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Academic habitats? An essay on research ethics

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Abstract In this essay, I experiment with Lauren Berlant's idea of 'cruel optimism' to explore how policies specifying responsible conduct of research within academia have effects that extend beyond efforts at establishing an untarnished university. Based on a feminist ethics of care, alongside experiences from teaching PhD students about research integrity and ethics, I unpack how culpability, vigilance and powerlessness surface. In this essay I then speculate: what would it entail to care? I suggest that there is a need to consider research ethics as an ethics that cares both for and about the university as a habitat[1].

Keywords Research integrity, affect, feminist ethics of care, research ethics, vigilance

QUIETEN: AGAINST A BACKDROP OF CRISIS

Over the last year, I have been part of a writing group.[2] The five of us meet on screen, in a space of feminist knowledge-making and sharing. We prepare free writing exercises in advance, using a selected word as a prompt. The words are chosen from the conversations that spring up when listening to each other reading our texts aloud. Such prompts propel the writing onwards. 'Quieten' was one such word. Quieten might refer to what happens when turbulent waters settle. It is the process of mud falling to the bottom so the water clears. It is also the affective effort to soothe an anxious mind or a crying baby, just as it might be efforts to calm down a crowd. It so happened that we found ourselves writing about academia, when 'quieten' was chosen as a prompt. It turned out that we were looking for the stamina to balance the turmoil of academic life. To quieten, we realized, was an ongoing daily effort to find balance individually as well as collectively. What needed to be quietened? In my case, it was the noise of a politicized landscape surrounding research within the humanities and social sciences which had intensified over the years. At the time of writing, the noise stemmed in particular from the turmoil of a vociferous politicized calling out of academics–particularly within gender and migration studies. Such continuous trolling affected not only those targeted directly but also the wider academic community. These events also spurred accusations of breaches of responsible conduct of research and peaked in accusations of practising what was labelled 'pseudo-research'. Such accusations were aired in media, on social media and also in parliament.[3] In the writing group we each needed to find ways to balance academic turmoil. In my case, it was this particular scenery.

1 With the purpose of reaching a wider audience, this essay is a translation and reworking of a paper originally published in Danish in *Journal of Professional Studies* (2021), 17, 33. Creative Commons — Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International — CC BY-ND 4.0

2 The group consists of Rachel Thomson, Louise Sims, and Gillian Ruch, University of Sussex and Rachael Owens, Durham University.

3 See for instance the question raised in parliament by members of the Danish People's Party and the Liberal Alliance: "Does the Minister agree that in certain humanities and social sciences research communities there are problems of excessive activism at the expense of scientific virtues, and does he agree that such a trend calls for action, similar to the reckoning announced by the French Government and the study of the extent of the problem which it has undertaken?" https://www.ft.dk/samling/20201/forespoergsel/f49/index.htm, accessed January 24, 2023, my translation.

Against this backdrop of how to live viable academic lives in such political climates, this essay will focus on thinking in noncontradictory ways about research integrity and ethics as matters of care. To think in 'noncontradictory ways' about research integrity and research ethics does not mean to shy away from contradictions. Rather it entails keeping research integrity and ethics and some of the implicit tensions together while thinking about care. I will focus on the part that policies of responsible conduct of research currently play in the life of academics, taking Denmark as a case study. To do this I have found inspiration in Juelskjær and Rogowska-Stangret's new materialist scrutiny of academic living (Juelskjær & Rogowska-Stangret, 2017) and I specifically draw on Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) thinking on care in order to think about research integrity and ethics as matters of care This involves also the uneventful doings of ethics. From a perspective of feminist ethics (Berlant, 2011; Moore et al., 2021; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Schrader, 2015), I will show how such policies do not stand alone but are entangled with how politicized accusations are made and how supervision and teaching of PhD students are entwined.

ATTACHMENT

"All attachment is optimistic" states Lauren Berlant on the very first page of her book *Cruel Optimism*. She understands optimism as "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene" (pp. 1-2).

Most academics employed at universities have an optimistic and engaged attachment to research – both as a metier in and of itself and as a field of study. Such attachment rests, also, on the ideal of the honesty and integrity of research. In addition, it would seem fair to say, that universities currently attach themselves optimistically to codes of conduct and policies for responsible research to ensure public trust in an untarnished university. Taking Denmark as a case, the purpose of the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity[4] is to "provide the research community with a framework to promote commonly agreed principles and standards. The Code of Conduct aims to support a common understanding and common culture of research integrity in Denmark" (Uddannelses- og forskningsministeriet, 2014, p. 4). The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity is based on international codes of conduct such as the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity,[5] the Montreal Statement[6] and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.[7] It emphasizes the importance of maintaining the credibility of research through common standards. The 'satisfying something' to which Berlant refers might well in this case be the codes of conduct, which are expected to ensure the integrity of universities and thereby secure their independence and the desired trust.

As the title of Berlant's work suggests, optimism can be cruel given that "a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011, p. 1). The object in which you have invested starts working not just with but also against you. So, while universities nationally and internationally develop codes of conduct and policies for responsible conduct of research to prevent breaches of sound research practices and thereby safeguard their scientific credibility, perhaps these efforts do more than simply safeguard scientific credibility?

4 The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity — Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet (ufm.dk), accessed January 24, 2023
5 Singapore statement - World Conferences on Research Integrity (wcrif.org), accessed January 27, 2023
6 Montreal statement - World Conferences on Research Integrity (wcrif.org), accessed January 27, 2023
7 The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity - ALLEA, accessed January 27, 2023

There has been a growth in attention to research ethics and research integrity internationally over the past decades through such policies and guidelines, and also through professional associations such as the AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers), AAA (American Anthropological Association) and BSA (British Sociological Association) and supported by Institutional Review Boards. On an introductory note, it is worth mentioning that at Danish universities, a process of ethical review has been put in place due to the requirements from funding bodies and journals over the last few years. It is, at the time of writing, not a requirement from the universities themselves. The development of institutionalized ethical review processes in Denmark is thus relatively late in comparison to other national academic communities. It is thus worth noting how debates about the need for ethical review do not follow the same timeline across countries. To mention one, the debate in the UK has been substantiated over a number of years, as evident in Stanley and Wise's 2010 critique of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) 2010 Framework for Research Ethics (Stanley & Wise, 2010), and later by Wiles and Boddy (2013). The training and education of ethics committees in Canada similarly are addressed by Edwards (2017). The debate in Scandinavia on the specifics of ethical review, however, is more recent. In this essay, I take Denmark as a case study and experiment with the concept of 'cruel optimism' to point to the inadvertent effects of Danish universities' optimistic attachment to policies for responsible conduct of research. This involves highlighting how these different policies, ethical review processes and codes of conduct create new grey areas. And how academia, as a habitat, is challenged.

DENMARK – A CASE

According to the Danish University Act,

universities must among other things safeguard and uphold research ethics. This is done partly through providing information and education, and partly through the handling of specific cases where a breach of good scientific practice is suspected.[8]

The Danish framework for upholding and safeguarding research integrity and ethics was revised in 2015. The introductory chapter in the report on the recommended revisions states: "It is crucial that we maintain the good reputation that research has. One prerequisite for this is a strong framework allowing research to be conducted in a culture that respects recognized standards of good scientific practice" (Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation, 2015, p. 6) (my translation). I am interested in this idea of a culture that respects recognized standards for good scientific practice – also as necessary to support academia as a habitat – i.e. a living space that is vibrant and alive in which research and researchers thrive. I will explore this idea as a matter *both* of caring for the specificity of the national and international standards for responsible conduct of research *and* of scrutinizing something far less concrete but no less decisive: how universities thrive while codes of conduct and responsible conduct of research and EU-based General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are realised in practice. This is a topic to which I will return.

To avoid a common but artificial distinction between the university as an institution on the one hand and its researchers on the other, let me first state: an optimistic attachment to codes of conduct for responsible research is initiated and maintained by a number of political and managerial decisions. Yet 'universities' are more than management. Universities are also made up of buildings, students, apparatus, policies, administration, researchers, study boards and much more. I will investigate the particularity of how the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity was realised in practice, while also pointing to how this national policy is embedded in developments internationally. There are specificities to this particular Danish case, yet there are also similarities

8 Safeguarding the responsible conduct of research at Danish universities – Forskerportalen.dk, accessed November 23, 2022

and convergence with how research integrity has grown and become an international field – not only politically, but also as a new field of research (Douglas-Jones & Wright, 2021; Mejlgaard et al., 2020; Sarauw, 2021). A key parameter in the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity is the provision of teaching, training and supervision: "Institutions are responsible for ensuring that all staff (including guest researchers) and students involved in research have sufficient knowledge of and receive training in the principles of research integrity and responsible conduct of research" (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2014, p. 18). Since the code of conduct was adopted in 2014, I have been involved in the development and organization of the mandatory course in research integrity and ethics for PhD students at the Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University, Denmark. Our aim has been to create a setting that allows students not only to become acquainted with current policies and regulations but also to cultivate a shared space in which to make sense of research integrity and research ethics as a collective concern within academia. We have insisted on treating research integrity and research ethics as noncontradictory. This entails keeping research integrity and ethics and some of the implicit tensions together. We have also insisted on approaching research integrity as something other and more than an individual endeavour.

My contribution here is rooted in my own field of research and in my current status as what Sarauw et al. (2019) term an 'academic developer'. I will elaborate on this phrasing later. My research explores processes of inclusion and exclusion among children and young people, with a particular focus on extreme exclusionary practices involving social media: cyberbullying and digital sexual assault. The stakes are frequently high when studying such matters. This obviously involves precarious situations and often intense affectivity. Furthermore, challenges in relation to research ethics often become particularly insistent. As more codes of conduct were adopted, and not least when the EU-based General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect in May 2018, the complexity of research ethics intensified. As such, ethics has become a pervasive – and sometimes amplified – matter within my own field of research, as have research integrity and data management. Throughout the years, my chosen field and its embedded ethical challenges have forced me continuously to address ethics and develop a terminology that allows a vibrant matter of care to spark. Through these attachments to research ethics – in my own field of research and through teaching PhD students – I will highlight what it entails to consider ethics as a matter that concerns humanities as a whole (Fink, 2017). But first, a short digression on the temporal becoming of this essay.

THE TEMPORAL BECOMING OF AN ESSAY

GDPR came into effect no later than May 2018. At the time of writing, more than four years have passed, and universities are still struggling to comprehend the extent of its effects on research within humanities and social sciences. Alongside GDPR and the resulting new practices of risk assessment and data management plans, the demands placed on institutional review boards (IRB) in Denmark have become institutionalized while new ethical standards and regulations see the development of specific terminology and vocabulary. In this particular national setting, the institutionalization of IRBs coincides with the realisation of GDPR which in itself complicates matters. We thus find ourselves in a landscape characterized by several re-organizations of research integrity and ethics. Within the space of a few years, research integrity and ethics have become a highly regulated field that not merely frames research but is entangled with every detail of research processes. This makes the present moment – the current 'now'– a fragile and urgent space.

How do we understand such 'nows'? Can we comprehend the situation while we are in it? Griselda Pollock thinks the answer is 'no'. We can never see and understand the times we are in while living in them, Pollock argues convincingly in the 2020 "Holberg Conversation" in conjunction

with the award (Holberg Prize - University of Bergen, 2021). Of course, Pollock argues, the frailty of our knowledge should not prevent us from trying to understand, but preferably with the humble recognition that what we see can only be fragments of a larger picture.

The fragments of this essay came to life at the time of the legislative and affective changes to regulations concerning research integrity at Danish universities. Apart from my own very specific and tangible clarifications of how to comply with GDPR in a new research project, this instance of writing – and later translating and reworking – was accompanied by a series of events, both large and small. These events were closely knitted into my everyday life with academic companions and with how research ethics and responsible conduct of research is lived and experienced. A few colleagues found themselves facing politically initiated accusations of a kind outlined in the introduction to this essay. Their research in the social sciences and humanities was singled out and they were accused of what was called 'politicized activism' and 'pseudo-science'[9] in parliament and in the media. The accusations themselves and the universities' response to them played out over the months when I began writing this essay. What happened 'further away' was the death of Lauren Berlant. Their death became an affective event through countless online expressions of loss and declarations of how their writing has impacted thinking across disciplinary fields. These declarations found their way into journals, published letters and essays, and, not least, social media, where exchanges began immediately after their death and continued over many months. For me, their death and the many associated conversations also sparked an interest in the topic of responsibility and the transitory nature of academia. Lauren Berlant was a Professor of English at the University of Chicago and a key figure within affect studies. Berlant's thinking has also touched my work, particularly through the concept of intimacy. 'Greg Seigworth has termed Lauren Berlant's critical-receptive stylistics 'a hum'. "Everything hums or can be made to. A hum insinuates itself, folds out as much as in. Hums can be hooks" (Seigworth, 2012, p. 349). According to Seigworth, this has "the effect of calling a body into new modes of attention: to hums, to incoherence and ambivalence, to history's coming-into- and falling-away-from forms and genres" (Seigworth, 2012, p. 346). It is in such a manner that Berlant's thinking has worked its way into mine: as an underlying hum. It is also such careful listening for enfolded hums that has propelled the contemplations presented in this essay.

With the term 'enfolded', I draw on Gilles Deleuze's conceptualization of the 'fold'.

So, what do I mean by 'Deleuze's conceptualization of the fold'? I will turn to an illustration that has always helped me grasp this concept. Years ago, in a Deleuze study group, the Danish philosopher Jørgen Huggler explained how 'the fold' should not be understood as the sharp edge that occurs when you fold a piece of paper. That sharp edge is not the fold, he clarified. No, the fold is different. He then reached into his pocket. Luckily, he kept a newly ironed handkerchief in this pocket, otherwise I am not sure that this incident and ability to grasp what the fold entails would have stayed with me for all these years. Jørgen Huggler unfolded the handkerchief and lifted it with two fingers. It was now hanging in his hand in arbitrary folds: some longer, some shorter, shifting, inner side, outer side, indeterminate. "This is the fold", he explained, while pointing at the material dangling from his fingers, "not the ironed crease of the handkerchief".

This essay explores such handkerchief-like folds of the affective events mentioned above. Such apparently unrelated events cease to "confront each other as exteriorities, but rather become folded into one another" in this temporality of writing (Schrader, 2015, p. 681): apparently unrelated events – such as the passing of a great thinker, the introduction of GDPR and the politicisation of my field of enquiry – coincide in this essay as a space from which I write, a fold. These events also weave themselves into my own research and into my responsibilities as one of the 'academic developers' of the mandatory course in research integrity and research ethics for the faculty's PhD students. You may ask, how is all this related? The answer is that it all has to do with care. Schrader has made the

9 https://www.ft.dk/samling/20201/vedtagelse/v137/index.htm, accessed January 28, 2023

distinction between to *care for* and to *care about*. She suggests that we shift "the question from how to care well for an already-defined subject to *how do we begin to care*" (Schrader, 2015, p. 668). I will return to this later.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPER – HOW?

I refer to the role that I currently perform as 'academic developer'. I am not sure exactly how I feel about this title. I use it because it is an acknowledged term for the work performed by those coordinating and managing such courses for PhD students and because it allows me room to talk about the role in more general terms rather than the details of how I perform this task. In the research project "Practising Integrity", Laura Louise Sarauw, Lise Degn and Jakob Ørberg have more closely examined how research integrity is performed and managed in courses for PhD students at Danish universities (Sarauw et al., 2019). They understand the mandatory courses in research integrity for PhD students as "venues of academic development", and they demonstrate

> the role that academic developers play in defining vague concepts like research integrity and how these processes of 'translation' enable early career academics to make 'research integrity' meaningful in their wider practice and the organisations within which they work (Sarauw et al., 2019, p. 179).

An *academic developer* is someone who does the work of unfolding research integrity in collaboration with junior researchers. As such, I and my colleagues who conduct the course for PhD students at the Faculty of Arts are part of the academic apparatus which is intended to rubberstamp the participating junior researchers' mastery of this field after completing the course. A certain individualizing cruel optimism is also evident in this tiny detail.

Let me here bring in some insights from this 'academic development work'. The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity has been in force since November 2014. Since then, "an increasing number of organisations and networks […] [have] been dedicated to supporting institutions in promoting research integrity. There has been a proliferation of documentation, training courses and procedures formalizing research integrity" (Douglas-Jones & Wright, 2021, p. 6). The position I currently take up is engaged in exactly that. As mentioned, "teaching, training, and supervision are of pivotal importance in raising awareness of research integrity because it provides a proactive and positive approach to promoting research integrity as central to the research mission" (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2014, p. 17). It is furthermore stressed that "institutions are responsible for ensuring that all staff (including guest researchers) and students involved in research have sufficient knowledge of and receive training in the principles of research integrity and responsible conduct of research" (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2014, p. 18).

To ensure the above, it has been an obvious starting point for many faculties to provide courses in research integrity for PhD students. At the Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University, we have hosted and organized the above-mentioned mandatory course entitled "Research integrity and ethics". As the title suggests, the fundamental approach of this course is to think in noncontradictory ways about research integrity and research ethics. In this manner, we allow the two to stand shoulder to shoulder, so to speak, without claiming that they are synonymous with one another and always maintaining a focus on both. Over the past eight years, this has created a space for discussing the topics of research ethics and research integrity from the perspective of junior researchers within the humanities with approximately 380 PhD students. During the course, students are introduced to existing national and international codes of conduct and rules and regulations. They are introduced to the rationales within current policies, as well as to cases of misconduct. In addition, we are

committed to addressing both the ethical challenges and the joys that emerge in the students' research projects. This entails an assumption that ethics permeates every aspect of every research process and that we think of ethics as relevant to all disciplines within the humanities. We shift away from thinking of ethics in terms of moral actions, and from focusing on the individual researcher instead attend to a broader community of research practices involving shared thinking across disciplines. To this end, a conscious decision has been made to offer a mandatory course at the faculty level rather than a discipline-specific course.

The development of courses for PhD students within this field derives from the Danish Code of Conduct for Research integrity and all such courses respond to the same overall policy discourse and its assertion that junior academics must receive training in research integrity and responsible conduct of research (Uddannelses- og forskningsministeriet, 2014). Sarauw et al. (2019) find that "different problem narratives" are at stake at different faculties and that discussions of how misconduct is perceived, and hence the need for training in such matters, also differ at the local level (p. 186). They employ the term 'problem narrative' to investigate the engagement with research integrity and to grasp "the ways research integrity is established as a problem to be addressed" (p. 180).

Despite differences between faculties, their findings also identify a striking but curious common theme:

> regardless of the different, and sometimes contradictory, problem narratives [at the different faculties], the problem solutions provided on each of the four courses […] were four diverse engagements with the same concept, that of reflexivity at the individual or local level. Pedagogies and course design all aim to enhance individual reflexivity among the course participants (Sarauw et al., 2019, p. 186).

This is a curious finding. It is obviously a problem if the answer to the institution's soul-searching question: 'do we take enough responsibility?' is 'yes, let us take care of research integrity by making sure that individual academics reflect sufficiently and independently on their own actions'. Edwards and Roy (2017) offer a timely reminder in this regard: "As stewards of the profession, we should continually consider whether our collective actions will leave our field in a state that is better or worse than when we entered it" (p. 56). They highlight what they term perverse incentives in academia, which, along with altered conditions for "competition for research funding, development of quantitative metrics to measure performance, and a changing business model for higher education itself", not only produce toxic working conditions but also open up for unethical behaviour (M. A. Edwards & Roy, 2017). Consequently, they draw our attention to how the structures of academia may in and of themselves spur unethical decisions and actions. It is perhaps worth noting that these incentives are not only perverse but individualizing.

Following this somewhat brief reminder of the role and consequences of incentive structures, it might be appropriate as an 'academic developer' to take a step in a different direction and examine whether and how one can leave the field (of academic development, to stick with the terminology) in a different state than when one entered it. And then to investigate whether and how we ourselves contribute to further individualization of junior academics through an expectation of (self-)reflection to meet standards for the responsible conduct of research. In taking this step I am particularly inspired by Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) urge to disconnect "ethics from individual self-reflective intentionality" (p. 218) and Niamh Moore and colleagues (2021) who suggest thinking in terms of a careful ethics that refuses the individualisation of ethical decision-making and emphasizes the ethical labour which is always involved in doing research.

ANXIETY AND POWERLESSNESS

It begins with a Berlant-like hum that becomes clearer. It can be described as follows: In the courses in research integrity for PhD students, there are audible sighs of what I can best describe as a sense of wary anxiety and powerlessness. When I choose to interpret such sighs as emotions, it is, of course, not a statement as to how individual academics might *feel*, nor an assumption that everyone will recognize themselves in this interpretation. It is more of an emergent listening. Bronwyn Davies distinguishes between 'listening as usual' and 'emergent listening'. She explains:

> What we usually think of as listening […] we listen in order to fit what we hear into what we already know. […] Emergent listening is not a simple extension of usual practices of listening. It involves working, to some extent, against oneself, and against those habitual practices through which one establishes 'this is who I am' (Davies, 2014, p. 21).

Listening in this manner is also an ethical enterprise, says Davies. Listening to hums during courses for PhD students thus involves listening beyond what we already know about PhD students, and about how rules and regulations for responsible conduct of research are applied and adopted. It also involves questioning what is already being made to matter. Emergent listening is a practice and an idea of attending to not only what is known but also what is yet to come. We know less about, and hence might listen for, such sighs of wary anxiety and powerlessness. Academic excellence coexists alongside audible anxiety and powerlessness. This can best be described as hypervigilance and untethered preoccupation with everything that might go wrong, all the decisions that might have unintended effects and could potentially be (mis)construed as fraud or misconduct. In other words, when conducting research, junior researchers seem caught in powerlessness and a need for vigilance when navigating the grey areas that arise when new policies – in plural – are adopted. It all coexists – through optimistic and cruel attachment. I think it likely, albeit with no real evidence, that senior academics experience similar conundrums.

It is one thing to conduct sound research and, of course, not be dishonest, manipulate data or plagiarize; for most people, these are self-evident research values. Codes of conduct and an increased focus on responsible conduct of research in codified form seem , at first glance, to create clarity, but they also lead to increased concern about things beyond one's control. But research processes are uncontrollable, too. In a sense, it is precisely such ungovernable research processes that we want PhD students to dare learn to navigate. We want them to make the effort to engage with what cannot be predicted or planned: research questions that will be challenged by new theoretical insights, empirical data that point in unforeseeable new directions, analyses that produce insights into areas that could not have been imagined, the stamina to not let their findings be crushed and flattened by waves of current theoretical trends, or, indeed, to allow new theoretical breakthroughs to open their eyes to what they would not otherwise have seen. Of course, none of this can be governed in any strict sense. An active effort must of course be made to keep open the possibilities of innovation and scientific breakthroughs. Conducting research is an inherently challenging enterprise even without the additional pressure of wanting to get research integrity 'right'. Or as Moore et al. (2021) argue: "Ethics can be a resource which supports taking new leaps in research, instead of a barrier which blocks creative interventions into existing research practice" (p.195). The above-mentioned need for vigilance in the presence of the well-known but ungovernable challenges of academic work is worrisome and calls for adequate forms of response: for whom, for what and how to care? Astrid Schrader cites Derrida in making the aforementioned distinction between caring *for* and caring *about*: "Caring requires decisions, but not without experiencing the 'ordeal of the undecidable'" (Derrida, 1992, in Schrader, 2015, p. 683). The 'ordeal of

the undecidable' might also be a fitting description of what it means to be part of a university and experience the policies for responsible conduct of research realised in practice. It makes sense, and yet this very sensemaking is an obstacle. It might have something to do with culpability.

CULPABILITY

A separate but closely related field to research integrity is the national framework for dealing with cases of scientific misconduct (Hjellbrekke et al., 2018; Jensen et al., 2017; Madsen, 2020). In Denmark the national structure has recently been re-organized (Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation, 2015). Following the Act on Research Misconduct in 2017, the Danish Committee on Research Misconduct (NVU/DCRM) was set up to handle cases of research misconduct.[10] A number of local research practice committees have been appointed at each of the universities to consider cases of questionable research practice or where freedom of research is under threat. If a case involves questions of misconduct, it is passed on to DCRM to be addressed at the national level. Hjellbrekke and colleagues have pointed out that there is no unequivocal, internationally accepted definition of what counts as research misconduct, but that a consensus has formed around understanding misconduct as so-called FFP practices: falsification, fabrication, plagiarism (2018, p. 5). FFP practices are considered acts of misconduct. This essay does not set out to question the established distinction between FFP and questionable research practices (QRP), but rather to point to how scrutiny of both FFP and QRP is based on examinations of research *products* and the principle of the individual researcher's responsibility for their own research. If the suspicion concerns research misconduct, only scientific products will be scrutinized. If the suspicion concerns questionable research practices, other materials can be included, such as public dissemination of findings, but scientific products remain at the core of this scrutiny. There is nothing strange or unusual about any of this. However, it is worth noting that this focuses on research products, rather than examining the research process through which these products were produced. Nor does it examine the broader research environment – did the research take place in a healthy environment, nurturing and supporting junior researchers, or in a toxic environment where the voices of junior researchers or anyone challenging the status quo are oppressed as a matter of course? Investigations of suspected misconduct do not take into consideration cases where key colleagues suddenly left the department, resulting in seismic shifts in the immediate environment – or even the entire field. One might say that by assessing the products of research, investigations of scientific misconduct only study the tip of the research-process-iceberg.

QUASI-LEGAL MATTERS

The Danish philosopher Hans Fink (2021) emphasizes how ethics, research ethics included, has increasingly become a matter for quasi-legal bodies. Ethics is not merely a question of how we treat research subjects, but concerns issues addressed by bodies such as IRB or committees on misconduct. Ethical principles that previously were not put down in writing are now formalized as codes of conduct, which are expected to trickle down into what is termed 'culture' in the very same codes. Fink adds that research ethics is not merely about obeying rules. All the difficult ethical questions that we face would still exist if the rules had not been written down.

These insights are important when attempting to grasp what is currently at stake within academia, and particularly in comprehending the optimistic attachment to the hope that codes of conduct will help maintain an untarnished university. Any reported suspicion of misconduct is scrutinized based on local policies for responsible conduct of research at each university, the national

10 Lov om videnskabelig uredelighed m.v. (retsinformation.dk), accessed October 24, 2022

code of conduct and the international recommendations that the national and local documents draw upon (Madsen, 2020). Hence, the national code of conduct that was adopted in 2014 does not only regulate academic development at different faculties but is part and parcel of how cases of misconduct are assessed. Assessments of possible scientific misconduct or questionable research practices are thus conducted based on this key document and what are termed "generally recognized standards for responsible conduct of research" (Madsen, 2020, p. 358).

Related to this transformation of ethics into rules and regulations, it is worth contemplating what the tendency to lean on legal and quasi-legal practices brings with it. Crudely put, the Danish law is meant to examine damages and culpability. My field of research is not law, so this I have learnt from a good colleague within Danish law: culpability and the individual subject are tightly related in Danish law. In the case of responsible conduct of research, responsibility for acts of misconduct or questionable research practices are not determined by a judge, but by quasi-legal bodies. Culpability is essential; ascribing fault and guilt and identifying mistakes to assess whether an offence has been committed requires some form of sanction or punishment. In cases of dispute, legal practices help assess whether someone can be identified as responsible, entailing such rationales of culpability. Academic incentive structures that promote and reward individual merits further underline the culpability of the individual researcher in cases of misconduct or QRP rather than placing responsibility with broader research environments or communities. This reinforces the focus on research products – i.e., the individual researcher and 'their' products – as the objects of scrutiny in cases of suspected misconduct.

What are not addressed when deciding whether an accusation of misconduct or QRP is justified are the environments, communities and cultures within which research is conducted. The various products that are seen as individually owned research outcomes are most often not only the result of individual endeavours, but also (directly or indirectly) the efforts of others. By 'others' I here refer to those colleagues with whom I might have done fieldwork, co-written texts, or shared feedback on thoughts and ideas. But I also refer to the colleagues with whom I share a corridor, a research programme, a department. And furthermore, the colleagues with whom I interact at seminars and conferences, exchange ideas and share references. Those who give constructive feedback and those who get annoyed and whose interests lie in completely different fields than mine. Those I meet often, and those I rarely bump into. Everything that holds research, teaching, meetings, and supervision together in one body. All this is embedded in research outcomes, and yet only the authors are credited, held responsible and assessed.[11]

But research environments vary. Healthy research environments are marked, among other characteristics, by their capacity to allow academics to 'share an unfinished thought' that might be ridiculed in a less healthy environment. I am not talking about the enforced community of a shared lunchroom, or about coffee breaks. What I am talking about is whether a research environment *works or not*. Whether it is healthy or toxic. A particular meeting can be toxic, but so can an entire research environment. Toxic environments leave their mark but are not always noticed. Or acted upon. Healthy environments can become toxic – and vice versa. Such shifts are almost imperceptible, despite taking place in plain sight. Presumably, a healthy research environment is necessary to address any wary anxieties that might arise. From the perspectives presented here it is

11 Here it is appropriate to point out that the thoughts presented in this essay are of course my own, but that I nevertheless draw on such circles of companions. One person whose importance I must particularly highlight is Morten Raffnsøe-Møller. It was together with Morten that the basic ideas for the PhD course were originally formulated. The format of the course changes, but we still work from these basic ideas and with Morten's special imprint. Others have also left their mark on this essay: Morten Dige, Hans Fink, Helle Rabøl Hansen, Mia Hesselberg-Thomsen, Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen, Malou Juelskjær, Nina Javette Koefoed, Palle Bo Madsen, Rachel Thomson, Susan Wright and Ida Wentzel Winther. Of course, none of them should be held responsible for any inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this essay.

noteworthy how the health and cohesion of a research environment are rarely treated as a matter of ethics. A system for assessing scientific misconduct that is preoccupied with flaws and culpability thus becomes a university with a view to guilt for the individual researcher. Arguably a university with a view to individual guilt leaves research permeable to vigilance and anxiety. I want to extend the responsibilities of this academic developer to include feminist ethics of care to examine whether there are "other concepts of the good life that would be more satisfying than the ones that you have been trained to pay attention to", as Berlant reminded us in a University of Chicago podcast (UChicago Podcast Network, 2019). Such scrutiny of concepts other than those laid out in various codes of conduct might encourage us to ask different questions. In the midst of disseminating the aforementioned policies and codes of conduct, perhaps it is timely to rephrase the often raised and implicit question: 'do we take enough responsibility?' Instead, we might ask: what would it entail to care at a faculty of Arts at a time when humanities are under attack at the same time as codes of conduct, GDPR and IRB are adopted, creating their own new grey areas for research?

HOW DO WE BEGIN TO CARE?

Let me first take a lateral step in considering this question. I need to return to the insights that surfaced after Berlant's death. We take care of ourselves when we are threatened or experience loss – or fear that we will do so shortly. We also care for each other. Loss and grief come in all shapes and forms. Twitter and Facebook were flooded with such care in the days and weeks following the death of Lauren Berlant. Not knowing, we-want-more-of-what-has-now-gone, allowing it to sink in, more grief, we-still-want-more. In such expressions, each of us become more than ourselves – including those of us who have not lost a close friend or companion, but a great thinker.

When the scientific legitimacy of research within certain areas of the humanities is questioned – in the media and by politicians – and when individual researchers and their work are targeted, it becomes urgent that we consider responsibility and care in relation to not only research products, but colleagues and the toxic tone of the debate. The accusations may be levelled at individual researchers, but the viability of a larger habitat is at stake. I am aware that viability is difficult to pin down, but nonetheless crucial in resourcing new ethical research practices. Above, I have referred to a few temporal folds in the writing of this essay. Despite their dissimilarities, something is at stake in each of them. This 'something' might be grasped through Astrid Schrader's terminology of care. Schrader makes a distinction between *to care for* and *to care about*. This distinction can help in understanding what is at stake when dealing with the powerlessness and culpability co-created by new policies and the grey areas that emerge. Here, I lean towards the refinement of Schrader's work by Staunæs, Bjerg, Juelskjær and Olesen, who point out that care in Danish means to "show interest in, be concerned about and look after – without becoming paternalistic and moralistic" (2021, p. 97). They emphasize that such caring entails "different modes of attention" (Staunæs et al., 2021, p. 99).

Schrader herself explains:

> Two broad meanings of care should be distinguished; one entails the often-gendered labor of caring for somebody in need, and the other alludes to an affective relation, or caring about. Caring for somebody is usually goal-oriented, as it involves an 'effort to improve the situation of a patient' (Mol, 2008: 23). […] Beginning to care about something or someone implies an opposite move, namely the transformation of the limit that places someone outside our socially sanctioned scope of care (Schrader, 2015, p. 668).

Schrader's point is that caring can be directed towards a particular subject. It can have a particular direction – to care *for* someone or something specific. Someone needs help and someone else

gives it. There are many such situations in academia: in publications, at the death of colleagues, on courses for PhD students, in collegial communities. But there may also be other ways – namely, what Schrader terms to care *about*, which involves an indeterminacy, a not-already-determined concept of what this care is supposed to fix, entailing a kind of passivity (Schrader, 2015).

One form of care does not replace the other. One is not better than the other. As mentioned, these are modes of attention. In relation to the topic, I address in this essay, a caring practice might involve extending and thickening ethics within academia beyond research practices to encompass an ethics of academia. This might mean directing questions of ethics towards universities that, despite operating with ethical frameworks, remain incomplete as new issues, new quandaries continually emerge. It might involve exploring the cracks and fissures in caring for and about academia in manners where we keep avenues open and without necessarily knowing exactly what is required. It might involve letting such not-knowing-exactly-what-is-required be a fruitful part of university ethics, encouraging inquiry by overtly acknowledging uncertainty.

Thus, both the events that accompanied the process of writing this essay and my observations among PhD students are not only a matter of caring for the individual, but also entail a more unfocused caring about what I would call a preoccupation with the viability of the university as a habitat. Caring for and about the viability of academia might seem risky. Here it is crucial to bear in mind Moore et al.'s reminder that caring involves risk. Caring in and of itself is risky business. They say:

> Care and risk can appear to be in opposition – a researcher cares by avoiding risks, by engaging in mitigating actions. We suggest that care always involves risk. Rather than approaching ethics as an inviolable, unchanging tradition, we approach ethics as an inventive tradition (Moore et al., 2021, p. 195).

Taking the risk of caring might bring with it more life, more sustainable academic lives. Could such modes of caring, both for others and about the university, be used to explore what it means to work at a Faculty of Arts at a time when research is met with politicized accusations at the same time as codes of conduct, GDPR and systems of ethical approval are being implemented?

CHOICE OF TERMINOLOGY AND QUESTIONS

Less explicitly addressed in the national code of conduct is what are often referred to as 'research communities' or 'research environments', both of which are terms I have used above. The vigilance I believe I hear among students during the PhD courses also points to how precarious employment conditions are at stake. This is interwoven with uncertainty and, more specifically, with the ascendancy of codes of conduct that both provide a framework for responsible conduct of research and establish a system for monitoring research practices. These codes may even prevent us from talking about research ethics in ways other than those prescribed by rules and regulations and prevent us from turning to other genealogies of ethics. Research communities and research environments are familiar terms. For the purpose of this essay, however, they are somewhat exhausted. This is first and foremost because they connote something that we already think we know and invite us to listen 'as usual' as Davies (2014) reminds us. Instead, the terminologies and insights from a Schrader-inspired distinction between two different modes of care – caring for and caring about academia, and Puig de la Bellacasa's attention to how to foster abundance – might open the questions in a different manner. Admittedly I make use of Bellacasa's concept rather displaced from the context in which she raised it. However, Bellacasa's thinking – alongside Schrader – offers paths for asking the questions of viability and sustainability of academia also as ethical doings. Thinking in terms of viable habitats and ethical doing does not only support delimitations and consistency (with rules),

but also allows inconsistencies to be left open and in plain sight. Would a terminology of habitat help maintain an openness about what is important? It is not only the kind of researcher lives that we are familiar with or are able to understand that count; there are kinds of researcher lives that we know nothing about, which we, as yet, cannot predict, but which nonetheless are of importance and can be addressed: researcher lives under political threat; researcher lives where, as I write, some of the wisest voices are lost; precarious researcher lives, especially for junior researchers. All of this points to the need for a more encompassing care for and about academia.

A care willing to take risks. How might that look?

The insights from feminist ethics of care, aids new questions. I have drawn particularly on Puig de la Bellacasa's (2107, p. 219) insistence that care is not one way, Schrader's thinking on care (2015) distinction between to care for and to care about and Moore and colleague's (2021) thinking of ethics of care as an inventive approach which "opens to a commitment to re-making relations, to flourishing and re-making the world" (p. 195). This suggests that caring for academia as a living habitat could be a way forward. Such risky caring would perhaps need an ethical imperative that can be raised as a question: Can the pressure from the sense of powerlessness, anxiety and vigilance I hear among our youngest companions drive the development of a more inventive and vibrant care for and about academia? Can we develop ways of caring that balance ethical obligations regarding what we know and what we do not yet know but one we willingly commit to protect? Even if – as Pollock says – we do not and cannot know or understand everything about the academic lives we currently live. Even if the only thing we know right now is that academia is in urgent need of care.

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