Reflecting on Practices

New Directions for Spatial Theories

Edited by Friederike Landau-Donnelly,
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CHAPTER 3

PRACTICES AND POWER IN PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE: THE EXAMPLE OF "RECOGNITION AND REWARDS" AT DUTCH UNIVERSITIES

Arnoud Lagendijk and Mark Wiering

This chapter develops a "practice and power" lens and applies it to assess the actual transformation of human resources (HR) practices in Dutch academia. The starting point of this "practice and power" lens is the idea that the (re)production of the social is relationally and contingently constituted, with an important role in power dynamics. Practices present temporal and spatial habits that can be characterized as processual, contingent, performative, contextual, fluid, meaningful, normative and unheroic, among other things (Lamers & Spaargaren 2016; Mueller 2017). The first part of the chapter draws on the notions of systemic, dispositional and episodic power to capture these aspects in terms of power. We also employ Schatzki's (2001, 2005) notion of "site ontology" and Law's (2004) notion of "hinterland" to build a dynamic, topological approach of practice and power dynamics. Our argument thus takes some distance from practice literature that searches for formats and common elements of practices, such as the threefold interpretation by Shove (the making and breaking of links between meanings, materials and competences) (Shove, Pantzar & Watson 2012). In particular, we focus on how practices are shaped through patterns of presences and absences, and lead to patterns of power in sites, bundles, spaces and landscapes.

Applying the practice and power lens, in the second part of the chapter we discuss the case of "Recognition and Rewards" (R&R) in Dutch academia. "Recognition and Rewards" ("Erkennen en Waarderen") is a programme of transformation launched by the Dutch universities to rethink and improve practices of staff selection, appraisal, promotion and supervision. With the context of university-wide consultation, one of us (Lagendijk) has been involved in the drafting of one of the local R&R visions, as well as in national responses to the strategy.

SITE ONTOLOGY, NEXUS AND SEDIMENTATION

Practices are enacted and evolved in what Schatzki (2001, 2005) aptly describes as a "site ontology". That term provides a language of composition through which we can describe the performance and situatedness of practices. Meetings are enacted in rooms (plus equipment), assessments are made behind desks with data provided by computers and phones, and so on. Sites are where practices happen, where they are arranged and performed through individuals (such as R&R receivers and givers) entangled with socio-materiality (locations, scripts, budgets, etc.). That entanglement also entails bodily capacities, habits, affects and emotions (Schatzki 2001; Weenink & Spaargaren 2016). Sites shape subjects, and vice versa. Through joined arrangements and the bundling of practices, sites gather and pervade "spaces". Such spaces assume both organizational and geographical forms, through which practices evolve and are sustained. Spaces can be (parts of) organizations, neighbourhoods, projects, networks, and so on dedicated to a certain activity (such as teaching or doing research). Spaces, in turn, host and equip the sites vital to their constitution and development. The language of sites, spaces and landscape helps to map where and how practices are performed, with what connections and in which settings, from local to global.

Practice theorists have further developed this thinking on the distribution and connections of practices in the volume *The Nexus of Practices* (Hui, Schatzki & Shove 2017). Drawing on Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour, contributor Watson (2017: 181) portrays the role of power relations as an integral part of the performance, distribution and connections of practice: "Tangling with questions about connections between practices takes on a sharper edge when the problem is that of explaining how some actors and sites come to be loci of a disproportionate capacity for shaping action elsewhere." This links power close to the notion of nexus. In the words of Allison Hui (2017: 52), "Multiple practices come together as a nexus with diverse links and relationships that contribute to the production of variation within the social field or plane." These variations, moreover, can be "identified through reference to shared spatiotemporal characteristics" (52). Nexuses are thus part of concrete processes of institutionalization and social sedimentation, which underpin routinized forms of social activity, including power relations. Nexuses help us understand the sedimentation of "specific hegemonic constellations of physical, material and symbolic power" (Landau & Pohl 2023). Such sedimentation can take the form of written (policy, vision, law, research) documents shaping knowledge and meaning, and scripts and devices providing competences and resources. Within this sedimentation, power evolves and settles at the intersection of materiality (resources) and expression (meaning, knowledge). From a nexus perspective, moreover, sedimentation can be understood through the

notion of discourse, or, to use Davide Nicolini's term, "discursive formation" (Nicolini 2017). The latter, in Nicolini's words, is "obtained by assembling existing discursive and non-discursive elements in a novel way through the institutions of new social and discursive practices" (Nicolini 2017: 108). Accordingly, "[n]exus analysis is the investigation of the forms of discursivity that circulate through specific sites of practice and which lead to the emergence of specific mediated actions and regimes of activity, for example, doing a class or appearing in court" (108–9). To understand this circulation, the next section discusses the notion of "hinterland".

HINTERLAND

As also explained in this book's Introduction (Carlsson, Lagendijk and Landau-Donnelly, Chapter 1 in this volume), practices encompass a discursive (or "expressed") dimension, which is substantiated and powered through what John Law (2004: 42) characterizes as a "crafting of presences". Law calls the context of this crafting the "hinterland". The term "hinterland" refers to the whole chain of events and connections, occurring through space and time, behind the formation of the landscape of practice. In what resembles a kind of micro-genealogical work, the challenge is to trace all relevant events, texts, crossroads and processes to reveal a practice's "hinterland of pre-existing social and material realities" (Law 2004: 13). That is, a hinterland exploration unveils what is behind current presences, notably by what has been made absent. Using Latour's (2005) actor–network theory (ANT) terminology, a hinterland exploration provides insight into how certain ideas, agents and protocols have become "obligatory passage points" in a landscape (including sites and spaces) of a practice. How do patterns of presences and absences turn particular interest into "sacred cows", and how do specific exemplary cases turn into "totem poles" drawing in hypes, hosannas and gurus? How do idiosyncratic rankings and competitions, and social media rants, turn into inescapable normalities or even become so obvious no one questions them (Runia 2018; ScienceGuide 2021b)? How are landscapes of practices filled with "truisms", "beaten tracks", and so on? How are (new) practices often advocated through "happy talk" (e.g. on diversity), which often smothers sensitivities concerning difficult social issues, as Sara Ahmed (2012) describes in her seminal work on diversity and racism? On the one hand, "happy talk" presents a major affective driver, moving the happy talkers to "totem pole" positions. On the other hand, "happy talk" disheartens and excludes those affected by a painful practice, and who are in need of more radical change and recognition. In this light, a particularly interesting form of presence in academia is the "streetlight effect", or

the "drunkard's search". Such presence is based on the use of available, easy methods that shed a very narrow and skewed light on the issue (Molas-Gallart & Ràfols 2018). This yields practices more based on affect and sentiment (a strong wish for "numbers to compare") than on proper argument and measure in appraisal and quality assessments.

The power that these presences exert depends on what is kept absent in the hinterland. In part, absence consists of what we can call *uncharte(re)d territories*, with no appearance of any issue of relevance or consequence. This entails a vast domain of fully dormant non-presences. More active are *manifest absences*, in which consequential items are "othered", and *hidden presences*, in which consequential items are ignored (Table 3.1). These absences are "generative" through "flickering" (Law & Mol 2001). Through flickering, they prompt, irritate and drum, with a twofold effect. On the one hand, they sustain a practice by giving some space to alternative voices and inputs. They may thus help to bring coherence to practices operating in and across very different sites and spaces. In Law's (2004: 99) succinct words: "Often different realities are simply held apart: cohering but not consistent." On the other, "flickerings" may also expose so much friction, such as institutional biases, racism and sexism, that practices change. Such absences may thus play roles like "elephants in the room", "ticking bombs" or "crises in slow motion". Flickering, hence, encompasses the volatile zone between different realities and different truths through which practices are shaped and transformed.

So, venturing into the hinterland means investigating how presences and absences at sites, in spaces or landscapes are crafted, how, where and by whom they are experienced, articulated, scripted and further inscribed. What is the politics of bringing to light certain presences and not others? What is the power and effect of flickering, as "hidden presences" as well as "manifest absences"? This venturing recognizes the tacit and covert aspect of practices, drawing on the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, as explained by Schatzki (2001). It also chimes with Foucault's

Table 3.1 Mapping presences and absences: shaping practices from the hinterland

	Presence	*Absence*
Manifest	Empowering: gate(keeper)s, landmarks, totem poles, sacred cows, pink elephants, truisms, beaten tracks and other known knowns	Flickering: othering, (out)framing, pigeonholing and other known unknowns
Hidden	Flickering: elephants in the room, spectres, geographical unconscious, blind spots, cover-ups and other unknown knowns	Dormant: uncharte(re)d territories

genealogical approach, although the practice approach suggested here is more fine-grained and anchored in space/time than the more synthetic and grander discursive approach drawing on Foucault (Burnham 2021).

TRANSFORMATION AND FACES OF POWER

How, therefore, do we shed light on how (nexuses of) practices evolve and transform? For this, we turn to Hanna Carlsson's "transformational landscape" (Figure 3.1). In a material sense, as Carlsson argues, transformation becomes manifest within organizational spaces (such as universities), within which practices are (re)produced and (co-)arranged. Analytically, this entails zooming in and out (Nicolini 2009). Zooming in, we focus on changes occurring in and between sites. Sites are the key places of creativity, trials of new practices and engagements with new actors. Sites become through entanglements of knowledge, capacities, emotions, affects, and so on. This is manifested through how practitioners invest in novel and modified practices, such as new ways of recruiting, supervising, appraising and promoting academic staff. Site evolution, in turn, affects spaces, nexuses and landscapes, although this very much depends on the mechanism of communication, diffusion, adaptation and, above all, acceptance (Carlsson, Chapter 2 in this volume). Zooming out, we may follow how change and circulation are accompanied by altered connections from the hinterland, shifting patterns of

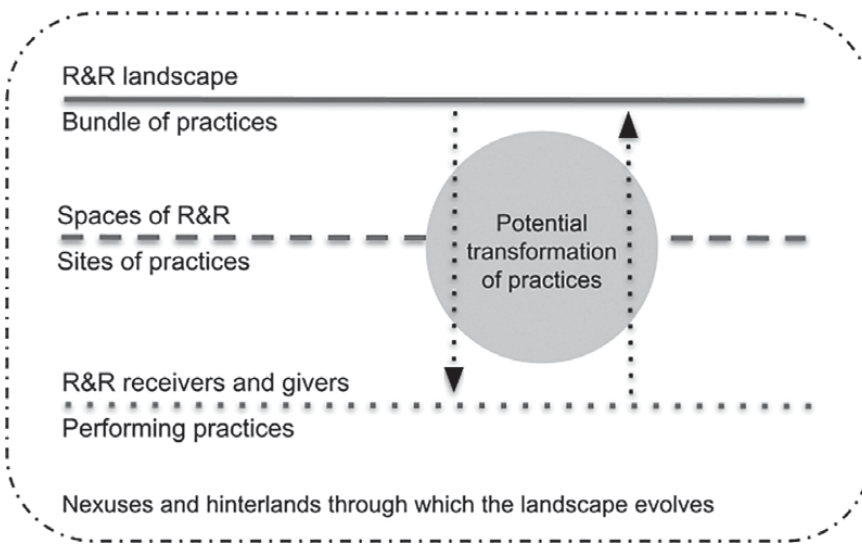

Figure 3.1 A site-ontological perspective on the transformation of practices

Source: Carlsson (2022).

absences and presences. Which "inconvenient truths" have come out in the open, which "received wisdoms" have faded? Which horizons have opened, which closed? Which associations with ("happy") affects have strengthened, and which weakened? How do affects and "emotions contribute to the making and breaking of linkages between (network of) practices" (Weenink & Spaargaren 2016: 80)?

Let us now, in light of this quest, delve somewhat more deeply into the concept of power. As Watson (2017) and Mueller (2017: 51) argue, practice approaches do not include a theory of power. On the one hand, power is deemed important and even considered as vital to understand the extent to which, and in what forms, transformations (can) take place. On the other hand, power presents a highly elusive, deeply contested concept, which is not easy to pin down and apply. In line with the "practice lens", a solution is to adopt a "power lens", in which power presents a toolbox through which social and political processes of influence and structuring can be assessed. A first step for this, as discussed above, is assessing the emergence and evolution of power relations through the lens of the hinterland. A next step is to associate different aspects of the site ontology of practices with the notions of "faces of power" (Lukes 2021).

Hence, in line with Mueller and Haugaard, and drawing on Steven Lukes' (2021) seminal work, we follow Stewart Clegg's (1989) threefold perspective on power, containing "episodic power", "dispositional power" and "systemic power". In Haugaard's (2010: 425) words:

> Episodic power refers to the exercise of power that is linked to agency. Dispositional power signifies the inherent capacities of an agent that the agent may have, irrespective of whether they exercise this capacity. Systemic power refers to the ways in which given social systems confer differentials of dispositional power on agents, thus structuring possibilities for action.

This threefold conception is more relational and performative than Lukes' original three-faced power. Although Clegg's triad features agency, notably as part of episodic power, what is crucial is how the scope for agency is structured through dispositional power, which in turn is distributed and shaped through asymmetric power relations (system). Dispositional power in this context encompasses the capacities at hand, including those that affect the way agents interact and act collectively ("culture") (Haugaard 2010). Systemic power, through shaping and channelling resources at scales that (far) exceed the "site" reach of episodic power, underpins the performative and circulatory nature of power. Through these three faces, subjects are shaped by power as much as they are wielding power.

Then, episodic, dispositional and systemic power, together with notions such as influence, empowering, domination and so on, present a practice-based power toolbox. Crucially, these three dimensions present differences in scope, not levels, in the shaping and enactment of practices. For each systemic observation of certain power relations, we need to zoom in onto the corresponding dispositional and episodic faces – that is, the shaping of capacities and their actual, agency-based, exercise of power. As Weenink and Spaargaren (2016: 81) caution, "Power analyses with the lens zoomed out very easily make us forget the 'agency-dimension' of change in networks of practices." A continual emphasis on the flatness of the power–practice entanglement should prevent that. Therefore, in this chapter we stay away from an idea of distinguishing between a "system level" and a "practise level", or between "larger structures and agency". Chiming with the notion of zooming, we use the term "scope" rather than "levels". What intrigues us is how relatively stable practices (staff recruitment, supervision, appraisal and promotion) are up for change because of a single manifesto on R&R. What does this set in train, within the scope of sites, nexuses and landscapes, and how does this shape the overall process of transformation?

How, then, can this association between a site ontology, hinterland and faces of power help us? Let us start with the practices occurring within the sites of our R&R case, in academic meetings, processes of supervision, appraisal, promotion, and so on. This entails a direct exercise of *episodic power*, fuelled by the dispositional power that subjects and devices obtain from organizational spaces (steering capacities and knowledge) and the wider landscape (sedimented forms, protocols, rules, conventions, etc.). This power affects the way subjectivities and normativities are conceived and how these shape certain behavioural and emotional standards, and thereby behaviour itself. The latter consequently actualizes and mobilizes *dispositional power*, resulting in certain presences (capacities and procedures to do things in certain ways) and absences (impossibilities to do so), which in turn further condition and channel behaviour within sites. Such dispositions, accordingly, take the form of capacities, practical knowledge and socio-material entanglements, with a strong role for (selective) circulation and bundling. The latter gives rise finally to sedimented *systemic power* – that is, of codes, scripts, rules, conventions and "habitus" evolving in the wider landscape (Table 3.2). Landscapes, accordingly, refer to more abstract and complex concepts of interactions, separations, possibilities and impossibilities, which are bound to be more difficult to uncover and grasp than the behavioural patterns at site level. Importantly, grasping such complexity may give insights into nexuses of practices across spaces and sites.

Further, a deeper understanding of power relations and their scope is obtained by unravelling patterns of presences and absences. What becomes

dominant versus marginal, and how patterns of presences and absences evolve, stems from the particular form and development of hinterland, of what is enabled to speak out versus being silenced, and how that becomes connected. Here, in line with the work of Foucault, Hannah Arendt and others, more subtle concepts of "power over", "power to", "empowerment", "hegemony", "resistance", and so on become important. In particular, hinterlands may reveal hidden and obscure places of resistance, alternatives and change. Transformation thus becomes a complex entanglement of behavioural change, or agency at sites (episodic), cultural change in spaces (dispositional) and institutional change at the scope of landscapes (systemic, including "discursive formations") (Figure 3.2 and Table 3.2). With this entanglement,

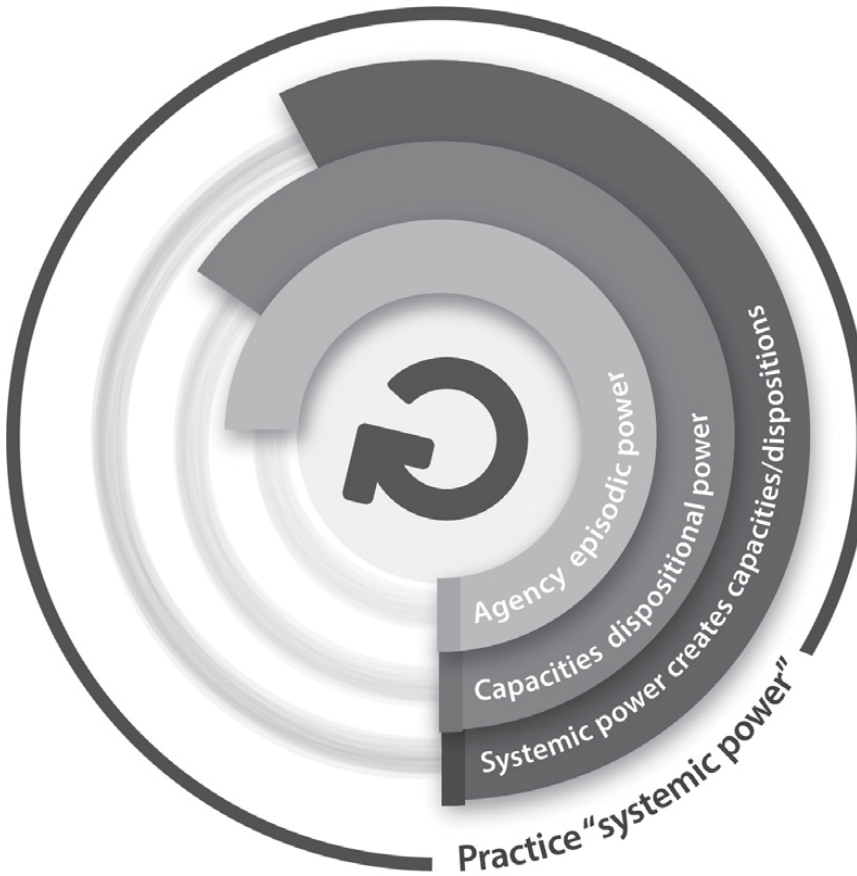

Figure 3.2 Mueller's practice-based understanding of power

Source: The authors, based on the work of Clegg (1989) and Mueller (2017).

Table 3.2 Tooling the power-in-practices-in-transformation lens

	Practice "site ontology"	*Faces of power*	*Scope*	*Transformation*
	Sites (enactment, performance)	Episodic power	What behaviour? What (emergent) subjectivities and normativities? What local rules, habits or emotions?	Agency/ behavioural change (new habits)
	Spaces (bundles)	Dispositional power	What distribution of knowledge and capacities? What socio-material entanglements between bodies, materials, habits or affects? What subject formation?	Cultural change (new capacities)
Hinterland ("flickering" of) presences/ absences (manifest, hidden)				
	Landscapes (nexus, sedimentation)	Systemic power	What (socio-) materialities, networks of circulation and "discursive formations"? What resources, codes, scripts, rules, conventions, habitus, etc., and nexuses between them?	Institutional change (new resources and "recoding")

power will always constitute a moving and elusive target. Power presents, to follow Gilles Deleuze's living interpretation, "a mole that only knows its way around its networks of tunnels, its multiple hole: it 'acts on the basis of innumerable points'; 'it comes from below'" (Deleuze 1988: 8). Without following a strict plan or protocol, we now use this vocabulary and the questions of Table 3.2 to further study our case.

STAGING RECOGNITION AND REWARDS

How have the Dutch ambitions to improve the way academic staff are recognized and rewarded for their work by their organization been met? To what extent has there been change in habits and activities, capacities and culture, as well as the "systemic" resources and rules of the game? The transformation of R&R in Dutch academia constitutes our case here. This case involves a broad set of both formal and informal practices. Formally, R&R is about contracts, notably fixed-term (temporal) versus open-ended ("permanent"), pay, division of tasks, performance assessment (plus consequence), appraisals, career steps, consultation and decision. One of us has been head of department for many years and formally involved in the national and local development of the R&R programme; this has helped to develop the "landscape" and "spaces" perspective on the case. Informally, it is about inclusion, social safety, combating harassment and discrimination, more intersectionality, career prospects and everyday appreciation. Both of us, as mature scholars, have experienced these aspects in detail. This has helped to shed light on the site aspects through encountering the different faces of power at work through numerous practices. Our discussion starts with a historical sketch, followed by a review of the transformation applying the lens of site ontology and hinterland.

Over time, formal R&R practices have manifested more change than informal ones, thanks to changes in the broader landscape of academic organizations and work. Like elsewhere, Dutch universities underwent massive growth in the 1960s and 1970s. This was followed by periods of what Klaas Sijtsma (2021) describes as "disciplining" (approximately the 1980s), "focusing" (1990s), "acceleration" (2000s) and "derailment" (2010s). *Disciplining and focusing* resulted from top-down intervention in the steering, financing and monitoring of higher education. Hence, funding became more "conditional" (performance-based, through multi-annual assessments of education and research) and competitive (distributed via grant organizations such as the NWO: Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Dutch Research Council). *Acceleration* resulted from a combination of rapidly growing "productivity", both in research (turning the Netherlands into one of the "top" publishing countries in terms of articles per scholar) and in education (massive growth in student numbers, both domestic and international). *Derailment*, finally, refers to how staff have been affected by increased competition, workload, administration and insecurity, as well as to the overall strain on academic organizations to do ever more. In the view of Koenraad Debackere (2021), a professor at KU Leuven, this manifested itself as a process of "disruptive gradualism". For staff, the years of disciplining, focusing and acceleration were accompanied by a radical overhaul in rules and practices, notably concerning contracts, workload, performance measurement and career steps and prospects. Fixed-terms contracts, such as postdocs and

temporary lecturers, became the standard for early career tracks, often for many years and without prospects of tenure. The workload exploded both quantitatively (more students, papers, proposals, etc.) and qualitatively (impact, committees, etc.). Key performance measures were whittled down to publishing in "top journals" and achieving adequate student evaluation scores.

As a result of these changes, power over staff members' work and future shifted from heads of department (HoDs) and deans to a variety of assessment panels, journal editors, metric systems, conference organizers (e.g. keynotes), award panels (e.g. "best paper") and, to a lesser extent, students (in the role of anonymously scoring subjects), among others. Moreover, this became mediated by new types of managers, notably the directors of research institutes and HR departments, who gained a stronger say in whom to recruit and on what terms. In practice terms, accordingly, nexuses proliferated. The recruiting and supervising practices led by HoDs became more and more dependent on all kinds of management and assessment practices, which in turn relied on a much broader landscape of interests and affects: governments setting evaluation protocols and standards to meet political aims; publishers revising journal performances to meet commercial interests; research councils changing call and panel practices in view of societal, political and organizational pressures; and so on. Within the organizational spaces of academic organizations, this unleashed a highly complex web of dispositional power caught in a culture of competition, hierarchical control and servitude. In general, research was more recognized and rewarded than education, although both became subject to nationwide, multi-annual scoring exercises. Certain universities invested heavily in standardized career tools such as tenure tracks. How exactly such practices became bundled and with what kind of capacities and cultures remained rather locally specific. One perspective comes from Sijbolt Noorda (2021: 5), professor in theology and former university governor, who continues to see the university as "an odd gathering of all kinds of subcultures". More critically, Eelco Runia (2018, our translation), an assistant professor who decided to leave academia, laments the "systemic" penetration of academia: "The net result is that we are saddled with a Pandora's box of audit systems, accountability protocols and powerful examination boards and assessment panels."

Because of this diversity, many past informal practices continue to thrive. At departmental and group levels, episodic power is still highly discretionary, albeit less absolute than in the years before "disciplining", with variable consequences. Discretionary power can do much to foster or stem career development. HoDs and supervisors make critical decisions on task allocation, projects and committees, work, authorship and grant writing, among other things, making major differences to how staff can perform. More informally, what is granted to and demanded from staff organizationally, socially and emotionally is very site- and space-specific. Typical for academic environments is

the strong autonomy of departments in HR issues (apart from recruitment and appraisals) and employees' consultation (apart from faculty and university rulings). There is often ample room for self-organization as well as oppression, discrimination and favouritism. By bending and overstepping the rules, HoDs and supervisors can simplify work processes, enhance collaboration, hence reducing workload and stress within a team. By opting for occasionally saying "No", episodic power may thus serve a department to buffer against ever-growing external demands from the organization, sector and society.

Unfortunately, recent studies have revealed the intensity of the latter, toxic side. Universities excel in aggressive, discriminating and exploitative behaviour by narcissistic and manipulative leaders (Breetvelt 2021). Early-career, female, gender-non-conforming and international staff are particularly affected (Naezer, van den Brink & Benschop 2019). Particularly toxic are departments led by highly successful professors who use their stardom to insulate themselves from external rules on recruitment, appraisal and consultation, allowing them to tyrannize their department at will. Even worse, as long as such terror remains hidden, faculty and university management often turn a blind eye in the interest of publications, grants, status and rankings. The result is what van Houtum and van Uden (2022: 3) call self-produced "autoimmune organizational disorder". However, importantly, such exercises of discretionary power are not only episodic; they draw on the broader culture of competition, permissiveness and support benefiting the "winners" (dispositional). By turning a blind eye, universities can deliberately seek to benefit from the Matthew effect, the mechanism turning winners into even stronger winners. In power terms, the vain drive for excellence thus seems to support informal yet impactful faces of systemic and dispositional power, fuelling toxic modes of episodic power and, in turn, seriously undermining fair staff recognition and rewarding.

Three quotes, from the angles of a "winner", journalist and manager, respectively, illustrate the depth of the problem. The successful professor: "Most policy makers don't like it when we say: 'We don't need your policy'. But when things work out well, it is hard for them to say we didn't do well strategically" (Scholten *et al.* 2021: 271). The science journalist: "This autonomy enables professors to make choices that they feel are better suited to their own development, without being restricted by the policies of the university" (van Heest 2021). Finally, in her inaugural lecture as new rector of Maastricht University, Pamela Habibovic firmly denounces this culture: "If we continue to name our research groups after ourselves, undervalue our teaching staff and ignore the importance of support staff, we may produce some more stars, but we will not be able to fulfil our role in society, to provide high-quality education and to push the boundaries of knowledge" (ScienceGuide 2022b).

This has presented the "Why?" of R&R. As a system, Dutch academia foregrounds the formal (assessments, career, etc.) and informal (culture of

excellence, autonomy, etc.) resources enabling selection and appraisal practices (dispositional) to be oppressive, discriminatory and exploitative (episodic). Moreover, this represents a two-way process. Competition, hierarchy and servitude are integral parts of the "episodic" working, and even living, culture on the academic work floor. Academic staff tends to be fully bought into the culture and practices of excellence, even if this means defying formal rules, ethics and even common insights about how we measure excellence (van Houtum & van Uden 2022). Although recently early-career researchers have started to claim their contractual rights for open-ended contracts, for decades undergoing precarity, exploitation and even bullying was considered part of the ritual to achieve tenure. In the words of criminologist Yarin Eski (2022, our translation):

> When you learn unhealthy academic work behaviour, you teach yourself specific techniques to perform the behaviour. We rationalize our own behaviour. For example, we get up extra early and work past five o'clock. Working on weekends has also become normal … We see conferences as holidays, get-togethers with colleagues replace our social life, and we see your name in an inaccessible Pdf file published in a pay-walled journal with a high impact factor as the highest achievement … To this end, we are also motivated, because 'Everyone is doing it.' We tell ourselves, 'That's how you make a career' or 'I make that decision myself, right?' In other words, when people exhibit unhealthy academic work behaviours, they do so not only because of the presence of people who have unhealthy patterns themselves, but also because of the absence of people with healthy patterns.

To break that culture, Eski (2022, our translation) advocates systemic and cultural change: "We need assessment criteria that pay attention to care, welfare and leadership, which primarily should not be about individuality, commercialism and competition, but about true collegiality." Will the R&R movement bring this about?

SHAPING AND LOBBYING FOR R&R

Between November 2018 and November 2019 a coalition consisting of all Dutch universities, their respective medical centres, the two major research funders (NWO and ZonMw) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences drafted the R&R position paper "Room for everyone's talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards for academics"[1] (Box 3.1).

1. See https://recognitionrewards.nl/about/position-paper.

The paper called for a stronger diversity in careers (not only research-based), more emphasis on teamwork, a move from quantitative to qualitative assessment of assessment, an embracing of open science and investing in good leadership. Consequently, this fuelled extensive rounds of local dialogue at individual universities and research institutes, resulting in local position and policy papers. Some universities have made concrete changes in their assessment practices, notably Tilburg (MERIT) and Utrecht (TRIPLE).[2] Most organizations have started policies to allow for more diversified career paths, notably by adding promotions largely based on teaching. The aim is to break the "monoculture of solitary career academics" as "a jack of all trades" excelling in research (Sluijs 2021; TU/e 2021) – or, in the blunter terms of Paul Wouters, professor of scientometrics at Leiden University, to steer clear of "academics who … are not totally deformed because they have had to work 80 hours a week for six years as a postdoc and no longer know what a normal life looks like" (Drayer 2021: 12).

To a greater or lesser extent, all organizations promote R&R as a fundamental cultural change, which, through dialogue and outreach, has to penetrate and transform the whole organization and sector. To promote outreach and the need for cultural change, two R&R "festivals" were organized, on 22 January 2021 and 4 February 2022. Besides workshops on key themes, there were keynotes and panels by core representatives of the partner organizations, the minister of education and spokespersons of academic collectives, such as the Dutch Young Academy (De Jonge Akademie: DJA), a movement of early-career academics supported by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen: KNAW).

BOX 3.1 THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTCH R&R MANIFESTO

This calls for a system of recognition and rewards for academics and research that:

(a) enables the **diversification** and **vitalization** of career paths, thereby promoting excellence in each of the key areas;
(b) acknowledges the independence and individual qualities and ambitions of academics, as well as recognizing **team** performances;
(c) emphasizes **quality** of work over quantitative results (such as number of publications);
(d) encourages all aspects of **open science**; and
(e) encourages high-quality academic **leadership**.

Source: https://recognitionrewards.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/position-paper-room-for-everyones-talent.pdf.

2. See www.uu.nl/nieuws/van-merit-naar-triple.

Complementing the general need felt for cultural change, various developments prompted this initiative. International, political, societal and internal sectoral pressures led to a call for "open science" (OS).[3] OS entails, among other things, moving away from the monoculture of paper publication "behind paywalls" dominated by global commercial publishers. In the Netherlands, a movement called "Science in Transition" strongly lamented the excessive significance given to journal articles. From a means to communicate with peers, publication has turned into a universal, quantified currency for making, and deciding, on academic careers (van Arensbergen 2014). Moreover, internationally, editors of core journals started to challenge the unwarranted use of journal impact factors (JIFs) as indicators for individuals' academic qualities. They were backed by debates among prominent scientometricians (Waltman & Traag 2017). Although JIFs may present, especially in certain disciplines, justifiable proxies for assessing the quality of individual papers, they provide only very limited information about the academic contribution of the authors, with quite high error margins. The use of individual metrics often amounts to no more than "pseudo objectivity" (Collini 2012). These debates resulted in two major declarations: the well-known San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Leiden Manifesto for research metrics (Hicks *et al.* 2015).[4] R&R partners underwrote and applied these various declarations.

The funding organizations (NWO, ZonMw) implemented the practice of "narrative CVs" into grant selection procedures, banning the journal impact factors. Narrative CVs may use impact data, although only at article level, as evidence for the track record told. As part of local R&R development and advocacy, universities set themselves the task to move from quantity to quality as the main yardstick of assessment. Utrecht University followed suit, as explained in a paper in *Nature* (Woolston 2021). As the then NWO chair, Stan Gielis, explains:

> If there is one party that influences the aspect of rewarding, it is the funding organizations. We are actually saying that we are going to change the system of recognition and rewarding. In the Netherlands, we are going to tackle this from NWO, with the VSNU, but above all I think that we as scientists should do this together. There are so many voices saying that this has to change that it is inevitable that people will join in. (ScienceGuide 2018)

His colleague from ZonMw, Jeroen Geurts, endorses how quality stems from collaboration: "I want to work towards a more open and honest science in which we focus more on collaboration and no longer on excellence-driven

3. See www.nwo.nl/open-science.
4. See also wcrif.org/guidance/hong-kong-principles.

diva behaviour" (ScienceGuide 2019). Moreover, the most recent national Research Assessment Protocol focuses solely on quality "within context", with metrics as support (ScienceGuide 2020). Thus, the Ministry of Education also supports the move towards "quality", although the main funding mechanisms continue to be conditional, competitive and individualistic (Ad Valvas 2022).

R&R's academic leaders became professors and governors, Frank Baaijens a professor at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) and Rianne Letschert president of Maastricht University. Besides their leading roles, both express strong views about R&R's significance, notably in the fields of leadership and teamwork. Baaijens states: "You can be incredibly good at your research, but if you intimidate your colleagues and excuse yourself from departmental tasks, do you deserve to become a professor?" (TU/e 2021). Letschert writes:

> Malfunctioning leaders, we can be very brief about that, they ultimately bring inconvenience to many colleagues around them. With corresponding costs … It is a thin line that runs between academic freedom and taking responsibility. If I intervene as rector or as director of a research institute, it is often seen as 'interfering'. The response is: 'I am a professional, so who are you to interfere?' In terms of content, I think academics should have enormous freedom, but when it comes to organizational matters, that freedom often turns into arbitrariness. (de Knecht 2019a)

On teamwork, Baaijens says: "What you can do is make sure you have a team in which research, education and impact are covered. I believe in team spirit: in a group you can develop an incredible strength that would never be possible as an individual" (TU/e 2021). In a similar vein, DJA produced an "R&R manifesto" arguing that teams foster productive collaboration and impact (de Knecht 2018).

The movement also embraces, and needs, an international dimension. The pillars of OS and DORA constitute global phenomena, developed and underwritten by academic organizations and networks worldwide. Yet R&R also warrants an international acceptance and alignment of quality- and team-based norms and practices concerning performance and career steps. There is a fear that, otherwise, Dutch academics will be disadvantaged in the global competition for academic connections and careers. Hence universities, research councils and the national political level engage in an international lobby for R&R. The minister of higher education, Robert Dijkgraaf, received a positive response at a recent EU meeting discussing OS and R&R: "I am very happy that our countries now have a common agenda regarding these two principles of R&R and OS. This is an essential step for

the future" (ScienceGuide 2022a, our translation). EU's innovation commissioner, Mariya Gabriel, endorsed the new approach, saying:

> The European Commission remains firm on this point. The current assessment of research is based on a number of limited quantitative indicators. Important contributions to science are not recognized in this way. We need to look together at how we can improve this. In the future, science should be assessed mainly on the basis of qualitative indicators. The quantitative indicators can still be used, but depending on the objective and the context.
> (ScienceGuide 2022a)

Associations embracing the principles include the European University Association (EUA), the Marie Curie Alumni Association and the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) (Bakker 2022a; EUA 2021).

So, will drawing on this concrete advocacy for R&R match with the broad wish for systemic and cultural change in staff practices? And how will this transform the role of episodic power? Seen through our practice/power lens, a summary of the advocacy may read as follows. R&R presents *advocacy towards systemic recoding (career diversification, teamwork, quality, OS, leadership, etc.), nurturing capacities to reaffect, resubjectivize and empower R&R receivers/givers (dispositional scope) to transform concrete practices of staff recruitment, appraisal and leadership (episodic scope)*. How much power does this advocacy have? For the moment, *systemic* recoding appears primarily abstract. Recoding seeks to alter discursive formations and habitus rather than to change system-wide rules and scripts. The only "hard" recoding currently entails the removal of contextless metrics from research assessments and CVs. How the R&R initiative is rolled out nationally, via dialogues and festivals, and locally, via visioning and participatory processes, reveals a core orientation towards bottom-up cultural change (de Knecht 2019b). For instance, Maastricht University calls upon staff to "unmute".[5] At Utrecht University, these debates help early-career staff "to change the system from within" (Bakker 2022b). "Happy talk" manifestos, festivals and social media buzz foster new entanglements between agents, emotions, affects and practices. Yet, for practices to transform within sites, genuinely changing behaviour for the better for all R&R receivers will require new presences and nexuses within and across broader spaces of academia. It is to these aspects that we turn in the next section.

5. See recognitionrewards.nl/portfolio/unmute.

INTO THE HINTERLAND: FLICKERING OF SUPPORT AND RESISTANCE

In our perspective, for practices to change, altered connections from the hinterland are required, so that practices such as narrative CVs, diverse careers and teamwork can grow and spread. For exploitation to go, major shifts in patterns of presences and absences are needed. From a hinterland's perspective, this presents a battle of flickering, in which – willingly and unwillingly – the unknown becomes temporarily known, and the known temporarily unknown (Table 3.1). Consequently, how this battle unfolds affects what more permanent changes occur in the landscape of practices, impacting resources, codes, discursive formations, capacities and habits. Flickering may thus change as well as lock ideas, scripts, values, protagonists, and so on. This section focuses on R&R issues undergoing strong flickering, namely the use of metrics, narrative CVs, staff appraisal and hierarchy. In doing so, we cover only a very small part of the vast hinterland of R&R practices. As with any genealogical approach, the potential work is effectively infinite.

Use of metrics, journal impact factors or narrative CVs

The issue of metrics stirred hefty debate. In response to NWO's and others' JIF ban, 171 academics wrote a critical manifesto titled "New Recognition and Rewards harms Dutch academia" (ScienceGuide 2021a). The manifesto posits that fair assessment of researchers warranted the use of objective measures such as the JIF, albeit differently across disciplines (ScienceGuide 2021a). It also challenges what was considered the "political agenda" of OS. This unleashed a (social) media storm between two camps, including a countermanifesto initiated by Young Science in Transition (ScienceGuide 2021b). The pro-JIF camp recalled past, pre-metric times, when well-performing early-career academics were fully at the mercy of local supervisors, and were "saved" by objective performance indicators. As Harry Garretsen, a professor at the University of Groningen (de Knecht 2019a), argues in a nuanced way: "I welcome the movement that distances itself from quantitative indicators that are often poorly substantiated, but I myself come from a time when every form of evaluation was still subjective. If the dean didn't like you, you didn't get promoted" (see also Sijtsma 2021).

The anti-camp, on the other hand, built on evidence that metrics such as JIFs provide only illusory pseudo-objectivity, particularly since they have come to favour and incentivize particular forms and subjects of research. A prominent UK study on the role of metrics thus asserts, "Metrics hold real power: they are constitutive of values, identities and livelihoods" (Wilsdon *et al.* 2015). Wouters, a prominent Dutch scientometrician, argues that, for

fair assessment, metrics should always be used, alongside qualitative indicators against concrete, individual objectives (Drayer 2021). Those objectives should then be set in the context of the local team and be assessed through processes of peer review. JIF advocates appear particularly wary of context and the use of individual objectives. For Wouters, working with objectives is actually quite straightforward: "That is not so complex. You just write down what you want to achieve" (Drayer 2021: 10). In stronger terms, Jarno Hoekman, an innovation scientist, calls the pro-JIF manifesto a "disconcertingly weak piece", stating: "Putting down 'objective' and measurable standards as science and putting down OS assessment criteria as political shows a complete lack of understanding of the historical context in which standards for measuring scientific performance were established" (ScienceGuide 2021c, our translation). This historical context encompasses political, economic (including commercial) and cultural aspects of scientometrics. Frank Miedema, who as a governor at Utrecht University supported the JIF ban, speaks of a "JIF-chasing disease" affecting science globally (Grove 2021).

Despite all the evidence and experience available, reshaping the practice of assessing researchers proves difficult. JIF advocates appear particularly agitated about the "narrative CVs": "As [a grant] applicant, spending even more time on non-science-related drivel just makes an already onerous application process more difficult and wasteful. As a reviewer, I can't imagine how I would use this information", according to a critical researcher (Grove 2021). A concern is that narrative CVs will primarily promote more bragging narrators, and thus, for instance, tend to discriminate against women and minorities.[6] In part, these criticisms make a caricature of the narrative CV, which, rather than being a promotional story, entails a well-grounded account of somebody's academic vision, trajectory and record. Nobody denies that metrics can provide valid evidence for certain aspects of research quality. To defuse these criticisms, therefore, the new format is now framed as "evidence-based".[7] As James Wilsdon, director of the UK's Research on Research Institute, comments: "No framework is perfect but the move to narrative CVs is a good one as they represent the multi-dimensional types of excellence we need in universities and research, and they recognize that [metrical] shortcuts to assessing research lead to certain problems around gender and inequality" (Grove 2021). What R&R advocacy thus seeks to counter, against quite some resistance, is the "drunkard's search" practice of measuring research quality through the available metrics "streetlight", which has been proved to be invalid and unfair through extensive scientometric research.

6. See eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/gender-sensitive-research-funding-procedures.
7. See www.nwo.nl/en/news/slight-change-course-horizon-nwo-talent-scheme.

Peer review and staff appraisal

Calling for contextual assessment points towards a "hidden present", namely the use of peer review in staff and team appraisal. Obviously, peer review presents a well-established practice for assessing papers, recruitment and research programmes (Forsberg *et al.* 2022). Although it has its biases and limitations, it has the potential to provide a fairer, better-grounded and more constructive mode of assessment. An organization that has explored, elaborated and implemented the use of peer review for individual academic appraisals and promotion is the University of Ghent (UGent), a process that the rector, Rik Van de Walle, started at his inauguration in 2017 (Cardol & de Knecht 2019). Every five years staff plans and achievements (qualitative and quantitative) are assessed through a broad panel, not only on output but also in terms of talent development and team performance.[8] Peer review is intended to evaluate as well as coach. Talent and team aspects play an important role in promotion. To coordinate and script the process, there is strong involvement on the part of HR. The expectation is that it will make careers more diverse, creative and geared to long-term investments. UGent's position in rankings is seriously played down. However, like elsewhere, rankings act as veritable pink elephants. Although they have generally lost their repute as oligoptica, staff as well as management remain concerned about rankings and their impact (Lambeets & Noij 2019).

UGent's model clearly stands out as an exemplary case, yet its future performance and significance remains to be seen. In topological terms, UGent presents a lone, "flickering" organizational space of transformed appraisal in the landscape of assessment practice. Unlike the R&R programme, UGent has deliberately refrained from (inter)national alignment (not even to DORA). Flickering appears twofold. On the one hand, UGent's model presents an oft-mentioned landmark of proactive assessment. On the other, it repels as a spectre of control and subjectivity. This includes a concern about the need for staff to be open, and have a qualifying debate about future ambitions and expectations. In addition, the emphasis on both talent development and teamwork is full of ambiguity and tension. There is a danger that, rather than reducing the emphasis on individual performance, the staff contribution to teams becomes an additional criterion that is not easy to assess through peer review. This presents a danger also mentioned by DJA: "By making clear agreements in advance about the individual assessment and including a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures, arbitrariness and favouritism are excluded from the equation. It is important, however, to prevent the old criteria from being supplemented with extra competencies and becoming 'and-and'" (DJA 2020: 20).

8. See sfdora.org/case-study/ghent-university.

Staff hierarchy

There is much more flickering to signal and reflect on, but we close here with another big elephant in the room, namely staff hierarchy. Although it is often marked by an open culture of communication, Dutch academia is rather hierarchical (Lange *et al.* 2018). The university job classification (UFO) distinguishes seven levels, from "junior docent" to "professor-1". The system is sustained by (very) high levels of precarity in the lower ranks, and by a detailed specification of performance and promotion standards (metrics plus more qualitative measures). Besides major differences in pay and power, full professors gain a specific benefit, because they are the only ones with the right to formally supervise PhD researchers (*ius promovendi*), making it easier to co-author publications. Even though the *ius promovendi* has recently been extended to a selected group of associate professors, it continues to constitute a major mark of disrespect for the hard work many assistant and associate professors put in co-supervising PhD researchers. Moreover, full professors are usually the ones who decide on budgets and staff development, making it easier to give direction to the research themes and objectives. As Marijtje Jongsma and colleagues argue in a union manifesto (ScienceGuide 2021d), such a hierarchy is incompatible with R&R's moves towards diversification and teamwork. However, with the exception of PhD supervision, the impact of hierarchy has not received much attention in the R&R movement. Although Rianne Letschert has expressed her wonder about the desire for hierarchy, there is no R&R standpoint on the issue (de Knecht 2019a). It is more than likely that those with vested interests in maintaining this hierarchy will prevent this issue from becoming more manifest. Moreover, as argued before, hierarchy links to another sensitive yet oft-hidden phenomenon, namely narcissism and petty competition. To what extent will academia's social fabric, in which narcissism and petty competition are so endemic, really be able to engender a "team spirit", going beyond the individual ethos of competition, winning and status?

CONCLUSION

The Dutch "Recognition and Rewards" programme, started in 2018, holds the major ambition and intention of changing academic practices of staff appraisal. R&R was launched and is steered by core players, university associations and main funders, and is assisted by the ministry, academic gurus and all academic organizations in the Netherlands. The core aspiration is to achieve fundamental "cultural change" in Dutch academia, shifting from a monoculture of solitary, "jack-of-all-trades" careers to diverse tracks and

teamwork, from a focus on impact from metric-based quantity to broadly reviewed quality, from commercial domination to open science and from toxic to high-quality leadership. This chapter has reviewed R&R using a site-ontological practice lens, combining Clegg's (1989) three-faced power concept (episodic, dispositional, systemic) with Law's (2004) notion of "hinterland". The key premise is that, for practices to transform, changes are required in their (often "flickering") hinterland power connections, altering habits (episodic), capacities (dispositional) and resources and codes (systemic).

Using this lens, the review has yielded three insights. First, the problem R&R faces is that, in current academia, local, episodic power often draws on informal capacities, resources and codes of domination, exploitation and favouritism, complemented by dysfunctional formal practices (metrics, competition, hierarchy). Second, through orchestrated (inter)local dialogue, R&R primarily seeks to reaffect, resubjectivize and empower R&R receivers/givers (dispositional) to transform bottom-up practices of staff appraisal (episodic). R&R primarily presents an advocacy for (incremental) agency change in sites (behavioural change), while embracing cultural rather than institutional change. To do so, R&R promotes "happy talk" to nurture transformational episodic power to counter the current unfairness of exerted episodic power. By way of exception, one fundamental institutional shift has occurred, namely the recoding and rescripting of the use of metrics, severing the link to JIFs (so far by two major funding bodies and one university).

Critically, how does the hinterland play out? To what extent will R&R result in a full rewiring of underlying presences (and absences) to meet its lofty aims? This dialogical, bottom-up character has opened the window wide for manifold arguments, stances, tools and tactics, inducing a strong flickering of presences and absences. Although only a few examples could be discussed here, this flickering is witness to how all kinds of (f)actors seek to reshape discursive formations, rewiring more or less deliberately what affects, equips and conditions a practice, and what does not. Here, we are left with the conclusion that, although R&R ambitions are generally well received, the hinterland is still full of quagmires (use of metrics, OS), spectres (peer review) and pink elephants (rankings) in the room (endemic hierarchy). As a result, the limitations on the use of metrics are meeting fierce resistance, notably from science departments; a key question is the extent to which, and how, (JIF-free?) "evidence-based CVs" will be implemented further.

The "Recognition and Rewards" landscape is obviously less characterized by rigid rules, laws and clear supervisory structures – for example, by structured state regulation or definite market principles – and allows for more diversity between universities or countries. The disciplining and structuring principles in academia are often only gradually coming to the surface, making them less tangible and making "resistance" more difficult to organize. Power is therefore not

so much outside the force field as it is internal, often more fluid but within spaces with many established structures, with some explicit messages, but where many remain implicit. However, other domains and landscapes will have other dynamics of power and practices, with sometimes more "overruling" transformative events and consequential rule-making (e.g. Covid-19) or supranational state planning (e.g. European Green Deal). How the more subtle and covert relations between power and practices, as we found them in the R&R landscape, relate to clearer "authoritative" rule-making spaces and sites, and how practices travel and are then influenced, is for further academic investigation.

Concluding, the ambitions of cultural and behavioural change will face many hurdles. To what extent will spaces such as departments and faculties prove immune to "happy" cultural change (van Houtum & van Uden 2022)? Will actual shifts in the discursive formation (open-ended contracts based on legal rights rather than "rites of passage", "more diverse careers") yield more dispositional power to dependent staff, unleashing true, systematic change in the landscape recruitment and promotion practices? In battle terms, to what extent will R&R staff, notably in precarious positions, help to enforce change by claiming their rights through collective, perhaps even legal, force? What other presences and absences will be able to exert influence, within the scope of sites, spaces and landscapes?

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