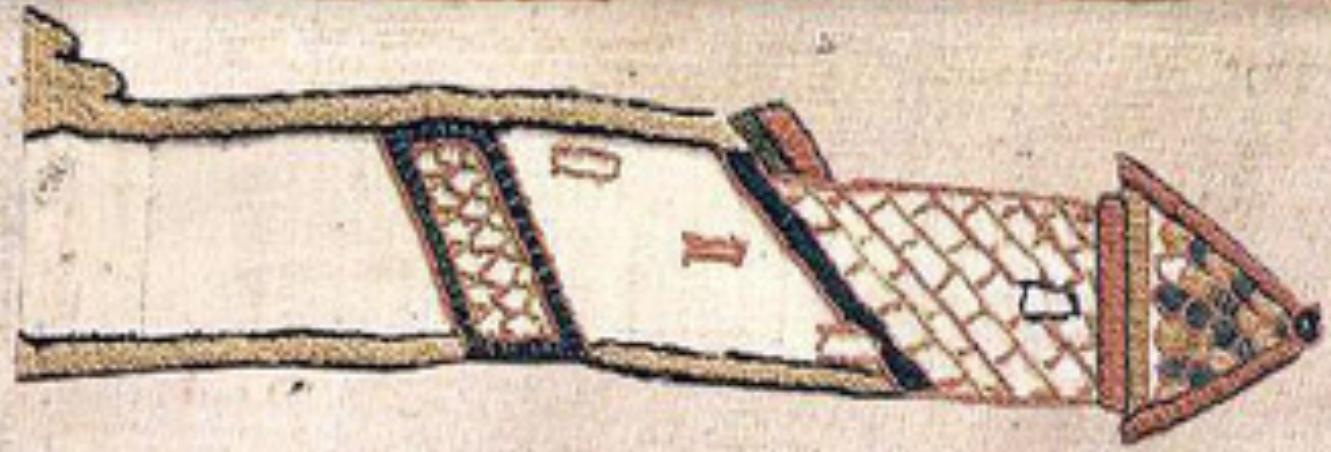


NEOLIBERAL
GOVERNMENTALITY.
CRITIQUE
COMMONS

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editorial

- The commons and their im/possibilities* 378
Casper Hoedemakers, Bernadette Loacker and Michael Pedersen

articles

- From open source to open government: A critique of open politics* 386
Nathaniel Tkacz
- Open education: Common(s), communism and the new common wealth* 406
Mike Neary and Joss Winn
- The return of the housing question* 423
Stuart Hodkinson

notes

- From humanity to nationality to bestiality: A polemic on alternatives without conclusion* 445
Werner Bonefeld

- Protest without return; or, pedagogy with a gag* 454
Matt Rodda

- Making choice, taking risk: On the coming out of Critical Management Studies* 463
Valerie Fournier and Warren Smith

reviews

- Between the event and democratic materialism* 475
Charles Barthold

Tales of 'Much of a muchness': Adventures in the land of social capital
Emma Dowling

480

Is capitalism dying out?
Steen Nepper Larsen

486

The commons and their im/possibilities

Casper Hoedemakers, Bernadette Loacker and Michael Pedersen

In recent years a familiar mantra has been recited through media channels, government reports and related sources, namely that of austerity. By now, the images of protest movements of various stripes have been well-documented, which has given the Left a renewed notion of opposition and resistance to a seemingly unperturbed neoliberal encroachment on almost all areas of life (e.g. Bonefeld, 2012, this issue; also Hamann, 2009; Read, 2009).

Consequences of the neoliberal transformation of society range from governmental policy-making along the lines of private corporate and industry interests, to the privatisation of public goods and public institutions – amongst others, hospitals, prisons, universities, schools and cultural organizations – to the self-responsibilisation of individuals for their employment, careers, welfare and health. Within neoliberal governmentality many areas and aspects that were once understood as social and political are thus repositioned within the domain of individual and collective self-government and self-management (Hamann, 2009: 40; Lodrup-Hjorth et al., 2011). Yet, this re-positioning is generally presented as an increase in autonomies and choices of individuals and groups of individuals (Vandenbergh, 2008).

However, as public services and properties in western countries become increasingly privatised, or disappear all together, the pendulum of public attention has firmly swung towards the social relations within society that appear to withstand the calculus of neoliberal transaction. For ideologies of neoliberalism, such areas of society provide a convenient support for a shrinking of the state. This can be seen for example in the notion of the Big Society, in the way that it functions as an ideological totem in David Cameron's conservative coalition government. Here, the charitable becomes an ersatz policy of public service provision, albeit one that functions without state funding and operates merely on philanthropy and a 'spirit of voluntarism' (e.g. Caffentzis, 2010). Aspects of society such as the arts, education, health care or nursing, which do not primarily operate on exchange value and can, thus, not clearly prove value and usefulness become a justification for a state withdrawal of services and support (also Böhm and Land, 2009). Within the cracks, private operators scramble to commodify and individualise what was previously a state affair.

Yet we should be careful to view such developments merely in the light of curbing public spending. Contemporary Marxist and post-Marxist work on the Left (e.g. Adler, 2007; De Angelis, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2009; Virno, 2004) has long theorised that capital sustains itself by gradually encroaching on the networks of non-transactional value that are cultivated within shared social settings. For this, Marxists have developed the notion of the, anti-capitalist, ‘commons’ (Caffentzis, 2010: 23f.). These commons provide spaces in which labour and its organization take place in greater mutuality and solidarity than that afforded by capitalist conditions of production, and common goods are produced here whose value is not parasitically creamed off through ordinary mechanisms of exchange, valorisation and surplus value extraction (Hardt and Negri, 2009).

Capital, however, relies on enclosure of both pre-capitalist and new commons and the social goods that are produced in them for its own accumulative drive (De Angelis, 2007: 133ff.). For this reason, commons are not merely social spaces in which work and life might unfold in richer, more autonomous and sustainable ways beyond the scope of capital; the commons are also sites in which critique and resistance have the potential to develop (Caffentzis, 2010: 36). These forms of resistance rely on the social relations, bonds and engagements that sustain social and political practices that are not (yet) readily subsumed under a neoliberal order of investment and competition, and the normalising and disciplining effects of the markets (De Angelis, 2007: 85; also Foucault, 1982, 2008). Within the commons, continuous movements are constructed and organized that can run counter to the attempts to instrumentalise, commodify and capitalise on social invention, integration, mutuality and creative and cooperative forms of labour. However, as the commons are currently used in various ways, we ‘can never guarantee a good outcome’ (Deleuze, 1995: 32). We can never know in advance if the struggles of the commons’ movements create cracks in the capitalistic accumulation process, are stifled by it or even used in the name and interests of recent, philanthropy- and collaboration-oriented, capitalism (Caffentzis, 2010: 40). Much work is therefore needed to create an affirmative politics and embodied ethical practices of (re)constructing the commons and common wealth and, in this vein, more actual participation, democracy, equality – and justice (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 300ff.; Hardt and Negri, 2009).

In this open issue, composed of three papers, three notes and three book reviews, we see the contours to what kind of discussion such an affirmative politics might entail in diverse areas, such as the Open Software Movement, Open Education Movement, Housing Policies, Critical Management Scholarship, Art Education as well as in debates on events and their relationship to democracy, social capital and immaterial labour. Above all, the contributions of this issue address specific concerns and tensions around capitalist exploitation and commodification logics *and* community-oriented practices of organizing that go beyond strategic calculation and exchange. In all these contributions a question that arises and seems to need constant attention is how capital moves to absorb and enclose the commons and their qualities, or to put it in slightly different terms, how the commons evolve in relation to certain contradictions within their own status as non-capital.

The first paper in this issue ‘From open source to open government: A critique of open politics’ by Nathaniel Tkacz focuses on the open source and free software movements. According to Tkacz, these movements emerged to oppose the private proprietary system of software code encryption in order to make users more dependable on repeat purchases and support, force brand loyalty through compatibility requirements and so on. Unified by a conviction that source code should be visible and openly accessible, the open source movement works on the basis of organically emerging principles of collaboration and access, in ‘bazaar’-like fashion. As such, both the free software movement and the open source movement can be seen as involved in the building of a commons that opposes the capitalist exploitation of intellectual property rights, through the commodification of the fruits of software developers’ labour. Here, as elsewhere, the labour of those who develop code is dependent not just on social bonds that are established within given companies that employ them, but in a much wider community of those interested and engaged in the sharing of ideas and knowledge, involved in mutual endeavours, educating peers and so on. Key figures in the open source movement have proclaimed the movement as politically neutral and merely founded upon universal principles of openness. Tkacz argues that this rhetoric of openness is indebted to a Popperian notion of the open society, which is ultimately only ever negatively defined, i.e. without positive ontological content but in opposition to notions of totalitarianism. For the open source movement, this means that its guiding ethos is defined in opposition to techno-legal forms of ‘closure’, which come in the shape of attempts at creating proprietary code and restrictions on information sharing by various companies and institutions. This lack of positive content then demonstrates the ways in which the common itself is contingent upon capital in its production and reproduction. Tkacz signals that the notion of the ‘open’ in guiding the formation of commons therefore has substantial limitations, as it distracts from core issues and obfuscates the modes in which enclosure of commons and co-optation of its imagery (such as in right-wing ideology) is already taking place.

We also see this concern about contradictions in the notion of the ‘open’ reflected in Neary’s and Winn’s paper ‘Opening education beyond the property relation’. While the authors acknowledge the participatory potentials of Open Education (OE) and Open Education Resources (OER) in principle, they question the realisation of OE(R)’s proclaimed intentions of going beyond traditional property relations and power structures. According to Neary and Winn, technologies such as Creative commons licensing, defining and communicating how to use intellectual property illustrate that OE(R) does not provide universal open access to education and knowledge and does therefore not fully undermine the privatisation of public education. Moreover, the authors problematise the social relations and the work and production processes characterizing OE. In their view, these processes are still infused by the logics of capitalist production, and are subsequently less oriented on autonomy, participation and democratic ideals than often assumed. Neary and Winn argue that especially within the rapidly commercialising realm of academia, the OE movement has not contributed to a liberation of constraints associated with the labour process. On the contrary, they see an increase in the commodification and standardisation of intellectual work and education through OE(R). However, in order to harness the

revolutionary and progressive potential of OE, it would be necessary to evaluate the broader material conditions in which immaterial work, the workforce and knowledge are produced. According to Neary and Winn, re-focusing on the social processes of production and labour (where value and power find their origins) would enable the OE movement to develop as real commons or ‘commonism’. This latter terms represents a form of the commons that would no longer sustain capitalist modes of production but rather form a collective political project that subverts commercialisation, commodification and alienation and, in this vein, the individualising power relations structuring our ‘virtualised’, post-industrial society.

These issues are also highlighted with respect to the public good of housing in Hodkinson. In his paper ‘The return of the housing question’, Hodkinson presents an overview of the UK housing situation within the contemporary neoliberal economy, including the ways in which debates around the defence of public housing and encroaching individualisation and privatisation have polarised activists and policy makers on the Left. On one hand, the legal possibilities of privatisation of council housing have been viewed as an opportunity to regain autonomy and self-organization by those communities who would otherwise be increasingly dependent on the state for the provision of a shrinking stock of public housing. However, this has been strongly critiqued by orthodox Marxists who view state provision of housing as the most pragmatic response to rising rents and inaccessible market prices associated with privatisation, in the absence of a wider transformation of capitalist relations. In responding to these debates, Hodkinson, like Tkacz and Neary and Winn, approaches the question of the public good from the perspective of contemporary Marxist theory on the commons. This allows for a reconsideration of the productivity of social contexts in themselves, and capitalism’s reliance on a reproduction of labour power within such social relations through the thematic of commons and their enclosure by capital. Hodkinson suggests that a progressive response to the question of housing involves three modes of mobilising the common against its capitalist enclosure: prefigurative, strategic and hegemonic commoning. Prefigurative commoning represents a way of thinking about sociality in terms that are distinctly non-capitalist in nature, and thereby constitutes a way to become aware of the oppositional relation between commons and capitalist enclosure. Here, social, material and aesthetic aspects of living become a focus for building communities with a shared, embodied relationship to their place of dwelling. This common becomes the basis for solving the immediate needs within residential communities, mutual aid and a basis for shared action against immediate threats to its stability and safety. Strategic commoning builds upon this prefigurative basis, by mobilising relations of solidarity and autonomy into tactics to prevent further enclosure by capital of housing in the form of ‘privatisation, demolition, repossession, eviction, commodification or displacement’. Hegemonic commoning, finally, points to the emergence of a political subjectivity based on struggles around housing, in the form of housing co-operatives and organized resistance against redevelopment and compulsory state purchases of council estates and other forms of community housing. Hodkinson concludes by outlining a set of demands that could guide such a radical housing politics.

In his note ‘From humanity to nationality to bestiality: A polemic on alternatives without conclusion’ Werner Bonefeld discusses the politics of (anti)austerity accompanying the financial and economic crisis. Like Hodgkinson, he thereby mainly reveals the positions that the political Left has recently taken up. Following Bonefeld’s evaluation, the Left either pursues a politics of anti-austerity, asking for a restructuring of the capitalist economy to benefit workers’ interests, or promotes a ‘socialist alternative’ to austerity, which routinely comprises suggested institutional transformations that re-nationalise and democratise parts of the financial sector. Bonefeld notes that these policies are ‘captured’ within the logic of capital and (anti)austerity, since they privilege a discourse of cuts in public policy. As a consequence, current leftist policies tend to sustain the basic assumptions, orders, classifications and relations that comprise market-oriented capitalism. However, the crucial question to pose seems to be the following: what does it mean to live a life as an economic resource? Here, Bonefeld asks for ‘radical opposition’ to specific aspects of the capitalist system. This would require as a first step saying ‘no’ to prevalent production modes within the realms of life and work. Furthermore, it would require re-politicising labour relations in the *social* sphere and, thus, critically engaging with these relations beyond the sphere and logic of capital and the economy.

The question Matt Rodda poses in his note ‘Protest without return; or, pedagogy with a gag’ is how art educators and teachers can practice critique and protest under institutional conditions that increasingly demand demonstrating value, efficiency and usefulness. While Rodda acknowledges a variety of political and economic dependencies artists and art educators are currently opposed to, he also states that effective critique and protest can emerge from art education. In this regard, Rodda introduces the example of the ‘alternative education road tour’ symposium to illustrate what ‘protest pedagogy’ in the arts could look like. Theoretically, the note takes its inspiration from Giorgio Agamben and his concepts of ‘gesture’ and the ‘gag’, which for Rodda exemplify how recent output-focused performance demands can be undermined within art education. Both the gesture and the gag are characterized by a status of ‘in-betweenness’ – they are or have neither an ‘end without means’ nor do they present a ‘means to an end’. Above all, the gesture and the gag operate on an aesthetic plane, which sustains their ambiguous, ephemeral and event-related nature. According to Rodda, it is also this nature that enables them to engage in protest in the context of art education, without running the risk of being captured and commodified by neoliberal measurement and valorisation programmes currently governing the arts.

Finally, Fournier and Smith’s note ‘Making choice, taking risk: On the coming out of critical management studies’ considers how critique has taken shape within academia and critical management studies specifically. Fournier and Smith challenge the way in which public critiques of management often come from senior academics in business schools. For the authors, such critiques are constructed within a site that itself embodies and indeed embraces many of the management practices that are the object of critique, such as highly hierarchical systems, labour intensification, precarious working arrangements and other features of contemporary labour management. The authors consider whether such a contradiction can be held responsible for the general failure of critical management critique

to connect with wider political struggles, social movements and alternative forms of organization. In doing so, they question whether radical projects pursued from the confines of the contemporary university are possibly too isolated from the commons in which social movements and radical politics emerge, hobbling efforts to connect with such progressive struggles for reform of work and management practice. Inter alia, Fournier and Smith suggest that the incentives and rewards within business schools may have been so successful in channelling the research activities of staff towards high-ranking journal publications, that critique has become disembodied from wider struggles. This note therefore reflects on the question of whether critical management scholarship is losing its meaningfulness.

We conclude this issue on the im/possibilities of the commons with three book reviews that all revolve around the topic of contemporary capitalism and its state of health. In the first review, Charles Barthold discusses Bruno Bosteels' *Badiou and Politics*. According to Barthold, this book is not only an attempt to give a coherent interpretation of Badiou's political theory, it is also a critique of two of the most well known interpretations of Badiou's political philosophy, namely Peter Hallward's and Slavoj Žižek's interpretations. With respect to the role of the commons within contemporary capitalism, one of the interesting aspects Barthold points out about Bosteels' reading is that Badiou's politics are a critique of left-wing communist political positions such as Hardt and Negri (2000).

In the second review of this issue, Emma Dowling discusses Ben Fine's *Theories of Social Capital: Researchers Behaving Badly*. Here, the concept of social capital emerges as principally relevant for understanding the commons. While the concept of social capital, referring to the importance of social relations within contemporary capitalism, often carries positive connotations, Fine's evaluation seems to be more critical. Rather than suggesting that the notion of social capital offers a critique of capitalistic relations, he assesses it as a means to maintain its status quo. In Dowling's view, Fine offers a sharp critique of the 'de-politicising nature of social capital'. However, she also suggests that for future studies it might be helpful to look at another concept that seems to simmer beneath Fine's critique - namely labour.

This issue closes with Steen Nepper Larsen's review of a book that debates exactly that topic within contemporary cognitive capitalism – André Gorz's *The Immaterial*. Here, capitalism is destined to die. According to Larsen, Gorz argues that human knowledge has become the most important productive force and an economic resource second to none for the valorisation of capital. But as knowledge is not a limited resource, reducible to a price or the time invested in its 'production', the possibility of a 'communism' of free knowledge and thinking is beginning to be envisioned within the contemporary corporate world. However, Larsen reminds us that capitalism is alive and 'kicking'. In his view, contemporary capitalism has an immense ability 'to integrate major parts of human creativity, our innovative skills, desires and communicative utterances to foster and maintain its own logic of accumulation'. What Larsen goes on to argue here is that the

commons might hold a possibility for going beyond capitalism but their existence is not a sign of the demise of capitalism.

Taken together, the contributions of this issue address the question of the ‘possibility of the commons’ in different societal areas, with reference to different, mainly neo-Marxist, theoretical concepts and with different degrees of optimism and pessimism. Yet a common evaluation the contributions follow is that the de-limiting nature of market-oriented capitalism makes it impossible to completely escape its order and power. Simultaneously, it is argued that the contemporary form or ‘spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) is, despite *and* due to its dynamics, hybridity and ‘co-operative’ nature, not able to fully capture, absorb and enclose the commons (Caffentzis, 2010: 40f.). The papers hence illustrate that the commons, and their social and creative dimension, cannot be reduced to commodities and, thus, economic and capitalist logics and rationalities (De Angelis, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2009).

According to Donzelot and Gordon (2008: 60) ‘no governmentality will abolish resistance to government’. Following this line, it seems that, while neoliberalism becomes limitless and ‘capital goes transnational’ (Vandenbergh, 2008: 897), resistance is somehow globalising as well. Recent protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street or EuroMayDay promote and support this assumption. Also within the era of neoliberalism, there seems to be ‘something that flees the system, something that is not controllable’ (Vandenbergh, 2008: 878). The commons can be seen as exemplars representing this ‘some-thing’. As ‘other spaces’ and contingent sites of resistance, they can create and enable the formation of collective movements and escape lines which have the potential and vitality to continuously or temporarily undermine, question and transgress dominant governmental rationalities, ideologies and politics of truth (Foucault, 1982). However, in order to be able to use these potentials it has recently been argued that the Left whose theory ‘sometimes seems to have got stuck in a rut’ (Thrift, 2011: ix), needs an injection of what Sloterdijk calls ‘hyperbolic theory’. This is theory that does not move within the normal dualism of western thought and which dares to think the impossible as a possibility. Contemporary capitalism and the commons are today in the middle of a battle for the imagination and, as Thrift (2011: ix) argues, if the Left is not able to forge new concepts and ideas, it risks losing this battle. It risks making the possibility of the commons an impossibility. The contributions of this issue, we believe, keep the struggle for the imagination of forms of ‘social life beyond the coordination of capital’ (Caffentzis, 2010: 41) alive.

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From open source to open government: A critique of open politics

Nathaniel Tkacz

abstract

Notions of openness are increasingly visible in a great number of political developments, from activist groups, software projects, political writings and the institutions of government. And yet, there has been very little reflection on what openness means, how it functions, or how seemingly radically different groups can all claim it as their own. Openness, it seems, is beyond disagreement and beyond scrutiny. This article considers the recent proliferation of openness as a political concept. By tracing this (re)emergence of ‘the open’ through software cultures in the 1980s and more recently in network cultures, it shows how contemporary political openness functions in relation to a new set of concepts – collaboration, participation and transparency – but also identifies important continuities with previous writings on the open, most notably in the work of Karl Popper and his intellectual ally Friedrich Hayek. By revisiting these prior works in relation to this second coming of the open, the article suggests that there is a critical flaw in how openness functions in relation to politics, beginning with the question: How is that new movements championing openness have emerged within a supposedly already-open society?

Introduction

Most think about these issues of free software, or open source software, as if they were simply questions about the efficiency of coding. Most think about them as if the only issue that this code might raise is whether it is faster, or more robust, or more reliable than closed code. Most think that this is simply a question of efficiency. Most think this, and most are wrong ... I think the issues of open source and free software are fundamental in a free society. I think they are at the core of what we mean by an open society.

– Lawrence Lessig (2005: 260)

One approach to understanding the democracy of the multitude, then, is as an open-source society, that is, a society whose source code is revealed so that we all can work collaboratively to solve its bugs and create new, better social programs.

– Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004: 340)

‘The open’ has become a master category of contemporary political thought. Such is the attraction, but also the ambiguity of openness, that it appears seemingly without tension, without need of clarification or qualification, in writers as diverse as the liberal legal scholar, Lawrence Lessig, and the post-Marxian duo Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Every political position worth its salt, it seems, must today pledge allegiance to this strange and relatively new political concept. The epigraphs above are indicative of a development that forms the basis of this paper: the re-emergence and re-politicisation of openness in relation to a set of developments specific to the realm of software. In the first epigraph, Lessig looks back, trying to connect open source and free software to an already existing notion of open politics, ‘the open society’. Hardt and Negri – who, it must be said, are a long way from home on this matter – look forward, trying to establish a connection between really existing practices and logic of open source software, and their yet to be realised ‘democracy of the multitude’. As does Lessig, I begin this paper by connecting back, by revisiting the father of open thought, Karl Popper. I trace what might be called the second coming of the open, through debates about open systems and open software in the 1980s and 90s, to the generalisation and proliferation of openness in network cultures – evidenced by such notions as open access, open education and open communities – and finally, to the re-emergence of the open in institutional politics and related writings.

My purpose is not to pin down the meaning of openness, nor to moralise upon this notion, but rather to trace its proliferation and consider how it functions in contemporary cultures, the writings of Popper, and in relation to competing and supporting concepts. Through a reconsideration of Popper, I finish by outlining some concerns for contemporary proponents of open politics – a task that I consider crucial as the open is increasingly used to ‘look forward’.

The open society

Karl Popper was not the first to write about the concept of openness, nor even of the open society (Bergson, Audra et al., 1935; Bertalanffy, 1960). However, it wasn’t until Popper wrote *The open society and its enemies* (1962), while in exile in New Zealand during the Second World War, that the political notion of the open gained mass appeal. In two volumes, Popper rewrites the history of political philosophy, and also lived political conflict, around the concept of openness. He locates the origins of his version of ‘the open society’ in the ‘breakdown of Greek tribalism’ (Popper, 1962: 183), culminating in the Peloponnesian War (circa 431-404 BC) between the Delian League, headed by Athens, and the Peloponnesian League, led by Sparta. Interwoven with this history is a detailed critique of Plato, whose ‘closed’ political philosophy, Popper argues, is strongly marked by these events. Plato is depicted as a brilliant but misguided thinker whose experiences of the war (and especially the execution of his mentor Socrates) lead him to build a totalitarian and reactionary political philosophy. This philosophy, Popper writes, is built on the principle that virtually all change is bad, and society, which is always ‘in flux’, is therefore in a state of deterioration. In opposition to this state of flux, Plato posits an original ideal form of

society existing in ancient history, highly stable and resistant to change from which the current imperfect society is derived. This original state equates to the *theory of forms or ideas* that underpins Plato's philosophical thought: the original tribal society is the ideal, whereas the actually existing society, with all its problems, is the inferior and degraded version of this form. In the battle between Athens and Sparta, the older, 'tribal' Spartan social structure is considered more desirable as it is closer to the ideal form, while the Athenian democracy represents radical change and, therefore, degeneration. It is around this notion of negative change and the ideal ancient Greek tribal form that Plato writes *The Republic* (1974). *The Republic* describes a society where all change is arrested. The social is organised around three classes – rulers, auxiliaries and producers – all with highly specific and unchanging roles. The whole social edifice – education, law, reproductive norms and so on – is designed to maintain this strict demarcation and rigid order. There is no 'cross-breeding' between the classes and social interaction between them is avoided.

Philosophy, conceived as the perception of ideal forms, emerges in Plato's thought as the bridging device from the status quo to this ideal state. As the famous 'simile of the cave' passage reminds us, Plato posits the philosopher as the only actor able to see true knowledge – the light of the sun as opposed to the darkness and shadow puppets on the cave wall – and thus, as the only individual qualified to determine how a society should be organised. Such enlightenment also distances the philosopher from the desires and indulgences of everyday life and thus makes them even more suitable rulers of society – so-called Philosopher Kings.

Popper critiques Plato on multiple grounds but the overall argument can be summarised as follows: Plato claims to possess a kind of true knowledge, the knowledge of forms. This knowledge provides the general laws of history and at the same time positions the philosopher as the only person able to steer society in the right direction (because of the knowledge they possess about how things should be). All decision-making capacity is removed from everyone except the philosopher, who decides in the most disinterested fashion what is right for all. That is, armed with the knowledge of history, with its ineluctable laws, the philosopher is almost compelled to become a *social engineer*. Deprived of any capacity to choose due to the reification of all roles and duties, coupled with the subjugation of non-philosophical knowledge – the mere 'knowledge of shadows' – individuals in Plato's Republic are effectively denied agency.

Popper's critique of closed thought and politics extends well beyond the writings of Plato. Any political philosophy based on unchallengeable truths – such as the discovery of the *laws of history* – that provide definite and rigid future programmes, and where individual will is always subordinated to these larger truths, is described in the language of the *closed society*. For Popper, the three most important philosophers in this tradition after Plato are Aristotle, Hegel and Marx. Aristotle is largely dismissed as Plato's mouthpiece, with the exception that he puts a positive spin on Plato's theory of forms: rather than constantly degrading, the state is positioned as heading towards an ultimate end, towards perfection. Aristotle is important for Popper, however, because his biologically influenced teleological

thought is taken up by Hegel, which in turn informs German nationalism through the notion of the destiny of one race (the most perfect) to rule all others, as well as Marx's laws of class struggle and the destiny of the proletariat. Thus, Plato is significant not only as the first closed thinker or 'enemy of the open society', and not just because he influenced these key historical figures, but because it is his political philosophy that informed the two major competing political programs during the second world war: fascism and communism. In Popper's time, therefore, fascism and communism are the modern manifestations of the closed society, while capitalism and the democratic institutions affiliated with it represent the open society.

The summation of Popper's thought is a re-articulation of existing political concepts (democracy, fascism, communism), of the writings of key historical figures of political philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx and others) and of lived conflict (the Peloponnesian War, WW2) around the new master categories of open and closed. In this new politics of the open/closed, the fate of a nation and its people, or alternatively the class inequalities produced by capitalism, are no longer the primary concern. The question is no longer about identity, race or class, but whether or not a social programme, that is, a set of knowledges and related practices, is able to change. Social programmes based on unchallengeable truths – the so-called laws of history or of destiny – emerge as the fundamental enemy, and what might be considered radically different political programmes in a different frame of analysis – communism and fascism – are made equivalent. The positive side of this political equation, the open society, is one where totalising knowledge is necessarily impossible. Openness is necessary because nobody can know for certain what the best course for society might be from the outset, and at the same time it is assumed that openness provides the best possible conditions for producing knowledge and, therefore, making better decisions.

I return to Popper and the open society below, but first I want to map the re-emergence and re-articulation of openness, beginning in software cultures, through to network cultures and more traditional political institutions. I want to demonstrate the significance of openness by gesturing toward its proliferation and showing how it is increasingly held up as the highest political ideal.

From systems to source, or, how we became open (again)

By the 1980s, the USA was under the sway of neo-liberalism. The organisational philosophy of 'competition' had seemingly defeated the socialist desire for 'centralised planning' in the socioeconomic ideology wars. The revised philosophical argument championing liberalism was put forward by Friedrich Hayek (1944) and resonates strongly with Popper's notion of the open society. Hayek argues that the knowledge of how a society should be organised and which direction it should take is beyond any one individual or group and can never be known with certainty. Because of this, any attempt at centralised planning (i.e. socialism, communism, fascism) which is founded on exactly the assumption

that what is best for all society is directly knowable, is likely to produce bad decisions that only satisfy a small group. For Hayek, giving one group the ability to make decisions for the whole results in the overall reduction of liberty and the advent of totalitarianism. Instead, Hayek suggests, once society reaches a certain complexity only a decentralised mode of organisation, where competing ideas and practices can interact and adjust in relation to change, can ensure liberty:

It is only as the factors which have to be taken into account become so numerous that it is impossible to gain a synoptic view of them, that decentralisation becomes imperative. ... decentralisation has become necessary because nobody can consciously balance all the considerations bearing on the decisions of so many individuals, the co-ordination can clearly not be affected by 'conscious control', but only by arrangements which convey to each agent the information he must possess in order effectively to adjust his decisions to those of others. (Hayek, 1944: 51)

The precise form that decentralisation takes is competitive markets. Such markets theoretically enable many individuals to shape society through the sale and purchase of commodities and, thus, with no 'conscious control'. Freedom is therefore intimately tied to economic freedom – to the freedom to sell commodities, including human labour, in a market. But the argument for economic freedom derives from a more fundamental critique of knowledge and centralisation. Thus, the critique of totalitarian knowledge put forward by Popper, and shared by Hayek, is translated into government and economic policy to justify competitive, market-based forms of organising society.

With these larger changes in the theory and practice of governance taking place in the background, important new contests over openness arose in computer cultures, specifically around the notions of open systems and, soon after, software. These contests were seemingly far removed from Hayek-inspired neo-liberal agendas but, as we shall see, arguments made by Popper and Hayek at the level of philosophy and economics are isomorphic with the ones that played out in computer cultures. In regard to systems, Christopher Kelty has covered how debates about openness played out around the UNIX operating system as well as the TCP/IP protocols. He describes these debates as at once technical and moral, 'including the demand for structures of fair and open competition, antimonopoly and open markets, and open standards processes...' (Kelty, 2008: 144). In the open systems debates, the battle for openness is not against closed forms of knowledge, à la Popper, but against proprietary standards – what might be described as closed infrastructures. I will not recount in detail this battle for open systems (this has already been done very well by Kelty). Instead, I will focus on one story that developed throughout this period: the birth of Free Software and the challenge of Open Source. I focus on this story because it surpasses notions of openness in open systems and captures both the lived experience and the contested distributions of agency in software cultures. It reveals how competing mutations of liberalism were aligned with new legalities and modes of production and, most importantly, how all these developments would redefine and re-energise political openness.

In 1980, a group of adventurous programmers at MIT, including a young Richard Stallman, were confronted with a problem: the AI Lab they were working in had received a new Xerox 9700 Laser Printer. As the printer station was located on a different floor to the majority of people who used it, the young Stallman had written a small programme for the previous Xerographic Printer that electronically notified a user when their print job was finished and also alerted all logged in users when the printer was jammed. This required some minor modifications of the Xerographic Printer's code. When the new Xerox machine arrived, Stallman intended to make similar programme modifications. But curiously, this new machine, which was offered to the lab as a 'gift' from Xerox, did not arrive accompanied with a document containing the printer's (human readable) source code. Without the source code, no modifications could be made to the Xerox. Stallman decided to track down the original programmer from Xerox to ask for the source code personally. On confronting the programmer, he was told that he could not have a copy of the source code and, moreover, that the programmer had signed a Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA), which at the time was a complete novelty in the field of software. It was after this encounter with Xerox, the story goes, that Stallman famously declared, 'All software should be free'. Not (only) in the sense of free to use or free to distribute, but in that greater sense of free to change, modify, rewrite, adapt... – in short, a freedom to reorganise and modify the algorithms that instruct the machines that populate our worlds. This story circulates as the mythic origin of free software and establishes Stallman as its guru and prophet.

After growing increasingly disillusioned with the effects of commodification as a mechanism of control taking place both in his immediate environment and the wider software community, Stallman left the lab at MIT. His plan was to create an entire operating system (OS) that would not be subject to what he perceived as the *closure* of proprietary software. In 1983 he announced plans to create the GNU OS as part of a new Free Software Movement (FSM). The GNU OS was to be written from scratch using non-proprietary code. In 1985, he set up a non-profit corporation called the Free Software Foundation (FSF) to formally oversee and represent the movement. The most significant development during this period, however, was the creation of several unique copyright licences designed to keep the outputs of the FSM 'open'. Although, initially, specific licenses were written for each new piece of software, in 1989 Stallman developed the GNU General Public License (GNU GPL) as a broadly applicable software license. These licenses are generally described as using the mechanism of copyright against itself, in that rather than restricting distribution through the creation of scarcity they use copyright to ensure an application or text can be accessed, made visible, dissected and modified or 'remixed' (Lessig, 2008). The GNU licences were not the only permission-based (as opposed to restriction-based) licenses, but the GNU GPL in particular was certainly the most progressive of its type; not only was any piece of software created under it accessible and modifiable, but the license states that any derivative of an earlier text/program must also adopt the same license. This was the legal mechanism that supported Stallman's desire to keep the outputs of his FSM 'free' and the movement as a whole growing (because of the so-called viral nature of the license). The FSF would not only oversee the movement:

Stallman also suggested that any product making use of the license be signed over to the foundation, which would police any violations and take appropriate legal action.

While Stallman proclaims that code is necessarily political, other programmers have attempted to uncouple this pairing (see Berry, 2008: 147-187; Williams, 2002: 136). Indeed, Gabriella Coleman (2004: 3) has argued that the refusal to acknowledge their actions as political is one of the key characteristics of many software cultures. In 1998, a group of high profile programmers started the Open Source Initiative (OSI). The most vocal member of this group, Eric Raymond, viewed Stallman as a controlling idealist who focused too much on politics at the expense of technical excellence and efficiency. This strategic reframing of the question of code in terms of excellence and efficiency was designed to make free software business friendly. The term Open Source was chosen to sidestep the connotations surrounding Stallman's rhetoric of 'free', which seemed less than appealing to profit-seeking enterprises, especially when attached to a product. 'Open Source' is well chosen as it foregrounds the technical dimension of these software practices – 'this movement is about source code' – and conveniently sidesteps Stallman's political concerns. In order achieve this distance from the FSM, the OSI had to generate their own licenses that effectively reversed the 'viral' nature of the GPL. The challenge for these licenses – such as the Mozilla Public License – was to 'balance' the requirement for companies to commodify software outputs with the increased potential for productivity, made possible by involving outsiders and harnessing their 'contributions'.

The OSI also had its own gurus in Linus Torvalds and Eric Raymond. In 1997 Raymond published his first iteration of *The cathedral and the bazaar*, a hugely influential musing on the production method he observed in the Linux operating system – the project headed by Torvalds. The terms 'cathedral' and 'bazaar' are used to represent competing production methods. Of the cathedral method, Raymond writes:

I had been preaching the Unix gospel of small tools, rapid prototyping and evolutionary programming for years. But I also believed there was a certain critical complexity above which a more centralized, a priori approach was required. I believed that the most important software (operating systems and really large tools like the Emacs programming editor) needed to be built like cathedrals, carefully crafted by individual wizards or small bands of mages working in splendid isolation... (Raymond, 2000: 3)

The bazaar mode of production, found in Linux, emerges as the improbable yet superior other:

Linus Torvalds's style of development – release early and often, delegate everything you can, be open to the point of promiscuity – came as a surprise. No quiet, reverent cathedral-building here – rather, the Linux community seemed to resemble a great babbling bazaar of differing agendas and approaches (aptly symbolized by the Linux archive sites, who'd take submissions from anyone) out of which a coherent and stable system could seemingly emerge only by a succession of miracles.

The fact that this bazaar style seemed to work, and work well, came as a distinct shock. As I learned my way around, I worked hard not just at individual projects, but also at trying to understand why the Linux world not only didn't fly apart in confusion but seemed to go from strength to strength at a speed barely imaginable to cathedral-builders. (*ibid.*)

Out of the FSM and the OSI emerge two competing mutations of liberalism. With Stallman lies the recognition that the creation of markets via the commodification of software actually reduces the capacities (or liberties) of individuals who use and modify it. The argument for open markets that played out in the open systems debates is extended to software itself. It is a liberal argument that fundamentally challenges the pre-existing liberal coupling of freedom and property. Openness is primarily understood as a technological quality, whose opposite, as Kelty reminds us, ‘is not closed, but “proprietary”’ (2008: 143). With Raymond, on the other hand, the emphasis is not on commodification, but the organisation of production. Hayek’s argument about the ideal organisation of society, as described above, strongly parallels those put forward by Raymond, but at the level of individual contributions to specific software projects. The cathedral parallels the ‘centralised planning’ critiqued by Hayek, while the bazaar emerges as a new liberal utopia: radically open to competing ‘agendas and ideas’; progress ‘at a speed barely imaginable’; and the miraculous emergence of a ‘coherent and stable system’. The history of the OSI, and the writings of Raymond in particular, demonstrate how contemporary political openness came to be articulated with a specific method of software development. The open would come to be articulated alongside notions of participation, transparency and increased efficiency. While Stallman remained steadfast in his preference for the term ‘free’ to describe his movement and its outputs, it was the business-backed ‘open source’, and eventually just ‘open’, that captured the minds of people outside software culture.

The open takes flight

While software, such as GNU/Linux-based operating systems, the Apache server client and the Mozilla web browser, have made FLOSS highly visible within software communities for many years, it is the *translation* of these ideas into new domains that is most significant. The material covered in this section is by no means exhaustive. Rather, I focus on a series of examples that demonstrate certain specific qualities of how openness has been translated. I begin with projects that name themselves ‘open’ and thus explicitly interpret their activities in relation to openness. I then look at different projects that describe key facets of their activities in terms of openness, including activist groups that organise around openness, two ‘mainstream’ entities (Wikipedia and Google), and finally different political writings and government initiatives that make use of the open. To be sure, there are many significant differences between all the examples covered but my focus is on this very fact: that the same rhetoric is deployed by what are otherwise very different groups or organisations. It is the fact of diffusion that is most significant.

The most obvious translation of openness emerges from online projects or movements that explicitly name themselves as such. Within this category are broad movements or trends, such as Open Access, which is generally used to describe the making available of published content and especially scholarly, educational and scientific materials. One example of open-as-Open Access is the Open Humanities Press (2010). This initiative publishes academic monographs but also acts as a kind of branding or certification mechanism for a

series of online journals. Open Humanities Press has four stated principles that cover access, scholarship, diversity and transparency, and a series of related goals, the last of which is to ‘explore new forms of scholarly collaboration’ (2010). Other examples of Open Access include the Bentham Open project (2010); individual journals such as Open Medicine, which makes its content ‘freely available for others to read, download, copy, distribute, make derivative works (“remix”) and use with attribution’ (2010) and whose stated mission includes the promotion of international ‘collaboration on health issues’ (2010); and finally, open access study material, such as those provided by participants in the Open Courseware Consortium (2010), of which MIT’s Open Courseware project (2010) is perhaps the best known.

Closely related to these open access initiatives are projects that include an open access component, but also emphasise a broader or perhaps more ‘procedural’ sense of openness. A good example here is The Open Knowledge Foundation. The Foundation ‘seeks a world in which open knowledge is ubiquitous and routine’ and sees openness as having ‘far-reaching societal benefits’ (2010). The Foundation states, for example, that politically ‘openness improves governance through increased transparency and engagement’; culturally, ‘openness means greater access, sharing and participation’; economically, ‘openness permits easier and more rapid reuse of material’; and ‘for science to effectively function, and for society to reap the full benefits from scientific endeavours, it is crucial that public scientific information be open’ (The Open Knowledge Foundation, 2010). Because of these perceived benefits, the Foundation supports and facilitates a range of projects, including the Open Data Commons, Open Shakespeare, Open Economics, Open Text Book, Open Milton, Open Knowledge Forums, Open Geodata and Open Environmental Data. I have listed only the projects with ‘open’ in the title, but there are numerous others (see The Open Knowledge Foundation, 2010).

The strongest expression of *translated openness*, however, is to be found in the Open Everything movement (2010). Open Everything has a wiki that details its events and its function. The welcome page of the wiki states:

Open Everything is a global conversation about the art, science and spirit of 'open'. It gathers people using openness to create and improve software, education, media, philanthropy, architecture, neighbourhoods, workplaces and the society we live in: everything. It's about thinking, doing and being open. (2010)

Further down the page are a series of statements about the open:

Open is changing the game. And, while Wikipedia and open source software offer great examples... we know that openness, collaboration and participation are spreading well beyond the realm of technology... Where open is headed is huge. Open Everything gathers people who are charting this trajectory. (2010)

Openness is conceived as a new mode of being, applicable to many areas of life and gathering significant momentum – ‘changing the game’ as it were. Once again, this ‘spirit of open’ is closely articulated with collaboration and participation. The Free and Open

Everything initiative is also associated with The Foundation for P2P Alternatives, which functions ‘as a clearing house for open/free, participatory/p2p and commons oriented initiatives’ (P2P Foundation Contributors, 2010). The P2P Foundation has its own Open Everything directory, including a detailed mind map titled “Everything Open and Free” (see Figure 1), which attempts to comprehensively map and classify the dimensions of openness.

Linked from the central “Everything Open and Free” hub is an array of different nodes, each of which covers a different dimension of openness, including: Aspects of Openness, Enablers of Openness, Infrastructures of Openness, Practices of Openness, Domains of Openness, Products of Openness, Open Movements and Open Consciousness. The Open Everything project, together with the Everything Open and Free mind map, represents an emerging desire to radically transform society around the concept of openness. Translated from the world of software (but not reducible to it), openness must therefore be understood as a powerful new form of political desire in network cultures.

This new stated commitment to the open is not limited to explicitly activist and marginal network cultures. Two radically different but equally ‘mainstream’ organisations, Wikipedia and Google, also understand their operation in terms of openness. As the ‘free encyclopaedia that anyone can edit’, Wikipedia is commonly held up as the most successful example of translated openness. On the “About” page of the English Wikipedia, the encyclopaedia is described as ‘open to a large contributor base’; ‘written by open and transparent consensus’; and the various effects of its ‘radical openness’ are considered (Wikipedia Contributors, 2010). Moreover, the project is built on wiki software, which allows for easy and immediate page creation and modification and is licensed under permissive, commons-based licenses (Creative Commons Attribution – Sharealike 3.0 License and the GNU Free Documentation License). Interestingly, while Wikipedia is more often celebrated as the open ideal in terms of contribution, governance, technology and licensing, the rhetoric of openness is stronger in Google’s case. For example, on Google’s *Public Policy Blog*, Senior Vice President of Product Management, Jonathan Rosenberg, published a post titled “The meaning of open”. He writes: ‘In an open system, a competitive advantage doesn’t derive from locking in customers, but rather from understanding the fast-moving system better than anyone else and using that knowledge to generate better, more innovative products’ (2009). The sentiments expressed in the post are very similar to the ones offered by Raymond and the Open Source Initiative, where openness is figured as an innovative and competitive production method perfectly compatible with a new form of capitalist accumulation. Rosenberg goes on to define openness in terms of hardware and software, information, transparency, and control. The key passage, however, comes toward the end of the post, where Rosenberg is explicit about what he sees is at stake in the battle for openness:

Open will win. It will win on the Internet and will then cascade across many walks of life: The future of government is transparency. The future of commerce is information symmetry. The future of culture is freedom. The future of science and medicine is collaboration. The future of entertainment is participation. Each of these futures depends on an open Internet. (2009)

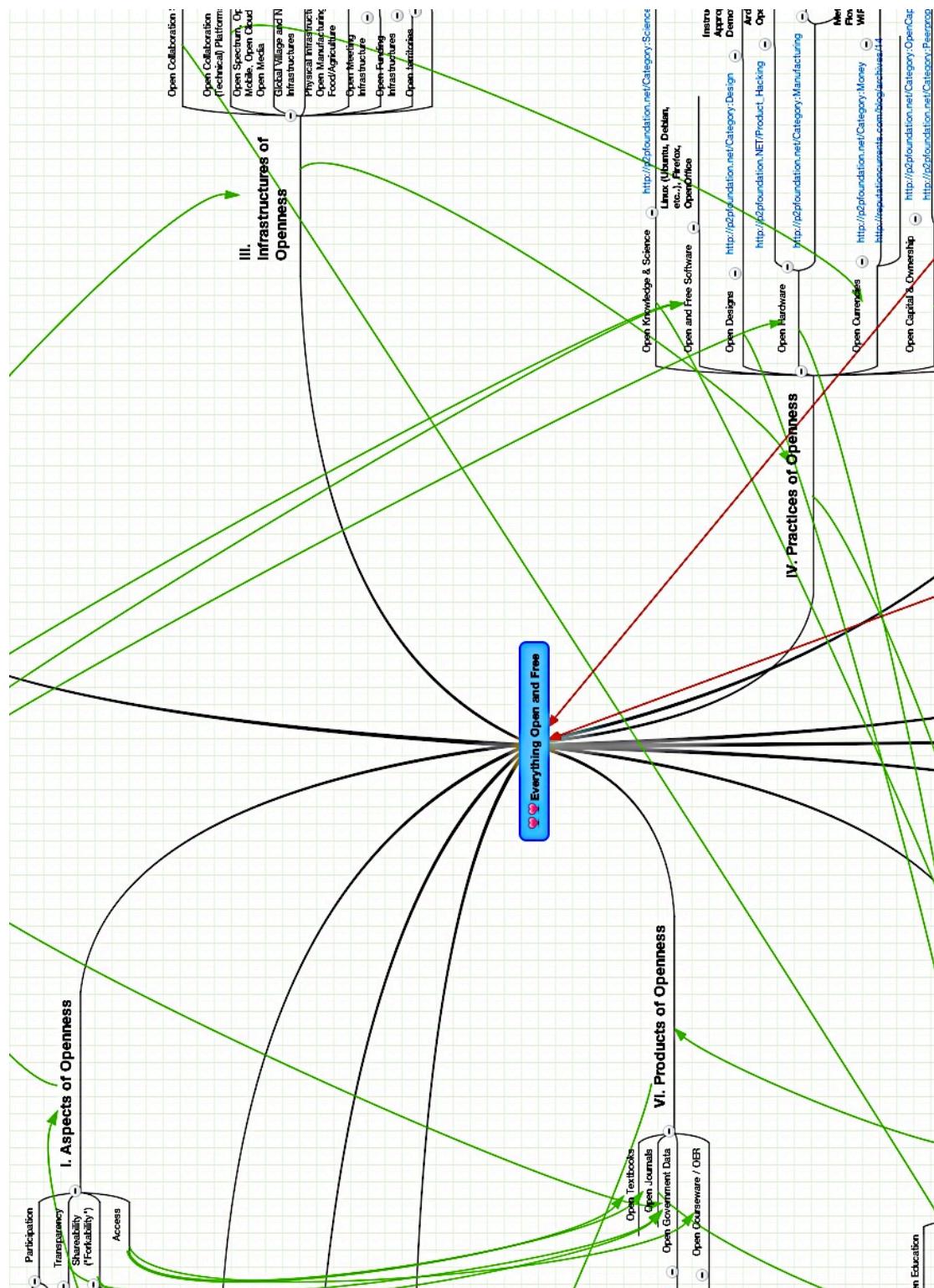


Figure 1

For Rosenberg, openness is also a quality of a system. Through competition, the most superior knowledge within that system will rise to the top and continue the march of the system's progress – 'better, more innovative products'.

I want to finish my review of contemporary openness by considering its deployment outside software, outside networks cultures, and into the realm of institutional politics and related writings. One of the first to translate the open (back) into institutional politics was Douglas Rushkoff. In 2003, he wrote a short monograph titled *Open source democracy: How online communication is changing offline politics* (Rushkoff, 2003). Rushkoff argues that a new 'electronic renaissance' has taken place, a profound shift in individuals' perceptions of their own agency in electronic environments. He uses open source as his key example: 'like literacy, the open source ethos and process are hard if not impossible to control once they are unleashed. Once people are invited to participate in, say, the coding of a software program, they begin to question just how much of the rest of the world is open for discussion' (Rushkoff, 2003: 56-57). Rushkoff's renaissance, however, does not merely detail how politics can benefit from the insights of open source; it is a politics totally enmeshed in computational metaphors: 'The implementation of an open source democracy will require us to dig deep into the very code of our legislative processes, and then rebirth it in the new context of our networked reality' (Rushkoff, 2003: 56).

Less than a decade later, Rushkoff's ideas are fast becoming the norm. For example, the recent edited collection, *Open government: Collaboration, transparency, and participation in practice* (Lathrop and Ruma, 2010), includes contributions by key members of government and commerce and is clearly aimed at a broad audience. The collection's rhetoric is a perfect mash up of Hayek, Popper, Raymond and Stallman, evidenced by a scan of the section titles such as, "Competition is critical to any ecosystem", "Open standards spark innovation and growth", "The closed model of decision making" and "Open government and open society". The connection to the organisational method of software cultures is made more explicit in Tim O'Reilly's contribution, "Government as a platform", where he writes:

What if... we thought of government as the manager of a marketplace? In *The cathedral & the bazaar*, Eric Raymond uses the image of a bazaar to contrast the collaborative development model of open source software with traditional software development, but the analogy is equally applicable to government. ... A bazaar... is a place where the community itself exchanges goods and services. (2010: 11)

The rest of the piece is dedicated to translating Raymond's insights to the practice of government. In another chapter, Charles Armstrong describes the profound impact the internet holds for democracy:

The Internet has changed a fundamental aspect of democratic systems which has persisted for 7,000 years. The change may presage a period of democratic innovation on a scale comparable to classical Greece. It will lead to democratic systems that are more fluid, less centralized, and more responsive than those we know today; systems where people can participate as little or as much as they wish and

where representation is based on personal trust networks rather than abstract party affiliations. This is Emergent Democracy. (2010: 167)

Upon considering ‘the road to emergent democracy’, Armstrong notes that ‘we tend to associate democracy with nations, cities, and other state entities’, but it is his ‘hunch that virtual corporations’ and not traditional institutions will pave the way (Armstrong, 2010: 175). The example of what these virtual institutions look like, once again, is Wikipedia. In both of these texts, government is re-imagined as a competitive marketplace of ideas, modelled after bazaar-like virtual corporations that resemble Wikipedia and which promise to reinvoke democracy on a scale unmatched since classical Greece.

This kind of sentiment is similarly expressed by serving politicians and newly-established government initiatives. One early supporter of the open in Britain was the conservative MP, Douglas Carswell. In 2009, Carswell appeared on the current affairs show *Newsnight*, specifically in relation to the parliamentary expenses scandal, which later led to the stepping-down of the Speaker of the House of Commons. After commenting critically on the scandal, Carswell called for a move to “Open Source Politics”. This historic gesture was mirrored on his blog, where he writes: ‘Open source software. Wikipedia and wiki-learning. Open source parties and politics, too?’ (2009). He also writes about opening the primaries (the selection of candidates for election) – ‘Open primaries might spell the end for closed-shop parties’ (2009) – and name drops Clay Shirky and notions like ‘collaborative creation’.

Australia’s recent Government 2.0 Taskforce represents a more organised statement of political openness. On the “about” section of its website the Taskforce divides its stated areas of work into two streams:

The first relates to increasing the openness of government through making public sector information more widely available to promote transparency, innovation and value adding to government information.

The second stream is concerned with encouraging online engagement with the aim of drawing in the information, knowledge, perspectives, resources and even, where possible, the active collaboration of anyone wishing to contribute to public life. (2010)

Likewise, in a memorandum titled “Transparency and open government”, which introduced his Open Government Initiative in the United States, Barack Obama writes:

My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government. (Obama, 2009)

Finally, even the recent conservative libertarian movement, the Tea Party, has borrowed ideals from open source. The production of the movement’s notorious “Contract from America”, a document that lists ten key agenda items the movement would like congress candidates to sign, was described by its creator in *The New York Times* as follows:

'Hundreds of thousands of people voted for their favorite principles online to create the Contract as an open-sourced platform for the Tea Party movement' (Becker, 2010). Openness, information, collaboration, transparency and participation – government 2.0 indeed.

Thus far, I have traced the open through debates about computer systems and standards, into software cultures in the eighties and nineties, and network cultures in the last decade, and, finally, outside of these realms and into that of institutional politics and society as a whole. And while the notion of openness in government is not unique to the current neo-liberal regime (as the writings of Popper make clear), I hope to have made clear that the general deployment of the open in institutional politics, and as a political concept more generally, cannot be separated from its emergence in software and network cultures. Indeed, it is perhaps more accurate to posit today's openness as evidence of the networked and computational, even cybernetic, nature of governance. Through these multiple trajectories, openness is placed in a variety of settings; articulated alongside different concepts and put to use in different ways. The open circulates, scales up, garners new allies, is reconfigured, distinguished and remixed; each movement troubles and destabilises the articulation of its meaning. The open sways between means and ends, between noun, verb and adjective. And throughout all this movement, openness nonetheless maintains certain consistencies, such as its couplings with transparency, collaboration, competition and participation, and its close ties with various enactments of liberalism. What to make of a concept championed by all walks of political life? When conservative liberals, libertarians, liberal democrats, post-autonomous Marxists and left leaning activists all claim the open as their own and all agree that the open is the way forward? What to make of a politics that contains bits and pieces of many older political positions, but cannot be aligned easily with any one in particular? Or one that can be effortlessly deployed on any scale, from small projects to all society, by the American government or the radical P2P Foundation? One that defends markets but (at least in some instances) attacks (intellectual) property, and whose meaning is so overwhelmingly positive it seems impossible to question, let alone critique?

While the *force of the open* must be acknowledged – the real energy of the people who rally behind it, the way innumerable processes have been transformed in its name, the new projects and positive outcomes it has produced – I suggest that the concept itself has some crucial problems. In the final section of this essay, I aim to demonstrate that not only is the open problematic in relation to contemporary software and network cultures, but that the concept contains a poverty that has existed in all its uses throughout history and that makes it unsuitable for political description. Indeed, I argue that the open actively works against the development of a political language – if, that is, we take the political to extend beyond questions of just governance to the circulation and distribution of power and force, and take politics to mean the distributions of agency in general, as well as the conflicts and issues that emerge when antagonistic flows intersect. To make this argument, I return to Popper and *The open society*.

A critique of the open

The various criticisms Popper levels against Plato and his followers have not gone unchallenged (Kendall, 1960; Cornforth, 1968; Levinson, 1970; Vernon, 1976; Shearmur, 1996; De Cock and Bohm, 2007). The critique I put forward does not rely on whether Popper was faithful in his interpretation of the great philosophers, or of the terrible events that inspired his texts, as do others. I do not interrogate how Popper's political philosophy is intimately connected to, if not derived from, his scientific philosophy and I do not challenge the validity of the unique concepts he relies on in *The open society*, such as critical rationalism and piecemeal social engineering. Instead, I focus specifically on the character of openness *per se* in relation to the rest of the text. I argue that the logic of openness actually gives rise to, and is perfectly compatible with, new forms of closure; indeed, that closure is inherent in Popper's notion of openness. Moreover, I claim that there is something about openness, about the mobilisation of the open and its conceptual allies, that actively works against making these closures visible. I finish by reflecting on the peculiar situation of the second coming of openness within the supposedly already-open society.

Like his critique of the closed – which has both philosophical and empirical dimensions – Popper's open society is both a set of ideas and a really existing entity. These two dimensions, which enact an awkward distinction between reality and thought, play out and interact in complex and ultimately troubled ways. The first thing one notices about *The open society* is that it is almost entirely dedicated to critique. In the first volume, for example, the open is not taken up at all until the final chapter, after nine preceding chapters on Plato. It is a work explicitly concerned with the *Enemies* of the open, rather than the open itself (Magee, 1982: 87). As a concept, therefore, the open is reactionary; it gains meaning largely through a consideration of what it is *not*. The open is significant in terms of the actually existing political situation of Popper's time largely because it is neither fascism nor communism. As we shall see, this negative, or *is not*, quality of the concept and concomitant reluctance to build a lasting affirmative dimension is entirely necessary and gets to the heart of the problem of the open as a political concept.

Of the negative or *is not* qualities of the open, we can extract the following from Popper's critique of closed societies: open societies do not condone historical or economic determinism; do not support programs of radical social engineering based on truth claims; and do not hold any truth to be absolute. These qualities are the direct result of the critique of the closed I detailed earlier. Under closer analysis, however, it is possible to identify numerous positive qualities of open societies, even though these are generally mentioned in passing and without extended elaboration in the text. Such positive qualities surface especially in the final chapter of the first volume, after the critique of Plato is concluded. In these pages Popper regularly invokes reason and the rational as characteristics of open societies, noting for example that the open is 'a rational attempt to improve social conditions' (1962: 172). Open societies are also individual-centric in terms of decision-making, responsibility, competition and familial ties. According to Popper, 'Personal

relationships of a new kind can arise where they can be freely entered into, instead of being determined by the accidents of birth; and with this, a new individualism arises' (1962: 175); and 'the society in which individuals are confronted with personal decisions, [is] the *open society*' (1962: 173). Such individualism also leads to strong competition and exchange relations: 'one of the most important characteristics of the open society [is] competition for status among its members,' and further, 'in an open society, many members strive to rise socially, and to take the place of other members. This may lead, for example, to such important social phenomenon as class struggle' (1962: 174). Regarding exchange, Popper writes that 'our modern open societies function largely by way of abstract relations, such as exchange or co-operation' (1962). While discussing the historical beginnings of the open society, Popper offers the following quasi-legal and ethical characteristics: 'The new faith of the open society, the faith in man [sic], in equalitarian justice, and in human reason, was perhaps beginning to take shape, but it was not yet formulated' (1962: 189). Furthermore, he states, 'Individualism, equalitarianism, faith in reason and love of freedom were new, powerful, and, from the point of view of the enemies of the open society, dangerous sentiments that had to be fought' (1962: 199). Finally, throughout the text as a whole, Popper regularly gestures towards a preference for democracy over totalitarian regimes. Indeed, at times the open society appears interchangeable with Popper's understanding of democracy.

Of these negative and positive identifiers, it is only the negative qualities that approach anything like the essence or definitive core of openness. More precisely, the positive qualities of openness are actually negative qualities masked as positive ones, or alternatively exist at the level of reality (of real practices) and are therefore subject to continual transformation. Openness emerges as a theory bereft of content coupled with a really existing practice, defined by its continual non-identification with itself. This character of openness is made clear through a consideration of Popper's understanding of democracy – one of the key *positive* qualities of the open society. He writes:

The theory I have in mind is one which does not proceed, as it were, from a doctrine of the intrinsic goodness or righteousness of a majority rule, but rather from the baseness of tyranny; or more precisely, it rests upon the decision, or upon the adoption of the proposal, to avoid and resist tyranny. (Popper, 1962: 124)

Popper proceeds to immediately distinguish between two 'types of government': one that can be removed 'without bloodshed', through institutional processes such as elections; the other which can only be removed via revolution. Only the first mode of governance is democratic: 'I suggest the term 'democracy' as a short-hand label for a government of the first type, and the term 'tyranny' or 'dictatorship' for the second'. So, a 'theory of democracy' on the one hand, a theory defined only as against tyranny, or *not tyranny*, and a practice of democracy on the other, with institutions and processes and all the messy details that practice implies. This *practice* of democratic governance, though, and as described, is necessarily dynamic and only ever represents one more or less flawed instantiation, one better or worse implementation of the theory of "*not tyranny*".

[T]he various equalitarian methods of democratic control, such as general elections and representative government, are to be considered as no more than well-tried and, in the presence of a widespread traditional distrust of tyranny, reasonably effective institutional safeguards against tyranny, always open to improvement, and even providing methods for their own improvement. (Popper, 1962: 125)

Democracy, as we can see, is only a positive quality of openness to the extent that it replicates the form of openness itself, in a fractal manner: it is composed of a negative core and an ephemeral, positive reality. Democracy's existence as a positive quality of the open is therefore at best dubious. As I have suggested, these two related components of openness, each of which defers the concept's meaning in different ways, are in fact necessary. Indeed, it is the continual deferral, the reluctance to assert an authoritative positive identity, which distinguishes the open from totalitarian, closed forms of knowledge. The open is a kind of negative response to totalitarian knowledge; a recognition of the fundamental agential significance of knowledge, of the old power/knowledge coupling, and at the same time an attempt to insert some distance between them by emptying one side of the equation.

I want to suggest at this point that all of these positive, if ephemeral, traits of the open are alive and well in contemporary society; they remain, in fact, the central values of neo-liberal democracies: freedom, democracy, individualism, competition and exchange (free markets), equalitarian justice and reason. This is hardly surprising, considering Popper's (abstract) concept of the open society in fact corresponds with the actually existing capitalist democracies of the mid-20th century, and such societies persist. (This is not to suggest that such characteristics are indisputably realised or haven't changed their meaning and function, but rather that politics still plays out in and through this language). It seems, therefore, that we are still in the society Popper described as open, both in terms of *is not communism or fascism*, and in terms of the positive qualities just mentioned. At the same time, however, and consistent with Popper's logic, this actually existing open society is likely to change.

To continue with the account of democratic practices, for example, it is likely, and indeed categorically necessary, that these practices may be replaced. How is it that *specific sets of practices* called 'democracy' are part of the open and yet in future might not be? One possible response is that the democratic practices might be succeeded by something that is even more democratic, and thus, even more open. Another possible response is that these practices have *become* closed; that somehow, through time this mode of governance loses its character of openness. Both of these responses suggest that *forms of closure* exist *within* open societies: in the first scenario, if a practice is to be replaced with a *more open* one, it must not be entirely open to begin with. The second scenario indicates that the seeds of closure are already immanent within this open mode of governance. However, the alternative, which is to affirm a specific version of democracy and a specific programme of knowledge and related practices – in short, a precise truth of the open – is simultaneously the open's closure. Thus, by invoking positive but ephemeral qualities, and a society that necessarily changes, Popper avoids the kinds of closure he identifies in totalitarian thought.

At the same time, closure remains an inherent part of the open; it is what openness must continually respond to and work against – a continual threat amongst the ranks.

Openness, we might say, implies antagonism, or what the language of openness would describe as closures. Such closures do not randomly emerge, unexpected and from the outside. It is the very qualities that Popper holds up as representative of contemporary openness and which constitute the formal language of the just organisation of society – freedom, competition, equality and exchange coupled with democratic institutions – that not only coincide with, but are actually generative of new forms of closure. The most obvious of these are the ‘economic’ closures produced by ‘competition’ and ‘free markets’, continuous and generalised asymmetrical distributions of agency produced by (debt-based) informational capitalism of which the on-going global financial crisis is only the most recent and dramatic episode. These are the same conditions that produced the invisible source code, non-disclosure agreements and broader regime of intellectual property that Stallman experienced as closures in his lab at MIT. In short, Popper’s argument against totalitarian knowledge – replicated faithfully by his close friend and intellectual ally Hayek to defend free markets and private property over centralised planning – is compatible with and even constitutive of neo-liberal capitalism. And it is these same forms of closure that the second coming of openness, together with its new set of conceptual allies, tries to address. But what to make of this second coming?

The first thing one notices is the curious situation of openness emerging within a supposedly already-open society. Other than confirming the closures inherent in the open, I think this curious situation is suggestive of a crucial conceptual shortcoming of openness. Once an organisation, state or project is labelled open, it becomes difficult to *account for* the politics (closures) that emerge from within. For Popper, this is because his version of the open is primarily a critique of totalitarian knowledge, but also because he struggles to focus on the details of his open society for fear of closing it. Recent uses of openness – from open systems, to open source and free and open everything – bear significant resemblances to Popper’s in terms of character and function. Once more, the open emerges largely as a reaction to a set of undesirable developments, beginning with the realm of closed systems and intellectual property and its ‘closed source’. And once more, the open is articulated alongside an entourage of fractal sub-concepts that defer political description: participation, collaboration and transparency. While this re-emergence works as a critique of Popper-Hayek openness, it simultaneously reinstates the same conceptual architecture. Of all the authors cited in the account of openness I have developed here, for example, not one has turned a critical eye upon the open, and there has been very little criticism of specific open projects. If a critical word is written, it is never about the whole, but only about how one small component can be made better, more open. Somewhat ironically, once something is labeled open, it seems that no more description is needed. Openness is the answer to everything and it is what we all agree upon.

I began this essay by quoting Lessig and Hardt and Negri, radically different thinkers who both gesture towards the open. Throughout my analysis I added many names and

organisations to these three, from the Tea Party to leftist activist groups, governments, major corporations and scholars. All these individuals and groups understand their practices and ideas in relation to the open and use it to ‘look forward’. I hope to have shown, however, that the open has not proven well suited to this task. Rather than using the open to look forward, there is a need to look more closely at the specific projects that operate under its name – at their details, emergent relations, consistencies, modes of organising and stabilising, points of difference, and forms of exclusion and inclusion. If we wish to understand the divergent political realities of things described as open, and to make visible their distributions of agency and organising forces, we cannot ‘go native’, as a young, anthropologically-minded Bruno Latour once wrote, meaning that we cannot adopt the language used in the practices we wish to study. To describe the political organisation of all things open requires leaving the rhetoric of open behind.

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Open education: Common(s), commonism and the new common wealth

Mike Neary and Joss Winn

abstract

Open Education, and specifically the Open Education Resources movement, seeks to provide universal access to knowledge, undermining the historical enclosure and increasing privatisation of the public education system. An important aspect of this movement is a reinvigoration of the concept of 'the commons'. The paper examines this aspiration by submitting the implicit theoretical assumptions of Open Education and the underlying notion of 'the commons' to the test of critical political economy. The paper acknowledges the radical possibility of the idea of 'the commons', but argues that its radical potentiality can be undermined by a preoccupation with 'the freedom of things rather than with the freedom of labour'. The paper presents an interpretation of 'the commons' based on the concept of 'living knowledge' and 'autonomous institutionality' (Roggero, 2011), and offers the Social Science Centre in the UK, as an example of an 'institution of the common'¹. The paper concludes by arguing the most radical revision of the concept of 'the common' involves a fundamental reappraisal of what constitutes social or common wealth.

Introduction

There are two distinct forms of Open Education: Open Education itself, and Open Educational Resources; these two terms are often used interchangeably, yet retain subtle differences.

Open Education refers to recent efforts by individuals and organisations across the world to use the Internet to share knowledge, ideas, teaching practices, infrastructure, tools and resources, inside and outside formal educational settings. Although the term Open Education has been used since the 1960s, the current dominant use of the term refers to co-ordinated efforts during the past decade to exploit the growing availability of personal computers and increasingly ubiquitous high-speed networks.

Examples of Open Education initiatives are varied and still emerging but include newly established organisations such as the P2P University; new learning theories, such as

¹ The authors are founding members of the Social Science Centre, Lincoln, UK.

Connectivism; and new styles of participatory learning design, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). All aspects of Open Education place an emphasis on the availability of and advantages afforded by the Internet for the production and exchange of knowledge. For example, the P2P University refers to itself as a ‘grassroots open education project that organises learning outside of institutional walls... leveraging the internet and educational materials available online’ (P2PU.org).

P2PU emphasizes its accessibility, low cost and democratic style of bringing together those who wish to teach and those who wish to learn. Connectivism is ‘a learning theory for the digital age’ (Siemens, 2004), a cybernetic theory of personal networks, interdependent nodes and dynamic feedback. Its authors emphasise the inter-related connections made possible by digital networks and the cycle of information that flows from the individual to the network and into organizations. The ‘amplification of learning, knowledge and understanding through the extension of a personal network is the epitome of connectivism’ (Siemens, 2004). MOOCs apply Connectivist learning theory in the design of courses with hundreds or thousands of autonomous participants encouraged to participate through their Personal Learning Environments (PLEs), constructed out of blogs, wikis and other loosely coupled services and aggregated resources from the Internet. From each of these examples, Open Education can be understood as a positive response to the seemingly technologically determined nature of our lives, constructing new opportunities for access to learning, advancing greater democracy in learning design, asserting self-determination and supporting lifelong learning in the face of rapid changes in labour-force requirements.

Open Educational Resources (OER) refers to the worldwide community effort to create an educational commons based on the provision of actual ‘educational materials and resources offered freely and openly for anyone to use and under some licenses to re-mix, improve and redistribute’ (Wikipedia). Typically, those resources are made available under a Creative Commons license and include both learning resources and tools by which those resources are created, managed and disseminated.

In their simplest form, OERs are any teaching or learning resource on the Internet that is licensed for re-use. The largest institutional collection of OERs is published by MIT’s *OpenCourseWare* project, which has systematically licensed teaching and learning resources for over 2000 of MIT’s courses since 2001 (Winn, 2012). Similarly, recurrent programmes of funding in the UK have led to the creation and release of OERs across the higher education sector and are available from JORUM, the national repository for open teaching and learning materials.

In just ten years, a relatively small number of educators have created a discernible movement that has attracted millions of pounds from philanthropic and state funding. This movement, growing out of hundreds of universities, colleges, schools and other organisations, has produced tens of thousands of educational resources, often entire course materials that can be used by anyone with access to the Internet. Today, there are

international consortia, conferences, NGOs and government reports that promote the opening up of education, to which Open Education and OERs are central.

Open Education is a pragmatic response by educators and researchers to the growth of the Internet, using a widespread technology to undertake what its advocates see as both a public good and to exploit an opportunity to effect educational reform. The question remains open as to whether Open Education and OER constitute a revolution in teaching and learning, as their proponents claim:

We are on the cusp of a global revolution in teaching and learning. Educators worldwide are developing a vast pool of educational resources on the Internet, open and free for all to use. These educators are creating a world where each and every person on earth can access and contribute to the sum of all human knowledge. They are also planting the seeds of a new pedagogy where educators and learners create, shape and evolve knowledge together, deepening their skills and understanding as they go. (Cape Town Open Education Declaration, 2007)

Private property and Creative Commons

The question remains as the extent to which the values that underpin Open Education and OER constitute a real revolution in education. The answer to that question revolves around the concept of ‘the commons’ and the way it has been used to encode new forms of property under the concept of the Creative Commons (Lessig, 2001, 2004; Boyle, 2008; Benkler, 2006).

Open Education and OER rely heavily on the use of Creative Commons licenses, all of which are in one way or another derived from the General Public License (GPL) and Berkeley Software Distribution (BSD) licenses first created in 1989. Since the 1990s, software has been created and distributed using such licenses and it is widely acknowledged that the popular Creative Commons licenses are inspired by the use of open licenses in the world of software. Creative commons licensing provides a method for producers of Open Educational Resources to define more precisely the terms of use of their intellectual work.

The writing of Lessig, Benkler, Boyle and others provides persuasive and eloquent arguments about the importance of protecting and developing a creative and (re)productive commons in the face of attempts to consolidate the property relation in an increasingly digital culture. However, this tactic has been characterized as ‘information exceptionalism’ (Pederson, 2010) in that while there is a well-established history of legislation that conceives ‘property’ as both tangible and intangible, prominent writers in the recent Free Culture movement tactically avoid conflating these tangible and intangible realms:

Essentially, the Free Software and Free Culture movements reject the concept of property and instead choose to frame issues pertaining to ideas, information and knowledge - or the intangible realm - in

terms of freedom, liberty, human rights, policy, intervention, and regulation. Anything but property, but preferably ‘policy’. (Pederson, 2010: 93)

As a result, an acknowledgement of the underpinning material basis for the production of the commons is avoided, treating information as the exception to the naturalised rule of property. However, this division of property into policy only serves to *protect* the private property relation by diverting public attention to the promise of freedoms in the intangible informational realm (Pederson, 2010: 102). Consequently, Open Education and OER, in their attempts to provide universal access to knowledge, do not undermine the increasing privatisation of the public education system.

From the freedom of things to the freedom of labour

While Open Education attempts to liberate intellectual work from the constraints of intellectual property law, it does little to liberate the intellectual worker from the constraints of the academic labour process and the reality of private property. The reification of ‘the commons’ as a site of non-scarce, replicable and accessible educational resources is to mistake the freedom of things for the freedom of labour. Open Education Resources are the product of intellectual work and not simply the application of novel Creative Commons licenses. In that sense there is nothing new about the production of OERs, they are simply ‘a stage in the metamorphosis of the labour process’ (Söderberg, 2007: 71).

As universities rapidly replace their collegial frameworks with corporate structures, prioritising commercial partnerships and promoting themselves as engines of economic growth (Finlayson and Hayward, 2010; Levidow, 2002), the jobs and employment rights of teachers grows increasingly vulnerable and exploited through the use of fixed-term and casual employment contracts and the roll out of technologies which aim to automate and regulate the work of teachers in the name of efficiency and improving the student-customer experience. In this form, education is simply a market where indebted students enter into a contract around learning content and accreditation (Noble, 1998).

As the university increasingly adopts corporate forms, objectives and practices, so the role of the academic is to improve the brand and reputation of the university (Neocleous, 2003). As can be seen in the case of MIT, the public profile provided by open, online courses and open educational resources provides a further level of academic distinction to higher education institutions, and is at once both a contribution to the ‘public good’ and a method of extracting further value out of the academic labour process (Winn, 2012). To what extent the Open Education movement can oppose the corporate personification of institutions and the objectification of their staff and students is still open to question, although the overwhelming trend so far is for OER to be seen as sustainable only to the extent that it can attract private and state funding, which serves the reputation building and, therefore, value creation of the respective universities as institutions for the public good and notable for the quality of their intellectual output.

'The commons': a new radical common-sense

The concept of 'the commons' has become ubiquitous as a generic term with which to conceptualise the notion of Open Education and OERs. At the same time the notion of 'the commons', has been subject to further critique and elaboration by Marxists scholars, so much so that the concept of 'the commons' has become the new radical commonsense, and a way of reinvigorating the concept of communism.

Commons has become: 'common organisational structures, where the common is seen not as a natural resource but a social product, and this common is an exhaustible source of innovation and creativity' (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 111-112), and 'the incarnation, the production and the liberation of the multitude' (2000: 303), as well as 'the shared substance of our social being' (Zizek, 2009). In another formulation 'the commons' has emerged as the verb 'to common', with 'commoning' as the basis for a new constitution, 'the rules we use to decide how to share our common resources' (Midnight Notes, 2009). In a more historical exposition 'commoning' is reclaimed as a way of establishing customary rights, the basic principles of which are: 'anti-enclosure, neighbourhood, travel, subsistence and reparation' (Linebaugh, 2008: 275) providing 'the right of resistance to the reality of the planet of slums, gated communities, and terror without end' (Linebaugh, 2008: 279), and the basis for 'networks of resistance... against the capitalist state' (De Angelis and Stavrides, 2011).

One of the more sustained renditions of a new commons is the notion of 'commonism' elaborated by Dyer-Witheford (2006, 2007), who, in a number of articles has sought to promote the concept of commonism as a way to avoid the bad history of authoritarian state communism, while, at the same time, providing an antidote to centralised planning and the restrictions of private property through new forms of collective ownership. An important aspect of the notion of commonism is the way in which it connects with issues of technological production in the context of Open Education and Open Educational Resources. Dyer-Witheford's most significant work to date has been *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism* (1999). In this book he sets out the ways in which postmodern capitalism has extended beyond the factory to permeate all of social life, particularly through the digitalised circuits of cyber-space. He shows how these extended social sites and the circuits through which they are connected provide spaces of interconnected collected struggle and resistance.

Cyber-Marx is conceptualized within the framework of Autonomist Marxism. The basic framework of Autonomism is well known (Wright, 2002). Key aspects of this version of Marxism are, firstly, Marx's mature social theory as elaborated in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* is a theory of capital's precariousness, rather than the theory of domination espoused by orthodox Marxism. This precariousness is produced through the power of labour (the working class):

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from

the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned. (Tronti, 1964)

Secondly, this ‘scandalous novelty of this new workerist ideology’ (Wright, 2002: 63) demanded an even more shocking revelation. Not only was Capital not the centre of its own social universe, but the working class was now reconstituted to include not just workers at work in factories, but other groups that included students, the unemployed and the women’s movement, previously not regarded as central to the reproduction of surplus value. Key to this formulation was the concept of the ‘social factory’:

At the highest level of capitalist development, the social relation becomes a moment of the relation of production, the whole of society becomes an articulation of production; in other words, the whole of society exists as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society. (Tronti, 1971: 51-2, quoted in Wright, 2002: 37-38)

Thirdly, at the centre of the notion of class composition lies the concept of self-valorisation (*auto-valorizzazione*). The Autonomists had taken the most central idea of Marx’s capital, the law of value, and turned it against itself: Capital as the self expansive Subject is now replaced by the capacity of the working class for self valorization in and against the Capital relation. Self-valorisation is defined as: ‘the positive moments of working class autonomy - where the negative moments are made up of workers’ resistance to capital domination’; and, ‘a self-defining, self-determining process which goes beyond the mere resistance to capitalist valorisation to a positive project of self-constitution’ (Cleaver, 1992: 129 quoted in Dinerstein, Bohn, and Spicer, 2008).

Finally, one of the very practical ways by which this self-valorisation and class recomposition might be achieved is through workers enquiry or co-research. Beginning as inquiry into actual conditions of work in Italian factories in the 1950s, workers alongside intellectuals used the methods of social science research to develop their own form of radical sociology as the basis for a revolutionary science, i.e., the production of knowledge as a political project: ‘the joint production of social knowledge’ (Wright, 2002: 23); and so come to know the basis of their own class recomposition. This is not knowledge for its own sake but ‘the only way to understand the system is conceiving its destruction’ (Asor Rosa in Quaderni Rosi quoted in Wright, 2002: 29).

All of this practical intellectual activity was possessed with a sense of immanence and urgency, giving immediacy to the slogan: ‘communism is the real movement which abolishes the present state of things’ (Marx, 1998). For these new revolutionary scientists communism is not a project for constructing a model of a future world; but, rather, ‘a practical means for the destruction of the present society’ (Tronti, 1965: 8).

Commonism: as a cell-like form

Dyer-Witheford takes the spirit and the sensibility of Autonomist Marxism, not least its conceptual ingenuity, and attempts to recreate a framework of resistance through his concept of commonism. Just as Autonomia inverts the notion of valorisation as self-valorisation, Commonism takes as its starting point the organising principle on which the circuit of capitalist expansion is established, i.e. the commodity-form, and uses it as the basis of revolutionary struggle. As Dyer-Witheford reminds us, Marx opens Capital Vol. 1 with the statement:

The wealth of society in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, *appears* as an immense collection of commodities; the individual commodity *appears* as its elemental form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity. (Marx, 1990. Authors' emphasis)

Commonism takes this statement as the organising principle for its own radical response to the social relations of capitalist society:

If the cell form of capitalism is the commodity, the cellular form of a society beyond capital is the common. A commodity is a good produced for sale, a common is a good produced, or conserved, to be shared. The notion of a commodity, a good produced for sale, presupposes private owners between whom the exchange occurs. The notions of the common presupposes collectivities – associations and assemblies – within which sharing is organised. If capitalism presents itself as an immense heap of commodities, commonism is a multiplication of commons. (Dyer-Witheford, 2007)

The emphasis here is on the difference between the production of goods for sale, and the production of goods to be shared as a public good. In each case the emphasis is on forms of ownership and sharing. Dyer-Witheford (2007) argues that the moment of collision between the commodity and the commons is the moment of struggle against the logic of capitalism. He identifies three distinct areas where these struggles are concentrated: the ecology, the social, and the network:

Ecological disaster is the revenge of the markets so-called negative externalities'; social development is based on market operations, 'intensifying inequality, with immiseration amidst plentitude'; and networks are, 'the market's inability to accommodate its own positive externalities, that is, to allow the full benefits of innovations when they overflow market price mechanisms. (Dyer-Witheford, 2007)

Commonism points towards the kinds of progressive forms of social associations that these struggles have created. Commonism identifies these new forms of ownership as the *ecological commons* – 'conservation and regulation but also of public funding of new technologies and transportation systems'; the *social commons* – 'a global guaranteed livelihood entails a commons based on redistribution of wealth, while solidarity economics create experimental collectively-managed forms of production', and the *networked commons* – 'a commons of abundance, of non-rivalrous information goods', including free and open-source software as well as OERs (Dyer-Witheford, 2007).

In a moment of theoretical ingenuity, Dyer-Witheford argues that just as Capital operates through circuits of exchange, so too the commons circulate to create self-reinforcing

networks of alternative provision in a way that is both ‘aggressive and expansive: proliferating, self-strengthening and diversifying’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2007). It is this sense of linked and connected struggles that form the core of his notion of commonism. Taken together these three spheres will form a new social order: a ‘commons of singularites’; or, ‘the circulation of the common’, i.e., commonism’. Commonism will be carried forward through ‘a pluralistic planning process’ involving state and non-state organisations supported by a ‘commonist’ government, and in that way represent a global new ‘New Deal’ of major proportions (Dyer-Witheford, 2007).

In a previous elaboration, Dyer-Witheford connects commonism very directly with the concept of cognitive capitalism, generated by new high technologies, based on digitalisation and biotechnology, all of which have the capacity to be life-changing (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 23). Following Marx (1843), he defines this capacity for human transformation, as ‘Species Beings’.

Dyer-Witheford develops the essence of radical subjectivity implied in this notion of the commons through the concept of ‘species being’, which he adapts from Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 1844. Dyer-Witheford reminds us that Marx defined ‘species being’ as human life that is alienated from products of its own labour, from fellow beings, from the natural world and from their own ‘historical possibilities of self-development’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 17). ‘Species being’, after Marx, is ‘life activity itself as an object of will and consciousness’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 17). ‘Species being’ is ‘a constitutive power, a bootstrapped, self-reinforcing loop of social co-operation, technoscientific competencies and conscious awareness’ (2006:17). It is ‘the capacity of humans to affect change in their collective development’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 17). Dyer-Witheford makes the bold claim:

‘Species Being’ is the closest Marx came to positively identifying, transformative agency of communism. The creation of a ‘working class’ as a decomposition of species being inflicted by the ‘class-ifyng’ gridding and divisive operations of capital as it alienates species being: class identity is that which has to be destroyed in struggle so that species being can emerge. (18)

Dyer-Witheford argues that the new regimes of biotechnology and digitalisation offer the potential for the socialisation of productive activity, new modes of product creation and circulation outside of ‘the orbit of the commodity form’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 25). This can happen, he argues, through the development of peer-to-peer and open source networks: as ‘creative commons’ and ‘open ‘cultures’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 25), as well as by access to affordable drugs, and the social control of pharmaceutical production and distribution. In this way commonism is contesting the regime of private property of the world market, ‘not as a natural state, but an equalitarian order to be achieved’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 27). Again, Dyer-Witheford argues this can be carried out by a regime of ‘social planning, and on a scale to make previous efforts look retiring’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 30). All of this, he claims, is made possible by the ‘new informational technologies created by cognitive capital [which] makes such governmentality feasible’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 30), kept in check by the logic of the new planetary logic of the

commons: ‘the logic of collective creativity and welfare proposed by the counter-globalisation movements’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2006: 16): the new commonism.

Critique of Commonism and Autonomist Marxism

While commonism draws attention to progressive forms of collaborative labour, its focus is very much on the positive redistribution of goods and resources. The implication is that different forms of exchange produce different forms of social activity, ‘shared resources generate forms of shared co-operation – associations – that coordinate the conversion of further resources into expanded commons’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2007). The focus is very much on exchange relations rather than searching for more substantive underlying levels of social determinations in the ways in which social relations are produced.

With its focus on exchange rather than production, commonism not only replays the consumerist limits of the Open Education and Open Educational Resources movement, but also, ironically, is in danger of replicating the forms of social regulation it is attempting to avoid: Socialism. If Socialism is ‘the collective ownership of the means of production and economic planning in an industrialised context’ (Postone, 1993: 7), then commonism looks very much like the latest form of socialist society. Notwithstanding the fact that commonism attempts to privilege one form of planning over another, radical and democratic rather than centralised and repressive, without a fundamental exposition of the processes through which capitalist society is (re)produced, these instructions look normative and contingent rather than determined by a progressive materially grounded social project (Postone, 1993: 11 & 15).

The limits of Dyer-Witheford’s commonism are the limits of Autonomist Marxism. Autonomia does provide a powerful theorisation, the strength of which is its ability to connect and reconnect with movements of revolutionary resistance. However, its populist and enduring appeal is also a source of its theoretical weakness. By presenting the working class as the substance of radical subjectivity, Autonomia is presenting labour as a fetishised and transhistorical category, transgressing the key formulation of Marx’s mature social science. This point is well made by the Endnotes Collective:

Labour does not simply pre-exist its objectification in the capitalist commodity as a positive ground to be liberated in socialism or communism through the alteration of its formal expression. Rather, in a fundamental sense value – as the primary social mediation – pre-exists and thus has a priority over labour. (Endnotes Collective, 2010)

In this way, the overcoming of Capital cannot simply involve the emancipation of workers, or any other form of work that suggests a naturalised quality of human activity, e.g., ‘species being’; but, rather, the destruction of the commodity-form and the value relation on which it is based. The Endnotes Collective refer to this type of negative critique as ‘communisation’.

The importance of ‘improvement’

This formulation of labour as the historical and logical product of the development of capitalist social relations is made clear through an exposition of the development of the anti-commons movement of enclosure. Writers in the Marxist tradition have exposed the historical and logical development of capitalism as the destruction of common land and its associated customary rights as well as the process by which value is extracted from workers. This process of the ongoing production of surplus value is captured by the concept of improvement – an important issue that is often underplayed in the historical account of commons and enclosure². It is, in fact, the process of improvement that provides the dynamic for technological developments and bio-science (Meiksins Wood, 2002).

Capitalism began as a process of enclosure and improvement; starting in England in the 16th century it spread throughout the world by colonialism, empire and globalisation (Meiksins Wood, 2002). This process of enclosure (i.e. ‘primitive accumulation’) by which peasants and indigenous peoples were forced from the land was characterised by violence and repression, signaling a complete transformation in the most basic human practices with each other and with nature (Meiksins Wood, 2002: 95; Bellamy Foster, 2000).

Enclosure and improvement are not simply about the restrictions and development of common land, but are more fundamentally concerned with the historic and social fabrication of human labour as waged work, forming the basis for capitalist relations of production. Under the terms of waged work direct producers are dispossessed of all property, other than their own labour-power, which they are compelled to sell to their employers. The rate at which labour-power is exploited by employers decides the amount of surplus value that is produced. The rate of surplus value is not in any sense related to the concrete nature of labour (i.e. use value) or the quantity of goods produced (i.e. empirical wealth), but is a social calculation based on the productivity of each worker (i.e. socially necessary labour) in relation to the productivity of labour in general (i.e. abstract labour), taken as a social average. It is the extent to which value in capitalism is calculated as the social measure of a real abstraction, rather than simply by the quantity of goods produced, that defines the character of capitalist value (i.e. non-empirical wealth). Under pressure of competition employers are forced to improve the objective conditions of production, including the capacity of labour-power, to realise their investment on the market by the exchange of goods and services (i.e. commodities). These objective conditions include the forms in which labour-power is reproduced, meaning that the relations of work extend to include the whole of society, until they constitute the nature of the social itself (i.e. real subsumption).

These improvements are highly contentious and are prone to produce ever more sophisticated forms of worker resistance as the capacity of labour-power is improved.

2 For example, Linebaugh’s compelling account of the Magna Carta in the history of commons has little to say on the issue of improvement.

These increasingly sophisticated forms of protest ensure that conflict, contradiction and crisis are an endemic aspect of the capitalist world. The alternatives proposed by dispossessed workers are based on the social ownership and control of the conditions of production, which the increasingly socialised process of production implies. It is this increasingly social process of production which creates the conditions for the idea of ‘the commons’ to re-emerge as a critical principle and political project.

The peculiarity of Capital is that these imperatives of production are impersonal and indirect, enforced through the abstract law of value which exists as the political power of the state and the economic power of money, each of which constitute, as complementary forms, the abstract power of the capital relation (Postone, 1993; Clarke, 1991a). This process of abstraction renders what is a social and historical process as if it were natural and timeless, requiring a critique of political economy to reveal its true nature.

Bearing this in mind, the state cannot exist as a functional solution to the catastrophe of Capitalism, e.g., a new ‘New Deal’, as however populist or democratic its planning structures might be the capitalist state is itself a form of crisis and catastrophe (Clarke, 1991a). Nor, by the same logic, can emancipation be found in the concept of ‘Species Being’, nor through the idea of alienated labour on which it is based. The power of Marx’s work is found in the revelation of the power of abstraction of labour and the value-form through which Marx laid the foundations for his mature critique of political economy (Clarke, 1991b: 82).

A fully grounded social theory begins in the substantive forms within which social relations are derived and determined. For Marx those relations are determined by Capital, described as ‘...value in motion...’ (Marx, 1990). Therefore, the starting point for any analysis of capital is value and not the commodity-form or ‘species being’ (Postone, 1993; Clarke, 1991b). While Commonism is right to draw our attention to the significance of the commodity-form as the organising principle for capitalism, Marx’s mature social theory is careful to draw our attention to the fact that the wealth of capitalist societies only *appears* to be the vast accumulation of commodities. The real wealth of capitalist society is not material things produced by alienated labour, as in the early work, but immaterial value, the substance of which is abstract labour, which *appears* in the form of things (i.e. commodities). Therefore, any attempt to build a critique of Capital from the concept of the commodity-form or ‘species being’, rather than the immaterial reality of value out of which the thing like world of commodities are derived, is based on a fundamental misconception of Marx’s critical social theory and the form of value in capital the substance of which is abstract labour (Clarke, 1991b).

A fully developed critique of capital does not start by replicating the cell-like commodity-form, nor by basing radical subjectivity within a transhistorical and suprasocial concept of ‘species being’. The key point is that ‘Marx’s notion of the overcoming of capitalism... involves a transformation not only of the existing mode of distribution but also of the mode

of production' (Postone, 1993: 23). This means negating the logic of capitalist production: the law of value, through a process of 'anti-value in motion' (Dinerstein and Neary, 2002).

Anti-value in motion: A new 'institution of the common'

In the final chapter of *Cyber-Marx*, Dyer-Witheford provides what *appears* to be a compelling account of the ways in which academic labour can develop forms of resistance, including strikes, inviting activists onto campus, by allegiances with other protesting workers and social movements against 'high technology austerity' (Dyer-Witheford, 1999: 235). Along with these he suggests newly constituted curricula based on specific radical topics: the establishment of new indices of well-being beyond monetarised measures; the new capacities for democratic planning afforded by new technology; systems of income allocation outside of wage – labour; the development of peer to peer open source communications networks; research projects that seek to enrich critical political economy with ecological and feminist knowledge, and the formation of aesthetics and imaginaries adequate to the scope of what a progressive and sustainable humanity might become (Dyer-Witheford, 2004: 90- 91). He suggests using the technologies against themselves through what he refers to as 'movements of species being' (Dyer-Witheford, 2004: 89):

They will invoke some of the same intellectual and co-operative capacities cognitive capital tries to harness, but point them in different directions, and with a vastly expanded horizon of collective responsibility. They will establish networks of alternative research, new connections and alliances; they build a capacity for counter-planning from below. (Dyer-Witheford, 2004: 89)

Dyer-Witheford is right to argue that 'Universities will be key to this transformation' (Dyer-Witheford, 2004: 90), as a key institution in the move towards a post capitalist society of the commons. But in Dyer-Witheford's communist world of knowledge production, the organisational structure of the university is not challenged fundamentally, its institutional form remains intact.

Recently, a reinvigorated version of Autonomia has emerged, which utilises the concept of the commons in a higher educational context, but in a way that prioritises the nature of the University's institutional form as: 'the institutions of the common', and an insurgent form of 'living knowledge' (Roggero, 2011). At the core of 'living knowledge' lies the form and character of the university 'where conflicts within the production of knowledge are a central battlefield of class struggle through power relations, and productive relations' (Roggero, 2011: 3).

At the centre of the process of production is co-research, challenging 'the borders between research and politics, knowledge and conflicts, the university and the social context, work and militancy' (Roggero, 2011: 5). The principle of 'co-research' involves students and academics working together as a form of political praxis, so that the production of knowledge becomes a key principle of self-organisation and radical subjectivity (Roggero, 2011). And in the middle of all of this the concept of 'the common' is re-established.

Living knowledge insists that ‘the commons’ must be denaturalised, and situated historically and logically ‘within the transformations of the social relations of labour and capital and not just in the current context’ (Roggero, 2011: 8); but, rather, as new ‘institutions of the common’ (Roggero, 2011: 9). This goes beyond communist notions of organising courses, or inviting academics onto campus, or holding strikes or even forming allegiances with social movements; but is, rather, a project to create ‘*autonomous institutionality*’ (Roggero, 2011: 129).

The Social Science Centre, in Lincoln, UK might be described as a new ‘institution of the common’ or ‘autonomous institutionality’. While the Social Science Centre has no formal connection with the architects of ‘living knowledge’, it shares many of their pragmatic and theoretical imperatives (Neary, 2012).

The Social Science Centre (SSC) is a not-for-profit, co-operative model of higher education, managed by its members: academics, students, administrators, educators, activists, on the basis of democratic, non-hierarchical, dynamic self-organisational principles. The Social Science Centre has emerged out of the crisis of higher education in the context of the crisis of capitalism. The Social Science Centre is rooted in the history of how those excluded from higher education have organised their own intellectual lives and learning in collaboration with university academics. Historical examples in the UK include Working Mens’ Clubs and University Settlements, Free Libraries, Extension Classes, Ruskin College and the Workers Educational Association (Rose, 2001; Thody, 2012).

The SSC is grounded in forms of organisation that have arisen out of the development of the Social Centre network in the UK and around the world. Social Centres have emerged as sites for the development of autonomous politics and resistance to the growing corporate takeover, enclosure and alienation of everyday life. Social Centres convert local unused buildings into self-organised sites for the provision of radical community use: social services, music, art and publishing. A key characteristic that the SSC takes from all these forms of provision is the concept of localness. The Centre will make use of the most up to date educational technologies, but this is not an online or web-based provision. It is important that the Centre is in a real space at the heart of its local community.

There is a very clear link between workers enquiry and co-research applied to the current moment through new concepts of autonomous education, revealed as the construction of ‘living knowledge’ (Roggero, 2011). The SSC is inspired by and connected with movements of resistance against the corporatisation of higher education in Europe and around the world. These movements include the Edu-Factory Collective for whom the crisis of higher education is part of a wider global social and political crisis. This group of academics and students argue that in a global capitalist economy, increasingly dominated by knowledge manufacture and exchange: cognitive capitalism, the University has become an important site of struggle over the way in which knowledge is produced.

The co-operative practices on which the management of the SSC is based extend to the ways in which courses are taught. All classes will be participative and collaborative, so as

to include the experience and knowledge of the student as an intrinsic part of the teaching and learning programmes. Students will have the chance to design courses as well as deliver some of the teaching themselves with support from other members of the project. Students will be able to work with academics on research projects as well as publish their own writings. A core principle of the Centre is that teachers and students and the supporting members have much to learn from each other.

Students will not leave the Centre with a university degree, but they will have a learning experience that is equivalent to the level of a degree; each student will receive a certificate in higher education, with an extensive written transcript detailing their academic and intellectual achievements. The time taken to gain an award is subject to negotiation between student and teachers. The subjects taught at the Centre will be based on the Social Sciences, broadly defined, in ways that involve the knowledge and experience of the teachers and students. The SSC acknowledges that the co-operative model does not provide an immediate, real alternative to the capitalist labour process, but provides a space within which lessons learned from the struggle to create a dissenting form of higher education can be further developed.

While the Centre is located in Lincoln, it does not have any formal links with the University of Lincoln or with any other University. It is hoped and expected that this model of small scale, self-funded higher education provision will be adapted for different subject areas and in different locations nationally and internationally. These multi-various Centres will provide a supportive and co-operative network to further advance this radical model for higher and higher education in the UK and around the world.

Conclusion: a new common wealth

Open Education and OER are progressive attempts to provide educational materials that are openly accessible and re-usable. While these forms of provision stretch the limits of the laws of intellectual property, they do not undermine the laws of private property, but further liberalise the conditions through which knowledge can be exchanged. While these new educational resources provide for closer engagement between student and academic they do not undermine the ways in which capitalist work is organised by concentrating on the freedom of things over the freedom of people.

Despite the dynamism generated by the digitalisation of social life and the apparently endless possibilities provided by this ‘technological utopia’, the logic of the so called virtual revolution does not escape the conditions where ‘the dull compulsion of economic life completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist’ (Marx, 1990).

Any attempt to escape these conditions demands recasting the meaning and purpose of work so that it is based on an emancipatory notion of what constitutes wealth in a newly substantiated post-capitalist world. This new form of common wealth is materialised through an understanding that capitalism has made an exponential improvement in the

productive power and knowledge of humanity, but that these powers and knowledge have been used to oppress its own productive populations (Postone, 1993). Any revolutionary project must be based on the need re-appropriate this knowledge and power for the populations that have produced it; not simply to make available new knowledge in less restricted 'open' forms as OERs, nor to reify new forms of property relations through commonism; but, rather, to produce a new common sense: raising critique to the level of society so that society can recognise its real nature and recompose itself in a more sustainable and resilient form.

The question for a *really* open education is not the extent to which educational resources can be made freely available, within the current constraints of capitalist property law; but, rather, what should constitute the nature of wealth in a post capitalist society. That is the really open question.

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The return of the housing question*

Stuart Hodkinson

abstract

The global financial crisis, rooted so fundamentally in the private market model of housing provision, reminds us that neoliberal housing policies work primarily in the interest of the powerful capitalist property sector and not the public. In this essay, I address the political question of what anticapitalists should *do* about housing by returning to the stage of an often ferocious debate between Marxists, socialists and anarchists that dates back beyond Friedrich Engels' famous 1872 polemic, *The housing question* (Engels, 1872). In what follows, I draw on the various insights as well as the commonalities and tensions present in these debates to devise a set of 'ethical coordinates' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) that might guide an anticapitalist housing politics. These coordinates are built out of recent theoretical discussions of Peter Linebaugh's concept of 'commoning', and particularly the work of Massimo De Angelis (2006, 2007), and they rest on three ethics of commoning: the prefigurative desire to 'live-in-common' and solve our housing problems collectively in the here and now; the strategic need to defend and produce 'anticapitalist commons' (Kamola and Meyerhoff, 2009) that impose limits to capital and open up an outside to accumulation; and the hegemonic quest for an alternative world in which commons and commoning can be generalised at the expense of capitalism.

Introduction

On 2 April 2007, New Century Financial, one of the largest corporate lenders of so-called 'sub-prime mortgages' in the United States, filed for bankruptcy after an unusually high number of homeowners defaulted early on their mortgages. Although the warning signs had been there for almost a decade, with the high rate of foreclosures particularly among low-income African-American home owners (see Rivera et al, 2008), New Century's collapse heralded a major escalation in the US housing crisis. Within months, the housing bubble – responsible for average house prices more than doubling between 1997 and 2006 – had burst spectacularly. New tent cities sprang up overnight as millions lost their homes, unable

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to meet their mortgage payments or refinance their borrowing amid plummeting house prices. In many cities, now stripped of public housing or emergency support thanks to decades of neoliberal roll-back policies, the new homeless simply displaced the existing homeless from the hotels and hostels back into the streets (see Immergluck, 2009).

We know only too well what happened next. The shock waves from the US soon hit Europe as the global scale of toxic mortgage debt was unveiled, causing jittery investors to withdraw from the securitized mortgage market and banks to stop lending to each other. In Britain, the main reference point for this article, the leading sub-prime lender, Northern Rock, was forced to seek an emergency loan from the Bank of England, prompting a run on the bank by savers and its eventual nationalisation in February 2008. More state buy-outs and bailouts of banks followed, but they failed to stop the contagion infecting the UK housing market as mortgage availability dwindled, house prices crashed and homelessness increased with repossession at their highest since the tail end of the previous housing market crash in the 1990s. The unfortunate losers merely swelled the ranks of the 4 million people on official housing waiting lists. By September 2008, the crisis had become truly global as international credit markets froze, sparking fears of world economic meltdown. Governments engaged in large fiscal stimulus programmes to offset the reduction in private sector demand caused by the crisis, while at the same time injecting money into the banking system through purchasing debts and assets (see Harvey, 2010, for a cogent Marxist explanation of the crisis).

Fast forward to 2011 and under the dubious cover of needing to ‘cut’ the public deficits incurred by the bailout of capitalism, we are seeing almost everywhere the radical re-imposition and extension of neoliberal policies temporarily questioned during the height of the crisis. In Britain, housing budgets are taking a pronounced dose of austerity primed with the discourse of what Neil Smith (1996) has called ‘revanchist urbanism’. Grant Shapps MP, the Conservative Housing Minister of the new Coalition Government (and one of reportedly 22 millionaires in the Cabinet), is justifying large cuts to the housing benefits of more than one million private tenants with a Dickensian take on what Soja (2010) calls ‘spatial justice’:

Just because you are on housing benefit, that shouldn’t give you the ability to live somewhere, where if you are working and not on benefit you can’t. We’d all love to live in different areas, but I can’t afford to live on x street in y location. The housing benefit system has almost created an expectation that you could almost live anywhere, and that’s what has to stop. (Shapps quoted in Ramesh et al., 2010)

The global financial crisis and its aftermath provides a sobering reminder, if ever one was needed, that the private market model of housing provision, so forcefully re-imposed by neoliberalism since the late 1970s, works primarily in the interests of the powerful capitalist property sector and not the public (Marcuse, 2009). This essay is not, however, about the failure of capitalism to provide decent, affordable, secure housing for the majority of the world’s population; nor does it seek to make the case for alternative housing models. These assertions rather form its *starting assumptions*. Instead, this essay addresses the political question of what should anticapitalists *do* about housing. What is our

alternative? Do we have one? Should we? If so, what does it look like and what is it alternative to?

Such questions are not new; they were at the heart of Friedrich Engels famous 1872 polemic against both reformism and anarchist self-help housing in *The housing question* (Engels, 1872). Over time, this classical Marxist orthodoxy that only proletarian revolution can solve the housing question has sparred with both socialists - who have come to place great faith or strategic importance in state intervention - and anarchists - who have championed local control, autonomy and self-organised solutions in the here and now, such as small-scale cooperatives and mutual ownership. In what follows, I want to draw on the various insights as well as the commonalities and tensions of Marxist, socialist and anarchist thinking on housing to devise a set of 'ethical coordinates' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) that might guide an anticapitalist housing politics. The need for such a political compass is particularly pressing in the current British context where the Conservative-led Coalition government is taking an axe to public services and the welfare state whilst simultaneously promising an unprecedented transfer of power and assets – including public housing – to local communities as part of its Big Society-Localism programme (see <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society>). For many, defending the state from government cuts is the priority; but others see the Big Society as too good an opportunity for generating community control to pass up. How should we respond? Building on recent theoretical discussions of Peter Linebaugh's concept of 'commoning', and particularly the work of Massimo De Angelis (2006, 2007), I believe we need to ground our activism in three ethics of commoning: the prefigurative desire to 'live-in-common' and solve our housing problems collectively in the here and now; the strategic need to defend and produce 'anticapitalist commons' (Kamola and Meyerhoff, 2009) that impose limits to capital and open up an outside to accumulation; and the hegemonic quest for an alternative world in which commons and commoning can be generalised at the expense of capitalism.

The politics of alternative housing dissonance

Today's housing activists follow in the footsteps of a long lineage of popular struggles that have attempted to both improve housing conditions and create alternatives to the private market. In Britain, the mass squatting movement that met the post-1945 housing crisis followed in the footsteps of the dispossessed peasants who resisted the long and uneven period of land enclosures by building 'illegal' cottages on village wastes, commons, or in the forests (Ward, 2002: 107). In the 19th century, workers set up building societies to pool their savings and build their own homes (Whelan, 1998). As public housing began to emerge in the early 20th century as a genuine alternative to the injustices of private landlordism, so too did inspiring alternative urban visions such as Ebenezer Howard's Garden City (Howard, 1902). Today, housing alternatives are enjoying another revival with growing interest in cooperative and co-housing schemes (CDS Cooperatives, 2005), low impact developments like eco-villages (Pickerill and Maxey, 2009) and Community Land Trusts (Community Finance Solutions, 2008).

But what exactly do we mean by ‘alternative’? In their innovative work on alternative economies, Fuller and Jonas (2003: 57) suggest that alternatives can be conceived as representing one of three different forms: the *alternative-oppositional* that consciously tries to offer a rival praxis to the ‘mainstream’ as a pole of attraction and opposition; the *alternative-additional* that provides a supplementary choice to the mainstream without any attempt to replace or contest it; and the *alternative-substitute* that provides a direct replacement to the mainstream but not necessarily in an oppositional or ontologically different way. In other words, alternatives can either happily co-exist with or substitute for dominant social configurations, or seek to transform and transcend them. To exemplify this typology more concretely, Table 1 below identifies three different alternative forms to the current housing systems of most western capitalist democracies that are dominated by private market provision and propped up by a residualised public or subsidised housing safety net.

Table 1: Mainstream and alternative housing

Mainstream	Market provision	Individual home ownership or private renting backed up by some form of state-regulated or funded safety net for those unable to access private market
alternative-oppositional	Squatting	Overtly politicised act of defying private property and creating (temporary) autonomous living spaces outside of market and state control as part of a squatting movement
alternative-additional	Housing cooperatives	Creation of a legal membership association to live and manage housing more collectively while reducing the cost of housing within the existing private property system
alternative-substitute	Self-build	Buy a plot of land, gain planning permission and build your own individually-owned private home

However, each alternative example could arguably fit into either rival category as well. Take squatting, for instance. Through the eyes of ‘non-state theory’ (Parson, 1987) we see squatting as constituting an act of refusal and autonomy, a counter-cultural prefigurative alternative to the everyday dictates of state and capital. But for many squatters, squatting is not a politically conscious expression of autonomy, but a last resort in the absence of alternative adequate and suitable housing (Crisis, 2004). Similarly, some housing cooperatives form due to the desire of tenants to build up a genuine cooperative alternative

and thus rival to the mainstream system, while self-build housing could be motivated by a love of DIY, financial cost, or the strategic next step for squatters in defiance of the law. In other words, the value practices that infuse ‘alternative housing’ are inevitably shaped by our ideological outlook (see Silver, 1991). It is this reality of political divergence that explains historical and contemporary dissonance within left social movements about how to approach the housing question. In what follows, I briefly highlight three such moments of dissonance before critically reflecting on their ideological roots and how the respective insights and tensions between them might inform the ethical coordinates of housing activism today.

The late 19th century ‘housing question’

During the early 1870s, ideological warfare erupted in German left circles over how to politically respond to the acute housing crises endured by the working class in many European urban centres.¹ German followers of the French anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, proposed outlawing private landlordism and converting tenants’ rents into purchase payments on their dwellings. This, they believed, would end the exploitative relations between landlords and tenants and transform the propertyless poor into a ‘totality of independent and free owners of dwellings’ (Engels, 1872 [1997]: 28). Bourgeois social reformers like Emil Sax (1869), meanwhile, believed that extending home-and-garden ownership would transform workers into capitalists by enabling them to generate income or credit from real estate in hard times of unemployment. Ownership would also provide a powerful means of improving the morality and behaviour of the working classes, which was seen as one cause of their poor housing conditions by social reformers.

In response, Friedrich Engels penned a series of polemical articles (eventually published as *The housing question*) critiquing the very notion of alternative housing models within the capitalist mode of production as ‘bourgeois socialism’ (see Bell, 1975). While Engels was acutely aware of proletarian housing misery from his 1844 study of working class living conditions in England (Engels, 1845 [2005]), he argued that there was no such thing as a *housing crisis*, only a crisis of *capitalism* in which housing conditions formed just ‘one of the innumerable *smaller*, secondary evils’ caused by the exploitation of workers by capital (Engels, 1872 [1997]: 18). The contradictory and uneven processes of capitalist development would, therefore, continue to generate housing questions at different points of the business cycle. The bourgeoisie’s only solution to these housing questions was what Engels called ‘Haussmann’ after the French civic planner infamous for the rebuilding of Paris in the 1860s – large demolition and regeneration projects for inner city working class areas that simply displaced the working class and their housing crisis to the next neighbourhood. From this flowed two inescapable political conclusions: the first was that workers, not tenants, were the agents of change in capitalist society; and, secondly, the only real alternative to the housing question was ‘to abolish altogether the exploitation and

1 The debates took place in *Der Volksstaat* – then the main organ of the German Social Democratic Workers Party – following a series of anonymous articles in the same organ (later claimed by a Dr. A. Mülberger).

oppression of the working class by the ruling class' (*ibid.*: 17) through working class revolution and expropriation of private property.

To illustrate his point, Engels subjected different housing alternatives to the logics and laws of capitalist society to demonstrate their impotency. Working class property ownership, for example, required workers to take on long-term mortgage debt, which far from liberating them from capital would merely transfer the ownership of their future labour product to their creditors and physically chain them to place. Indebtedness and immobility would in turn increase capitalists' social power to intensify labour exploitation, and render the working class far more vulnerable to the sudden shocks and turbulence of economic crises by threatening repossession, devaluing their property, and making living off the real estate impossible (*ibid.*: 46). Engels similarly dismissed the idea of factory owners themselves supplying workers with housing or helping them to build or own as simply another form of class control that rendered resistance self-defeating. Self-help through building societies would only work for the better off workers who could afford to save and repay mortgages. Nor could the working class rely on the state to improve its housing conditions while capitalism and the ruling class remained in place.

It is perfectly clear that the existing state is neither able nor willing to do anything to remedy the housing difficulty. The state is nothing but the organized collective power of the possessing classes, the landowners and the capitalists as against the exploited classes, the peasants and the workers. What the individual capitalists (and it is here only a question of these because in this matter the landowner who is also concerned acts primarily as a capitalist) do not want, their state also does not want. (*ibid.*: 65)

As Barton (1977) argued, Engels believed that the collective experience of capitalist production would eventually generate the objective and subjective conditions for both revolution and a new cooperative society. This convinced him that alternative housing discourses obstructed this process by taking political struggles out of the production sphere, and creating aspirations among the proletariat 'to small property ownership and individualism rather than cooperation' (*ibid.*: 33). This merely submerged irreconcilable class antagonisms that underlay housing crises within a fantastical social order in which 'all wage workers can be turned into capitalists without ceasing to be wage workers... a bourgeoisie without a proletariat' (Engels, *op.cit.*: 42).

The self-help housing controversy in developing countries

During the 1970s, a debate of equal rancour emerged within Marxist and anarchist writings on 'Third World urbanisation', specifically on the role of 'self-help' solutions to the housing crises in developing countries. The debate was sparked by a shift in the World Bank's urban housing policy away from state-led slum clearance towards incremental improvement by slum dwellers themselves (Davis, 2007). These programmes had been inspired by the so-called 'anarchist architect', John Turner, whose Latin American studies suggested that housing shortages and slum growth were primarily caused, not by capitalism or market failure, but by bureaucratic, heteronomous systems based on hierarchical structures and centralized, large-scale technology that underpinned slum clearance and new

housing development (Turner, 1968; 1972; 1976). Turner argued that such approaches were failing for three interconnected reasons. First, removing dwellers themselves from the decision-making process of their housing alienated them from the end product. Second, this alienation rendered dwellers less interested in investing in, maintaining and paying for this housing, which added more costs to an already expensive process of mass redevelopment that relied on non-renewable resources (Turner, 1978: 1141). Third, the unaffordability and unpopularity of these schemes, and their frequent bankruptcy and closure, simply fuelled mass squatting, which contributed to the growing chaos and loss of administrative control over urban and economic growth.

In contrast, Turner argued that autonomous self-help systems based on squatting and self-build produced housing that was locally self-governing, lower in cost and higher in use-value, and generated wider economic and political benefits. The cheapness was derived from self-employment and avoiding the finance and credit costs of land and construction (*ibid.*: 1110). Enhanced governance and use-value came through *dweller control* of the housing process because housing was not just a physical ‘thing’ or ‘commodity’ but a ‘verb’, an essential human activity, an empowering process in its own right (Turner, 1972). It was these incontrovertible qualities of self-help housing that led Turner to call on Third World governments, NGOs and international agencies like the World Bank to support the creation of autonomous housing systems in which local people controlled the design, construction and management of dwellings and settlement, the assembly of land, infrastructure, and services; and the state provided infrastructure and support at the *municipal level* (basic site and services), while ensuring equal access to, and the planning and management of, essential resources (e.g. building materials such as cement, land and the provision of credit and finance) at the *central level*. Fundamental to this state support was the legalization of tenure of land and dwellings illegally occupied by squatters.

Turner’s Marxist critics, however, accused him of providing capitalist interests with a useful neoliberal discourse and model to facilitate massive cuts to state programmes at a time of global crisis and help pave the way for privatisation and deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s (Burgess, 1978; Davis, 2006; Harms, 1982; Ward, 1982). The most comprehensive critique came from Rod Burgess, who argued that self-building squatters had not escaped capitalism but were ‘merely in another part of it’ – the petty commodity production of housing (Burgess, 1978: 1111-2). This meant that they remained vulnerable to the real causes of the Third World housing crisis – the general conditions and contradictions of capitalist development that Engels had originally outlined. The conversion of the World Bank to the philosophy of self-help housing thus represented nothing less than an attempt by ‘capitalist interests to palliate the housing shortage in ways that do not interfere with the effective operation of these interests’ (*ibid.*: 1120). Indeed, self-help housing posed new opportunities for capital accumulation by creating ‘an easy way of facilitating the capital valorization of huge areas of land, property and finance in an area where previously there were severe blockages and bottlenecks’ (*ibid.*). It was here that Burgess saw specific dangers in Turner’s self-help housing model, such as his call for the legalisation of ownership tenure for squatted land, which would enable commodity

relations in land and ‘the lucrative business of urban land speculation and development’ to penetrate self-built settlements creating displacement pressures and a whole new housing question. In a similar vein, the more radical aspects of Turner’s model – to guarantee local access to raw materials, finances and land – could never be won through Turner’s political method of appealing to the conscience of the capitalist state: ‘does he seriously expect that the interests of industrial, financial, landed and property capital are going to legislate against themselves?’ (*ibid.*: 1119).

Housing privatisation in Britain: threat or opportunity?

Our third moment encompasses the past 40 years of neoliberal restructuring in the British housing system that has seen the gradual privatisation of large parts of the public housing stock (known as ‘council housing’) to sitting tenants and alternative providers amid a wider marketisation and commodification of housing. The question of how to respond has generated highly divisive debates within the left over, for example, tactical questions of resistance, and the relationship between the tenants’ movement and the Labour Party (see Sklair, 1975). The most divisive issue, however, has centred on whether or not council housing is worth defending at all from privatisation, and what the progressive alternatives might be. This debate arguably began with the 1974 publication of Colin Ward’s anarchist manifesto for dweller control and self-help housing, *Tenants take over* (Ward, 1974; see also Ward 1976, 1985, 1990). In contrast to the Left’s generalised demand on the incoming Labour Government for more council housing, Ward condemned socialists’ continuing defence and advocacy of state housing, or ‘municipal serfdom’ as he called it, with its paternalism, bureaucratic social control, segregation and sub-standard housing that people did not want to live in, and state officials had no desire to save or improve (Ward, 1974: 17).

For Ward, the task of progressives was to find a housing system that simultaneously enabled three freedoms denied by the state – to move at will, to stay put and to control one’s own home (Ward, 1985: 41). This housing alternative, he argued, could be found in the model of ‘mutual home ownership’, which allowed for a form of collective ownership that simultaneously recognised individual autonomy and control. Tenants would become members of a housing society that bought existing public dwellings (or land to build new homes), and would be directly involved in the collective management of their homes with the freedom to physically modify their individual dwellings as they wished. Rents would be set at a level necessary to service any debts incurred and build up an equity share in the property so that when a tenant left, they would receive capital returns based on their share. Ward (1974: 131) argued that this was necessary to make mutuality as attractive as individual home ownership. For the local state, the burden of administration would be lifted; for tenants, ‘it would extend the psychological, social and financial benefits of independence much more widely’ (*ibid.*: 40). Ward’s ‘pragmatist anarchism’ (White, 2007) decreed that this model could not be achieved through militancy or insurrection, but through a strategy of ‘encroaching control’ that prioritised coalition politics to gradually build up a favourable legal and financial framework so that cooperative ownership and self-

management were no longer the preserve of the few with the income, specialist knowledge and social networks to get their schemes going (Ward, 1974: 52-3). Once a proper legal and financial framework was in place, the only obstacle would be tenant mistrust.

During the early 1980s, debates on socialist housing strategy exhibited, albeit in different ways, these tensions over state housing. Sidney Jacobs, for example, saw tenant control as a red herring but agreed with Ward's critique of the inhuman bureaucratic management of council housing and argued that at its heart, the political economy of council housing, like the wider public sector and welfare state, served capitalist interests in multiple ways. Raising living standards whilst cheapening housing costs bought political security, enabled the reproduction of labour power, and restrained wage demands. The production of council housing had also 'been of considerable benefit to loan capital and the large construction companies and... an effective mechanism for social control' (Jacobs, 1981: 39). Opposing sales of council housing to sitting tenants as an anticapitalist position was therefore not only inaccurate, it was a strategic mistake that would alienate and attract hostility from existing working class home owners and would-be council home buyers. On this point, Jacobs received much criticism from those socialists who believed that preventing housing privatisation was vital to defending the material position of those for whom ownership would always be untenable or precarious, building a political movement beyond the workplace that recognised the importance of class and feminist struggles in the sphere of reproduction, as well as protecting a key bulwark against wider neoliberalisation (Ginsburg, 1981; Karnavou, 1981).

This tension between fighting privatisation and pushing for tenant control resurfaced during the passage through parliament of the Labour government's 2007 Housing and Regeneration Bill. The Bill, which became an Act in 2008, was principally concerned with increasing the supply of new private house building, but it also represented a further assault on the public housing model (see House of Commons Council Housing Group 2008; Hodkinson, 2010 for an overview). As a result, it was opposed by Defend Council Housing (DCH) – a coalition of mainly left-wing Labour MPs and councillors, tenants, affiliated trade unions and organisers from the Socialist Workers' Party – who sought to rally support from within the English tenants' movement for a return to the post-war consensus of direct investment in new council housing (Defend Council Housing, 2006). However, the three official national tenants' organisations – Tenants and Residents Organisations of England (TAROE), the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations (NFTMO) and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH) – would neither endorse a new era for council housing nor oppose the government's Bill, prioritising instead 'tenant empowerment' within the *current* social housing sector as the basis for long-term transformation towards a community housing model 'based on tenant and community ownership, control and membership' (TAROE et al., 2007: 4).

Central to the divergence here was the issue of ownership. While Defend Council Housing resolutely opposed to all sales or transfers of council housing, the official tenants' bodies saw this as a major opportunity to promote the 'third sector' as the solution to the failures

of state and market: ‘the debate should not be about whether transfer takes place – it should be about what transfer should take place to’ (Bliss, 2006: 9). Their vision was embodied in the Community Gateway Model (CCH, 2001) in which the transfer of council housing to an alternative provider would be the start of a devolution of power in which residents, organised in their own self-defined neighbourhoods, would gradually and collectively move from a standard tenant/landlord relationship to a tenant management model to co-ownership of their community’s housing stock. The Community Gateway Model was partly a reaction against the undemocratic and alienating tenant experience of stock transfer, but was also inspired by a belief that ownership transfer from the ‘bottom-up’ could lead to long-term tenant empowerment. However, Defend Council Housing claimed that regardless of ‘empowerment’ rhetoric, these mutual models would be run as businesses dependent on open market borrowing, making tenant control (and housing need) ultimately subservient to debt viability and delegated ‘professional’ management decisions (Defend Council Housing n.d.). In other words, Community Gateway and CLTs would mean yet more privatisation of council housing.

Discussion

Running through these three moments of dissonance in Left housing politics are four main dividing lines. The first and most important concerns the underlying cause of housing crises. Marxists and socialists see the housing question as inseparable from capitalist social relations; while many anarchists share this view, they also emphasise, often to a greater extent, the harmful role of the State and other large-scale, bureaucratic forms of that provision. A second division centres on the nature of housing itself. Marxists view housing as a commodity like any other in capitalist society between sellers and buyers; whilst not denying this, socialists and anarchists have brought to the surface its use-value both as an essential human activity and as a sphere of productive non-market activity. A third divergence concerns political forms of action needed to improve housing conditions. Marxists see housing activism as futile in isolation from a wider class-based movement to abolish capitalism; socialists and anarchists want to improve housing in the here and now, not in some far distant future. The fourth focuses specifically on the nature of State versus self-help housing. Despite Engels’ rejection of the State, Marxists and parliamentary socialists have come to view it as a vehicle for improving working class conditions (as well as overseeing socialist transformation) whilst seeing self-help housing as another kind of capitalist commodity that generates dangerous political illusions that workers can opt out of capitalist social relations or solve the problems they create by themselves. For anarchists and cooperative socialists, state housing is another form of alienation whereas the process of housing oneself is empowering, efficient and ecologically superior.

These recurring positions and tensions are obviously not representative of all Marxist, socialist or anarchist thinking or action, but nevertheless they provide a useful platform to reflect on what anticapitalists can do about housing in today’s context. An obvious starting point is to recognise that the ongoing global financial crisis has reasserted the explanatory

power of Marxian political economy. Indeed, Engels' original thesis on late 19th century housing conditions reads at times like a prophecy of the contemporary urban experience in capitalist society, particularly in the waves of disinvestment-demolition-displacement-redevelopment-gentrification cycles that have occurred in response to overaccumulation crises, and the structural incapability of the private house building industry to build affordable, decent housing for all. The passage below, with some slight modifications, could have been written about the experience of most British cities over the past 30 years.

The growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often colossally increasing value; the buildings erected on these areas depress this value... They are pulled down and replaced by others... The result is that the workers are forced out of the centre of the towns towards the outskirts; that workers' dwellings, and small dwellings in general, become rare and expensive and often altogether unobtainable, for under these circumstances the building industry, which is offered a much better field for speculation by more expensive houses, builds workers' dwellings only by way of exception (Engels, 1972 [1987: 18]).

This ever-presence of housing crises under capitalism suggests that regardless of the use-values we attach to our homes and housing process, exchange-values of land and property as commodities ultimately dominate as long as capitalist social relations exist. This is not just the case for private housing as the 20th century experience of public housing provision was heavily circumscribed by the private ownership of land and the political and economic power of the commercial building industry. Nevertheless, however alienating the experience of public housing, the post-1979 retreat of the state from housing provision in the West has had a particularly devastating effect on housing conditions in all sectors (see Hodkinson, 2011). And far from enabling more local, self-managed housing to emerge, housing privatisation has worked alongside other neoliberal urban policies to inflate urban land values and thus impose further barriers to tenant control and community ownership. During this time, cooperativism and mutual housing have remained at the periphery of housing tenure in the UK (just 0.6% of all housing according to the Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing, 2009), while it has come under attack in its strongholds of Norway and Denmark.

We can better understand the constraints on, and contradictions of, self-help housing solutions in the British context by briefly considering the Mutual Home Ownership Cooperative (MHOC) model currently championed by the cooperative movement (CDS Co-operatives, 2005). The MHOC model works hand-in-hand with a Community Land Trust (CLT), a community-controlled organisation that buys the freehold of land (and existing properties) and legally binds its use to providing affordable housing (Confederation of Co-operative Housing, 2001: 5). By supposedly removing the land from the private property market and controlling its use in perpetuity, the CLT stops speculative and inflationary forces driving up property prices and rents for the existing community while any increase in value (or equity growth) stays with the local community and does not becomes private profit (Community Finance Solutions, 2008: 34). The CLT grants the MHOC a lease of its land at peppercorn (very low) rents. Should the MHOC wish to build new housing, it contracts a developer at an agreed maximum price and then purchases the

housing using a 30 year mortgage from a commercial lender. MHOC residents (who are simultaneously tenants, owners and coop members) finance the debt repayments through a combination of an upfront deposit and monthly rents, which are fixed at 35 per cent of net income and include equity stakes. Vacating residents sell on their units of equity to existing members and the incoming member using a formulae based on a local housing market value index and average earnings, taking 90 per cent of any ‘profit’ with the remaining ten per cent going into an asset reserve that can help to drive down borrowing costs (CDS Co-operatives, 2005).

It all sounds great, but there are three fundamental and interrelated problems with the MHOC-CLT model that undermine its potential to be a genuine housing alternative and explain its failure to grow. The first concerns the question of access – who is it for? To borrow affordably and create capital gains for residents means that all MHOC members must financially contribute and not pose a risk to the MHOC’s financial model. In other words, the MHOC model is not open to the poor and low paid who usually are the most disadvantaged in housing terms, a point Ward (1974: 121) himself conceded: ‘Self-interest obviously leads to an inbuilt prejudice in favour of those who can undoubtedly pay their way. An assessment of housing need points in the opposite direction’. We can see this dilemma in the example of LILAC, an ecologically low-impact, co-operative, co-housing project in Leeds (<http://lilac.coop/>). A key aim of LILAC’s intended 20 home radical community is to ‘respond to the housing crisis by providing permanently affordable housing’ using the MHOC model (*ibid.*). However, the table below makes clear that with average net household incomes in Leeds around £25,000 (and falling), and despite wanting to be an affordable housing model, LILAC is really only accessible to middle income households who come with personal savings.

Table 2: An example of the affordability constraints on mutual home ownership in Leeds

	Net household income required		Deposit required	
	From	To	From	To
1bed	£15,547	£21,036	£6,625	£9,180
2bed	£23,372	£30,484	£9,974	£13,285
3bed	£33,347	£41,657	£14,337	£18,206
4bed	£40,146	£49,410	£17,272	£21,586

Source: Lilac’s website, <http://www.lilac.coop/concept/affordable.html>

The potential inequity at the heart of the cooperative mutual links to a second question – how does the CLT (or in its absence, the MHOC) come to acquire the land in the first

place? Either the CLT must purchase the land at open market value from the private owner, which would almost certainly make the MHOC unviable without either government financial support or it becoming even more class exclusive; or, the CLT must depend on the discounted sale or gifting of *public* assets (Community Finance Solutions, 2008). The problem here is that this inevitably involves using the opportunities of privatisation, and thus amounts to a separation of tenant control away from the wider class injustices that could result from privatisation. This brings forth a third problem – the MHOC does not actually take housing out of the market, it just moves it to a different part of the market, working within the confines and logic of private property and not challenging the root causes of housing need. Returning to Fuller and Jonas's (2003) framework, the mutual home ownership model is best understood as an alternative-additional form of private ownership *within* but not *opposed* to a wider private property system that effectively relies on discounted or free gifts of land/housing from the local authority. Should this land be made available at the expense of public housing, it would transfer the risk and responsibility for providing affordable housing from the public to the local community level within a micro-level commercial enterprise, which is far more vulnerable to the power of finance capital and the instability of financial markets.

However, if Marxian political economy explains how capitalist social relations engender crisis in housing conditions as well as make housing alternatives both difficult and potentially reactionary, we can equally argue that such capitalocentric thinking leads us to a political dead-end. As poststructuralist feminists, JK Gibson-Graham², have argued, by conceiving of capitalism as a unified, singular system with the capital-labour relation and accumulation at its centre encompassing the totality of society as a singularity with no outside, we theorise away the possibility of capitalism being ‘chipped away at, gradually replaced or removed piecemeal’ (Gibson-Graham, 1996 [2006: 256]). Any project aimed at creating alternative housing in the here and now is thus discouraged because it cannot transform the entire system – it’s either revolution or nothing. As *Midnight Notes Collective* (1990: 11) has argued, this thinking not only denies the humanity of people living in poor or precarious housing conditions, it ignores the strategic question of how the spatially defined class composition of a city might determine working class power and the role that defending working class housing and improving housing conditions might play in that. For those socialists, meanwhile, who see state intervention as the only game in town, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence from the past 100 years to support Colin Ward’s assertion that state housing within capitalism has been a disempowering and alienating experience for tenants through the top-down and paternalistic welfare relationship it has created between provider and client.

We seem to be going round in circles, pushing up against the same limits time and again. The relations of capital, labour and land under capitalism make housing alternatives difficult and politically tenuous. Yet, the experience of state housing as well as the precarious life of private homeownership and renting, along with the perceived

2 JK Gibson-Graham is the pen name of two Marxist geographers, Kathy Gibson and the late Julie Graham.

impossibility of total systemic change, makes any alternatives seem desirable and worth pursuing in the here and now, regardless of their impact on capitalist social relations. It is a dilemma captured perfectly by John Holloway's (2010: 83) invitation to 'crack capitalism': 'Our only option is to fight from the particular, but then we clash against the force of the whole'. In British housing politics, it is a tension that has produced the ultimate perversion with one part of the tenants' movement defending state housing as a democratic, affordable and secure tenure and the only alternative to the market; and another defending the privatisation of housing to individual tenants and seeking to exploit any opportunities for transferring public housing to tenant cooperatives and other organisations under tenant control. This divergence has weakened both causes and strengthened the hand of the privatising state. How can we get out of this mess? In the remainder of the essay, I want to try to answer this question by drawing on ideas generated more recently within autonomist and feminist Marxism about commons and the politics of commoning.

Towards a housing common(s)?

In Massimo De Angelis's groundbreaking 2007 theoretical contribution to autonomist Marxist thought, *The beginning of history*, we are presented with an analysis of capitalism that potentially reconciles the diverging approaches to the housing question discussed above. Capital, he argues, is not 'a totalised system, but... a *social force* with totalising drives that exist together with forces that act as a limit to it' (De Angelis, 2007: 135). This drive to colonise all realms of social and ecological life with capital's '*mode of doing*' (*ibid.*: 37) stems from the inherent potential for crisis at each point in the circuit of capital accumulation, which Marx set out in the formulae $M - C (LP/MP) \dots P \dots C' - M'$.³ Significantly, De Angelis (*op. cit.*: 52-53) does not simply restrict this crisis potential to the sphere of production (e.g. in the form of workplace wage struggles), but, drawing on feminist analysis (e.g. Federici, 2004), highlights capital's continuous and fundamental dependence on both the biological reproduction of labour power as wage-labour (e.g. through unwaged labour by women in the home), and the ongoing separation of people from the means of (re)production. Put simply, capital can never take the *a priori* basis of its own expanded reproduction for granted because people not only resist but also 'identify and struggle to reclaim social spaces that have previously been normalised to capital's commodity production and turn them into spaces of *commons* (*my emphasis*)' (*ibid.*: 139). Capital, with the state as its ally, must therefore continuously seek to 'forcibly separate people' from these commons through new enclosures that 'fragment and destroy them' (*ibid.*: 145).

If we can understand enclosure as the *modus operandi* of capital, the notion of the 'commons' as its antithesis appears a little more difficult to grasp. What exactly does De

3 Where Money (M) is used to purchase commodities (C), including labor power (LP), and the means of production (MP), that are thrown into production (P) to create new commodities (C') that are sold for more money (M'), part of which is retained as profit, part of which is used to purchase more means of production to make more commodities)

Angelis mean by ‘commons’? The term, after all, conjures multiple meanings. Most obvious is the *natural commons* gifted by the planet such as land, water, atmosphere, wind, plants, forests, minerals, fuels and solar energy that forms the common material basis of our existence and the common property of humanity. Customary and common law rights of people to freely use and subsist on these natural commons have been understood as the system of *common right* (Linebaugh, 2008; Neeson, 1993). Similarly, we can think of *public or social commons* as broadly goods (including services, information, knowledges and skills) whether material or immaterial, that are collectively produced, owned and managed for ‘shared use’ based on the satisfaction of needs not the realisation of exchange value (Dyer-Witheford, 2006). How such natural and social commons are collectively managed and used suggests a fourth conceptualisation, that of the *relational commons*. Here we might mean the operation of *common property regimes* (Ostrom, 1990); or Jean-Luc Nancy’s (1992) idea of ‘being-in-common’ to mean ‘the sociality of all relations’, emphasising how we necessarily depend on, shape, and live with each other, and thus how we cooperate in the everyday (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 82). This *relational commons* is embodied with the value practices of cooperation, mutual aid, solidarity, horizontality, non-hierarchy and equality. Finally, to come back to resisting enclosure, we have what Kamola and Meyerhoff (2009: 11-12) call the *anticapitalist commons*, those compositions of people and projects defined and organised along the value practices of being-in-common, defending natural commons and/or producing social commons as a conscious act of creating limits to capital.

In reality, De Angelis’s conception of commons encompasses all of these different meanings, for commons are ‘social spheres of life... [that] provide various degrees of protection from the market’ (De Angelis, 2007: 145). But De Angelis is most interested in emphasising how commons are created, and to this end employs Peter Linebaugh’s (2008) concept of ‘commoning’ as a *verb* to describe the active, continuous and collective production by proletarians throughout the history of enclosure as the ‘means of survival in the struggle against capitalism’ (Linebaugh, 2010: 16)⁴. For De Angelis, commoning does not end with the enclosure of land but in fact constitutes our daily acts of producing alternative forms of sociality that protect against enclosure and accumulation. In this way, commons are not just things, spaces or networks that protect people from the market or enable us to survive independently of wage-labour; nor are they just forms of resistance to capital and its value practices and modes of doing; they are also, simultaneously, composed of alternative social relations based on *commoning* where individual interests and differences are articulated into common interests and people produce to share and share what they produce: ‘it is through (re)production in common that communities of producers decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things’ (De Angelis, 2006: 1). Dyer-Witheford (2006) usefully conceptualises this process as ‘the circulation of the common’. Mirroring Marx’s circuit of capital, he sets this out in the formulae A – C – A’ (where C represents not a Commodity but Commons, and A stands for Association) to

4 I want to suggest that we also think of ‘commoning’ as an intellectual praxis that seeks to continuously find or create common ground between ideologies and practices on the left.

capture how associations of people ‘organise shared resources into productive ensembles that create more shared resources which in turn provide the basis for the formation of new associations’ (*ibid.*: 4). The point, he argues in a later contribution, is to keep multiplying these commons until they become socially hegemonic (Dyer-Witheford, 2010).

By placing the housing question within this wider framework of capitalist enclosure and anticapitalist commoning, I want to sketch out three ethical coordinates of commoning that might guide our political activism around housing: prefigurative commoning; strategic commoning; and hegemonic commoning. I take each in turn.

#1. *Prefigurative commoning: living-in-common*

To pursue ‘living-in-common’ means to act prefiguratively, to try to meet our housing needs and desires through the creation of non-hierarchical, small-scale, directly democratic, egalitarian and collective forms of housing in our everyday lives, what we might think of as the essential value-practices of Nancy’s notion of ‘being-in-common’. Rather than confrontational and consciously anticapitalist, living-in-common is instead based on the idea of life *despite* capitalism, taking action in cooperation with others directly in the particularities of our everyday lives to create the kinds of housing relationships, material forms and aesthetics that not only reflect our being-in-common, as opposed to our status as wage-labourers, but also our immediate needs and desires as human beings. These principles of ‘living-in-common’ find real expression in the pragmatic anarchist approach of solving our housing conditions in the here and now through the extension of ‘dweller control’ and ‘mutual aid’. Colin Ward’s vision of mutual home ownership combines the need to co-manage with the freedom for individual autonomy through possession rights. By controlling the use of land in perpetuity, the local community can democratically decide together what the land is used for, but inside the walls is our own personal space to do with what we want.

#2. *Strategic commoning: housing-as-commons*

But, living-in-common is not enough because enclosure is always imminent, always threatening. Therefore, we must also think about how housing can act simultaneously as an anticapitalist commons. By calling this principle ‘housing-as-commons’, I am deliberately de-emphasising the prefigurative and instead accentuating the strategic and tactical interventions required to resist enclosure by both defending and creating housing commons as forms of protection against the market, however ‘corrupted’ they are, to borrow Hardt and Negri’s (2009) term. The gradual enclosure of land that produced wage-labourers is replicated in today’s re-privatisation of public housing, forcing more and more people out of a quasi-secure housing space that constrained the exploitative power of capital through its mix of low rents and legal protections, and into the private housing market where, through fear of mortgage defaults or evictions, people are more susceptible to capitalist exploitation (see Glynn, 2008). The loss of this social commons opens the door to more aggressive enclosures, and thus should never have been abandoned by anticapitalists. But *all* forms of housing and tenure contain residues of commons at risk of enclosure and thus

represent important sources of resistance to enclosure. For example, individual home ownership, and the mortgage-bondage it usually requires, might form an essential pillar supporting capitalism in many countries, but when a household is repossessed for failing to meet mortgage payments or is compulsorily purchased by the state to make way for a new housing or commercial development, a new round of enclosures are taking place that can only be resisted by defending the home owner. Indeed, whoever owns or manages your home, it is where you live and it thus connects you into the ‘neighbourhood commons’ produced out of the spaces and places of everyday shared experiences, interactions and cooperation (see Blomley, 2008). Strategic commoning, therefore, defends everyone’s ‘right to stay put’ (Hartman, 1984), regardless of tenure, whether against privatisation, demolition, repossession, eviction, commodification or displacement.

#3. *Hegemonic commoning: circulating the housing commons*

So far, the concept of commoning enables us to see how the value practices of living-in-common (prefigurative) and housing-as-commons (strategic) are not inherently opposed or mutually exclusive. Those who prioritise the desire to live-in-common need to recognise that resisting the privatisation of public housing or the repossession of individual homes also involves people engaging in the value practices of solidarity and self-organisation that bring people together and compose new subjectivities based on commoning. In the same manner, those who prioritise fighting housing privatisation need to recognise that the process of tenants mobilising for community control is an essential part of building an anti-privatisation and anticapitalist movement. As Barton (1977: 28) argued:

Tenant control enables people to create community social relationships among people in a building and often in the surrounding neighbourhood as well. It enables people to use non-market means of maintaining and repairing their building... It provides an example of what a society based on use value could be like and helps create the social and moral basis for a movement to bring that society into existence. Engels was correct to say that self-help cannot solve the housing problem without control over capital, but it is essential to building a movement... It is through co-operative productive activity that a material basis for a co-operative ethic is created.

Producing housing commons, therefore, takes place at the apex of resistance and creation. In the very moment of struggle to defend the existing housing commons, we must seek to transform it along the principles of living-in-common wherever possible but *without weakening the protective shield that strategic housing commons provide*. Similarly, in the very moment of creating cooperative forms of housing, we should ensure that these new spaces of commons *actively support existing housing commons and undermine enclosure and accumulation*. This approach can be perfectly illustrated by the famous case of tenant takeover on the central London council housing estates of Walterton and Elgin during the early 1990s (see WECH, 1998). Back in 1985, these tenants had learned that the Conservative-controlled Westminster City Council intended to sell their homes to private developers who would demolish and displace the existing community in order to redevelop the site as part of a gentrification process. Tenants initially responded by forming the

Walterton and Elgin Action Group (WEAG) to campaign against the sell-off. However, the Council held the upper hand by slowly emptying the estate through not re-letting any flats which became vacant. So, in 1988, WEAG decided to use the government's privatisation legislation against itself in order to transfer ownership of the estates to the community, and pre-empt the sell-off to private developers, and in April 1992 the residents of Walterton and Elgin estates took over ownership and control of 921 homes under a resident-controlled housing association. In short, tenants fought off displacement, gentrification and the commodification of precious secure, affordable housing by collectively taking over and holding their homes in common.

There is no reason why this localised form of commoning could not be extended to the city scale through a concerted campaign to realise Nevitt's (1971) 'communal tenant ownership' vision in which all public tenants are made joint-legal owners of public housing. This would give them rights to security of tenure, to improve their homes, to be represented on local housing management committees, and to enjoy the lowest possible rents based on collective sharing of costs and risks via the state and foregoing the financial stake in the capital value of their homes. In the same vein, existing home owners trying to resist repossession by banks or compulsory purchase by public authorities, can look to the mutual home ownership model as a means of resistance through creation. By selling their homes to a new housing cooperative, individual owners could swap their existing mortgages for rents that built up an equity stake in the now collectively-owned asset. Significantly, these homes could no longer be bought and sold in an anonymous competitive market place: tenants who wanted to leave their existing home and coop and thus realise their capital gain would sell their shares back to the coop at an agreed value. Coop members therefore create a collective shield that protects them from the speculative and competitive forces driving up the high and inflating prices in the private housing market. This enables a form of social ownership that opposes commodification but not individual ownership.

Here we see tantalising glimpses of how housing commons can be (re)produced through different forms of commoning. But how can these singular, one-off circulations of housing commons become, like the circulation of capital itself, 'aggressive and expansive: proliferating, self-strengthening and diversifying' (Dyer-Witheford, 2010: 110)? The answer lies in the creation of a 'common housing movement' that brings together public tenants, home owners, private renters, squatters and the homeless around a political agenda to take all housing out of private property relations and into a form of 'commonhold' that would provide affordable, secure, collectively-controlled housing for all. Following the proposals of Peter Marcuse (2009) for the US context, at one level, this would be a movement making radical demands to ameliorate the effects of the housing crisis and tackle its root causes. These would include:

- a moratorium on all evictions, repossession, compulsory purchases, privatisations, demolitions, and benefit cuts;

- the ‘Right to Sell’ (Dorling, 2010) – the government purchase of any property that has been or is in danger of being repossessed and the previous owner allowed to remain in occupancy as a secure public tenant;
- full funding to enable the existing public housing stock to be refurbished and maintained at a decent standard;
- stronger rent regulation.

To complement these protective measures, the common housing movement would also support all forms of cooperative and mutual home ownership schemes as long as they do not involve the undemocratic privatisation or transfer of public housing, or a net loss of affordable housing in a locality. Empty or misused private land and property could also be occupied to provide free squatted housing and social centres, as well as allotments to grow food. The long-term aim of such a strategy would be to create a critical mass of diverse strategic and tactical interventions, from blocking privatisation and gentrification, stopping the closure of community facilities, occupying land, standing in local elections, to force periodic concessions from state and capital, to re-energise the housing campaign, to create and defend housing commons and bring them into articulation with prefigurative and strategic commoning in other spheres of production (e.g. cooperative food growers), exchange (e.g. people’s shops) and reproduction (e.g. community schools). To return to the problem of enclosure, these actions to commonise public and private housing cannot by themselves mean the end of capitalism and thus the end of the housing question, but they can help to circulate and expand the commons to improve life in the present and provide the basis for post-capitalism in the future. As Dyer-Witheford (2010: 112) argues, achieving this would mean two things:

...first, that the movement of movements had won something, averting harms to, and bestowing benefits on millions; and, second, it would mean that we were winning: these altered conditions would create opportunities for new collective projects and waves of organising that could effect deeper transformations, and the institutions of new commons.

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From humanity to nationality to bestiality: A polemic on alternatives without conclusion

Werner Bonefeld

World Stock Markets in Turmoil (*Guardian*, 5/8/11)

Collapse of Neoliberal Ideology (Harvey and Milburn, in *Guardian*, 5/8/11)

State of Emergency (*Guardian*, 5/8/11)

Preface

Given these headlines, the conclusion is easily reached that capitalism has had it. Yet, in the meantime the politics of crisis resolution has gone forward unabated by means of a ‘financial socialism’ that akin to the political response to the debtor crisis in the 1980s, seeks to secure capitalist wealth by socialising the losses through a politics of austerity – in essence, this is what the so-called neoliberal project of social adjustment was and is about. It is however the case that the attacks on labour since 2008 express a neoliberalism of a new dimension. Whilst Margaret Thatcher declared that there is no such thing as society, the currant British Prime Minister, David Cameron, believes that society does not only exist. He also thinks that society is big. No wonder, the cuts that his government is in the process of implementing would break the backs of a small society. The demand for the big society is therefore apt. It really takes a big society to cope with a financial socialism that, in the case of the UK, seeks to balance the books by the ‘deepest cuts to public spending in living memory’ slashing departmental budgets by an average of 19% and predicting job losses of five hundred thousand public sector workers by 2014, and similar measures in France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy and Greece, have been introduced as a matter of ostensibly sheer necessity¹.

1 BBC News, “Spending Review 2010,” October 20, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11579979>.

Protests in Greece have been the most sustained. The dilemma faced by the protesters became clear when in late 2011 the former Prime Minister Papandreu proposed a referendum to make Greek society take ownership of, and responsibility for, austerity. In essence, the proposed referendum asked Greek society: ‘do you prefer poverty within the Euro or do you prefer poverty outside the Euro?’. In the meantime, poverty is to be achieved by means of Euro-membership, for now at least. We will see whether the conventional political process possesses the capacity of fracturing and domesticating the rebelliousness of Greek society or whether the alternative parties of social order will come to the fore to re-order Greek society, and whether the well funded and equipped Greek military will remain in the barracks. The shift from the humanity of anti-austerity to the nationalisation of order is certainly a real possibility, and the question then really will be about the degree of bestiality that will render order and accompany the re-ordered nation. Of course, bestiality is not relative and does not come in degrees. It comes for the sake of social discipline.

Institutional transformation for labour and against austerity

The necessary critique of austerity is not intrinsically critical of capitalism, and often amounts to proclamations that are merely abstract in their negativity. Abstract negativity is the sniffer dog of thought². It barks in perpetuity and without bite. It sniffs out the miserable world, from the outside, as it were, and asserts its own superiority of insight and political know-how to resolve the crisis of a whole political economy. What purposes will anti-austerity serve? Is it about the courage and cunning of a struggle for the creation of a different mode of subsistence; or is it about the rejection of cuts without further thought about the irrationality of an economic system that contains misery in its conception of wealth; or is it about the attempt at containing financial excess, making capitalism more effective as an economy of labour; or is it about the regressive utilisation of misery as a pretext of national revival for the sake of national industry, national wealth, and for the benefit of a national people? And what is the name of The Other upon which the idea of an anti-austerity politics of national harmony depends in its organisation of the national outrage against the forces of economic disharmony, be they the invisible as the hand of the market and its naturalised proponents whoever that might be, the abstract national as the exacting hand of the Germans, or abstract institutional in the form of bankers as merchants of greed and peddlers of misery?

The struggle against austerity is a struggle for the basic provision of human needs: housing, food, heating, clothing, and also for the time of affection and love. It is a struggle for existence (Bonefeld, 2010). This struggle can be expressed in all sorts of different forms, including communism and socialism, and also nationalism and barbarism. The political left has no monopoly on the forms that progress takes (Bonefeld, 2012a). Progress is not a given. It has to be fought for. For some, from Panitch via Lapavitsas to Callinicos and

2 On abstract negation as the sniffer dog of thought, see Adorno (2008).

Wagenknecht, anti-austerity describes a political project of restructuring capitalism in the interest of workers. Wagenknecht (2012) demands a left strategy that akin to the 1950's idea of the social market economy secures the social presuppositions of market freedom, that is, the inclusion of workers into the realm of capitalist freedom. She portrays the then German minister of economy, Ludwig Erhard, as a proponent of a socially inclusive and socially responsible economy. Her vision of the 1950s bears little, if any, connection to the reality of a political economy that Erhard defined succinctly as 'prosperity through competition' (on this see Bonefeld, 2012b). Her view is however symptomatic of a left that perceives of social democracy as a progressive social market alternative to austerity. Unsurprisingly, in the election contests, Die Linke looses out to the Pirate Party, which campaigns for free access to the Internet.

In distinction to Wagenknecht, Alex Callinicos (2012) argues for a socialist alternative to austerity. At its base, he argues, socialist anti-austerity has to overcome the entrenchment of neoliberal dogma in the regulative institutions of the capitalist economy, and he therefore demands institutional transformations to achieve anti-austerity objectives. He urges the left to remember the original response to the crisis of 2008, which, for him, revealed the real possibility of a socialist programme of crisis-resolution, one that combined financial nationalisation with – socialist – fiscal stimuli. In order to re-assert the reality of this 'hastily' abandoned response to the crisis of 2008, the left anti-austerity strategy has to focus on achieving institutional reform, putting banking and credit into public ownership and operating the system of finance under democratic control³. He proposes the devaluation of weaker currencies, reintroduction of capital controls, concentration of investment resources on strategic industries, and the re-institutionalisation of national policy controls. However, he considers that the desired alternative of a progressive Keynesianism at the national level is not in-itself sufficient. Its viability requires anchorage in transnational institutions to secure progressive objectives in the face of global market challenges. Nevertheless, the national state is key. As Saad Filho (2010: 253-54) argues, the national programme of economic planning 'is potentially more advantageous for the working class because the state is the only social institution that is at least potentially democratically accountable and that can influence the pattern of employment, production and distribution of goods and services... at the level of society as whole'. For the sake of a rational political economy, ostensibly for the benefit of workers, finance has to be nationalised and democratized by means of state. This is the background to Panitch, Albo and Chibber's (2011) demand for a programme of central planning. They argue that the movement against austerity, particularly the Greek rebellion, 'only served to reveal the continuing impasse of the left' (2011: x). In fact, the anti-austerity movement exhibits a 'sorry lack of ambition' (2011: xi) – that is, it amounts to a mere reaction to austerity. The movement is merely negative in its refusal to accept austerity. That is, it does not formulate a left alternative to austerity and thus lacks the ambition and courage to struggle against austerity with a positive political programme of manifest change. As they

3 On the history of this demand since the abandonment of the Bretton Woods system of international financial regulation in the early 1970s, see Bonefeld (2006, 2008).

put it in dramatic pose, ‘we cannot even begin to think about solving the ecological crisis that coincides with this economic crisis without the left returning to an ambitious notion of economic planning’ (*ibid.*). That is, anti-austerity requires a programme of economic planning to secure those rational investment decisions ‘for the allocation of credit’ that benefit the working class (*ibid.*). This socialism of investing in the working class, says Saad Filho (2010: 255), requires a left that is able to ‘imagine an alternative future’. There is thus the call for a large scale mobilisation of the working class to alter the balance of class forces in favour of labour – to overcome ‘wage restrain’, gain ‘control of the financial system’, ‘rebalance core economies’, ‘nationalise banks’, ‘recapture [national] command over monetary policy’, ‘facilitate workers participation in confronting the problem of debt’, ‘impose capital controls’, ‘regain [national] control over monetary policy’, pursue an ‘industrial policy’ to ‘restore productive capacity’, etc. (Lapavitsas, 2011: 295). The aim of progressive socialism is the long term ‘abolition of capitalism’ (Saad Filho, 2010) and its replacement by a system of central planning (Panitch et al., 2011). That is, the capitalist economies are to be restructured ‘in the interest of labour’, for the sake of ‘employment’, and in the interest of ‘better conditions’ for workers, including the ‘distribution’ of wealth, the achievement of ‘economic growth, and employment in the longer term’ (Lapavitsas, 2011: 295-296).

The socialist programme of anti-austerity rightly contests the manner in which the economic surplus is distributed, and is strenuous in its demand that capitalist wealth should not be sustained by taking money out of the pockets of workers. They demand that wealth is redistributed from capital and labour and one might add, this redistribution is good for capital, too – commodity markets depend on sustained consumer demand. Money, they say, has to be made to employ workers, create employment, pay good wages, and improve conditions. Struggle is the means of shifting the balance of class forces in favour of workers to secure the ‘institutional transformation’ (Callinicos, 2012) that will make money the servant of the working class, securing its interests. The struggle against austerity is thus a struggle for the working class. Whichever way one looks at it, to be a member of the working class is a great ‘misfortune’ (Marx, 1983: 477). Even its proponents demand that it works, and what they call socialism comprises the ambition of transforming money into productive activity, into productive engagement with workers by means of state authority, in the name of economic rationality, and for the benefit of society at large. They assert that this planner state does not govern over labour but that it rather governs in the interest and for the benefit of workers.

Political economy is indeed a scholarly dispute how the booty pumped out of the labourer may be divided and clearly, the more the labourer gets the better. After all, it is her social labour that produces the ‘wealth of nations’ – and the proposed anti-austerity politics recognise this in their programmatic stance and political outlook. However, class analysis is not some flag-waving on behalf of the working-class. Such analysis is premised on the perpetuation of the class of workers as the socio-economic condition of social reproduction. Affirmative conceptions of class, however well-meaning and benevolent in their intentions, presuppose the working-class as the labouring class that deserves a better, a new deal – that

is, profits are to be invested into labouring activity, which in fact perpetuates the ‘old dodge of every conqueror who buys commodities from the conquered with the money he has robbed them of’ (Marx, 1983: 546). The critique of class society achieves positivity only in the classless society.

Anti-austerity and the critique of society

Anti-austerity as a critique of existing society is confronted by the great difficulty of conceiving of communism as a form of human existence that is totally different from what we know, from the pursuit of profit to the seizure of the state, from the pursuit and preservation of political power to economic value and economic resource, and the reduction of the life-time of the worker to labour time. What really does it mean to say that time is money, and what would it take to transform the time of capital into the time of human purposes? This idea of anti-austerity follows a completely different idea of human development – and it is this, which makes it so very difficult to conceive, especially in a time of ‘cuts’. One cannot think, it seems, about anything else but ‘cuts, cuts, cuts’ (cf. Bonefeld, 2011). Only a few years ago the debate was about the Paris Commune, the Zapatistas, Council Communism, the Commune of human purposes, now it is about cuts, and fight back, and bonuses, and unfairness, lack of job opportunities, etc. And then suddenly, imperceptibly it seems, this idea of human emancipation – in opposition to a life compelled to be lived as an economic resource – gives way to the demand that money is to be used for the productive investment into workers to render capitalist accumulation valid – for the sake of workers. Cuts or no cuts, capitalist austerity or socialist ambition for rational economy that is the question – not of communist transformation but for the sake of employment, fair wages, and welfare support for workers. On this everybody can agree. Capitalism is not a system that takes mass unemployment and sluggish rates of accumulation lightly – in fact, it characterizes its crisis. For the sake of abstract wealth, it demands the employment of the unemployed to secure optimum factor efficiency, sacrificing living labour on the pyramids of accumulation for accumulation’s sake. Workers do indeed depend on employment for the sake of life. Divorced from the means of subsistence, waged employment is the means of existence of labour in capitalism, at least for the lucky ones! The socialist demand that capitalism invests into workers is to the point: in capitalism, labour subsists by means of wage income and concessionary welfare hand-outs, and this form of subsistence requires sustained economic growth in support of employment.

What is the alternative? Let us ask the question of capitalism differently, not as a question of cuts but as a question of labour-time. How much labour time was needed in 2011 to produce the same amount of commodities as was produced 1991? 50 percent? 30 percent? 20 percent? Whatever the percentage might be, what is certain is that labour time has not decreased. It has increased. What is certain, too, is that despite this increase in wealth, the great majority of society has been subjected to a politics of austerity as if famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence. What a

calamity! And, yet, this is absolutely necessary in our society, to secure the progress of abstract wealth. Capitalism does not produce deplorable situations (*Mißstände*) that require political intervention to rectify the situation and improve the market situation of workers. It comprises deplorable human conditions (*Zustände*). Less living labour is required to produce the same amount of commodities than only yesterday, and society finds itself cut off from the means of subsistence, forced to accept frugality and be more industrious in order to perpetuate an irrational mode of production, in which human productive effort asserts itself as a crisis of finance, money and cash. The current crisis is said to require the appropriation of additional atoms of unpaid labour time to resolve the crisis of debt, finance, and cash flow, by means of a real breakthrough in labour productivity. Time is money. And if time really is money, then man is nothing – except a time's carcass. That is to say, class is a category of a perverted society, and thus an entirely negative category that belongs to workers, that is, the misery of labour is the sine qua non of capitalist wealth. Poverty is not a deplorable state of affairs. It is a deplorable condition: capitalist wealth entails the pauper in its concept.

What does the fight against cuts entail? Fundamentally, it is a struggle for subsistence and against the reduction of life-time to labour-time. The fight against cuts is in fact a fight for life, and for a life to be lived. This fight, as I argued at the start, might well express itself uncritically as a demand for a national politics of jobs and wages, technocratic government and protected borders, and in the name of national solidarity, national wealth, national labour, and national harmony. This national idea will focus on The Other as an excuse for a damaged life. Still, the demand for access to the means of subsistence might not be contained by the assertion of the national state as the authoritative institution of an imagined national community. It might in fact politicise the social labour relations, leading to the question why the development of the productive forces at the disposal of society have become too powerful for this society, leading to financial disorder and austerity to maintain it. Such politicisation, if indeed it is to come about, might well ask why the human content of economy, that is, human social reproduction, takes the form of a national labour plan, at its most progressive. This politicisation of the social labour relations will thus express, in its own words, Jacques Roux's (1985: 147) dictum that 'freedom is a hollow delusion for as long as one class of humans can starve another with impunity. Equality is a hollow delusion for as long as the rich exercise the right to decide over the life and death of others.' The struggle for freedom is the struggle for the certainty of human subsistence. Freedom from need is the satisfaction of needs, and need is not hierarchical. Needs are always equal, except in a society in which equality is coerced to appear as an abstract equality before the law, nation, or money. The social individuals who possess no other property than their labour power must by necessity become 'the slave of other individuals who have made themselves the owners of the means of human existence' (Marx, 1970: 13, translation amended). For them, the freedom of capitalist wealth is the 'freedom to starve' (Adorno, 2008: 201).

There is as much freedom as there are men and women with the will to be free. This 'will' cannot be manufactured, nor can it be organised from the outside. Only a reified

consciousness can declare that it has the requisite knowledge, political capacity, and technical expertise for resolving capitalist crises in the interests of workers. Its world-view describes capitalist economy as an irrationally organised practice of labour, and proposes socialism as a rationally organised practice of labour by means of conscious planning by public authority. In this context the role of the ‘theorist’ is that of the analyst, not of the unconscious, but of the conscious organisation of economic necessity, without asking how the workers might benefit from a production process that is not at the disposal of direct producers themselves. Freedom is not a resource. It has no price and in its essence it is priceless. There is then the conundrum: as I argued elsewhere (Bonefeld 2002: 133), communism is the self-activity of the social individuals who determine their own affairs. Or as Marcuse (1967: 61) put it: slaves ‘have to be free for their liberation so that they are able to become free’. In other words, the society of the free and equal has already to be present in the consciousness and practice of the dependent masses and has to achieve material existence in the revolutionary movement itself. The crux of the whole matter lies in Marcuse’s paradoxical formulation: the slaves can free themselves only insofar as they are not slaves, on the basis of their non-identity. How can this be?

Making ends meet is the ‘real life-activity’ of ‘living labour activity’ (see Marx and Engels, 1978: 154). It entails everyday struggle over the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus value in every individual workplace and every local community. The existence of living labour as an economic category does not entail reduction of consciousness to economic consciousness as such. It entails the concept of free market or planned economy as an experienced concept, and economic consciousness as an experienced consciousness. At the very least, economic consciousness is an unhappy consciousness. It is this consciousness that demands resolution.

‘In itself’ the working class does not struggle for institutional transformations, capture of monetary policy, or ambitious programmes of economic planning. It does indeed struggle for better wages and conditions, and defends wage levels and conditions. It struggles against the ‘werewolf’s hunger for surplus labour’ and its destructive conquest for additional atoms of labour time, and thus against its reduction to a mere time’s carcass. It struggles against a life constituted solely of labour-time and thus against a reduction of human life to a mere economic resource. It struggles for respect, education and recognition of human significance, and above all, it struggles for food, shelter, clothing, warmth, love, affection, knowledge and dignity. Its struggle as a class ‘in-itself’ really is a struggle ‘for-itself’: for life, human distinction, life-time, and above all, satisfaction of basic human needs. It does all of this in conditions in which the increase in material wealth that it has produced pushes beyond the limits of the capitalist form of wealth. Every so-called trickle-down effect that capitalist accumulation might bring forth presupposes a prior and sustained trickle up in the capitalist accumulation of wealth. And then society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence; too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces

at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does bourgeois society get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. (Marx and Engels, 1996: 18-19)

The freedom to starve is an experienced freedom. In this context, the idea of anti-austerity as a matter of political choice between capitalist austerity and a socialist labour economy really amounts to party political ticket-thinking that organises itself as an attack on This misery and That outrage, promising to overcome This poverty and That misery. And who attacks the conditions that render this and that possible? Ticket-thinking transforms the protest against a really existing misery that blights the life of a whole class of individuals into a political advertisement for some alternative party of order. Its assertion to possess the means of resolving the conditions of poverty and misery cuts ‘the sinews of [the] greatest strength’ of the oppressed class by making it ‘forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice’ (Benjamin, 1999: 252). That is, the promise of a beneficial resolution to poverty without any changes in the existence of the worker as a productive means debilitates the power of resistance by deluding the oppressed that history is on their side, freeing the future generations of working class nieces and nephews from this and that poverty.

Without conclusion

The understanding of class struggle has thus to be brought down, away from the ‘lofty’ sphere of abstract supposition of a politics on behalf of workers, and towards ‘the real life-activity’ of the real individuals, their activity and their conditions of life. Instead of asking how best to plan the economic resources labour, land, and means of production, one should ask what it means to live the life of an economic resource, leave behind the labour market – this Eden of human rights – and accompany the seller of labour power beyond the factory gate on which it is written ‘no entry, except on business’, and follow the seller of body parts into the operation theatre, if indeed there is one. What, then, does it mean to say ‘no’? Where is the positive? The society of the free and equal can be defined in negation only. Humanisation of social relations is the purpose and end of human emancipation. However, the effort of humanising inhuman conditions is confronted by the paradox that it presupposes as eternal those same inhuman conditions that provoke the effort of humanisation in the first place. Inhuman conditions are not just an impediment to humanisation but a premise of its concept. Especially in miserable times, the positive cannot be found in the perpetuation of this premise. Any such claim would disavow the ostensive humanism of anti-austerity as a shame at best or at worst a pretext for the claim to power for its own sake. The positive can only be found in the negation of the negative world. Only radical opposition to capitalist society is able to force concession (Agnoli,

2003). The politicisation of the social labour relations by means of sustained mass demonstrations and social struggles is of key importance. It comprises the laboratory of the society of the ‘free and equal’ in action. Historically, it has assumed the form of the ‘Soviet’, the Commune, the Räte, the direct street democracy of the assemblies, which, pace Panitch et al., manifests no impasse at all. It is the laboratory of communist freedom.

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Protest without return; or, pedagogy with a gag

Matt Rodda

In art and art education, when those representing protest speak, write, perform, or otherwise distribute their labours, they encounter a conflict of consumption. This conflict is fought over the returnability of such actions into the system of funding, validation, and recognition that generally defines the climate of art's research culture today – a research culture dominated, on the whole, by contemporary neoliberal policies in UK education. At stake here is the autonomy of protest in art education and pedagogy, and its role in the critique of neoliberal governmentality in general. With this in mind, it is the aim of this article to address the problem of returnability and, specifically, how to suspend it. The intention is not to elaborate further on this government's ideological attack on the arts and humanities *per se* (inclusive of a wider attack on the poor and the British welfare state in general). But rather, to focus on the pedagogical performance, i.e. the signifying or discursive practices, of those artists, lecturers, and theorists engaged with dissent against this system.

Firstly, the intention is to address the repercussions of occupying a pedagogical terrain of protest. The primary point of reference here (specifically with relation to the pedagogical activities of anti-cuts actions) will be John Cussans' paper 'The paradoxes of protest pedagogy in a "research culture"' (2011), in which he formulates the term 'protest pedagogy' as 'pedagogy *about* protest, *through* protest and *in* protest' (Cussans, 2011: 1). Secondly, in order to posit how artist educators might organise themselves from a critical territory of autonomy, this article develops a gestic understanding of protest pedagogy in relation to Giorgio Agamben's conceptualisation of the gag. To express the gestic concept, I will refer to the artist Jonathan Trayner (involved with Free School In A New Dark Age) and specifically his pedagogical performance/role at the Slade Research Centre's symposium *It started with a car crash: Alternative education road tour* (2011). Neither Trayner nor the symposium are posited here as an example of protest pedagogy *par excellence*, but serve to give focus to the individual struggles and contexts associated with occupying a space of protest and art, protest and pedagogy. From these sources, this article seeks to define a critical gestic space of artistic production, a space defined by the gag, which is not subject to return.

Protest pedagogy

A summation of the predicament in question can be made according to Cussans' critical paper 'The paradoxes of protest pedagogy in a "research culture"', which addresses:

... the paradoxes of being invited to speak about anti-cuts actions in contexts which are either research-funded, take place in established educational institutions (which charge students fees) or events which charge the public for entry. (Cussans, 2011: 1)

Cussans' paper – presented at the *Alternative education road tour* symposium, alongside the Bruce High Quality Foundation, Kurt Schwitters DIY Summer School, Free School In A New Dark Age, The New International School, among others – contributes to the present debate around alternative networks of arts education and artwork dissemination. In particular, his comments highlight both a personal struggle and general need to identify, review, and make predictions about what it means to occupy a space of protest that coincides with art, pedagogy and research.

For free or open school initiatives (such as The Free University of Liverpool, the Really Free School, and Free School in a New Dark Age) this struggle involves organisational problems over how to address 'the pragmatic requirements that would enable a free school to operate effectively and consistently' (Five Years, 2010: 4). At the individual level, the problem involves performing a pedagogical role about, through and in protest while maintaining some kind of distance (non-return) to the framework of university pedagogy, which supposes certain consumability. For instance, when artistic protest or critique is conducted within or at the invite of institutions, there is a tendency for art to become what Maria Lind calls 'constructive institutional critique' (Lind, 2002: 150). This means that critique becomes a productive practice of the institution rather than an analytical and judgemental practice. Cussans' scrutiny, though, is not only directed to the external pressure of consumption by institutions, but how 'workers in arts education increasingly treat any work they do outside the university as a potential "research output" that can be "returned"' (Cussans, 2011: 5). This process is epitomised in UK Higher Education by the Research Excellence Framework (previously the Research Assessment Exercise), a five yearly survey of the quality of research being done at universities. The REF follows on the general neoliberal turn the UK has taken in art education/research policy since Thatcher's Conservative government (1979-1997), then under Blair's and Brown's New Labour government (who placed emphasis on the arts as an economic generator for the 'knowledge economy') (1997-2010), and now under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government¹. The particular issue at stake is not merely the problematic of diminishing critical distance between artists and institutions of power, but over the emerging prevalence of 'a new mindset among artist educators, who increasingly tend to assess their work in terms of its "returnability"' (Cussans, 2011: 5). This tendency goes hand in hand with present educational policy, whereby, in the words of Alexander García Düttmann

1 For an overview of the neoliberal turn in the UK see Claire Bishop's 'Con-Demmed to the Bleakest of Futures: Report from the UK' (Bishop, 2011).

(professor of philosophy and visual culture at Goldsmiths) ‘the value of an academic is ... measured against his ability to provide money’ (García-Düttmann, 2010)². It is a system that not only models the artist academic as “the networker and the lobbyist”, as opposed to “researcher and the teacher” (García-Düttmann, 2010), but produces practitioners that foster their own return.

It is not a matter, though, of drawing new definitions around the categories of art making, about separating out art teaching, writing, theory, criticism, and talking. Instead, the importance of Cussans’ conceptualisation of protest pedagogy is that it pin-points the crux of (re)organising art and education around understanding the pragmatic requirements needed to organise at the individual level, at the level of the ‘mind set’ of art educators. The individual performance of protest pedagogy therefore becomes the front line in a conflict fought over one’s awareness of the present intolerable trend and one’s already defined position within it. The task at hand, then, is to postulate how artist educators might free their utterance, writing and actions (namely their performative communication) from return, without simply withdrawing from the sphere of art education.

Protest pedagogy as gesture

Consider protest pedagogy in terms of one’s performative practice. Following the concept of the performative that Jacques Derrida details in his essay ‘Signature event context’, I propose to address what we might call one’s essential ‘force of rupture’ in communication (Derrida, 1988: 10). The force of rupture is that which ‘separates [performative communication] from ... all forms of present reference’ (Derrida, 1988: 9). Moreover, and appropriately insofar as the form of performance predominately addressed here is the spoken word, I argue that we need to think of this rupture in terms of gesture, and particularly as a gag. Here I take my meaning from Agamben’s essay ‘Notes on gesture’:

In itself it [gesture] has nothing to say, because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure potential for mediation. But since being-in-language is not something that can be spoken of in propositions, in its essence gesture is always a gesture of non-making of sense in language, it is always a gag in the strict meaning of the term, indicating in the first instance something that is put in the mouth to hinder speech, and subsequently the actor’s improvisation to make up for a memory lapse or some impossibility of speech. (Agamben, 2007: 156)

Before expanding the concept of the gag, it is first necessary to define Agamben’s use of the gestic and understand what is at stake in the artist’s gesture of protest pedagogy. Gesture is a term that situates human activity at a point that is neither truly action (*praxis*) nor production. Production, we come to understand from ‘Notes on gesture’, constitutes a means with a view to an end. Action, or *praxis* (the ‘to do’ of acting), defines itself as its own end, or what we may call an ‘end without means’ (Agamben, 2007: 154-155). Both action and production therefore form ends of human endeavours that, as such, are open to

2 Rosalind Gill’s ‘Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia’ elaborates further upon life within neoliberal academia and the urgent need to investigate it critically (Gill, 2009).

systems of valorisation. Gesture is contrary to both of these statuses. What it defines is the aesthetic dimension of *praxis*, which is neither truly a means directed toward an end (production), nor action as an end in itself (*praxis*). Instead the gestic describes a process of ‘undertaking and supporting’ (Agamben, 2007: 154). What is meant by this gestic status, insofar as it denotes purely the ‘undertaking’ or ‘supporting’ of human action, is that, rather than focus on the alternative positions of means and ends, gesture focuses on the act of mediality itself.

If we pursue Agamben’s example of the gesture in terms of performance, e.g. dance, we would say that dance is *praxis* because the performing human body directs its movements not as a means toward an end – in the way walking is the active aspect of directing the human body to move from A to B – but for its own end of dancing. *Praxis* assumes an aesthetic dimension, becomes gesture, when we make evident the means of one’s bodily movements. Agamben explains this with the example of photographing a performance, whereby ‘through the sole fact of being photographed and displayed in his or her own state of mediation this person is suspended from that mediation’ (Agamben, 2007: 155). Barbara Formis exemplifies the aesthetic dimension in theatre, in her essay ‘Dismantling theatricality: Aesthetics of bare life’, with reference to Anna Halprin’s *Parades and changes* (composed in 1965 and presented in New York in 1967). Formis argues that the choreographed performance of actors whose walk becomes militarised like a parade, as well as their gaze that affronts the audience like the stare of a star in a pornographic film, opens up a dialogue of knowing and makes us understand ‘that the persons on the stage are not so much bodies or characters, but very much persons, anyones’ (Formis, 2008: 183). Effectively the gestic, by engaging only with the position of means and one’s evident mediation in that position, allows us to relate to actions without action itself being related to individual biographies (authorship) or outcomes. In conclusion, ‘gesture is the display of mediation, the making visible of a means as such’ (Agamben, 2007: 155).

Although the conceptualisation of gesture defines a ‘means without end’ (*ibid.*: 155-156), it is necessary to draw a distinction between it and Michel Foucault’s concept of *travail*. *Travail* – situated by Foucault’s contemplation of the question ‘how is one to live?’, to which he proposes an ‘aesthetics of existence’ (Foucault, 1989: 451) – defines ‘a continuously renewed act of creation’ (O’Leary, 2002: 17). For Foucault, the aesthetic task of existence is an artistic task, and the result of such a work, Timothy O’Leary posits, ‘is an ephemeral, never to be completed work-in-progress’ (*ibid.*: 133). The gesture is similar to *travail* insofar as it is a process by which a connection between art and life is achieved (Agamben, 2000: 73-88). By comparison, however, gesture does not focus on the ethical position of how one is to live, but instead on how one is to give aesthetic visibility to one’s living in language. In this way, gesture is rather ‘the name of ... intersection between life and art, act and power, general and particular, text and execution’ (Agamben, 2000: 80). Whereas the process of *travail* cannot be separated from life even with death (O’Leary, 2002: 137), the gestic is a process of subtracting ‘a moment of life ... from the context of individual biography as well as a moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics

(*ibid.*). I will return again to this idea of the gesture as a moment of subtraction, or rather a moment of suspension, later in this paper.

At this point it is useful to address the concept of gesture to an example. Consider the artist Jonathan Trayner, whose art practice involves various performative relations to knowledge, pedagogy, and dissemination, and includes informational videos (*A short history of the two-fingered salute*, 2011), radio plays (*Tales of the woodland folk (ignorance or terror)*, 2011), and readings (*Reading Rabelais*, 2009). He is also involved with Free School In A New Dark Age. For the *Alternative education road tour* Trayner brings together these practices through a reflection on his art performance *Not a manifesto*. Conducted at Brixton Village Market in 2011, *Not a manifesto* involves the artist standing and reading a (non)manifesto he drafted for the Communist Gallery. In it he addresses the problems of participating in a ‘collective endeavour’ while believing in ‘collective individualism’ (Trayner, 2011). In particular, at the symposium he candidly draws attention to his uncertainties about the relationship between art performance and art protest and, especially, the process of dissemination in institutional contexts. The concern Trayner voices, extending a problematic of art performance in general, is that the action of ‘standing … and reading’, or the artist’s attempt to ‘hold the street’, has the dangerous potential of turning the art/protest event into mere representation or theatre (*ibid.*)³.

The problem Trayner confronts is that if his labours at the *Alternative education road tour* are understood as a mode of production, then we identify only with the outcome and end product of his talk. Namely we identify with the dissemination of knowledge through oratory and visual displays of representation, which reifies his actions. If we focus on the ‘to do’ of his acting in front of an audience (*praxis*), then we define his performing human body only according to how he directs its movement and assumes this movement as an end in itself (theatre). As such, a critique based on *praxis* (rather than gesture) as an end without means will still fail to escape attributing means to ends. This is because, as Agamben tells us, a ‘finality without means is just as much of an aberration as a mediation that makes sense only in relation to an end’ (Agamben, 2007: 155). Both of these operations lead to outcomes that are returnable.

The alternative is to read Trayner’s performance in terms of the gestic. This means that we address the aesthetic dimension he gives to *praxis* as a position of pedagogical labour. His position, then, is dissociated from all other considerations except expressing its own medium. However, in order to achieve this, Trayner would first have to engage with protest pedagogy, which as Cussans posits is ‘pedagogy *about* protest, *through* protest and *in* protest’ (Cussans, 2011: 1), and have all of these positions as a privation. Having a privation means ‘not simply non-being, simple privation’, Agamben tells us, ‘but rather *the existence of non-being*, the presence of an absence’ (Agamben, 1999b: 179). Trayner, in having his action as a privation, would therefore be present in his actions of art and

3 The paradigm of the event, understood according to Maurizio Lazaretto, focuses on images, signs and statements as they contribute to the world’s happening. The representational paradigm, in contrast, decodes images, signs and statements according to how they represent the world. (Lazaretto, 2003: 1)

pedagogy only as absence. He would express *nothing more* than the endurance of action, and *nothing more* than the exhibition of action. If, as Agamben posits, the human being is characterised as ‘*zoon logon echon* (living thing using language)’ (Agamben, 1993: 156), then gesture denotes the human being as the *living thing in-language*.

The gag

The medial position of gesture, then, ‘is not an absolutely nonlinguistic element but … a forceful presence in language itself’ (Agamben, 1999b: 77). The force of this presence, understood in performativity as a rupture, is what I propose the gag defines in the gestic. It is the force that ‘hinders speech’ and indicates the ‘impossibility of speech’ to be fully resolved in signification (Agamben, 2007: 156). Furthermore, linked to Agamben’s use of the shifter in language (specifically with regard to Heidegger’s *da*, the there, of *Da-sein* and Hegel’s *diese*, this), the emergence of the gag, as Justin Clemens comments, ‘is not itself simply due to the performative aspect of utterance; it is rather the ‘place’ at which the performative opens onto something quite other’ (Clemens, 2008: 45). What we need to address, then, is what makes the ‘other’ space of the gag different to a normalised space of production?

In *Language and death: The place of negativity*, Agamben similarly asks: ‘What, in the instance of discourse, permits that it be indicated, permits that before and beyond what is signified in it, it *shows* its own taking place?’ (Agamben, 1991: 32) His conclusion is that taking place ‘*shows* its own taking place’, such as it is, by not-taking-place (*ibid.*). The relevance of both, this question and his subsequent theses, is that in showing ‘its own taking place’ there occurs a correspondence between three key points: the instant of discourse (the articulation of labour), the meaning or what is indicated by that articulation (what it signifies), and a time-space that accounts for a presence ‘before and beyond what is signified’ (*ibid.*). The instant of the gag, I argue, refers us to the last of these points. It directs us to a time-space that has a presence neither in the instant of discourse nor in meaning. Rather it grounds artistic labour at the specific (and solitary) point of its own taking place between the ‘before’ (*praxis*) and the ‘beyond’ (production).

The power of the gag to open up a non-returnable space of protest in pedagogy becomes clear if we follow Agamben’s logic of this ‘before’ and ‘beyond’ of production and *praxis*. In defining the status of the work of art and artistic practices in *The man without content*, he employs two aspects of work’s presence into being: being-at-work (one’s energetic status) and availability-for-work (one’s dynamic status) (Agamben, 1999a: 65). Being-at-work (which is also referred to here in terms of *praxis*) is work traditionally associated with human production under aesthetics, whereby human action ‘enters into presence and lasts by gathering itself into its own shape as into its own end’ (*ibid.*). Art’s availability, on the other hand, or what we may call its *dynamic* aspect, is defined by the availability of the artist’s production, literally as a product in the strict sense of the word, for aesthetic enjoyment, judgement and consumption (Agamben, 1999a: 66). ‘Wherever a work of art is

produced and exhibited today', we are told, 'its *energetic* aspect ... is erased to make room for its character as a stimulant of the aesthetic sentiment' (*ibid.*). This process of erasing the energetic status in favour of the dynamic status describes a passage that leads from artistic action to the potentiality of aesthetic production, whereby the latter obscures the former. This passage also describes the tendency of art's research culture to turn critique into constructive critique and events into representation.

The third zone that exists between these two statuses (being-at-work and availability-for-work), where I posit the gag, is described by Agamben as a space of "availability-toward-nothingness" (Agamben, 1999a: 67). Availability-toward-nothingness describes a zone of non-production that operates by negating the interchange of the other two productive aspects. The gag opens up this third space of production and escapes being reduced to a (returnable) exhibition value by freeing the status of artistic work from belonging to both its energetic and dynamic aspects simultaneously. This arises not from the artist educator elevating one specific status of their productive activity, nor by merely playing with the double status of artistic production. Instead, what the gag hinders, we may say, is the ability to possess one's energetic aspect as its own end, because it only concerns solitary moments of activity subtracted from activity. On the other hand, the dynamic aspect is removed from consumption and strict availability because the gag does not denote anything that is resolved into an outcome. The third space of production, one's availability-toward-nothingness, therefore identifies the gestic with a play on Kant's expression 'purposiveness without purpose' (Agamben, 2000: 58). The gag does not refer to the process by which artists/educators labour or produce works, because each of these stations in presence are what we can call purposeful. Instead, the purposiveness of artistic means is made apparent in their being-toward-purposiveness.

Extending the argument further, this strategy seeks an encounter with a 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005: 40). This means that one operates from a space of production where the force-of-law (the norm) can only really be expressed as a state of law in suspension, or temporally removed from present application. Developed from the juridical theory of exception, which Agamben notably outlines in *State of exception* (2005: 25, 31), the role of suspension describes the peculiar presence in law when law itself requires its own release from the force of the law, or from the obligation of observing the law. The gag, like the state of exception, does not propose a state of artistic production that supersedes the original order of (energetic/dynamic) production with a new model, nor is it really a strict suspension of production. Instead, the exception arises as a release that takes place 'from the literal application of the norm' (Agamben, 2005: 25).

It is useful to think in terms of suspension here to help define the indistinction that Cussans' conceptualisation of protest pedagogy seeks between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. Drawing on Willem Schinkel's essay 'The autopoesis of the artworld after the end of art' (Schinkel, 2010), Cussans suggests that the paradoxical self-constitution of the art world and contemporary art, 'despite all its defamiliarising and relational tendencies must uphold its self-referentiality *as art* in order for the artworld to maintain its

relative autonomy' (Cussans, 2011: 7). As such, he proposes that 'the most programmatic way to do this would be to position the actions [of protest pedagogy] as an artwork' and, therefore, 're-secure the operational closure of the art/not art system' (*ibid.*). The gag, according to this present article, does not insist that protest pedagogy assume a position of art work *per se*, but that artist educators adopt a gestural, which is to say aesthetic, dimension of protest in pedagogy. For ideas of what this might look like in art education one might draw on art practices for potential *modus operandi*. The group of artists, practitioners, designers, theorists and teachers known as the Faculty of Invisibility, for instance, show how communicability and intelligibility can be manipulated around an organisational psychology in order to situate artistic speech as an encounter with its own deferral (*The speech*, 2006). Or consider Nicoline Van Harskamp's (pseudo)events of education (*Any other business*, 2009) that encourage disjunction between the event-act and event-language of performance, whereby the event-act is specifically designed to break up its own system of communication (Lütticken, 2010: 129).

Protest without return / pedagogy with a gag

In these neoliberal times, in order to assert critical opposition to neoliberal policies and governmentality, protest in the arts and especially in art education needs forms of protest pedagogy. Not only to offer alternative forms of art education, but also to provide a mode of pedagogical dissemination that escapes the pervasive mechanisms of valorisation peculiar to the contemporary University. As Claire Bishop proposes, the neoliberal idea of academic capitalism has 'entirely foreclosed' on the notion of the university as 'a place where research cannot always be accounted for' (Bishop, 2011: 7). Nevertheless, this present argument posits the gag as a point of contestation against the prevailing mindset of returnability. It contests returnability by focusing precisely on the peculiar moment where the artist educator's position of means (for instance Trayner's act of standing and reading at the *Alternative education road tour*) is evidenced only by one's mediation in that position. In general it evokes what Agamben calls the 'essential "mutism"' of articulation (Agamben, 2007: 156). The gestic gag mutes action, it neither denotes a presence or absence of the action, is neither at-work nor available-for work, but like the state of exception defines the presence of a space where the normal forces (of capital, art education) do not apply but still exist. In short, the gag contributes to the ongoing autonomist fight over 'what authorised speech cannot capture through immaterial production of intellectual property' (Brouillette, 2009: 146).

In conclusion, protest pedagogy maintains a space of criticism by reducing its subject to the sphere of pure gesture, and gesture, in reducing communication to the mediality of language, finds reality precisely in what itself "has nothing to say" (Agamben, 2007: 156). Moreover, from a reality that has nothing to say, nothing can truly be returned.

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Making choice, taking risk: On the coming out of Critical Management Studies

Valerie Fournier and Warren Smith

abstract

The successful institutionalisation of Critical Management Studies is now beyond doubt; but the consequences of this process on the efficacy and legitimacy of critique are more contentious and require attention. Despite recent calls by senior critical scholars to make critique more relevant by engaging with pressing political and social issues and addressing a broader public, there have been few attempts to reflect upon the way our own personal positions and choices are implicated in the realities being denounced. Yet, we argue here that taking risk and making choices that would achieve some consistency between what we say and what we do, are essential elements of critique. We also explore what it would mean to make our critique more personal and give example of the choices we could make to bring some consistency between our critique and our personal position.

Introduction

Critical Management Studies (CMS) has been quite successful at establishing a respectable place for itself within the academic community; at least in the UK, it is associated with well-recognised journals, conferences and key figures (Grey and Willmott, 2002; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011).

But the way critique is performed within management studies, and CMS in particular, has been the object of severe criticisms in recent years. Critique has remained firmly situated within academic circles and therefore has had little impact on work organizations or the practices it aims to challenge (Parker, 2002; Butler, 2008). CMS has tended to spell out its critiques mainly amongst itself and has failed to engage with a broader public; it has yet to demonstrate its ability to make a difference to actual organisational and management practices outside the academy (Grey and Willmott, 2002). Perhaps even more damning, not only has CMS kept its critiques to itself, but it has also failed to engage with current political issues. As Dunne et al. (2008b) demonstrate, management studies – even in its ‘critical’ guise – has had little to say about war, violence, or global injustice; yet these are realities in which modern organisational practices have been deeply implicated. In this

respect, critical management scholars' silence is only a sign of complicity and irresponsibility.

Finally, critical management theorists are also accused of failing to embody their proclaimed ethical commitments in their own academic practices, and in particular in their relation to the 'researched', thereby reproducing asymmetrical power relations. For example, Wray-Bliss (2002) argues that CMS authors routinely separate themselves from those they study and subordinate the voices of the subjects they claim to speak for under their own authority.

To sum up, CMS has been accused of failing to engage with current social and political issues, to reach out to a broader public in the name of whom they supposedly speak, and to reflect upon the ways their own practices reproduce the power relations they condemn. As a result, critique within management studies has remained ineffectual and has had little impact in changing practices, worse it has reproduced patterns of inequalities that it denounces in the outside world (Tatli, 2012). In short, CMS has been little but self-serving.

Reaching out

In a letter published in *The Guardian* in 2009, fourteen business school professors called for a windfall tax on bankers' bonuses to save public services such as education, health and arts projects (Carter et al., 2009). They argued that the bailout of banks, funded by taxpayers, was threatening public services, and that it was now time for banks to reciprocate the favour and make up for funding shortfalls in public services through a windfall tax on all bonuses. Such public denunciation of unjust business practices by management academics seem to have become more common following the financial crisis (e.g. Harney, 2008; 2009; James, 2009; Parker, 2008; Simms et al., 2010; Starkey, 2009).

What is of note about these public condemnations by academics is that they do, to some extent, address many of the criticisms recently levelled against critical management studies; they are made outside the close circles of academia and address a broader audience through the 'quality' press (e.g. *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *Financial Times*, *Times Higher Education*). They also engage directly with current social, economic and political issues by pointing to the injustice of business practices, such as rewards systems in banks, and the complicity of business schools in reproducing the conditions that lead to the excesses of financial capitalism. Central to these engagements is also a certain ethical commitment that calls for more responsible forms of management and management education, ones that would emphasise ethics and corporate social responsibility, and contribute to more sustainable economies.

So could this form of public engagements by (senior) academics help address the irrelevance to which critique in management studies had been condemned?

If we go by the arguments outlined above, it would follow that addressing current political issues – for example the role of the banking industry in the recent financial crisis – and disseminating our critique in non-academic media, say the press, would save critique from its current morass and help give it more teeth. So the letter to *The Guardian*, for example, could be seen as re-invigorating critique.

Why then did we recoil so?

We certainly don't have a problem with the broad intent of these statements, indeed it is difficult to imagine who, within the audience to whom they are addressed, could disagree with the content of these statements (to fight against injustice, to develop more sustainable, fairer ways of managing and so on). And that is one problem. By confining their interventions to safe grounds, making statements of principles to an audience that largely shares these 'progressive' ideas, are the authors not avoiding the sort of difficult political and ethical choices that would need to be brought into relief if they really wanted to make progress towards the ideals they are preaching? Without this, what are these statements with which the targeted audience is largely bound to agree meant to achieve?

Additionally we find this form of engagement particularly problematic for it fails to reflect any personal commitment that may be inconsistent with, or threaten, the critics' own position within institutions which are themselves sustained by the sort of practices they are critiquing. Yet, critique can only have impact, be meaningful, if it starts from the personal. Denouncing certain practices seems insufficient if we are not prepared to look at our own position in relation to these practices; and this means both considering the choices we do, can or fail to exercise in relation to these practices, and the way these choices may make us complicit.

In what follows, we first argue that the type of critique we have been discussing so far reflects bad faith in that it involves no acknowledgement of personal choice or implication in the conditions or realities being denounced. We then look at what it would take to make choice and here discuss the importance of risk or sacrifice. Finally, we explore some of the choices we could make as academics wishing to sustain critique.

Bad faith

Returning to the letter published in *The Guardian* it is notable that the critique was issued from a position of authority as 'professors' in 'business schools'. And indeed institutional position, and perhaps more recently the 'celebrity status' of some intellectuals, has been one of the bases for establishing the authority or legitimacy of academics' voices in public debate (Mitsztal, 2007). Within the context of CMS, this might involve exploiting one's status or visibility, as for example management professors, to offer critique of contemporary organisational practices which resonate outside of the academy. For example, Martin Parker (in Dunne et al., 2008a) wants 'us' as 'Business School experts to

shout loudly if we are offered the microphone' (293) to provide critique about modern organisations.

But caveats are immediately registered. He warns against the danger of co-option of such interventions by pointing out that our university press office will be only too pleased to count the number of times our university gets named. Later in the same article, further doubt manifests itself as he argues that 'superhero' professors might be asked to pronounce themselves on various things, but that

no-one listens [...] the cultural counterpoint to the wise tenured expert is the irrelevant boffin who uses 10 words where one will do and leaves his umbrella on the train. This is the box we are really in, one in which we can imagine ourselves to be important, whilst our squeaky mannered voices simply don't travel far enough for anyone to hear. (Parker, in Dunne et al., 2008a: 290)

However conceiving of critique, or the type of critique we can issue, purely in terms of institutionally derived 'authority' seems problematic on several counts. Wray-Bliss (2002) argues that rationalising the authority of the researcher as a necessary political devise might be a tenable approach if critical theorists were able to persuasively show that their voice was actually heard and that they did have a positive impact in changing oppressive practices. Thus, this self-authorisation could maybe justified on the grounds that the voice of those we seek to emancipate would not be listened to whilst our academic voice carries more authority and does make a difference. Yet, as Wray-Bliss goes on to argue, there is so far very little evidence that critical research has had much success in changing oppressive work practices. Moreover, in practice, CMS has been preoccupied with engaging with *management* and its possible transformation to more enlightened practices, rather than directly seeking to advance the prospects of the disenfranchised *managed* (Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008: 1534).

But this is far from the heart of the problem. Additional difficulties arise from the very terms of engagement. Besides being (at least so far) ineffectual in making any difference, grounding critique in institutional status is problematic because it raises fundamental questions about our own position in relation to the critique we issue. There are at least two problems here.

Firstly, it masks incoherence between what we claim to speak for (emancipation, equality, justice), and the grounds we use to speak out (institutional status based on hierarchy of knowledge and status). Considering the implication of our own institutions (the business schools) in the state of affairs that CMS scholars claim to critique, how can we use the status that these institutions confer to critique the system they are a part of? Universities, and business schools in particular, are deeply implicated in sustaining the current economic order, both by producing its elite and by relying on the wealth it generates (e.g. Jones and O'Doherty, 2005; Roszak, 1971). So, what legitimacy or credibility can there be in a critique issued from the very grounds (the institutional position of critical management professors and business schools) it is meant to target? Can management professors, whose very position and status rely on rewards and career systems based on hierarchy and

competition, and whose institutions are deeply involved in serving the corporations whose practice they claim to denounce, use this position to critique the logic that has given them their ‘right’ to critique?

Secondly, grounding critique in institutional status masks the moral or ethical commitment that makes us want to speak in the first place. We do not have to put our own (ethical) position on the line. We speak from knowledge or position rather than moral commitment. Would critics be prepared to call into question the role of their own institutions (and hence their own personal positions) in sustaining the practices they are denouncing by slapping the hand that feeds them (or perhaps more pertinently rejecting the offered food)?

These problems amount to a failure to put ourselves into critique since our own practices remain unquestioned. We take no risk. Critique can be issued from the security of institutional positions. In other words, we avoid making choice, or at least we only make choices that are not personally threatening. Worse, we shun alternatives that are more consistent with the arguments that are issued. This foreclosure of choice amounts to bad faith.

Risk, sacrifice and critique

Risk has been central to much discussion of critique. In a minimal sense, one could argue that critique, being oppositional, inherently involves antagonism and therefore threat, danger and risk. For critique to act as critique, it must have the force to ‘go against’, shock, shake, provoke. Therefore it has to break away from norms and accepted conventions. This suggests that critique will always involve an element of risk, of danger, of exposing oneself. Indeed, in the Enlightenment tradition, having the courage to think beyond authoritative regimes, and especially having the courage to question the rules governing one’s actions and beliefs, constituted the essence of critique, as exemplified by Kant’s invocation: ‘dare to know’ (Bohm and Spoelstra, 2004). But what does this ‘daring’ or courage mean in a democratic society where freedom of speech prevails? Where speech is ‘free’, can speaking out, however loudly, be regarded as an act of courage? Can it have any critical power to shock, shake, provoke?

If courage and risk are essential elements of critique, then critique needs to involve more than ‘free speech’; rather it becomes a practice, or even a ‘virtue’. Drawing on the Enlightenment tradition of critique as ‘daring to know’, Foucault (1997) proposes to see critique as a virtue, one that calls for self-transformation, for questioning the way and extent to which we are governed. He further explores the relationship between critique and risk in his discussion of *parrhesia*, or fearless speech (Foucault, 2001). Again, he stresses the personal quality of critique. One speaks out of ‘moral duty’ rather than as an institutional right. Critique here becomes an everyday practice, an ‘attitude’ rather than a performance one enacts as part of one’s job. And it is inextricably linked to risk, danger,

threat: parrhesia involves ‘the courage to speak to power in the face of personal danger and out of a strong sense of moral duty’ (Foucault, 2001: 16).

One of the pre-requisites of parrhesia is some coherence between one’s beliefs and actions, one speaks the truth out of a sense of personal commitment and this commitment is demonstrated by the harmony between what one says and what one does. Critique is the art of not being governed ‘quite so much’ in the name of these principles. This would suggest that offering a critique of exploitative practices, or greed, in modern organisations would also involve questioning the extent to which we are ourselves governed by these principles, and to manifest the desire not to be governed ‘quite so much’ by these same principles. It means that we cannot denounce unfair practices whilst holding on to the benefits that these same practices give us.

This involves risk in two ways. Firstly, it insists that there is no certainty within which we can anchor our criticisms, for critique must take place at the limit of truth or knowledge. It operates by undermining the terms within which it could be justified, challenging the regime of truth within which its claims will be judged. Critique cannot appeal to, nor hide behind, the authority of truth or institution; rather it works by ‘putting forth’ values that can only be justified in terms of one’s own commitments (Foucault, 1997). Secondly there are obvious material consequences to questioning, or refusing to be governed by, principles we want to denounce but that give us privileges and the authority to speak. Fearless speech is opposed to free speech in the sense that ‘it always exacts costs both in its production and effects’ (Jack, 2004: 121). Critique cannot be conveyed by speech that is ‘free’ or gratuitous, that carries no consequences for the speaker. Rather it requires some personal engagement and sacrifice. In other words, critique has to come at a cost to those who make it. It cannot be ‘free’.

Returning to our discussion of critique within CMS, it is clear that formulating ‘critique’ has so far been envisaged in terms of speaking out, either to the academic community, or more recently to the ‘public’, or in terms of ‘free speech’. And we would argue that it is precisely because these ‘critiques’ are ‘free’, come at no cost to those who issue them, that they have remained, and can only remain, inauthentic and ineffective.

CMS, or the type of critique that has been made within its auspices, is ineffectual precisely because it is ‘free’, it fails to provoke, to stand out of line. It fails to provoke the outside world because as many have suggested, most of the time it does not even engage with it; and even when it does engage with the public, no one listens. It does not provoke the academic community because it has tended to obediently submit to, and reproduce, its institutional logic and reward system. Consequently Jack (2004) suggests that CMS academics are probably not prepared to engage in fearless speech because of the potentially adverse material consequences that would follow. Fearless speech would involve risking and perhaps sacrificing the privileges and recognition that come with our institutional positions.

Does this mean that we as ‘critical management academics’ are condemned to irrelevance, our voices tolerated only because it can be safely assumed that they won’t make a difference? Only if the only way we can imagine critique is in terms of free speech. If critique, as practiced within CMS so far, has involved little consideration of the choice we exercise, or fail to exercise, in relation to the arrangements we aim to denounce, what would it involve to make coherent choices, to put ourselves into our critique? We should ask ourselves how many of us attempt, less realise, such consistency. It seems that the reconciliation of these questions is vital to the integrity of CMS. Yet these questions are irresolvable without some institutional and individual sacrifices. In the last section, we want to explore what it would mean, to go back to Foucault’s conception of critique, to refuse to be governed ‘quite so much’.

Making choices

Grey and Willmott (2002) concede that CMS is parasitic on the business schools in which its members are employed. They admit financial dependence upon corporations and recognise that these resources are generated in a manner counter to the principles of CMS. Their response is to present it as a vehicle of reform, ‘the project of CMS should be the transformation of management practice in tandem with the transformation of B-schools. The latter without the former means impotence of CMS, the former without the latter is all but unthinkable’ (Grey and Willmott, 2002: 417). This is a strategy of engagement, of change from within. As Zald (2002: 374) remarks, ‘as we think about the prospects of CMS we must think about how it may be institutionalised and its position in the stratification order of management education and research. What journals are respected and how open are they to CMS works? How are critical works of different kinds likely to be evaluated in hiring and tenure decisions at the Department, the school and university level?’ In short, the strategy is to play the game by its rules until CMS is in a position to change these rules. But the dangers of incorporation are hardly unknown. Similarly familiar is scepticism that radicalism can emerge from conditions of privilege and many economic injustices are defended by the assertion that rewards will eventually flow downwards. There are also certain, perhaps unpalatable, realities that have to be faced. CMS emerged out of and exists within the business school. Its students (and corporate clients) are rarely attracted by the prospect of critique or advancements in social justice, but rather by the ‘value’ that will accrue from the ‘knowledge’ to be obtained. Current changes in the funding of higher education and the continuing difficulties in the labour market will clearly accentuate these instrumental assessments. Crucially, many universities are heavily dependent on the financial contribution made by the business school. Any moves that might affect this contribution are received sceptically.

The point here is that these consequences are also a matter for the CMS ‘community’. Benefits that derive from high student numbers and serving corporate clients are not wholly redistributed to support less marketable disciplines. Rather, these activities serve to fund critical scholarship, the recruitment of like-minded friends and colleagues as well as

conference travel. Again, to take an analogy from the economics of globalisation, Amory Starr (2000) provokes critics to face up to the material consequences of their ethical positions. Some, she argues, ‘seem to fantasise that first worlders can maintain their current living standards, consumption and technology while relieving third world debt, destroying the military industrial complex, and rescuing third world workers from inhumane working conditions on the global assembly line’ (79).

CMS academics seem similarly to want it all. They want to enjoy the (financial) benefits that come from a marketable and commercially successful product, whilst criticising its very worth. They are often resentful of the other parts of the university benefiting from the income derived from management courses.

Moreover this strategy of engagement still imagines critique in terms of speaking out from institutional positions, as academics, or even better it seems as ‘professors’. But is this the only choice we have? Critique need not be a matter of shouting loudly, however authoritatively. It could be imagined in a different way, for example in the form of quieter, smaller interventions, ones that would avoid publicity and which could not be self-serving for they would take place outside any forms of institutional recognition. Consequently the best way to fight the ‘common disease’ of self-congratulation among academic intellectuals (Parker, in Dunne et al., 2008a: 290) would be to ‘de-institutionalise’ intellectual practice and critique (a suggestion that Parker himself makes briefly at another point in the same paper). This of course would come at great risk and sacrifice to academics, for on these terms, engagement in critique would offer no institutional rewards or recognition, no headline grabbing, not even the guarantee that anyone would listen. But decoupling critique from institutional rewards may take us closer to fearless speech.

So what would it involve to turn our critiques into fearless speech, to make them more ‘personal’ and less ‘institutional’? What sort of choice could we make to bring some consistency between our critiques on the one hand, and our personal positions and actions on the other? Maybe a good starting point to explore these questions would be to look at our relationship with the academic reward system, a system which serves to link individual aspirations with ‘corporate’ objectives.

The reward system within universities, and perhaps business schools in particular, has often been pointed at as the main culprit in encouraging ‘moral bankruptcy’ in academia (e.g. Murray, 1971). The rewards themselves (e.g. money, promotion, recognition), as well as the principles upon which their distribution is based (competition, hierarchy), seem to differ only in magnitude from what is on offer in the corporate or financial sectors. In addition, the reward system creates conflict between serving the public interest and individual interests (Harney, 2008); academics are not rewarded for making the world a better place but for publishing in top ranked journals.

And there is an even stronger performative aspect whereby the significance of academic work becomes almost solely valued in terms of its marketability within the professional structures of the academic career; the development of, or identification with, a well-funded

research ‘project’ or the publication of an article in an ‘influential’ journal all score points. There are strong institutional pressures to conform to particular expectations. All this is before we begin to consider the more overtly cynical institutional game playing that sometimes accompanies the realisation of career projects in a collective environment. Within the United Kingdom, the dreadful effects of past research assessment exercises have been often heard. We hear of its various consequences, the sapping bureaucracy it entails, the perversion of academic freedoms and deleterious effects on collegiality. Willmott (2011) has recently outlined the consequences of ‘list fetishism’, specifically the use of the Association of Business Schools (ABS) journal rankings, in assessing the value of research and by extension informing strategy and policy decisions. List fetishism involves ‘making calculations about elite journal selection and the pay-back (e.g. appointment, promotion) from this form of scholarly subjection; and it involves collusion in a hegemonic genre of scholarship which is technically well-executed but “conservative”’ (43).

But the point is that we know all this and have known it for quite some time. Willmott (2011) even concedes that (most) university managers who ‘promote fetishism’ are also aware of its ‘perverse and farcical’ nature. A more pertinent question is the tepid response of individuals subject to its regime. How many have rejected it and refused to submit to its requirements? Of course, to do so would be to withdraw from the system of promotion it supports and to reject the benefits that this produces. But such deeds would require principled acts involving certain individual and collective sacrifices.

Therefore what makes our conduct morally incoherent is not the reward system itself but our choice to abide by its rules, to accept to be governed by it. Moral consistency would only follow an antagonistic, ‘riskier’, approach to life as a CMS academic and business school employee. Pointing to this conflict of interests to explain the irrelevance or complicity of business schools in addressing current social and economic injustice obfuscates the fact that we do exercise choice in privileging particular rewards over others, and that we could make different choices.

Considering the compromised nature of the reward system, and its conflict with serving the public good, we can choose to make choices that would maintain a coherent relationship between our claims and our own positions. CMS academics could certainly more rigorously challenge the organizational arrangements that they are part of. It seems curious that criticisms can be applied to external organizations but rather forgotten when there is the difficulty of facing consequences for our own activities. So it is not as though alternatives are unconceivable, they are simply rarely sought. They might encompass smaller, more localised, structures and a rejection of a growth imperative, a refusal of strict division of labour, hierarchy and the compartmentalisation of knowledge in favour of self-management and self-governance. How might the CMS academic seek to translate such principles and practices into her/his institutional and professional existence?

There are ways in which individuals can, and have, practiced activities that are more consistent with CMS principles and more marginal to the conventional functions of the

business school. For example, we might select organizations whose objectives are consistent with our own and offer them our expertise on a pro-bono basis. We might direct our research towards protest movements and other overtly antagonistic manifestations of alternatives, so we might do free consultancy with an NGO rather than for-profit multinational corporations, or have a conference on Occupy (with associated publication of selected papers) rather than on the National Health Service. The problem is that these activities often seem to take forms entirely consistent with the institutional context that they are supposedly challenging. So these efforts to engage with alternatives only renders them digestible by the institutional systems of recognition and reward that also appreciate consultancy with MNCs, research into the National Health Service and four star publications. Why not simply do consultancy? Join Occupy? Talk to protest movements? Why must these activities be always instrumentalised?

We anticipate a number of counters to these arguments. Firstly, some may deny that these activities of broader engagement are institutionally valued or instrumental. In this case, our professorial colleagues might need to contemplate the source of their relatively well-paid positions. Consulting with NGOs or ‘protesting’ are not traditionally well-paid occupations. Funding of business school posts derives from their traditional activities and not those more palatable to CMS. What explains the growth in size of business schools and senior academic salaries over the last 15 years? Why didn’t we also see growth in sociology, social policy, philosophy and similar disciplines?

A further rejoinder is that without undertaking activities that provide markers of academic esteem, CMS academics will be pushed to the margins of business schools, maybe condemned to mainly unrewarded teaching positions. Our first response is that whilst CMS seems to have constructed its identity around some imagined threat of marginalisation, there is no sense that it is enjoying a less comfortable position within academic institutions than the mainstream, be it as a community or at individual level (Tatli, 2012). Secondly, it would seem preferable to be on the margins of institutions whose objectives and practices are not wholeheartedly shared. From this perspective, being on the margins may actually be a good place to be; and being placed on the margins of teaching leaves us with one of the greatest possibilities we have to make a difference.

We also recognise that many of our arguments have been directed at more senior, well paid and resourced colleagues. What then of the young academics setting out on their career, perhaps burdened by student loans, facing years of low income and high expenses, and realising that the redistributive commitments of their more prosperous elders are not really *that* redistributive? We recognise that this may appear a bleak message of despair; of inaction over action, withdrawal over influence.

But this is not at all our intention. Our message is simply to make honest choices. We all have to make a living and sometimes this is what is most important. Doing or not doing things is not the only question, what is important is that we recognise the reasons, conditions and consequences of our action or inaction. Sometimes not doing things is better

than doing them. Sometimes different choices have to be made. But we need to admit the consequences of action and the commitments that follow. And we also need to admit that there are many ways of not being governed ‘quite so much’ by the academic reward system if that is our desire. The reality is that there are more and more ways to challenge the established mechanisms of this system. For example, with the development of open online journals, there are many opportunities for non-ABS publishing. No longer do we need the institutions of capitalist publishing to make our voice heard. Of course deliberately targeting non ABS-ranked journals, or making anything we feel worth saying available freely online, may not be a career building strategy. But this is a choice we can exercise.

More generally, we could choose not to participate in the broad spectrum of activities that serve to promote the academic marketability of CMS and our own individual status within it. For example, we could question whether yet another conference on critical management studies would achieve any more than reinforce its/our institutional status. We could not apply for promotion. We could acknowledge when a conference simply provides a pleasant location and go on holiday instead. We could admit when we have nothing to say and simply not write anything rather than fabricate an industrial product or build our CV. We could do something entirely different.

What we are trying to say with these limited examples is that we can exercise choice. The rewards system may make recognition, salary increase, and promotion conditional on certain forms of engagement that would conflict with CMS acclaimed intent to work for the greater good of society, but it does not dictate our desires for these rewards, we chose them.

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Between the event and democratic materialism

Charles Barthold

review of:

Bruno Bosteels (2011) *Badiou and Politics*. London: Duke University Press. (PB, pp. 464, £18.99, ISBN 978-0-8223-5076-7)

Bruno Bosteels, Professor of Romance Studies at the University of Cornell, has translated into English *Theory of the subject* (Badiou, 2009a) and *Wittgenstein's anti-philosophy* (Badiou, 2011). Additionally, he has written a number of significant articles and essays on Alain Badiou, including 'Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics' (2005), *Badiou or the restarting of dialectical materialism* (2007), *Alain Badiou: A polemical trajectory* (2009a). He is therefore one of the best specialists of Badiou within the Anglophone academy. Furthermore, Bosteels is an expert in French contemporary radical philosophy, having also published on Jacques Rancière (2009b).

Recently, Badiou has become one of the most prominent Continental thinkers in the English-speaking world. This is demonstrated by the amount of studies and scholarship on every part of Badiou's thought. This is illustrated most clearly by the creation of *The International Journal of Badiou Studies*. Similarly, nearly all of his major books have been translated over the last ten years, including *Being and event* (2005) and *Logic of worlds* (2009a). The acceleration of the translation of Badiou's books into English reflects his rising fame within Anglophone departments. This is demonstrated by the fact that while *Being and event* was published in English 17 years after the original French edition, his *Logic of worlds* was published in English just four years after the original. By contrast, one of Badiou's first books that interested an English-speaking academic audience was *Deleuze: The clamor of being* (1999), as though the philosophy of Badiou would not be significant per se. In reality, within the French academy Badiou had been teaching in the rather marginal university of Paris 8 before his retirement from French higher education because of his commitment to radical politics. Indeed, Badiou's oeuvre has recently come to the fore with his polemical writings on French contemporary politics.

Badiou and politics constitutes one of the first attempts at giving a coherent interpretation of Badiou's political theory. The point of departure for Bosteels is the rejection of the two main interpretations of Badiou, namely the ones articulated by Peter Hallward and Slavoj Žižek:

Both Hallward and Žižek, each in his own inimitable style, proceed to follow up their praise with a strong critique, to the effect that Badiou's philosophy would fall in the traps of dogmatic, sovereign, or absolutist understanding of the event and of militant, not to say blind, fidelity to it, without giving due consideration either to the question of relationality and historical mediation (Hallward) or that of negativity, repetition, and the death drive (Žižek). (xi)

Contrary to Hallward and Žižek's idea that the event is opposed radically and ontologically to being, Bosteels argues that Badiou's philosophy theorizes a kind of continuity between the event and being (xi). Consequently, Bosteels puts emphasis not only on *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, but also – in opposition to most commentators who tend to focus exclusively on the aforementioned texts – on *Theory of the Subject* and other works from the 1970s (xiv).

Consequently, Bosteels enumerates three 'working hypotheses' (xii). First, he characterizes the whole oeuvre of Badiou as a 'dialectical materialism' one, signalling a continuity between the Maoist years of Badiou (between 1968 and 1985) and his post-Maoist period (xvii). Second, Bosteels claims that Badiou's politics involve a more extensive truth procedure than art, science and love (xviii). Thirdly, he argues that mathematics has a secondary function within the philosophy and politics of Badiou; on this view, 'the role of mathematics becomes heuristic at best and analogical at worst' (xviii).

Bosteels thus provides a Hegelian reading of Badiou, in contrast to a Kantian one. The latter insists on the mediation between different or contradictory domains, whereas the former puts emphasis on separation: '[Badiou] is seen as setting up a rigid divide along Kantian (perhaps even pre-Kantian) lines between the world of phenomena and the realm of things in themselves' (2). From this perspective, Badiou is set in strong opposition to Deleuze's anti-dialectical political thought (13).

However, Bosteels does not use an altogether Hegelian dialectic, but rather a Maoist one characterized by the concepts of 'alienation' and 'scission': 'Hegel must be split rather than merely put upside down or discarded and spit on' (11). Accordingly, Badiou's politics is seen to contradict any ontology or anthropology (32). History now plays an important role in the evolution of Badiou's political thought through a rejection of Althusser and Lacan's 'inability or unwillingness, of either thinker to find any significant political truth the events of May'68' (77). Therefore, Bosteels argues that Badiou's subject of truth is defined in terms of politics (104).

For Bosteels, the political experience of Badiou was essential in shaping his political philosophy. In fact, Badiou's involvement with Maoism is defined by a kind of dialectical continuity:

Badiou's relation to Maoism, which I will suggest amounts to a form of post-Maoism, can in fact be summarized in the ambiguous use of the narrative present. If we were to spell out this ambiguity, we could say that Badiou was and still is a Maoist, even though he no longer is the same Maoist that he once was (110-111).

In reality, Badiou was a member of the UCFML (Union of the Marxist-Leninist Communists of France) which opposed, on the one hand, the Proletarian Left and their supposed fascination for spontaneous violence and lack of political strategy, and, on the other hand, the orthodox and bureaucratic Maoists form the PCMLF (French Communist Marxist Leninist Party) (131). Accordingly, the UCFML represents the supposed correct political line. Badiou's politics, according to Bosteels, define a political truth, or indeed any truth, as 'an ongoing process': 'Badiou's philosophy, then, can be read as an untimely recommencement of the materialist dialectic' (173). The materialist dialectic – particularly in *Logics of worlds* – consists in the description of bodies, signs, and 'truths', as opposed to postmodernism, for which there are no truths (200). Consequently, Badiou links dialectically the site as a locus of multiples and the event as a locus of truths (242). Ultimately, Bosteels describes Badiou's politics as a dialectical critique of the left-wing communist political position, which is exemplified by Deleuze and Guattari as well as Hardt and Negri: 'In all these cases leftism involves an external opposition that is as radical as it is politically inoperative, along the lines of the spontaneous and unmediated antagonism between masses and the state' (284).

One question that could be raised concerning Bosteels' interpretation of the oeuvre of Badiou lies in the assumption that there are no breaks in it. The works of Badiou from 1968 onward would be characterised in their entirety in relation to the theme of the dialectic. However, *Logics of worlds* clearly puts more emphasis on the topic of dialectic, referring explicitly to a materialist dialectic, than *Being and Event*. Daniel Bensaid (2004: 94) describes *Being and Event* as outlining a 'rupturalist' ontology and viewing the event as a miracle. In other words, it might be possible to argue that there is a tension within Badiou's oeuvre between rupturalist texts (such as *Being and event* or *Ethics*) and more dialectical texts (such as *Theory of subject* or *Logic of worlds*). However, Bosteels argues that a dialectical interpretation of Badiou's is more fruitful than a rupturalist one from the political point of view. In fact, the main advantage of dialectics consists in saving Badiou from the leftist deviationism typically represented by anti-Hegelian politics. This view is grounded in Badiou's Maoist and post-Maoist politics. Furthermore, Bosteels is brilliant in demonstrating the link between Badiou's militancy at the UCFML and his later political conceptions. Indeed, in his view, post-Maoism is a consequence and not a rejection of the Maoist experience. Nonetheless, the notion of leftist deviationism is ambiguous within the French political context because this term was mainly used by the French Communist Party (referring to Lenin's *Left-wing communism: An infantile disorder*) in order to discredit the Trotskyites, Maoists, anarchists and Situationists. From the standpoint of the French Communist Party, Badiou's politics has always been leftist. Consequently, the usage of this concept concerning Badiou seems quite paradoxical.

A second question raises a more historical point. Bosteels lauds Badiou's, and the UCFML's, political critique of the Proletarian Left and, more generally, of left-wing communism. However, the Proletarian Left produced the most influential political Maoist practice within the French context and was able to create some links between students, intellectuals, workers and immigrants, for example in the Renault's factory of Boulogne-Billancourt. Thanks to the support of Sartre, its newspaper *La cause du peuple* was widely circulated and very vocal about the proletariat's interests and struggles. It therefore seems rather inaccurate to dismiss leftist politics without providing a detailed critique of its political tradition and experience of French left-wing communism.

A third question revolves around the idea of the party. Bosteels argues that Badiou proposes a mediation between State power and resistance to it, although Badiou clearly lost faith in party-based politics after 1985 (see Badiou, 2000: 106-107). However, within Marxist thought the party, through the political organisation of the working class, plays a role of dialectical mediation between the repression of the State and society. As such, Marxist philosopher and Trotskyist militant Daniel Bensaïd (2004) is consistent in denouncing the anti-dialectical and theological aspect of Badiou's philosophy since he sees the party as essential. Unless prepared by professional militants within an organised political structure, the event as a political truth procedure does indeed seem to emerge as 'miracle' or absolute rupture in the work of Badiou.

However, these critical questions should not obscure the considerable merit of Bosteels' work, which consists in providing a meticulous and coherent interpretation of Badiou's politics. Significantly, *Badiou and politics* investigates Badiou's militant experience and philosophical reasoning in extensive detail in a way that had not hitherto been achieved.

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Tales of ‘Much of a muchness’: Adventures in the land of social capital

Emma Dowling

review of:

Ben Fine (2010) *Theories of social capital: Researchers behaving badly*. London: Pluto. (PB, pp. 288, £27.50, ISBN 0745329977)

Ben Fine’s argument in his second book on social capital, *Theories of social capital*, is straightforward: social capital is a non-sensical concept. With a nod to the Mad Hatter and his tea party in Lewis Carroll’s much-loved *Alice in wonderland*, Fine’s purpose in this book is to point out to us the circularities, tautologies and oxymorons of the exhaustingly vast academic and policy literature on social capital. For Fine, social capital is perhaps like the tales of ‘much of a muchness’ told by the Dormouse at the Mad Hatter’s tea party; that is, not really very much at all, and not something that is easily drawn or made comprehensible. In Fine’s view, the concept of social capital is all things to all people, its deployment is chaotic and its meanings amorphous, such that it is utterly unhelpful in providing any kind of analytical purchase on the socio-economic conditions of our present, that is, contemporary capitalism. The concept is therefore a degradation of, not a contribution to, social science; it excludes or sweeps aside important analytical categories such as social stratification, power, class, race, gender, oppression, violence – or indeed political economy. The whole notion of social capital is oxymoronic, because it seems to presume that there can be a capital that is not social, and what is more that it is a ‘thing’, not a relation. Rather than offering tools for interrogating, critiquing or challenging the status quo of neoliberalism, the wide-spread use of the concept of social capital in public and social policy serves as a panacea for maintaining this status quo and assisting capital in finding ways to measure the utility of social wealth, both for the purposes of producing social cohesion conducive to accumulation and as a force of accumulation in and of itself. In short, the concept of social capital recognises the social as a productive power whilst obfuscating the actual contradictory and conflictual social relations of capital.

This is no light-hearted synopsis of what social capital is, and indeed Fine's book is very much a scathing critique of the term. His earlier work *Social capital versus social theory* (2000) sought to provide an intellectual history of the term from Pierre Bourdieu (1980; 1984; 1987) to Robert Putnam (1994) and Gary Becker (1996), providing a critique of its political economy and its function in policy and in the social sciences. The present book tries to get to grips with the continued explosion of research which deploys the concept in ways that Fine argues are not only vacuous and badly researched, but also reinforce a neoliberal agenda of 'generalised commodity fetishism' (xi), where 'everything from our abilities to our states of mind becomes capital-like' (*ibid.*), to be brought to market and valorised.

So what, if anything, is social capital? In Fine's definition, it is 'any aspect of the social that cannot be deemed to be economic but which can be deemed to be an asset' (3). In the words of social capital advocate Robert Putnam (2001: 167), it encompasses 'features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. Social capital is anything, then, that fosters forms of connection and cooperation across society. The personal acquaintances one has that might be helpful in achieving particular aims, family networks of care, one's consent to and trust in the government, civic engagement in the community, friends that strengthen one's emotional well-being, the neighbour who does the shopping for the elderly lady next door, young people volunteering for a charity, even greeting someone in the street – all of these could be considered as a kind of social capital that makes a neighbourhood a friendly and attractive place where people would want to live. Conversely, anything that impacts negatively on this social cohesion – unemployed youth, social unrest, lack of care for the elderly, dirty streets, alienation in the community, forms of violence and abuse – would supposedly signal negative social capital. Likewise, institutions such as the World Bank have been incredibly interested in the generation of social capital as a mode of development. Indeed, the entrepreneurial approach to poverty alleviation in developing countries is one of the lynchpins of contemporary development policy, namely, communities providing for themselves in the wake of neoliberal structural adjustment and lack of public funding, and what is more, harnessing this as a business model. This is why Fine reminds us that this is not about social cohesion per se, it is about social cohesion for the purposes of accumulation.

Fine's acerbic critique begins with a survey of the literature on social capital that, in his view, will just not stop proliferating. *Theories of social capital* is at once a guide on how (not to) carry out social science research and a scathing look at how research on social capital both serves the ideological function of masking the political economy of the present and provides a conduit for the legitimisation of the World Bank's structural adjustment agenda. Fine's first port of call in the book is a twist of the theme of 'McDonaldisation'. For him, 'social capital is to social science as McDonald's is to gourmet food' (21). The analogy here is that social capital is not only everywhere, it is also produced under problematic conditions (that is, the commercialised neoliberal university) and is bad for one's health. Yet, in the face of a good deal of criticism, including the prolific work of the

author himself, social capital advocates have responded to their critics. This, according to Fine, has not amounted to much; in fact, it has made matters worse. The criticism that social capital fails to take into account the relational distinctions of gender, race and class has been 'brought back in' (60ff) to the concept. However, this 'bringing back in' (the BBI syndrome) is one that is simply an 'add and stir' remedy, and therefore not much of a remedy at all. At no point is there a real engagement with the ways in which gender, race and class stratify relations of power in society, nor, as Fine argues in a subsequent chapter, can social capital account for any kind of historical contextualisation of its own rise. Before concluding, Fine turns his attention to management and organisation studies. He points out that while the concept first surfaced in the critical wing of this field, here too social capital is deployed in problematic ways, not least as a means for obtaining approval for unpopular socially or environmentally questionable projects for the purposes of augmenting shareholder value.

On the penultimate page of the book, Fine makes a prescient observation, and one that shows how relevant his intervention still is in 2012, two years after the book was first published. His observation is that in the wake of the global financial crisis, there is an indication that the resolution of the crisis will be found in 'more bridging and linking capital between finance and the rest of us, and between governments and finance [...] and otherwise for the rest of us to help one another out as best we can' (206). This is exactly what the UK Government has been proposing as a route out of the crisis, epitomised by David Cameron's notion of the so-called 'Big Society'. It is precisely the social energies of each and every one of us, coupled with further financialisation and further marketisation that will produce the remedy. Fine's work helps us to make the link between the present Tory Party's Compassionate Conservatism of the Big Society and the former New Labour's Third Way post-Washington Consensus. This link allows us to see that what the current coalition government of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties are currently propagating is very much a continuation of what came before, except with less subtlety than a Labour Government that felt much more compelled to justify what it colluded in.

The Big Society is the idea that power is devolved 'from the state to the people', so that communities and civil society organisations become much more involved in the organisation and delivery of public services run by the state. Civil society is thus activated to provide health care, eldercare, run the local libraries and so forth. What lies behind the Big Society is privatisation in the form of social investment, namely an acceleration and intensification of existing forms of Private Financing Initiatives, Public Private Partnerships and so-called 'arms length' companies that we remember well from New Labour days. So on the level of rhetoric, or perhaps ideology, the state continues – with a new twist – to retreat from its involvement in the management, delivery and funding of public services, and relies on civil society organisations and local communities to deliver them instead. Not only are civil society and community organisations supposed to act as service deliverers, but individuals and communities are of course supposed to become more empowered and claim greater autonomy over the management of their everyday lives and the reproduction of their livelihoods without having to depend upon or make demands on

the state. This stems from a conservative ideology that is based not in understandings of autonomy and self-management that we find in left-wing notions of community organising and community involvement, such as mutuals or cooperatives, but is derived from Christian and conservative moral philosophies like communitarianism and virtue ethics. It is the image of the small rural community transposed on to urban social relations, the village where everyone knows each other and helps each other out.

Thus, on the one hand the Government is making drastic cuts in the public sector and instituting austerity measures across the board to deal with the indebtedness of the state. On the other hand, there is an encouragement of a culture of community engagement and social activism whereby the state removes itself in order for people to be more autonomously involved in the production of social life, rendering these areas of so-called 'community empowerment' open to capitalist valorisation through a process of marketisation. It is quite interesting here to remember Thatcher and the beginnings of the neoliberal project. Her famous slogan was '*There is no such thing as society*', and now we have David Cameron ostensibly invoking exactly the opposite – '*society is everything*' – which suggests that we have to harness the social as a way out of the crisis. Yet, looking at all of this more closely, not only is there little difference between New Labour and the ConDem Coalition (except perhaps in degree), the present Tory policies connect directly with the Thatcherism of the 1980s. There are various ideologues behind this who have put out literature in recent years, for example Philipp Blond's *Red Tory* (2010), Jesse Norman's *Big society* (2010), or Matthew Bishop and Michael Green's book on the virtues of philanthrocapitalism, *The road from ruin* (2010). Each of these provide both ideologies and policy road maps for how this 'Big Society' is supposed to work to produce the kind of social capital that is the target of Fine's criticisms.

The affective dimension of Fine's writing undoubtedly conveys to its readers the message of its author. The book tells us so much about social capital, yet as a reader one can't seem to quite grasp exactly what it is. Fine provides us with a litany of lamentations as to the problems with the concept and the demise of social science research today, and his book is bursting with literature surveys and policy critiques. His charge of 'benchkinism' against Robert Putnam in particular and, by association, the pushers of the social capital drug more generally is a striking example. 'Benchkin' is a neologism Fine derives from an amalgamation of the surnames of two economists Levis A. Kochin and Daniel K. Benjamin, who in 1979 developed a theory of unemployment that maintained that high unemployment was the result of workers laziness due to the availability of welfare benefits (cf. Fine, 2000: 82). Their theory was discredited as flawed, while it obviously played into the hands of a neoliberal ideology of welfare state retrenchment that was emerging at the time. This analogy highlights once again the crux of Fine's double argument. The concept of social capital is as much simply bad research with spurious theory, spurious methods, spurious measures, spurious evidence and false conclusions, as it has grave ideological consequences in reproducing and legitimising neoliberal policy. Villified too is what Ben Fine calls today's 'hack academia' (as in low-quality and hastily assembled, not as in breaking and entering in order to transform or reappropriate). This 'hack academia' and its

concomitant commercialisation that fosters a ‘MacDonaldisation’ of social theory, with its formulaic approaches to the study of social phenomena – “social capital plus X” (32) – serves to reinforce technocratic approaches to social science research.

While Fine offers us an acerbic critique of the de-politicising nature of social capital, the reader is left with a question as to how to make sense of the social processes that the concept is an expression of. Here, I would argue, it would help us to turn to the other side of the social relation of capital, and one that seems to simmer beneath Fine’s critique, namely labour. One of the pernicious aspects of the literatures on social, human and other capitals that have burgeoned in recent years is precisely the eradication and invisibilisation of labour. Indeed, as Jason Read (2009), Etienne Balibar (1994) and others have pointed out, today’s neoliberal subjects have, or are supposed to have, internalised the perspective of capital. Digging up the perspective of labour and making it visible in the analysis of social capital, I would argue, actually helps us to move forward. Such a perspective is a wedge that enables us to prise open the technocracies that Fine laments. Firstly, taking a labour perspective allows for an understanding of the ways in which people’s free labour is harnessed where the state divests from the reproduction of labour through the imposition of cuts and austerity. This is something that feminist literatures aware of the persistent invisibilisation of reproductive labour are particularly attuned to.¹³ Secondly, a labour perspective allows for an understanding of how the social activities of living labour are rendered productive for capital through the imposition of the market and through social investment, which shapes these social activities in ways that make them conducive to accumulation. The political wedge of a perspective from the view of labour and of social reproduction is made apparent in Massimo De Angelis’ (2003: 9-10) counterposition of social solidarity against social capital:

Civil society organisations have sprung into public domains to fulfil human needs. In the eyes of neoliberals, such an emergent activity of society’s self-defence against market colonisation is seen as an opportunity to build ‘social capital’, i.e. to promote a form of social cohesion that is compatible with capital accumulation. But in the eyes of the millions of grassroots organisations, the opposite is true: their activities are a form of social solidarity that sets a limit to capital accumulation and the colonisation of life by capitalist markets.

This account of a disjuncture between the expansion of capital and its resistance across the terrain of civil society in processes of governance highlights the important fault-line of the current crisis and one that is epitomised by the so-called Big Society even as it seems to falter. Yet here, a further problem surfaces, and is one that Ben Fine also draws attention to. If the social capital literature is underpinned by a pernicious methodological individualism, as Fine argues, so too are the ‘communities’ that are invoked across the board from the left to the right. Politicising social capital, then, does not only mean pulling an (often supposed) community from the claws of capitalist valorisation, it also means struggling against the

13 See for example the recent special issue of *The Commoner Journal* on ‘Care Work, Domestic Labour and Social Reproduction’ edited by Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici (Winter 2012), available at http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/commoner_issue-15.pdf.

kind of neoliberal subjectivity that striates our very being in the world – on the one hand subsuming us completely into the production machine and relying on our cooperative and communicative connections to do so, while on the other pitting us against one another, turning us into competitive utility-maximising beings caught up in the affective anxieties of a rat race that is only being intensified by austerity. Thus, I would venture that the contestation of social capital may lie, not in the vituperation of badly behaved researchers and the revocation of the concept, but in its politicisation as a site of struggle. Rendering visible the perspectives of labour, and thus the current widespread crisis of social reproduction, makes it possible to drive a stake right into the heart of the kinds of reifications that Fine is rightly concerned about.

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Is capitalism dying out?

Steen Nepper Larsen

review of:

André Gorz (2010) *The Immaterial: Knowledge, Value and Capital*, trans. Chris Turner. London and New York: Seagull Books. (HB, pp.212, £13.50, ISBN 1906497613)

The Austrian born but French writing social philosopher and author André Gorz's (1923-2007) important book *The immaterial: Knowledge, value and capital* is now available in English. The leftist radical post-Marxist theorist originally wrote the book in French, entitled *L'immateriel. Connaissance, valeur et capital*, five years before the international financial crisis hit the world in 2008. Gorz became known outside the narrow circle of critical interpreters of contemporary capitalism when he wrote the essay 'Écologie et Liberté' (1977; 'The Ecology of Freedom', 1982) and the books *Adieu au prolétariat – au delà du socialisme* (1980; *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-industrial Socialism*, 1982) and *Les chemins du paradis, L'agonie du capital* (1983; *Paths to paradise: On the liberation from work*, 1985).

Gorz's thesis in *The immaterial* is that contemporary cognitive capitalism is in deep crisis and destined to die. In the book's opening chapters, he argues that human knowledge has become the most important productive force and an economic resource second to none for the valorisation of capital. Creative and innovative human thought, the precious fruits of 'human capital', have replaced industrialised work and production forms. But despite the social nature of and global access to knowledge (at least in principle), capitalism exploits immaterial labour and tries to invent ways to privatize knowledge (e.g. via copyright, high access fees, control of communication, etc.). But as Gorz suggests, capitalism is also in crisis. It is becoming obsolete in a society where human beings can exchange knowledge and good ideas beyond the market sphere and the production-commodity-money-consumption 'logic'. Knowledge is not a limited resource, reducible to a price or the time invested in its 'production'. Gorz traces how a 'communism' of free knowledge and thinking is breaking through in the midst of the present day corporate world. He baptizes the new stand-ins for the long-gone proletariat as 'the dissidents of digital capitalism' (114), and predicts that liberation is close. The creative potential of man will come to

blossom far beyond capitalism. According to Gorz, networks of free cooperation will take over and make corporate powers vanish.

Beside these profound and dramatic prophecies, the book contains a convincing defence of the idea of a basic income for everyone in society and attacks the labour-as-a-value convention: ‘By freeing the production of the self from the constraints of economic valorization, a basic income will necessarily facilitate the unconditional full development of people, beyond what is functionally useful for production’ (28). Chapter Three is called ‘Towards an Intelligent Society?...’ and Chapter Four ‘...Or Towards a Post-Human Civilization?’. In these chapters Gorz discusses whether we are standing at the threshold of a post-human civilization, where human nature will be drastically transformed, genetically modified and brain-enhanced by cognitive-instrumental reason and the accompanying techno- and bio-sciences. But this review will focus primarily on the intertwined double skeleton of Gorz’ argument that: (i) cognitive capitalism is a crisis phenomenon; and (ii) capitalism as such is worn out and will soon become a relic of the past.

Immaterial labour

At the beginning of the book Gorz quotes a long and telling passage from Norbert Bensel, the Human Resources Director of Daimler-Chrysler:

The employees of an enterprise are part of its capital...The motivation and know-how of the employees, their flexibility, capacity for innovation and concern to satisfy the clients' wishes (*Kundenorientierung*) constitute the raw material for innovative service products...Their behaviour and their social and emotional skills play an increasing role in the evaluation of their work...This will no longer be assessed by the number of hours they put in but on the basis of objectives achieved and the quality of outcomes. They are entrepreneurs. (6)

Gorz draws several striking clues from this statement. Work is no longer measurable by pre-established norms and yardsticks. The idea of time as the measure of value is no longer a reality in the production sphere nor is it a valid theory, raising serious problems for both traditional bourgeois economics and Marxist labour theory. The societal value is neither reducible to scarcity and supply-demand curves nor related directly to a quantified and exploitative time-schedule that aims to speed-up the production process. In immaterial cognitive capitalism work becomes individualised and labour power becomes personalised. At the same time, social coordination capabilities and network activities tend to mandate procedures in which the flexible and mouldable workforce are involved. Personal performance criteria like motivation, flexibility, creativity and innovative skills overtake the roles that formal knowledge, craftsman qualifications and vocational skills used to have. To work is transformed into the capability to be able to produce oneself in unforeseen and unpredictable ways. The heart of value-creation is immaterial work. In present day post-Fordism, capital becomes more dependent on the implicit and explicit knowledge of workers' everyday lives and socio-psychological skills. Gorz stresses that capital tries to incorporate and exploit these *externalities* (free resources). The non-economic but precious

nature of man (intelligence, wit, desire, curiosity, creativity, lust, communication, language, etc.) is drawn into economics as necessary *conditio sine qua non*s for prosperous cognitive capitalism. The experiential knowledge of man cannot be formalized, and neither the igniting trigger of production nor its product is tangible. Gorz instead highlights what he calls ‘the total mobilization’ (16) of the mental and affective skills of the workers. Unpaid, unseen and voluntary work is integrated within the sphere of an ever-more virtual production process and employees are forced to see themselves as ‘entrepreneurs’, as a part of ‘fixed capital to be continually reproduced, modernized, expanded and valorized. No constraints must be imposed on them from the outside; they must be their own producers, their own employers and their own sales force...’ (19-20). Therefore, everybody must take responsibility for their own health, competence adjustment and the indispensable updating of knowledge. The modern workforce has to be ‘fit’ in the bio-political sense of the word. In short, life becomes business. Your health is your wealth! ‘Everything becomes a commodity. Selling oneself extends to all aspects of life. Everything is measured in money’ (23). Again: ‘The obligatory production of oneself becomes a “job” like any other’ (25). Here is a recent Danish example that seems to validate Gorz’s argument: Roskilde University Centre (RUC) is organized into interdisciplinary and problem-oriented academic educational programmes, based on a great deal of self-determined student involvement. At RUC it is not only possible to study ‘Performance Design’ but also something called ‘Personal Branding’. Good old Karl Marx would probably turn in his grave, full of shame, if he knew. Human capital, in this sense, seems destined to be cultivated (like the prosperous and ‘positive’ human skills of learning and creativity) from cradle to grave. As the French writers and sociological thinkers Éve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski wrote in their famous book about the spirit of new capitalism, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (1999), it is a predominant tendency that we come to study and to work in flexible and time-limited project networks based on profitable self-governance.

Immaterial capital

For Gorz, it is against the ‘nature’ of society if there is a widespread scarcity of, or limited access to, knowledge. ‘Unlike general social labour, knowledge is impossible to translate into – or measure in – simple abstract units. It is not reducible to a quantity of abstract labour of which it can be said to be the equivalent, the outcome or the product’ (35). In other words, heterogeneous phenomena such as judgement, aesthetic sense, intuition, the ability to learn or anticipate unforeseen events cannot be bought nor ‘tamed’ with a price tag. Nobody can measure the exact ‘value’ of the internet, Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, the unique sound of Jimi Hendrix’s Fender Stratocaster guitar, Kafka’s collected works or a kiss and a word from your loved one. Thereby the logic of cognitive capitalism decouples the value of knowledge, the most important productive force in society, from the realm of exchange and the market sphere (e.g. through copyright, high access fees, monopoly pricing). For Gorz contemporary capital relies on immaterial human and inter-human forces while it seeks to appropriate the talents and fruits of living labour. New powerful phantasms and neologisms are created: experience economy, attention economy,

knowledge economy, network economy, etc. But society's capacity to think and acknowledge risk becomes removed from society itself even though knowledge cannot (at least in principle) be detached from social individuals who practice and 'possess' it. What is in its nature, both social and common, becomes privatised in a world in which radical transformations 'hit' and challenge concepts like labour, knowledge, capital and value. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Commonwealth* (2009) represents the full potential of this thought six years later and refers explicitly to Gorz' analysis of the common in *L'immateriel*.

Gorz claims that cognitive and immaterial 'products' ought to be everybody's goods. When they are 'spent' they do not disappear. They are like love and happiness. The more you divide and bond knowledge and other immaterial 'products' the more you blossom and engage in mutual exchange beyond the sphere of commodities, money, alienated paid work or reified work forms. Using a colourful phrase Gorz describes the (forthcoming) free society beyond capitalism as a 'universal intercourse between human beings' (39). The exchange-value-free knowledge can, in theory, be shared at will, without having to pass through a value-form such as money. What is going on via the Internet is potentially beyond private appropriation. Gorz depicts a generous gift-economy in which standardized units of economic measurement dissolve and eventually vaporize. 'Human capital' has to be liberated from capital and our collective intelligence has to invent another conception of wealth, and dare to set new goals for mutual human activity.

Gorz writes about an 'affluent economy' which tends towards a no-cost economy, and thereby capitalism becomes obsolete by its own inherent logic. It is not hard to see that his concepts of affluence and economy differ profoundly from the mainstream definitions used by scientists and politicians. Gorz backs up his speculative thinking with interpretations of visionary quotations from *Das Kapital* and *Grundrisse*, and refers with admiration and vivid hope to the American economist and future research scientist Jeremy Rifkin's point that 'the immaterial capital or 'intellectual capital' of most companies [in Sweden around 1999] reached levels between five and sixteen times higher than their material and financial capital' (59).

Cool headed critique and a warm heart

Gorz's claim that capitalism has intrinsic difficulties in 'making intangible capital function as capital [and] making so-called cognitive capitalism function as capitalism' (65) is certainly thought-provoking. But even though I have great sympathy for his analysis of the inner contradictions in present-day capitalism, I suggest that we keep a cool head. Impatience is no escape route or a freeway to paradise. What is needed is a thorough and critical diagnosis of the compulsory, immaterial and cognitive capitalism.

We have to reflect upon the fact that not only knowledge circulates on the Internet, but also blogs, diaries, private video-clips, pornography and subliminal PR for products and

services. The Web is not a liberated zone for free global and interactive citizenship. Gorz does not seem to differentiate between knowledge, information and the multitude of other signs. He wears only his knowledge glasses. It might also be the case that he underestimates the amount of work that is not based on novel knowledge production. Besides, powerful corporate interests and brands are able to privatise great parts of the value-added knowledge circulating online, even though the actual production costs on the Internet are something close to zero. We also have to realize that free access to Wikipedia and the like does not necessarily mean that we have become more knowledgeable than we were when we ‘only’ read whole books made of paper.

Even though Gorz sees a new hacker ethic and a free software ‘precariat’ – namely, underpaid and creative digital workers, the so-called ‘postindustrial neoproletariat’ (121) – breaking through, and actively welcomes their attempts to bring back knowledge into society, he might overstate this new tendency. The majority of the ‘dissidents of digital capitalism’ might be living on the fringes of salaried employment not because they want or choose to, but because economic trends dictate their living and working conditions. If we see a new global recovery, the creative commonality may well rush back to work for money in the big corporate machine(s). Gorz overloads the free software agents with labels like ‘anarcho-communism’ (125) and the idea that they ‘consciously [practice] within capitalism against capitalism’ (125) is unconvincing.

Capitalism has survived crises throughout in its long history and the market economy continues to spread across the world. The relations between exploitation, profit ‘creation’, the division of labour, wage-labour and commodities – for example, the fulfilment and production of needs at the market place – are not deteriorating, but are in fact becoming the dominant condition for the majority of working people on this planet. And capitalism has a talent for inventing needs while manufacturing and selling endless types of consumer goods to the masses. Great societal experiments of the non-capitalist kind or even socialist alternatives are unfortunately not easy to envisage, neither in 2003 when the book was written, nor 9 years later, at the moment when I’m writing this review.

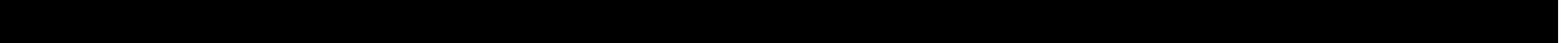
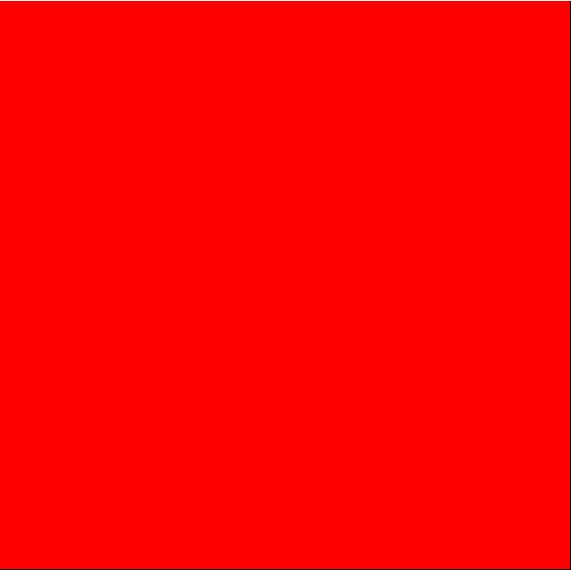
Exit

Where Gorz envisages a capitalism dying out and negating itself in a fertile virtual sphere of communication that contains real political potentialities for radical social transformation, I see what Marx called ‘the civilizing influence of capital’ giving breath to ever newer forms of contradiction. Gorz is right in claiming that knowledge is not reducible to a commodity. He is also right to emphasize that neither the Marxist theory of value nor the dominant ‘liberal’ theory of economic value can grasp the process of transforming knowledge into value. But unfortunately he is mistaken in claiming that capitalism will soon disappear. Maybe it is capitalism’s ability to produce powerful conflicting and contradicting patterns of social life that keeps it alive and kicking. Capitalism manages to integrate major parts of human creativity, our innovative skills, desires and communicative

utterances to foster and maintain its own logic of accumulation, and until now we have not been able to conquer its destructive aspects or find a way to live without its seemingly magnetic power.

the author

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