹Assistant professor of early childhood/middle grades education at Mercer University.

²Assistant professor of qualitative research at the University of Georgia.

³Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019).

Abstract

In this commentary, we create speculative fictions of the good life in academia. We take note of the ways that academic platforms and counting practices orient us, and perhaps other academics, toward a good life that is achieved through maximum production of citations, mentions, and connections. Through a close reading of N.K. Jemisin’s *Non-zero probabilities*, we consider the refrains and rituals that structure our interactions with academic platforms as junior tenure-track professors and our desire for recognition. Then, we put forward two innovatory practices, drift and desiring ambivalence, that prompt us to turn to other poles of valorization in a process of defamiliarization, turning affirmatively toward another good life.

Keywords: measurement; algorithms; citational politics; subjectivity; speculative fiction

with that life. We innovate multiple points of entry to intervene in and imagine our algorithmic identity differently guided by multiple theorists and philosophers. We ask, how do we live a good life while enmeshed in these systems? What other refrains can we attend to?

Performances of the Good Life

Becoming an academic is a complex process imbued with performativity: acrobatic manoeuvres to publish in the right journals, with the right people, on the right topics, to increase citation counts, reads, and downloads.⁴ Academics are encouraged to perform in these ways to make our academic subjectivity visible and recognizable to universities, tenure and promotion committees, funding boards, and other members of the academic community.⁵ More specifically, these gymnastics seek, in their contortions and turns, to orient academics toward a vision of the “good life.” The good life as defined by promises: the security of tenure, time to write and create, to linger with data, to read deeply and thoughtfully, to cultivate work with students, to engage with the community. What is shared in these promises is an elusive quality of purpose, of doing work that matters, of engaging meaningfully in academic work and communities. However, as Berlant wrote, the good life shimmers like “a promise of the promise that there will be a moment of reciprocal *something* between [one]self and the world.”⁶ The good life becomes a kind of cruel optimism where the very actions that pave the way to the promises of the good life (publishing in the right journals, citation counts, etc.) stand in the way of achieving the promise the good life holds. The good life binds us with its promises and threats.⁷ The algorithmic identities created through Google Scholar, Academia and Research Gate promise to account for and promote the academic work that will allow us access to the good life (tenure, promotion, prestige).

In this commentary, we argue that one way the cruel optimism of the academic good life functions is through the logics of counting, algorithms, and quantification. Whelan noted the “instrumentalisation of academic practice” has led to a narrow definition of what is valued in academic life, “minimally: this many publications, this many grant applications, this range in Likert scale student evaluations, this form and extent of community engagement and so on.”⁸ Through assigning meaning to particular behaviours (number of articles, citations, grants), an algorithmic identity is created.⁹ The algorithmic identity relies on narrow definitions and binaries that, “limit the potential excess of meanings that raw data offer. [...] [A] subject’s identity can be articulated according to the programmed rational of the algorithm.”¹⁰ In other words, the algorithm limits through the operational definitions within it. This counts as a “read.” This does not. This journal is “high-impact.” This one is not.

Others have explored the logics of counting and quantification, notably in a special issue of *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies* exploring the ontologies of number and computational culture.¹¹ The authors in the special issue explored how ontologies of number saturate and discipline everyday life. They further argued that datafication and algorithmic logic can be used as a means to disrupt, resist, or emancipate. For example, Dixon-Román discussed the possibility of algo-ritmo (the Spanish word for algorithm that Dixon-Román uses to invoke the concept of iterability) to “reconfigure the boundaries of ‘difference’ as well as further magnify the sedimentation of ‘difference.’”¹² Likewise, Monea argued that the possibilities of algorithms are both dependent on and reflective of the real, and that through the constant process of refreshing, “the potentiality of the virtual continues to allow for the actualization of the impossible.”¹³ This is echoed by de Freitas, who has asserted that the iteration of arithmetic creates the possibility for chance and recursion.¹⁴ Algorithms contain

⁴Paul Sutton, “Lost souls? The demoralization of academic labour in the measured university,” *Higher Education Research & Development* 36, no. 3 (2017): 625–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1289365>.

⁵Petra Angervall, “The academic career: a study of subjectivity, gender and movement among women university lecturers,” *Gender and Education* 30, no. 1 (2018): 105–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1184234>; Stephen J. Ball, “Performativity, commodification and commitment: an I-spy guide to the neoliberal university,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 60, no. 1 (2012): 17–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2011.650940>.

⁶Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 184, emphasis original.

⁷Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

⁸Andrew Whelan, “Academic critique of neoliberal academia,” *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015): 136, <https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-vol12iss1id258>.

⁹John Cheney-Lippold, “A new algorithmic identity: soft biopolitics and the modulation of control,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 6 (2011): 164–181, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0263276411424420>.

¹⁰Cheney-Lippold, “A new algorithmic identity,” 170.

¹¹Elizabeth de Freitas, Ezekiel J. Dixon-Román, and Patti Lather, “Alternative ontologies of number: rethinking the quantitative in computational culture,” *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 431–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616655759>.

¹²de Freitas, Dixon-Román, and Lather, “Alternative ontologies of number,” 489.

¹³Alexander Monea, “The graphing of difference: mediation and the case of the knowledge graph,” *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 458.

¹⁴Elizabeth de Freitas, “Number sense and the calculating child: measure, multiplicity and mathematical monsters,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37, no. 5 (2015): 650–61; Elizabeth de Freitas, “Calculating matter and recombinant subjects: the infinitesimal and the fractal fold,” *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 462–70.

within them the possibility of contagion—they are always on the move, always morphing, always changing.¹⁵ In other words, iteration and repetition, or the refrain of algorithmic logics, not only functions as a device of control—limiting what is possible—but simultaneously produces the possibility of contagion, the unexpected, the uncontained, the indeterminate.

Close examinations of algorithms and number ontologies within academic platforms expose them as onto-epistemological devices that discipline us. We respond in relation to these systems to know and become in the world differently. Algorithms hold the potential for disruption, reanimation, the possibility to become otherwise. We consider this potential for disruption as ‘non-zero’—in other words, small but not impossible probabilities, proliferations, and chances, drawing from N.K. Jemisin’s work of speculative short fiction *Non-zero probabilities*.¹⁶ We find her story aligned with the precarity of the present moment, along with offering a speculative and fantastical reading on how we might respond affirmatively to indeterminacy, how we might create new refrains. Thinking with Jemisin, we seek non-zero probabilities, affirmative responses that guide our engagements with academic platforms, our journey to a good life. Particularly, we find entanglement between Jemisin’s (2013) desire for “fantasies of exploration and enchantment that didn’t slap me in the face with *you don’t belong here messages*,”¹⁷ the call from Berlant to detach from “waning fantasies of the good life” in favour of ones that embrace “surrealistic affectsphere[s],”¹⁸ and Guattari’s call to promote “innovatory practices.”¹⁹ Through weaving together Jemisin, Berlant, Braidotti, and Guattari, we begin to map how we might imagine new futures for intervening in ontologies of number, how we might respond affirmatively to the calls of academic platforms and the promises of the good life.

Datafication

As the good life shimmers ahead of us, we are anaesthetized by the refrains that indicate our immanent arrival. The good life is always just around the corner, just ahead, we have always almost reached it. And yet, it remains outside our grasp, always beckoning, always on the horizon. The iterations within academic platforms create a territory and cry out their purpose and values, delimiting our actions within and beyond these sites. Almost there, a refrain, *ritournelle*, is both a claim and creates a territory.²⁰

You have a new read
Adding your lab affiliation to your profile will help more researchers in your field connect with your work on
ResearchGate
Track your growing reputation (Academia)
Get all the tools and information you need to advance your academic career. We continuously monitor your Mentions
and notify you. (Academia)
You may be missing out on more than you realize (Academia)

In the first phase of this inquiry, we followed Sellar and Thompson as we traced the givens, forms of content and forms of expression to explore the information ontologies of academic platforms.²¹ We found that the refrains of academic platforms spoke to a coherent academic subject who makes rational choices to improve their impact. The road to the good life exposed through this tracing is paved with mentions and reads, academic platforms offering themselves as purveyors of privileged coin along the journey. It is assumed that by participating in these platforms any researcher can increase their impact and achieve the good life—recognized as high citation counts. Alternatively, this same logic suggests that if you fail, your failure is due to your refusal to participate in the system in the right ways. As Berlant wrote, through participating in these systems, “we have consented to consent to a story about the potentialities of the good life around which people execute all sorts of collateral agreements.”²² Collateral agreements: I will do the research I want to do after tenure, I will

¹⁵Susan O. Cannon, and Maureen Flint, “Measuring monsters, academic subjectivities, and counting practices,” *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research* (in press); Luciana Parisi, “Automated thinking and the limits of reason,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 471–81; Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, and Space* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

¹⁶N. K. Jemisin, “Non-zero probabilities,” in *How Long ‘til Black Future Month?: Stories*, 1st Edition (New York, NY: Orbit, 2018), 362–72.

¹⁷N.K. Jemisin, “How long ‘til black future month? The toxins of speculative fiction, and the antidote that is Janelle Monae,” Blog, *N.K. Jemisin* (blog), September 30, 2013, para. 9, <http://nkjemisin.com/2013/09/how-long-til-black-future-month/>.

¹⁸Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 263.

¹⁹Felix Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London, UK: Althone Press, 2000).

²⁰Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²¹Cannon and Flint, “Measuring monsters, academic subjectivities, and counting practices,” in press; Sam Sellar and Greg Thompson, “The becoming-statistic: information ontologies and computerized adaptive testing in education,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 491–501, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616655770>.

²²Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 185.

change my pedagogy next semester, I will stay in my lane, reproduce the same research, resist experimentation, keep my head down. These collateral agreements become dangerous when, as stepping-stones on the way to the good life, they prevent the good life from being achieved. For example, one could imagine (or perhaps has heard of) a colleague of a friend who played by the rules, followed the track they had begun on with advisers and doctoral work, and then did not make tenure or did not find an academic job because their work was not innovative enough.

In this way, the presumed linearity of the good life-logic of academic platforms that promotes quantity of cites, downloads, likes, and connections became troubling to us. So, we began to “interrogate the self-representations and conventional understandings of being human, which ‘we have inherited from the past.’”²³ We desired a different way of becoming within these systems.²⁴ We sought to “wak[e] ourselves up to more intimate modes of being,” derived from a radical reconsideration that seeks to “counter the pervasive atmosphere of dullness and passivity.”²⁵ In this commentary, the second phase of this inquiry, we carve out a new territory within these platforms by inserting new refrains, fantasizing, imagining, and creating within the limits of non-zero probabilities. In doing so, we draw “a circle around that uncertain and fragile center, to organize a limited space”²⁶ to experiment. We heed Guattari’s advice to design “pragmatic interventions” in our lives to “escape the dominant capitalistic subjectivity.”²⁷ We seek change through the promotion of “innovatory practices”²⁸ attuned to “social and aesthetic ‘profitability’ and the values of desire.”²⁹ Specifically, we take up Guattari’s concepts of poles of valorisation, drift, and desiring ambivalence so that we might hum a different refrain and therefore draw a different circle, create another territory. We affirm and embrace indeterminacy: we look for possibilities to call attention to the arrangements that decentre the power and value of impact, leaning into fundamentally unpredictable and uncontainable logics. We do not reject measuring or numbers, rather, we make a methodological move to uncover the making of numbers and to uncover their indeterminacy—to find or insert the nonsensical in response-able ways.

Drift and Desire

To be in response to and responsible within the academic platforms that inform our academic subjectivities, we offer propositions for living the good life differently in relation to academic platforms. We proliferate, turning to Guattari, Braidotti, Berlant and Jemisin as models and muses for turning toward the aesthetic, shifting to a new pole of valorisation. These turns and shifts are not undertaken in naive expectation that we can escape the platforms, but through a desire to become differently with them. To co-constitute a different becoming with different arrangements, invitations, and attunements. In response to the refrains traced and outlined above, in this paper, we work to write a score for different ways of interacting within these academic platforms. The stories that we are told and that we tell ourselves about the good life are hummed as a tune under our breath almost without knowing it. Write more, publish more, be productive, increase your counts. Defamiliarization “entails active processes of becoming that enacts in-depth breaks with established patterns of thought and identity formation.”³⁰ In other words, in order to defamiliarize ourselves from the prescribed version of the good life in academia, we seek practices that make the familiar strange. Following Guattari, these practices are an ongoing process of attunement to other refrains. We make the familiar strange through telling each other new and radical stories about what counts as the good life in academia. We walk together through the woods. Talking of love and combining households, picking up lost items, winding through wildlife sanctuaries and vegetable gardens in the middle of the city. How can that count as part of the good life?

Poles of valorisation

We do not find it productive to turn completely away from one pole of valorisation, one pillar of value, to take up another, in critical negativity and opposition. Instead, following Braidotti, we orient toward affirmation and tune toward the aesthetic within the platforms. As Jemisin mused, “We’re a species that ascribes meaning to everything around it [...] the same human impulse that generates superstition also generates fiction and

²³ Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 41.

²⁴ Maureen Flint and Susan O. Cannon, “Becoming feminist swarm: inquiring mentorship methodologically together,” in *Philosophical Mentoring in Qualitative Research: Collaborating and Inquiring Together*, ed. Kelly W. Guyotte and Jennifer R. Wolgemuth (Routledge, in press).

²⁵ Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 69.

²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 311.

²⁷ Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 9.

²⁸ Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 59.

²⁹ Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 64.

³⁰ Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 140.

other forms of creativity. Without meaning we can't have stories, and stories are what fantasy is all about."³¹ Jemisin's short story *Non-zero probabilities* is situated in a world where uncertainty has taken material form, where non-zero probabilities become every day. In *Non-zero probabilities*, the protagonist, Adele, "layers on armor," medals and rituals to protect her from the risk of disaster.³² In this speculative future, New York City has become a zone where infinitesimal probabilities become all too probable, where "the state had to suspend its lottery program; too many winners in one week bankrupted it. The Knicks made it to the Finals and the Mets won the Series."³³ In the opening paragraphs of the story, Adele is walking to work, "swinging her arms, enjoying the day if it's sunny, wrestling with her shitty umbrella if it's rainy. (She no longer opens the umbrella indoors.) Keeping a careful eye out for those who may not be as well-protected,"³⁴ when an elevated train leaps from the rails in front of her. As she rushes to help those trapped under the wreckage, she reflects, "They should have known better. The probability of a train derailment was infinitesimal. That meant it was only a matter of time."³⁵ As the story goes on, Adele slowly begins to break from the rigidity of her rituals, finding "others, all tired of performing their own daily rituals, all worried about their likelihood of being outliered to death."³⁶ Through these connections, her poles of valorisation modulate. "She still plans her mornings around her ritual ablutions, and her walks to work around danger-spots — but how is that different, really, from what she did before? Back then it was makeup and hair, and fear of muggers. Now she walks more than she used to; she's lost ten pounds. Now she knows her neighbors' names."³⁷

As in the speculative future of Jemisin's New York, academics are at risk of being taken over or derailed through their interactions with and within academic platforms and counting metrics. It is almost impossible not to interact with them. Some academics might develop rituals to persist, submitting to conferences and journals, reading articles and books, citing the right people in the right spaces. These rituals are guardrails against the probability of the system to take over, to swallow us up, to spit us out. To turn us into the wrong kind of outliers, as academics we are embedded in these systems. Like Adele in Jemisin's fiction, to go too far afield - to give up these rituals completely - risks rejection from the system. And yet, like Adele, we, Susan and Maureen, seek ways to shift our poles of valorisation within these rituals and movements. We orient to relationships, seek joy and delight, we write our own speculative fictions of the good life in the academy. As Braidotti noted, "Epistemologically, understanding requires critical elucidation of one's conditions. Ethically, the posthuman subject needs to stay in tune with one's innermost essence. Combining them expresses the fundamental freedom, which is experienced as a joyful passion."³⁸ In the following two sections, we explore the practices of drift and desiring ambivalence as we seek joyful and generative encounters, singing and sharing different tunes, shifting and reorienting our poles of valorization.

Drift

In *Non-zero probabilities*, Adele finds herself drifting, letting go of the promises of rituals, "She closes her eyes and lets herself forget for a while."³⁹ With Adele (and Jemisin) and Guattari in concert, the first innovatory practice we offer is *drift*. In this practice, we let go and allow the academic platforms to carry us along with their predictions and recommendations, leaning into the possibilities they hold. We dedicate ourselves to clicking on all the "recommended articles" from Google Scholar, we peruse the "paper related to a paper you read" whether we think it is related or not. We have had a habit of ignoring these invitations because we have not been able to imagine that the algorithm would *get* us, that we would be so easily understood, so boring in our becoming. Now, we allow them to pull us off course onto other paths, to drift—to hazard the improvisation. We trust the contagion in the algorithm to offer us something. An "intrusion of some accidental detail, an event-accident that suddenly makes his [the artist's] initial project bifurcate, making it drift [derive] far from its previous path, however certain it had once appeared to be."⁴⁰ We invite drift as one of our "navigational tools to help us through the complexities of the present, with a special focus on the project of actualizing the virtual"⁴¹ whatever that virtual might be.

³¹N. K. Jemisin, "Nebula Awards 2009 interview: N.K. Jemisin," interview by Larry Nolen, April 14, 2011, para. 15, <https://www.sfwawards.org/2011/04/13/nebula-awards-2009-interview-n-k-jemisin/>.

³²Jemisin, "Non-Zero Probabilities," 362.

³³Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 365.

³⁴Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 362–63.

³⁵Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 363.

³⁶Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 369.

³⁷Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 372. (or Ibid, page number.)

³⁸Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 132.

³⁹Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 371.

⁴⁰Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 52.

⁴¹Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 69.

Desiring Ambivalence

The promise of a good life that echoes through the narrative of *Non-zero probabilities* congeals in a moment when Adele comes across a missionary standing on a street corner. He hands her a flyer, inviting her to "Come join us. We're going to pray the city back into shape."⁴² The flyer he hands her offers a promise of the good life through stabilized practices, and Adele is tempted, "I could ride the train again" she thinks, "[I] could laugh at the next Friday the 13th."⁴³ The good life unfolds in front of her, beckoning and promising, a mirage obtained through simply believing that, in this case, her and others prayer will fulfil the promise of the good life. And yet, as she talks with her neighbour, he notes that the possibilities of the happenings around them were always there, "one in a million. But never zero."⁴⁴ Adele considers this, and at the close of the narrative, she is again approached by a missionary. This time the flyer he hands her reads "WE NEED YOU TO BELIEVE" and Adele finds herself smiling, and

folds the flyer carefully, her fingers remembering the skills of childhood, and presently it is perfect. They've printed the flyer on good, heavy paper. She takes out her St. Christopher, kisses it, and tucks it into the rear folds to weight the thing properly. Then she launches the paper airplane, and it flies and flies and flies, dwindling as it travels an impossible distance, until it finally disappears into the bright blue sky.⁴⁵

In this moment, Adele finds another path to the good life, a path paved through desiring ambivalence, a rejection of the assertion that to make the good life happen all you need to do is follow a prescribed path and believe.

Thus, the second innovatory practice we explore is that of *desiring ambivalence*. In this practice, we experiment with letting go of expectation as to what the platform might do for us, how it might allow us to attain the good life. We allow ourselves to be exhausted by it, as the "conditions for regeneration."⁴⁶ While drift centres on following different paths through the platforms according to the algorithms, desiring ambivalence centres on letting go of aspiration for what the platform might do for us. We lean into our contradictory feelings about the platforms to "reevaluate the purpose of work and of human activities according to different criteria than those of profit and yield."⁴⁷ Does it matter if I become M. Flint instead of Maureen Flint? As temptations and flirtations from the platforms enter our email boxes, "you have a new read" "check your mentions" we resist clicking as a show of our desire for the affirmation and increase in scores that might result. To desire ambivalence, we play with desire. We desire a different good life, a different subjectivity—a becoming, temporarily, distant from the platforms. Folding the promises into paper airplanes and letting them fly. Can we become ambivalent to our citation counts, our H and RG scores? If so, to what (or where) else do we find ourselves attending? What other poles of valorisation are available?

Speculative Fictions

Throughout this paper, we have wondered how we might interact with algorithms in affirmative ways—tuning and turning to other poles of valorisation, seeking practices of drift and desire. We have wondered how we might play in the non-zero possibilities of academic subjectivity and counting metrics to produce other ways of being and knowing, how we might defamiliarize ourselves from the projected future in favour of a tangential line. And, simultaneously, we have wondered how we might do this without seeking the system's attention—knowing too that we are always in the system. Our goal is not to increase our metrics, (even as we write this paper for publication, submit to a conference, a line on our CV, a notch in our belt, a bump in our score). We write this paper together for the joy of creating, to engage and challenge each other's ideas, to enter into relation with each other. We also write to disrupt, to ask that others might think with us, to invite more intimate modes of being in relation in academia. Through the practices of drift, desiring ambivalence, and poles of valorisation, we seek speculative fictions of how the good life might be otherwise. This is an ethical move, as Jemisin noted, we "pursue in reality the things that we're capable of imagining, and those of us who are in industries or fields that play with imagination have a responsibility to depict futures that are for everyone."⁴⁸ Imagining the good life otherwise to create possibilities to become otherwise. We want a

⁴²Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 366.

⁴³Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 367.

⁴⁴Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 370.

⁴⁵Jemisin, "Non-zero probabilities," 372.

⁴⁶Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 18.

⁴⁷Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 57.

⁴⁸N. K. Jemisin, "The WD interview: author N.K. Jemisin on creating new worlds and playing with imagination," interview by Jera Brown, March 29, 2019, para. 47, <https://www.writersdigest.com/be-inspired/the-wd-interview-n-k-jemisin>.

good life, although it may not be the good life that has been promised to us by Academia, Research Gate and Google Scholar. Thus, with Guattari, Jemisin and Berlant, we explore other poles of value, other ways to proliferate within these systems. Seeking and writing speculative fictions within academic platforms “functions as a pedagogical tool to encourage knowing subjects to disengage themselves from the dominant normative vision of the self they had become accustomed to”⁴⁹ —to defamiliarize ourselves from the algorithmic identity as representative of our academic work and value. We may find the paper airplane circles back around and lands at our feet. Yet, we put forward the speculations of other ways of being in this paper, as a promise and challenge to ourselves to live differently. We are writing ourselves into another future.

References

- Angervall, Petra. “The academic career: a study of subjectivity, gender and movement among women university lecturers.” *Gender and Education* 30, no. 1 (2018): 105–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1184234>.
- Ball, Stephen J. “Performativity, commodification and commitment: an I-spy guide to the neoliberal university.” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 60, no. 1 (2012): 17–28.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2011.650940>.
- Barad, Karen. “On touching: the inhuman that therefore I am.” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 25, no. 5 (2012): 206–23.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019.
- Cheney-Lippold, John. “A new algorithmic identity: soft biopolitics and the modulation of control – John Cheney-Lippold, 2011.” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28, no. 6 (2011): 164–181,
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0263276411424420>.
- Cannon, Susan O., and Maureen Flint. “Measuring monsters, academic subjectivities, and counting practices.” *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research*, in press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Flint, Maureen, and Susan O. Cannon. “Becoming feminist swarm: inquiring mentorship methodologically together.” In *Philosophical Mentoring in Qualitative Research: Collaborating and Inquiring Together*, edited by Kelly W. Guyotte and Jennifer R. Wolgemuth. Routledge, in press.
- Freitas, Elizabeth de. “Calculating matter and recombinant subjects: the infinitesimal and the fractal fold.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 462–70.
- . “Number sense and the calculating child: measure, multiplicity and mathematical monsters.” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37, no. 5 (2015): 650–61.
- Freitas, Elizabeth de, Ezekiel J. Dixon-Román, and Patti Lather. “Alternative ontologies of number: rethinking the quantitative in computational culture.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 431–34.
- Guattari, Felix. *Three Ecologies*. Translated by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. London, UK: Althone Press, 2000.
- Jemisin, N. K. “Nebula Awards 2009 interview: N.K. Jemisin.” Interview by Larry Nolen, April 14, 2011.
<https://www.sfwaworld.com/2011/04/13/nebula-awards-2009-interview-n-k-jemisin/>.
- . “How long ‘til black future month? The toxins of speculative fiction, and the antidote that is Janelle Monae.” Blog. *N.K. Jemisin* (blog), September 30, 2013.
<http://nkjemisin.com/2013/09/how-long-til-black-future-month/>.
- . “Non-zero probabilities.” In *How Long ‘til Black Future Month: Stories*, 1st Edition., 362–72. New York, NY: Orbit, 2018.
- . “The WD interview: author N.K. Jemisin on creating new worlds and playing with imagination.” Interview by Jera Brown, March 29, 2019.
<https://www.writersdigest.com/be-inspired/the-wd-interview-n-k-jemisin>.
- Monea, Alexander. “The graphing of difference: mediation and the case of the knowledge graph.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 452–61.
- Parisi, Luciana. “Automated thinking and the limits of reason.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 471–81.
- Parisi, Luciana. *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, and Space*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013.
- Sellar, Sam, and Greg Thompson. “The becoming–statistic: information ontologies and computerized

⁴⁹Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 139.

- adaptive testing in education.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 491–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616655770>.
- Sutton, Paul. “Lost souls? The demoralization of academic labour in the measured university.” *Higher Education Research & Development* 36, no. 3 (2017): 625–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1289365>.
- Whelan, Andrew. “Academic critique of neoliberal academia.” *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015): 130–52. <https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-vol12iss1id258>.

fiction,
scholarship,
poetry

utopos publishing



an imprint of tankebanen forlag

<https://utopos.tankebanen.no/>