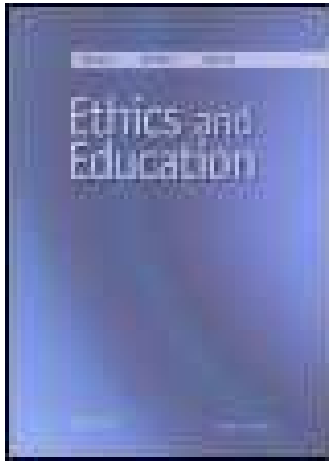


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Exhausting the fatigue university: in search of a biopolitics of research

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Exhausting the fatigue university: in search of a biopolitics of research

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Today it would seem that being fatigued is a fairly common physical and psychological effect of educational systems based on an increasing demand for high-yield performance quotas. In higher education, 'publish or perish' is a kind of imperative to perform, perform better, and perform optimally leading to an overall economy of fatigue. In this paper we provide a critical theory of what we are calling the 'fatigue university.' While highlighting the negative costs of fatigue, we also provide a philosophical distinction between tiredness and exhaustion that disrupts the biopolitics of fatigue from the inside. To do so, we turn to Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben whose writings on exhaustion point to its educational importance. Indeed, it is through the very 'illnesses' of exhaustion that the biopolitics of research can be problematized and opened up for new configurations.

Keywords: education; research; exhaustion; Agamben; Deleuze; biopolitics; fatigue; university; critical theory

Introduction

In a famous passage in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice and the Red Queen 'somehow or other, [...] began to run' (1872, 39). The little girl 'was getting so much out of breath [...] till suddenly, just as Alice was getting quite exhausted, they stopped, and she found herself sitting on the ground, breathless and giddy' (41). What surprises Alice is that, despite the race, she and the Red Queen are still at the same place. In our opinion, this scene could be a metaphor of our actual society, which is, in the words of the cultural theorist Han (2010), a fatigue society (*Müdigkeitsgesellschaft*). According to this German author, our society is not disciplinary anymore (Thou shalt not!) but based on achievement (Yes we can!). The subjects of this new society are constantly pushed to achieve goals and tasks, thus they are expected to be faster and more productive than ever before. The typical disease of this society of achievement is fatigue. Indeed, the fatigue society is so pervasive that even the last bastion of rest – sleep itself – is now under threat by the colonizing forces that emphasize productivity, efficiency, and constant self-monitoring (Crary 2013).

Alice and the Red Queen's race might also give a certain insight into research as it is experienced in what we would call the 'fatigue university.' Even more than knowledge, cleverness, or curiosity, a strong physical and psychological condition has become

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essential to survive research: we have to run, and keep running, in order to bear the current pace of publications, research project applications, etc. The old adage 'publish or perish' is an injunction to maximize one's utility to a knowledge economy through research, or else one will lose opportunities for grants, research positions, or tenure. Or, even worse, researchers are caught in the trap of publish *and* perish. It is not enough to merely publish but one must also publish in the highest ranked journals and the most competitive venues. If one submits to such an injunction, then researchers are more than ever exposed to the risks of escalating fatigue. All the while, this frenetic pace does not necessarily improve research; on the contrary, it often seems to lead us nowhere (D'Hoest and Bárcena 2011).

In this sense, fatigue would seem to be a kind of social and educational sickness brought about by the very real working conditions of a biopolitical knowledge economy – an economy that concerns the investment in and management of life itself (Foucault 1990; Hardt and Negri 2001). Indeed, it is only within a biopolitical framework emphasizing health, optimization, and achievement that fatigue would even register as a political, economic, and educational issue. Importantly, fatigue is not merely a regrettable result of the achievement paradigm but rather is its central product, for it is through fatigue that ever increasingly refined and sophisticated tools and strategies of self-improvement can be designed and implemented. And if such fatigue cannot be surmounted, then the individual will be abandoned by the system as a form of 'collateral damage.' In this sense, fatigue is *internal to and constitutive of* biopolitical logistics.

While critics are quick to point to fatigue as a symptom of larger forms of biopolitical control, is it not possible that tiredness and exhaustion, which are both expressions of fatigue, also have redemptive possibility overlooked by these very same critics? This is the clue given by two philosophers, Giorgio Agamben and Gilles Deleuze, whom we will explore in this essay. In dialog with Agamben and Deleuze, we analyze the conceptual space opened up by tiredness and exhaustion in relation to education, particularly with reference to the student–professor relationship within a university research framework. Our contention is that, nowadays, tiredness and exhaustion are necessarily at the heart of the research experience. In the following, we will study tiredness and exhaustion (1) in their common, philosophical, and educational meanings, (2) as concepts indicated (more than elaborated) by Agamben and Deleuze and, finally, (3) how these concepts relate to each other in a concrete educational situation that includes academic advising and research. Making a critical distinction between being tired and being exhausted will enable us to argue that only by thinking through the problem of fatigue can educational research become otherwise than a mere symptom of a fatigue society bent on producing quantifiable achievements in the name of optimal performance quotas. Indeed, it is through the very 'illnesses' of exhaustion in particular that the biopolitics of research can be problematized and opened up for new configurations.

A brief review of tiredness and exhaustion

What does research have to do with tiredness and exhaustion? Such an inquiry into the nature of being tired and/or being exhausted is of personal interest to both of us. We are researchers in the field of philosophy of education. One of us is a teacher at the university, and part of his job is to advise students on their dissertations; the other one is a Ph.D. student, who is writing a dissertation under the supervision of an academic advisor.

As such, we encounter valences of tiredness and exhaustion all the time in our professional lives, both in terms of our own work and in the work of other students/researchers. And yet, due to the emphasis on achievement that we encounter daily in terms of professional goals, standards, and expectations, speaking (let alone writing) about the topic of fatigue is accompanied by a certain taboo. For faculty, to admit fatigue is to admit to a ‘lack of willpower’ or to a ‘lack of productivity’ or to a ‘lack of passion’ or even worse, such admissions demonstrate a certain ‘ungratefulness’ for one’s professional life. For students this means that they are labeled ‘unreliable’ or ‘lacking promise’ and thus are cut from large research projects, conference panels, and so on. In academic advising, fatigue is all-too-easily dismissed as a psychological problem that can be dealt with by seeing a psychiatrist or through medicalization. In all cases, it is something that is discussed in secrete, in whispers in hallways, or behind closed doors. The following is an attempt to break through this taboo on discussing fatigue in order to understand how society at large and philosophy in particular have constructed the complex concepts of tiredness and exhaustion. Our goal is to lay some groundwork for a much more in-depth analysis of the same concepts found in Agamben and Deleuze.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, ‘tired’ means ‘in need of sleep or rest.’ After the race, the Red Queen tells Alice: ‘You may rest a little now.’ Indeed, Alice may rest a little because the race has tired her. At this point, Carroll uses the word ‘exhausted’ (‘just as Alice was getting quite exhausted...’). The same dictionary registers two meanings of ‘exhausted’: (1) ‘drained of one’s physical or mental resources; very tired’ and (2) ‘completely used up.’ In the common, everyday uses of the terms, tiredness and exhaustion are thus clearly related: there seems to be a difference of degree between ‘tired’ and ‘exhausted.’ ‘Exhausted’ is *more than* ‘tired’ (a comparative), to the extent that it can mean *the extreme form* of ‘tiredness’ (its superlative). In the description of Alice after the race, the use of ‘exhausted’ instead of ‘tired’ indicates that Alice could not have run much more or faster than she did, since she was actually reaching her limits.

For the French historian of philosophy Jean-Louis Chrétien, fatigue is an essential phenomenon of existence, and, as such, it has always been a philosophical theme. In his book *De la Fatigue* (1996), the author surveys the history of philosophy and points to some interesting elaborations of fatigue by Aristotle, Sartre, Lévinas, and others. As Chrétien is right to point out, nobody gave more importance to ‘tiredness’ (*Müdigkeit*) and ‘exhaustion’ (*Ermüdung*)² in philosophy than Nietzsche; indeed the author dedicates a whole chapter to Nietzsche and the ‘great fatigue.’ Throughout his work, Nietzsche seems to refer to tiredness and exhaustion indifferently, and the various ways he describes the two are never fixed, yet he does suggest that there are different sorts of tiredness. When Nietzsche refers to tiredness, he usually points out a symptom we have to fight, for it is a sign of Christian decadence. Roughly speaking, tiredness deserves, in Nietzsche’s thought, the same treatment as disease:

Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life’s nausea and disgust with life.... Hatred of ‘the world,’ condemnations of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality... – all this struck me, no less than the unconditional will of Christianity to recognize only moral values, as the most dangerous and uncanny form of all possible forms of a ‘will to decline’ – at the very least a sign of abysmal sickness, weariness, discouragement, exhaustion, and the impoverishment of life. (1967, 23)

Christian values provoke weariness, that is, make us weaker, and it is against these values that we have to struggle in order to recover our authentic forces from the grip of this ‘will

to decline.' Chrétien concludes: 'Fatigue becomes the more including, the more general denomination of everything we should say no to' (our translation 1996, 138). But sometimes Nietzsche refers to an original 'tiredness,' which is the reverse of the 'fatigue' we have just depicted: what Chrétien calls the 'fatigue of the fatigue.' In this sense, to be tired is to be tired of tiredness, of Christian values, and this is indeed a good sign. Nietzsche experienced original tiredness himself: there is a kind of tiredness that is a force, and not a weakness. It is to be tired of the tiring: to be tired of 'the good' (and not to be tired of the suffering).

Thus, according to Nietzsche, tiredness always carries a value, and it is usually negative, for it weakens us, making us decadent. The only case in which tiredness is positively considered by Nietzsche is when tiredness is a good sign: it is good to be tired when tiredness is a force that reacts against tiredness.

As we discussed previously, the current educational dogma emphasizes becoming an active worker, citizen, student who realizes his or her full potentiality in the name of economic efficiency and productivity (Lewis 2013); but, obviously, the more active you are, the more tired you become. Therefore, we can expect *more* tiredness from the current educational system: students, but also professors, are expected to be more tired than ever (given that, for example, there are more tests to pass, more student work to be graded, more papers to write, more grants to apply for, more conferences to attend, and so on). Thus, if activity is an educational goal, tiredness should be a healthy symptom, a sign that we are being truly active. And indeed, symptoms such as testing fatigue testify to the constitutive role of being tired under high-stakes testing. Interestingly, psychological research shows that this fatigue does not necessarily impair test-taking outcomes, and in this sense cannot be offered as evidence against high stakes testing (Ackerman 2009). Tiredness is not an obstacle to taking the test and maximizing outputs but is part and parcel of a fatigue society, becoming an opportunity for the student to continue to devise motivational strategies and skill sets in order to achieve optimal outcomes.

However, this natural tiredness which is internal to high-stakes testing and its fatigue cannot be drawn out to the point of becoming tired with being tired: activity has to remain permanent, the machine has to keep running, no matter which degree of tiredness affects us. We cannot avoid tiredness, but, as far as possible, we are expected to avoid its limit: exhaustion. We are educated to avoid exhaustion: we are educated in how to guard some reserve of our energy despite 'getting so much out of breath.'

This brief review thus leaves us with several remaining questions. First, is there a real difference between tiredness and exhaustion, and, if so, is it one of degree instead of kind? It would seem that common, everyday usage of the terms in the English language would suggest the former rather than the latter. Yet, being tired of being tired (as Nietzsche writes) could indicate a qualitative (rather than merely quantitative) transformation from tiredness to exhaustion. A second question then follows: Is there any space for rethinking being exhausted in the space of research? If exhaustion is the real taboo here (not simply tiredness), does this not indicate that there might be something fundamentally *disruptive* to the biopolitics of the knowledge economy about exhaustion? To further develop these lines of inquiry, we now turn to a careful reading of the themes in Agamben and Deleuze. What will emerge is a rethinking of the biopolitics of exhaustion as a kind of redemption of the tiredness of being tired.

Agamben on study, potentiality, and exhaustion

In this section, we would like to turn more explicitly to education and its particular relationship to fatigue. To do so, we will begin with an overview of Agamben's reflections on studying and their connection to exhaustion. In particular, his gesture toward Bartleby the Scrivener as the exhausted figure of study will lead us to Deleuze and a more in-depth discussion of the potentially positive powers of exhaustion. In short, we will use Bartleby as a hinge or fold between Agamben, Deleuze, and the concepts of education and fatigue. The result will be a new appreciation of exhaustion that is directly relevant to the question of research in the 'fatigue university.'

Before turning to Bartleby directly, it is important to understand the relationship between potentiality and education in Agamben's work. For Agamben, study is the quintessential educational experience of potentiality as such, freed from any ends or measurable actualizations (Lewis 2013). This is important because in the fatigue society, potentiality is usually only thought in relation to some actualization (which can be measured and thus improved upon). Indeed, for Agamben, the principle injunction of the fatigue society (as well as the fatigue university) might very well be 'Be all that you can be!' In this formulation, we must push ourselves to 'realize our full potentiality' without remainder. Potentiality must be put to work in order for the individual to be competitive in a fast-paced world of do or die, publish or perish. Yet what is missed here is any experience of our potentiality as such, or potentiality as a pure means rather than a mere means to another end. When we think of potentiality in and for itself, we realize that potentiality is not simply a capacity to do something but also and equally a capacity not to do something. To think potentiality is to think impotentiality. When thought on its own terms, potentiality, according to Agamben, has a particular tautological structure that holds within itself mutually exclusive opposites in a single formula. Speaking of potentiality, Agamben writes, 'the tautology "it-will-occur-or-it-will-not-occur" is necessarily true as a whole, beyond the taking place of either of the two possibilities' (1999, 266). In such a tautology, each alternative is returned back to a purely contingent state. Stated differently, in the tautology an event occurs *and* does not occur simultaneously. To be in potential, an occurrence cannot foreclose upon its contingency to not happen. Thus, potentiality is a suspension of distinctions such as occurrence and non-occurrence, being and not being, in order to keep open a perpetual field of contingent possibilities. The field of contingent possibilities is the precise location of human freedom as the opposite of necessity (something must occur or not occur) and impossibility (something that occurs cannot occur). As Agamben writes, '... the root of freedom is to be found in the abyss of potentiality.... To be free is, in the sense we have seen, *to be capable of one's own impotentiality* ...' (183).

What makes us human is the capability to *not* be: the impotential of our potentiality. This description is important for educators because, as Agamben argues (1995), study is an educational experience of potentiality: it is a time and space of rhythmic turning from undertaking to undergoing, stupidity to lucidity without necessary end. Held in this perpetual sway, when asked what one is studying, it is essential to answer with an indeterminate formula: 'I would prefer not to say.' In this formula, the studier remains indistinct, yet free in this indistinction. Freedom here is both positive and negative. The studier is free from the compulsions of an educational system obsessed with assessment of outcomes and measurement of potentialities, but also free to be continually *otherwise than*

assessments and evaluations predict or society demands. Given that the fatigue university concerns itself with developing skills and capabilities for the purposes of actualizing these skills and capabilities in educationally and socially measurable forms, study seems to be nothing more than an obstruction or annoying rest stop on the way toward full optimization and thus economic utility. Indeed, the studier would most likely be labeled as suffering from depression – which is said to be a sort of fatigue,³ and thus crossed off as a mere degenerate excess of the knowledge economy.

Interestingly, for Agamben, *Bartleby the Scrivener* is the ‘most exemplary embodiment of study in our culture’ (1995, 65). *Bartleby*, as a studier, withdraws his capabilities to copy from actualizing their potentiality in the form of work and prefers not to write. At this precise moment, when *Bartleby* famously prefers not to copy yet remains in the legal office as an ‘employee,’ he embodies the tautology of potentiality: no longer a worker he is not yet something else either. Indeed, his impotent gesture opens up a space and time that suspends the daily functions of the office: the formula ‘I would prefer not to’ spreading exponentially to the point of driving his employer to the brink of madness. As a studier, *Bartleby* is interminably moved between two antithetical poles: ‘the potential to be (or do) and the potential not to be (or do)’ (1999, 255). To prefer not to opens and sustains an indistinction to be and not to be that defines the tricky terrain of study. Only in this suspension is *Bartleby* freed to study and to become a paradigm of study. But to move in this space and time of study is to be exhausted by study. In a slightly different context Agamben again argues that the artist who puts down his/her pen and turns his or her back to Genius embodies ‘exhausted and suspended time’ (2007, 18) not unlike *Bartleby* who renounces the practice of his craft through the suspending function of his ‘I prefer not to.’ But what precisely is exhausting and exhausted about *Bartleby*? What distinguishes his exhaustion from the simple tiredness of his coworkers and employer, both of whom are frustrated by *Bartleby*’s lack of willful intentionality?

For answers to these questions, we must now turn to Deleuze. But first, an important linguistic remark. ‘Exhausted’ is the word that has been used by the translators of Agamben’s ‘*Bartleby, o della contingenza*’ and Deleuze’s ‘*Bartleby ou la formule*’ and ‘*L’Épuisé*.’ The original words are ‘épuisé’ in French and ‘stremata’ in Italian; Agamben writes: ‘Lo scriba che non scrive (di cui *Bartleby* è l’ultima, stremata figura)’ (1993, 53). The adjective ‘stremata’ points at the extreme of the force, which has been reached, the limit of the energy that has been exceeded. We will see in the following that, whereas Agamben and Deleuze are not thinking through the same words, they are virtually drawing the same concept: ‘stremata’ and ‘épuisé’ point in the same direction. In this light, the clue given by the English language – the one word ‘exhausted’ – happens to be a good lead.

Deleuze: the positive power of exhaustion

‘The Exhausted’ was written by Deleuze three years before his death, as he was fatigued by a long standing lung disease (Cull 2011). Interestingly, the Spanish Dictionary *Maria Moliner* describes ‘cansancio’ (‘tiredness’) as provoked, sometimes, by a lack of breath; that happens to Alice, who, while ‘getting quite exhausted,’ ends up breathless. Besides, we often use this expression, ‘breathless,’ to indicate ‘tiredness’ or ‘exhaustion’: in French, ‘breathless’ can be translated by the expression ‘être à bout de souffle’ – like Godard’s film – which literally means ‘to the end of the breath.’ Thus, Deleuze thinking concepts such as tiredness and exhaustion are no accident; rather, exhaustion and

tiredness, that is, his permanent condition of breathlessness, have been the structural accident of Deleuze's life that have, like Nietzsche's various illnesses, pushed him to philosophize.

In 'M comme Maladie' ('M stands for Illness'), from *Gilles Deleuze from A to Z with Claire Parnet* (Boutang 2004), Deleuze expounds upon his fragile health condition. To him, illness ('maladie') is not something bad ('mal'), since illness serves the thought much better than a good health condition does. To think is to be attentive, to be listening to life, and illness sharpens life; in this sense, illness makes thinking easier. But Deleuze insists on the fact that tiredness and illness are not quite the same. Yet both concepts are existentially related: illness increases and brings tiredness forward. To be tired means: 'today, I have done what I could'; tiredness is the signal for the end of the day. In this interview, Deleuze never uses the word 'exhausted,' but it was recorded in 1988–1989, a few years before writing 'The exhausted.'

In this later text, which shows a shift in focus from the question of being tired to being exhausted, Deleuze provides a startling description which is worth citing in full:

The possible is only realized in the derivative, through tiredness, whereas you are exhausted before birth, before self-realization or realizing anything whatsoever When you realize some of what is possible, it's in relation to certain goals, projects and preferences: I put on shoes to go out and slippers to stay in . . . the realization of the possible always proceeds through exclusion, because it presupposes preferences and goals that vary, forever replacing predecessors. It is these variations, these substitutions, all these exclusive disjunctions (daytime/night-time, going out/staying in . . .) that are tiring in the end. (1995, 3)

In this passage, Deleuze begins by noting a difference between being tired and being exhausted. To be tired is to 'realize' some sort of potentiality in relation to certain goals, a possibility. Thus when one takes a test in order to measure skill acquisition, one is legitimately tired for one has attempted to realize a possibility: 'today, I have done what I could.' While it is perfectly acceptable and legitimate to be tired, Deleuze notes that such realization 'always proceeds through exclusion.' Thus the goal of taking the test produces a certain exclusion: not winning or not passing. When one is tired, sets of 'exclusive disjunctions' are produced such as 'going out/staying in.' Deleuze continues:

Exhaustion is altogether different: you combine the set of variables of a situation, provided you renounce all order of preference and all organization of a goal, all signification. It is no longer so as to go out or stay in, and you no longer make use of days and nights That does not mean that you fall into indifferentiation, or into the celebrated identified contraries, and you are not passive: you press on, but toward nothing. You were tired by something, but exhausted by nothing. (1995, 3–4)

One is exhausted not by realizing a set of defined goals but rather by renouncing all preferences, all goals, and all determinate outcomes. Like Bartleby, Beckett's Mr. Knott 'does not reserve any combination for a singular use that would exclude others – whose circumstances are yet to come' (Deleuze 1995, 4). Rather than particular uses determined by particular goals, the combination holds within itself all possibilities equally: 'The combinatorial is the art or science of exhausting the possible, through inclusive disjunctions.' The exhausted tallies combinations, permutations, enumerations, and infinite lists to the point where he or she 'replaces projects with tables and programs denuded of sense' (5). In this sense, for Deleuze and Agamben, Bartleby and other enigmatic figures of study are exhausted because they are in a state of perpetual potentiality (perpetual combinatorials). Whether Agamben's tautology or Deleuze's

combinatorial, contingent possibilities remain open, and thus withdrawn from all measure of success or failure.

'The Exhausted' is originally a post-face to a French publication of *Quad and Other Television Plays*⁴ by Beckett. According to Deleuze, what makes these plays interesting are Beckett's different ways of exhausting the possible: meaningful sentences are exhausted by words, which are exhausted by voices, which are exhausted by space, which is exhausted by the image (which is the final exhaustion of the possible). This is not about tiredness, but exhaustion: here, it is clear that Deleuze traces a difference of nature between both concepts. Exhausted is not a comparative or superlative of tiredness, but something different. The exhausted does not rest, because he/she cannot rest. And the reason of this restlessness is the structural lack of rest (reserve) of exhaustion.

Deleuze does not use the word 'exhausted', but 'épuisé', which comes from 'puits': a well; 'épuiser' literally means 'dry up.' In Spanish, 'exhausted' is 'agotado', which comes from 'gota' (drop): someone who is 'agotado' has no drop left, no water reserve. 'Exhausto' is a synonym of 'agotado': 'exhausto' and 'exhausted' are built with 'ex' and 'haurire,' which means 'collect, draw water (haurire) outside (ex).' As has been indicated before, 'stremata,' the adjective used by Agamben to describe the figure of Bartleby as the last scribe, points at a limit that has been pushed to the extreme, exceeded. These linguistic facts put us on the way to understanding the radical difference between tiredness and exhaustion: admittedly, both states tend toward inactivity. But, first, after tiredness comes always rest, and rest is possible only because there is already some rest: not everything has been buried in the activity, something remains, and this remainder is the starting point for a new activity. But the exhausted does not rest: indeed, the exhausted does not lie in a bed but sits, like Dürer's melancholic angel, like the studier, like Bartleby. Second, someone gets tired after having done *something*, whereas the exhausted is exhausted 'already before his birth' *of nothing*. Third, you get tired because of a choice; you get exhausted when you do not choose, when there is no preference (we could perhaps say that exhaustion is an existential skepticism that prefers to withhold judgment at the very threshold of such judgment).

In 'M comme Maladie,' again, there is an interesting development and celebration of old age. To be old is to *be*; *Being*, full stop. When you are young, you have to be(come) this or that, you are tied to projects. On the contrary, to be old is to be free of projects, careless about the actualization of possibilities. To be old is to be exhausted, someone 'who has no other need than to be without need.' Bartleby has no age either, but we have the feeling that he is old: not that he has become old, but that he is (already old, already exhausted). And yet, isn't education about building and following projects, be(com)ing this or that? Are we claiming, as with Bartleby, that students who are already old are already exhausted?

Bartleby has no reserve, and he produces nothing. He does not tire himself, he is exhausted. But Bartleby is not only a character who has been fictionalized by Melville: we *are* Bartleby when we study, when we do research. To research is to re-search, to search repeatedly, and to search and search and keep searching means to have nothing to report, no conclusions to offer up. As studiers we are confronted not with meaningless materials or with meaningful results but rather with the exhaustion of an unfulfilled *potentiality of meaning*. When studying, we hold the various combinatorials in our minds without firmly committing to any particular thesis or conclusion. This is not a state of indecision but rather a firm commitment to our potentiality as such – our potentiality to do-this-and-that or to say-this-and-that. But such a commitment is not merely intellectual, it is also

embodied, and thus written on and through our postures and gestures. Indeed, to be exhausted is to be haunted by the combinatorials that we not only think but also live. Exhausted studiers do not simply lie down and go to sleep. Rather they are always sitting, hunched over, carrying stacks of books, rubbing their eyes from the endless strain of reading and re-reading. They are, like Deleuze, out of breath. They are somewhat absentminded, jotting down this or that set of notes, which inevitably pile up on desks and in small, secret stashes only to be forgotten or eclipsed by new combinatorials that reveal themselves. As such there is a phenomenology of exhaustion that is very different from mere tiredness where one lies down and ‘sleeps it off’ to emerge refreshed and ready to begin work again early the next morning. Unlike this renewal, the exhausted is always dragging along ... he/she is always somewhat inoperative. His or her life appears suspended in a state that is neither moving forward nor retreating, but a constant series of hesitations and detours. As such, the economy of tiredness and renewal that is essential to the overall fatigue society is deactivated by a much more radical state whereby the studier is so exhausted that he or she *cannot be tired*.

Bartleby *looks like* a tired person, but he is not: he is exhausted *by nothing*. His exhaustion as a ‘preferring not to’ opens up a radically different possibility, one that has profound implications for research. Of course, the irony of this move is not lost on us: the character who appears to do nothing, research nothing, and fade away into nihilism does not seem a very efficacious paradigm for research, especially now in the day and age of ‘publish or perish.’ Certainly, Bartleby perished, his rhythm of study slid into nihilism. As such, if he represents – as we argue, drawing on Agamben and Deleuze – a point of suspension where the logic of tiredness is interrupted precisely through the limit case of exhaustion, this point of suspension must be further examined. How can the exhausted neither perish nor become yet another functionary of the biopolitical knowledge economy?

Tiredness and exhaustion in a concrete educational situation: academic advising and research

The exhausted departs from nothing and *does/goes to* nothing; the researcher lets idle everything he/she has learned before in order to study; he/she loses definitive destinations and prefers not to choose anything beyond his/her own potentiality without sacrifice; he/she dwells endlessly in the tautology or combinatorial. The research is exhausted and the research exhausts him/her: beyond the possibilities of supporting this or that theory/conclusion lies a preference not to actualize potentiality in a quantifiable form. All that is left is the potentiality to be and not to be, to do and not to do held together in the combinatorial that haunts the researcher day and night, never allowing him or her to rest.

As a teacher, one of us has often seen the advent of exhaustion overcome students when they suddenly open their mouths as if to say something profound only to fall quickly back into silence, when they retreat into hours of prolonged reading, when they doodle endless outlines and permutations of possible relationships between concepts, and when they postpone deadlines in order to keep tinkering with an idea. They define themselves in terms of some ‘fixed’ problem (we need to raise test scores for instance) only to realize that the problem pulverizes itself into multiple problems, dispersing into a series of pathways that, in the end, lead away from one another toward new horizons and new combinatorials that are loosely held together by the tautological potentiality of the study itself. In all cases, the students, heads bent down, back’s hunched over with bags full of books, are not lazy or

tired but rather caught in the interminable rhythms of research, the trace of which is written on the body through various signs of exhaustion – sitting in the library late at night or before the computer screen, finding themselves restless at the very moment when they should be tired out and going to sleep.

As teachers and advisors to future researchers, we have a role to play in bearing the burdens of exhaustion. Exhaustion should not be brushed off as merely an unsavory and thankfully temporary phase that will be eventually overcome through the completion of specific projects. This attitude again views exhaustion as a kind of deficit, but teachers cannot afford to be like the employer in *Bartleby's* office who is impatient, frustrated, and constantly agitated by this strange, interminable figure who is not productive or responsive to either commands or care. Exhaustion cannot be easily instrumentalized or absorbed back into the biopolitical economy of publish or perish. Indeed, there is a strange freedom from ends that is its own pleasure. Just as Deleuze found illness to be the very source of thought, so too bearing the burden of exhaustion need not be reduced to a psychological blip on the research ladder to success. It can and should be experienced as a state of freedom from determinant outcomes.⁵

Yet, sooner or later, the exhaustion of research will be pushed to publish something. Studies have to turn into dissertations – otherwise the result is infinite delay in the aporetic space of study, if not nihilistic dissolve as witnessed in the case of *Bartleby*. These goals are tiring, so it seems that the exhaustion of research is forced to live with the tiring pace of the fatigue university, but how? Tiredness and exhaustion are mutually exclusive: tiredness comes after realizing a possibility, to exhaust possibilities is to prevent them from applying to actualization; tiredness comes after having done something, the exhausted is exhausted by nothing; tiredness is a consequence of choice, exhaustion is the state of choosing not to choose, a permanent existential standstill (a radical gesture of academic 'preferring not to').

Like Alice, we are tired of this tiring research race. With this in mind, we would like to share a few questions that seem relevant to the concrete educational situation of research, and which it would be useful to think through for academic advising. These questions will not resolve the issues outlined here, yet we hope that they will break the taboo of the fatigue university, and thus enable us to question how exhaustion and tiredness shape the biopolitics of research.

- (1) For the teacher/advisor: How can you open up the space and time of study so that students experience exhaustion as not simply an unwelcomed contingency that needs to be overcome but also as freedom to be otherwise than? As teachers and advisors, it is crucial that you open up the difficult yet free space and time of study so that students can come to experience exhaustion as a pure means.
- (2) Yet if the teacher/advisor's role is to open up the space and time of study, is it not also true that something must in the last instance be produced? Does not some materialization of the work need to be brought into the world? But if this is the case, then have we not merely instrumentalized exhaustion, turning it back into a *resource* to be appropriated by the fatigue university on its quest for escalating efficiency?
- (3) But this question leads to another: Can we think of a way to help students actualize the *impotentiality* of their thinking? With this question we enter a threshold that moves us beyond the fatigue university. If exhaustion is indeed the qualitative leap

that comes from being tired of being tired, then perhaps we can define *inspiration* as the second qualitative leap that comes from being tired by exhaustion. Indeed, Agamben argues that when Bartleby puts down his pen and ceases to produce ‘evidence’ of his potentiality, he opens up a space for action beyond any recognizable action – a space of ‘inspiration’ (1995, 65) that is also a space of nothing. And it is here that exhaustion suddenly morphs into a kind of inspiration. Exhaustion can push us to say, to write certain things, but in which way?

- (4) In conclusion: What does it mean to *write* inspiration or to write impotentiality? To do research is, of course, to end up saying *certain* things (instead of *other* things, at least not at the same time), but in order to end up saying *certain* things, we have to re-search, that is, to come back to the ambiguous, the inclusive disjunctions, combinatorials. This means *saying things about the potentiality for saying things* – *saying certain things about that which remains uncertain* (our impotentiality). Is this not precisely the experience we have of reading Agamben’s work – texts that appear to de-create themselves in the very moment of their appearing as texts? A new kind of research is thus made possible here; one modeled less on quantifiable and measurable outcomes or standardized/recognizable formats and more on the aporetic practices of Beckett’s plays or the novels of Walser and Kafka or the aphorisms of Nietzsche or the emphasis on problems over solutions in Deleuze. As both teachers and students, we should look for alternative forms of writing that interrupt, suspend, and render inoperative the fundamental logic of the research article that has been fully co-opted by the biopolitical knowledge economy. Such forms are tiring and tiresome. In other words: could we not make the most of the ‘publish or perish’ period by using these spaces and times to *exhaust* them, thus writing articles *as not* articles (returning them to their impotentiality to be otherwise than what they have become)? Only then can we discover the inspiration of that which remains in the remnants of the ‘article.’ Then, as Deleuze and Parnet suggested (1987) and performed, our academic writing would become completely different: ... or ..., ... and ... and ... and ..., it could be ... or/and ..., the ... -... -... -....

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Notes

1. Email: tyson.lewis@unt.edu
2. The German language seems to confirm what has been supposed above: that exhaustion (*Ermüdung*) is a degree of tiredness (*Müdigkeit*).
3. Before depression was officially recognized as a mental illness, it was usual to consider it as a form of fatigue. Someone depressed was someone who was extremely tired. We still hold fatigue for the essential feature of a depressive mood.
4. *Quad* illustrates (and probably inspires) the difference which Deleuze traces between ‘tiredness’ and ‘exhaustion.’ The central point of *the square is a point of exhaustion/the exhausted point*:

There’s no doubt that the protagonists tire themselves out and will drag themselves more and more. But tiredness is a minor aspect of the enterprise [...]. The protagonists tire according to the number or realisations. But the possible is accomplished independently of this number, by the exhausted protagonists who exhaust it. [...].

The protagonists realize and tire at the four corners of the square, along the sides, and the diagonals. But they accomplish and exhaust at the center of the square, where the diagonals cross. [...]. The center is precisely that place where they might come together; and their meeting, their collision, is not an event among others, but the only possibility of event -the potentiality of the corresponding space. To exhaust space is to extenuate its potentiality through rendering any meeting impossible. (Deleuze, 1995, 13)

5. The German historian of art Aby Warburg was said to be what we call today 'bipolar,' but we may read differently his psychiatric episode. In his essay 'Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science', Agamben writes that Warburg was tired of the divisions within and between knowledge systems, and he wanted to embrace everything in a 'science without name.' 'Depression' as a medicalized psychological state misses precisely what was his genius: from exhaustion, he created the unfinished *Atlas Mnemosyne*, 'a figurative atlas,' 'gigantic condenser that gathered together all the energetic current that had animated and continued to animate Europe's memory' (Agamben, 1999, 95) – a true combinatorial, as Deleuze might argue.

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