

*'What are we here for?' –*  
**Compliance and resistance in  
academic development (a view  
from the UK)**

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# A discursive/reflective paper on AD (and HE in general):

- giving some background information about academic development in England
- use this background to introduce the concept of value gaming in academic development (research project between the UK, Belgium, Scandinavia and Poland)

# Once upon a time in Amsterdam (2010)...

- ... Who?
- ... Why?
- ... How?

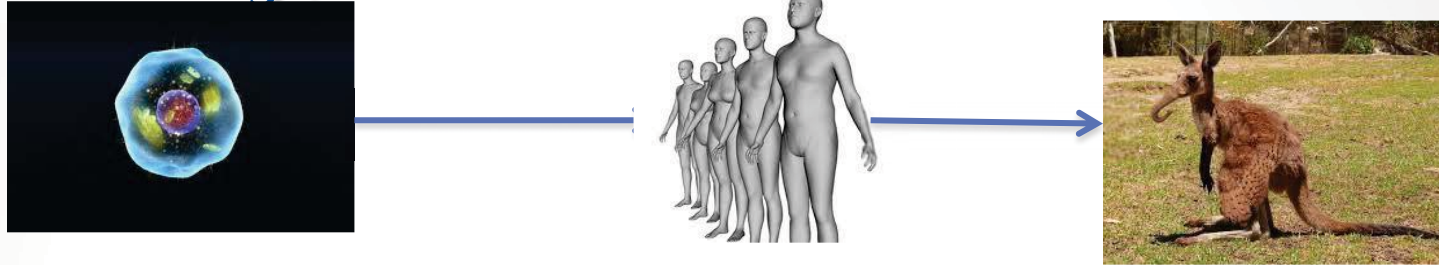




From (almost) 'invisibility' to  
'complex visibility'

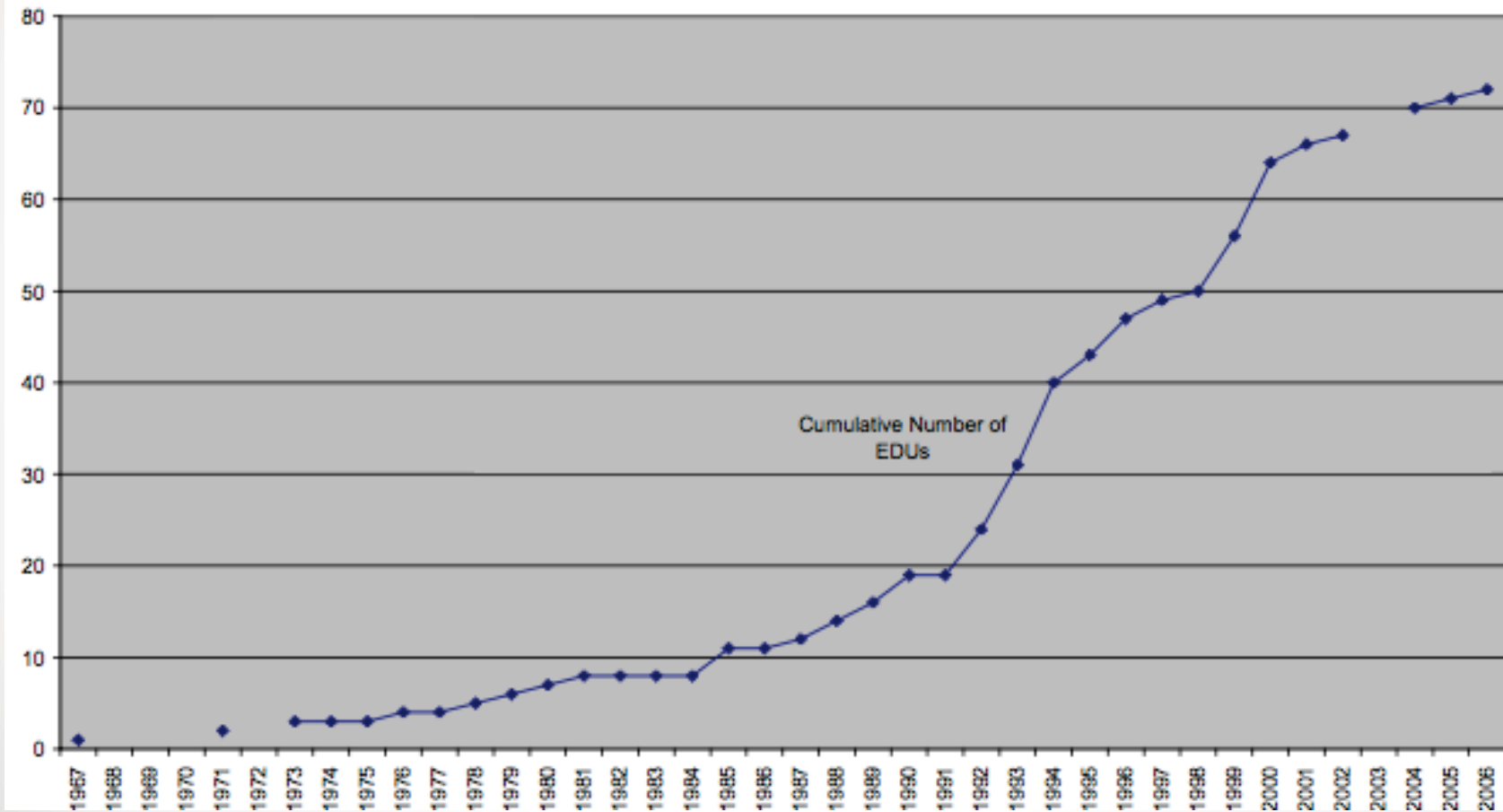


# Genesis - From cell to full body, and beyond...



- 1970s – Individual efforts to improve learning and teaching in universities ('almost invisibility')
- 1980s – 1990s – Grouping of developers with a specific institutional role ('partial visibility')
- 2000s – Institutionalisation and expansion of educational development units; solidification of the role of AD/ED ('contested visibility')
- 2005 onwards – Diversification and complexification ('complex visibility')

# Growth...



(Gosling, 2008)

# Nomenclatures...

- Teacher trainer
- Teacher educator
- Educational developer
- Academic Developer
- In Latin-derived languages:  
*formateur/formatore/formador*





# Current complex positioning of the role...

- Central service
- Stand-alone unit
- Within academic faculty
- Library/information services
- Human Resources/personnel
- Quality office
- Education faculty

(differentials in the balance between teaching and research)



## THE CONTEXT...

### HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR:

- Increasingly performance and market-driven, top-down interventions
- From education and scholarship to learning and teaching
- Saturated with 'virtuous' language about LT but dubious actualization
- The 'learnification' of everything (Biesta), with teaching being 'de-politicised'
- Criticality often marginalised in favour of fast implementation of reforms

### ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Increasingly hybrid identities (positioning and self-positioning between academic and service, management and academic cultures)
- Unstable and liminal positions, very context-dependent
- 'Unsure' epistemological profile
- Both aligned and mis-aligned with institutional and national policies (allegiance to institution and own values)

# Living with/in contested concepts

Autonomy ----- Government/Management/Market forces

*Verstehen* ----- *Erklären*

Questioning ----- Answering

Creativity/divergent thinking ----- Quality as administrative consistency/convergent thinking

Flexibility and reflectivity ----- rigidity and application of rules

Excellence as aspiration ----- application of rigid bureaucratic procedures and market imperatives

Real innovation ----- academic expediency



# Does this spell...

- The demise of scholarship? (as an attitude to critically engage with ideas and not as the development of intellectual infrastructure for the different disciplines ?)
- The demise of philosophy? (not as a discipline but as an attitude to question)

# Project questions:

- How do academic developers position themselves if their own (personal and professional) values do not reflect the social and institutional discourses in their workplace?
- Do they comply with the institutional imperatives, resist them, side-step them, or a combination of these responses?
- What kind of value 'game' do they enter to ensure that their own beliefs about education remain aligned with their own actions?



# Centrality of values, against neutrality, in favour of mediated intentionality and ‘authenticity’...

(bearing in mind not only client characteristics and institutional  
culture and policies, but also personal and professional values)



## A matter of 'practical reason' (Bourdieu, 1998) in

terms of:

- ◎ How academic developers try to solve moral dilemmas in terms of actions and behaviours that are in line with their own value sets
- ◎ How academic developers interact with their own institutional environments and negotiate their sense of agency within them

# Some definitions...

- ◎ Values: the various *affective* forces that underpin our actions (Mouffe) and are at the heart of *being* and *becoming* academic developers in specific educational environments
- ◎ Compliance and resistance as forces that are very context-dependant and whose interplay constitutes 'value gaming'

# Political ontology as...

- ... not a fixed identity but a process of value negotiation...
- ... that is at the heart of a ***professional imagination*** where 'norms are breached and amended by appeal to principles, insights and new understandings often in light of changed and changing circumstances.' (Sugrue, 2012)

3 case studies to illustrate how compliance and resistance play

within specific institutional contexts and specific value sets...

- Poland
- Belgium
- Norway and Sweden



# Provisional results...

- Contextual factors are important in defining role and agency – they shape the relationship between self and hetero definitions (active agents of change or merely mechanistic supporters of reforms? Supporters of academics' growth or supporters of performativity and reform implementation?);
- Interpreters and intermediaries of reform; buffering function; encouraging academic ownership;
- However, this happens within time frames increasingly reduced that do not allow for reflection - this makes reform superficial.



# Towards...

Academic Development as:

- 'Thinking together' (agonistic dimension);
- Debating concepts rather than just 'using' them
- Preserving divergence

**But is this always possible in current higher educational climates? And if convergence is further reinforced, what happens then?**



- Special issue of the *International Journal of Academic Development* to appear in January 2014



# Questions for the audience

- Is any of this relevant in/for your local contexts? Does it ring 'true' in your case(s) too? Why/Why not?
- What are the prevalent discourses/values about education?
- Do these impinge on academic development? How?
- Is there a value (anta-)agonism? What shape(s) does it take?

