

on courage

“We need courage.”

This is what we tell each other. We need courage to resist the further commodification of university life, courage to speak out against the measures of managerialism, courage to teach what we know should be taught. To continue learning what should be learned. Courage to overcome what we fear.

## **Fear**

Freire knew that “the humility of facing a fear is the first step in turning it into courage.” Facing our fears is the only way to overcome them. In the absence of courage there may be fear but in the absence of fear, there is no need for courage. If indeed “we need courage”, then we must have something to fear. So, what are our fears?

We fear that everything is being destroyed. We fear that something else is in control. We fear dying under these conditions. We fear this living death. We fear being immobilised by fear.

## **Discipline**

We fear we are Foucault's 'docile bodies' disciplined by institutions that are disciplined by government objectives, which are disciplined by Capital, value in motion. We fear we are becoming a government objective, moulded and managed by observation, those tedious, intrusive measurements of 'quality', 'feedback' and 'performance reviews'.

We are disciplined by work. Our creative work becomes commodified, subordinated, sold and separated from us. Wage-work is *the* method of control, a way of disciplining our productive activity by the threat of money.

Disciplined by money. Academic reputation is a commodity strategically bought and sold before the next national assessment exercise. Such exposure is a contradiction of power. The greater the exposure, the more thoroughly you are observed, the less power you have over yourself. Powerful are the unobserved.

Let us learn from each other and so share our courage. Shared courage might help us control our fears but it is no guarantee of controlling our lives and what if we fail?

## **Failure**

Brecht's Mother Courage was a walking contradiction, torn between protecting her children and profiting from the war. She knew that only a 'long anger' could change the world yet she failed to sustain that anger. We too, are walking contradictions, complicit in our own destruction, living off that which is killing us while crying, "this is not sustainable!"

"Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

Beckett reminded us that despite our contradictions, having the courage to fail over and over again is better than no courage at all. The 'long anger' doesn't come easy. Aristotle thought that we become courageous by being courageous. That is, courage leads to greater courage. Courageous activity leads to more courageous activity. Doing leads to more doing. Sometimes, more courageous activity can lead to rash activity and we fail again.

## **Activity**

We say we need courage and that courage is to face our fears

and *act* in a way that tries to assume control of oneself. “Acts of courage”. “Courageous acts.” Courage is always expressed in activity, the desire to do despite fear. This is Holloway's emancipation of 'power-to' (*potentia*) in the face of 'power-over' (*potestas*).

Courage is struggle, better shared than not shared, better fail together than fail alone. As a universally admired virtue, you'd think that it would be universally encouraged, but by its nature, courage always meets opposition, control, domination, power-over. Courage to do is always courage controlled, courage opposed.

## **Dignity**

Courage has been classified into four virtues: Bravery, honesty, perseverance and zest.

*Bravery* and *Honesty* are the struggle for dignity and truth, acts which resist, which rise against. *Perseverance* and *Zest* are Mother Courage's 'long anger' and Beckett's 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better.' Such are the categories of courage, yet courage itself is clearly a category of *struggle*.

In our case, let's consider courage as *the struggle for dignity against the discipline of wage-work*, “that which rises against humiliation, dehumanisation, marginalisation, dignity is that which says 'we are here, we are human and we struggle for the humanity that is denied to us'.” Holloway's struggle for dignity is the mutual recognition of acts of courage. A struggle despite being contradictory and despite failing some of the time.

But how? How can we fail better (for we will fail) and still assume some dignity through our acts of courage?

Recognise that we, in our struggle, are contradictory. We oppose our humiliation with what dignity we have left, but are coerced into complicity in creating this world we are against. This world we are in and against and trying to move beyond. We oppose our oppression with dignified struggle, that is, courage.

## **Invisibility**

How do we oppose our oppression?

We become indiscernible, we increasingly operate in the cracks of capitalist domination, moving, *always moving*, against control and therefore towards self-determination. We subvert and resist the profiling, measuring, quantifying and qualifying that manages our lives, the transparent cycle of observation and feedback. We work collectively and invisibly, we “renounce distinction in order to evade repression.”

“The starting point is refusal, insubmission, insubordination, disobedience,” says Holloway. Our activity says *No!* and by doing so, we negate our negation. “No, we will not do as we are told, we shall do as we think fit: we shall do what we consider necessary, enjoyable or appropriate.” We sustain the 'long anger' by *collectively* aspiring to something else. What? We don't really know, but it is beyond this.

## **Communism**

Marx wrote, “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”

And so as the Invisible, we oppose our oppression through visible and effective acts of courage, acts which contribute to a movement (the *real* movement) based on courage. Acts which mean, *No!* Acts which are shared by a movement that renounces distinction for the sake of dignity, flooding the cracks of Capital with negativity, anti-value in motion. We do not measure this courage against some ideal state of affairs, but by our collective ability to *sustain* our courage in the present, and when we fail, we fail better.