Monsters astray in the flesh: A layered exploration of the im/possibilities of resistance-work in the neoliberalised university

At this point in time we know that universities across the world have been traversed by neoliberal and new managerial discourses and that academic work has changed considerably as a result. A great deal of good work has been undertaken to ascertain the extent and nature of these changes and the impact they have had on all aspects of university life. We know that academics are overworked and stressed and that there is a widespread sense of desperation and malaise. The pressing question now seems to be: how come academics do not engage in more forceful resistance? How does resistance become difficult, and when and where is it achievable? Drawing on ethnographic materials created over 10 years in various Australian universities, this paper offers a layered reading of some of the ‘monsters’ that appear to have ‘gone astray in the flesh’ of academics, that is, the embodied discourses or ‘passionate attachments’ which get in the way of strong and powerful resistance to neoliberal practices. The contention is that we need a much richer understanding of these and other monsters and the work that they do in everyday academic work-life to be able to destabilise and exceed their hold on us, and to enable more potent individual and collective resistance.