The Future that is my Present

Temporariness and Insecurity in Swedish Academia

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Abstract

This thesis explores the question of what it means to be a temporary academic worker in the business studies discipline in Sweden. It presents how academics’ temporariness translates into insecurity and how they respond to it. The research is conducted using an open design, reflexive framework, and an abductive approach. It offers a narrative presentation of the lived experiences of temporariness and a critical interpretation of the multiplicity of the translation of those experiences into insecurity, as well as the responses to it. The rich empirical narrative offers a glimpse into the variety of lived experiences of the temporary academic workers and the multitude of opportunities for social action. It advances an understanding of the relationship of different individual, collective, organisational, and professional aspects with the lived experience of temporariness and temporariness as insecurity and as precarious work. It is argued that temporary academic work can be experienced as job field insecurity – the concern of involuntary exit from the professional field that is fuelled by challenges to professional identity, membership, and organisational citizenship; epistemic uncertainty; social and financial uncertainty, lack of alternatives; and the permeating imperatives for individual responsibility, self-improvement, and forward-living. The work discusses different ways in which the subjectivities of insecurity are navigated. It is argued that temporary academic work can be experienced as precarious work in certain circumstances, but also that some elements of the profession can be invoked in order to challenge precarious subjectivities.

Keywords: academic work, temporariness, temporary employment, insecurity, job insecurity, professional insecurity, anticipatory insecurity, job field insecurity, precarious professional work

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На бягащите в пясъка
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Abbreviations

EC  European Commission
ECA  Early career academic
EU  European Union
HEI  Higher education institution
LAS  Lag om anställningsskydd - Employment Protection Act
RI  Research institute
ROWE  Results Only Work Environments
SULF  Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers
TAW  Temporary academic worker
UKÄ  Swedish Higher Education Authority
YAS  Young Academy of Sweden
Prologue

Chased by predatory time
you run and run, till you run out of breath,
wearng away one spot in the sand.
The faster you run, the deeper you sink,
till you’re up to your heels, to your ankles, your knees -
till you’re under entirely, and merge with the dunes,
a wrinkle in the sand’s dry surf.
You’ll have arrived at last.
But where?

Blaga Dimitrova, 1989
Introducing: insecure work

A woman named Mary picks up a rideshare order while in labour. She is praised as the heroic embodiment of the hustle, of entrepreneurship, of what it means to get it done, to be resilient and self-reliant. She is also painted as the embodiment of a worker so precarious that they need to put themselves and their unborn child in danger for 11 (eleven!) US dollars – the average rate for this ridesharing company for this location and time. Jia Tolentino from The New Yorker (2017) puts it this way: ‘Or maybe Mary kept accepting riders because the gig economy has further normalized the circumstances in which earning an extra eleven dollars can feel more important than seeking out the urgent medical care that these quasi-employers do not sponsor’. From this ridesharing driver’s story to an ad campaign by an online marketplace for freelance services promoting coffee for lunch and sleepless nights (Fiverr add, 2017), precarious work is continuously being normalised within a discourse of entrepreneurship, coolness, youngness, self-reliance, anti-board rooms, anti-bureaucracy and anti-conservatism.

Mary and the ‘fivers’ are gig workers, part of the gig economy, which is often defined as IT, crowd-work or work-on-demand via app (see De Stefano, 2016). Gig economy has been embraced by the younger generations and the digital nomads and has been seen as liberating, empowering, promoting entrepreneurship and flexibility. In the discourse of entrepreneurship, flexibility, and autonomy, the dangers of precarity, insecurity and exploitation are often omitted, however. ‘While the rise of this ‘gig’ economy is praised by some as a response to the wishes of a more entrepreneurial generation’, writes Friedman (2014, p.171), ‘it is more likely that it is driven by the concerns of businesses to lower wages and benefit costs during business down-turns while also reducing their vulnerability to unfair dismissal lawsuits’. It is well documented that being a temporary worker means fewer organisational rights, fewer possibilities for critique, more risk and stress (Aronsson, 1999; Kalleberg, 2009; Friedman, 2014; Pfeffer, 2018; Kezar, DePaola and Scott, 2019). Still, with the new wave of technological developments in recent years, we welcomed a new wave of alternative and temporary “loose” work arrangements, which we called “gig”, and we continue to praise and normalise insecure work within an entrepreneurial discourse of self-reliance (du Gay, 1996), self-improvement and shaping your own future (Rose, 1989).
Recognising the allure of gig – both in its glorification and vilification in popular media and scholarly work, Fleming, Rhodes and Yu (2019, p.488) argue that gig is ‘a potent and dangerous pro-market fantasy’ – an extreme case of neoliberal capitalism which will not take over the labour market but is nonetheless dangerous in propagating its ideology. ‘All of a sudden’, write the authors (ibid., p.504), ‘hard won rights look like questionable privileges.’ MacDonald and Giazitzoglou (2019, p.724) see the gig economy ‘as a concentrated form of a more general de-standardisation of employment that has brought multiple forms of insecure work’ and work in those forms, they claim, often means ‘a lack of choice and control, and experiences of disempowerment, low pay, degraded work conditions, alienation, anxiety and insecurity’.

Gig is a representation, a shadow on the wall of the cave. Out of the cave behind the fire, there walks the “post-modern” worker – ‘the idealized figure of the new economy, capable of embracing flexibility and instability’ and their search for security is ‘a sign of weakness or lack of motivation or ambition’ (Morgan and Wood, 2017, p.95). The post-modern worker is not only driving strangers while in labour or having sleepless nights for a $5 fee. She can now be found anywhere. On the following pages, you will recognise her in the persona of the temporary academic worker.

She is typically a he. She is dependable. She tries to be likeable. She does not show opposition. She focuses on quantifiable evaluable output. She puts a lot of personal decisions on hold. She does not undertake serious challenges. She makes herself available to everyone and everything. She dreams of achieving freedom in the future. She dreams of pursuing interesting questions and performing “real” work in the future. She trades her time for another time, a future time. She trades present non-freedom for imagined future freedom.

She is a composite image, of course. And, as it is with images and stories, what I painted here is a scary picture, an extreme image, an object inducing fear so that I can have your attention for the upcoming pages where I will unpack this image and will give you more sides to the story.

Another scary picture of academia has been painted by Gary Hall (2016, uber.edu, para.5):

*Increasing numbers of university workers will thus find themselves in a situation not dissimilar to that facing many cab drivers today. Instead of operating in a sector regulated by the state, they will have little choice but to sell their cheap and easy-to-access courses to whoever is prepared to pay for them in the “alternative” sharing economy education market created by platform capitalism. They too will become atomized, freelance microentrepreneurs in business for themselves. And as such, they will experience all the problems of deprofessionalization, precarity (in the sense of being unable to control or even anticipate their own future), and continuous performance.*
monitoring by networked surveillance technologies that such an economy brings.

Hall’s words are not a description, but a warning. Similar to Fleming, Rhodes and Yu (2019), he presents the embrace of the ideology of gig as a dangerous precedent and envisions what could lie ahead for higher education. Kezar, De-Paola and Scott (2019) dig deeper into the present processes and claim that the gig ideology has already led to substantial changes in the profession. The authors suggest ‘But by 2018, academic capitalism and neoliberal policies had become the dominant regime in higher education, leading to this wholesale shift in labour. Fuelled by the larger gig economy that has become part of the fabric of business and society, the neoliberal trends are amplified and embedded within academe in recent years’ (ibid., p.2). Scholars now talk about the enterprising professor (Haeussler and Colyvas, 2011), the academic entrepreneur (Peter, 2017), the precarisation of professional work (Styhre, 2017), but still there are many barriers faced in the study of insecure and precarious work in academia. The prestige of the profession, the security of the tenured faculty, and the ideological views on the profession as a calling and not merely a job are some of the issues which, as Gallas (2018) points out, prevent the recognition and investigation of precarious experiences in academia. Exactly this, however, makes the academic profession an interesting case for such investigation. In addition to the perceived stratification of security, in relation to employment and careers (Gill, 2014, Nästesjö, 2021), and the intensive internal debate on the changing nature of academic work and values because of the embrace of neoliberal ideology and discourse (see, among others, Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Henkel, 2005; Wedlin, 2008; Winter, 2009; Knights and Clarke, 2014; Alvesson, 2013; Kezar, DePaola and Scott, 2019; Fleming, 2021), an inherent epistemic uncertainty in academia (Knorr-Cetina, 1999) adds to the complexity of investigating and recognising precarious work.

The inherent insecurity of the academic profession comes from the type of “product” of their work – the output of academic work can be seen as a singularity – a cultural good whose value is difficult to determine (Karpik, 2010; 2011; Nästesjö, 2021). Because of that difficulty in assessment, there is always an underlying uncertainty in the ones “producing” and the ones “evaluating” – something that has also been described as epistemic uncertainty (Knorr-Cetina, 1999).

The profession as well as the career structures within the field are changing. Laudel and Gläser (2008, p.388) argue that the changes concerning the early career stages of academics are not being investigated in depth, but they can have ‘grave consequences for any national science system’. The authors outline one of the most troubling trends as the transformation of post-docs from educational and developmental positions into a “holding pattern”. This “holding pattern” can mean years spent on fixed-term contracts, instead of working towards tenure. This, in turn, leads to the stratification of insecurity with
relation to career structure within the profession. A manifestation of the permanence and seriousness of these developments is the processes of professionalisation of non-tenured faculty. In the US, for example, we see unionisation of adjunct faculty happening at American University, Georgetown, George Washington University, Tufts and Montgomery College (Delany, 2013). In 2018, a national award was established with the purpose ‘to recognize the exceptional efforts of different types of groups to support non-tenure-track faculty on their campuses and in their communities’ (Delphi Award, see Scott, Dizon and Kezar, 2019, p.13). At Harper College, the Centre for Adjunct Faculty Engagement has been created (Scott, Kezar and Bates, 2019). It is obvious that the period of fixed-term employment can no longer be considered as a development stage leading to permanent employment for everyone (Laudel and Gläser, 2008), and there is a need for more investigation into the experiences of temporariness. Many academics face the possibility of never reaching tenure or permanent employment, and their experiences could, quite strongly, differ from the secure, prestigious, well-remunerated calling that Gallas (2018) points out is the imaginary of the academic profession and one of the barriers of recognising precarious experiences in the field. This imaginary is also at the core of another debate, namely the one on the nature of the academic profession and the processes of corporatisation.

Academia today is simultaneously a place where academics are ‘being encouraged to become microentrepreneurs of themselves and their own lives’ and a place where ‘the forces of contemporary neoliberalism’s anti-public sector regime’ are being opposed (Hall, 2016, preface, para.3). The profession is ‘seen as offering a way of living, of being alive, that is not just about consuming and working and very little else’ (ibid.). This ideological battle has materialised on the individual level with many accounts of how academics respond to the demands to transform their selves to reflect this change towards a corporatised academia (see, for example, Churchman, 2006; Henkel, 2005; Winter, 2009; Meyer, 2012; Alvesson and Spicer, 2016; Peter, 2017). Gill and Donaghue (2016), however, do not believe that there is enough focus on the actual experiences of academics and their labour conditions. The authors (ibid., p.92) state that the existing scholarly work concerned with the changes and challenges in academia is abound; ‘however its focus is primarily upon institutional transformation and even at times on using the university as a cipher for ‘reading capitalism’, rather than on the experiences or labouring conditions of those who work in universities’. Similarly, and speaking in more general terms, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008, p.233) call for more investigation into ‘the complexity and multiplicity of modes of experiencing the regime of precarious life and labour’.

Taking up this challenge, I look into the lived experiences of temporariness in academia – the modes of experiences, as Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) call them, and how they translate into insecurity. I use a narrative view on experience where lived experiences are based on interaction...
and continuity, meaning that the individual experiences something in the context of interaction and ‘experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.2; Dewey, 1938). Thus, “temporariness” is not seen as a strictly descriptive measure that points to a certain type of contract or a certain number of years, but it is rather a multidimensional notion. The multiple layers of temporariness are the lived experiences, the subjectivities arising from the state of “being temporary”. That is the subject of investigation. Addressing the concerns mentioned above that more investigation is needed into the experiences of labouring conditions of academics (Gill and Donaghue, 2016) and joining Michael Flaherty’s (1992, p.142) appeal to avoid the ‘seductions of grand theory and abstracted empiricism’ (see Mills, 1959), in the pages to come, I will be exploring the lived experiences of the temporary academic worker. Studying lived experiences is a way to investigate social processes, while not being ‘too distant from human experience’ (De Rond, Lok, and Morrison, 2021, p.3).

The “temporary academic worker” is the main character in my investigation and that is an individual with a PhD and career aspirations in academia, who is on a fixed-term contract with varying lengths and conditions. There is another closely related, and widely applied, term used in other works investigating the conditions of scholars in-between PhD and tenure, namely “early-career academic” (ECA). TAW is more accurate for the purposes of this project, given that “early-career academic” does not implicitly suggest temporariness or insecurity; rather, it suggests a shorter time spent “on the job” (Laudel and Gläser, 2008; Robinson, Ratle and Bristow, 2017). Some of the participants in this study have spent many years on temporary contracts and are not necessarily “early” in their careers. The insufficiency of the term “early-career academic” is actually another manifestation of the shifting purpose of temporary academic work from a development stage into an indefinite employment practice. I will use the term TAW when discussing the participants in this research, but you might encounter the term ECA when discussing previous work on the topic.

The participants in this research are all working in the larger field of business studies in Sweden. The business studies discipline in the country is heavily influenced by the US model, and US higher education institutions (HEIs) have long been role models for change (Engwall, 2000). With American-style tenure track programmes gaining popularity, internationalisation being part of the national policy and of many HEIs missions, journal publications and procurement of external funding gaining more importance as evaluative criteria for academic labour and development, and the introduction of “no hanging around” policies, Swedish academia is embracing and importing forms of temporary work arrangements, which add to the complexity of its own system. The Swedish academic system is a system of contrasts and a system in transition. Governed by a famous welfare state with comparatively high degrees of labour protection, the Swedish academic system has seen and is seeing its fair
share of critique. The critique came to a boil about a decade ago, when many voices had accumulated to a call for a change in what they claimed was a fragmented career structure, which has been “gradually dismantled” for the last three decades, and in the HEIs, which were seen as unable ‘to provide clear career paths and good conditions for young researchers’ (Öquist and Benner, 2012, p.12). Since then, some steps have been taken to address those concerns; however, recent reports by organisations in the field still question the adequacy of the measures.

Intrigued by all of the above – the change in career structures, the debates on the academic role and identity, the changes in the field in Sweden, and the ideological barriers to the study of insecurity and precariousness in academia, I set out to investigate the lived experiences of the temporary academic worker. My aim is to understand the temporary and insecure work of academia. To do so, I make use of the following questions: How do temporarily employed academics in Business Studies in Sweden experience the temporariness of their employment? How does it translate into insecurity? How do the temporary academic workers navigate insecurity?

Following this aim and addressing those questions, I will shed light on the conditions of the temporary academic worker. By taking a critical stance, I hope to uncover the subjectivities arising from insecure work and some opportunities for emancipation and control. Theoretically, the contribution lies in the way we understand and conceptualise insecurity in relation to work, and more specifically professional and academic work. This research bears an emancipatory ambition; thus, I hope that it will contribute to a positive change in the conditions of the temporary academic workers.

The thesis is structured as follows. First, I will introduce some specifics of the academic profession and the field in Sweden. Then, I will introduce how we see, investigate, analyse and interpret insecurity in light of different concepts and disciplines – in general, and in the academic profession, in particular. Following, I will present in more details my approach, methods and design. Then, I will narrate how the participants in this project experience their temporary employment and will discuss those experiences in relation to insecurity, including the subjectivities and demands emanating from that and the responses to them. Thereafter, I will close with some practical implications and suggestions for future research.
Field: academic profession

Burton Clark (1987, p.1) calls the academic profession ‘an oddity among professions’ – with its tremendous internal variety and unprecedented expansion, this ‘loosely coupled array of disciplines and professional fields’ shapes the world and all other professions. Perkin (1987) calls it a “key profession” because of its influence over other professions, but also argues that it is losing its stability, confidence, and autonomy because of financial cuts and managerialism. Brint (1994) discusses the transition of professionals in general from social “trustees” to knowledge experts, and this same transition has been detected and often detested in academia. O’Dair (2001, p.162) states: ‘At the same time, some among us [...] have moved recently to embrace what in the larger society is no longer merely emergent but clearly the dominant understanding of professionalism, one grounded by ‘strong interests in marketable knowledge and weaker concerns about the relationship between community and authority’ [Brint, 1994, p.15]’. Kezar, DePaola and Scott (2019) talk about the “gig academy” where, similar to other professions, gig has been translated into the proliferation of insecure, temporary and alternative work arrangements and the widespread cultural acceptance of withdrawal of employee protection. Peter Fleming (2021, p.3) paints this picture of “dark academia”:

Impersonal and unforgiving management hierarchies have supplanted academic judgement, collegiality and professional common sense. In many institutions, senior executives have no PhDs and have been trained in business or the military instead. Mindless performance targets dominate teaching and research to the point of caricature, designed by functionaries who’ve never taught a class or written a research article in their lives. Unfortunately, these hierarchies have become notoriously bossy. Coercion rather than volition compels much academic labour today, even tasks that scholars would have otherwise done willingly because it’s central to their vocation. This surfeit of duress, most of which is unnecessary and counterproductive, is a defining feature of the corporate university. Making matters worse, more than 70 per cent of teaching staff are employed on zero-hour contracts that were perfected in the gig-economy. But even
tenured academics are wilting under the pressure, too afraid to speak out and wracked with anxiety about their publication pipeline.

How did we arrive here?

In this chapter, I will introduce the academic field and a few points of interest, which represent some major changes in the profession that have been under way for the last couple of decades. Following a brief overall introduction into the topic, I will focus on the more specific implications for temporary academic workers. Then, I will describe the academic system in Sweden, focusing on the business studies field and fixed-term employment. Very often, when we talk about the changes in academia, the focus in scholarly work is directed towards changes in research as an aspect of academic work (Whitley, 2010). There are some that investigate the changes as manifested in teaching as an activity (Cox et al., 2011; Pfüger and Mojescik, 2021). But all in all, the general tendency is for the elements of academic work to be studied separately (Musselin, 2009). In this project, academic work is referred to and investigated in its wholeness, looking into all the aspects recognised by the participants as elements of their labour.
The changing nature of academic work

Universities are one of the oldest and most enduring social institutions, which continue to grow and thrive amidst strong pressures for reforms, restructuring and change of “mission and vision” (Wedlin, 2008). Indeed, stemming from pressures for relevance and efficiency, certain processes have been ignited and are regarded as causing major changes to the profession – the turn to “academic capitalism” has been claimed to be a development as major in scope as the Industrial Revolution (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). In the centre of it all is the notion that academia has moved from a collegial to a market logic governance. It has been argued that we are witnessing the "privatisation" of public education because of the transformation of universities into for-profit entities, participating in a wide range of commercial activities (Rhoades and Slaughter, 1997). In the last two decades or so, the intake of students worldwide has increased tremendously, education has become a serious export business in a lot of western countries, and marketing and branding activities have become a norm, consuming a lot of resources (Alvesson, 2013). The University has met the Market, and something new has been born.

The process of “marketisation” suggests ‘fundamental shifts in both ideologies and practices’ (Wedlin, 2008, p.144). Many scholars see the changes in academia as a neoliberal project and the infusion of neoliberal ideology in the domain as a threat to the core mission of education and research because of the valorisation of knowledge (Barnett, 1997; Rhoades and Slaughter, 1997; Levin, 2006). The valorisation of knowledge, as described by these authors, is in direct opposition to the previously commonly-held belief that ‘one of the most important roles of the university in society is the encouragement of research that would not otherwise take place in the private sector. This includes the production of scientific and technical knowledge that cannot be appropriated as well as knowledge that would never be of value to firms in the private sector, such as that produced by research into literature, philosophy, pure mathematics, and public policy’ (Carmichael, 1988, p.455).

The “pioneering” countries that started moving in the direction of “marketisation” were USA, Australia and the UK, but some European countries, including Sweden, closely follow the trend of submerging university governance to external forces, be it state, professional organisations, business or press (Engwall, 2007). A heightened interest in linking science and industry, as well as a stronger focus on science policy and governance, have been observed in many national contexts since the 1990s. This is a cause and a consequence of the dream of the “knowledge society” and its discourse, which puts science and research in the centre of economic growth and national competitiveness (Engwall, 2007; Nedeva and Wedlin, 2015). Because of the new position of science and knowledge production in the political agenda, new forms of regulation and governance have been initiated. A paradox, where we see
deregulation and increased regulation at the same time, is observable in the EU higher education area. The paradox comes from deregulation or increased freedom and decision-making power given to the HEIs by the states and at the same time having more “soft regulations”, including a lot of the market mechanisms of audit and control, for example, rankings, assessments and evaluations (Wedlin, 2008). The marketisation of universities implies commodification of research and education, new working practices and organisation. The reorganisation of universities has been directed towards closer interaction with industry and business, be it regarding education which is expected to “produce” employable students or research which is to be useful and commercially applicable (ibid.). All of this, together with the competition on the “university market” pushes universities into becoming “market actors” acting “strategically” and gives rise to a specific form of managerialism within the field (ibid.). Management and leadership practices, work tasks, even the ‘terms of academic employment, and nature of the professional workforce in higher education are being re stratified, restructured, and reconfigured’ (Rhoades and Slaughter, 1997, p.9). The “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997) has manifested in increased orientation towards the market, towards audits and evaluations, formalisation and standardisation, demanding accountability, visibility and auditability of academic labour.

These processes are important not only for the academic profession, but they also stem from and are drivers for changes on the societal level. The rise of the entrepreneurial self, for example, is a cornerstone of the rise of the gig economy and a manifestation of neoliberalism in academia. The normalisation and the wide spread of flexible alternative work arrangements from the “entrepreneurial” gig economy have trickled down into other professional environments, such as academia. These developments are what Ball (2015, p.258) calls ‘the big-neo-liberalism, out there’. And that big neo-liberalism has changed the everyday work and practice of academics in a material and affective way – the ‘little-neo-liberalism, “in here”’. Below, I will discuss how the ‘big-neo-liberalism’ has translated into the professional practice of academics, according to previously published research on the topic. Some are general trends in the profession, but one must keep in mind that they strongly affect academics on fixed-term contracts who are ‘particularly vulnerable to the restructur ing of higher education in comparison with more established and tenured/permanently employed senior scholars and professoriate’ (Vostal, 2015, p.82; see also McAlpine, 2012; Meyer, 2012; Müller, 2014).
Audit culture

With the increasing importance of rankings and accreditations as a form of “soft regulation” of the university market (Wedlin, 2008), universities had to make sure that their structures, procedures, working practices were “audit-able”, i.e. making them visible and producing a paper trail that can be audited (Shore and Wright, 2000).

The rise of rankings and accreditation systems has promoted the prevalence of quantifiable output, steering scientific output into narrow boundaries. Research publications have become the main and most important evaluation criteria – quantifiable and countable, publications are then easily monitored and evaluated. But this is not even news. Decades ago, Haas (1996, pp.387-388) pointed to the trend:

*This pattern of rewarding academics for research and publication, more than for teaching, has been followed for decades in research universities. In recent years, other institutions have also begun to move in that direction. Our evidence shows that the pressure on the academic to conduct research and publish is now quite widespread. On most campuses, being a superb teacher will no longer by itself bring the highest rewards.*

Power (1994, p.33) says that audits ‘do as much to construct definitions of quality and performance as to monitor them’. This understanding is perhaps what creates a resistance towards the permeation of audit culture within academia. But even if this audit culture or culture of accountability is perceived as dangerous and a threat to the core principles of academia, it is still difficult to critique because ‘it advances values that academics generally hold dear, such as responsibility, openness about outcome and widening of access’ says Strathern (2000, p.3). For these reasons, more and more organisational “time and morale” are dedicated to auditing and monitoring of academic work and output (McLennan, 2008). Another implication stemming from “audit culture” is the administrative burden it places on academics. In a study investigating the changes in academic work and workload, McInnis (1998) reports that the heaviest burden, according to respondents, stems from meeting external demands directed at accountability.

While previous research has shown that academic work is performed towards its future evaluation (Shrater et al., 2000), how academics decide what their performance should entail is an entirely different question. Nästesjö (2021) argues that forming an understanding of what constitutes good work in academia is complex enough on its own, but when one adds to it the social uncertainty of job and career insecurity for ECAs, the complexity increases immensely (Nästesjö, 2021). Academic work, similar to other cultural “goods”
can be seen as a singularity – a unique and incommensurable product whose value is difficult to determine (Karpik, 2010; Karpik, 2011; Nästesjö, 2021). Individuals who work in such fields with quality uncertainty often struggle to find meaningful ways to determine the value of their own work while being caught between market uncertainty and career aspirations (Fürst, 2018). To do so, they make use of appraisal devices, says Fürst (2018), contrasting the appraisal devices to the judgement devices that Karpik (2010) suggests consumers use when encountered with quality uncertainty in singular goods. Appraisal devices used to determine the value of one’s own work can be a way to reduce uncertainty, according to Fürst (2018), but only when they come from a trusted source and are used to reduce the tensions between uncertainty and aspirations:

*While any evaluation can constitute an appraisal, an appraisal device is an evaluation that artists can use to handle the tension between quality uncertainty and aspiration to succeed in a market. Appraisals only become useful appraisal devices when they come from sources that are both trusted and knowledgeable enough for the artist to assume that the appraisal corresponds to how the artist’s work will be evaluated on the artistic market.*

Present academic work is more and more performed in anticipation of future scrutiny (Strathern, 2000). But what that scrutiny might entail is hard to decipher. Nevertheless, it happens more often than before. This leads to another change in academic practice – the need to produce more and to produce it faster.

Acceleration and productivity

Wanting more and faster “results” is a trait of our times, of modernity. Bauman (2000/2012 ed., p.9) describes:

*Once the distance passed in a unit of time came to be dependent on technology, on artificial means of transportation, all extant, inherited limits to the speed of movement could be in principle transgressed. Only the sky (or, as it transpired later, the speed of light) was now the limit, and modernity was one continuous, unstoppable and fast accelerating effort to reach it.*

This accelerating effort is not just connected to technology anymore; it is the drive, the hunger, the ‘time pressure, haste, hurry and rush’ (Tomlinson, 2007,
p.3) we experience in our everyday life, and it did not miss academia, promoting an accelerated ideal. Vostal (2015) shows how despite academics’ understanding that they are free to allocate their time or have more time autonomy than other professions, they experience high levels of oppressive acceleration, which means that the decisions to speed up certain activities are “reactionary” instead of intended. This is in contrast to the nature of academic work, which has an “unhastened quality” to it (Pels, 2003).

Müller (2014, p.16) also talks about an oppressive acceleration which she calls anticipatory acceleration and describes as follows: ‘a type of acceleration that aims at increasing units of output per units of time that is not developed in response to a certain event or specific time horizon, but rather constitutes a generalized response to a state of pervasive competition in the academic life sciences that primarily selects along the question of “how much per time?”’ Furthermore, she shows that ‘anticipatory acceleration of this kind tends to privilege research questions and approaches that are predictable in terms of their outcomes or requires highly elaborate and exhaustive individual risk management strategies to engage projects bearing more epistemic uncertainty, and hence potential for novelty’.

Other scholars have also shown how academics with fixed-term employment are subjected to forms of demanding temporalities. Examining academic time, Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003, p.65) offer the category of “contract time” to signify ‘a sense of time as something that is terminating combined with an uncertainty about the future. The orientation is towards the end of the present contract (how much time do I have left?), and a worry about the future (how/when/where do I get the next contract?).’

Acceleration and increased productivity are in themselves signs of the permeating marketisation and audit culture in academia. For temporary academic workers, however, these demands take an oppressive size because of their uncertain future (Müller, 2014) and the specifics of the experiences of “contract time” (Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003).

Roles and identity

The drive towards corporatisation of academia creates identity struggle and role ambivalence for many academics. ‘The growing insistence by most institutions that academic staff change their behaviour to reflect more corporate imperatives has created in many academics a sense of ambivalence and role strain’ says Churchman (2006, p.7). Academics are often shown to be at odds with the values and direction exhibited in their institutions. The increased corporate orientation and introduction of market models of organising, career development and “customer” orientation render their professional selves more
insecure and unstable (see, for example, Henkel, 2005; Jones, 2007; Winter, 2009).

Some authors have discovered that in order to decrease identity tensions, academics sometimes prefer to accept and/or be compliant with certain procedures rather than question them (Winter, 2009; Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012; Knights and Clarke, 2014). This type of behaviour could be characterised as ‘an ambiguous and shifting amalgam compliance and opposition’ (Collinson, 2003, p.539). Alvesson and Spicer (2016) believe that in order to cope with the tensions of shifting between different scripts (i.e. compliance, resistance, cynicism, romanticism), academics resolve to seeing themselves as “playing a game” – a vision that allows them to keep using all of the available scripts without being forced to fight the contradictions between them.

The corporatisation of the university and the adoption of market models, ideals and discourses demand compromises regarding the previously shared collective idea of the university. Many scholars claim that the competitive environment, rankings, audits and accreditations are commodifying education and research and are in direct opposition to the raison d'être of the university (see, for example, Barnett, 1997; Winter, 2009; Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012). ‘As terms such as “accountability” and “viability” drift into university vernacular, meanings of terms such as “creation and dissemination of knowledge” are compromised’, says Churchman (2006, p.4).

Readings (1996) argues that while the efficiency, accountability and all other managerially-inspired discourses came from outside and were met with criticality and hostility, it was the discourse of excellence that grew from within and engulfed the field more freely. The danger with the excellence discourse is that “excellence” means nothing and everything. There is no clear understanding of the prescribed meaning of excellence regarding one particular issue or another. In an attempt to unpack the scripts of excellence (‘how excellence is coded, signaled and recognized’, p.160) in peer review funding panels in the US, Michele Lamont (2009) demonstrates that the evaluation of excellence is highly dependent on the personal perceptions and understandings of the individual panelists, which entails the social scripts they employ, the meaning and weight they give to various standards and their own self-identity. Readings (1996) argued that, because of that ambivalence, the discourse of excellence is, in fact, the Trojan horse of academia. Juxtaposing the University of Thought and the University of Excellence, he claimed that corporatisation and market forces crept in because of the discourse of excellence and are the ones governing academia, instead of the traditional principles of culture and critical thought.

While the discourse of excellence might be the Trojan horse, another discourse introduced by it is the discourse of enterprise. Building upon the work of different scholars, Styhre (2017) demonstrates how the discourse of enterprise permeated academia – boosting the importance of the entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, 2003) and the enterprising professor (Haeussler and
Colyvas, 2011). The discourse of enterprise re-imagines the organisation as ‘a place where customers’ needs are to be satisfied, productivity is to be improved, quality service guaranteed, flexibility enhanced and creative innovation fostered through the active engagement of the self-fulfilling impulses of all organisation’s members’ (du Gay, 1996, p.148). Moreover, the members of the organisation are being ‘conceptualized as enterprising subjects: self-regulating, autonomous, productive individuals whose sense of self-worth and virtue was inextricably linked to the success of the company for which they work’ (ibid.).

The discursive creation of the entrepreneurial academic has been documented by different authors (Etzkowitz, 2003; Haeussler and Colyvas, 2011). Peter (2017) discusses the transition from Homo academicus¹ into an academic entrepreneur. The academic entrepreneur is in a constant competition, and the evaluation of their work is based on the output of projects (especially in research), which is the perfect setup for the rise in temporary employment. Kezar, DePaola and Scott (2019, p.17) recently expanded that idea discussing how gig practices, also reinforced by the discourse of enterprise, manifest within academia:

One strange development in this iteration of contingent labor markets is the extent to which contingency and withdrawal of protections have been culturally reconfigured as virtuous markers of self-reliance. These widespread changes are significant to higher education, where workers confront a similar transformation in conjunction with the proliferation of digital-age knowledge and information commodities.

The processes of marketisation, corporatisation, gigisation, if you will, do not just materialise in a field. These processes affect and are affected by the discourses that get adopted and the roles and identities of the actors in the field. Some scholars show how the change processes create identity struggles. But elsewhere, we also see the adoption of the entrepreneurial discourse, the rise of the enterprising professor (Haeussler and Colyvas, 2011), the transformation of Homo academicus into academic entrepreneur (Peter, 2017), and the overall acceptance of the demands for flexibility, self-reliance (Kezar, De-Paola and Scott, 2019), self-fulfilment and self-regulation (du Gay, 1996). All of this has contributed to the proliferation of alternative and contingent employment practices in academia. Next, I will focus on that and how the issue has been addressed in EU policy.

¹ Homo academicus is a term used by Pierre Bourdieu (1984/1990) in his homonymous book, where he describes the academic field in France as a field of power, prestige and status.
Instability of employment

Early career academics are most often “stuck” in fixed-term contracts because they find themselves struggling to secure positions after finalising their doctoral degrees. The positions that they usually get are, for the most part, short-term and provide various degrees of stability and guidance: ‘[...] these positions often lack a living wage, benefits, pension, long-term contract, paths for career advancement, involvement in governance, protection of academic freedom, and autonomy to define one’s role and work, all of which are features of professional roles’ (Kezar, DePaola and Scott, 2019, p.15).

There are many reasons why the academy (in general and in Sweden) has reached this stage of widespread instability of employment, and some were already mentioned in passing in the previous sections – the permeation of different logics and discourses and the change in the nature of work and professions in general. In Europe, state deregulation and the empowerment of the universities, argues Musselin (2013), has led to a profound change in academic career management – the introduction of more and more formal and rational procedures of recruitment, assessment and promotion has standardised academic career trajectories and has ‘made [universities] more present, more important and less escapable to their own members than in the past’ (p.28). The academic workforce is becoming more and more homogeneous, because of institutionalisation of norms and mechanisms across the “university market” and standardisation of models and processes (Churchman, 2006; Musselin, 2013).

Huisman, de Weert and Bartelse (2002) show that because of the uncertainty and lack of long-term career opportunities now associated with the field, the academic profession is starting to lose its appeal to younger generations. The authors present a comparative study between several European countries, one of which is Sweden. They state (ibid., p.141):

Internationally, the fault lines of an uncertain academic career are becoming increasingly apparent. Despite extensive preparation, young academics confront restricted opportunities to become regular members of the academic community. Many of them are on a temporary contract, often with poor working conditions and uncertainties about reappointments. A long academic career seems unobtainable, which can lead to a negative image for academic employment. Those who opt for an academic career run the risk of moving from one contract to another without the opportunity to establish a particular research program.

These issues are not unknown to the decision-makers in the field, and there are certain steps that have been taken to address some concerns.
In 2005, in Europe (Commission Recommendation 2005/251/EC, 2005), we agreed on the following principles (among others):

**Stability and permanence of employment**

Employers and/or funders should ensure that the performance of researchers is not undermined by instability of employment contracts, and should therefore commit themselves as far as possible to improving the stability of employment conditions for researchers, thus implementing and abiding by the principles and terms laid down in Council Directive 1999/70/EC (1).

**Recognition of the profession**

All researchers engaged in a research career should be recognised as professionals and be treated accordingly. This should commence at the beginning of their careers, namely at postgraduate level, and should include all levels, regardless of their classification at national level (e.g. employee, postgraduate student, doctoral candidate, post-doctoral fellow, civil servants).

**Research freedom**

Researchers should focus their research for the good of mankind and for expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge, while enjoying the freedom of thought and expression, and the freedom to identify methods by which problems are solved, according to recognised ethical principles and practices.

These principles come from a two-decades long effort campaign in the European Union aimed at making Europe the leading knowledge economy through the recognition and elevation of the research profession. Starting in 2000, when the idea of the European Research Area began to take shape (see COM(2000)6 final of 18.01.2000 where the creation of ERA is suggested) and going through the 3% objective (see COM(2002)499 final of 11.09.2002 – suggesting increasing spending on research to 3% of GDP) and the 2005 recommendation and subsequent drafting of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (Commission Recommendation 2005/251/EC, 2005), we can clearly see not only the ambition of Europe as a leading knowledge economy but also the recognition of the problems stemming from instability of employment.

In the 2003 Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament “Researchers in the European Research Area: one profession, multiple careers”, we read:
‘The need to establish a career structure for researchers has only been realised relatively recently, by taking into account two factors which hinder long-term perspectives: the awareness of the career structure and the consciousness of the lack of long-term employment perspectives particularly for a career in academia. [This is partly linked to the changing role of universities and the way research is funded. Consequently, there will be more and more project based contracts, which provide little or no opportunity for planning a career in R&D. See also COM(2003)58 of 05.02.2003.] (COM(2003)436 final, p. 20)

Within this context, it is worthwhile noting that the future of fixed term contracts, including research contracts is also related to the implementation of the “EU Directive on Fixed Term Work”. The Directive aims to prevent fixed-term employees from being less favourably treated than similar permanent employees; to prevent abuse arising from the use of successive fixed terms contracts; to improve access to training for fixed terms employees; and to ensure fixed-terms employees are informed about available permanent jobs’. (COM(2003)436 final, p. 19).

Thus, we can see that already in 2003, the problematic issues of the lack of career planning opportunities and insecurity of temporary workers were acknowledged in EU policy documents – both in general terms, and in the context of academia. Unfortunately, the recognition of the challenges connected to fixed-term positions in academia has not led to specific resolutions. On the contrary, there is more and more scholarly evidence pointing to the vulnerability of those positions (Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003; McAlpine, 2012; Meyer, 2012; Müller, 2014; Vostal, 2015).

I will continue discussing the instability of employment with a focus on the temporary academic worker in Sweden in the next section, after I introduce the system and some of its local peculiarities.
Swedish academia

Overview

Higher education is the biggest state sector in Sweden, with a considerable percentage of all state employees working at a higher education institution (28% in 2018 - UKÄ, 2019). In the last two decades, the previously state-regulated Swedish higher education system has undergone a number of reforms, with the latest one (dubbed the “autonomy reform”) leading to further deregulation and providing more freedom to HEIs regarding employment structures and positions. The degree of freedom for the HEIs to define some positions and career structures as well as the translation into English in official documents and legislation might create some confusion; therefore, before going any further, I would like to introduce some definitions of the key terms used to describe the academic positions occupied by the participants in this research. The terms have been chosen based on a careful comparative reading of the terms used in different translations of legislative and communication documents, and the reference and self-reference done by the interviewees of this project.

**Career-development position** – In Swedish: meriteringsanställning. Career-development positions are positions intended to give early career academics the opportunity to develop research- and teaching-wise, following a third-cycle degree. Currently, there are de jure three, but de facto two positions that are recognised as career-development positions – assistant professor and postdoc. The third one is being phased out and replaced. See below.

**Assistant professor** – In Swedish: biträdande lektor. Assistant professor is the US equivalent, and the biträdande lektorat is the Swedish version of the US tenure track system. Official translation also includes the British version – “associate senior lecturer”. The position comes with various HEI-specific percentages devoted to teaching and research. There is an eligibility criterion – one can apply for the position up to 5-years after obtaining a PhD. The assistant professorship offers 4 to 6 years for the further development for the early career academic. After that period, the assistant professor has the right to apply for promotion to associate professor.

**Postdoc** - In Swedish: postdoktor. Other terms: postdoctoral fellow, postdoctoral researcher. The postdoc is a fixed-term research position.
The postdoc appointments are not centrally regulated and can be financed through an employment contract (regulated through a collective agreement, typically maximum 2-years but can be extended in special circumstances) or through a stipend. They give an opportunity for someone with a PhD to spend more time on research and to work towards a promotion in title (docent), but it does not give the right to application for career promotion to associate professor.

**Researcher/Temporary researcher** – researchers (in Swedish: forskare) can have “until further notice”, instead of fixed-term contracts. However, even if they are until further notice, they are typically short-term because they are guided by LAS (Lag om anställningsskydd – the Employment Protection Act, more on it below), which would allow for a maximum of 2-years employment within a 5-years period with the same employer.

**Lecturer/Temporary lecturer** – fixed-term teaching position. Other terms used can include lecturer (Swedish: lektor), adjunct (Swedish - adjunkt, adjungerad lektor), junior lecturer. Similar to the above, LAS is often applied. Junior lecturer and adjunct have been used interchangeably to describe an entry-level teaching position that does not require a third-cycle degree. In the temporary lecturer category, I also include substitute teacher/lecturer/reader (Swedish – vikarierande lektor). The term temporary lecturer will be used to describe any type of non-permanent teaching positions.

Currently, only three positions in the field are state-regulated – professor and lektor (senior lecturer) are regulated in the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), while employment for biträdande lektor (assistant professor) is regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100). The regulations on the latter only state that the academic has a right to apply for promotion to associate professor, but what the application and requirements entail is entirely up to the HEI. The conditions of the tenure track vary from institution to institution, in terms of length, evaluation criteria, mentorship and progress tracking. The common denominator is that once selected for the tenure track, the academic looks forward to a future point of time where they have the right to apply for promotion to a permanent position without undergoing a comprehensive selection in competition with other academics.

The HEIs can also decide on any other employment structure, category and position apart from those three that are regulated (UKÅ, 2020). Among those additional positions are the various postdoc and temporary lecturership positions mentioned above. The postdoc position is classified as a career development position by the Swedish Higher Education Authority, which distinguishes among two postdoc types – ‘postdoctoral research fellowships are 4-
year positions and postdoctoral appointments are 2-year positions’ (UKÄ, 2020, p.57). The first (also called forskarassistent in Swedish) is a position that is being phased out and is being replaced by the position of assistant professor (biträande lektor) (YAS, 2020).

Unfortunately, there is no absolute number of the temporary positions in the reporting. The Swedish Higher Education Authority reports the employment trends according to six categories: professors, senior lecturers, career development positions, lecturers, other research and teaching staff with doctoral degrees, and other research and teaching staff without doctoral degrees (UKÄ, 2020). Apart from professors and senior lecturers, which are permanent positions and career development positions, which are temporary, the constitution of the other categories according to temporariness is not easily deciphered and can include both permanent and temporary employment. The “obvious” category representing temporary employment – the career development position, has seen the steepest increase in the last decade, growing by 68% since 2009. This category includes assistant professors (4–6-year positions), postdoctoral research fellowships – the one that is being phased out (4-year positions), and postdoctoral appointments (2-year positions). The increase, however, might be even higher, since it has become known that UKÄ does not include postdocs who are externally funded in their statistics. Recent journalistic investigation has revealed that ‘every fifth postdoc is excluded from statistics’ (Skarsgård, 2020).

Research positions in Sweden see a great variety. One can be employed as a postdoc in a HEI or bring in one’s own funding into the HEI and be financed through a scholarship. Postdoc scholarships and positions vary in terms of strength of contract, benefits, length and opportunities for prolongation within the funding scheme or the HEI. Additionally, we see researchers who are not official postdocs but have research funds and varying lengths and percentage of employment. Some academics hold multiple appointments – postdoc in one university, teaching in another, affiliated researcher in a third one.

Rightly out of UKÄ’s career-development classification is the temporary lecturer. That position has no or almost no time dedicated to research. In the stage where early career academics need to produce peer-reviewed publications if they want to build a competitive portfolio, which can eventually let them compete for a permanent position, teaching full time means no or minimum research time. The academics in teaching positions need to secure external funding themselves in order to dedicate some time for research. That, in fact, is true not only for the ones on fixed-term contracts. Procuring research funding is a big part of the Swedish academic practice. Swedish academics are responsible for securing their own research funding, even if they have a permanent university position. With varying degrees among different institutions, permanent and temporary positions alike (except for strictly research-oriented positions such as a postdoc) usually suggest a very high percentage of teaching load, which the individual scholar can decrease by successfully
applying for external grant schemes. In fact, success in securing funding is now one of the most important factors for recruitment, as opposed to genuine assessment of quality of work according to Öquist and Benner (2012). For some, this is promoting healthy levels of competition that boost productivity and turn academics into entrepreneurs. This model, however, creates a precarious situation for early career academics, as it further jeopardises their chances of getting a permanent job by being stuck in the vicious circle of needing a competitive portfolio in order to get funding and needing funding in order to build a competitive portfolio.

The assistant professorship, which can be described as the Swedish equivalent of the US tenure track system, was first introduced in 2001 as a trial; after some changes, it was re-introduced in 2017 in its current form. A recent report from the independent Young Academy of Sweden (2020) provides a good historical perspective on the issue:

In 2001, the position of assistant professor was introduced in the Higher Education Ordinance as a trial. This trial was to last five years, after which it would be evaluated. The new element in this form of employment was that an assistant professor could, after evaluation, be promoted to associate professor. The “autonomy reform” of 2011 once again deregulated all categories of teaching staff, apart from professor and associate professor. However, some higher education institutions retained the position of assistant professor and the opportunity for promotion to associate professor. In 2012, a text about a career-development position was reintroduced in the Higher Education Ordinance, although the position did not provide the right to be evaluated for promotion. This position was for four years, and those eligible to apply must have received their PhD no more than seven years before the application deadline.

The issue was again investigated in 2016 and led to another amendment to the Higher Education Ordinance. This entered into force on 1 October 2017 and has been applied in full since 1 April 2018. In the current Higher Education Ordinance, the career-development position has been replaced by assistant professorship, in the form of a four to six-year tenure-track position with the right to be evaluated for promotion to associate professor. At the same time, the time limit for applying for this position has been reduced from seven to five years after receiving a PhD.

The report not only provides historical details but also offers an insight into the reasons for the introduction of the position and the effects of it. It suggests that one of the main reasons for the establishment of the position was to
provide clarity and transparency; however, it is questionable if that was achieved. The position was an answer to a problem identified by many scholars and practitioners – the lack of clear career structure which leads to complexity and dead-ends. I discuss this critique next, but first let us have a look at a few more peculiarities of the Swedish academic field. One such peculiarity is LAS – the Employment Protection Act that I mentioned above. Lag om anställningsskydd (1982:80), commonly known and referred to by its abbreviation LAS, is the legislative protection for contingent workforce.

Sweden saw a slight decrease in its overall contingent workforce in the last couple of years, with a measurement of 15.43% in 2020, coming down from the record high of 17.45% in 2014. However, this is still above the average for the OECD countries, which reads 11.42% in 2020 (OECD, 2022). These numbers reflect all contingent workforce, but according to a report from SULF, the numbers in academia are even higher than that because ‘the number of fixed-term employment positions at higher education institutions is significantly higher than at other employers’ (Fagerlind Ståhl, 2021, p.1). Despite or because of these higher than average numbers, the country has a legislative response to insecure work. There are several sections in the Employment Protection Act (1982:80) dealing with temporary or fixed-term employment. Section 5 (Section 5a, SFS 1982:80 Employment Protection Act, unofficial translation) sets out the general conditions of when temporary employment is transformed into a permanent one:

*General fixed-term employment is transformed into indefinite-term employment when an employee has been employed by the employer in a general fixed-term position for a total of more than two years:*

1. *during a five-year period; or*

2. *during a period in which an employee has been employed by the employer in fixed-term periods of employment in the form of general fixed-term employment, temporary substitute employment or seasonal employment and the periods of employment have succeeded one another.*

*One period of employment has succeeded another where it has begun within six months of the last day of the previous period of employment. Temporary substitute employment is transformed into indefinite-term employment when an employee has been employed by the employer in a substitute position for a total of more than two years during a five-year period (SFS 2016:248).*

The above describes the practice of what, in Swedish, is referred to as “inlasning” – how a temporary employment can automatically transform into a
permanent one. The law has been passed for the protection of employees, with the idea of disrupting the long years of insecurity and hanging around on short-term contracts. It has, however, opened a new space for political agendas and problems with how it is being practiced. With inlasning, one simply “slides into” a permanent contract without going through external evaluation in competition with others – two principles that are regarded as key for the academic system in Sweden. The opposite practice is referred to as “utlasning” – when an individual is refused extension of employment because they are nearing the limit for “inlasning”. For academics, who might wish to continue working on fixed-term positions with or without the goal of acquiring merits for tenure, this might lead to dead ends.

Thus, there are several problems with how LAS is being used in practice. First, the possibility to bypass competitive external evaluation for permanent employment. Second, the impossibility for continued fixed-term employment because of impending inlasning. There is a third issue, according to the Swedish Higher Education Authority, which is that LAS can, in fact, be surpassed because of other special provisions in the academic system (UKÄ, 2020, p.68):

*Fixed-term appointments based on LAS are problematic in higher education because they can lead to career dead ends for individuals. Within higher education, it is also possible to alternate fixed-term appointments based on LAS with those based on higher education’s special regulations, so that the individual can become stuck in insecure employment for long periods of time.*

Thus, the efficacy of the law in academia is questionable – it can be surpassed, but at the same time, the practices of inlasning and utlasning, based on the provisions in the law, are used without clear indication of when one or the other is preferred, leading to further questions about objectivity and accountability in the hiring practices of the HEIs.

With that critical view on the effectiveness of LAS in academia, I will move on to the next section, where I will introduce some more critical opinions on the conditions of the temporary academic worker in Swedish academia.

**Critique on fixed-term employment**

The critique towards the conditions of the temporary academic workers comes mostly from the field. There are some research papers on the topic, but the major efforts are concentrated in reports and studies conducted by union and professional organisations, as well as government and independent agencies.
In a recent research paper, using data from one such investigation (a survey done by the professional organisation, National Junior Faculty of Sweden, NJF), Signoret et al. (2019, p.273) analyse the conditions of ECAs in various fields in Sweden and point to some issues they believe have an impact on the ‘perceived possibility of conducting the best science’. In the paper, the authors focus on the relationship between work situation and well-being of ECAs and how those two factors shape the structural conditions for an ‘ideal scientific environment’ (ibid.). A major factor the authors describe as having a negative impact on that environment is lack of ‘clarity, attractiveness, and security of the career path’ (ibid., p. 287). Driven by a need for flexibility and the opportunities that opened up following the deregulation processes of the last few decades, Swedish universities have increasingly made use of temporary and alternative appointments – the use of fixed-term teaching contracts, which come with lower salary and more teaching hours compared to, for example, assistant professorships, which are very attractive for the HEIs because they not only offer financial relief but are also more flexible (Askling, 2001). The increased use of such fixed-term contracts has created a tension between the interests of the HEIs and ‘the individual who asks for clarity, predictability and a long-term perspective’, say Henningsson, Jörnsten and Geschwind (2018, p.1217) in a message ringing closely to the conclusions of Signoret et al. (2019, p.283), namely that ECAs believe clarity and security of career paths will lead to an enhanced ‘perceived quality of life and the opportunity to create the best science’.

As a response to that tension and the call for more security and the creation of a clear and transparent career structure, the assistant professor position was re-introduced in Sweden in 2017 (YAS, 2020). Prior to its introduction, many voices were raised, critiquing the fragmented, complicated and non-transparent career structure in Sweden. In a report from 2012, Öquist and Benner (p.30) stated ‘Sweden arguably no longer has a proper career system, but merely a range of opportunities’. They also suggested that the dependence on external funding is limiting HEIs’ ability to set strategic goals in terms of research direction, and this dependence was engulfing not only junior but also senior academics – ‘today, most academics depend for their careers entirely on fluctuating contributions from external funders’ (ibid., p.12). Signoret et al. (2019, see also Wöhrer, 2014) point to the dependence on external funding as problematic for the establishment of ECAs as independent researchers, which then affects their opportunities to secure more funding or permanent positions. Öquist and Benner (2012, p.32) identified the fragmented career structure and the dependence on external funding as creating ‘a culture of opportunism among new entrants’ and ‘a culture of caution and tactical manoeuvrering, rather than of a quest for innovative research’. These issues gained attention and traction and, as mentioned above, led to the latest re-introduction of the position of assistant professor.
The introduction of the assistant professor position did not erase all other temporary academic positions, of course. It is an expensive position to finance, and the HEIs do not often announce such openings. A recent report from SULF, the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers, looking into the issues of uncertainty and insecurity, shows a high proportion of fixed-term employment and the HEIs’ explanation through their dependence on external funding (Åmossa, 2021). The HEIs suggest that their dependence on funding coming from outside makes them reluctant to offer permanent positions. This, in turn, means that an increasing number of academics are made to practise in uncertainty, which, according to the report (ibid.) impacts their ability to exercise their academic freedom, to raise concerns, or to publish controversial results without fear of retaliation. In their study, Signoret et al. (2019) outline some of the factors leading from that position of uncertainty to the perceived limitations to the practice of the ECAs. The authors point to the importance of a long-term research perspective, quality of life, university support, career path and job clarity, and career opportunities in academia and in the same HEI as being related to the perceived opportunity to work in the best possible way. In fact, their results show that those issues are quite problematic and, with some variation, the career path for ECAs in Sweden is ‘neither clear nor secure’, and there is room for improvement in all areas outlined above. The need for improvement is recognised by a variety of actors in the field, and even though the interests of academics and HEIs might sometimes seem divergent, the tensions are mostly stemming from the complexity of the academic system and the principles it follows rather than from a direct opposition between academics and HEIs.

The broader implementation of the assistant professorship across Swedish universities can be seen as a response to the above critiques. The tenure track, however, should not be seen as a panacea for the condition of the fixed-term academic. It is often driven by ambitions other than improving those conditions, according to some scholars – ‘the choice of a tenure track system does not necessarily defend individual academic freedom to choose one’s own work goals and means’ say Herbert and Tienari (2013, p.158). Henningsson, Jörnsten and Geschwind (2018) further argue that academic freedom and security are not drivers for the implementation of the tenure track system in Swedish HEIs. They have identified that the implementation of the tenure track by some universities in Sweden has been driven by talent hunting, sustaining international competitiveness and the association with the American model. An additional ambition for transparency, focusing on resources and retention, has also been pointed out (ibid.). The scholars conclude that job security is addressed in state legislation and that, in a way, has been seen by the HEIs as a transfer of responsibility to the state.

Apart from research papers and independent reports, the inherent tensions caused by a fixed-term employment in academia have also been recognised by government agencies and institutions. UKÄ (2019, p.55, accent added by
me), even if they do not have the absolute numbers when it comes to counting temporary academic workers, state in that regard:

*Fixed-term employment offers flexibility for HEIs in organising their operations and can result in creativity, innovation and knowledge transfer between different sectors. One argument for fixed-term employment is also that HEIs’ career paths are based on continually improving qualifications and assessing of staff. Fixed-term employment can also have negative effects, particularly at the individual level. General temporary employment and substitute positions that lack connection to a clear career structure at HEIs can lead to dead ends for individuals.*

The same sentiment is found in other government reports. The following statement, for example, is from a government report from 2007 (Karriär för kvalitet, SOU 2007:98, p.200, roughly translated by me), where one can find references to the 2005 European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, which was previously introduced:

*The government notes that despite a political ambition, as well as a desire from the higher education institutions, to create a coherent career and a system based on merit, development in certain parts has gone in the opposite direction in the last decade. One problem that is specifically pointed out, in the directive as well as in numerous reports and documents, is the period between the doctoral degree and the first permanent position at a university, which in international contexts is usually referred to as the transition to tenure.*

This transition period has been recognised by both Swedish and EU authorities as problematic; however, we still lack a clear vision on how to address it in such a way that it does not ‘lead to dead ends for individuals’ (UKÄ, 2019, p.55). The good news is that there are many actors, including HEIs, unions, associations, and state and independent institutions in the field, who are trying to investigate and address the problematic areas and find better solutions. I hope that this research will also contribute to finding better solutions for the temporary academic worker.

Before meeting that worker and unpacking their conditions, I will introduce in the next chapter some perspectives on insecurity that will help me build a conceptual and analytical framework for the upcoming discussion and analysis. I will introduce ideas and perspectives from multiple disciplines, as well as examples from their application in the field of higher education and academic work.
Perspectives on insecurity

The previous pages had the aim, research questions, and subjects of this research laid out. The framework that is to carry the answers to those questions was, however, not that clearly spelled out. This was done with the purpose of conveying the true analytical process and hinting to the open framework, which has slowly built itself in interrelation with the empirical evidence throughout the whole research process. From the preparatory readings through the interviews in the field to the typing up of these pages, the empirical material has been contrasted with different theoretical ideas. Even if the analytical framework has been an open one, it does not suggest that there has not been a starting point, and this research has started from a blank canvass. The variety of understandings and perspectives on insecurity in relation to work have formed the field of possible theoretical understandings and contributions and the lens through which I have investigated the lived experiences of the temporary academic worker in the business studies disciplines in Sweden. Below, I will zoom in on those different perspectives. Each one has informed the analytical and theoretical process to a certain extent. Answers to some of the tensions, contradictions and blind spots found within these research traditions and mostly in the “conversations” between them will be distinguished later on as contributions made by the analytical work presented in this dissertation.

I will begin the overview with the concepts most closely associated with insecurity related to work – job insecurity, professional insecurity and precarity, and finish with the idea of the post-modern worker which contains in itself the importance of ontological insecurity and demands on the individual for self-realisation and self-responsibility – the demands to be responsible for one’s own future, to be flexible and adaptive, and always improving. In that same tradition of thought, I will discuss time and temporality and the potentially oppressive nature of the future and anticipation as a regime. In this overview, I will discuss the concepts in general, as well as in their relation to the academic profession.
Job insecurity

The view of job insecurity as something problematic can be traced back to the 1980s, with the most prominent work being that of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) who saw job insecurity as a stressor. Prior to that, scholars were mostly focused on security as a motivator (some of the main works that were also inspirational for others include Maslow’s need hierarchy, Herzberg’s two-factor theory and Super’s work on security; see Maslow, 1954; Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959; Super, 1957). Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984, p.438) saw job insecurity as having both objective and subjective characteristics, defining it as ‘perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation’. Powerlessness, the authors claim exacerbates the perceived threat of insecurity, and they also distinguish four main factors contributing to the experience of powerlessness: lack of protection (for example, union or employment contract), unclear expectancies, organisational culture and absence of dismissal policies. They provided a model where job insecurity is explained by external objective cues, subjective experiences, individual differences as moderators, and different outcomes as reactions to job insecurity. Despite this early recognition of job insecurity as an embodied experience in an interplay of many factors – individual, organisational and contextual, many researchers later on have preferred to view and define job insecurity as something objective. Some researchers have calculated probabilities of having a job in the future, classified whole organisations or types of employment as more or less secure or calculated job insecurity according to unemployment levels (see Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall, 2006 for a detailed review).

The continuous interest has also led to many different streams of perspectives and methods employed in the study of job insecurity. An important distinction some authors make is the one between quantitative and qualitative job insecurity (Hellgren, Sverke and Isaksson, 1999). Quantitative insecurity is defined as ‘concerns about the future existence of the present job’, while qualitative insecurity refers to ‘perceived threats of impaired quality in the employment relationship, such as deterioration of working conditions, lack of career opportunities, and decreasing salary development’ (ibid., p.182). It is in this second type of job insecurity that Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall (2006) argue that there is still a lack of understanding, and the need for conceptual advancement is palpable.

The many decades of scholarly interest towards job insecurity are a proof of its importance and fluctuating meaning – job insecurity cannot be a stable concept with a fixed definition – it changes with changes in the nature of work and the institutions governing the labour market. Recently, it is the concept of perceived job insecurity that is typically used in the study of insecurity in permanent employment. Its most common definition sounds approximately like
this: ‘the employee’s perception and/or concern about potential involuntary job loss’ (De Cuypere et al., 2018, p.175; see also Vander Elst, De Witte and De Cuypere, 2014). The corresponding concept for employees in temporary positions has typically been considered to be the category of employability – ‘the individual’s perceptions about alternative job opportunities that are readily available’ (De Cuypere et al., 2018, p.175). The reason behind this is the assumption that by signing up for a temporary job, the employee accepts that that job does not offer security. Thus, they focus on the influence that job could have on their employability in the future. These two concepts and the differential way they are being used might not be appropriate in the current climate of rising numbers of alternative, non-standard employment relations and the changing nature of work (De Cuypere et al., 2018). Most of the knowledge we have on job insecurity and employability comes from research in traditional employment, and today we have a variety of employment relations which do not fully conform to previous understandings of employment. A basic assumption in the study of job insecurity is that ‘it is based on an involuntary change from a secure to a non-secure situation’ (Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall, 2006, p.7). Today, however, we talk about portfolio work, crowd employment, collaborative employment, casual work, employee sharing, job sharing and other new forms of work, which question the employer-employee relationship and the conventional work patterns (Eurofound, 2015). Thus, a question arises as to whether we can even talk about job insecurity in the context of alternative forms of employment, where the “job” was never secure to begin with.

In academia, job security has been a major tenet of how the field has been organised. Dany and Mangematin (2004) describe in several points why the promise of job security (in the form of tenure or any other lifelong appointment) has been a cornerstone in academic careers and scientific development. First, the authors say, scientific development requires specialisation, but specialisation carries a risk for the individual that their narrow niche might become obsolete. Lifelong appointment counterbalances that risk. Another reason for the importance of job security in academia lies in the profession’s collaborative rather than individualistic nature. The renewal of the field through the recruitment of new talent and knowledge production depends on collaboration more than on competition (ibid., see also Carmichael, 1988; Stephan, 1996). Job security, however, is no longer on the table for everyone entering academia. With the rising number of PhD students, the only way the field can continue with the same model is to ensure a rising number in tenure positions as well (Dany and Mangematin, 2004). This is not happening. Then, suggest Dany and Mangematin, if academia cannot honestly offer the promise of job security to its aspiring new members, it should offer something else – the promise of employability. As mentioned above, employability has been seen as the alternative to job security when investigating different aspects of work attitudes – mostly motivation and satisfaction. Thus, the suggestion of these
two authors is not that surprising. Their argument reinstates the loss of the expectation of job security in academia. Even though they say that job security is pivotal for the operation of the scientific field, the promise of job security to the up-and-coming academics would be a lie.

Even if job insecurity – whether quantitatively or qualitatively, is not perfectly fitting to use when investigating temporary academic work, there is an abundance of insights which we can take from previous research on job insecurity in the search for contextual contemporary understanding of the new realities of insecurity in terms of work. For example, and what is a big part of the research on job insecurity, studies in the fields of psychology and stress research can be very informative for the investigation of the lived experiences of the temporary academic workers.

The psychological effects of job insecurity are well known and, for the most part, negative – stress, depression, anxiety and lack of control (Ashford, Lee and Bobko, 1989; Pfeffer, 2018). Harmful workplace exposures (including the experience of insecurity) have also been documented by business scholars, who focus on showing how the issues are not only concerning with regard to individuals and individual health, but the “health” of the companies too. Although this should not be our main concern, says Jeffrey Pfeffer (2018), it just goes to show how no one is actually benefiting from work-induced stress, caused by unrealistic demands, job insecurity or else. ‘People are literally dying for a paycheck’ says Pfeffer (2018, 15:37) and goes on to suggest that we need to be concerned with human sustainability, as much as we are concerned with sustainability in general. Other scholars have found out that the anticipation of a stressful event might lead to even more anxiety than the actual event (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Anticipation, as hinted before, is a major point of interest for this research and for the contemporary understandings of insecurity. Anticipation today is a concept that incorporates not only an expectation of a future event, but a forward-looking, a required preparedness for future events which can be governed by our actions (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009). I will return to the concept of anticipation; however, before I do that, I will have a look at another form of insecurity that has been discussed in relation to work – namely, professional insecurity.
Professional insecurity

Professional insecurity has sometimes been used interchangeably with job insecurity (see, for example, Maggiori et al., 2013). Perhaps we can find the reason for that within the broader and under-investigated concept of qualitative job insecurity. Gendron and Suddaby (2004) introduced professional insecurity as a concept separate from job insecurity, which was welcomed as an analytical division, but their research can also be seen as an illustration of a type of qualitative job insecurity. Professional insecurity, according to the authors, reflects how changes in the profession affect professional identity and arises when the professional is uncertain about their identity. Professional insecurity thus ‘encompasses feelings of ambiguity, confusion, lack of confidence, and discomfort about one’s professional identity’ (ibid., p.86).

As mentioned, the feelings of discomfort, ambiguity and uncertainty could be seen as an instance of qualitative job insecurity, but what Gendron and Suddaby did, which is especially interesting, was to focus specifically on the professional and the consequences for the profession of the experience of professional insecurity. Their study shows that professional insecurity implies not only uncertainty about one’s self-identity, but also doubts about the profession. They state (ibid., p.107) that ‘professionals who are insecure about their identity may in the field translate into members whose daily actions and behaviours undermine their profession’s ability to hold jurisdiction’. This could obviously have negative consequences, but it can also engender positive institutional changes.

The concept of professional insecurity does not capture the richness of the embodied experiences of insecurity in relation to work, but it has its undeniable analytical value and can add to the understanding of insecurity in professions – a field that has just recently started attracting interest, in terms of insecure work. In order to understand why professional insecurity, as defined by Gendron and Suddaby (2004), might be key to understanding the temporary academic worker and their insecure work, I will address what we call a profession and its core elements.

There is no simple answer to what we call a profession. There are multiple views, some of which are cohesive and some – rather conflicting. Main points of agreement are that ‘professionalism has been the main way of institutionalising expertise in industrialized countries’ (Abbott, 1988, p.323) and that the number of people that are considered or consider themselves “professionals” has been rapidly increasing since the second half of the last century (Brint, 1994). Other than that, scholars tend to disagree on the definition of professions and on how we can study them. Some even find the attempt to define professions a “sterile exercise” (Saks, 2012).

Professions have traditionally been regarded as an alternative to other forms of organisation. Merton (1957), Mills (1951) and Abbott (1988)
consider them in opposition to bureaucracy in what has come to be a dominant view. Professionals are trusted to exercise professional discretion in order to serve in the best interest of their clients or in the best interest of the public. They have autonomy to exercise their professional discretion. Professionals are less professional if one needs to control and manage them or if they do not get the space to exercise said discretion. ‘The ideological core of professionalism is its claim to a discretionary specialization’, says Eliot Freidson (2001, p.109). Fligstein (2001) believes that the core of professionalism is in fact collegiality, which makes professions important for one’s career but not organisations or industries. Moreover, Fligstein (2001, p.102) believes that individuals tend to “stay for life” within one profession. Grey (1998, p.571-572) states that:

*Whatever the social and historical conditions under which an occupation has professionalised, and whatever the political contestations which sustain and promote that profession, the professional, as an individual, is defined through membership of the profession and adherence to its rules and standards.*

Decades ago, a conflict came to be realised – the one between bureaucratisation and professionalism. Starting from Weber himself, many scholars have argued that the bureaucratic organisation is killing professionalism. Weber (1922) and later Merton (1957), Mills (1951) and Abbott (1988) pointed out how administrative structures suffocate professionals by imposition of superficial boundaries on their autonomy and discretion. The Weberian bureaucracy is the ideal formal organisation – roles based on technical qualifications, impersonal evaluation, rationality, division and categorisation of activities, which are guided and assessed through clearly defined rules (Weber, 1922). All of this impedes and makes redundant expert thought and professional discretion, thought the above-mentioned scholars.

It is not only bureaucracy, however, that has been seen as an impediment to the professions. Further on in time, scholars saw even more threats to the jurisdictional claims of the professions in the face of different socio-political processes such as the culture of uncertainty and “institutional reflexivity” in Giddens’ (1990, 1991) late modernity terms (Reed, 1996) and globalisation, technological change, and access to information (Greenwood and Lachman, 1996). Ironically, with the demise of the boundaries of the professions, the notion of “professionalism” was rising in importance and “creeping up in unexpected domains” (Fournier, 1999, p.280). Building on Wilensky’s ideas from 1964, Greenwood and Lachman (1996, p.565) state, ‘This has reached the point where the quest for “professionalization” seems to have encompassed “everyone” who has some claim to a level of specialized knowledge’.
Professionalism was now seen as a discursive\(^2\) practice (Grey, 1994; Grey, 1998; Fournier, 1999). As such, professions were no longer defined only by having specialist knowledge and controlling it, as was the classic interpretation (Hall, 1968; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Freidson, 1986; Abbott, 1988), but now the distinction between professional knowledge and professional behaviour was made (Grey, 1994, 1998). Grey (1998, p.571) explains, ‘In summary, then, the argument thus far is that claims about possession of knowledge and the display of appropriate behaviour are two of the important elements in the constitution of professionalism. These elements may, to some degree, substitute for each other, either in cases where unqualified individuals impersonate professionals, or where particular occupations lack socially recognized expertise’.

Professionalism as a discursive practice was recognised, and Valerie Fournier (1999, p.302) further demonstrated how it could serve as a disciplinary device, and also as a mobiliser:

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[...] the meaning of professionalism, and the type of ‘moral conduct’ it invokes, is not fixed but is highly contestable. And it is precisely this indeterminacy and slipperiness that makes the disciplinary logic of professionalism an inevitably imperfect form of government. Whilst the deployment of the discourse of professionalism and the articulation of ‘professional competence’ may index new forms of organisational control, they also open up new possibilities for resistance or subversion as the meaning of professionalism gets contested.
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Fournier (1999) demonstrated how the meaning of professionalism could be contested and that is by means of drawing upon different discourses (in her paper – the discourse of enterprise and the discourse of expertise). The image of the professional, says Fournier (ibid.) is intertwined with the ‘celebration of the self-actualising employee’. Styhre (2017) confirms these ideas by demonstrating how precarious professional work has permeated many professional fields stimulated by what he calls “entrepreneurship ideologies”. The discourse of enterprise has normalised work which lacks economic stability and leaves the professional without the safety and benefits typically enjoyed by members of a professional field (ibid).

\(^2\) Discourse is understood as ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a topic and a way of producing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. Thus, the term refers both to the production of knowledge through language and representations and the way that knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices and setting new practices into play’ (du Gay, 1996, p.43). Discourse sets up what’s possible and what is not and makes ‘sense of the world for its inhabitants’ (Phillips, Lawarence and Hardy, 2004, p.63). It ‘define[s] the rules of the particular game’ (Hall, 2001, p.72) and the “particular” social reality (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000).
In summary, we can distinguish some defining core elements of a profession: lifelong membership (Grey, 1998; Fligstein, 2001), collegiality (Fligstein, 2001), claim to a discretionary specialisation (Freidson, 2001) and autonomy (Scott, 1965). These core elements are not given, however. They can be contested as a form of organisational control or can serve as a mobiliser, because professionalism is not “fixed” but is rather enacted (Fournier, 1999; Grey, 1994, 1998). Furthermore, the contested nature of professionalism through the permeation of different dominant discourses has opened up the professions towards precariousness (Styhre, 2017) and challenged identities, which can result in the experience of professional insecurity (Gendron and Suddaby, 2004).

We already know a lot about job insecurity and professional insecurity, which could be distinguished as two main theoretical strands looking at insecurity in relation to work; however, by re-examining the existing knowledge, it becomes clear that the contemporary context challenges, poses new questions and opens up new avenues for interpretation of the experience of insecure work that cannot be fully addressed within these existing frameworks. In the next section, I will look more closely at the concept of precarity, which, as mentioned before, has recently been used in relation to professional work (Styhre, 2017); thereafter, I will look at the idea of the post-modern worker and the subjectivities that speak to insecurity.
Precarity

The experiences and subjectivities of insecurity are often addressed with the term “precarious” as synonymous to insecure. But that equation is also, as often, challenged and questioned. According to many scholars, precarity inhabits insecurity, but it is much more than that (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008; Waite, 2009; Millar, 2017). The concept of precarity has been built on the shoulders of Pierre Bourdieu and his précarité. Précarité has come to signify a condition and a point of resistance (Waite, 2009), falling back on the premise that precarity is ‘a regime of domination’ (Bourdieu, 1998). And while the concept has gained significance in a more direct manner – in the understanding that precarity as a regime of domination is a class struggle, in the writings of Bourdieu (1998, p.83) and in subsequent scholarly work, it is even more than that:

*Objective insecurity gives rise to a generalized subjective insecurity which is now affecting all workers in our highly developed economy. This kind of ‘collective mentality’ (I use this expression, although I do not much like it, to make myself understood), common to the whole epoch, is the origin of the demoralization and loss of militancy which one can observe (as I did in Algeria in the 1960s) in underdeveloped countries suffering very high rates of unemployment or underemployment and permanently haunted by the spectre of joblessness. The unemployed and the casualized workers, having suffered a blow to their capacity to project themselves into the future, which is the precondition for all so-called rational conducts, starting with economic calculation, or, in a quite different realm, political organization, are scarcely capable of being mobilized.*

Thus, in Bourdieu’s (1998) words, the inability to project oneself into the future amplifies “objective insecurity” into a generalised subjective insecurity, which turns into a “collective mentality” of the group that cannot get politically mobilised. This speaks to the politically charged understanding of the term, but it also speaks to the new subjectivities emerging from the double meaning of precarity. We find this double meaning more explicitly addressed in other scholarly publications. Gill and Pratt (2008, p.4) expand on the duality by offering the distinction between precarity and precariousness:

*Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work -- from illegalised, casualised and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn, precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living, and, simultaneously, new forms of*
political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. This double meaning is central to understanding the ideas and politics associated with precarity; the new moment of capitalism that engenders precariousness is seen as not only oppressive, but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics.

Similarly, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008, p.226) see precarity as designating the centrality of insecure and alternative employment relations in contemporary capitalist societies. However, as a second facet, they outline the emergent labour subjectivities, which are the ‘fluid substance through which labour is reorganised, in which precarity materialises’ and ‘the ground on which the embodied experience of precarity is lived’. This second meaning is what the authors assert as under-investigated and deserving of more scholarly attention. Understanding precarious subjectivities, claim Papadopoulos et al. (2008, p.231), will give us a better look into the ruptures, the breakage, the emancipation, the revolt against precarity, the ‘intrinsic possibilities for overcoming its oppressive structures’. Precarious work, however, has been “cooped up” in a unified category of workers (similar to the “working class”), which limits the way we can understand and investigate the phenomenon. Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) argue against that “unification” of workers presenting precarity as a broader transformation, because, according to them, such categorisations ‘gloss over the very different ways in which precarity is lived’. Gill and Pratt (2008, p.3) also raise the issue that with regard to precarity: ‘the relationship between the transformations within working life and workers’ subjectivities has been relatively under-explored’.

Precariousness has been used to show the insecure nature of professional work. Sthyre (2017, p.11) argues that professional work deserves the term “precarious” because of indicators such as a sharp rise in middle-class debt and perceived economic equality and declining real wage growth. He describes how ‘what was once regarded as a safe haven for a middle-class career and a relatively comfortable lifestyle, more or less devoid of the concern regarding employment and faltering economic compensation, is today the privilege of a shrinking group of elite professionals, and not infrequently being employed in, or associated with, the finance industry (as in, e.g. law firms). As a consequence, all these economic changes, new policies, and the decline of “the implicit social contract” (Hacker et al. 2013) have generated a new world of professional work that is in part entirely different from traditional professional work, in part basically the same’. Sthyre (ibid.) shows that precarious professional work, similar to other fields, is increasingly employed through “flexible” practices shifting the risk towards the professional and taking away previously enjoyed a sense of stability of employment, income and career development. Precariousness, which has previously been used to describe more exploitative blue-collar labour practices, is now an indicator of
job insecurity and high risk in professions as well. Styhre’s valuable contribution is informative on the premise of the first meaning of precarity – the ‘objective insecurity’ in Bourdieu’s words (1998), but it does not contribute directly to our understanding of the emergent subjectivities, the embodied experiences of insecurity – that under-investigated second meaning Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) claim that is very often omitted from research.

More and more voices are raised to warn and point out that academic labour, like any other form of labour, can be and is getting more and more precarious (see, for example, Powelson, 2011; Birdsell Bauer, 2015; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; McCarthy, Song, and Jayasuriya, 2017; Gallas, 2018; Kezar, DePaola and Scott, 2019; Fleming, 2021). ‘The precarisation of academic labour’, says Gallas (2018, p.69), ‘is reflected in the proliferation of termed contracts, low pay, unclear employment prospects and the existence of repressive governance strategies forcing academics out of their profession or even out of their country’. Even if many scholars and practitioners recognise the signs of precarisation of academic labour, there are some analytical difficulties, or barriers, as Gallas (ibid.) calls them, to the study of precarity in academia. The first barrier Alexander Gallas recognises is the ethical-political barrier. The academic profession still brings status and prestige in most settings and job security and good renumeration for its senior members. This makes it an odd setting for the empirical investigation of precarity. Then, there is the political-strategic barrier, which forms because labour conflict has not been so frequent in academia. A third barrier is the economic one – ‘precarious academic workers may fear to bite the hand that feeds them’, as stipulated by Gallas (ibid., p. 70), and what is more – tenured academics who enjoy more security and in theory should have more power for resistance do not often speak up on behalf of their precarious colleagues because they do not want to endanger their standings and relationships. Last, and most difficult to overcome, according to the author, is the cognitive barrier. The author writes (ibid., p.71):

*It is the cognitive barrier produced through the ideological formations that constitute the academic subject. In my view, the dominant imaginary surrounding academic practices prevents scientists from perceiving their activities as just another type of wage-dependent work that is characterised by relations of social domination such as class, gender and race.*

That imaginary, the specific image academics have of their own profession, especially the belief that it is meritocratic, and all aspects of their work are somehow normal and acceptable, prevents them from actually and truly seeing, recognising, and investigating their own precarious experiences or the precarious experiences of their colleagues. Critical scholars investigating precarity in academia can be attacked as ‘undermining its professional ethos’,
says Gallas (2018, p.73) and concludes that these attacks often suggest that ‘people who are complaining are working in the wrong profession’.

Apart from these specific barriers for studying precarity in academia, there are general analytical difficulties in studying precarity. One such difficulty that was already mentioned is the duality of precarity as a condition and as a point of resistance (Waite, 2009; Bourdieu, 1998, 1999). Then, there is the difficulty that precarity, as a condition, can ‘exist in different forms’ (Gallas, 2018, p.69).

Precarity is an incredibly rich concept, and I will carry it throughout the analysis with all of its meanings. However, it is becoming clear that this multitude and richness, as well as the political charge, which is narrowing down the empirical implications of precarity, might be impeding its analytical use. Looking at precarity alone might steer the analysis in a narrow way, thus missing the depth of the lived experiences of insecurity. Previously, we saw that the theories on job insecurity and professional insecurity also evade capturing the lived experiences of insecure work. Given the rise of alternative forms of employment relations across sectors and the demands of the contemporary regimes in society – the demands on the self as a continuous project (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000) and of anticipation as an active orientation towards the future (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009), insecurity in relation to work remains an important topic, requiring new insights and investigations. In order to open up the possibilities to understand those lived experiences, I will next look into those general claims of insecurity in our times that might be informing the conditions of the insecure worker.
The post-modern worker

In the introduction, I talked about the changing paradigms of work and employment relations. These changing paradigms form the backdrop of our understanding of work and employment relations and the understanding and relationship to their work of the individuals engaging in that work. To understand these paradigms means to understand the way work and employment relations are perceived in society at large and the processes and systems that are deemed appropriate or inappropriate. That is why I introduced the idea of gig and the gig academic as a metaphor and a representation of the change in paradigms in the way we, as a society, look at work and employment relations. To call Swedish academia a “gig academy” is perhaps a stretch, given the benefits and protection that employees in this welfare state have compared to other countries. It is important, however, to understand the change in paradigms at a higher level before we zoom in to the specific context of Sweden and Swedish academia. The academic field in one country can hardly be viewed as an isolated system anymore. With the opening up of the field, information, ideas, models and people constantly move around, and the specific context of one country or system cannot be wholesomely understood without looking at the meta ideas and paradigms in the field. The gig academy and the gig economy are the catchy new terms and the latest development of a bigger trend that started a while ago but has now been reinforced by the fast developments in technological opportunities. That bigger trend has had many names and has been attributed to many causes and effects, but it is generally seen as a description and consequence of a specific time period – late modernity.

To be post-modern is to be in a state of flux, to be continuously changing, improving and growing, to be flexible, to embrace the unknown and to anticipate it. Modernity is liberating, but the freedom of choice gives rise to uncertainty and doubt – we ought to consider and answer the questions “Who am I?” And “How shall I live?” all the time and in all situations in search of a lost ontological security (Giddens, 1991). In that quest for securing stable and coherent identities, people become more open to subjectification, images and discourses (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Collinson, 2003). Bauman (2000/2012 ed., p. iix-ix) goes even further, suggesting that to be modern (as in liquid modernity – his response to post-modernity) means to be in a perpetual state of “becoming” – that there is no end goal, but the goal is to be in a constant movement:

What was some time ago dubbed (erroneously) ‘post-modernity’ and what I’ve chosen to call, more to the point, ‘liquid modernity’, is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty. A hundred years ago ‘to be modern' meant
to chase 'the final state of perfection' -- now it means an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired.

The embrace of uncertainty is thus the watermark between Giddens’ (1991) late modernity and Bauman’s (2000) liquid modernity. The embrace of uncertainty and the conquest of conquering it is the constitutive element of Adams, Murphy and Clarke’s (2009, p.247, highlight in original) anticipatory regimes:

Crucially, predictable uncertainty leads to anticipation as an affective state, an excited forward looking subjective condition characterized as much by nervous anxiety as a continual refreshing of yearning, of ‘needing to know.’ Anticipation is the palpable effect of the speculative future on the present. The anticipatory excitement of the cliff-hanger as a narrative mode is as familiar as terror-inducing apocalyptic visions.

The certainly uncertain future becomes more important than the present and demands an active orientation towards it. It inhabits the present and gives the individual the responsibility of imagining a future and working towards it.

For the individual and their relationship to their work, all of this has translated into alternative employment, demands for more self-responsibilisation and self-realisation, and the embracing of certain ideologies. It has been argued that alternative employment relations give the individual more freedom and flexibility (Oyer, 2017) and increase equality (Goldin, 2014). It has also been argued, however, that insecure and temporary work arrangements reduce the strength of the employee-employer connection, shift the risk towards the worker (Friedman, 2014) and reduce organisational citizenship rights (Kalleberg, 2009). The flexibility of loose work arrangements is said to give freedom, but the “freedom” of the flexible arrangements is also the risky and insecure future, the responsibility for which is shifted entirely towards the individual. Atkinson (2013) and Ross (2008) claim that the flexibilisation of labour is benefiting the capital and sustaining the neoliberal ideological model, despite all claims of it being a liberating experience for the worker. Will Atkinson (2013, p.644) states that “Neoliberalism demands flexibilization of labour - that is, the easy hiring and firing of workers – if it is to maximize efficiency, adapt to the vicissitudes of demand and deliver economic growth, and this, the argument goes, is imposed as much on the top of the chain of socio-economic being as the bottom”. Ross (2008) goes even further

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3 Freedom is a concept that typically carries a positive connotation. However, there are authors (see, for example, Berlin (1969/2002)) who claim that “freedom” should not be perceived as a singular concept – it can have different meanings and manifestation, and “freedom from” (a contract, for example) does not necessarily equal “freedom to” (have time at one’s disposal). This multiplicity is not typically addressed in the rhetoric of the gig economy.
and calls this “flexploitation”. ‘Post-industrial capitalism thrives on actively disorganizing employment and socio-economic life in general, so that it can profit from vulnerability, instability and desperation’, says the author (ibid., p.44). Furthermore, some scholars (Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt, 1999; Ehrenstein, 2012) argue that the flexibilisation of employment practices and the demands for entrepreneurial and self-responsible individuals have been important for the rise of affective and immaterial labour. Ehrenstein (2012, p.29) states:

Hence, the rise of temporary modes of employment and the related loss in relevance and weakening of wage-labour based security systems could be depicted as engendering a vast amount of unpaid affective labour: precarious workers invest and engage in various forms of networking and interdependent support practices, not only to remain or become employable and productive, but to enable themselves to survive under conditions of restraint and insecurity.

Hardt (1999) argues that affective labour is not a new phenomenon, but while before it served in anti-capitalist projects, it is now ‘at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of labouring forms’ (ibid., p.90). The authors conclude that post-modern production is increasingly relying on immaterial labour and affective labour. This increased responsibilisation of the individual who is supposed to carry all the risks of employment which, in turn, is becoming more and more precarious and uncertain, is what Fleming (2017, p.693, p.697) calls ‘radical responsibilization of employment’ – ‘where each individual human capitalist becomes entirely responsible for his or her economic fate’. He argues that not only is this bad for individuals, but it is also bad for society at large. In Fleming’s (ibid., p.697) argument, human capital theory is to blame for this radical stage we have now entered, because it paved the way for a view on employees as ‘individual mini-enterprises’ and ‘the ideals of economic self-reliance and independence [which] supplanted expectations of a long-term relationship with an employer’. He suggests that the radical responsibilisation of the workforce is enhanced not only through the “obvious” employment practices of freelancing, work on demand, or zero hours contracts, but there are also models and practices within seemingly permanent full-time employment which can be seen as engendering radical responsibilisation. One such practice, the scholar suggests, is the “Results Only Work Environments” (ROWE, see Ressler and Thompson, 2008) where the company is only interested in and controls for the output. In this context, claims Fleming (ibid., p.697), the employee is ‘somehow external to the organization, which is used to good effect’.

Working in that stream of research into insecurities and subjectivities for the employees brought forward by flexibilisation of employment practices, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008, p.232) suggest that ‘the exploitation of the future is sustained through the break of the bond of the contract, rather than through the contract itself”. This post-contractual dependency, as
the authors call it, has two sides: dependency on the employer and dependency on the self, who has the responsibility to anticipate and be “compatible” with any future demands of the market (ibid.). This, according to Ehrenstein (2012), is a form of ‘exploitation of the self’ – anticipating a future which is insecure and already disseminated in the present – making individuals work more and more, exploit their social relations, their body and mind in order to stay relevant and “competitive” in the future.

The arguments made by Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) and Ehrenstein (2012) lead us back to the regimes of anticipation, as described by Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009). Living in a regime of anticipation makes the future more and more important and demands forward living and a state of preparedness, say Adams, Murphy and Clarke (ibid.). These demands on the individual are similar to what Ehrenstein (2012) describes as exploitation of the self and Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008, p.232) call ‘exploitation of the future’. Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009) go further by breaking down anticipation into its different valences – the different ways through which the future gains more importance over the present. Their work is not focused on the individual at work, but it further develops the ideas of exploitation of the future and exploitation of the self.

The key dimensions or valences of anticipation, according to Adams, Murphy and Clarke (ibid.) are:

- injunction as the moral imperative to characterize and inhabit states of uncertainty;
- abduction as requisite tacking back and forth between futures, pasts and presents, framing templates for producing the future;
- optimization as the moral responsibility of citizens to secure their ‘best possible futures’;
- preparedness as living in ‘preparation for’ potential trauma; and
- possibility as ‘ratcheting up’ hopefulness, especially through technoscience.

Anticipation, as an episteme, suggests an active orientation towards an unpredictable future, which governs the present through affective states emanating from politics of fear or hope (ibid., p.249): ‘Anticipation is not just betting on the future; it is a moral economy in which the future sets the conditions of possibility for action in the present, in which the future is inhabited in the present. Through anticipation, the future arrives as already formed in the present, as if the emergency has already happened’. Anticipation brings the future into the present with an increased importance. It has the moral imperative of creating the possibility for and preparing for imaginary futures.

Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009, p.246) introduce anticipation as a regime of forward-living, living in preparation for a future that could be safe and secure if we create the opportunities for it. Naturally, the question of what
a “secure” future might look like often arises. Is the future not inherently insecure? Nadia El-Shaarawi (2015, p.52), who explores the in-between state of refugees, has posed and reflected on the same question: ‘The mundane observation that uncertainty is a ubiquitous feature of human life is transformed by attentionality’ (Throop, 2010). The attentionality that El-Shaarawi references explains how the patterns of attention shape lived experiences (Throop, 2010). Thus, we can no longer simply disregard an insecure future as the mundane and “usual” uncertainty experienced by all, because ‘the suspense of the future becomes a focus of worry and a source of suffering’ (El-Shaarawi, 2015, p.52).

The gaze into the future will become a more and more prominent part of lived experiences and of the analysis of lived experiences, believe Stephan and Flaherty (2019), along with many other scholars who also believe that a good way to understand the future looming over the present is by use of the concept of anticipation (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009; Appadurai, 2013). Even if anticipation can have multiple meanings and is still somewhat underresearched, it is a valuable tool for the investigation of the ‘first-person perspective on futurity’ (Stephan and Flaherty, 2019, p.1). In the work of Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009), we find many of the meanings (or valences, as they call them) of anticipation, but often the investigation of the phenomenon is somewhat fragmented. Anticipation can bear the meanings of prediction (Appadurai, 2013), imagining (Molé, 2010) or acting-in-advance (Ingold, 2013). Stephan and Flaherty (2019) suggest the concept of “anticipatory experience”, which to them is an approach that can bring together all of those meanings and senses of anticipation and unravel their interrelations. It is also an approach suitable for foregrounding ‘socially generative asymmetries between individuals’ (ibid.), which can speak to issues of privilege and precarity.

The “anticipatory experience” is an approach that looks at anticipation as a lived experience on the individual level. It is an approach that can help us better understand the looming future in temporary and alternative employment relations. It has been argued that the rise of such models and processes of employment has engendered an increased demand for self-reliant (Hardt, 1999, Ehrenstein, 2012), independent, compatible (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008), radically responsible micro-entrepreneurs (Fleming, 2017). Peter Fleming (ibid.) can also see many academics in this radically responsible workforce. He says that academia partially operates upon a ROWE model, which makes the employee external to the organisation and, again, promotes incessant individualism and self-reliance. How those academics experience the looming uncertain future of their alternative uncertain employment relations is a question yet to be fully understood. Before moving forward and starting to answer that question, I will introduce the guiding paradigms, the design, and the methods used in search of answers.
The project unfolding

Approach and paradigms

Reflexive interpretation framework
Alvesson and Sandberg (2014, p. 976) state: ‘Adopting a prepacked framework often means that the researchers unreflectively reproduce the overall research agenda and received wisdom of the research box’. To facilitate for a more open and emerging investigation and in order not to put my study in a research box, I have followed what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) suggest as a reflexive interpretation framework. This suggests ‘an interpretation at several levels: contact with the empirical material, awareness of the interpretative act, clarification of political-ideological contexts, and the handling of the question of representation and authority’ (ibid., p. 263). This framework is also associated with an abductive approach – not a mixture but an alternative to the inductive and deductive ones, where the researcher does not have to choose either empirical or theoretical starting points but rather alternate between the two (ibid.).

In order to illustrate my approach, I will mention here that insecurity and temporariness were not theoretical underpinnings from the start. My choice to focus on individuals experiencing temporariness was brought forward by a notion similar to the “unready-to-hand theorizing”, built by Karl Weick (2003) on the shoulders of Heidegger’s ideas. Weick (2003) builds upon Kirkegaard’s famous saying that life can only be understood backwards but must be lived forward and Heidegger’s ready-to-hand and unready-to-hand living forward. Weick’s thinking concerns theorising and, more specifically, the reconciliation between theory and practice. At the moments of interruption when practitioners are “unready-to-hand”, they must refer to their assumptions of their “ready-to-hand” mode and reconsider them. These moments, says Weick, are best for theorising. I saw the liminal stage between a PhD and a permanent position of individuals pursuing an academic career as such, to be an interruption when they must reconsider their professional ambitions, values, norms, ideas, goals, ways of being and behaving. Thus, I saw the insecure stage as a good empirical instance that could provide opportunities for theorising. Subsequently, insecurity grew as a theoretical interest. This was made possible by my open, reflexive, abductive approach towards the research. Continuously
confronting the empirical material with different theoretical ideas allowed me to follow the emerging questions and give weight to the ones that proved more novel and interesting in terms of theoretical contributions and impact on practice and policy.

Critical interpretation

This project bears an emancipatory ambition. The emancipatory interest is one of the three “knowledge-constructive interests” formulated by Jurgen Habermas (1971). It consists of normative criticism towards other approaches (positivism, interpretivism – or in Habermas’ terms the technical and the practical interest, respectively) which reinforce the status quo and the power relations and ‘are not open for an explicit discussion of questions which have always been implicitly taken for granted, i.e. the basic assumptions about what is considered ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in our social world’ (Scherer, 2003). But as Willmott (2003, p.100) notices, the emancipatory interest is not only critical towards the other two but also ‘stimulated by consequences flowing from ideas and actions guided by the other two cognitive interests’. The critical approach then challenges not only theoretical assumptions but also the empirical, “real life” manifestations of the theoretical assumptions and concepts born in the other knowledge interests that are unconcerned with power dynamics.

Critique carries the ambition to question taken for granted assumptions and to emancipate, to disrupt the status quo (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Fournier and Grey, 2000). It does not have the goal to create political opinions, but to disrupt those. In the words of Foucault (1988, p.265):

_The work of an intellectual is not to shape others’ political will; it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization (in which he carries out his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as a citizen to play)._ 

Scherer (2003) posits that ‘critical theory uses much of the interpretive mode of explanation but adds a normative dimension’. Thus, the researcher could be a “critical interpreter” and take a “participatory point of view” (ibid.). The researcher is not striving towards “objectivity” outside of the research, nor are they simply interpreting taken at face value claims of participants or manifestations of events or discourses. Instead, the researcher is critically present at
the research moment – in a dialogue and interaction, the researcher questions what is true and builds up legitimate claims about the research.

Although this research bears an emancipatory ambition, it does not treat agency critically in the commonly held understanding. Thus, this is not a study on agency “deprivation”. The limits of agency have been discussed at length in many critical inquiries, for example, Marxist theory and labour process theory (Braverman, 1974). While those theorists claim that workers’ agency has been limited through alienation from work, others (Burawoy, 1979; O’Doherty and Willmott, 2001) have shown that there are opportunities for micro-emancipation and re-claiming of agency through individual actions, such as resistance (see also Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Investigating insecurity is, in itself, a “traditional” critical perspective; so in order to be truly reflexive, I have avoided adopting a pre-packed critical view towards specific concepts. I have strived to be a “reflexive critical interpreter”, which in my opinion has been greatly facilitated by an abductive approach and an open design.

Studying lived experiences

I am interested in the lived experiences of temporariness and insecurity. The ideas stemming from the analysis of the individual lived experiences are then elevated through interpretations in order to gain insights about social practice. Giddens (1984, p.2) explains that ‘The basic domain of study of the social sciences is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across time and space’. We cannot separate the individual from structure because they are one and the same – the individual creates the structure and enables it, sustains it through every instance. Kaspersen (2000, p.42) expresses: ‘Structure does not exist as such; rather, it is being continually recreated qua the agent, who draws on the same structure (or, more correctly structural properties) whenever action occurs’. Understanding the individual’s experiences means understanding the duality of that condition.

De Rond, Lok, and Marrison (2021, p.7) propagate the stark need within organisation research to better understand ‘the role of lived experiences in social action’ and to utilise it as a method in reducing societal polarisation. Building upon the ideas of Heidegger (1927/1962) on being-in-the-world (Dasein), the scholars (ibid., p.14) explain how the multi-layered possibilities of experiencing presuppose and constitute social action:

* A community’s phenomenological lifeworld is constituted in the network of practices it engages in. The continuous open-ended
performance of these practices involves specific existential modalities of practice engagement (ways-of-being) that disclose what and how things matter (embodied concerns) through the thoughts and emotions they bring to the fore. A way-of-being also enables a specific understanding of self and others in action. When this self-understanding is connected to culturally familiar archetypes and plotlines, an aspirational identity can take hold, the imaginative authoring of which can fuel continued practice engagement.

Lived experiences is a concept that goes beyond personal emotions and motivations and looks at the situational affective collective ways of being that orient people into what they are experiencing, why it matters, how it matters and what they can do.
Empirical work

Methods

The main method I used for empirical work was in-depth semi-structured interviewing. This method facilitates for emergent, rather than designed conversations, and provides an opportunity for the researcher to get “closer” to the interviewees (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, conducting pilot and context interviews, including topics and participant groups (for example, former academics) emerging from reflexion and analysis of already obtained material, were several tactics I employed to ensure more reflexive and “thicker” research. I continuously reflected on and revised the interview protocols. There were three different interview protocols, with 10-14 questions, distinguishing between administrators, academics and formerly employed academics (see Appendix 1 for the interview protocol for academics).

Although I did not “perform” life-story interviews per se, I was encouraging and gave way for participants to tell stories of their life, their family, social and professional circles. Life-story interviews have been said to create an opportunity for the subject of the research to give deeper and fuller accounts of experiences in their life, because the narrative form allows for recollection and reflection, which uncovers deeper meaning (Atkinson, 1998). ‘Narrative research is, by and large, an empirical tradition that examines how experience is reflexively constructed into stories that may or may not be commensurate’ (Rhodes and Brown, 2005, p.180). According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2006, p.42), narrative inquiry is ‘an exploration of the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual’s experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted – but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual’s experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others’. Moreover, narrative research focuses on the lived experiences of the individuals, but they are always situated in relation to something, in a contextual and temporal interaction (Dewey, 1938; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The temporal interaction means that the present time point cannot be investigated without accommodating it in relation to imaginaries of the past and the future. ‘Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum - the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future’, write Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.2) ‘each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future’.

Mitroff and Kilmann (1975) also use storytelling in organisational research – by making managers “dream about” and tell the story of their ideal organisation, the authors found a way into their sensemaking process. Prompting the participants in my study to imagine or dream about an ideal future
workplace/organisation/work was one of the methods I employed to elicit their reflections on what they experience as good or bad, missing, hindering or helping them in their process. Dreaming opens up the repertoire beyond “rational” or “possible” solutions and presents an opportunity for the interviewee to imagine ideal types.

An important element of the interview that I was trying to evoke was the participants’ images of an alternative present. As opposed to the “ideal future” question when participants were prompted to envision a perfect, ideal-type future and in the process reveal what they lack or mind in the present, the question of an alternative present revealed how anticipating a particular future influenced their present.

Longitudinal observations were not performed for this project; however, as a researcher, I have used every opportunity to add to the depth of the research. Observations were limited to the time I have spent interviewing the participants, but as Silverman (1993/2011) points out – the interview itself is an opportunity for observation. For example, I have observed and included in my analysis physical manifestations of temporariness (i.e. an empty office) or external time pressures (a white-board filled with deadlines).

Additionally, and mostly for context building and understanding, I have used national and supranational legislation documents, communication materials, press and social media articles and reports. Those sources provide context and a better understanding of the underlying processes and the organisational, professional and social discourses. They can be found under references.

Design

This study has its focus on the Swedish business scholar. While my main interest lies in those who are currently in the transition period between a PhD and a permanent position, I also met with administrators, former academics and people with permanent contracts, who nonetheless reached out and wanted to share some experiences from their past or present.

The main group of participants in this study are temporary academic workers, holding a fixed-term contract and working towards a career in academia. I personally sampled and approached potential interviewees from seven HEIs in Sweden. I was looking for postdocs, adjuncts, academics with temporary teaching contracts or biträdande lektors – scholars on the Swedish equivalent of a tenure track. I have opted to use the US translations of the Swedish career terms, as provided by the Swedish Council for Higher Education (Universitets- och högskolerådet, Svensk-engelsk ordbok för den högre utbildningen) because that was also how most of the participants referred to their positions during the interviews. Thus, biträdande lektor is assistant professor and biträdande lektorat is tenure track. Temporary teaching contracts as
universitetslektor or adjunkt are lecturer/temporary lecturer. Among the participants, there are also postdocs and researchers.

It can be argued that the assistant professor position is not a position of insecurity. Assistant professors have the right to apply for promotion to the permanent position of associate professor, and the rate for promotion for the period 2012-2018 in Sweden was 96% (YAS, 2020). Still, I believe that investigating the experiences of temporariness and insecurity would not be complete without the voices of assistant professors. The position, in its form, was actually introduced recently (in 2017) as a response to insecurity. Thus, it was important to see assistant professors’ attitude and experience of insecurity.

PhD students were not included in this project, despite the fact that they are also academics on a fixed-term contract. The reason for excluding this group is the importance of the intention to build a career in academia. This future orientation is a cornerstone in the search for a better understanding of insecurity and temporariness as an experience in a profession. And while I certainly do not wish to deny the possibility that many PhD students possess this future academic career orientation, it is also often the case that the PhD is seen as an end in itself and a career boost for other professional fields (Müller, 2014). Thus, I have decided to exclude the PhD students from the “early career academic” group and focus on what I refer to in my sampling as “the in-between academic” – individuals who have a PhD degree, hold a fixed-term position at a higher education institution or a research institute, and have an intention and/or work towards building a career in academia. Although I view the academic profession in its totality and do not wish to focus on the research aspect exclusively, I decided that reaching out to academics in specific RIs is appropriate, since often the researchers there are also teaching at affiliated HEIs.

After commencing the interviews, I started approaching people who have opted out of academia while holding a similar fixed-term position. Additionally, I met and talked to administrators in order to get a better perspective on the formal and informal work environment, regulations, requirements and the institutional perspective. I was approached by academics with permanent contracts, who, however, experience similar pressures from their environment. These permanent academics recognised the validity of their experiences in my call for participants and approached me. Their interviews have been used for reference and context building in this project.

I approached the interviewees personally, via a scripted email (see Appendix 2). The e-mail contained a short introduction and a 1-page attachment with a brief description of the project and contact details for my supervisor and myself. The prospective participants were encouraged to contact us in case of further questions. My supervisor did not receive any requests, while I received several follow-up questions regarding eligibility for the study. While my initial e-mail and the information about the project included in the consent form (more on the form below) sketched out some of the conceptual lines of the research, it also maintained a certain degree of coverterness. This was
intentionally done, in an effort to avoid scripted answers from the participants. The information provided before the interview was thus carefully crafted so that it explains that I am interested in the participants’ individual experiences and views on certain topics, but not to provide detailed questions or to showcase the interviewer’s agenda in any way that could provoke scripted answers or performances from the participants.

Even so, during the initial minutes of the interviews, I could sometimes sense that the participants were limiting or shifting their answers to address what they thought I was interested in. They would ask questions such as “Is this helpful?” As a response, I would reassure the participants that there are no right, or wrong answers and I am simply interested in hearing about their experiences and perspectives. This reassurance would discard the concern for helpfulness or looking for the “right answer”. I believe I managed to build a good rapport with all interviewees in the minutes prior to the interview and the initial minutes of the interview itself, and that served as another mechanism to prevent scripted answers. Taking participants’ statements at face value or, in other words, trust that the interviewees are “knowledgeable agents” (Van Maanen, 1979) could be a critical issue for any researcher; however, building a close rapport, not “fishing” for specific answers, leading a narrative or life-story interviews (Czarniawska, 2014) are good methods to decrease the chance of receiving scripted or performative answers. I discuss the interviewees themselves in more detail in the methods section.

I sent out more than 100 e-mails to academics at seven different institutions. I sourced their contact information myself, guessing the temporariness of their contracts. Sometimes the temporariness of a position is obvious, for example, “biträande lektor” or “postdoc”. In other cases, however, it is almost impossible to guess if a “universitetslektor” (Swe; literally: university lecturer) is a fixed-term or a permanent position. Thus, indiscriminately, I sent out e-mails to everyone who could possibly be on a temporary contract.

In case of no answer to my initial e-mail, I would follow up with a reminder e-mail after a period of approximately 2 weeks. In case of no answer after 2 e-mails, I did not contact the same person again. There were a few cases where I was personally introduced to academics who did not respond to my e-mails by their colleagues who I interviewed. After a face-to-face introduction, the academics agreed to participate. My interpretation of these encounters is that an e-mail introduction was too impersonal, especially for a project which investigates individual experiences and lived realities. This is perhaps a question to be further explored in a methodological inquiry.

In many cases, I applied a “snowball” technique, asking the participants for referrals to or contacts of other academics on a temporary contract. Many of the participants were happy to provide names and contact details of their colleagues, who they believed would agree to partake in the project. In a few cases. I was introduced face-to-face to people occupying neighbouring offices. Especially important was to receive names and contact details for scholars
who have opted out of an academic career. This group of individuals was included later on in the study, because some of the interviewees were referring to the stories of the ones who left, and in some cases, those stories have become a sort of “organizational myth” (Gabriel, 1995). I had an opportunity to talk to a few people who have left academia during their in-between period. Those meetings were very informative; however, they are not presented and analysed here, but rather used for context-building and gaining understanding. I write more about leaving academia elsewhere (Burneva, 2021).

In addition to the introductory e-mail and description of the project, another artefact of the interview was the informed consent form (see Appendix 3). I typically brought the printed form to the interview, with one case in which the participant asked for it beforehand. The consent form was prepared with regard to ethical conduct and protection of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Although signing a consent form is not a standard procedure in this research milieu, it was my conviction to have one prepared for my project. The form consists of yet another brief description of the project’s objectives, the structure of the interview (approximate length, recording, etc.), a list of rights of the participants (for example, a right to withdraw their participation), and contact information. The participants were asked to read through the form in order to acquaint themselves with it and to date and sign it as a sign of their consent to voluntarily participate in the research project. There was no refusal to sign the form, but most of the participants were surprised and curious about it. Some of them actually asked me for a permission to use the form for their own research purposes. Initially, I had concerns that presenting the form might create some distance and formality between the participants and myself, but this was not the case in most instances. On the contrary, it showed preparedness, concern for the interviewees and being an ethically conscious researcher. There were very few cases in which people were taken aback by it, but we quickly moved on to the less formal interview.

I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews, of which 48 were recorded and transcribed (either strict or intelligent verbatim). Two interviews were not recorded – one of which upon a request from the interviewee and one due to a technical issue. The empirical volume, measured in recorded minutes, reached 1873 (37 hours and 23 minutes), and I spent many additional hours in conversations with the interviewees prior to and post recording. Thirty-six of the interviews have been used as the main empirical source for analysis as they were conducted with academics holding a fixed-term position (see Appendix 4 for an anonymised description of the main group of participants and Appendix 5 for a log of all additional interviews). The additional 14 interviews were used as a background information source and inspiration for the development of the conversation with the other participants. Out of the 14 participants, 5 are senior administrators, 4 hold a permanent position but expressed an interest in taking part and sharing their views, 4 are people who decided to exit Swedish academia, and 1 is a PhD student with a prospective tenure-track job offer.
The interviewees who form the main group hold positions such as postdocs, assistant professors on tenure track, lecturer, temporary research position (researcher, affiliated researcher) with varying percentages and length of employment. Some of the interviewees have multiple affiliations, for example, they have research funding in one institution and a teaching contract with another. In this case, their primary affiliation, according to their statements, has been considered. They come from 7 Swedish HEIs – 4 universities and 3 research institutes. The disciplines they work within are Management, Finance and Accounting. I have put together some related sub-disciplines in order to keep the analysis slender and to protect the anonymity of my interviewees. Swedish academia is not a densely populated space and giving a literal description of the participant’s field in combination with another demographic factor might jeopardise my ethical responsibility to keep their identity anonymous. Thus, under the “management” discipline, we might find organisation, international business, entrepreneurship and marketing. Finance incorporates finance, financial management, logistics and similar.

Foreignness and gender have been identified as important demographic factors relating to the study in the course of the interviews and analysis. Of the main group of participants, 42% were female and 67% of the participants identified as foreigners.

Gender is still an issue we cannot discard, especially in a study investigating insecurity. The questions of insecurity are related to power and power structures, and gender is one of the many manifestations and propellers of problems related to power structures. Although gender has not been a main focus of this study by design, I have been constantly mindful and reflexive of the gender-related issues brought forward by the participants. Since it has not been explicitly a topic, however, the attribution of the participants towards gender categories has been subsequently done by me based on common identifiers and attributions made by the participants throughout the interviews (“as a woman”, “as a man” and other). I have not been made aware of interviewees’ identification, other than male and female.

For the purposes of this study, foreignness was treated on the basis of self-determination. There were many cases of people holding multiple nationalities and having diverse heritage – for example, people holding Swedish passports or having a Swedish heritage but still identifying as foreigners. It is important to take into account the idea of being a foreigner to a country and to a system. People coming to a new country typically have less knowledge of how the formal and informal systems work and need to dedicate much more conscious efforts in learning how things work and building a safety network. Having a safety network, whether personal or professional, plays an important role in an insecure context. Thus, “being a foreigner” is not simply a demographic fact evaluated by whether one holds a passport from a given country.
My view on and use of nationality and foreignness is not in line with the definition of nationality used by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ), which provides annual statistics and reports on higher education in Sweden. UKÄ uses the following definition when presenting statistics on internationalisation: ‘By foreign background is meant individuals that are either born abroad or born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents’ (Higher Education Institutions in Sweden - Status Report 2019, p.55). The reasons I disagree with this definition can be found above. When discussing professions and professional development, the intrinsic knowledge of a system and its operations, the existing personal and professional safety networks and language skills are all important factors to consider. The “foreign background” in terms of the passports your parents hold does not give out enough information.

In the context of academia, Ayala-Lopez (2018) suggests the use of Erlenbusch's (2018) taxonomy of material and linguistic foreigners, where the first one means that a person is working in a country other than their country of origin and the second one denotes that the academic is not working and writing in their native language. The concept of material foreigner comes close to the view on foreignness that I have appropriated, with the addition of country of previous academic experience to country of origin. Still, I have found that the most proper method to use when determining foreignness is to rely on the self-determination of the participants. There was a great diversity among the academics with 33% Swedish, 29% EU and 38% non-EU citizens. The five administrators with whom I had a conversation were all Swedish.

Finally, sensitive issues such as racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health, sex life or sexual orientation have not been addressed or collected and will not be discussed. These might be of interest for further research on the topic, especially in the form of an intersectional study. Those issues are, however, subject to approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Etikprövningsmyndigheten, 2021). This study has not gone through a review process by the Authority since it does not deal with sensitive data.
Analysis

This work has two beginnings and two main interests – the academic profession and insecure work. The academic profession and how it is changing were the first inspiration and the impulse for looking into the “in-between” early career academics and how they understand the profession while being in such a vulnerable position. That vulnerability, however, proved very important and demanded a more focused investigation. Thus, it turned into the second point of interest and main theoretical interest, while the academic profession turned into the empirical setting for the study of insecure work, with the condition of the temporary academic worker as a contribution to the study of the field.

There was something unexplainable and puzzling about the vulnerability of the group of academics I was meeting. They were attesting to experiences of insecurity, uncertainty, stress and worry that were hard to sustain within one specific term or definition and hard to explain through one theory or another. I set out to investigate them through an open framework with a mix of theoretical perspectives that speak to insecurity as my points of reference. The perspectives of insecurity were used to identify certain tensions and experiences that have already been recognised and thus to point to and identify new tensions and experiences that have not been recognised and discussed. I structured the analysis around the known, leading the reader to the previously unrecognised, i.e. my contribution to the study of insecure work and the academic profession.

The process of analysis was, of course, not as simple as it sounded in the paragraph above, and it started way before I knew that insecurity would be a main point of interest and before I recognised the specific theoretical perspectives that could form the framework of the study. Analysis was initiated simultaneously with the start of the empirical work; also, already in the process of interviewing, some general themes were developed. Some of those key themes pointed my attention towards the topics of insecurity and temporariness. Thus, guided by the empirical evidence, I focused on these issues more in subsequent interviews and started to contrast the themes with different perspectives and looked for a theoretical lens through which to interpret them.

Even if my analytical work was abductive – alternating between the theoretical and the empirical, after acquiring a critical mass of interviews, I decided to initiate an inductive coding procedure, and I coded some of the fully transcribed interviews in their entirety. The purpose was to get re-acquainted with the rich empirics and to look for something interesting and novel that could be uncovered by working inductively. At this stage, my method followed what Van Maanen describes as first and second order concepts, where ‘first-order concepts are the "facts" of an ethnographic investigation and the second-order concepts are the "theories" an analyst uses to organize and explain these facts’ (Van Maanen, 1979, p.540). This method is not a template
but rather an approach since some of the dangers Van Maanen (ibid.) warns against are social scientists ‘following the customary and respected practices of the day’, facts that are ‘twisted to fit a given theory’, the assumption of the ‘knowledgeable agent’ and the unquestioned intentions of the researched. First and second order codes were developed, independent of the previously developed key themes, and were then compared and contrasted. Thus, working “from both ends”, the themes of the experiences of temporariness were developed. I coded the rest of the interviews for these themes. Thereafter began the writing process. In addition to the themes of the empirical narrative of the experiences of the temporary academic worker, the responses to insecurity that will be presented as vignettes later on were also developed.

After developing some of the themes, I began writing them up. The analysis then took the form of ‘writing and thinking and laying out of the field of the text, moving’ (St. Pierre, 2018, p.606). Writing-thinking is a method of inquiry; it is formative, and it creates the field and the “data”, and the researcher (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). It is in the text where the method is undone – in writing, the research happens. This research also happened in the text. Elisabeth St. Pierre (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.1428) explains her journey of writing as a method of analysis: ‘I made accidental and fortuitous connections I could not foresee or control’. Most of the connections I have made happened while writing these pages, but they were, of course, informed by so much preparation – not only the interviews I have conducted, transcribed, read, re-read and listened to, but also the hours spent reading about the participants and their places of work, reading about Swedish academia, experiencing Swedish academia, reading theory, thinking about theory and discussing theory.

This is not a post qualitative inquiry. I have been guided by many conventional methods and models which perhaps ‘control[ed] the study’ (St. Pierre, 2018, p.603) to some extent, but when I recognised the strange and the bizarre, I gave it space and attention to come into being in the text. In writing, the research is non-hierarchical, allowing for the multiplicity of the experiences of insecurity to co-exist in presentation. Still, as this is not a “true” post qualitative inquiry, my role as an interpreter is prominent, and there is a quasi-hierarchy in the text as it concerns my role in it. I start with a thick description (Geertz, 1973) and present the experiences of temporariness of the participants. I wished for you to get acquainted with the setting and get immersed in the experiences of the participants together with me as a researcher before I offer my interpretation. I strived to present the experiences of temporariness and to bring you closer to the subject of the research, without turning the interviewees into disembodied “cases”. “Giving voice” to the participants is a reflexive undertaking, and it does not in any way suggest that the narratives exist outside of the research; rather, they are seen as co-created and the researcher is part of the project, not a neutral observer or interpreter (Mauthner, 2017). Sustaining the duality of closeness and distance between the subjects
and the research is inherently challenging. Bourdieu (1999, p.2) writes: ‘The analyst’s intrusion is as difficult as it is necessary. It must proclaim itself openly and yet strive to go unnoticed’, and he goes on to suggest how this might be carried out successfully:

But the analyst will be able to make the most unavoidable intrusions acceptable only through a rewriting that reconciles two doubly contradictory goals. On the one hand, the discussion must provide all the elements necessary to analyse the interviewees’ positions objectively and to understand their points of view, and it must accomplish this without setting up the objectivizing distance that reduces the individual to a specimen in a display case. On the other hand, it must adopt a perspective as close as possible to the individual’s own without identifying with the alter ego (which always remains an object, whether one wants it or not) and turning into the subject of this worldview. And the analyst will never succeed in this enterprise of participant objectification so well as by managing to make self-evident and natural, even given, constructions that are wholly inhabited by critical reflection.

After the first immersion into the experiences of temporariness, my role of an interpreter becomes more important as I offer interpretation and discussion. The analysis takes the experiences of temporariness and follows how they can become a form of insecurity, how temporariness translates into insecurity and how and why it does not. In the discussion, I will also sporadically bring you back into an encounter with the people of this research – this time guided by me and my theorising in an immediate infusion of the empirical and theoretical. The reason I do this is that it allows you to follow more closely the rhythm of the research process. Most importantly, however, this type of non-hierarchical presentation is true to the richness, multitude and complexity of the modes of experiences of temporariness and insecurity and their interconnectedness. Staying close to the subject while offering interpretation is one way to show the lived experience as not just “individual” but as informed by the social reality of the academic and the perceived possibilities of collective ways of being.
Writing and presentation

In a recent publication, Kociatkiewicz and Kostera (2019, p.125) portray the ‘dramatic loss of meaning in contemporary social sciences’ as ‘a murder of the body of knowledge’. The scholars (ibid.), joining in on the call of other academics (see, for example, Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013) propagate for the escape from formulaic and rigid research presented in formulaic and rigid forms as one step closer to meaningful research. The expectations towards the form of a PhD thesis are not less rigid and formulaic (Honan and Bright, 2016; Weatherall, 2019). Instead of following such templates, Kociatkiewicz and Kostera (2019) argue that social scientists, including management and organisation researchers, can very well make use of alternative forms of presentation, including the narrative form. They state ‘…Writing social science is to engage in telling stories’ (ibid., p.115), pointing out that they use “story” and “narrative” interchangeably. I too, am a strong believer in the narrative approach and have made use of it in my research process and in its textual representation. I present a big part of the empirical material and analysis in the narrative form. The argumentation I build is presented to the reader through stories. The stories have main and supporting characters. I refer to some of the interviewees as “main characters” because they re-appear in some of the chapters and sections. I have chosen to carry their narrative through the pages, not because of who they are as individuals, but because their experiences and the way they have portrayed them have translated more easily into the narrative form. I include the experiences and interpretations of other participants because of the richness and nuances they add, and also because they speak to the rigour and depth of analysis. Admittedly, I too am subjected to the pressures to write within the boundaries of what is considered acceptable, “valid”, and scientific, and have tried to not write “too differently”. For the same reasons, I have tried to sustain my research within the acceptable form of "introduction – literature review – methods – findings – discussion – conclusion" expected from a PhD thesis (Honan and Bright, 2016, p.732). Although not perfect, this form is familiar to the reader and is a useful tool in its own right.

The ambition to write an impactful and meaningful work has provoked me to be reflexive of my own approach and writing, as well as my preconceived notions of the appropriate academic form. Throughout the whole process of reading, writing, interviewing, analysing, presenting and debating, I have tried to question my actions. In the text, I have channelled this effort into small acts of resistance and breaking down of patterns. For example, I have given my interviewees names in my native Bulgarian, which is a lesser-known Eastern-European Slavic language, which is hard to read and pronounce for most western scholars. In the next pages, you will meet Rosen, Tamara, Yasen, Bojoura, Tsvetan, Bilyana, Varban and many more. Those names have a shared etymology – they are personal names inspired by the natural world. I gave the
participants these pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and to honour my heritage. This act was deliberately performed as a challenge to the western-centric academia and my conformity in and with it. Reflecting on it, I understand that it might create difficulties for the reader in following the text and my arguments, and, in turn, make my work seem less appealing or hard to comprehend. Even so, I stand by this performative act as one small way of reflexively looking to create an impact through my writing. Another example is my effort to try and find relevant and interesting concepts outside of what is currently known and used in western academia. I have found and incorporated one such concept – the Maori idea of ‘tūrangawaewae’. I wish I could have included more such concepts, but this will have to be a project for the future.

Now, it is time for you to meet the academics with the strange Bulgarian names and read about their experiences of temporariness.
Temporary academic worker

What would I do differently [if I had a permanent contract]? That's a nice thing. I would relax probably a little bit more.

[laughing]

I mean, you wouldn't live with this constant idea that something is ending.

[pause]

That's the main thing. You can think about the future without worrying about the fact that "Oh my God, tomorrow I might not have a job, basically".

Again, I grew up in this system, so for me it's the normality. It's not like an exception. It's sad to say, but it's true. I grew up in a system where the idea of having a permanent position was something so far from yourself that... But, again, after many years, it's not even sustainable anymore. You know? I mean, I graduated [more than 5 years prior to the interview]. So, you get to a point where you are like “Ok, maybe I should try to find a real job at some point". I mean, a job that doesn't end every year. But we will see.

So, the difference, I think, is more mental. The difference is that you just plan for everything without stressing on this idea of "Oh my God, I have to find..." It seems stupid, but it's not. All the time that requires you just to look for positions or look for applications, and apply to them, and to never know if you're getting... I mean, these are just things that...it's extra time that you give to things that are not really related to your job, but are related to the job... So, it's tricky. Because otherwise, you would just do your own work. Probably, I would publish much more if I didn't have to do that because I could just concentrate on doing my work, instead of worrying about looking for a job.

That's, I think, the main thing. And mentally, you will relax, you know:

[sigh]

"I have a job forever!"

Kalina
These rich statements paint a picture of what it means to be in the headspace of temporariness, to live the future insecurity in the present, to prepare for continuous scrutiny in order to have a future, to feel wasteful with respect to your present time in order to secure future time, and to try and explore every possible opportunity because you do not know what comes after. It also shows the perceived stratification of insecurity in the academic profession. On the one side is insecurity, temporariness, unknown future and the responsibility for it, and on the other – a job forever – the ultimate security of the academic tenure. As Tsvetan puts it: ‘You have a job when you have tenure’. He also shares with me an anecdote of a senior faculty member calling everything before tenure ‘getting tickets to the party’. So, if they are not yet at the party, where are they?

What does it mean to be a temporary academic worker? Well, it does not mean just one thing; as we see in Kalina’s statement, it could mean a multitude of things and multitude of practices. It means, for example, feeling worried about not having a job in a year, and it also means feeling like you are wasting your time worrying instead of actually doing your job. It means focusing on quantifiable fashionable research output against your professional judgement, taking on more projects than you can cope with or being nice to people only to appear unproblematic and easy to work with. In the following pages, I will unpack all of this and more.

In order to understand the insecure work of the academic, I focus on the experiences of academics in fixed-term positions. Their interpretations and images of the profession and of their labour, of strategies for developing a successful career and of being employed will first paint a picture of temporary employment in academia and will then serve as a point for the analysis of insecurity in academia – insecurity in a professional field.

The experiences of the temporary academic worker have been inductively clustered into four sub-sections – output, pace, membership and personal. In the first sub-chapter, you will get acquainted with the type of work and output with which temporary academics choose to engage. The second category deals with the pace and rhythm of academic work and shows how TAWs express the need to continuously do more and faster because of the ticking clock, and how they have to fit their working rhythm with the external rhythm of applications and calls. Then, I present the issue of membership, including professional and organisational citizenship, outsiders and the academic persona. In the last part, I touch upon the personal costs of temporariness and personal contingencies. Some questions of privilege and inequality will be addressed in the last two parts. These four clusters represent distinguishably different topics but are, at the same time, very interrelated. When it comes to narrating the experiences of temporariness, which is the purpose of this chapter, this delineation is easier than when it comes to the analysis of insecurity. Then, and that will come in the two subsequent chapters, you will see that the temporary academic workers draw upon multiple experiences and resources.
across those clusters in order to face and navigate insecurity. I will come back to this. For now, however, I urge you to focus on the lived experiences of temporariness of the Swedish business academic on a fixed-term contract.
In this section, I present the participants’ reflections on how they select and manage their work tasks and output. Their efforts are often focused on a future point of time – evaluation for tenure, application for a permanent position or external funding, a move to another HEI or country. In their future orientation, they express the need to take into account and imagine different scenarios, systems, scrutinisers, and that often leads to the decision to (willingly or unwillingly) fit their work and output into a standardised form that is perceived as more easily evaluable.

Setting aside “unattractive” work aspects

There is a curious paradox concerning the practice of the academic – while academics state that there is a considerable inflation in job content (more on that later on), the perceived importance of all but one part seems to be diminishing. The most important way for a career progression is believed to be through research and publication. And not any kind of publications – peer-reviewed journal publications have become the currency of the academic system, according to all participants. Ablen, for example, states that there are numerous boxes to tick when applying for a tenure track and those include some teaching experience, funding procurement, evidence of networks, and international experience, but still the most important box to tick and the thing that will get you through the door is having a publication or an R&R in a top journal: ‘And that’s how they select. And that’s also what I’ve heard from a lot of universities – that that’s how they set the cutoff’. Boril makes a similar statement in regard to getting the promotion to tenure after going through the tenure track: ‘The way it works for us is that it’s mostly based on publications. So, basically, they have three criteria that they use in order to assess a performance. [...] But the dominant criterion is, for sure, the publications’.

Tsvetan is on a tenure track, and he has one major task to focus on in order to achieve tenure – publish peer-reviewed papers in highly-ranked journals. It’s not like he dislikes it, but: ‘Just blindly concentrating on research is a bit dull to me’. He believes in the “whole” academic and is dissatisfied with the sole focus on research output as the “real” measure of his progress. On paper, he is supposed to also be evaluated on the quality of his teaching and thirdmission activities (outreach and community contribution); however, these two points are openly given less priority.

Delyan is also on tenure track. Research and publishing are his preferred academic activities and he, like many others, admits to the relative unimportance of everything else when it comes to promotion. He says that third-
mission activities and contribution to the community are ‘not really worth a
lot of investment’ because they have “marginal” value in your assessment. At
the same time, he believes that as a scientist he has a collegial obligation to
the members of the profession and that includes those same third-mission ac-
tivities that are not given a lot of weight when one’s performance is being
evaluated. He also states that ‘teaching is the core of our profession’; however,
excelling at teaching is not something that is nurtured. Anything beyond “good
enough” is perceived as a non-transferable, non-value-adding skill, which in
the early stage of one’s career requires time and efforts that need to be directed
to research in order to secure a future in the field:

...you need to do this, to reach this quality, such that you’re not drag-
ging the performance of the school [...] but besides reaching that
level, that’s it. There’s no value in continuing to improve or perfect
your class, right? You might win some award and stuff but... In the
end, it matters for the school you are in, but when/if I move to another
school, this is something they’re gonna look at, but it’s really just a
box to check, right? "Are you good at teaching? Yes, ok, done. Let’s
talk about your research”.

Other interviewees also confirm the perception that HEIs view scholarly ac-
tivities other than research as something to quickly tick and move on. In some
troubling cases, interviewees have stated that it can also be employed as a tool
for alternative motives. Detelin (tenure track) shares:

I've been told [third-mission activities] is kind of...everyone gets it, as
long as, you know... That's like one way for them to kick you out if
you're intolerable. That's how I've been told, at least. Teaching seems
to be also like ticking the box kind of thing.

Boril, similarly, states that third-mission activities are an official part of the
evaluation for tenure but are “marginal”. He actually does not mind that he
does not have to divert too much of his time to any activities outside of re-
search, because that gives him the time to focus on what matters at this mo-
ment – ‘I think at first it’s maybe more important to focus on your research
and [...] once you’re there and if you’re there, then the idea for me is that you
give back to the community’. Avgust shares that after writing a 30-page appli-
cation for his current tenure track position, he came to realise that the thing
that counted was his publication list. Talking about success in academia,
Ahlen reiterates the opinion of some that it is a problematic issue that research
always takes the front stage in evaluating academic work:

I think one of the problems we have in academia which is a very seri-
ous one as well (there are many, there are many [laughing]) – our
research can be used as a currency. I can go to the US and people will recognise my publications. If I do excellent teaching, that's only recognised – if I'm lucky – within my own country and typically only within your own institution. So, you have people that devote a lot of time to teaching, do an excellent job; all their students are super happy, learn a lot, but they don't get rewarded for that. And I want to base my feeling of if somebody's successful or not on that also: are they good teachers? But the information is usually just not there. Even for my close colleagues – I don't know if they're good teachers or not. So, you kind of have to look at their research and their collaboration network.

It is of little surprise then that most of the interviewees who are temporary workers focus exclusively on research – some prefer it, others do not. But even those that wish to put more efforts in different aspects of the profession cannot afford to, because it is not seen as strategic. Some of the interviewees that struggle with the centrality of publishing believe that they might escape this confinement when they reach tenure; others accept that this is the system – good or bad – and they must accommodate it. Some struggle with it and question the shared values in the profession. There is not just one way in which this issue is experienced or interpreted, but there is a consensus that TAWs do not have the tools or the power to change it and must play along.

Focusing on visible and evaluable results

In the previous section, the participants testified to the increased and almost exclusive importance of research output as an evaluation measure of the totality of academic work and how they feel compelled to focus on this type of activity and set aside other aspects of the profession in their present stage of temporary employment. While research and publishing are considered very important by the interviewees and are the preferable academic activity for some of them, its exclusivity in terms of added value for career progress is deemed exaggerated or even disheartening by many – 'I want to be broad. I don't just want to take the things that are really good for my evaluation [i.e. publishing in highly-rated peer-reviewed journals]’, shares Detelin.

The temporary academics testify to the increasing pressures to perform their work towards some imaginable future point of time when it will be evaluated. They believe they have a limited amount of time to perform a maximum number of activities and produce a maximum number of output, which will then be scrutinised (possibly multiple times and by multiple scrutinisers). Thus, they often express a need to comply with what they believe is currently
encouraged within the system on a broader scale. ‘I don’t think quantity is quality’, says Reneta, ‘and unfortunately, I feel that recently it feels that it’s changing more towards quantity. So, it’s like a checklist, right? So, if you do check boxes and have like 5 publications this year, it’s ok, you’re evaluated in a very positive way. But it could take some time that you actually publish a very good paper. So, this one I think is not what I really appreciate. I feel that something is wrong everywhere... The whole system is changing’.

In that setting, the space for innovation and groundbreaking work becomes risky. TAWs felt like they need to focus on safe, fast, specific output which can be easily evaluated. Boril puts in words this same conclusion that many of the other interviewees expressed when I asked him how his work would look like if he already had tenure:

*I think what I will change is that I will go for maybe bigger ideas, like bigger projects. [...] I think when you’re on the tenure track, you work on some stuff [you did] already during a PhD; you’re trying to publish these things and then, there’s huge incentives to double down on this kind of research and to work on the very same topic, or to go for not so risky projects. Why? Because you can spend a lot of time on it, and if it fails, you don’t get any rewards. [...] I think if I get tenure; once I get tenure, that’s what will change. I will go for bigger ideas and bigger stuff because I wouldn’t have the same type of pressure. That, I think, would be the main difference. [...] But right now, I feel that I’m not going after these kinds of things because, just because, you know... The priorities for me are to try to publish.*

Neven also points to the performance of academic work towards a future point of evaluation. His words, however, express something even more critical and unstable:

*The thing is also that it’s very complex because if you start evaluating people, people start to behave in the way that you evaluate. Right? And the thing is that the person that evaluates doesn’t really know what it was that led up to the success historically. So, you don’t really know what the things were that should be evaluated, and then you don’t know what it is that’s going to be valuable in the future. So, it’s a really difficult thing to construct a meritocracy or a system that’s supposed to be neutral. Really, really difficult thing.*

Even if temporary academic workers have an image of what is “evaluable” within the system and fit their work and output in the present towards that image, things might change. The imagined future evaluation becomes the norm. However, there is no guarantee that they will reach that future
evaluation and that the standards will be the same as they imagine them in the present. The following stories by Gergin and Zornitsa are a testament to that. Gergin, an affiliated researcher, believes that he was caught in the change of systems in Sweden and Zornitsa, who failed her tenure track assessment – in the non-transparency of her HEI.

Gergin is one of those academics, whose career path started when the shared ideas of what constitutes quality in academic work were almost the opposite of what they are today, according to him:

_The majority of my texts are not seen as qualitative [sic] enough; they don’t have the high enough quality. Which they may not have. I’m completely open for that. But the main thing when they evaluate quality [...] it’s the outlet. I have a text on both research gate and academia.edu is one of the 5% most downloaded. It counts as zero, because it’s published from the school. My articles – both ABS 2 and book chapters, don’t count. This is how the game is played. If I were a bitter person, I would be bitter that when I started my PhD, writing in Swedish monograph was what you should do. These articles are unscientific was the idea. Because they’re too short, they...blah-blah-blah. [...] And the game is different now. That’s just how it is._

The in-between scholars who try to tackle new topics, investigate longitudinally, or start multidisciplinary collaborations, simply do not have the time or the infrastructure or the support to do that. Thus, in order to succeed, it is communicated and perceived that they better stick to what is safe, fast and fits the mould. ‘Definitely for me and my field of research [management] and my approach to science, I will say they have worsened because now we’re getting more in a factory productive way of making science. So, we are factorising. Can you say it like that? Industrialising. But it's like a factory. It's a factory. You have production standard; you have quality criteria. This is what it is. _Produce or you're out_’, says Flora, on a tenure track. She goes on to say: ‘So, am I contributing to knowledge? No. I'm producing a paper that will get me a job’.

Ablen also confirms that some types of research are seen as risky, and young scholars are often discouraged to pursue:

_Doing qualitative research is very risky for a PhD. [...] it’s so risky when you have such a short timeframe. [...] you get extremely good papers; the payoff is usually higher than for quantitative research, but there is just a time element involved where you have so much dependence on people helping you that it's just very risky._
‘If I would be a little bit more strategic, I probably wouldn’t do the kind of research I do. I probably would do a little bit more hit and run empirics, umm… perhaps a little bit more quantitative stuff’, reiterates Detelin. Viola also recognises her academic output as not having a “strategic” advantage: ‘And I know some people who are doing quantitative studies, and they just go on producing work after work and get it published. But the thing is it’s like this salami effect because it is not contributing to anything. But at the same time, their work is valued’.

Srebrin, who is a part-time affiliated researcher and a practitioner, shares that he did not do a PhD with an intention of building an academic career and that, in a way, gave him the opportunity to pursue the type of research he really wanted to do. Comparing his process to the process of his fellow PhD students, he says that it was quite different – they were focused on publishing and strategic collaborations early on, and he wrote a monograph, many book chapters and practitioners articles. He realises that his actions were not “strategic”; however, it is without regret that he now shares that. Today, he says that he would not like to become a full-time academic because then he would need to ‘follow all these rules of looking at journal rankings and teaching and scoring points and… I’m way behind that. That’s not why I wanted to come into academia. I wanna do what I wanna do, basically’.

Let’s talk about Zornitsa. When Zornitsa started her tenure track, she was presented with rather broad requirements of what she must accomplish in order to get tenure and that was ‘to collect the competence needed for promotion for docent’. Zornitsa felt happy and lucky to get this position, spending only a year in a temporary position after getting her doctorate. In her interpretation, she had to ‘teach a certain number of hours, in terms of research […] do something that I didn’t do during my PhD in terms of new empirical material, […] build and develop further the theoretical aspects that I’m working with’. Zornitsa knew about a priority area for the whole institution, which was still underdeveloped. The demand was there and so was Zornitsa’s interest in the topic. She thought the area was “really exciting” and decided that she could be ‘the one who would develop this’. And so she did, both in terms of research and teaching. That required a lot of time and effort on her part. It was a new area and there were no experts in her department, so she had to establish an international network and develop courses from scratch. She did that and now she is running courses, has a good collaborative network of researchers and some publications. The publications that came out of her new scholarly undertaking, however, were not in the highest-ranking journals. Zornitsa explains: ‘the area is rather new and the journals that actually promote this area are also quite new, and they don’t have enough time to gain this weight in terms of rankings yet. But they’re definitely going to go up with time’.

By this point, you might wonder how this story illustrates limitations when it seems to be quite the opposite – Zornitsa is developing new research and
teaching programmes, setting up new international collaborations and networks and publishing in up-and-coming journals that are pushing innovative topics. Well, Zornitsa failed her tenure evaluation. The requirements for her successful transition to tenure suddenly changed six months before her evaluation and were made more specific with regard to publishing in journals with specific rankings. She did not have the full picture at the start and took an unpopular approach. Starting new research and/or teaching programmes is risky, time-consuming and is inherently more difficult to reach the quantifiable factors which are currently used for career evaluation and promotion by many HEIs. I will revisit Zornitsa’s story below because it points to another issue that affects the way TAWs practise their profession – the trust they have in the formal rules, requirements and processes. Before that, I will look in more detail at the future scrutiny that is leading the TAWs to more visible and evaluable results.

Preparing for (multiple) future scrutinisers

In his own words, Orlyn feels he is “outside the system”. He is a researcher at a research institution and is quite content – he feels he has autonomy over his work and loves that he does not have to be “strategic” and does not have to put up with the obligation of being a “part of an institution at a university” and following “that order which is much more bureaucracy”. The insecurity of his temporariness has been in a way neutralised by years of “luck and coincidence” – years during which he has pulled through and pulled back into academia through offers for collaborations with colleagues and mentors. He acknowledges the insecurity of his position but is not concerned about his future because he has strong personal and professional safety nets. Moreover, to him, the insecurity outweighs the “bureaucracy, surveillance, controlling mechanism” of a tenure track. Even so, he feels that he has been limited in his choice on whether or he would like to be on a tenure track. He says that the system has changed drastically since he started his academic career, and his past academic work is worthless in terms of applying for a tenure track.

Orlyn: It's changed quite a lot during this period, during the last 15 years, when it comes to tenure. So, back then when I was registered, it was more like yeah you go in now and you just keep on as long as you like. [...] But in the current system, it's impossible for me to get a tenure at [HEI]. Impossible!

Petya: What would you have to do?
Orlyn: No, it's impossible, it is [emphasis] impossible.

Petya: People say everything is possible. [laughing]

Orlyn: Well, this is... I need to be from another university. I need to be younger. [...] I need to convert my monograph to papers. And I did it in Swedish. That's... So, everything is bad! And the worst part is I graduated [HEI], and they don't get any credits for hiring me. So, I will never win anything. Even though I'm not intending to, I'm trying to publish papers. So, I'm in the game, sort of. I'm not writing books anymore.

Even Orlyn, with his views on permanent positions in universities, gets ‘in the game sort of’. He is not writing books anymore. He is not planning on chasing a permanent position at a university anytime soon (or at all), but in case he needs or decides to, he would have the currency of the papers. Moreover, he feels the pressure, the expectation from the system to have publications.

Petya: Is that what you're focusing on now? More publishing [in peer-reviewed journals]?

Orlyn: Yeah, partly. But it's not to become tenured. I don't have that as a plan. I don't know... Because it's expected.

Petya: By whom?

Orlyn: By you. You looked at my publication list.

I did look at his publication list. And Orlyn knows that this is just what everyone does. He does not know for sure whether in the near or distant future he will have to go through an evaluation or assessment. If he wants to have options in the future, he needs to get in the game, play by everyone’s rules, and publish papers and not books. Even if presently Orlyn is comfortable where he is and he states that he is not planning on pursuing tenure, he needs to be prepared.

Dimo recounts how insecurity is exacerbated by a system, which is not “loyal” – even if one is doing a great job in the present, they cannot have any guarantees of a secure future within the same institution because of the looming future scrutiny:

Right now, as the academic system is built, there is no way to say that if you’re doing a good job with us now, you will get a faculty position. Because they don’t know that. They can’t guarantee that. We need to announce it publicly and then it goes to reviewers, which is good from
a system perspective. But it sucks from an inside perspective, so to speak. Because even if you’ve done a great job and everybody is happy, someone can still come from somewhere else and have more publications and then you’re screwed and then you’re out. So, it’s not a loyal system, so to speak, which causes stress. Because you never know who you’re going to compete with.

In that same regard, many other interviewees compared the academic system to industry, where employees can count on promotion and career advancement based on what they are doing currently, in the present, without having to account and prepare for an unforeseeable future scrutiny in competition with others. Avgust points out:

I guess it's particularly hard in academia because when you have a normal job, you have a probation period and that's usually half a year or something like that and then you are supervised more or less and when they see "OK, now this person is not really delivering what we expect", then you don’t get a permanent employment. In academia, it's similar but, it's, of course, a bit tougher because this probation period is not half a year but four years. That's a significant part of your life.

Dimo expresses similar concerns:

When I speak to my friends in industry, if their bosses are happy, they will move on in their career. They will get their promotion, or they will be recommended for their next position and then that’s fine. But here, I can make everyone happy and still end up number 2. Because when it comes to scrutiny... and that causes stress. So, you always need to prepare for the persons or applicants that you don’t know. You don’t know who’s going to show up.

He cannot overlook the stress this system creates, even though he admits that it might be beneficial in some respects, for example, reducing nepotism. At the same time, he offers plenty of examples of units or institutions optimising different strategies to tailor positions for certain individuals or to make use of the inlasning opportunity. This reduces his trust in the transparency and equality arguments for the way the system functions – it is not formally “loyal” to certain insiders but can be informally “loyal” to others. The solution? Clarity and actual transparency, according to him. Clear, timely communicated, and transparent requirements of what people need to do to achieve different steps in the career hierarchy or be hired for certain positions. Dimo says he spent about a year more than needed preparing his application for a certain career step because “better to overkill than get a rejection”.
Trust in formal rules

While academics on temporary teaching and research positions expect little or no commitment at all from the HEIs (as Dimo states above – it’s not a loyal system) or support and guidelines for their future career advancement elsewhere on the job market, assistant professors on tenure track do in fact expect guidelines, structure, and transparency regarding their evaluation and steps to career advancement. And while some indeed find it, this is not the case for everyone. Sometimes, formal guidelines are vague or change unexpectedly for academics who are years into the tenure track, leaving no room to manoeuvre. Below, I will first revisit Zornitsa’s story and will add Neva’s situation, who is on a tenure track in the same field and the same HEI. Their experiences will showcase how the unclear and suddenly changing criteria for assessment of the tenure track can lead to increased insecurity, not only for the immediate subject of those vague and unclear requirements, but for those who come after. It also creates a mistrust in the HEI and formal rules, leaving room for speculation and interpretation of alternative motives and subjectivity, which, in itself, can have a huge impact on the behaviour and work experience of the academics.

No one knows what has to be in the actual application, so that they can make a decision. Everyone knows that I should be close enough to being a docent. Each of them has some kind of picture of what that would be or not be… In total, I can say we are all quite frustrated because it's not at all clear… That has good and bad [sic] obviously because if you have very clear instructions what is close enough to docent, then if you don't reach it, then it's very hard to get a position anyway… But if it's not defined at all, then it's also very hard.

Neva is months away from her final assessment for promotion to tenure position. She is subjected to vague and confusing requirements and sudden changes in said requirements. She, as it might have become clear, does not have trust in the formal rules in her HEI.

But in this meeting, they told me that they had come up with some better definition of what close enough is […] I almost had a heart attack. […] So, in total, the whole process has been horrible. I think the way they handled it has been really, really, really bad. […] Because, I mean, legally, when I started, there was no requirement whatsoever. So apparently, you know, depending on the requirements, you choose your strategy. […] It's a really unstructured and very frightening process we are in now. Especially since they keep coming up with new requirements on the way.
Zornitsa is the academic who was presented with new tenure evaluation criteria shortly before she had to defend her work. Half a year before said evaluation, the requirements suddenly changed; it was made explicit to her that only certain publications count: ‘I heard about it half a year ago. Half a year before I was supposed to complete this application and, of course, I couldn’t…even if I knew that. So, I couldn’t quickly proceed with this long process that actually takes time, to go through the process, review processes and so on’.

‘If you knew about those requirements then, what would you do differently?’ – I asked her, expecting her to say that she would have focused on something completely different, easier to publish, in fashion. She never says that explicitly, not for the new research programme she has started, anyway. She says she could have “skipped” a collaborative project which produced many books and chapters which were educational and published in Swedish, adding that ‘it doesn’t count in the evaluation’. She is very proud of what she has achieved and does not denounce her achievements. What she wished for was having clarity of requirements from the start.

Zornitsa’s case is very problematic – in addition to those sudden changes in evaluation criteria, she says, ‘they didn’t even look at what I did in terms of teaching’, and the whole evaluation process was considered questionable in terms of collegial behaviour, ethics, and gender balance, as attested to by some of Zornitsa’s colleagues. The lack of transparency and the “flexibility” of the whole process brought up questions of trust, fairness, and accountability – questions that many of Zornitsa’s colleagues also asked themselves, especially those who were in her shoes.

Dimo is on a tenure track in a different HEI than Zornitsa and Neva, and he feels quite good about his process and the work he has already done. Even so, the lack of transparency creates ambiguity and insecurity for him and pushes him to try out different strategies:

*I’m more or less, as we speak, handing in my application to be a docent. I’ve been walking around the important persons to look at that and say “Ok, do you think I qualify?” – “Yeah, yeah. Ok, it looks good”. So, I’ve basically been networking to make sure that it meets the... It’s not the only way to do it. I mean you can, of course, send in and hope that you’re... but due to this intransparency [sic] that’s what I’m doing.*

He believes that his application to be appointed as a docent (which is an academic title, not an employment promotion) is indicative of his future application for a tenure position (from assistant to associate professor – promotion in employment), because he knows that in order to get promoted to the permanent position of associate professor, he needs to satisfy the requirements for the promotion to the academic title of docent. He finds the lack of transparency highly problematic:
That’s the problem with the system in general, the way I see it; that the requirements are very fuzzy. So, it’s very unclear. When you read the requirements, you’re feeling ok, maybe I’m qualified. But you never know how they are interpreted. There are significant portions in the system which are not transparent, even though on paper it’s transparent.

On the other end, we find Rosen, on a tenure track within Management, looking at a very clearly defined set of requirements for his career advancement.

So, not only was I happy to hear that this is a clear-cut requirement, I was also happy to hear that this is what I desire to be doing, anyway. So, the things I desire to be doing is what I need to do to be successful professionally. So, it couldn’t be any better for me.

Even though his field in general might not be perceived as very formalised, he finds clarity and structure within his department and that, according to him, is “refreshing” and reassuring.

Neva and Zornitsa are also on a tenure track and that, according to some, should reduce uncertainty. Tenure track, however, does not automatically diminish uncertainty because of the promise of future security – there is no such explicit promise. Bilyana states that the tenure track ‘is definitely a temporary position because if you don’t make it [...] then your contract terminates, and you don’t get another position’. Avgust also testifies to the inherent uncertainty:

So, I know that I fulfil the requirements but there is some degree of subjectivity attached to the process because an external reviewer might say…for some reasons, very subjective reasons… "No, I think this person is not suitable". [...] But a friend of mine who’s working in [another country] had a tenure track position and he had a list basically where he just puts in his publications, which was an excel sheet and it was counted and at some point, it said "Click. Promotion!" So, there’s like zero uncertainty. And that’s really cool because there’s no subjectivity involved, and I think that’s good. Because if there are some strict formal requirements, if you have fulfilled them, it should be like “Click. Done.” But here, it’s a bit vague and nobody knows exactly, and I was collecting information from the faculty, from administration here, from the union. I was just trying to know what needs to be done. [...]
and is ‘just a formality if you tick the right boxes’ and that his appraisal meet-
ing is ‘just collegial meetings here with my colleagues’. He compares this
experience to his previous experience on fixed-term positions or in other coun-
tries where, according to him, the academic system is much more “manage-
rial”, adding that things are much more collegial and to his liking in his current
space. For him, the boxes he has to tick and the rules he has to follow are set
in the collegium; they are not disciplinary tools, and he believes that he has
both freedom and guidance if need be.
Pace

In this part, you will follow the temporary academic worker in their rhythm and pace of work – from the intensifying demands to do more and more in core and non-core tasks, through the ever decreasing personal time, to the intrusive breakages to their working rhythm coming from the outside. The pace and rhythm of academic work are getting faster and faster and more externally defined and that is, as many other things, profoundly affecting academics on fixed-term contracts.

Inflation of job content

Even if I argued above that research and peer-reviewed publications in top tier journals have become the focal point and currency of the academic system, forcing TAWs to put aside and spend less time and effort on other aspects of the job – like teaching and outreach, there is an apparent inflation in job content, according to majority of the interviewees. In order to carve out time and opportunities, allowing them to pursue highly regarded publications, which could then possibly lead to a permanent position, temporary academic workers need to do an array of things in addition to their academic work. Kalina sees this inflation as another representation of the change in the profession: ‘But again, it's not what you are supposed to do as a job. But now you are supposed to do many other things other than the things that you're supposed to do’.

Thus, in a strange way, while many interviewees feel restricted in their wish to focus on other aspects of the job that they consider important – like teaching, pedagogical development, outreach or service to the scholarly community or the HEI, they also feel that they need to do things that are not necessarily fundamental to the profession. Having to do all those “other things” often means not doing things as well as one would wish or choosing to do the things that will build your portfolio in a competitive way. Dimo, for example, testifies to this cynical, in his own view, way to practise:

And that was very evident before I got the position also when I was... sort of in this limbo. My only loyalty, my only professional loyalty, was towards myself and my own CV. Doing extra stuff for the department or [HEI]... “Ok, if I did this, this would benefit [HEI]” – that fell away unless it also helped me. And you can do that for a year or two, but it’s not a nice... And I’m not sure that’s the people we want in academia either. The ones who are best at managing their own CV.
The majority of the interviewees confirmed the trade-offs between personal, career or organisational interests and/or values, but they did not always express the experience Dimo iterated for me. More often, instead of making sense of this focus on their CV through terms such as loyalty, the participants showed that they are, in fact, responsible and loyal towards themselves only, because there is no other way and no one else who can be responsible for them. Varban states:

_You have to have this internal drive. You have to be innovative all the time and that can be tiring but... [...] You have to stay on top. [...] You have to invent it yourself all of the time. Nobody tells you what to do. I mean, I have to make my own way and that can be tiring._

Bojoyura expresses similar ideas:

_But you really have to be an entrepreneur, you know, for research actually. I mean, even if not for money, you also get people to be invested/interested in your research. You need to find one idea, develop it, and sell it._

Kalina is quite the embodiment of Bojoyura and Varban’s ideas about the entrepreneurial academic. She says:

_I’ve been growing academically into this framework. So, I’ve been going into a framework of precariousness, contracts that are going to expire, and all these kinda things. [...] So, I’m sort of used to the war. [laughing] You know what I mean?_

Kalina is a go-getter. She is the embodiment of a strong, independent, competent woman. She sees things, says things and gets things done. Hailing from a foreign country, Kalina is fixing her own career without any given knowledge of the system or safety network to fall back on – either personal or professional. She is objectively accomplished, having won funding and grants and having publications in the “appropriate” outlets. Nonetheless, she has no permanent position or promises for one on the horizon. But she is laughing it out because she’s “used to the war”. The system she comes from was even more insecure, so she’s happy with what she can get. She believes she is responsible for her own survival and strives to be fully in control. She sees systematic problems that affect her; however, she does not allow herself to complain. She takes charge and is getting informed, applying for funding, publishing, forming networks.

Viola is another foreigner “used to the war” – fending for herself and coming from worse:
I know right now I don't have a job. [...] Then, you know, I also think “Ok, there are opportunities, there are other things I can do...like I can apply for funding, and I can go and teach in [city] or... somewhere...” But, of course, that's not an ideal situation, but... But, you know, when I was in [another country]... there is nothing, there's no backup or something...

Kalina, Viola, and the other go-getters could be the heroes of any gig economy praise. They are out there hustling, getting money, getting things done, always ready, never complaining. Ruslan, on a temporary teaching contract, will tell you it makes him push harder:

So, when you have a tenure track, they tell you "Okay, publish here and then you're in", right? So, if you get that done, then you're there. You don’t need to do more, right? But in my case, I need to work more to keep the results, to have everything set. [...] But for me, it's okay because this kind of pushes me to do more, and it gives me a sense of life’s purpose, which I like.

And Zlatko, also a temporary lecturer, will tell you it makes him tough:

And also, maybe we can say it’s a good thing to know how strong you are as a person. I think the PhD, if you would ask me, was the most stressful time in my life. But I would say I would still do it again, because the many things I’ve learnt about myself is through this period. Like, they say that the most important lessons you learn through pain. [...] But I think we’ve all come out very strong [laughing]. So, that’s why these temporary jobs are...I don’t get scared [laughing].

The temporary academics are expected to be entrepreneurial and self-reliant, and to create the conditions that will allow them to pursue research and fulfil the requirements for high-impact publications. But creating these conditions requires a whole different set of skills – for example, writing and managing applications, building a network and language knowledge. Those skills are becoming increasingly important and normalised as part of the professional repertoire and workload without being recognised as an additional burden requiring extra time and support.

Everyone in academia, including many of the participants in this project, will undoubtedly say that networking is one of the most important things one needs to focus on if you have an intention of building a career in academia. Networking, it turns out, is important for anything and everything in academia – from publishing to employment. Networking, however, is a particular skill that not everyone can employ to their benefit. Nia, for example, believes that she does not possess this important skill and that might be detrimental to her
career: ‘I think it's just to keep working hard. Also, maybe building up networks. I'm good at working hard, but I'm not that good at building networks. So, this is something that I think I need to overcome’.

Something else that not only early career researchers but basically all academics in Sweden need to overcome and learn how to do is procuring external research funding. Rosa’s white board is full of detailed descriptions of deadlines and calls for funding, but the neat representation is deceiving, because she admits that she finds it hard to learn the skill of applying for funding. She comes from a different academic system and has not done this previously. Even if it is quite difficult for her, she has the determination to learn how to successfully do it because it is a very important skill to have if she is to make it in Swedish academia.

Another important skill that plays a role in both formal and informal chances for career advancement is language. Swedish academia strives to be a part of the global scientific community; however Swedish is very important formally and informally. Learning the language will be further discussed later on when I present the personal matters in temporariness. Now, I will go back to how academics interact with the inflation in job content and the need to do more and to do it faster.

Doing enough fast enough

Nia is quite content with her current position – on a tenure track in a good university; she is optimistic that she will make the cut – halfway through her tenure track, she almost fulfills the requirements. The stress she feels comes mostly from doubting whether she’s doing well enough fast enough. Both internal and external cues prompt her to want to do more and to reach “higher level” (in publishing) sooner rather than later. For example, Nia took some time away from her maternity leave, so that she can have things done:

So, now I need to think – should I spend all the time with my baby or should I spend some time revising the paper? Also, my co-author is waiting. So, I mean, with our profession, there is really no absolute... Even though I was actually, formally, on maternity leave, I was able to do some work. So, later it was a very smooth transition when I got back. And I got to get the papers done and didn't have to keep my co-authors waiting.

Reneta is another academic who had no time to “waste” while on maternity leave – she was applying to and interviewing for positions while taking care of a newborn because she was a postdoc and she felt “unsafe” about her
future. Even TAWs on tenure track, who have the promise of a future permanent security, embrace the “hustle” because the more work they do now, the more secure their future might be.

Petya: You seem pretty certain of your pace [of fulfilling the requirements for tenure].

Ablen: Yeah, but....

Petya: Hasn’t that allowed you to slow down? Or you don’t want to slow down?

Ablen: No, no, no. No, maybe not. I don’t know. I mean, it’s difficult... It’s honestly something I’m struggling with at the moment. My friends and parents tell me "You can take it a bit easier now". But I don’t want to, you know? Why would I do that? I don't want to. Yeah. I think I probably should, but I’m still really hungry to do more, basically. I’m not there yet. Also, with my [partner] we kind of both like this at the moment. And we both accept that we both work hard and that we’re basically building a basis for the future, if you will. That kind of enables us to accept it and put it into a rational thing, like "Yeah, of course, it's the rational way of doing things – working like this". Because in our view, if we work hard now then in a couple of years, we can take it a lot easier and then have to worry less, which is a temporal thing. [...] I don't know how rational it is; maybe we're just looking for an excuse to continue this unhealthy working behaviour, but I don't know.

Ablen has recently started on the tenure track, and he is on a fast track of fulfilling the requirements before his time is up. Still, he needs to be fast, to do more, because he is “not there yet”. Slowing down seems like an unlikely option. He questions whether this behaviour is healthy because it has been continuously normalised in academia. Ablen has a personal cautionary tale in the experience of a relative who has warned him of the danger of becoming a workaholic. Ablen admits that having an uncertain future amplifies the constant pressure of needing to do more and to advance faster:

You kind of almost have to be a workaholic if you want to do well in academia. [...] Because literally the number of hours I put into my work leads to higher or better output. And that's a dangerous thing about academia. [...] I think it gets easier once you're more certain about your future; you're settled in one place, and you can kind of manage it better because you can hold constant these other things like
"Am I even going to live in this country for 10 years?" or things like that.

Dimo is one of the “inlasad” academics – hired permanently because he spent a certain amount of time on temporary contracts. His path took him from in-lasning through an unsuccessful application for lektor/associate professor to his current position as an assistant professor on a tenure track. Reaching this stage has not been easy and looking back, he recognises that his behaviour has not been the healthiest in regard to his own self or to the profession.

_Dimo: But I realised after getting my current position that all the projects I had jumped into just for the sake of building a CV...it wasn’t 3, it wasn’t 5...More like 25 things._

_Petya: Wow._

_Dimo: It was very evident that this is stress behaviour. Sort of jumping on everything and being project leader there, doing that, writing that paper, then we give these courses, then we do this there..._ 

_Petya: How did you even manage?_ 

_Dimo: Well, the problem is you don’t do anything good. But you can manage. Sometimes, when you become cynical and sort of filling a CV, you can be a project leader, you don’t need to do well. So, I jumped, I said yes to be a project leader, for example, for a project I knew would be impossible for me to lead [...]. So, I knew this was doomed from the project leader perspective and it was frustrating, but it was a good line in the CV, and I knew that would help me, so that was... “Ok, fine, I’ll do this”. So now, today I would say no to that project._

_[...]

_The problem is you don’t do things well. You do a lot of things ok._

He admits that he has been cynical quite often and now asks “what’s in it for me?” before deciding how much effort to put into certain activities. 

_Similar “stress behaviour” was recounted by Iglika, Tsvetomira, Tamara and many other TAWs who work through long nights and weekends on a regular basis. The prospect of having no job in the near future, the unknown requirements by unknown or even known institutions who will be evaluating their work pushes the temporary academic workers into doing more things that they wish or can handle in a good manner (in Dimo’s words) or even forces_
them into a subservient behaviour of yes-saying and being “nice” (more on that later on).

According to Dimo, the only way to have managed the “painful” period of temporariness better would have been ‘through transparency and saying “Ok, this is what we expect of you”’.

This intensification and acceleration, or stress behaviour, in the words of the interviewees, is also prompted by the inability to control the timing of the processes on which TAWs depend. Ablen considers himself lucky to have gotten to where he is now – on a tenure track position because he got an R&R right before the deadline for the position. He says he would not have applied had he not gotten the R&R. He concludes, ‘You have to have everything going at exactly the right timing’.

The number of PhD students increases continuously, while the same is not true for tenure positions. The gap is widening; the competition is intensifying, and there is absolutely no certainty about when a new tenure position might come on the market. Thus, temporary academics feel that they need to advance as fast as possible in case a position within their field is announcement. Dimo explains:

But it’s always having this slight worry. It’s a strange thing to be 35, highly educated and not knowing for sure that you will have a job. You need to be lucky as a new PhD also; so, you need a position to come out that fits your profile. And even if you’re the most competent person in the world with the best CV you could potentially have, if the position is never announced, you can never get it. [...] It was always a worry because you didn’t know... You knew if you want to make an academic career you needed one of those positions, but you never knew when it would come.

This inability to know not only if something will happen (getting a publication in the pipeline, a position being announced, etc.), but when it might happen prompts a hastened behaviour of intensification and acceleration. TAWs have to be “ready” ASAP – as soon as possible – for an unknown future event. And they cannot rely on the quality of their work to regain some sort of feeling of control: ‘I mean, of course, you have to have a good paper to get an R&R, but it's also a lot of luck. A lot of very good papers get rejected. And you need to have everything going at the right time, otherwise you know....’. In addition to the previous statement, Ablen shares that his perfectionism is not something that has been appreciated by others, because it takes too much time to be rigorous. Again, this reflects the extensification and intensification of academic work – performed for the clock, not for the quality, necessarily. Clarity might help, adds the academic. ‘I think that having clearer timelines would be a very [emphasis] big improvement. Knowing that if I submit now, in two or three months I will have an answer and not this constant uncertainty of when things...'}
will come because then you cannot plan things properly’. What else might help reduce the strain of uncertainty? A permanent job – ‘the certainty of really [emphasis] not having to worry about getting too many publications or not enough’. In the next section, I will speak more about the extensification of academic work – the external rhythm that TAWs often need to address.

Following an external rhythm

When I enter Rosa’s office, the first thing that catches my attention is her white board. It is full of dates and deadlines for different funding opportunities. Rosa’s fixed-term postdoc position ends in about 6 months and that white board with deadlines has become her priority. Bojourea, who is another foreign female academic in a research position with external funding, shares in words what I see on Rosa’s whiteboard: the ticking clock of time:

_It is possible that you apply for five things and then don’t get any funding, somehow. Then you have to wait for another year or so to apply for more funding. And then you kind of try to push on with teaching, try to find small teaching jobs and things like that. Luckily, it didn’t really go very long for me, that sort of without-funding period. But may have it after this two-years’ funding because... you have two years funding and then, you know, after one year of that funding... Because it takes a year to hear from those, and you really have to think about the next project and apply for new things. Then you have one year gap between them if there are no other projects that you can get involved in. So that’s something for me to live with._

Bojourea lives with this external rhythm of applications and ending time and shares that the minute she starts her two-year project, she starts thinking of the next application, because the clock is ticking. Not having security for her near and/or far future means exploring any and every possibility for future employment or external funding. This “exploration”, however, is laborious and time-consuming, and it breaks down the natural thinking patterns and work rhythms of the individual.

Biser is another researcher at a research institute, and he shares a very similar experience of what he calls ‘the headspace of contingency’. Biser does not talk about the multiple funding opportunities he might explore, and I have not seen his white board. What he likes to point out is the break in his working and thinking patterns that he experiences because of these ending contracts:
It takes a long time to even recover your thinking pattern. So, when you're in the last six months of not knowing where you'll be in a year – that’s really detrimental to your productivity and your ability to motivate and think. And then, it doesn't automatically come back the day that it is all solved. You need to build up the momentum again and sort of free your mind of the stress of that. So, it leaves some kind of scar when you have that contingency. [...] It’s like a mental block or something like that.

Delyan, who is on a tenure track, also testifies to the importance of a “free mind” – an opportunity to follow your own rhythm without breaks from external factors: ‘I also like to have an empty schedule. So, if I have a whole week with absolutely nothing, my mind would be free, and so I can fully focus on my research. So that’s something I enjoy – to have a free schedule’.

All of that comes on top of the uncertain timeframes regarding the activity that, as mentioned above, is believed to be important for finding employment in academia – publishing. The publication process is seen as unpredictable, and academics do not feel in control – not only because of the end result but also because of the timeframe. Margarita explains:

It’s super risky because you don’t have time, right? So, in a way, you invest in one idea. If it works out, it’s great, but it might as well not work out. So, it’s a big risk which you don’t have much control over, because you don’t know what the result is going to be.

The rhythm of academic work can, of course, be broken from multiplicity of other tasks and those are what Delyan above refers to – outreach, collegial obligations and administration. For the academics with temporary contracts, however, securing a job in the future comes on top of all this and intensifies the moments of interruption. The deadlines for applications for positions and funding come to the forefront with urgency and demand for all other work to become secondary. The end of the contract can overpower all else. Whatever they do or wish to be doing at this moment of time – writing a paper, developing an idea, starting up a new collaboration – all of that must become secondary. The primary concern? – Looking for a way to prolong their time in academia. And then, maybe, they can continue working on what they were working on before. But as Biser explained, it is not even that simple. The disruption has occurred and even if they manage to get themselves some more months or years on the job, recovering their thinking and working pattern occupies some of that time. Sometimes, they cannot even devote that time to recover if the new funding or position is rather short-term. Like Boujura explained, most of the processes in academia, including applications for funding and positions, are rather laborious and might take years from call to decision.
Membership

Insiders and outsiders

The academic system is quite complicated, and as it has become clear from previous accounts – could be controversial and difficult to navigate. Even if there are signals that HEIs and state institutions strive for transparency and equality, there are many ways to get ahead by alternative means, according to the participants. One such strategy is what Varban calls “entrenchment”: ‘I’ve been told, and I knew that it’s more strategic to move some place where you know everyone or stay at an institution where you did your PhD. Because you’ll be able to sort of entrench yourself somehow’. He shares an anecdote about a recent position – with very specific and detailed requirements and an extremely short deadline, where there was only one candidate that applied, and everyone was quite certain the position was written for them. Apart from the controversial practice of writing position requirements tailored for a specific person, other types of help that are arbitrarily offered to some and not to others could be providing scholars with diverse teaching opportunities or including their name in a funding application (successful funding applications are a big plus on ECA’s CV). Dimo is adamant that these latter practices are all fine, however, not when they are available to a selected few: ‘That absolutely happens, and there’s nothing bad in that unless it... It’s only bad when it doesn’t help everyone. So, if one PhD is selected in the department and everybody knows that’s the golden goose’. He himself admits to being “fed” projects and opportunities to build up his CV and says those, of course, could have been offered to other people. The reason he sees is that he was good at networking (on top of being seen as a competent professional):

*I’ve received a lot of support here and basically throughout my whole career. I had people helping me. I’m pretty good at networking and seeing what needs to be done and... So, I think, everywhere I have gone, I’ve been considered a good employee. When we talked earlier about grooming... all the things I did, these were projects that were also being fed to me through my surrounding because they knew I needed the CV, and they knew I would do a good job. And that could, of course, [have] been fed to other people. Same thing with supervision of PhDs – they involved me in that. So, in that way, it works and there is loyalty that’s built up and you’re being informally given the ability to build a good CV so that you can then apply for this position. But in my case, it was a lot of networking and being open to tasks and a bit of structure.*
“Entrenchment”, as Dimo calls it, is another controversial issue within academia, which is not unequivocally good or bad. With the increasing importance of mobility as a policy and goal in the field of higher education, many HEIs continuously implement policies of not offering jobs to their recent graduates and do not wish to have them “hanging around” doing odd tasks with the hope that something more will come about. For the recent graduates, however, that HEI is often the only academic environment they know of, and it gives them some sort of structure and security to try and hold on to if they have nothing else lined up. Bojoura explains:

But for me it was that point: “OK, will I be able to stay in academia or not?” that I faced. It wasn't given that I will get something. [...] I was like whatever it takes – I will write applications; how many doesn't matter... Meanwhile, actually that was a good coincidence that I got involved in teaching, also, here at [HEI]. So that also kept me kind of in the mood, because I think, for me, I was kind of worried about that. You finish your PhD and then you suddenly don't have a desk, you don't have the email account, and then you are totally, you know, out. And what are you going to do? It's very difficult to get in afterwards. Once you're out, it's just difficult to get back in actually. So that was the good thing that I also started teaching and I started writing applications.

For Bojoura, what little opportunities she had to “entrench” herself a little bit longer meant having the time to take a breath, look around, and start figuring out what she can do to stay in academia – something she desired but had not started working on before she finished her degree. Bojoura did not have the foresight that she needs to start working on her next steps early on. According to some of the interviewees already at the beginning of the PhD, one needs to build a strategy if they are to build a career in academia. But even the knowledge that one needs to do this and, moreover, the knowledge of what that strategy might look like is complicated and controversial and is, in itself, a strategic advantage. The help you get on the way can be crucial, explains Dimo, and presents it as another insider/outsider event:

You can get varying amounts of help. Everybody gets supervision to defend their thesis, but I absolutely think there are those that are groomed for faculty positions early on, so they don’t just do their PhD, they make sure that they have some of the qualifications necessary that the supervisors know that they will need to win the assistant professorship, which will be announced. So, the race is rigged a little bit.
Many other interviewees also state that support – from your supervisors as a PhD or from your network in the in-between stage, is crucial for career development. Knowing what to do and making strategic decisions, according to them, is difficult and complicated and having a guiding support might make all the difference. Ablen states that for him, the number one factor is the strategic advice given to him in the early stages of his PhD: ‘I always credit my supervisors for helping me so much with getting everything right’. Avgust shares that he ‘learned to participate in this publication game’ already as a PhD under the guidance of his supervisors. Bilyana states that she does not ‘rely so much on others or the system’ for help but having some sort of guidance or mentorship from senior faculty would have been beneficial. She also says that she is ‘fortunate to end up in good collaborations and good projects’ but others might not have the same luck as her – ‘I feel like we deserve it. Even if I can manage, there are some who might benefit from getting support’.

Many interviewees, coming from abroad, admit that as foreigners, it took them a while to get to know the Swedish system and to be able to recognise opportunities and plan for them. Kalina describes how one cannot relax and think that things are ok, because a moment will come when they realise things are not ok, but then the opportunities will be gone. This mode of operation becomes double the burden in an unknown system:

> Trying to understand the academic system in every country is extremely time consuming. It's not straightforward. So, you have to have some good motivation. Because otherwise if you think "OK" and then at the end of the next year here, there are no more grants; there's no opportunities, then... You know...

Rosa says she was lucky to have mentors who introduced her to the system and helped her have a strategy. Neven, who is Swedish, says that it is especially difficult for outsiders to learn how things work: ‘Because in my eyes, the system is rigged and this makes it really difficult for foreign students to get into the system’. In his opinion, outsiders are defined not only by nationality but also by class, as he sees the Swedish academic system as a place still inhabited by the upper and upper middle class.

The issues of who is seen as an insider and who – as an outsider, can be important not only in regard to what doors are being open and what opportunities and advice given, but also relating to what space in the organisation one is made to believe they have the right to occupy. I continue below.
Organisational citizenship

Many of the interviewees expressed the experience of being seen as less important members of their HEIs because of their temporary position and uncertainty about their future within the institution. Instead of being treated according to the work they do, they feel like it is the temporariness of their positions defining their value as members. Some of the concerns mentioned include the inability to express opinions and partake in decision-making processes, lack of access to career development opportunities, and being deprived of symbolic power – not having a title, an office, or an email.

_Petya: Do you feel you are part of the organisation – you have a voice, you can change things, or you can give your opinion?_

_Zlatko: No, no... No, if you are temporary, you’re really temporary. Your decisions are really temporary. Yeah [laughing]. So, if you’re temporary, I think you’re really temporary. You’re just there to teach, work your butt off and that’s all. [laughing]_

Zlatko is a foreigner on a temporary teaching contract, and he believes that he is seen as just a “temp” without any rights to have an impact on the future of the institution because his future in the institution is questionable at best. Directly comparing permanent employees to temporary employees like him, Trendafil – another foreigner on a temporary teaching contract explains that he sees this tension as an uneven power dynamics: ‘Those with the permanent contracts, they are more powerful than... [those with temporary contracts]. Not because of the capability, but because of the type of their contract. A permanent position gives access to many, many things’. Trendafil finds that his rights to organisational citizenship – access to opportunities and decision-making is defined not by his academic capacity but by the length of his contract. That, according to him, is not only discouraging as an experience of being seen as an outsider, but it further compromises his chances of building a stronger portfolio which could help him get a permanent position. The example of the “many, many things” he did not have access to included being a programme director – an avenue he wanted to pursue but did not have an opportunity because of his temporariness. In another institution, Tamara, a foreigner on research funding in a research institute, who is also teaching at the adjacent university, shares that she cannot even get an appropriate title to use in communication with students, which creates awkwardness and challenges her status as a teacher and a colleague: ‘So, for me, it’s more of a survival. You want to be fair, treat people fairly. Then, if you do so many things for the school... Like with me – I’m teaching a lot, then I should have at least a title.'
It’s just logical. You can have the same conditions but at least to show the students, to give me some legitimacy’.

Tamara and a few other temporary academic workers have shared how they have been left without titles, physical office space, and virtual office space. Their work is still contributing to the HEI’s development, however. They are there to work their butts off, as Zlatko said, but who is doing all that work does not seem to matter. In a way, they are just another body at work, but with the individual removed from the body – their temporary positions and uncertain future within the HEI have been translated into an unimportant disembodying experience.

Challenges to membership and citizenship differ widely across the board – academics on tenure track typically feel that they are more often seen and recognised as “proper” members of that institution than their colleagues on one or two year teaching or research positions. This could be interpreted not only on the basis of the longer period of the tenure track, but also on the basis of the competitiveness of the selection for tenure track positions. Reneta has done a PhD and a postdoc and is now on a tenure track in the same HEI. For her, the tenure track seems like a permanent contract, and it means that she is now “official”. She has been seen and recognised as a member of the community: ‘Yeah, it’s like in a junior way that you start having a position in university. Before that it was always like you’re a PhD or postdoc, but then I officially became a lecturer here or researcher here. So, it’s good, yeah, I really like it’.

Tsvetomira, however, describes a disembodying experience at the start of her tenure track:

No, so it was very strange. When I began, everyone's like "Yeah, yeah, you are beginning now. Who are you?" And I was like, "Okay, so yeah, I'll just be here and... teach, I suppose". [laughter]. But it makes you feel like no one... They need me because there is a classroom with students in it, and there should be a teacher there and someone has to stand there and talk to them. But me in particular... no one cares. So, it’s a very strange way to start a job, and it doesn't do wonders for your feeling at home.

Tsvetomira confesses that she feels like she is just another body in the organisation. Iglika, also on tenure track, shares with disappointment how she brought some ideas and propositions about new teaching courses, topics, and collaborations to the department, but they were simply dismissed. ‘My opinion doesn’t mean a thing’, she says and adds that she hopes it will change in the future.

In the words of Ablen, also on tenure track, one can recognise this disembodiment:
Yeah, we have postdocs here, but they're not... I don't feel that they... They don't have like a timeline usually. They just work as postdocs; they don't have any goals tied to having the job. But I don't know if the postdocs are affiliated; it's a very complex system. They have affiliated researchers, and then some of them are postdocs and some of them are not. So, we don't have many people where it clearly says that they are postdocs on their profile. [...] I still don't know what they are, if they are like on the same level or lower or higher than me. I just don't know.

This is not personal. Ablen is not the one disregarding nameless people; he is actually troubled by his lack of knowledge about the positions and conditions of his fellow academics. It is the HEI who has given them a vague “affiliation” or no title at all and has put them behind a smokescreen with little importance given to them as members of the HEI.

Organisational citizenship and membership can also be challenged in the opposite manner – the academic is not a stranger, but rather seen as an intruder. Silena describes how she was “too much” for the HEI, where she was a temporary lecturer. She was engaged with the organisation and the students, but that was not appreciated; it was not her place to be so engaged:

Why I say that I'm over-engaged is because those who are like me, like precarious contracts – they never showed up or came to the office very often. And the fact, the very strange fact is that one guy who was working like this – he never showed up, I mean, he was never there for the fika or stuff like that, and then he got the position. And I, who was very engaged and trying to do a lot of stuff... Perhaps, they thought "Oh, she's too much". I don't know.

Organisational citizenship and membership can be challenged both externally and internally, but they are, in fact, reinforcing each other. The uncertainty of the future membership puts off the efforts to become a fully immersed member in the present. Academics put off a lot of long-term or time-consuming personal and professional decisions because of future insecurity. For example, doing services for the benefit of the organisation, which are not transferable or “evaluable”, or creating collaborations. Temporary hires would often see no commitment from the HEI and have few incentives to play a more substantial role. They are refused a voice, but they themselves might also feel disengaged.

Another major implication of temporariness is the way it challenges and engenders specific behavioural response. The academics shared their oppressive need to be subservient, to say yes, to present themselves as nice and non-problematic people, because of the possibility that the person in front of them
might be a person they will need in the future to get another gig. Neven explains:

*If you have a permanent position, you have a really strong position in Sweden – the Swedish labour market. If you have a temporary position, next time your contract is getting renewed, it won’t get renewed if you’re troublesome. So, you can’t say things... Like you can’t criticise your workplace; you can’t be open. And that’s something I really learned.*

Tsvetomira’s words have a similar ring:

*And always, whenever someone else asked, I was like "Yes, I can do that". Because you never know – if you say "no" and then the next time you need it, they will ask someone else. So, you always have to be like, "Yeah, sure I can do that. I can teach that. I can... I will be there. I will be there" – you know, "No problem". And also, always sort of be like, "I'm very unproblematic! Work with me! There's never any problem with me". [...] So, in the end I felt like a boy scout, like "always ready" – "I can! I'm unproblematic and always happy!" And this sort of wears you down.*

Tsvetomira is out of the woods. She is on a tenure track now and is quite certain that she will get tenured soon, but she can still remember a time when she would sit at night thinking ‘*Oh, how can I finish [all of] this?’* with “this” being all of the projects she said yes to because she did not want to miss out on any opportunity that would put food on her table for the next few months. “This” was also all the projects she said yes to, only to appear as the nice, friendly, and unproblematic person everyone would possibly like to work with in the future. Her temporary employment forced her into a subservient space where she felt she needed to perform as the nice, unproblematic, mellow person. Tamara has had similar experiences – being extra nice to people with grants, going to parties she did not want to go to and saying yes to things she did not believe in.

While the temporariness of the contract often presents challenges to the organisational citizenship as well as the identity of TAWs in universities where they are to be validated by permanent faculty, there is a group of academics who see their temporariness as invigorating for their academic selves. The temporariness they choose feeds their strong professional identity rather than challenge it. Those I call “professional outsiders”.

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Professional outsiders

There are many academics who think that the academic system is not quite functional as it is at the moment and dislike numerous aspects of the “system” academic. From the increasing administrative burden to the teaching workload, to department politics, and restrictions in research direction – academics find many flaws in a complicated and complex system without having a clear idea or a belief that they have the power to change things. Some TAWs perceive their positions as independent from the system; hence, working in research institutes as postdocs or at universities with their own research funding, they prefer to see the stress of the temporary contract as a trade-off to freedom.

Many of the participants from research institutes talked about freedom and autonomy. ‘I’m interested in the world, and I want to understand things; in order to do that, I need to be an academic with research freedom’, says Biser. Those researchers see themselves as outsiders from the system, but the system is not desirable to them. In some way, they feel that they are more authentic academic professionals when they are out of that system, which they see as oppressive and problematic. Having a critical perspective of the system, they embrace their non-permanent employment as a shield from the oppressive nature of a permanent job within the system. Varban states:

So, job security doesn’t exist. In that sense, it’s better... [...] Academia, in my view, you only get so much fun as you need to make it your own fun. You need to make it fun for yourself. So, there’s the positive aspect of all this insecurity, which is that you have greater freedom. Of course, it’s stressful but you need to find for yourself...

Varban imagines that if he was to get a permanent position, he would still need to go through funding applications all the time if he is to do the things he enjoys research-wise. Teaching will also be an increasing part of his job and he says that even though he does not dislike it, he is ‘not in it for the teaching’. What he dislikes are department politics or administrative duties. He shares stories about people who get complacent once they have tenure and ‘don’t do anything interesting anymore’. He says he will not go to extremes and work on multiple projects for 10% or short-term, that he will stay as long as he can get long-term funding, which is more manageable in terms of insecurity, but he also does not want to “play it safe”. He concludes: ‘So what I do is just apply for my own funding, so I don’t have to bother’.

Srebrin is another scholar who says that he does not even consider full-time academia because he would be restricted in what he can do and will have to follow all rules and steer his work according to rankings and journal lists. Similarly, Yavor, who is an affiliated researcher, has never applied for a
permanent position because he is not worried that he might be ‘out of salary’ but he is worried about his ‘degrees of freedom’:

I’m not worried that I would be without a salary. I’m not worried at all. I can always find work. Yeah, the degrees of freedom are more important. I can, for example, say no to certain educational and administrative stuff that if you, for example, are employed, it’s much harder to do that. You need to accept certain things and do certain things... [...] So it’s more freedom, but it’s less security. [Laughter] So, it’s actually good, I think, in a sense.

Yavor concludes that academia is ‘a really strong profession’ and what that means for him is that ‘as a professional, you can decide for yourself’.

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Belonging, voice, space, citizenship, identity, roles – the many issues addressed above come into play with the temporariness of academics. For some, the temporariness of a contract is an invisible barrier to the professional space and community of their HEIs. To others, it is a sign of academic freedom. Some are disengaged, others are disembodied, and yet some others are seen as too much. There is not just one way that temporariness of employment is experienced in the context of professional membership. Something that has critically become known is that the experience is not always a matter of objective factors or meritocracy. Many of the interviewees hinted at questions of privilege and unfair gains. I will discuss this more in the analysis, but it will also be a topic in the next section, where I present the personal costs of temporariness.
Personal

There are some personal circumstances that prompt different experiences of temporariness. Those circumstances might include family demographics, financial means, individual geographic preferences and attitudes towards mobility. Avgust, for example, shared that he would not even consider short-term positions, either a postdoc or a lectureship, because of his growing family. He had set up his own deadline for finding a tenure track position, which he sees as having less insecurity; otherwise, he would have exited the field. There was no other option for him: 'There’s quite a lot of uncertainty attached to academic careers when you don't get a position. [...] I said, "I don't want to have a postdoc position and then uncertainty at prolonged temporary positions”’.

Zlatko, in contrast, does not believe he can or wants to start a family before finding some sort of stability and permanence. Zlatko shares that he is reluctant to start a family or even a relationship because he does not know if he will be in this city or this country in a few months. The lack of financial stability also contributes to his reluctance. He is a foreigner, and he has no other strong ties to Sweden. He has internalised his employment temporariness and is putting every decision, even personal ones, on hold. He is just waiting:

Because when we work in academia, we’re still humans. We have plans to get married; we have plans to have a family; we have plans to be like the rest. For me, being in a tight spot for job security for 3-4 years, that’s a big part of my life. [...] So, I’m just waiting. I’m in a transition period, you know... And when you have to wait one year, two years, three years... it sort of becomes part of you. It has become part of my life that I have to continually keep waiting, waiting. [...] Well, for me, actually I wouldn’t mind staying in Sweden. But I would like to have job security. This means a permanent position in my field. And giving me conditions that others have. I’m not asking for something more...[laughing]...just the idea that you have a permanent position. And you can go to the bank and ask for a mortgage for a house. You feel alive again. That alone makes you feel you are part of society.

Zlatko also thinks it is normal that he has to work more in order to be accepted, because he is a foreigner. He says he will never use that as an excuse for the fact that he cannot get permanent employment ‘because, of course, as a person who is not from this country, I have to work 50 times more than a normal Swede. For me to be accepted, for me to be legitimised…’.

Rosa confesses that it is especially hard for women to be academics in uncertain employment, because being female could be brought into consideration with every new job application and because the profession is still male dominated. Both Zlatko and Rosa believe they are in a fair, good system, and
both believe so because they have seen worse. ‘But I would say, compared to [another country], where I was, it’s much better. Yeah, even if people don’t want to see you here, they won’t show it. Which is ok’, says Rosa.

Trendafil is also a foreigner and the sole income-earner in his family. The whole family recently immigrated to Sweden and are dependent on him.

All depends on me, yes. This is also one of the most challenging things when you have a temporary job and when you have a family and you have only one source of income, which is this temporary job. This also makes you sometimes stressed because it’s not easy to... [...] Sometimes you have to think about ok, should I open my own business, should I go outside academia...this is one of the things that comes to my mind sometimes. [...] So, all these investments, let’s say, of time, effort, travelling, are in order to be in academia, in order to build my career as a researcher and a scholar. So, it’s not easy, my feeling, my emotion is even... To leave academia and work full time in private companies just for the income? No, my passion is to be in academia. At the same time, it’s also important to live a comfortable life, especially when you don’t have another source of income. So, this is also one of the things that I’m always thinking. What business ideas should I create? I always think about it.

Trendafil’s plan is to start a business, to create a job so he can keep his job. His plan is to finance his passion for being a scholar and provide some security for his family by engaging in business in his spare time. Neven, who has a variety of short-term contracts behind him, has already realised this plan:

Neven: I have my own company on the side and so on. [...] 

Petya: So, you have another income then?

Neven: Yes. Yeah, I make almost as much as I make in my normal job from my other...

Petya: Has that helped in dealing with this uncertainty?

Neven: In one way... I mean, I get money. But in another way, it makes it tougher because working at the university, you work at least 60 hours a week, maybe 80. And doing [extra work] on top of that means that a normal working week for me is 80-100 hours. That’s normal for me. So, that’s tough.

Petya: Yeah. So, how do you manage to keep a balance in your personal life?
Neven: I don't have a balance. [laughing] And I don't have a family.

Financial insecurity is something that Bojoua also points out. But it is just a signal of a larger problem area stemming from her temporary contract – the inability to plan, the feeling of dependency, of being “useless” on your own:

I think it's not an easy life. For anyone, I think. One thing is, of course, security. Not knowing that you will get something or not get something. And also, for your living conditions. I mean, for example, if you want to buy a flat, they don't give you mortgage because you have this two years funding... I mean, you have to secure it with your partner. By yourself, you are not a reliable income source, basically. [laughter] [...] I am useless by myself...

Yavor, on the other side, says that he prefers having the “freedom” to say no to teaching, administrative duties, and all extra activities that he thinks come with a permanent position, because of his family: ‘Not when it comes to money. I think we have a good situation, so that’s not... But it’s more like the other side that I want to have time for my family; they come first. So, I see many people in this profession that sort of work all the time and often they’re divorced. [Laughter] So, yeah... It’s just a choice...’

Language learning is another interesting area where one sees the manifestation of temporariness. Rosa, Nia and Kalina all teach in English and say that that definitely decreases their options. ‘Because in Sweden, there are not so many universities. And among the universities that hire scholars who teach in English, there are even fewer, right?’, says Nia. Viola hints that one might be seen as inconvenient:

And, maybe yes, it is easier, I think, if you are Swedish because it's easy for people to... you know, “OK, he knows everything, the language...” so, if you’re putting him up for teaching, it's easy for him to read all the rule books and things like that. But for us, you know, some explanation [is needed], and they have to switch to English and things like that.

Rosa admits that not knowing Swedish is a barrier, and Iglika says that she worries that her not speaking Swedish is bothering her colleagues at work. Their learning opportunities, however, have been bound by their temporary status. Kalina explains:
I realise that I should learn Swedish to be completely part of this world system. So, my thing was that I arrived here knowing that I had a two-year contract and, that's it. And so, I was like “Ok, if I'm staying for two years, I'm not gonna spend two years to try to learn a language if I'm going away then”.

Learning Swedish can be of importance for Kalina’s ability to get another position in the future or to have full access to organisational developmental opportunities or to practise her organisational membership in different committees, etcetera. Of course, learning a language is a huge undertaking which requires time and mental capacity, which Kalina needs to redirect from her present job and from securing a future job. Moreover, she has no idea whether in 2 years she would need to relocate again and what language she might then need to learn. A similar sentiment is expressed by Delyan, who is on a tenure track with more “promising” prospects of staying in the country or at least the temporal distance to his end of contract is years longer than Kalina’s. Still, he says:

I'm gonna be shameless and say I don’t intend to learn Swedish, because I’m very bad at languages. It’s too costly and everyone speaks perfect English here, so I really don’t need to. In terms of sociality, it’s costly... [...] I made, I think, the conscious decision not to try to integrate too much in the Swedish community because it just looks too long and a tedious process. I’m not even sure I’m gonna be here in 5 years, so... What the hell...

Other personal factors that can have an impact on how TAWs experience temporariness could be having an extra passive or active income, financial support from a partner or other family, desire to relocate, etc. There is no clear conclusion that can be drawn from the empirical material, as I have not explicitly investigated such personal contingencies. For example, having a family could mean looking for a permanent position at every cost, but it could also mean having financial support from a partner, allowing the TAW to explore temporary options. Further investigation into these personal contingencies might be an avenue for future research.

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In the pages above, you met the temporary academic workers and read about how they experience their work in the context of their temporary contracts. The narrative was divided into four categories, delineating the experience of relationship with, and view on their output and tasks; the pace and rhythm of
work; the questions of membership and belonging, as well as the personal contingencies that come into play. Some of the major points suggested an increased focus on publishable and recognisable topics, diverted attention from teaching and third-mission activities, while simultaneously needing to do other tasks in relation to securing future employment, such as networking and applications. The pace of work is perceived as continuously increasing, and the rhythm is often broken by those extra activities, external calls, and job and funding applications. The professional identity and membership of the temporary academics are often challenged because of their temporariness within the HEIs. The TAWs themselves experience difficulties devoting fully to their current environment because of the unknowable future and because of the challenges to their “insiderness”. Many accounts point to the importance of personal contingencies in the way TAWs experience all of the above. Critical issues of gender, foreignness and class also play a role.

Some of the experiences and processes described above have been observed by other authors in academia in general and might be valid for tenured faculty as well (for example, feeling pressured to choose to work on “fashionable” topics because it is easier to publish and might bring about faster career progression and more prestige or the urge to have a “nice academic” persona). As mentioned before, there are processes in academia – the processes often called academic capitalism, which bring tensions and uncertainties for a broad range of academics. My goal is not to compare or contrast the experiences of tenured versus non-tenured academics. What I presented here were the lived experiences of temporariness of the temporary academic worker. Temporariness, as I hope became visible on the pages above, can often be experienced as insecurity. Now, I will move on to discuss that relationship – how the experiences of temporariness translate into insecurity and how TAWs act on those experiences.
Job field insecurity

On the previous pages, you read about the different experiences and views of the temporary academic workers. It has become obvious that those are sometimes contradictory, which makes an already complex system increasingly hard to comprehend and navigate. The interpretations and understandings of the academic system expressed by the interviewees are also sometimes confusing and contradictory, which is, in itself, an account of the complexity and “unknowability” of the system – another factor contributing to insecurity. In this chapter, I will discuss what we learned from the experiences presented so far and focus on some points of interest by bringing in the concepts that were presented in the chapter on the theoretical perspectives of insecurity. In the analysis, I will focus on the experiences of temporariness that speak to insecurity, which does not mean that temporariness always equals insecurity. My goal here is to draw out the critical implications of working as a temporary academic and to discuss when and how temporariness becomes insecurity – when it is experienced as insecurity, as well as the possibilities for different responses and orientations.

Early on, I made the suggestion that the traditional understanding of job insecurity might not be ideal for the investigation of the lived experiences of insecurity in the context of temporary and alternative forms of employment, more so in academia. In their work on insecurity in academia, Fochler and Sigl (2018), for example, refer to the concern of having a job in academia in the future as “social uncertainty”, instead of job insecurity. The shared understanding of the concept of job insecurity is that of a threatened continuation of the job (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Vander Elst, De Witte and De Cuyper, 2014; De Cuyper et al., 2018). It is often assumed that applying job insecurity to temporary employment is not viable because the end of the contract, i.e. the loss of the job, is “part of the deal” (De Cuyper et al., 2018, p.174). In academia, however, it could be argued the “job” is not equivalent to a contract with a particular HEI. The job that the participants in this research attested to having is being an academic and building a professional career in the field. The temporariness of their contracts signified a possible involuntary exit from the professional field and that often translated into different subjectivities and an increased attention to the future, which I refer to as job field insecurity. Job field insecurity is the concern of not finding another appointment and involuntarily exiting the field. It has been captured in previous research on temporary academic employment by Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003)
who describe fixed-term contracts as a combination of worry about the uncertain future and the finishing time. Job field insecurity is fuelled by matters of professional identity and professional insecurity, previous investments in career development and change, personal contingencies (financial and safety networks), belief systems and questions of privilege, and images and views on the profession. I will focus on those issues below in an analysis interwoven with case vignettes of different responses to the issues at hand. The analysis will offer alternative interpretations of the relationship between the issues mentioned above in a mixed writing method – engaging the empirical material with theoretical interpretations in a narrative presentation. That relationship is never one-sided. For example, drawing on a strong professional identity might mean a rejection of the subjectivities of insecurity and a focus on the discretionary work of the academic. But it could also mean conforming to insecurity, because of a sacrificial ethos permeating academia.

The analysis that follows is not hierarchical – I use different concepts and theoretical ideas to unpack how temporariness is experienced as insecurity and the different opportunities for making sense of, coping with, and navigating insecurity. The analysis is not strictly comparative either – in terms of non-tenured vs tenured faculty (a group which is not part of my research) or different groups of temporary academic workers. I draw some conclusions based on position, gender, foreignness and class; however, I will not offer any concrete generalisations. It has become obvious from the empirical work that there are too many complexities pertaining to the experience of temporariness, which are too fluid and complex in order for generalisations to be drawn from them in a comparative manner.

The chapter is structured around four types of insecurity that come from and fuel the experience of temporary academic work as job field insecurity. The presentation is non-hierarchical, and the order does not show importance. I start by delving into professional insecurity and how professional identity and membership are related to the lived experience of temporariness as insecurity. Then, I discuss the prospects of leaving academia, as another type of concern that feeds into job field insecurity. Following, I address precarity as a condition, encompassing personal and social uncertainties. At the end of the chapter, I will argue that some temporary academic workers experience another type of insecurity – something I call anticipatory insecurity, which brings the future into the present through a moral imperative for anticipation and preparation.
Professional insecurity

A career in academia or the aspiration for it often comes with a very strong professional identity (Henkel, 2005). Many of the participants expressed their concerns regarding not finding a successive job through the fear of losing a part of their identity – their professional selves. Grey (1998) and Fligstein (2001) argue that professionals form strong identities and typically stay in a professional field “for life”. The participants who expressed that for them, being an academic is much more than a job or a career have also often shared that they cannot even imagine doing anything else. For many, their current temporary contract is of concern, not because they would have to part with a particular HEI, but because they might not be able to find an opportunity to stay in the field.

Professional insecurity has often been conflated with job insecurity. As argued before and as visible in the empirical testaments in the previous chapter, the two can have quite different connotations and content. Perceived job insecurity (in its qualitative dimension, which resembles the definition of professional insecurity) describes the fear of a change in the conditions of the job (Hellgren, Sverke and Isaksson, 1999; Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall, 2006) and that suggests an exogenous event. Professional insecurity describes a doubt and uncertainty in one’s professional identity and the ways of the profession (Gendron and Suddaby, 2004). While such doubts can also be prompted by external events and causes, it suggests an individualised subjective experience, following an interpretation through the individual’s perception and identity work.

The temporary academic workers interviewed here expressed such feelings of ‘ambiguity, confusion, lack of confidence, and discomfort about one’s professional identity’ (ibid., p.86) in many instances. They generally originate from two challenging spheres – outsidersness (or challenges to membership) and epistemic uncertainty (or challenges to discretionay thought). Epistemic uncertainty is something inherent to academia (Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Lamont, 2009; Musselin, 2010). It can be experienced by anyone at any point of time in their career. Of course, there are still some special facets in its interaction with temporary work and that will be discussed shortly. Outsidersness, however, has deep and clearly visible roots in the temporariness of one’s employment. It is prevailing among temporary academic workers, especially the ones who are not on tenure track. I will unpack that first.
Outsiderness

There is a word in the Maori language which signifies a place where one has the right to stand. Tūrangawaewae roughly translates into a ‘place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship’ (Māori Dictionary). It is a place where you have rights to stand and to express your opinions and, more importantly, feel empowered to do so. Tūrangawaewae describes an ideal-type professional space – it encompasses citizenship, authority and support as integral parts of being a professional or in other words – being a discretionary specialist with a lifelong affiliation and a jurisdictional authority in a field governed by collegiality (Grey, 1998; Freidson, 2001; Fligstein, 2001).

From the experiences described in the previous chapter, we saw that on many occasions the temporary academic workers did not perceive the space they were currently occupying in academia as tūrangawaewae. Their ‘rights of residence and belonging’ were challenged through different actions, processes and signs. Challenges to membership are manifested in many physical symbols, such as (the lack of) titles, affiliations and office space. These serve as signs of stigmas – signs of a ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman, 1963). For example, the lack of a contract, title, or office are visible stigma signs. The TAWs themselves sometimes questioned their belonging and loyalty to a place because of the short-term relationship ahead. Kinship was shown to some and not to others.

The citizenship and authority of many of the temporary academic workers were challenged and questioned in a myriad of ways. Apart from the stigma signs, such as the lack of title or physical space, they often expressed feelings that their opinions did not matter, or they were not even given the rights to express any opinions. Some of them felt invisible or disposable in the organisations because of their temporary status.

The loss of citizenship rights is, in fact, one of more well-known and discussed effects of temporary employment (Kalleberg, 2009). Moreover, non-permanent employees feel that it is ‘more difficult to voice criticism and to have their voice heard’, especially if they want to obtain permanent employment within the same organisation (Aronsson, 1999).

Not voicing criticism, saying yes, and, in general, appearing as a friendly, unproblematic, flexible, accommodating person was one of the more troubling effects of insecurity that surfaced in the interviews of this project. This type of behaviour was confessed by many temporary academic workers to be done in lieu of future insecurity and preparation for a future event – an invitation for collaboration or teaching, sharing of information, recommendation or any other type of possibility that might come about from being seen as a “nice academic”. Even when they are not hoping to get a permanent position within the specific HEI in which they are currently positioned, the TAWs feel the
need to present this particular persona in case something comes up in the future where one of their current colleagues is a decision-maker.

Not all temporary academic workers feel the need to manage this possible future. Some are anchored in the present altogether. And some, in a twisted way, reject not insecurity itself but this special demand on themselves – to present a specific persona in order to fit in and have their professional membership recognised now or in the future. A special group that confessed to rejecting the demand to be a nice academic was some female participants. By invoking their gender identity and rejecting the notion of the “nice girl”, they managed to some extent to decrease the stress of insecurity and to invoke their sense of professional agency. Let’s have a look at how they do that in the first vignette below.

(NOT) Your productive good girl

So, I guess [now] I’m not too strict with deadlines and I learn not to be too hard on myself, in terms of being the productive good girl, you know? [laughing]

[...

And sometimes I say no, and you know that is a career suicide, but still... [laughing]

Tamara

The “productive good girl” means being nice, being available, being subservient, saying yes. Although this form of limitation is not reserved for people who identify as female, it is more problematic for them because of the value construct of the “good girl”. The expectation of women being “good girls”, or “nice girls” is a normative form of control that restricts freedom and autonomy through an imposed lady-like behaviour, which is noncontroversial and submissive (Rokeach, 1971; Fox, 1977). Fox (1977, p.805) writes: ‘This form of control over the social behavior of women is embodied in such value constructs as "good girl", "lady," or "nice girl". As a value construct, the latter term connotes chaste, gentle, gracious, ingenuous, good, clean, kind, virtuous, noncontroversial, and above suspicion and reproach’.
Silena is none of the above. She is loud, controversial, takes up space and wants her voice heard. She says:

*I'm hindered because I do experimental research, [because] I'm a woman, [because] I always open my mouth in all meetings. So, I'm kind of disturbing, I feel like. [...] I feel like I also have this leadership desire. So, I think that perhaps people feel that and [think that] I'm a little bit crazy. But I refuse to say that I am the problem!*

Fotaki and Harding (2018, p.35) argue that ‘because women are associated with the traits that are seen as being ‘out of place’ in organizations, a version of sanitized masculinity continues to be the prevalent norm’. The “femininity” of showing emotions is portrayed as inferior to the “masculinity” of being stable, detached and unemotional (ibid.). Silena is twice “out of place” – she is a temp, and she is an emotions-exhibiting woman. She shows care, she devotes time to engage with people in the corridors, she attends meetings that she is not required to attend, and she voices opinions and concerns about the organisation. And that, according to her, makes her seem “a little bit crazy” in the eyes of her colleagues. After all, she is just a temporary female lecturer!

Fotaki and Harding (2018) draw on previous studies, highlighting how organisational language constitutes women as “problems” and as “intruders’ into male space (Calás and Smircich, 1991, 1992; Gherardi, 1995; Czarniawska, 2006) and go further by showing how women themselves use this language (because there is no other...) to make sense of their experiences and to create their identities, which leads to self-blame. While this argument is well illustrated in the quote from Silena, who refers to herself as “disturbing” and “crazy” (even if from the perspective of the other), she goes a step further and states ‘*But I refuse to say that I am the problem!*’ As if partaking in Fotaki and Harding’s (2018) line of argument, she narrates her experience with an objectifying language – what the authors see as ‘female academics [...] performatively constitute themselves as “problem”’, but then she actively and reflexively rejects it:

‘*But I refuse to say that I am the problem!*’

There are more like Silena. Flora is another example of calling normative gendered spaces out and rejecting the performance expected of her:

*Flora: But some years back, my manager told me "Well, wait until you have six or seven or eight and then you apply". And I think he was being very naive.*

*Petya: Why did he say that?*
Flora: Because he thought, then you're on the safe side. Typical female evaluation kind of things. You know females have to produce 20 per cent more? But that was his take – then you are on the safe side. I'm sorry. I'm meeting basic requirements.

Sweden as a country and the Swedish academic field in particular have explicit policies directed towards equality and meritocracy. Still, the numbers and the knowledge and experiences of the interviewees show that groups that have traditionally been privileged are still enjoying some of that same privilege. Many female academics still face gender-based discrimination and prejudice. Iglika, for example, shared that her opinions and suggestions are often ignored. Wu (2021) suggests that being ignored is a big aspect of gender inequality in universities – being ignored undermines your perception of self, your professional security, your experiences. Iglika was also once told ‘How nice that women now have it so easy!’ (paraphrasing from researcher’s notes). She was qualified and went through an extensive external evaluation. In the eyes of that (male) person, she was a quota filler, and that was made known. Similarly, Flora’s whole career was negated in one sentence coming from a superior:

The person asked me to write a draft which is very common. So, I wrote a draft and said "Well, within six years, you know, professorship level...". And then this person changed that and said, "The school is very keen on promoting diversity and [Flora], being an ethnic minority and a woman, will probably be considered for professorship then". Yeah. And then, you think like "Ok. But then I...", you know, you're clear in your message and how you see me. And that's my hierarchy. So, you want to leave? Well, sometimes I feel like, you know, "What do I do here?"

But Flora sees through this message, Silena says that she is not going to see herself as the problem, and Tamara starts saying no and stops being a productive good girl.

In “The Temps’s Dream”, Stéphane Baude (1999) paints a grim picture of life of temporary workers in 90s France. Depicting jobless, voiceless, young men living in a dormitory for temps, Baude (1999, p.285) describes not only their condition but also the limits to their opportunity for emancipation:

Lucien and the other young men who find themselves in this shaky situation seem to be caught in and haunted by the condition of the temporary worker. They have no other political perspective than that of a timid reformism, with no inkling of subversion, and they seem preoccupied above all with making their situation livable and trying
to get rid of the most intolerable parts of the daily life that is their lot. Deprived of a unifying collective political language, they are in a way doomed to talk about their situation in euphemistic, psychologizing terms. Since they have no “political” understanding, their revolt against a social order that makes no room for them takes the form of a violent opposition to the “old guys” (the “fossils” in politics).

Unlike Stephanie’s Lucien, Silena, Tamara and Flora do have the political knowledge and the inkling of subversion. They have a unifying collective political language, and they manage to ‘revolt against a social order that makes no room for them’ and to raise their revolt to the high level of professionalism – revolt as a service to the profession, despite a lack of a personal gain (‘that is a career suicide, but still...’, Tamara).

These not productive, not good, girls have, in fact, more than one common political language – they reject the subservient space as women and as discretionary specialists, i.e. professionals, namely academics. Through the act of rejection of the subservient space, they re-claim their professional agency.

The constraint becomes the mobiliser. Through the act of rejection of the confined gendered subservient space, many female academics claim a disruptive anti-good-girl identity and mobilise a sense of professional agency. The gender identifier plays an important role in claiming this disruptive identity, because the disruption is seen not only as a disruption to one’s career but a disruption to the whole system, inhabiting a historical oppression and the oppressive temporality which puts their future on their shoulders and cripples their opportunity for discrecional action in the present. Being professionals for life (Grey, 1998) and women, they resort to two strong identity anchors to challenge the demands stemming from insecurity and the gendered normative construct of the “productive good girl”. And their revolt serves that future persona even if it puts their present academic self at a disadvantage.

The challenges to one’s professional membership and identity can come in different forms and can invoke different responses. Some academics have their citizenship challenged through the inability to voice opinions and concerns. Others feel stigmatised through the lack of recognition. The responses can also be multifaceted. Some feel pressured to create a specific persona in order to fit better in the present or to insure they might be seen as possible collaborators in the future. Some reject this pressure to perform – an example of which we saw in the vignette above. There is not one specific way in which
temporary academic workers respond to such pressures. For example, Tamara, whom you saw rejecting the demands to perform as the “productive good girl”, is also one of the academics who embraces her current insecurity because of the perceived higher calling of the profession. Academics deal with the insecurity prompted by their temporariness in different ways at times, and this testifies to the complexity of their experience.

Another question that I hinted at is that of who is and who is not an outsider. The temporariness of the position is the common denominator in this investigation; however, there are some other issues that come into play and those are issues of privilege and “insiderness” invoked, not by the length of contract but by belongingness in other groups. Apart from the female perspective that was previously discussed, there were a number of male interviewees that confessed to their own privilege, in terms of having supportive networks helping them to find their footing. Some interviewees mentioned issues of class – feeling like they do not fully belong because they are not from the proper side of the tracks. Many foreign participants expressed stronger challenges to their membership compared to Swedish colleagues. I will come back to those critical questions later on, because they are important not only for the membership and identity, but also for the ability to withstand the pressures of insecurity. Before I move to the second issue that is paramount in the experience of professional insecurity, namely the difficulty in measuring quality in academia, I present another vignette that speaks to the issues of privilege I described above.

Do what you love and help will come

Petya: Ahm. Your advice is not strategic at all.

Orlyn: No, I’m more into the old school, I think. But still, I’m not sure I would be pursuing that type of job [tenure]. And to be honest, maybe I’m not capable of pursuing it. Instead, I focus on what I believe I do best.

Petya: Why wouldn't you be capable?
Orlyn: [...] I've done basically everything backwards or alternatively and I've done it incorrectly. So, I'm not well fit for the tenure opportunity. Instead, I try to do it another way.

Orlyn is a researcher at a research institute. He sees himself as independent from the “mainstream” academic system, but he is not independent from the profession. On the contrary, he has strong ties to the profession and does not see himself as less of an academic because he is not “fit for the tenure opportunity” – in his own words. He understands that working the way he does might not be evaluated highly if he is to apply for a permanent position in a university, but that does not bother him. Insecurity, which he confirms is part of the deal when you are not tenured, is something he does not mind. In his case, this can be explained by his stable personal circumstances and his belief that he could find a job outside academia. But also, rather than giving in to the imperative of anticipating the future, he transfers that responsibility to his community: 'But then all of a sudden, maybe you don't have any money. Your colleagues here can say, 'Hey, you can come into my project for three months' and they solve it.'

He tells me that I can “blame” a colleague of his for recruiting him in the first place, and that even if he tried to change career paths at some point, he always brought him back: 'So they're still holding me, you see! They are still holding me! Although I'm not sure I wanna be here. [laughing]'.

Similar views were expressed by other researchers at research institutes, mostly by those who have been around for much longer. They might be in temporary insecure positions, but they have a strong community of like-minded people in the same boat, and they believe that they carry the responsibility for each other to a certain extent. This perception that you are a part of something bigger, you are a member, a part of the community, is an important anchor. Something or someone will take care of you, help will come, your work will be recognised – these beliefs take away the demand to be solely responsible for your future, to envision, to anticipate what might come and always be prepared.

Academics often make sense of the way the profession functions through sheer luck or different forms of dependencies, which are exacerbated in insecurity:

And like I said, you just have to be lucky, or you need to have all the right conditions if you want to make it like this. And nine out of ten PhDs in my faculty don't end up going into academia, not because they don't want to but because either there is not enough supply of positions, or they didn't get an R&R or something like that.

To become an academic, thinks Ablen, you need to hit ‘all the right conditions’.
Some call it luck: ‘So speaking of security... I feel like it’s just happy cir-
cumstances all the time that lets you survive. Yeah, I think the system is built
on that’, says Bilyana. And Avgust adds on:

*But you never know. I mean, there are so many contingencies, you
never know. [...] There are so many random factors involved, you
never know where you land.[...] But I think it's super random. So, I
think it's almost unplannable [sic]. It's a matter of good luck to quite
some degree.*

But some think that “the dice is loaded”: ‘[...] he is from Sweden, so he knows
a lot of things which I don't know just because I have not been brought up
here. So, he has always been a part of the system – he has a network, he knows
how things work, which I don't know’, explains Viola.

Having trust in your community and transferring some of the responsibility
for creating the future seems like, yet again, a question of privilege and access
to a network of opportunities. Prone to an archaic professionalism of ‘credential-
ism and exclusivity’, academia is a space where part-time employees are
excluded even if their number has been growing steadily (Bennet, 2003).
Smith (1989, p.291) observes ‘extraneous clubbiness and exhibitions of arro-
gance that add insult to injury for a considerable body of internal ‘outsiders’,
that is, people in the academy who lose in the related status wars’. Certain
contingencies become more profound when you anticipate insecurity in the
future, and the “right conditions” take something extra to anticipate and pre-
pare for. For a selected few, a community is a position of privilege. Orlyn has
been selected and groomed for a career in academia and trusting the shared
values and commonly upholding a future for every member of the community
is something that comes easily to him.

*Orlyn: I mean, this [position/scholarship] came down to me with-
out...you know.*

*Petya: So, do you have a retrospective explanation?*

*Orlyn: No, I don't. Partly... Probably structural. I'm a white man and
good at socialising, maybe.*
Epistemic (un)certainty

The unknowability of the academic field and how it measures quality plays an important part in how academics experience insecurity in relation to work and, if managed, it can also be a factor in navigating said insecurity. Working in insecurity, the temporary academic workers orient their present work towards an unknown future. They feel the need to prepare as fast as possible for multiple imagined future scrutinisers and try to fit their present work into that imagined future event. Facing insecurity, temporary academic workers often feel the need to resort to the one thing that is perceived as the “currency” of the academic system – publications in high-ranking peer-reviewed journals. Succumbing to the evaluative strength of this one type of academic activity and making it more important is a demonstration of what Power (1994, p.33) describes as audit culture – audits ‘do as much to construct definitions of quality and performance as to monitor them’. Present academic work is performed for future evaluations (Strathern, 2000). Faced with epistemic uncertainty – uncertainty about the value of their work and how that value is measured in academia (Hollin, 2017; Knorr-Cetina, 1999), academics turn to the form as something that is known. Focusing on the form of work, rather than the content, does not suggest that their work is of higher or lower quality. It suggests that what they perceive is valued is the form, and when they cannot resort to any other certainty, they might choose to resort to that one. By doing so, they also manage to bring some certainty into their future – imagining and preparing for future evaluations, applications and submissions, the academics take on the responsibility to be prepared for the future, to envision it, to imagine it and to arrive to that future in their best selves. Holding on to the one certainty they now believe to know of – the form in which they must fit their work – is a starting point around which one can start imagining a future.

The academics in fixed-term positions are incentivised to fit their practice within a quantifiable mould and focus on limited types of research and publishing strategies in the hope that those would bring them the desired results in time for the next evaluation or funding application. This encourages what is known, for example, as ‘gap-spotting research’ (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013) – finding minor gaps in the literature and “filling” them, which is a very safe strategy to stay within a well-developed research stream with established publication channels and accepted relevance. Alvesson and Sandberg (2013, p.132, see also Adler and Harzing, 2009; Lawrence, 2008; Macdonald and Kam, 2010) identify the institutionalised use of journal lists in the evaluation and assessment of academic work as one of the drivers for gap-spotting research, saying that ‘the use of such journal lists is likely to encourage researchers to concentrate on publishing articles in particular journals rather than trying to develop more original knowledge by identifying and challenging the assumptions underlying existing literature’. Given that this tendency has been
identified for all academics, it is of little surprise that TAWs express the need to stay within this practice, too. It is not only by socialisation, which Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) suggest as another reason for gap-spotting research, but also as a way to decrease the tensions stemming from working and making decisions in job field insecurity. Similarly, TAWs might turn to “salami publishing” – a term signifying academic publishing strategy where one slices up scientific results from the same study into multiple publications, instead of publishing one big work, with the objective to increase the number of their publications (Klintman, 2014; Wawer, 2019; Pfleegor, Katz and Bowers, 2019).

Not knowing whether you will have a job in the next 3 months, 6 months or even 2 years is highly problematic for academic work, because academic work differs in nature, depending on the length of the period you can plan for. For example, developing a new course or even a change in curriculum might take years while it goes through all the channels of planning and approval. Some research projects require longitudinal work and “shortening” the project span is not an option, because it then turns into a completely different project. Even if one sticks to shorter-span projects or quantitative work with readily available data sets, publishing, especially in high-ranking peer-reviewed journals, is a notoriously long and laborious process (Gabriel, 2010; Tsang and Frey, 2007).

Now, the question rises as to who would go into the risky business of new, critical, unpopular, time-consuming research and teaching programmes or starting up new collaborations, if that as a rule of thumb diminishes one’s prospects of being positively evaluated for a career progression. And who would be writing the “normal” educational books if they count for zero in evaluation? And who would be developing and putting efforts into teaching if it is “ticking the box activity”? Not many, as has become visible in the pages above. Svensson et al. (2010) point to the same issue when they discuss the need for HEIs to demonstrate excellence, which is typically done by counting publications in high-ranking journals. “[...] manifestations of excellence in publishing tend to leave little room for boundary crossing between disciplines, and it is quite averse to creative connections’, say the authors (ibid., p.2). Klintman (2014) points to the same effects of the blind faith in a number of publications and citations as the omni powerful indicator of academic value. He is concerned with the superfluous counting in evaluations, instead of evaluation of content and quality, and the lack of interest in deep, longitudinal, holistic research projects. He also points out unfair comparison between disciplines within the humanities and social sciences when some of the disciplines have traditionally preferred the journal publication as an output and measure of evaluation (for example, economics).

My wish here is not to compare the journal publication as a form of academic output to other forms. All forms of academic output have their advantages and disadvantages (see, for example, Eriksson-Zetterquist and
Östberg, 2014 on writing books, Klintman, 2014 on writing articles). The issue I take up is that the exclusive focus on one particular type of output in evaluations of academic work has many consequences for temporary academics. For example, one of the major problems of insecurity has been said to be the ‘culture of caution and tactical manoeuvring’ (Öquist and Benner, 2012, p.32). Caution and tactical manoeuvring sound problematic, but they can also be a strategy of survival for the academics who are buried under the responsibility for creating their own future and are looking for any way to reduce that strenuous burden. Dany and Mangematin (2004) point to job security as an organising form of academia and an absolute condition for the development of the scientific field, because it counterbalances the risk carried by specialisation and collaboration, instead of individualism and competition.

Focusing on the type of activity and output that is perceived as the currency of the profession is a way to deal with epistemic uncertainty in insecurity. That focus is often engendered from another strategy that might be employed to navigate the demands of the insecure future – trust in rules. That is, unsurprisingly, especially pronounced for the academics on tenure track. While TAWs on positions such as postdoc and temporary lecturer which do not carry the promise of a continuous future within the HEI do not expect any formal guidance regarding their career choices, tenure track holders do expect formal guidance. The academics on tenure track have more access to rules and guidelines on what is expected from them and how to proceed in order to reach the security of the tenure. When they are presented with clear requirements and trust that the process will look like what has been presented formally, TAWs express that they feel in control; they believe they are making informed decisions, and some of them even say that they do not consider themselves as being in a position of insecurity. When academics on tenure track do not trust the formal rules and processes, however, they express concerns and attitudes towards future insecurity similar to other temporary academic workers. The story of Zornitsa and Neva served as an illustration of how the lack of clarity and trust in formal rules presents the most extreme case of insecurity brought forward by the organisational configuration and processes.

The tenure track structure can be seen as an appraisal device (Fürst, 2018, Nästesjö, 2021) but only when the academics have trust in the formal rules of the HEI. Nästesjö (2021) demonstrates how, when encountered with the tension between career aspiration and market uncertainty, TAWs make use of appraisal devices in order to navigate insecurity and gain an insight about whether their work will be valuable in regard to a future evaluation. Appraisal devices, in a way, turn uncertainty into risk (Beckert, 2016), making the future more knowable and providing ‘cognitive support in their efforts to make reasonable decisions about courses of action’ (Fürst, 2018, p.390). Trust in formal rules serving as an appraisal device brings some insights over the future and reduces the demands for operating in insecurity – carrying the responsibility of imagining and creating all possible futures.
Logically, one can expect the tenure track position of assistant professor to influence the perception of job field insecurity. Not only are the time periods longer (4 to 6 years), but academics are given the chance to apply directly to promotion to permanent employment (associate professorship) at the end of it and without competition, and assistant professorships are highly competitive themselves and signal status and employability. This assumption would be correct in the common case. Many interviewees who had spent some time on other fixed-term contracts prior to the tenure track share that their perception of insecurity is different now, and they feel more secure in their future in academia. Some prospective interviewees even declined participation because they do not consider their assistant professorship a temporary position. This, however, changes drastically when there is no clarity in requirements and no trust in the HEI. The tenure track is expected to reduce the uncertainty of the future and to provide structure – if you do this and this, you can have this position in this institution without having to compete with another person again. When that structure and clarity are taken away, as was the case of Neva and Zornitsa, the possibility to know and imagine the future is also taken away, which intensifies the experience of insecurity and turns the tenure track into a ‘really unstructured and very frightening process’, as Zornitsa puts it. The title of “assistant professor” in itself does not mean job security to the temporary academic worker when they do not trust the processes or do not have clear and transparent requirements. This was also confirmed by a recent evaluation of the tenure track in Sweden done by the Young Academy of Sweden. Their report (YAS, 2020) states: ‘Clarity and transparency are vital to good career planning. If conditions for a person who starts a tenure-track position do not correspond with what has been communicated, it can result in unnecessary stress and worry, and the lecturer leaving the HEI’.

The need for clarity and structure is a major issue for temporary academic workers and can be a tool for navigating insecurity and uncertainty. However, it also brings to the surface a major tension – the inherent tension in the simultaneous desire for structure and freedom. These opposing drives are very intense for the temporary academic workers, who are affected strongly by the oppressive nature of the market, forcing them into specific fashionable type of work, while at the same time being subjected to unstructured and unclear processes within the HEIs. The tension is also palpable in the expressed views on the demands TAWs need to navigate – the perception that they need to fix their work into a specific mould and the simultaneous view that it is hard to anticipate and navigate the future evaluations and assessments.

The drive towards clarity, however, should not necessarily take the direction of formalisation and standardisation of output, careers or behavioural elements. Standardisation and formalisation have been considered as having a negative impact on a profession, because of limitations to professional autonomy (Scott, 1965), an important feature of a profession. However, standardisation and formalisation also translate into clarity and a belief in practicing
according to a shared set of values and norms. In the stories above, it became clear that the TAWs are looking for structure, transparency and clarity as a way to navigate insecurity and make decisions. But that does not mean they need to find it in a standardised and formalised environment. A way forward would need to solve this tension. Freedom and clarity do not necessarily need to be seen as opposites, because another suggestion one can take with them from this research is that the lack of clarity and rules does not necessarily mean freedom. On the contrary, it could mean control and subservience. Temporary academic workers often feel compelled to concentrate on one specific type of output. Focused on building a portfolio that will help them achieve a positive outcome in any future evaluation (for a position or funding), TAWs typically resort to working on publications in peer-reviewed high-ranking journals. The limited time they have until the next evaluation, combined with the general epistemic uncertainty in academia, often leads to focusing on the one thing that is considered as “currency” in the profession.

Similarly, and interconnected to trust in rules, trust in collegiality can serve as an appraisal device to navigate anticipatory insecurity. By transferring the responsibility of the unknown future to the collegiate body, the future becomes less uncertain for the individual, and making decisions becomes more feasible. In order to decrease the tensions stemming from the uncertainty and their career aspirations, the individuals turn uncertainty into risk by acting as if the future is not so uncertain (Beckert, 2016; Fürst, 2018). We see that it is possible for TAWs to transfer some of the responsibility for the future and make it less insecure when they believe in the collegium, believe that there are shared set of values and norms that guide it. Again, however, trust is an important element. In fact, trust is the sine qua non, not only for collegiality as an appraisal device, but for collegiality in general. In the following vignette, you will meet a few academics who choose to put their trust in the system as a way to reduce uncertainty and to navigate their insecurity.

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The invisible hand of the collegium

Rosen is an assistant professor on tenure track. He is confident in his academic identity and believes that his past actions have been true to himself – guided by his own discretionary specialisation, and are the reason for his present success:

...and every time I'd find myself doing a strategic move, I would say, "You know, I need to do research moves. So, these strategic moves
aren't gonna benefit me unless I have some research to talk about when I talk about myself.

He believes that the collegial system works and ‘the research community, and the scientific argument, is wiser than just the individual leaders’ (Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016, p.4). So, he transfers back to the profession a part of the responsibility for navigating insecurity and epistemic uncertainty:

Instead of me finding out what they want and then I'll do those things, I'm kind of doing these things and it seems to be having a positive result. So, I'm just gonna keep doing what I'm doing and maybe someone will stop me if they don't... you know, they'll say: "What? We don't like what you're doing”.

Similarly, Boril states that ‘at the end of the day, I think if you’re really a good academic it will show at some point’. He is not blind to issues within the system, such as academics jumping on fashionable topics just to build a brand or the experience of privilege within the system because of “fast-tracks” and networks; however, he still believes that the collegium eventually recognises the good work.

‘Collegiality presupposes, of course, that there are colleagues who can listen and talk to each other. Hence, trust, knowledge and a continuous dialogue based on and upholding a common set of norms for what is good science, good knowledge and the main objectives for universities are basic prerequisites for a collegial system to function’, as expressed by Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016, p.4). Insecurity puts to the test the trust in the collegial body and the “common set of norms”: ‘Then a lot of people can just become shocked at how unstable everything is. How unstable the values we have are’, says Neven. Tseno believes that there are norms that must be non-controversial and shared, such as diligence, conduct and equality. He is not convinced, however, that those are, in fact, commonly held or that they are even necessary for success:

It is ultimately a question of attention; it’s not very different from pop-culture. If you look at why Madonna is famous, that question is not super different from “Why is professor X so well-known and so famous?” I think the difference is less than people think. The similarity is about attention. [...] This is a question of what is interesting. The problem of what makes something interesting is relatively hard to define, and it’s very individual; it’s subjective.

Even if many people like Neven and Tseno question true meritocracy and the existence of shared values and standards in academia, there are some like
Rosen who choose to believe in collegiality and meritocracy because that act allows them to break down the hold of insecurity and claim their professional discretion:

*It's not gonna do me any good to just suddenly think that these people are full of shit. Right? It's just gonna make me angry. It's not gonna help my research. [...] If my research is really good, they're gonna think it's really good and if it's not good, they're gonna think it's not good. [...] I just can't devote the cognitive and emotional energy to assessing whether or not they've earned their station. It's just irrelevant. [...] I could see like maybe it's problematic, but I can't worry about that. I can't worry about everything.*

Rosen’s trust in collegiality and meritocracy does not come from a place of naïveté. It is an active choice, a strategy, and a coping mechanism. Even more so, it comes from personal observations of how insecurity can become overwhelming. Having observed how people ‘wallow in the uncertainty and the low status we have as grad students and they let that recursively become a vicious cycle for them and affect the quality of their work, the pace of their work, and their own self-confidence and their own self-concept in a way that prevents them from doing good publications’, he believes that ‘[…] some people just get really down about being an academic. There are times that are very heavy on like the ego or whatever… but you gotta, you know, find a coping mechanism and shake that off’. For Rosen and some other academics, that coping mechanism is trust in collegiality and trust in rules.

Margarita is another young academic who states that trusting the system is her active choice in how to grow in her career. She shares that she does not judge the system – it is what it is. She feels “nurtured” and supported and believes that she has a place in the organisation and the opportunity to learn and be an active member. She trusts that the HEI, the senior faculty, and the system in general are guiding her in the best possible direction: ‘I’m a believer… maybe I’m naïve, but I hope if you have a good paper, you should eventually be recognised. Maybe I’m an idealist in that, but I hope that academia should be like this. Should have this meritocratic environment. At least’. That belief has allowed her to focus on her present without worrying too much about the future or trying to anticipate it:

*To be honest, I’m just trying to enjoy it… I’m just trying to use this opportunity, because I think it is quite unique, and see how it goes. Ok, if I don’t manage to publish, it’s not gonna be like the end of my life. [...] I decided that the safest for me is not to think forward and just concentrate on the current state and, as I said, I enjoyed it so far. Because otherwise, if you start thinking about it, “ok I have to publish
Choosing to trust the professional body and the system in place is an active choice for Rosen and Margarita; it is exercising their agency. In a healthy collegium, according to Bennet (2003), members do not simply comply, they exercise agency – they create the collegium. The act of transferring some of the responsibility for the future onto the collegial body is an act of faith in the community. At the same time, the trust in the system or in the collegial body which some temporary academic workers exercise is not really an answer to the increased instrumentalism in academia. Ekman Rising, Lindgren and Packendorff (2020, p.187, in Swedish) describe instrumentalism as ‘an attitude to academic work that is based on individualism, competition, performance measurement, short-term benefit creation and formal rule management’. They claim that instrumentalism is detrimental as a governance system because it promotes a focus on individual careers and measurable output, regulation and control, and that is detrimental for the role of the university. Instead, the authors suggest a focus on academic citizenship as an alternative. Bennet (2003) also points to the “insistent individualism” as one of the main problems at the heart of academia. Individualism, he claims, glorifies self-preoccupation and promotes separation, it breaks down community ties and pits its members against each other. ‘For the insistent individualist’, he writes (ibid., p.43), ‘community is really a pseudo community, a conglomerate or aggregation of solitary egos linked to each other through instrumental relationships - relationships that in the heat of competition threaten individuality and autonomy’.

The trust some TAWs put on the system might simply be reinforcing a “pseudo community” that is based on individualism and instrumentalism. That trust, however, might also serve as a central point for creating and sustaining a healthy collegium. It can also be a naive romanticism. In any case, trusting the collegium serves as a coping mechanism, a way to decrease the strenuous demands of insecurity, and that is what the majority of temporary academic workers are focusing on, quite understandably.

The need to focus on publishing in high-ranking journals is just one facet of the experience of insecurity for temporary scholars. It is also recognised as one of the problematic issues in academia in general. Svensson et al. (2010,
p.5) point to it as a self-fulfilling method of organising and governing – ‘leading scholars publish in leading journals and leading journals only publish leading work’. They also point to the almost impossible space for resistance of early career academics – not only is complying a matter of pursuing a successful career, but even a matter of survival, the authors say (ibid.). Faced with epistemic uncertainty and insecure future, the temporary academic workers often turn to what is one of the few certainties in academia today – publications in high-ranked journals. Do they want to focus all of their professional time and effort on it? Do they believe this is the best way they can contribute? Do they think they have skills and aptitude for a different form of academic work and output? Those questions become almost irrelevant if they want to pursue the standard career path, which goes through a permanent position at a university. Some of the TAWs do not wish to pursue that standard career. Some are fine with putting aside those questions and instead trusting the system. Some of them do not put them aside but find some other coping mechanisms to alleviate the tensions from the contradicting views and demands. And some put them aside for now. This last “option” can also be seen as playing along, but it carries a time stamp: playing along until. This time stamp, which is facilitated by the temporary position of the academic, also carries the promise that things might be different in the future. I will come back to that in a subsequent section that deals with the increased focus on the future as an extreme regime of forward-living and the use of temporalities as coping mechanisms.

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To sum up, professional insecurity relates to the insecurity and doubts about one’s self-identity and the profession. Professional insecurity can be prompted by different issues, but most prominently the issues of epistemic uncertainty and outsidersness stood up in the analysis here. These issues presented challenges to the professional identity, membership and discretion of the participants. While epistemic uncertainty is inherent to the academic profession and experienced by a vast number of tenured and non-tenured faculty, the issue of outsidersness was mostly prompted by the temporariness of the contract. Knights and Clarke (2014, p.336) have previously argued that insecurity and identity can be seen as ‘conditions and consequences of one another’. The scholars explained the circular nature of that relationship: ‘insecurity tends to generate a preoccupation with stabilizing our identity yet the contingent nature of the world makes such stability unrealizable and this reinforces the very insecurity that we expect identity to dissipate’ (ibid.). In a similar circular relationship, the temporary academic workers have their professional identity challenged because of the temporariness of their contract, which, in turn,
reinforces their experiences of insecurity and makes them more prone to its subjectivities, and those experiences, again, are important for their own perceptions and the perceptions of others of their professional selves. There are academics who find a way to escape this viscous circle, even if temporarily, by invoking different mechanisms to strengthen their professional standing. All of these responses speak in a way to a possibility to contest the meaning of professionalism (Fournier, 1999). Some rely on others – and put their trust in the academic system. Some rely on community and personal network. Some use their belonging to other groups, such as female academics, in order to garner the courage to stand their ground and work in a way that they believe is proper. Some choose to believe in themselves, whatever the consequences, and that is their act of service to the profession. This last response to insecurity will be presented in the following vignette. The protagonists are TAWs who are betting on themselves as discretionary specialists and professionals.

Do what you love and hope for the best

Yasen says that academia is the perfect place for him because he’s a free spirit and likes to be autonomous. He has a 2-year postdoc position and is doing the work he loves.

I’m very much focused on my research. I hear a little bit more about the politics of academia from other people that are more senior, and some of the things obviously are not very enticing at all. But so far, my present is here so if I cannot land a proper job later on, I would be open to go into industry.

Yasen does not worry too much about the past or the future. He feels lucky to be able to stay out of politics as a young scholar and does not like to strategise. He says that everything is messy, and it is almost pointless to try and ‘bend the future to your agenda’:

It’s more like seizing the opportunity that I have right now and just take it from there. I think I’m on the right track so far, so let’s see how it goes in a couple of years.

Contrary to expectations, Yasen does not have an extensive safety net that he could fall back on. He is a foreigner, and he supports a family of four.
Nevertheless, he insists that the best thing you can do is: ‘Pursue what you really like, what you’re interested in. And take it from there’.

Yasen sees the academic system as chaotic – not impossible, but hard to navigate. The chaotic nature makes the efforts to strategise of less value, because of the unclear relationship between actions and consequences of actions. In this chaotic system, giving in and trying to strategise, bending the rules, cheating the system is, according to Yasen, pointless. By stepping out of it, he is already breaking the system down – he is not ‘playing the game’ (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016; Butler and Spoelstra, 2020).

Yasen bets on his professional self – he knows what he could do best and that, according to him, should mean this is best for the profession as well as for his career. Tseno shares that perspective. He chose an unpopular path in his PhD and was told by many people that the ‘probability of [him] actually succeeding and getting a job in academia are pretty low’. He believes that many people ‘respond more to incentives’ and choose to work on topics that are more ‘fashionable’ and ‘easier to communicate’ in order to get to tenure. But this for him is not the job: ‘I do what I think is consistent with my view, my thinking and understanding, and figuring things out even if that puts me in a worse position’. Detelin has similar views and experiences:

“That's one of the things I don't like... I don't enjoy strategising. [...] Strategising to me was just too anxious. I mean, it's tough enough to write a thesis. And it's not like I'm just doing this to push through. This is probably the rest of my professional career. So why strategise? I prefer to do things I'm finding interesting – that's kind of my logic..."

“Strategising” is a representation of insecurity – letting the future take control over the present, anticipating and planning, having the responsibility of creating a future and letting that future guide your present actions. In Detelin’s words, we recognise the danger of “strategising” – he believes that the things he does at this present time-point for his future are the things that will define his future and are not just things done to cheat the system.

Krusho is another academic who has made the active choice to focus on the things he believes are important for his growth and not his career per se. But it was not an obvious choice at first. It took him some time and some struggles to come to this realisation. He got a permanent position straight after PhD, and he was then given advice on how to navigate the system and progress quickly. He tried to follow it for some time but ‘failed horribly’. He describes the first few years he spent in that position:

“I felt that I was writing boring articles, unsuccessfully trying to publish them, and in the end, I didn’t have any desire to do research at all. Everything I was working on wasn’t intrinsically motivating, it was things that people told me would be good for my career, that I
could only write on certain types of subjects if I wanted to get published in the so-called best journals, the highly ranked journals. After two years I realised this was nonsense and a horrible way to spend your life. Professionally, I felt in a bit of a dead end. In my final year I was really trying to think what it is that I’m really interested in, maybe start from there. Instead of thinking about my career and how I can progress in terms of promotion along the academic career ladder, maybe I should just think about what I am interested in and have an opportunity to research cool things.

He managed to revert the process and rejuvenate his sense of the academic he wants to be, not in small part because of the security of his permanent position. Still, he left and exchanged the permanent position for a postdoc in another HEI. He has been working on temporary positions with his newly found conviction that he will only do things according to the idea of the academic he is and wants to be. Moreover, he concludes that the idea that you can strategically do the right things for success is unattainable because ‘the dice is loaded’ and the meritocracy of academia is a ‘myth’.

The academics who bet on themselves exhibit a form of professional security, an opposite concept to what Gendron and Sudaby (2004) explain as professional insecurity. They argue that professionals who are uncertain about their professional identity experience a source of insecurity which might be detrimental to the profession itself, because in their actions, they might undermine the jurisdictional claim of the profession. In a reverse scenario, Yasen and the other academics who put their trust in their professional discretion exhibit professional security – certainty in their professional identity which allows them to practice with autonomy and discretion and to avoid strategising and being subjected to external demands and requirements stemming from anything else than their discretionary specialisation.

These scholars are a representation of the greengrocer of Vaclav Havel’s powerful essay, who stops putting the propaganda sign on his window. In their velvet revolt, doing what you love without calculating consequences and preparing for evaluations and applications is the best fight you can put against a chaotic system and an insecure future. They can control what they do in the present, and what they do is what they love doing. They do not strategise: ‘He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game’ (Havel, 1978/2018, p.36).
The insecurity of leaving

Building a career in academia requires a lot of years of education and training. In the linear case, a person will go through a bachelor’s, master’s, and a PhD before being considered a career academic. The overwhelming majority of participants in this project have also followed these steps, and sometimes exceeded them – by having 2 master’s degrees, for example. Of course, there are adjunct, honorary or other special appointments, which do not follow these steps, but in general, it takes years of preparation to even enter academia as a profession. In the previous vignette, I discussed how sometimes academics hang around because they do not see an exit option. The difficulty of translating the academic experience into the world outside is one reason for sticking around, and I will come back to that, but another important reason is the inability to easily discard all of the years and efforts that have gone into preparing oneself to be an academic.

Economists talk about sunk costs as costs which have already been invested and cannot be recovered (Friedman et al., 2007). The sunk costs in the case of the temporary academic workers are direct costs – in the form of financial investments in their education and development, but also emotional costs – years of working on their professional identity, network, expertise and social costs – the sacrifices and long nights and weekends devoted to science, instead of spending time with family and friends or on personal growth. The sunk cost fallacy is a concept that suggests that people will continue investing in an unsuccessful (or losing) undertaking because of the costs already made. The psychological explanations include escalating commitment (Staw, 1976), self-justification (Aronson, 1968) and loss aversion (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). The concept of the sunk costs’ fallacy challenges the assumption of rationality in human behaviour. But Friedman et al. (2017) suggest that there are some explanations that can also be rational and applied equally successfully, for example, maintaining a reputation. Staying in academia, even when things are difficult and insecurity is overwhelming, can be a way of maintaining one’s perception of themselves as well as an attempt to control the way others see them. Potential leaving, on the other hand, can be experienced as giving up or even selling out. Trendafil, for example, is a foreigner who has built a career twice – in his native country and in Sweden. For him, work outside of academia “just for the income” is unthinkable. Being an academic is his “passion”, but it is also how the world sees him. Back home, he had a pronounced academic presence, but in Sweden, as well, he is not just another immigrant, but a highly educated person who put a lot of effort into his career. Giving this up will change how the world sees him and how he sees himself.

Leaving academia, as I mentioned, is also tied to having viable options outside of it. This concern is typically referred to as “employability” in the study of
job insecurity. Employability has often been used to investigate job satisfaction in temporary employment and signifies ‘the individual’s perceptions about alternative job opportunities that are readily available’ (De Cuyper et al., 2018, p.175). I argued above for the understating of job insecurity in academia as job field insecurity – pertaining to exiting the professional field and not just a specific HEI and, similarly, in the case of employability, ‘alternative job opportunities’ pertain to alternatives outside academia.

The organisation of the academic field is quite particular, and even economists agree that the assumptions made for other fields’ labour markets cannot simply be transferred and applied here. It has been shown that job security is one of the major organising forces of labour in academia (Carmichael, 1988; Dany and Mangematin, 2004). Dany and Mangematin (2004), however, claim that the promise of job security would be a lie in the current situation in academia; instead, HEIs and other actors in the field should talk about and focus on employability when addressing early career academics’ career concerns. Such suggestions are supported by theories coming from psychology as well as psychology of sustainability, claiming that higher perceptions of employability lead to lower job insecurity for temporary and alternative employees (Chiesa et al., 2018).

Having a clear exit option, a viable alternative in case one does not manage to secure another appointment or position, is undoubtedly an advantage in facing temporary employment. Many interviewees referenced the ease of mind that gives them, or they even see it as, a position of power – they have a stronger footing in case they want to pursue projects and work that do not fall under the trendiest or more easily published topics and spheres. There is even a visible demarcation line between disciplines when it comes to exit options – both in view of its “existence” and the perspective of following through. The TAWs in the disciplines of finance and accounting had very clear exit options. For the finance discipline, the alternative employment outside academia can even resemble the work they do as scholars and thus, their expertise is more than easily translated. At the same time, academics within management, marketing and organisation more often stated that they do not clearly see how to translate their knowledge and expertise outside the academic field and to position themselves in the job market. This was also confirmed by statements describing the available jobs and competition within the disciplines. In the common case, HEIs are recognising direct competition with organisations outside academia for the recruitment of people within the disciplines of accounting and finance more than they do when recruiting academics from the other disciplines investigated here.

While employability might, in some cases, serve as a counteract to the experience of job field insecurity, focusing on employability as a fix to insecurity (Dany and Mangematin, 2004) does not truly reflect the specifics of academia. As it became evident in the pages above, the professional identity of academics is more often than not a driving force for the experience and relationship
to their work. Having a clear, viable alternative is no doubt helpful and could be an actor of resistance or stability for some, similar to having an extra income or family support (I will address those next). However, since it is not the main concern of the temporary academic workers, it should not be the main fix either.
Precarity (as a condition)

The questions of uncertain personal and social conditions and financial insecurity in relation to work and employment usually lead to the idea of precarity – an amalgam of insecure employment, perpetuating the insecure social circumstances of the individual or even taking advantage of underprivileged communities by exploiting their labour. Admittedly, precarity is most often associated with blue-collar work, which academia is arguably not (at least not Swedish academia). As mentioned before, there are several barriers, as Gallas (2018) calls them, to the study and perception of precarious work in academia. The prestige of the profession and the relative financial and job security for the tenured faculty, the “imaginary” of the profession as not just a job one does for money, the fear of economic risks for raising an issue – those are all factors that have been pointed out as preventing one from speaking up about precarious academic work (ibid.) There are, however, some scholars that have branched out into these territories. Styhre (2017), for example, uses the worsening or even dissipating economic and financial security in professions, including academia, to argue for what he calls “precarious professional work”. In this case, it can be argued that precarity is seen as a condition and not as its full meaning of both the spread of precarious, insecure, work arrangement and as a political struggle (Bourdieu, 1998; Gill and Pratt, 2008). I have argued before for the use of precarity in its dual meaning, but I have also discussed the complexity of the term, making its analytical use rather difficult. Thus, I will also use precarity step by step, by first focusing on the more “empirical” manifestation of precarity as a condition. Then, I will return to the concept and discuss precarity both as ‘a condition and a possible rallying point for resistance’ (Waite, 2009, p.426).

It is undoubtedly visible from the empirical testaments that for many interviewees, their personal and/or social uncertainties relate to how they experience and navigate their temporary employment. There are certain factors that speak directly to the experience of temporariness as insecurity. For example, financial stability – whether through extra income or family support – generally could be said to reduce the experience of insecurity. Family demographics, however, are more controversial. For some participants, not having a family means that they feel at liberty to explore different options and to take more risky approaches. For others, it is quite the opposite – not having a family means a lack of support and a safety network, so they do not feel prone to explore more risky approaches to their work. There was one interviewee who shared that he plans to start a small business so he can support himself as an academic. Some others were already doing that through second jobs outside of academia. Many shared that they can endure some more years on temporary contracts because they can fall back on their partners for support. On the social side, one of the more troubling stories came from an academic on a one-year
contract who confessed that he cannot even think about starting a family or an intimate relationship before he has a more stable employment. Not only was he worried about what his financial situation will look like in a few months when his contract ends, but he was also unsure about his possibility to physically stay in the country. He comes from outside the EU, and he was living with the constant idea that he might need to leave. He had internalised the temporariness of his contract and shared that he was just waiting and putting everything on hold, including his personal life, until he has a secure position.

The temporariness of the contract undoubtedly creates more precarious conditions for the groups that are typically regarded as more vulnerable. Class and foreignness have come to the forefront as two issues which can strongly exacerbate the experience of temporary academic work as precarity.

Being an immigrant comes with a lot of different conditions. There are some foreign academics with Swedish partners and/or many years spent in the country prior to starting an academic career who have established domicile. The foreign academics from EU countries follow different rules than the ones with a passport from outside the EU. There are some with dual citizenship. The Swedish Higher Education Authority even counts Swedish-born individuals with foreign-born parents as foreign academics – a classification I argued against in terms of professional and job field insecurity where the knowledge of the system and the country, and the professional and personal safety networks play an important role. In terms of vulnerability, however, that classification makes more sense. Statistics from UKÄ (2020) show that the proportion of foreign academics in temporary positions is more than double that of Swedish academics (45% to 20%). An interpretation of these numbers offered by the Swedish Union of Civil Servants, suggests that important factors could be ‘structural discrimination and internal appointments’ (Myklebust, 2020).

The class issue opens up to questions of not only financial means but also of belonging and support. Some of the interviewees testified to building their career according to their own visions, taking risks, and asserting their discretion and autonomy in the face of perceived pressures from the environment, because of an additional financial income, financial support from their partner or family inheritance. While capital alone cannot determine the course of professional action, the social security it provides can make the difference in any particular decision-making situation. Conversely, the lack of financial stability can mean the opposite – risk-averse behaviour aiming for the least risky line of work with the hope of keeping a job and building a portfolio pleasing to a broad audience. Many interviewees attested to such behaviour, especially when they shared that they are the only or the main breadwinner for their family.

Precarity, in its meaning as a condition and a representation in financial and social uncertainties, can have a tremendous impact on how the temporariness of one’s contract translates into insecurity and the decision-making and
behavioural choices of TAWs. In the next chapter, I will discuss this further in an analysis of the so impossible to talk about precarious academic work.

Sacrifice for is the profession

So, you have to live one day at a time, but there’s no goal now anymore because you see that... But maybe, the goal is to have more security and if you can find the path that gives you that identity, that you have some security, I mean, the one that gives you that fulfilment. Maybe, you get that research project and at the same time that will lead to something else that leads to some things... Because you don’t know what will... So maybe that’s something that you can... But as of now, I don’t want to think. From experience I don’t want to think because if you don’t get it, you just get frustrated, so... Maybe, I just want to take it one day at a time.

Tamara has “fallen out of the research wagon” – her career seems to have reached a point of no (or almost impossible) return into the “system”. Tamara sees no prospect of a permanent position in her imminent future and has learned to accept that. Her academic self is surviving from one funding application to another in a research institute and is sometimes teaching in the affiliated HEI. She shares that her professional confidence suffers from the lack of status and lack of a promising future. She teaches without a title and is an academic without a position. The academic system seems foreign, hostile and impenetrable; her past actions do not matter anymore, and her present actions cannot guarantee any future outcomes. She wants to let go of the future and learn to accept the present:

I mean, you didn’t get a clean break, so this is the price that you have to pay.

She is paying the price by embracing her suffering. That is not uncommon in academia. Some authors have shown how academics sometimes prefer to accept sides of the profession they do not appreciate or agree with, only to decrease identity struggles prompted by these opposing views (Winter, 2009; Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012; Knights and Clarke, 2014). Knights and Clarke (2014) call it bitter-sweet. Alvesson and Spicer (2016) call it “playing a game”. These authors, however, discuss a condition of hope – academics believe they are temporarily complacent with a side of the profession they
dislike or suffer from, only so that they can reach a point where it will be different, maybe even a point where they will have a position of power to change things for themselves and for others. I will discuss this condition of hope as part of the experience of temporariness later on. However, it is not the case with Tamara. She is not looking into the future where she will be safe and secure and will be in a position of power. She is taking it one day at a time. She has “no goal now”. There are many academics like Tamara. But this is not shocking, and this is not precarious because in academia it is “normal” to suffer; it is part of the profession; it is part of the imaginary of the academic (Gallas, 2018).

Gill (2009) argues that academics bear the costs of precarious and insecure work because they are “silenced” from their “sacrificial ethos”. The stress, the anxiety, the inability to cope with an insecure future do not measure enough compared to the danger of presenting or seeing oneself as not “noble” or devoted enough (Gill, 2009). This sentiment is the corner idea of the famous essay by Stanley Fish (1994, p. 275):

...for the inattentiveness, like the ugliness of Volvos, is purposeful and is valued both by those who perform it and those who receive it: [...] In the collective eye of the academy, sloppiness, discourtesy, indifference, and inefficiency are virtues, signs of an admirable disdain for the mere surfaces of things, a disdain that is itself a sign of a dedication to higher, if invisible, values.

Finding nobility in sacrifice (either by driving an ugly Volvo or by having no employment security) seems to be a defining feature of the academic profession, tied to academic identity and reinforced through a sacrificial discourse. Discussing Peter’s (2017) idea of the scientist as a “heroic figure”, Gallas (2018, p.71) states:

This gives rise to the perception that academics, in contrast to other workers, have voluntarily signed up for the insecurities and risks attached to their profession, and that they are not dedicated enough and not willing to carry the consequences of their career choices if they complain about those insecurities and risks.

Peter (2017, p.112) believes that there are three main characteristics describing Homo academicus – passion, reputation and projects. Passion is the one describing the heroic scientists, who can put their commitment to the profession on top of everything else in their lives. This, believes Gallas (2018, p.71), is reflected in the academic practices that reinforce such beliefs and, moreover, trickles down into the impossibility of addressing precarity in academia, because ‘the situation of academics is not comparable with workers who face “involuntary” hardship’.
Gergin, for example, is one that likes to take the full responsibility for his current position of insecurity. He knows the rules and if he is not happy, it’s on him. His is a “voluntary” insecurity:

If I were a more bitter person… Maybe because I’ve been here a long time; I do a lot of stuff. I am planning teaching, sometimes taking more responsibility for the department than people that are tenured and still I’m not tenured, but… That’s being bitter. I know the rules of the game. I could decide to stop playing it at all.

But there are some that challenge this “normal” and “voluntary” experience of precarity, as defining for academia. Zlatko, for example, explains that he encounters the discourse of sacrifice and suffering quite often, especially directed from senior to junior researchers. He does not buy it:

But what I don’t like is also the rhetoric among academics. When you discuss with them, they say “Oh, that’s how it is. We also did that. You have to suffer to reach where we are”. So, it’s this kind of mentality like… it’s an army… It can feel like “Oh, we did that, you have to go through that before you come”. And I wonder why? It’s academia. Why doesn’t it have a programme for people that when you finish, if you get a job, it should feel secure, like other companies. Some of my friends who finished at master’s, they just worked 6 months, and they were able to be permanently employed. I don’t understand why they have fixed it this way… I really don’t get it.

Adding to that discourse of sacrifice that has the academics endure hardship because it is a normal part of the profession, the profession itself can often be hard to “translate” into the industrial and corporate world, and the years of preparation to become an academic cannot easily be discarded. The difficulty of translating academic experience into other fields is another reason for people to stick around, even if they find it hard to navigate and cope with the insecurity of their temporary positions. Dino recounts his experience in applying for jobs outside of academia while on a temporary contract, before he got to a tenure track:

Well, I was never desperate. I was tired of it, but still ok. I got my salary… I worked on a yearly basis but… and then it’s difficult to find ways to express your competence. [...] They don’t know what to value in a PhD. And I never really cracked that language either. [...] I probably applied for the wrong jobs and I wasn’t desperate enough.

This difficulty in translating their experience, combined with other factors such as different social and personal inter-dependencies, makes the claim that
academic suffering is somehow “voluntary” not feasible (Gallas, 2018). At the same time, those difficulties of exiting the profession or making a change because of personal circumstances are sometimes the reason why academics stick around and learn to endure whatever insecurity they are facing. In doing so, the embrace of their suffering as something noble can serve as a coping mechanism: If I am suffering, I am suffering for a higher cause, at least. This is also the case for Tamara, who seems to find solace in the idea that she is enduring these precarious conditions because of her academic self and the contributions she can make to the profession. But Tamara sometimes uses another coping mechanism to shake off the oppressing feeling of insecurity, challenges to her professional identity and membership, and the lack of a promise for her future. She is one of the female academics that sometimes says no.
Anticipatory insecurity

In the previous sections of the chapter, I introduced different types of insecurities experienced by temporary academic workers that are fuelling the experience of temporariness as job field insecurity. Temporary academic workers can face different uncertainties and insecurities – professional insecurity, precarity and epistemic uncertainty. The unavoidable end of contract is part of the deal with a particular HEI, but the looming possibility of exiting the profession if no other option is found exacerbates the subjectivities stemming from these insecurities and uncertainties and brings the future into the present. Not only do they experience insecurity, but for many, it has become normalised that they need to carry the responsibility for it. Preparing for an uncertain future, the temporary academic workers need to change their actions in the present in order to create the possibility of security in the future. They operate in what I call anticipatory insecurity – their future becomes more important than their present and the responsibility to create that future belongs to them and them only. Their present actions are oriented towards achieving security in the future, and they internalise a moral imperative that if they want to reach that secure future, they must imagine and create it themselves. Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009) name this “injunction” – ‘the will to anticipate’. The will to anticipate and the normalisation and internalisation of this moral imperative adds another layer of insecurity into the experience of the temporary academic worker. Injunction is one of the features of anticipation as an oppressive regime of forward-living (ibid.). That regime is constituted by the processes of abduction (tackling between the temporalities of past, present and future), optimisation (delaying of action in the name of reaching the possible “best scenario”), preparation (acting in preparation for a future trauma as if it has already happened) and possibility (the sense that if the future is engaged properly, things will be ok) (ibid.). We recognise all of these in one form or another in the experiences of the temporary academic workers. Many of them are subjects of that regime of forward living that makes their future more important than their present, that requires more self-realisation and self-responsibility, and demands a state of preparedness for trauma and search for best scenarios. The processes which Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009) call injunction, possibility and preparation are also central ideas in what Fleming (2017) calls radical responsibilisation. The moral imperative to imagine and create their own future and to live in preparation for trauma as well as the responsibility to make the future “ok” – these are the self-responsibilisation and self-realisation required of the post-modern worker, who needs to be reliant, flexible, self-improving and solely responsible for their own future (du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1989; Ehrenstein, 2012; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008; Fleming, 2017; Morgan and Wood, 2017). I will discuss this first, followed by a discussion of the other two processes in the experiences of
the temporary academic worker – abduction and optimisation – the tackling between different temporalities and delaying of action in search of the best possible scenario.

Radical responsibilisation

Many temporary academic workers experience intensification – tackling many tasks at once at an accelerated pace and following an external rhythm of deadlines and calls. TAWs feel there are many things they need to do, in addition to what they would define as the core of academic work, and they need additional skills in order to do so. They need to work as fast as possible because of the uncertainty and the unknowns of the processes within academia – the publishing process and the announcement of new positions. In addition, and following from the same unstructured and surprising mode of the “market” – they start working according to an external rhythm, often breaking down their natural rhythm and prioritise work according to deadlines and calls. These demands for intensification, acceleration and externalisation affect not only the pace of scholarly work but also speak to the choices academics make in regard to their focus on work output and membership. In a way, those different uncertainties and insecurities reinforce each other. Then, one has a limited contractual time within a HEI, where they might try to speed up their integration into the collective, build relationships and networks. The need to work faster and have more “production” ready, just in case a position is announced, also affects the type of projects and output they focus on.

All of this is often seen as unavoidable. There are academics who try to resist some of these demands for intensification, acceleration and externalisation of their work by utilising certain strategies to stay focused on their present work and not on the looming future, others comply unwillingly or “just temporarily” (more on that in the next section), and yet there is another group that embraces the call to do more and to do it faster and according to some external timeframe. This latter group can also be generally divided into two – TAWs who believe that these are simply the properties of the academic system and follow the course more or less uncritically, and a second group that is critical towards those demands and expresses stronger dissatisfaction, but does comply anyway and, what is even more, embraces these demands. In the first case, one can see a manifestation of Mark Fisher’s argument (2010, p.2) that we now operate with the ‘sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it’. I will focus on the latter group because their attitude towards their insecure future speaks directly to one of the core issues
stemming from the demands for a forward living, for anticipating the future and creating it – the demand for self-responsibilisation and self-realisation.

In the pages above, you met the “go-getter” – the academic who gets things done without complaint. Carrying the whole responsibility on their shoulders, the go-getters believe that they are the only ones who can and must create their futures. The discourse of enterprise shows through their words, reinforced by a psychotherapeutic discourse. Ainsworth and Hardy (2009, p.1203) explain:

*The worker is an individual in search of meaning, responsibility, a sense of personal achievement, a maximized ‘quality of life’, and hence of work. Thus the individual is not to be emancipated from work, perceived as merely a task or a means to an end, but to be fulfilled in work, now constructed as an activity through which we produce, discover, and experience ourselves (Rose, 1989). Psychotherapeutic discourse thus reinforces the discourse of enterprise (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008) through its emphasis on self-examination and self-improvement, that is, the reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1991). Individuals are expected to become ‘entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make’ (Rose, 1989: 226).*

Creating their entrepreneurial selves through the dominant discourses of academia, Zlatko, Ruslan, Kalina, Viola and the other go-getters draw upon the entrepreneurial discourse to find meaning in their struggle, to explain how insecurity can lead to self-realisation. By doing so, however, they reinforce the demand stemming from this regime of anticipation to be independently responsible for and prepare for their future. Their “hustling” is both an experience of insecure work and a coping mechanism to overcome its demands. The embrace of the entrepreneurial self could be seen as an indication of insecurity in academia, but it can also be seen as a response to it. The internalisation of the imperative for self-realisation and full responsibility for the future is the focal point of the regime of anticipation (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009). As such, insecurity is expected to be perceived as something “normal”, something the academic must get “used to” and there is nothing they can change or can expect to be changed for them. This can be problematic for some TAWs. In some cases, the embrace of this entrepreneurial self, the responsibility for the future and the imperative for self-realisation is in line with one’s own perceptions of themselves and what the profession entails. In other cases, however, these demands are seen as problematic. Nonetheless, even among those academics, I have observed the embrace of the aforementioned demands. In their case, embracing the discourse of entrepreneurship and accommodating the demands of insecurity gives them a sense of agency – they are “at war” with the system, in control of their actions, and not just subjects of an uncertain, insecure, unknowable system.
Many of the academics who are subjected to the demands of the insecure future and feel that working harder, faster and better is the only way to reach a future they imagine as secure, take on that responsibility and, as a coping mechanism – embrace the race, embrace their entrepreneurial competitive self-responsible selves. But that has its costs. Fleming (2017, p.700) points out that when individuals are supposed to be ‘permanent enterprises’ (Foucault, 2008) and ‘life itself becomes a constant economic venture’, nobody wins. Individuals are often going to struggle with mental health issues like burnout and stress, and work with less autonomy, rather than more (ibid.). This is quite visible in the accounts of the participants in this project. Many testified to the overworking, blending of personal and professional time, stress and anxiety. They also testified to the need to choose fashionable, easily evaluable, and countable output and to even change their personal image and persona at work so that they appear as friendly and unproblematic. The autonomy promised by the alternative employment arrangement does not seem to materialise in the case of the temporary academic worker. Or, in any other case, to be honest (see Fleming, 2017). The embrace of the imperative for self-realisation and self-responsibility can lead to diminished well-being and less autonomy, not only because of the overwork and stress, but also because it requires a sort of exploitation of the self (Ehrenstein, 2012; Fleming, Rhodes and Yu, 2019). The academics employ both their professional and personal selves and skills in a search for a secure future. They need to utilise themselves, to put all they have in “the game” and, as Fleming (2017, p.703) bluntly puts it: ‘If you’re a loser in the new world of work it must somehow be your fault’.

The attitude of embracing the imperatives for self-realisation and the shift of the risks and responsibilities towards the individual are often encountered among groups who come from systems which are perceived as relatively “worse” – i.e. even more insecure or with fewer opportunities for support, or in groups which are typically marginalised or discriminated against – groups which have internalised the imperative that they must fend for themselves and cannot expect access to a network of support or opportunities that can protect or provide any possible future. The TAWs, like Nia, Kalina and the others you met above, invoke and embrace their entrepreneurial selves as a way to navigate the complex and controversial “game”. It is mostly foreigners who strongly expressed their lack of choice but to be entrepreneurial, self-responsible, “permanent enterprises”. The “outsiders” cannot rely on the support of a network because they typically do not have a strong one moving to a new country and a new institution. They do not possess the same knowledge of how the system in this particular HEI or field or country works. Thus, it is more difficult to rely on other coping strategies, such as transferring the responsibility towards the collegium or the community.

Of course, it is not only foreigners who are “radically responsible” for their future. Foreignness can be seen as a particular or an added case of
outsiderness. There are academics who have shared an experience of otherness because of class, gender, and most of all – the length of their contract. I suggest further research with an intersectional focus in my recommendations at the end of this work. Now, I move to another manifestation of anticipatory insecurity – the tackling between different temporalities (as in the past, present and future) as a way of forward-living, of bringing the imaginary of the future into the present.

Abduction of temporalities

Many of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with one or more of the issues discussed above – not only the need to fit their research into a template but also the demand to be entrepreneurial and self-responsible, to work on many additional things, and to change their behaviour so that they are seen as a particularly desirable colleague. Many of those same academics do those things, anyway. Alvesson and Spicer (2016, p.30) describe the following paradox: ‘They comply with this system in the pursuit of the promise of upward mobility. Yet they want to maintain a fantasy of themselves as radicals who identify with the underdog’. The “system” in their paper is the system of managerialism and the “they” are academics working in business schools. The authors argue that academics wander between compliance and resistance, love and loathing, and at the end, start to see their work as a game and lose track of anything outside of the game. Similarly, Gallas (2018, p.70) points out that senior academics might not speak up on behalf of their more precarious colleagues because they imagine they ‘pursue strategies of changing the institution from within by advancing through the ranks’. In this sense, they imagine they will be compliant for a while, until they reach a position of power and can change something. This strategy, however, leads to a long-term compliance and silence. The imagined future resistance serves the sustained fantasy of themselves (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016).

Butler and Spoelstra (2020, p.415) discuss the double meaning of the game metaphor in regard to the publishing – ‘the “publication game” as a set of institutional norms for developing one’s academic career and the “publication game” as a set of underhand techniques for cynically gaming the system to one’s own professional advantage’. In any case, say the authors (ibid., p.415), the use of the metaphor is problematic because it involves a logic of disavowal – ‘an assertion that A is not literally B’. In this manner, academics believe that they can separate their “careerist” moves from their “academic” moves, which, as Butler and Spoelstra (ibid.) argue, is not really the case.

Undoubtedly, seeing their work and referring to it as “playing a game” is part of many academics’ repertoire. Many of the participants in this research
have also made references to their work and navigating the system as playing a game. Their game, however, is slightly different from the one Alvesson and Spicer (2016) describe. If I was to continue the metaphor, I would say that the temporary academic workers are in the qualifiers, so to say. Similar to the academics, Alvesson and Spicer (ibid.) describe that they also see their compliance or the journey between resistance and compliance as playing a game so that they can keep a desired identity and have some relief from the juggling of different roles and demands. Additionally, however, they juggle between their past, present and future in more absolute terms. Many of them believe or want to believe the possibility that playing the game might be temporary and they might reach a future where things will be different. That dreamy future usually takes the form of the security of tenure. Svensson et al. (2010, p.5) say that a pragmatic view on resisting the oppressive demands to pursue formulaic and list-approved publications is ‘to play along and, if we wish, slowly change it for the better from within’. But the temporary academic worker is not really “within” – they are reminded of that quite often through challenges to their membership and identity and through the looming final date of their contract. But that looming final date can also serve as a promise of another future, a reinforcement of the separation between the present and future, which feeds the fantasy of change. ‘The hallucinatory presence of the nightmare or fantasy future transforms anticipation from a call to action into a call for compliance with tyrannical futures’ (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009, p.257). The temporary academic workers, similar to the creatives described by Ross (2008, p.34), now ‘endure a feast-or-famine economy in return for the promise of success and acclaim’ – a future imaginary event. Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009, p.257) discuss this dream of imaginary futures as a form of compliance, and it seems to be so in the case of some TAWs.

Tsvetan is on a tenure track straight out of a PhD, but even if things have worked out for him so far, he is not happy with the way things work in general. He very much dislikes the fact that research is given so much more priority over teaching and third-mission contribution which, he thinks ‘are equally if not more important’. The way academic work is being evaluated does not, according to him, reflect what academic work stands for. But for now, he is holding on because he believes he will be able to do things differently in the future. In his fantasy future, once he gets the security of the tenure (‘you have a job when you have tenure’), he will have more control over his work and will be able to direct his efforts to the things he believes matter the most.

Quite the opposite of Tsvetan, who endures the demands to fit his work into specific templates and puts aside work aspects that are important for him in the expectation of his fantasy future, is Varban who trades his nightmare future for insecurity. For Varban, a permanent position means that all of his dislikes will materialise – the entanglement with administrative and bureaucratic procedures, the increased teaching loads and the politics within a department.
And it is not only the nightmare of the permanent position that helps him embrace his insecurity, but it is also the nightmare of applying for a permanent position. He is disillusioned with stories of how HEIs fake open announcements while, in fact, they write such specific job descriptions and open such short timeframes for applications that it is clear for everyone that the position is written for a specific person. He wishes to avoid all of this and thus embraces the insecurity of his non-permanent appointments, which to him means avoiding a nightmare future.

The way Tsvetan and Varban use the future they imagine in order to navigate the present could be seen as ‘playing a game’, as maintaining ‘a fantasy of themselves’ (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016, p.30) through a wishful separation of career moves and academic moves (Butler and Spoelstra, 2020). But it is most of all ‘compliance with tyrannical futures’ (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009, p.257), and the importance of these futures has been achieved because of the temporariness of their contracts, and the insecurity and concerns they have about having to leave academia involuntarily.

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It is often assumed that the end of the contract is part of the deal for the temporary worker, and they do not or should not experience the fear of losing one’s job as insecurity – something that has been recognised as an issue for permanent employees and investigated most often under the concept of job insecurity. The question of whether one can talk about job insecurity in the context of temporary employment at all receives a negative answer; instead, scholars recommend that the proper way to address the concerns of temporary employees is to look at their perceived employability. In academia, however, it turns out that temporary workers do experience job insecurity. However, job (field) insecurity speaks to the fear of losing a job in academia as a whole and does not concern their employment within a particular HEI as much. The concern of having to exit the profession in the future creates challenges to one’s ability to practise with confidence at their own discretion and to entertain a sense of autonomy. In a very problematic way, it can also strongly subject the academics to a state of subservient behaviour and yes-saying, because they see their colleagues not as peers but as gatekeepers, who could potentially have an effect on their opportunities to stay in the profession. It can affect the choices TAWs make in regard to their work and output, the rhythm of their work, their behaviour and their self-perception.

Temporary academic workers, however, are not only subjected to insecurity, but they also have an agentic role. TAWs resort to different tools and strategies to navigate the demands of insecurity, and those are often overlapping and in relation to one another. Resorting to different conscious or
intuitive strategies and tools, temporary academic workers experience insecurity differently and create micro possibilities for emancipation from and control of insecurity. The mechanisms presented here are not at all exclusive, and there might be a myriad of other strategies that academics employ to navigate insecurity as they experience it. “Navigating” insecurity does not mean “escaping” it. Navigating can signify both embracing and rejecting insecurity, among other reactions between those two extreme classifications. Navigating, however, suggests agency. Academics use one mechanism or another to react to the demands of insecurity while navigating their actions towards building a career. Adams, Murphy and Clarke (2009) also point out that there might be many (not investigated) possible responses to anticipation, for example, Cooper’s (2006) ‘creative sabotage of the future’ and Papadopoulos, Stephen- son and Tsianos (2008) ‘escape routes’. On the previous pages, we saw some tactics people utilise when encountering and engaging with insecurity – the transfer of responsibility to the system or the collegium, the trust put in community or in one’s own professional authority, the revolt or the sacrifice as service to the profession and not oneself. As it was pointed out, not all tactics or escape routes are available to everyone – there is a disparity even here. And the escape routes cannot always be defined as fully agentic. They are often a combination of happenstance circumstances and access to certain tools.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn so far is that the experience of job field insecurity is multifaceted, complex and complicated. There are different ways one experiences temporariness and different ways it translates into insecurity. The responses to those experiences are equally complex, intertwined and, sometimes, contradictory. For academics, and that might be true for other professions, the boundaries between job, career, profession and personal aspirations are very blurred. So, capturing the full experience of insecurity in the context of temporary employment is a challenging, if not impossible, task. In order to gain a more wholesome understanding of the experience of insecurity for the academics in temporary employment, I used multiple perspectives and an open framework and built the discussion in a mixed method, intertwining the analysis with vignettes of specific responses to insecurity, which themselves were a mix of narratives and analysis. Before summing all of this up in the concluding chapter, in the next pages, I will return to one of the questions that was not directly posed at the beginning but started looming throughout the discussion. Is there such a thing as precarious academics?
Precarious academic work?

This work is centred on one idea – the idea of insecurity. I wanted to stay with this big idea, investigate it and unpack it as a phenomenon without positioning the research within a specific narrow frame. I first immersed the reader into its many and diverse understandings, then erased them altogether and offered a look at insecurity as an unknown phenomenon in a specific setting – academia. At the onset, I typed the word “gig” because it has come to signify the temporariness and anticipation of an insecure future for the individual, the flexibilisation of employment practices, the shift of economic risks from the organisation to the individual, and the imperatives of the entrepreneurial discourse. That representational quality is inherent in the way we have come to use the term and is both an appealing and a problematic issue. Gig, in its empirical use, features most prominently in investigations of the new technologically driven models and methods of work. The analytical problem with “gig” is not, however, its narrow classification, but rather its simultaneous use as that narrowly defined field and as a representation of the centrality of insecure work relations and the subjectivities stemming from that. I used “gig” as a metaphor following some authors who did the same and put the metaphor in the context of academia to paint a scary picture of what academia has or might become (Hall, 2016; Kezar, DePaola and Scott, 2019). Gig, as a metaphor, played a great role in introducing the reader to the emergency and significance of investigating insecurity – in general and in academia, in particular. However, it did not offer enough in terms of understanding insecurity in academia. It seems that the term has outgrown itself and has come to represent more than it was originally infused in it.

Then, there is another heavily loaded term that we use to describe the subjectivities of insecure work – precarity. Precarity has been associated with blue-collar work and has been heavily politicised as a concept addressing class struggle. In a way, gig has been used to represent similar experiences in professional work when “precarity” has been contested as applicable. In both cases, we see narrow empiricism in the definitions (tech-driven or blue collar) but also broad use in their second representational quality of signifiers of the increase and normalisation of insecurity and the subjectivities of the experiences of insecurity. The two concepts are often collapsed into one another, or their representational characteristics are equated with the subjectivities they engender. For analytical clarity, I decided to take out the phenomenon of
insecure work, out of both popular concepts and investigate it as a phenomenon in and of itself. I discarded the definitions and narrow empiricism and turned my investigation into the underlying assumptions structuring the conditions of the post-modern academic worker – flexibility, uncertainty and temporariness.

Now that we are coming to the end of this work and have already discussed how temporary academic work can be seen as job field insecurity, I can make one final conclusion on whether we can see temporary academic work as precarity. Styhre (2017) suggests that professional work is becoming precarious on the basis of perceived economic instability and increased debt. I argued above that temporary academic work can, in some cases, exacerbate financial and social uncertainty and, thus, be seen as precarity as a condition. My argument here is not going to take us through any more financial issues. I would rather take you back to France in the 1990s and to the words of one of its most famous sociologists. In the Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, p.83) argues that the casual (i.e. gig, temporary) workers virtually cannot be politically mobilised, because they have ‘suffered a blow to their capacity to project themselves into the future, which is the precondition for all so-called rational conducts’. In “The precariat: The new dangerous class”, Guy Standing (2011, p.12) describes one of the insecurities that make the precariat a precariat:

_Besides labour insecurity and insecure social income, those in the precariat lack a work-based identity. When employed, they are in career-less jobs, without traditions of social memory, a feeling they belong to an occupational community steeped in stable practices, codes of ethics and norms of behaviour, reciprocity and fraternity. The precariat does not feel part of a solidaristic labour community. This intensifies a sense of alienation and instrumentality in what they have to do. Actions and attitudes, derived from precariousness, drift towards opportunism. There is no ‘shadow of the future’ hanging over their actions, to give them a sense that what they say, do or feel today will have a strong or binding effect on their longer-term relationships. The precariat knows there is no shadow of the future, as there is no future in what they are doing._

And here lies the difference between casualised workers and casualised professionals. Many of the temporary academic workers interviewed for this research project might not have the ability to project themselves into the future within one particular higher education institution, but many can surely project themselves into the future as members of the profession, as scholars or as academics. They draw upon sources such as professional identity, membership, collegiality to see themselves as still standing in the future and that calls for mobilisation in the present. They might revolt, endure, disrupt, conceive –
whatever mechanism they choose to employ, it all comes back to their future as academics. Unfortunately, those sources of mobilisation as a response to insecurity are not accessible to everyone. There are still some academics who are truly marginalised – they question their professional identities and membership and have them questioned by others; they do not have trust in any formal rules and structures, do not have access to a system or a collegial body to whom to transfer some of the responsibility for creating a future or from whom to receive some guidance, and do not have the financial means or personal safety network to endure more uncertain “entrenchment” periods. These academics are often (but not exclusively) the academics who were also more prone to experience the direct conditions of precarity – financial and social uncertainty. These individuals are precarious academic workers.

The relationship of the individual with their future is very central to the way they experience insecurity. It seems like a professional can escape the precariat, armed only with their strong identity or a feeling of belonging because of the possibility it gives them to imagine the future, to project themselves into the future. They can revolt against an oppressive present invigorated by a specific image of the future. In this sense, the ‘shadow of the future’ (Standing, 2011) or the ability to project themselves into the future (Bourdieu, 1998; Baude, 1999) is the invigorating and emancipating mechanism the temporary academic worker can use to escape insecurity. But in other cases, the future can be oppressive and multiply the experiences of insecurity, which I discussed as anticipatory insecurity. Both precarity and anticipation are concepts that explain the relationship of the individual and their future. Precarity as a condition is possible because of the inability of the individual to envision a particular future, a continuation of the present that may grant them the political strength to mobilise and revolt against the current precarious conditions they experience (Bourdieu, 1998; Baude, 1999; Standing, 2011). Anticipation, on the other hand, is a regime that demands the continuous preparation and work towards an imaginary future, a regime that has an ‘affective dimension, binding subjects in affective economies of fear, hope, salvation and precariousness oriented temporally toward future already made ‘real’ in the present’ (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009, p.260). How can this different relationship to the future be explained then? In one case, it is good to imagine a future and in the other – not so good. Well, in terms of precarity – being able to project yourself into the future, i.e. seeing yourself in the profession in the future is a promise, a possibility. When it comes to the regime of anticipation – the future is not promised; you cannot project yourself there, there is no future unless you work relentlessly to create it. Speaking metaphorically, one must see the shadow of the future without having to imagine it themselves.
Conclusion

Summing it all up

This work investigated the experiences of temporariness of the academic worker on a fixed-term contract in the Business studies discipline in Sweden and how those translate into insecurity. The investigation aims to create an understanding of the conditions of the temporary academic worker and contributes to the knowledge on insecure work in general and specifically in the academic profession.

The experiences of the temporary academic worker were presented in four spheres – output, pace, membership and personal. With regard to their work, the participants testified to an increasing orientation towards a specific output that is perceived as the currency of the profession – publication of peer-reviewed articles in highly rated journals. In turn, TAWs feel that they should not focus on other aspects of the profession, such as teaching and third mission, because those are non-transferable and are not decisive in future evaluations for funding or job applications. TAWs often base their professional decisions regarding the focus, form and outlet of their work with regard to a possible future evaluation of multiple and unknown actors. Thus, they feel compelled to choose safe and popular topics with fast turnaround. Speed is often a major component of how they relate to their work. Keeping in mind the unpredictability of the publishing process regarding the assessment of their work and the notoriously slow turnaround, TAWs express a need to “produce” as much and as fast as possible with the hope they can put some of their output on their portfolio in time for the next application. For many, the applications for the next gig have become a timeframe according to which they work. This externally imposed schedule is often restrictive and breaks down the natural rhythm of work as well as challenges the length and strength of engagement with the specific work tasks and projects. Similarly, the engagement with the HEI and the community is generally challenged by the length of the contract of the academic. Temporariness can prompt disengagement by the TAW themselves or non-acceptance by the permanent faculty of efforts to contribute and voice opinions and concerns. This often translates into fewer organisational rights, lack of voice, and challenges to the professional identity of the temporary academics. These processes can sometimes be reinforced or upset
by personal factors. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, unprivileged groups seem to experience more of those challenges.

The experiences of the temporary academic worker are multiple, complex and intertwined, even contradicting. The experiences can be prompted by the temporariness of the contract, the organisational processes within a given HEI, the specifics of the profession, personal values and views on the profession, personal factors and circumstances, to name a few. I used a framework informed by multiple perspectives to see how those translate into insecurity.

Temporary academic work can be seen as job field insecurity – a concern of involuntarily leaving the professional field in the event of no further employment. The strong professional identity of academics, the considerable investment into becoming an academic, as well as the blurring of boundaries between job, career and personal aspirations contribute to the translation of a temporary contract into job field insecurity. The experience of temporariness as job field insecurity is fuelled by other types of insecurities – professional and anticipatory insecurity, precarity and the insecurity of leaving.

Professional insecurity tackles the issues of identity and membership. The doubts and uncertainties of one’s professional identity and authority can be prompted by outsidersness – the challenges to one’s membership and citizenship because of their temporary contract and/or because they are in a marginalised position. In addition, the complexity of establishing the quality and standards of academic work also contributes to the instability of professional identities. There are different strategies and coping mechanisms that the participants employ in order to manage the experience of professional insecurity. Some of them that were analysed here include trust in rules, in the collegium and in a community as a way of negating epistemic uncertainty and professional insecurity. There are those who embrace their insecurity as a sacrifice to the higher values of the profession. And yet another group of female scholars who lean on their gender identity to reject the challenges to their professional identity and invoke a sense of agency.

Anticipatory insecurity speaks to the importance of the future over the present and the more extreme cases of radical responsibilisation and abduction of temporalities. Radical responsibilisation means the embrace of the imperatives for flexibility, reliability, creating your own future, exploring and exploiting every possible avenue in order to be responsible and a self-improving person. The group of academics who strongly embrace this imperative and its discourse are overwhelmingly TAWs who do not enjoy a lot of explicit support from their professional community or cannot fall back onto personal safety nets, which could help them weather prolonged periods of insecurity. The abduction of temporalities speaks to a coping strategy where academics negotiate their insecure present through the imaginaries of the future (sometimes informed by the past) – either as the dream or the nightmare future.

The idea of leaving academia brings another sort of insecurity to the academics with a looming end of contract. There are two factors that come into
play here. One is the massive investment in becoming an academic which is not easily discarded. Leaving could seem to some as quitting or giving up, and that might be perceived by some academics as detrimental to their reputation or self-image. Employability, or the perception of having a viable option for employment outside academia, is another important factor. In general, the academics who believe they can easily translate their experience to other sectors or continue with a similar work elsewhere are more at ease with the possibility of not securing another employment and having to exit the field.

Precarity speaks to job field insecurity, which is exacerbated by financial and social uncertainties of groups of academics. As mentioned above, these are also the TAWs who usually strongly embrace the imperative for radical responsibilisation. Precarity can be challenged through acts of revolt and political mobilisation based on a strong professional identity. And that is what is unique for the precarious professionals. Professional identity can serve as both a constraint and a mobiliser. It can make people endure precarious conditions because they cannot see themselves as anything else but academics; however, it can also serve as a mobiliser in an act of rejection and revolt.

The temporary academic workers that were the main protagonists on the pages above were not only the ones whose temporariness was speaking to experiences of insecurity. Temporariness does not always equal insecurity. In fact, discussing ways through which academics do not experience temporariness as insecurity was a substantial part of the analysis. This is a critical work that aims to contribute to the understanding of insecurity, and this aim benefits from looking into what is not insecurity and why. The focus was, however, on the ways through which the temporariness can constitute, prompt or exacerbate insecurity, and how those experiences of insecurity translate into the everyday professional life of the academics, which, in turn, can have lasting effects on how the professional field develops.
Contributions

One of the main contributions of this thesis is to the work on the conditions of early career academics (Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003; Müller, 2014; Vostal, 2015; Kezar, DePaola and Scott, 2019) and academics in business schools (Knights and Clarke, 2014; Alvesson and Spicer, 2016; Butler and Spoelstra, 2020). The rich empirical narrative offers a glimpse into the variety of lived experiences of the temporary academic workers and the multitude of opportunities for social action. It advances an understanding of the relationship of different individual, collective, organisational, and professional aspects with the lived experience of temporariness and temporariness as insecurity and as precarious work. This work adds to the novel use of the concept of “lived experiences”, which bridges the individual and the social dimension in organisation research. By looking at the lived experiences of the temporary academic workers, I have shown how temporariness can be experienced as insecurity. Going beyond the personal and the individual, my analysis shows that temporariness can translate into different forms of insecurity and can be experienced and responded to differently according to different situations and “access” to certain resources. By “access” to resources, I mean according to what is possible for the individual to draw upon based on their collective lifeworlds – discourses, identities, roles, values, expectations, imaginaries of the future and the past. The thesis also indirectly speaks to the literature and discussions on the corporatisation of academia (Churchman, 2006; Winter, 2009; Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012; Knights and Clarke, 2014; Fleming, 2021). It was shown that the corporate and entrepreneurial discourses play a formative role in the constitution of possibilities perceived by the academics. The realm of what is possible to experience, to imagine, to act upon is all situated either within corporate ideology or the discourse on the corporatisation of academia. I also offered a new interpretation of the embrace of this orientation by showing how some vulnerable groups that are already in a disadvantaged position embrace the demands for individual self-responsibility and self-realisation to not experience temporariness as precarity.

Another major contribution lies with introducing job field insecurity as a concept capturing the concern of temporary academic workers of involuntarily exiting the professional field in the event of no further appointments. Job field insecurity adds to the work of Ylijoki and Mäntylä's (2003) description of “contract time” as a temporal experience of fixed-term contracts, and to the work of Gendron and Suddaby (2004) on professional insecurity. In previous research, the idea of talking about job insecurity in temporary employment has been directly disregarded because the end of contract is implied and part of the deal. Looking into a profession, however, I have shown that the end of contract is not simply the end of contract and can be experienced quite
differently. Professionals can experience their temporariness as insecurity and that orientation can be prompted or navigated in a myriad of different ways.

Interpreting the concept of anticipation (Adams, Murphy and Clarke, 2009), I also introduced the concept of anticipatory insecurity as a type of insecurity that feeds into the experience of temporary academic work as job field insecurity. Anticipatory insecurity adds richness to the understanding of the temporal orientation of the academics and the way they draw upon the collective imaginaries of the past and the future as well as the collective will to embrace certain ideologies and demands on the self.

I join the discussion on precarious professional work by adding some evidence of precarity as a condition and pointing to the opportunities for emancipation and resistance anchored in the elements of the profession. A novel insight is the rejection of the demands of insecurity and rejection of the experience of temporariness as precarity by drawing on a strong professional identity, which creates the possibility to imagine a future within the field. This possibility of imagining a future is counterbalancing the experience of temporariness as precarity and job field insecurity. These insights speak to the works of Styhre (2017), Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008), Baude (1999) and Bourdieu (1998), as well as to the contested nature of professionalism (Fournier, 1999), which could prompt professional insecurity but could also serve as a point of resistance. To a certain extent, I also speak to the questions of risk and uncertainty (Fürst, 2018; Nästesjö, 2021), post-modern work (Ross, 2008; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008) and gender (Fotaki and Harding, 2018).

By investigating temporary academic work through those lenses, I hope to have contributed to the further development of the conversations focused on those topics. Finally, I hope that this research leads to conversations and actions in the academic field – at least in Sweden. I will address some specific implications and recommendations for Swedish academia after I suggest some avenues for further research, which are also reflections of the limitations of this study.
Limitations and topics for further research

This research, like any other, has a lot of limitations and room for improvement. The limitations that come to light in the research process are also a way to understand the topic further and to shine a light on potential additional topics of investigation.

One of the directions I would recommend for future research is an intersectional investigation into the same issues. It has become visible that some groups which are more often underprivileged are prone to also be most vulnerable in relation to temporary employment. While I do talk about gender, outsiders and foreignness and draw some conclusions on their significance when investigating insecurity, an intersectional approach to those issues might give us a better idea of the underlying processes. Foreignness in academia is a somewhat neglected topic in direct and intersectional investigations, because of the perceived elite status of the profession, which is in a way seen as “canceling” the negative connotations of being an immigrant, says Ayala-Lopez (2018) while warning us that this perception is dangerous and obstructing. The participants in this project also hinted at that duality by stating that in general they do not feel that Swedish academia is bad towards foreigners. At the same time, they also shared experiences of being seen as outsiders or not having the same guidance and overview of the system as the locals do. A further intersectional investigation is suggested.

Another issue that is important and deserves more attention, and perhaps a different method of investigation and analysis, is the experience of insecurity in a processual perspective. As I have said previously, the experience of insecurity does not seem to be linear and can depend on many personal and structural issues. Many of the participants attested that they could view the same contractual time very differently based on external cues in their day-to-day life. A longitudinal case study following a few temporary academic workers for a certain period of time might yield a lot more insights about those experiences than a onetime semi-structured interview.

I would also suggest a comparative study between temporary academic workers and different groups of tenured faculties (for example, associate professors, full professors), especially on the topic of professional insecurity. The experience of professional insecurity can have a very significant impact on the professional conduct and the choices of the academics. It can challenge the jurisdiction of the profession, or it can have a lasting impact on the shared professional norms and standards. I found out that along with epistemic uncertainty, which is inherent to the profession, outsiders can have a detrimental effect on the feeling of professional insecurity by challenging one’s membership and identity and undermining trust in collegiality. This strong experience of outsiders is perhaps not warranted for the majority of tenured
faculty based on their contract. But they can, of course, experience outsider-
ness based on another factor. An intersectional approach might be useful in
this instance as well.
The road ahead for (Swedish) academia

SULF (2020, p.22), the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers, has the following to say regarding fixed-term employment in academia:

*An academic career requires mobility, and there are many benefits to be gained by building networks and exploring different academic cultures at different Swedish and international universities. There is therefore a need for fixed-term positions. Unfortunately, there is also a widespread abuse of fixed-term employment within higher education. It is not uncommon for a newly qualified PhD graduate to have between ten and fifteen years of fixed-term employment ahead of them before there is a possibility of permanent employment. For the individual, this can lead to a feeling of insecurity and create difficulties for obtaining a mortgage, establishing stable circumstances for starting a family and planning for the future. Accumulating back-to-back fixed-term positions is not something that the management of higher education institutions encourages, but it is still a major problem within academia. SULF advocates the creation of more associate senior lectureships to enable the acquisition of skills and experience and then assessment for permanent employment.*

The position of associate senior lecturer (biträdande lektor, referred here throughout as an assistant professor or tenure track position) has been a response to the call for more structure within the Swedish higher education sector. Institutions focused on the issues of human sustainability within the field, such as the union and professional organisation SULF and the Young Academy of Sweden, plead for its continuous and increased implementation. The evidence found here in support of that plea is multi-layered. One issue that is undeniable is that the temporary academic workers are faced with a complicated system that they find hard to navigate, and they wish for more guidance and clarity. It was already discussed that often the desire for clarity is translated into more formalisation and standardisation, but that does not need to always be the case. A clear and transparent career structure with a focus on the evaluation of quality over quantity can be an answer to the problems of lack of transparency and the steering of career and work decisions through evaluation and audit compatibilities. A second factor in favour of the tenure track system is its impact on the feeling of belonging and identity and membership. Assistant professors shared fewer instances of challenges to their professional and organisational membership compared to their colleagues in other
fixed-term positions such as postdocs or lecturers. That gives them more tools to cope with the insecurities they face.

Additionally, the questions of privilege and under-privilege play an important role in how academics experience insecurity and what access they have to different mechanisms for coping with the demands stemming from that experience. Sweden is a welfare country with a comparatively strong employment protection and active unions and professional associations. Even so, it seems that vulnerable groups deserve even more focus and an intersectional approach if Sweden desires to have a truly diverse and inclusive academic field. There are controversial signals coming from the higher political levels in the country. There are steps undertaken to change the Swedish Employment Protection Act (LAS), with the aim to increase security and employment protection (SULF, 2021a). At the same time, amendments to the Aliens Act might create new uncertainties and conditions for insecurity and precarity for foreign academics (Migrationsverket, 2021; SULF, 2021b). Fortunately, as I said, Sweden has active unions and professional associations, and these issues are usually quickly brought into light when they happen, and there are steps undertaken towards shining a light on the conditions of temporary workers, minorities and underprivileged groups, including such groups in academia.

Additional steps that can be taken include, for example, creating supporting structures for early career academics and vulnerable groups, including the academics who have “fallen off the research wagon” and allocating direct resources and funding towards those groups. Early career academics or academics stuck on a series of fixed-term teaching appointments need to secure external funding if they are to allocate time for research and build a portfolio competitive enough for application to permanent positions in the current competitive climate. Often, however, it is a vicious circle of not having a good enough portfolio to apply for funding, which would give them the opportunity to build such a portfolio. The requirements from funding bodies and agencies also need to reflect the efforts to address insecurity and its effects on the academics and their work.

Another step forward that could counteract the experience of temporariness as job field insecurity or precarity could be the phasing out of quantitative journal-related metrics as the major evaluation criterium for hiring and career promotion and advancement. This practice is detrimental to academic freedom, and the exercise of professional discretion and temporary academic workers are particularly vulnerable to the subjectivities stemming from it. The need for more diverse and inclusive evaluation standards for academic work has been expressed by many scholars. My research just adds to the evidence that the current focus on journal publications has become oppressive and does not lead to the efficiency and meritocracy once believed it would. It has become obvious that counting papers is not the objective tool it seems to be, and it can lead to restrictive and subservient academic labour.
Saying that we need to focus on quality rather than quantity sounds general and unhelpful, perhaps, but it really is what needs to be done. There are many scholars that have called out the dangers of individualism (Bennet, 2003), “speed fetishism” (Adam, 2003) and a culture that promotes competition (Müller, 2014). But the question of “how” is a bit more difficult than why. “How”, I believe, can be best answered locally and will be a continuous process, rather than a one-step fixed solution. There are, however, some good examples that are already happening and can be inspirational towards more quality driven, diverse, and inclusive evaluation of academic labour. One such example is Utrecht University in the Netherlands, which recently announced that they are phasing out the impact factor as a criterium for hiring and promotion (Woolston, 2021). In their Recognition and Rewards Vision (Utrecht University, p.1), they state that they embrace open science and will strive to build a system that ‘will acknowledge pluriformity in academic work and its outcomes, it recognizes and rewards teamwork by support staff and all others involved, and it will evaluate quality, real impact on academia and society, sharing, and openness to the world’. This move is inspired by other actors and actions such as DORA – San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. The Declaration (DORA, 2012), signed by more than 20,000 individuals and organisations in 148 countries, has a few specific and one general recommendation:

*Do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist’s contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions.*

Another example, connected to the action taken by Utrecht University, is the position paper “Room for Everyone’s Talent”. Signed by every university in the Netherlands, the paper calls for inclusive and diverse career paths and academic profiles (VSNU, NFU, KNAW, NWO and ZonMw, 2019; Woolston, 2021).

Obviously, the issue of insecurity in academia is not unknown. I presented some evidence found in national and supranational legislation, opinion pieces and reports from journalists, independent organisations, trade unions and professional associations. There are many good examples across the world of groups tackling the issue locally, but also globally. I believe that there is enough will in the academic community that can be sufficient to sustain a process of introspection and resistance to the increasing precarisation of academic work.
Final words

Writing this thesis has been extremely challenging. Using theories and perspectives from multiple disciplines, following an open abductive methodology, and carrying an emancipatory ambition, my reflexivity as a researcher has been the main tool that I have used in order to investigate, present and analyse insecurity and temporariness in the academic profession. My decision to work in this challenging way has been informed by my belief that having this open approach is an opportunity to address new questions and issues that might otherwise have been inaccessible because of preconceived notions and disciplinary boundaries.

Working in this manner has presented challenges not only in my research process but also in the positioning of the contribution of my work. Working between the boundaries of disciplines and outside of a specific “gap” in the existing knowledge is a risky undertaking, especially for a young scholar who needs to “join a conversation” of more established scholars in order to create a space for themselves (Aitchison and Lee, 2006). Having a critical stance, I decided to place my bets on an unpopular approach and try to follow the surprising, interesting and impactful questions, no matter their fit within a specific discipline. In her book “A room of one’s own”, Virginia Woolf (1929/1945) describes her quest to find a specific “truth” about the female experience in the British museum. After a day spent researching at the library, she gives up hope of finding truth in all the books written by men for women. Even if those books remain unopened, no-one will suffer, says the author. There are two things I hope to avoid regarding my research. Firstly, I hope that I am not writing about things that I am not in a position to write about and that I am not spinning a narrative that reinforces unjust power dynamics. Secondly, I strive to find, recognise and direct the meaning of my research towards creating an impact. In a selfish way, I do hope that it will matter if this book remains unopened.
Epilogue

Such is the way of the world
You can never know
Just where to put all your faith
And how will it grow
Gonna rise up
Burning black holes in dark memories
Gonna rise up
Turning mistakes into gold
Such is the passage of time
Too fast to fold
Suddenly swallowed by signs
Low and behold
Gonna rise up
Find my direction magnetically
Gonna rise up
Throw down my ace in the hole

Eddie Vedder, Rise, 2007
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**Legislative documents, official reports and communications**


**Independent reports**


**Media and other sources**


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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview protocol
Appendix 2: Introductory email
Appendix 3: Informed consent form
Appendix 4: List of interviewees on temporary positions
Appendix 5: Log of additional interviews
Appendix 1. Interview protocol

**Interview guide**

[present/personal]
1. Tell me about your work, your position and conditions.

[past]
3. How did you end up here? Tell me about your academic journey.
4. What did you do [as an academic] before? Why? [as a PhD, previous positions]
5. How is it different than now?

[present/structural]
6. What is expected of you? [By whom? Who are you accountable to?]
7. How is your work evaluated? [How do you think it should be evaluated?] [How do you evaluate yourself?]
8. What is excellence in academia?
9. 3 words for the “excellent academic”?
10. What is your ideal work environment? [conditions, culture, opportunities,...]

[future]
11. What does your progress look like? [What is your goal? What would you like to avoid?]
   How is the future [academic] you different from the one today?]
12. 3 things that help you move forward? [formal/informal] [how important are personal relationships?]
13. What hinders your progress? [3 things that you are struggling with?] [What do you need to avoid?]
14. Is there anything about you personally that helps or hinders your progress? [gender, personal networks, family condition - class, soc.-econ. issues, parents/partners]
15. Who do/don’t you want to be? [Describe someone you look up to?]
Appendix 2. Introductory email

Dear [Name],

My name is Petya and I am a PhD candidate at Uppsala University, Department of Business Studies. I am conducting a study on professional roles that is empirically focused on Sweden and the Swedish academic. I am interested in uncovering how early-career academics construct notions and understandings of professional roles, norms, and values in the “in-between” stage of temporal employment. I believe that the issue bears high political, social, and economic importance. I am sure that you, yourself an academic, are very aware of the practical relevance of such projects for the development of our field. Attached you can find a brief but somewhat more informative description.

I am beginning my empirical work by investigating academics holding temporary positions within the disciplines accounting/finance and management/organization. Would you be interested in sitting down for an interview with me? I will gladly meet you at any place of convenience for you!

Let me know if participating in my project would be of interest to you.

Best regards,

Petya

Petya Burneva
Department of Business Studies
Box 513, 751 20 Uppsala
Ekonomikum, Kyrkogårdsg. 10, Ingång C
Phone: +46(0)184710000, : +46(0)725646883
Petya.Burneva@tek.uu.se
www.tek.uu.se
Constructions of professional role understanding in academia. The case of Swedish young scholars.

Project description

Initiation to a new professional environment, change of status, position or role - these are times of insecurity and ambiguity, times that could be transformative to a person and their perceptions of professional values, norms, and demands. Early-career academics often find themselves struggling to secure positions after finalising their doctoral degrees. The positions that they usually obtain are in the most part short-term and provide various degrees of stability and guidance. This liminal stage is at the same time defining for their professional future.

The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of what is considered “an academic”, what is considered professionalism and success in academia, and how these understandings are formulated and used by early-career academics in liminal positions.

The research is focused on early-career academics occupying temporary positions in higher education institutions in Sweden. I sample participants that are affiliated within the disciplines of accounting/finance and organization/management, and those holding doctoral degrees.

Method of investigation

The empirical investigation is carried out through semi-structured interviews.

Researcher

Petya Burneva is a PhD candidate at Uppsala University, Department of Business Studies. Her dissertation is part of the research project HERA - Higher Education and Research Administration.

Contact information: email: petya.burneva@fe.ku.se  mobile: 0725646883
Supervisor: Linda Wedlin  email: linda.wedlin@fe.ku.se
Appendix 3. Informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Purpose of the research
The purpose of the study is to provide better understanding of the notion of excellence in academia. The researcher is interested in learning about the participant’s own experience and ideas about what constitutes academic work and how it is perceived and qualified as good or bad. The empirical material collected in the study will be analyzed and used to draw conclusions about how these ideas are created and disseminated.

Your participation
As a participant in the research you agree to an interview with the researcher lasting approximately 1 (one) hour. You will be asked a series of questions and you are also encouraged to bring on any topic that you find relevant. You are not obliged to answer all questions. You may ask the researcher for clarification of terminology or the purpose of the questions.
The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed unless you object to it in which case the researcher will take notes.
Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time. You may also request that any data collected from you not be used in the study at a later stage. The researcher will provide confidentiality to the best possible extent and your name will not be used in any published material.
The researcher may however use direct quotes from you.
The researcher will try to accommodate your preference for time and location of the interview.

If you have any further questions please contact the researcher Petya Burneva at petya.burneva@fek.uu.se or her supervisor Linda Wedlin at linda.wedlin@fek.uu.se.

By signing below I acknowledge that I have read and understood the above information and I give my informed consent for participation in the specified research project.

Signature____________________________________

Date____________________________________
Appendix 4: List of interviewees on temporary positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Interview log</th>
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<tr>
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Appendix 5: Log of additional interviews

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