

**Valerie Hey**

University of Sussex, United Kingdom

**Who do they think we are? Interpolating Academia/ics in Selected Advertisements in Times Higher Education. (0184)**

**Programme number: M12.2**

**Research Domain: Higher Education Policy**

This is a cultural studies inspired paper based on a purposive sample of senior post advertisements and related 'promotional' material published in Times Higher Education. I focus on social science/humanities/education domains. My interest lies in uncovering the lay moral norms (Sayer, 2005) that underlay human resource-academic recruitment discourse. I question what these norms suggest about the range/type of institutional habitus and thus the performance of academic subjecthood required. Louise Archer and colleagues (Archer et al, 2001) in a methodological paper, discussing class and social difference, unpack the emotional/identificatory force of not/recognising ourselves in respondents' transcripts. I ask in similar vein, what of the affects of pleasurable recognition or alienation secured in academic self-advertisements. These questions come under particular critical scrutiny in view of the Academy's woeful record in terms of employment inclusiveness and representativeness (Leathwood et al, 2009; Lynch, 2009). I prise open the issue of representation a little more.

Carmen Luke argues that higher education is now part of a global 'eduscape' (Luke 2005:159):

'In the last two decades, the multinational and transnational turn in economies, populations and cultures has had powerful impacts on public institutions in industrial and post-industrial states in the North and West. [...]Notwithstanding domestic consequences for the educational cultures and practices of these countries, *the new economic and demographic configurations have increased the volumes of people, ideas, images, and finance that flow across national borders.*'

This paper explores this dynamic through the quotidian micro-practice of recruitment. Examining last year's editions of the Times Higher Education, (hereafter THE), I am interested in the ways in which higher education 'performs' itself as a professional job market. This enquiry is part of my on-going project of developing a cultural sociology of higher education, in this instance by asking how the Academy and its agents (private recruitment consultants for example, Verdus, Saxton Bampfylde) works not least by inciting desire. If advertising is about recuperating the affective domain through stimulating interest, pleasure and anticipation, I ask who these advertisers think we are.

In a fascinating article about academic obituaries, Malcolm Tight (2008) comments citing Bourdieu that such serendipitous data is revealing:

"'Obituary notices are first-rate documents for an analysis of university values' (218). Bourdieu [1988] notes how 'The system of adjectives used maps out the *world of professorial virtues*, which, like the university careers to which they grant access, are hierarchized'" (215)

As Tamsin Haggis comments (2009), the broad field of HE studies tends to be dominated by conservative, positivist and for my purposes, affect-lite methodologies which mark it as quite sterile for my purposes, I have thus turned to the feminist enquiry into affects (Hey and Leathwood, 2009; Leathwood and Hey, 2009) in this brief paper. I use theory to speculate about what appear to be the stakes in these 'mini-dramatisations' of the Academy? If these representations are 'performative' (Butler: 1997:7) what is it about academic embodiment that they presume and elide?

### **'Swankverts'**

As I looked over editions I noticed several of these 'academic appointments' were in fact masquerades for glossy demotic boasts about the recruiting institution. The University of Aberdeen for example had a full page (THE April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009:71) ostensibly advertising for *Chairs for our 6<sup>th</sup> Century* which was the premise of a grand narrative about 'being one of the UK's great institutions'; having 'plans which will put our undergraduate education alongside [...] Melbourne, Harvard and Hong Kong'. Here these names are brands used to shine their glory back on the aspirant one. Hyperbole dominates, 'Our desire and determination for further success has intensified [...] we are determined to achieve even more'. The University is looking for 'remarkable individuals'. Syntax is studded with superlatives and no institution *ever* declares satisfaction with the present. Indeed the question arises about the 'character' of the university in these adverts – as if the institution has become a person, speaking with one voice, one vision and one purpose. This person is unvaryingly relentless, imperialistic, bestriding the global academic world, always looking to acquire, achieve, and dominate. It is exhausting just reading this sort of text. If you can survive the bombast of the representation, you discover that you have to actually write in to the University to find out the specific details of the posts.

The University of Birmingham, College of Social Science (THE July 19<sup>th</sup>) occupies similar territory, with the by-line of *Investing in academic excellence* (page 65). The tone here is slightly less messianic but an opportunity is also taken to locate its 9 Chairs in a 'can do' context which has 'see[ing]n a *surge* in its research awards and *significant increases* in *high quality* undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers'. Moreover, the new VC 'has stated his ambition to make Birmingham one of the *leading* global HE institutions'. It is the entirely normative focus on '*aspirations and achievements*' that the applicant is invited to discuss with the Head of the College. One wonders what is being performed and privileged in this text, the hunt for the right person or an anxiety-ridden display of the 'right' kind of identity as a HE institution?. In sum, who is interviewing who? It is as if a strange reversal has occurred.

'Showing off' seems compulsory but old hierarchies still prevail. The super-elite do not seem obliged to declare their supremacy. Possibly because as 'the top', they can (at least at the level of self-representation) 'rest assured'. To fret is to suggest the existence of competitive discomfort and that is only for the arriviste.

## University of Cambridge ; a world of opportunities

The contrast between the former 'swankverts' and the plain advertisement for a Cambridge Professor of History (THE, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 009:73) is instructive. The most excitable comment in the advert is the claim about 'a world of opportunities'. Judging its appearance as an aesthetic is to see its very literalism, (it does what it says on the tin) as a form of elitist minimalism. Its form is small, non-frenetic and simple. There are no visuals and merely, 3 changes of small font type, suggesting a calmer statelier world. The 'brand' is so embedded that it does not need to be refreshed or to 'shout'. Its gravitas removes it from any swaggering, presumably it wants 'stately' historians to apply, since what is seen as salient is the *knowledge base* the person is to bring to the institution.

### In/conclusions

It is not possible to make any broad analytic claims from such data but I would suggest that it perhaps the very ordinariness of this excess which is worth further investigation. 'Making the familiar strange', opens up critical space for imagining the University otherwise. This is part of a wider project at the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) at Sussex. We consider it important to do so least the academy keeps calling its subjects to account in neo-liberal ways that appear beyond reproach.

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