

On the Abolition of Academic Labour: The Relationship Between Intellectual Workers and Mass Intellectuality

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Abstract: This article analyses the ways in which academic labour as a productive activity is subsumed inside the circuits and cycles of finance capital. These circuits are redefining universities as transnational associations of capitals, through which the concrete and abstract realities of academic labour are recomposed for value production and accumulation. One way of critiquing and moving beyond such a recomposition is through a reconsideration of academic labour as a fetishised form of labour, and subsequently framed in terms of the idea of “mass intellectuality”. The potential for mass intellectuality to enable liberation from the domination of capitalist social relations is contested, but the idea of socially-useful, living knowledge offers a mechanism for rethinking the value of academic labour, and pointing towards its abolition. Thus, the article asks whether it is possible to dissolve academic labour into the fabric of society as intellectual work, through which another image of society and social production becomes possible. Here the ideas of open co-operativism and fearless practice underpin a politics of alliance against capital that seeks to abolish the present state of things.

Keywords: academic labour, mass intellectuality, open co-operativism, university, value.

1. Introduction

Increasingly, the academic has no apparent autonomy beyond the temporary amelioration of her labour relations with those who direct the University for the logic of accumulation, commodification, and profit-maximisation (McGinn 2012). Those who direct the University for the market are not simply Vice-Chancellors, but include policy makers, private equity fundholders, credit rating agencies, technology firms and publishers, and, indirectly, fee-paying students (Hall 2013; McGettigan 2013). This transnational activist network forms an association of capitals (Ball 2012; Marx 1993a; Robinson 2004) that subsumes and disciplines academic labour.

This subsumption of academic labour emerges under “the social tyranny of exchange-value” and the profit motive (Wendling 2009, 52). What is currently being enacted through global labour arbitrage, outsourcing and precarity, is the alienation of academic labour through the enclosure and commodification of its products and relationships (Neary 2012). This focus on production for exchange is then furthered through the cultural imperatives of student-as-consumer, league tables, impact-measures, and knowledge exchange (Willetts 2013), and the economic value of higher education (Snowden 2013; Willetts 2014). Against this tyranny of enclosure, might the value of academic labour, in terms of its labour-power, the research/teaching products that it creates, and the relationships that it enables and maintains, be re-evaluated for its social use?

Such a re-evaluation demands that academics imagine that their skills, practices and knowledges might be shared and put to another use, in common and in co-operation, as a form of mass intellectuality (Manzerolle 2010; Virno 2001). This demands that academics understand the mechanisms through which capital co-opts the living knowledge that is produced by their labour-power as the general intellect (Marx 1993b). This co-option of academic practices through processes of enclosure and commodification, includes: knowledge transfer and the use of patents; impact metrics for research outputs; a focus on student satisfaction and learning analytics to drive pedagogic development; the institutional enforcement of thresholds for the use of learning management systems, alongside social media policies; the

implementation of project and programme management methodologies. These engagements restructure the labour-power of the academic as one form of the general intellect, so that it can be congealed inside technical and organisational innovations that enable value production (Virno 2004).

In pushing back against co-option and alienation, the idea of the general intellect might usefully be reclaimed as a form of mass intellectuality, which is socialised knowledge that is a direct, social force of production. Mass intellectuality is socially useful knowledge that emerges through the definition of an alternative value-form that will work in terms of the social reproduction of society in a different image (Harvey 2010). It provides a valuable counterpoint to *both* the fetishisation of technology *and* the “immaterial” production and accumulation of value (Manzerolle 2010; Marx 2004). Thus, in terms of developing a really existing mass intellectuality, academics might ask, is it possible to live and tell a different, overtly political story of academic labour as it relates to human sociability?

This focus on politics and organisation is a focus on recovering subjectivity as an academic and a labourer. As Cleaver (1993) notes in his final two theses on the Secular Crisis of Capitalism, this idea of recovering subjectivity through radical democracy is critical in liberating humanity from the coercive laws of competition and the market. For Cleaver, the creation of a revolutionary subjectivity is entwined with the need to develop: “[a] politics of alliance against capital [...] not only to accelerate the circulation of struggle from sector to sector of the class, but to do so in such a manner as to build a post-capitalist politics of difference without antagonism.” Here the idea of academic as labourer working to abolish her labour is central, rather than the academic as fetishized carrier of specific skills, practices, and knowledge.

In addressing the relationship between academic labour and mass intellectuality, this paper makes four points. First, it will address the mechanisms through which academic autonomy is increasingly alienated inside-and-against the University. Second, it will relate this alienation to the recalibration of the University as an association of capitals. Third, it will ask how academic labour might be understood in concrete and abstract terms, and then abolished as part of a social struggle for subjectivity that is situated against value production and accumulation? Fourth, the paper will ask whether it is possible to liberate academic labour as a form of mass intellectuality that can be used inside and across society? Here, the potential for co-operative alternatives based on solidarity, where they connect to a radical, societal, democratic project of refusal, will be highlighted.

2. On the rollback of academic autonomy

Ball (2012) writes of three stages of neoliberalism. The first is *proto*, and refers to the intellectual genesis and maturation of the neoliberal project. This is the cultural attack on the everyday reality of the public and of the State, and lays the intellectual groundwork for building a consensus around the value of the market in defining the production of everyday life. It lays the groundwork for the market as the primary social arbiter. In this phase, a set of spaces is created inside-and-against, which the State can be reconfigured to deliver a policy structure that enhances marketisation. This then becomes the doctrinaire, new normal.

The second stage is *rollback*, during which social life that was hitherto experienced as public, like the post-war Keynesian consensus, and which included free-at-the-point-of-delivery healthcare, education or social services, is broken-up (Cumbers 2012). As a result, those services are enclosed, financialised and marketised (Deem et al. 2007; McGettigan 2014). In this stage there is a clear interplay between the doctrinal, intellectual underpinnings of neoliberalism and the undermining of the State or of public services as inefficient (Willetts 2013). This then connects to the third stage, that of the *rollout* of the new neoliberal normal. This last stage incorporates public policy that enables *both* the privatisation of public spaces, *and* new associations of corporations or capitals that can extract or accumulate value (Deem et al. 2008; Newfield 2013). It also opens-up access to public goods like pensions, healthcare and public data (Willetts 2014).

For instance, inside English higher education these three interconnected phases of neoliberalism have played out in an increasingly amorphous manner. In this context, there has been a limited intellectual project about what higher education should be, or of the idea of what the University might be for. This has been based upon ministerial pamphlets like *Robbins Revisited* (Willetts 2013), and analyses of the Higher Education White Paper that never became an Act of Parliament (McGettigan 2013). It has also emerged from statements that anchor the University in economic growth (Snowden 2013) through partnerships with, for example, finance capital (Willetts 2014). The analyses of the role of private finance and global publishers like Pearson Education on private expansion inside higher education have also been important (Morgan 2013). Willetts (2013) developed the connections between data, pedagogy and consumerism, in order to organise educational life for the market. A key driver is making information available to students and parents about teaching as a quantifiable set of activities, so that *families* can make choices about courses (Willetts 2013, 44). Moreover, he argued that funding rooted in student fees will enable such choices to be aggregated. As a result, an HE market that materially affects teaching will be created (Willetts 2013, 47).

This quantification of academic practices is also underpinned by secondary legislation that is focused upon: student debt and university funding; leveraging the role of finance capital and the bond markets in institutional debt/refinancing; using student number controls, funding for core and marginal numbers, and deregulation to catalyse competition; and the monetisation of the student loan book (Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS] 2014). Thus, in order to compete, individual universities are forced to consider a range of strategies for restructuring. These include refinancing through bond markets (McGettigan 2013), and rebranding using engagement in on-line projects like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). They also focus upon contesting labour rights through zero-hour contracts, casualization and outsourcing (CASA 2014; University of Leeds Postgraduates for Fair Pay [PG4FP] 2014; 3cosas 2014). A final set of drivers pivot around entrepreneurialism or social enterprise, and engaging in corporate partnerships with publishers and technology firms (Hall 2013). Here the *proto* phase of the marketization of higher education meets the *rollback* of State funding and regulation, and the *rollout* of opportunities for marketization and accumulation, in a conflicting and contested set of spaces. This leaves those employed in the university having to make sense of an increasingly contested educational context, and one that is increasingly alienating (Brook 2009; Constanti and Gibbs 2004; McGinn 2012).

A critical element in this process of alienating the perceived, concrete reality of academic labour is the role of transnational activist networks that themselves form geographies of neoliberalism (Ball 2012; Robinson 2004). These networks consist of academics and think-tanks, policy-makers and administrators, finance capital and venture capital and private equity, educational publishers, and philanthropists. Their aim is to regulate the State and the institutions that are structured by it, like universities, for the market, for enterprise, and for-profit. Critical here is that the *proto*, *rollback* and *rollout* phases are increasingly playing out together in real-time across networks that subsume individual universities inside associations of capitals (Marx 1992). As a result, the room for manoeuvre for individual institutions is restricted, so that they are forced to restructure for competitiveness in the face of increasingly scarce resources.

The on-going process of restructuring affects the everyday educational and pedagogical labour of academics and students by recalibrating: academic forms of production, exchange and consumption; academic relations to nature and the environment; the social relations between academics, managers and students; academic conceptions of the world; academic labour processes; university governance structures; and how the university contributes to social reproduction (*pace* Harvey 2010). Thus, academics might ask the following questions.

1. How do the University's managers, staff and students produce, exchange and consume, in terms of commodities, knowledge and value? What is the role of financialisation and the market in those processes, and whom do they benefit?

2. What is the relationship of the University to nature and to the environment? What is the impact of the productive activities of the University on the environment, including its reinforcement of the idea that economic growth is the only option?
3. What does the production and the reproduction of the University as a marketised and competitive space mean for the social relations between people, including between staff, between academics and students, between managers and unions, and between academic labour and the public?
4. What does the production and the reproduction of the University mean for our mental conceptions of the world? What does higher education mean in terms of commodified knowledge or economic growth, or for co-operative, social solutions, or for the development and dissemination of knowledge through society as mass intellectuality?
5. How does the University as a competing business represent and reproduce casualised and precarious labour processes, amongst staff and students? What does the entrepreneurial turn inside the University mean for the autonomy of academic labour?
6. How does the marketised University affect our understandings of democratic, social governance? What forms of cognitive dissonance affect the role of the academic in making sense of the recalibration that is enforced through the proto/rollback/rollout phases of the neoliberal university?

In making sense of these questions, academics are reminded of Marx's (1845) response to Feuerbach: "All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice." A critical, pedagogic project that does not valorise specific entrepreneurial practices that make the individual academic/student resilient or employable or a commodity-skilled labourer inside the market informs comprehension. Such a project is grounded in situated, democratic productive activity, which offers a mirror to the co-option of academic labour in the current *proto/rollback/rollout* phases of the neoliberal university. Moreover, it forms a critique of the transnational control exhibited by associations of capitals over the material reality of everyday life, and which is reinforced pedagogically (Clever 1993; 2002).

3. On academic production inside associations of capitals

This idea of the subsumption of academic labour inside the circuits of capital is increasingly important in light of Marx's (1992; 1993a) focus on the associational phase of capital, in which development emerges on a global terrain, with an interrelationship between commercial and money-dealing capital and productive capital. Those who direct the University for the market are not simply Vice-Chancellors, but include associations of policy makers, private equity fundholders, credit rating agencies, technology firms and publishers, and, indirectly, fee-paying students, who form a deterritorialised network (Ball 2012; Deem et al. 2007; McGettigan 2013; 2014; Robinson 2004). Here, the expropriation of surplus value from producers by merchant capital is a primary source of profit, and in educational production it is leveraged through the use of finance capital and credit to increase the rate of turnover of specific educational commodities and services-as-commodities (Gartner 2013; Lipman 2009). This is achieved through the on-line production and circulation of curriculum resources, and the competitive pressures of open education, MOOCs and learning analytics (Ravitch 2012; Thorburn 2012). The management and sale of the student loan book and corporate engagement both in the funding of research centres and knowledge exchange, and the outsourcing of physical and technological infrastructures, complement these strategies.

Thus, in order to develop alternative, concrete realities it is worth re-thinking how merchant, credit and finance capital affect the inner workings of education, in particular as universities are being reconstructed inside the equivalent of joint-stock companies, subject to the coercive logic of competition for research grants and student numbers. What is the impact of the coercive role of money as it is insinuated inside educational practice? To what extent does this process reinforce the reification of the student, the entrepreneurial academic, or specific technologies? How does the politicisation of these roles relate to the reproduc-

tion of capital? The market, defined by corporate entities operating as commercial capitalists, is divorced from the realities of educational production as a social activity, and is recalibrated around the individual production and consumption of educational services and products. Thus, students/academics are recalibrated not as social learners/teachers but as individual entrepreneurs able to access/produce educational services and products in a global market.

However, in this process of commercialising education a tension emerges from the increasingly limited spaces that are available for productive as opposed to rentier or interest-bearing capital (Marx 1992). As a result, there is an increase in venture capital and private equity investment in University restructuring and technological innovation, in-part because they deliver higher levels of short-term profitability. This focus on commodifying services and data, rather than on developing productive capability, dissolves previous forms of academic production. As money capital and its characteristics define the University, there emerges global pressure to reform (Gartner 2013; PA Consulting 2014), or become revolutionised as an organisational form for the accumulation of capital be that social, cultural, or commercial/financial (McGettigan 2014). Harvey (2013) refers to this as the “solvent effect” that is also conjunctural with the development of a world market. The domination of commercial capital over production is witnessed in the University through increasingly precarious working conditions for outsourced employees and attrition on academic labour rights. It is also amplified through organisational development and the implementation of management methodologies like lean, PRINCE2 or Managing Successful Programmes. One result is a proliferation of zero-hour contracts, precarious employment for hourly-paid or postgraduates/adjunct staff. Here, the focus is on the generation and maintenance of a surplus population/labour that can underpin global labour arbitrage and undermine solidarity.

However, *pace* Marx (1992), this also tends to re-focus academics on the act of production, rather than on the circuits of money or commercial capital, as the truly revolutionary social activity. Here campaigns like 3cosas (2014), PG4FP (2014), and Australian anti-Casualisation (CASA 2014) ask important questions about where power lies in the academy. Such campaigns point towards the tensions that exist between, finance, merchant and productive capital, and how such tensions impact individual producers and consumers of educational products. They also force us to recognise the different strata that define academic labour. In terms of this latter point, academic labour covers full professors, assistant professors, adjuncts, sessional instructors, teacher assistants and so on. These individuals are employed on a range of tenured and non-tenured contracts. The power differences between these various strata facilitate disciplinary control. Moreover, through mechanisms like performance-related pay for professors and heads of department, they enable divisions between academics to inhibit the solidarity necessary to abolish academic labour.

Such stratification is amplified where educational corporations control most of the surplus value that is produced. In such moments, they can discipline and divide production through labour arbitrage and a refusal to negotiate with collectivised academic labour. As employment is made precarious amongst individuated and separated educational producers fulfilling a range of roles, solidarity and co-operation are negated and ultra-exploitation or proletarianisation emerges. As a result, the domination of commercial or finance capital drives low prices in the sphere of production, and this restructures organisational forms through efficiency drives or technological innovation (Marx 1993).

McGettigan’s (2014) analysis of this restructuring of education by hedge funds, private equity, technology firms, credit rating agencies, publishers, think tanks and so on, demonstrates how the capital produced inside the University is circulating and accumulating on a global terrain:

As universities mirror the increasingly unequal nature of English society, what they offer is a positional rather than a market good: their role in advancing social equality, or minimising embedded disadvantage, will be traduced in a meritocratic game of spotting ‘talent’ and ensuring that it is slotted into the appropriate tier. But the possibility of ditching even such minimal commitments to fair access hits a tipping point if the conversion from charity to for-profit is facilitated by government. This is so novel that we do not even have

a term for such a process ('privatisation' does not cut it, since the charity is already private). We do though have a precedent. In 2012, [the UK] College of Law was sold to Montagu Private Equity for £200 million. The export strategy document encourages universities to consider this option if they wish to exploit the new opportunities opened by the digital revolution that fixes education as a tradeable service. It goes without saying that this process and that of the financialisation associated with a generalised loan scheme will feed off each other. Although the policy terrain is settled temporarily, the ball is very much in the court of individual institutions: there are few safeguards against the ambition of overweening vice-chancellors fuelled by new financial options.

Critically, the subsumption of universities inside the mechanics of capitalist reproduction and financialisation demands a market. This applies to Vice-Chancellors acting as CEOs or nascent business leaders, and to private providers of educational services, both of whom need specific use-values, like course content, data, knowledge exchange partnerships, research outcomes as products, technical infrastructures and so on, in specific amounts that can be purchased and put to work. Crucially, this work has to be productive of surplus value, and profit. Hence it needs a market, and if one doesn't already exist it must be created. This need for a market is also extended to potential students who carry debt, and who are encouraged to purchase commodities or services-as-commodities, as positional goods. Thus, the material circumstances of the production, purchase and circulation of educational commodities are critical, and they catalyse policy as a means of restructuring intellectual work or academic labour.

4. Rethinking concrete/abstract academic labour

One of the central issues for academics is that, as they labour under the structural domination of commodity capitalists, they have to vie for a place on the market. This makes them vulnerable to crises related to: futures-trading; access to means of production; overproduction; market-saturation; an inability to access credit; or the more general, societal access to debt. This tends *both* to restructure institutions *and* to reduce the points of solidarity for academic labour. Hence the very real impact of finance capital in creating a higher education market based on catalysing new systems of production, organisational development or technological innovation leaves universities at risk. Moreover, it leaves academics at risk as the University's much-vaunted institutional autonomy abstracts it from a notion of public good and distances it from any socialised purpose or meaning (Thorburn 2012). Thus, it becomes difficult to separate out governmental policy based on competition (Willets 2014), governmental support for innovations like MOOCs (Willets 2013), venture capital investment in educational technology start-ups (Gartner 2013), or University restructuring and reorganisation (Snowden 2013), from this drive to create a market.

One outcome of this drive is the need to commodify *both* pedagogy *and* academic relationships. *Pace* Marx (1993a), education's role in commodity formation and exchange is critical in the processes that connect and amplify financialisation and marketisation because the commodity is the social form against which every educational capital can be considered. The global circuit of educational commodities is the form of motion common to all educational capitals. It is social only in that it forms the total social capital of the capitalist class, as it is restructuring education transnationally. Moreover, the movement of individual educational capitals is conditioned by its relationship to other educational capitals, be they public universities or private, for-profit colleges. This is a material relation underscored by categories of the commodity, competition, surplus value extraction and accumulation, financialisation, and the rate of profit.

This process of commodification across higher education is also catalysed through value formation and the concomitant domination of academic labour by time. As Postone (1996, 191) writes: "As a category of the totality, socially necessary labour time expresses a quasi-objective social necessity with which the producers are confronted. It is the temporal dimension of the abstract domination that characterizes the structures of alienated social relations

in capitalism. The social totality constituted by labour as an objective general mediation has a temporal character, wherein *time becomes necessity*.”

As a result, the University enmeshed in the market becomes a source of value and also seeks out value from new markets. The attrition on the average time it takes academic labour to produce, circulate or exchange commodities damages the sociability and solidarity of the academic's wider communities with whom she is now in competition. Thus, the socially necessary labour time of academic production increasingly dominates the life of the academic and the student. This domination is made worse for the academic as the University is subsumed under value accumulation, because the academic means of production are necessarily revolutionised through technological and organisational change. This leads to speed-up, impact measures, always-on technologies, performance or lean management, the use of learning analytics or data mining, and so on, in order that the productivity of the academic can be measured against her peers through the socially-necessary labour time that determines what her productivity *should* be. In a competitive, transnational educational market, academic labour rights will be threatened by the equalising pressures of socially necessary labour time. Moreover, these pressures will tend to affect the potential for co-operation between academics within institutions and across the sector.

What is missing in the current debates about the fee-cap, student-as-consumer/customer, the executive pay of vice-chancellors and institutional managers, deregulated markets and student number controls, the allocation of research income, and so on, is a meaningful discussion about the value of academic labour as social work/activity, rather than as reified exchange-value (Harvey 2010; Marx 2004; Postone 1996; Wendling 2009). What is its use-value as work/activity *for* society, as opposed to its price as a commodity/as academic labour-power? Increasingly academic labour is abstracted for exchange and subsumed under the laws of competition, and as Wendling notes (2009, 52) this is disciplinary: “the social tyranny of exchange-value is so comprehensive that it determines how things are made and even what is made [...] Capitalism does not care if it produces quantities for use; it cares about producing profit.” It is against this tyranny that the value of academic labour, in the costs of its labour-power, the research/teaching products that it creates, and the relationships that it enables and maintains, might usefully be discussed and re-evaluated. What is currently being enacted through global labour arbitrage, outsourcing and precarious employment, is the alienation of academic labour through the enclosure and commodification of its products and relationships. This focus on production for exchange is then furthered through abstract cultural imperatives, like the idea of student-as-consumer, the use of league tables and impact-measures, and the development of knowledge exchange and intellectual property rights (Lipman 2009; Neary 2012).

Thus, analysing the interplay between the abstract world and its concrete realisation is fundamental to understanding the formation and co-option of academic labour. In this view, there is a flow between the concrete and the abstract so that each emerges from and reinforces the other. This leads Postone (1980, 108) to argue: “What is required, then, is an approach which allows for a distinction between what modern capitalism is and the way it appears, between its essence and appearance. The concept ‘modern’ does not allow for such a distinction. These considerations lead us to Marx's concept of the fetish, the strategic intent of which was to provide a social and historical theory of knowledge grounded in the difference between the essence of capitalist social relations and their manifest form.”

Critical here is finding a means of decoding how relations of educational production and the educational commodities that are produced socially are externalised and take the form of fetishes. Moreover, these relations and forms are at once both abstract and concrete, with each informing the production and reproduction of the other. This appears on the surface of society to be a set of relationships that are mediated and abstracted by money (the cost of a degree is reduced to a fee that acts as a representation of value) and by the law (in terms of requirements for published data, or access to/control of a market, and so on). For many academics, abstract labour rooted in exchange-value feels less meaningful or truthful than the concrete form of academic labour rooted in self-critical scholarly work (Harvey 2013; Postone 1980). However, inside a global education market and against the structuring realities of

money, it becomes difficult to move beyond the alienation of both concrete and abstract academic labour because neither can be properly decoded. Again, Postone (1980, 109) argues:

One aspect of the fetish, then, is that capitalist social relations do not appear as such and, moreover, present themselves antinomically, as the opposition of the abstract and concrete. Because, additionally, both sides of the antinomy are objectified, each appears to be quasi-natural: the abstract dimension appears in the form of 'objective,' 'natural' laws; the concrete dimension appears as pure 'thingly' nature. The structure of alienated social relations which characterize capitalism has the form of a quasi-natural antinomy in which the social and historical do not appear.

This is the dialectical relation between the abstract and the concrete, which is both historical and material, and which is subsuming academic life as labour inside a terrain of value-production and accumulation. Without an analysis of the ways that *both* concrete *and* abstract academic labour are manifest in capitalist social relations and generative of value, there is no way that crises can be overcome. Postone (1980) makes a critical point about the relationship between the concrete, productive manifestation of capital, through its relationships to industry and technology, as a form of natural work or labour, and crisis. Thus, the idea:

that the concrete is 'natural,' and which increasingly presents the socially 'natural' in such a way that it is perceived in biological terms. It is precisely the hypostatization of the concrete and the identification of capital with the manifest abstract which renders this ideology so functional for the development of industrial capitalism in crisis [...] The identification of capital with the manifest abstract overlaps, in part, with its identification with the market. The attack on the liberal state, as abstract, can further the development of the interventionist state, as concrete. This form of 'anti-capitalism,' then, only appears to be looking backwards with yearning. As an expression of the capital fetish its real thrust is forwards. It is an aid to capitalism in the transition to quasi-state capitalism in a situation of structural crisis (Postone 1980, 111).

In moments of crisis, it is a mistake to seek redress in technocratic determination or organisational change, or in terms of abstract reason. It is also alienating to look for natural solutions in the form of concrete labour or the use-value of work, because both routes are historically and materially "impotent in the face of capital", and offer no direction towards post-capitalism (Postone 1980, 115). This is an extreme tension for academic labour where that has previously rooted itself in ideas of 'the public good' and of autonomy (Cumbers 2012; Thorburn 2012), connected to its use-value outside of the market. As academic labour in all its stratified forms is folded into the transnational circuits of commodity capitalism, the duality of its abstract and concrete nature is realised inside-and-against the categories that define it, namely the commodity, money, labour-power and value (Jappe 2014). Both abstract and concrete labour and their manifestations in use and exchange are rooted in the production, circulation, and accumulation of value, and in capital's drive for self-valorisation.

5. On value and academic alienation

What is required is a means of critiquing the alienation imposed by and emerging from capitalist work in its interrelated abstract and concrete forms, and through its fetishisation of technological solutions to crises, be they political, financial, societal, or environmental in appearance (Braverman 1998). The attempt to overcome crises borne of competition by renewing personal or social or transnational values that are themselves fashioned inside that competitive dynamic is impossible (Cleaver 2002). A social revolution of life cannot be delivered through a revolution of social (re-)production that is rooted in value production and labour, or through the recuperation of concrete labour or use-value as an alleged antidote to the abstract capitalist world. As the natural world is subsumed and reproduced inside it, the ecology of capitalism reveals both the concrete and the abstract as alienating.

This is important because academic labour is increasingly being revealed as subsumed inside the material (structural and systemic) and historical inability of capital to overcome the limitations on stable, global forms of accumulation (Cleaver 1993). Jappe (2014) argues that the capitalist mode of production is reaching its historical limits, in part through technological innovation that drives up the organic composition of capital and undermines the basis of value production and the rate of profit. One of the critical issues is that globally “the absolute amount of value, and therefore of surplus-value, is declining precipitously” (Jappe 2014, 7), which places any society based on the production and accumulation of value in crisis. What might be needed, in order for academics and students to push back, is a re-focusing on the counter-hegemonic potential of academic labour-power, knowledge, skills and practices for socially-useful work or activity, which is beyond Capital’s system of value.

Pace Marx (2004), this reveals a set of contradictions and tensions, between use and exchange inside the production and movement of value, and the role of labour as commodity needs to be addressed in the context of the University. How should the work that academics do be valued? How does it add value and for whom, and how might its social potential be liberated? This means that academics need to understand the concrete and abstract mediation of their work (Postone 1980), in order to address the mechanisms through which that work is leveraged. It also means that revealing the diversity of academic labour might enable moments and forms of solidarity to emerge.

Here one returns to the mechanisms through which academic labour is co-opted and then *both* abstracted from the circuit of production (in bond markets or student debt) *and* made concrete in the realities of everyday life (in marking or giving feedback, or in writing). One also returns to the role of academic labour in the reproduction of a society that is based on value production and accumulation:

A growing disparity arises between developments in the productive powers of labour (which are not necessarily bound to the direct labour of the workers), on the one hand, and the value frame within which such developments are expressed (which *is* bound to such labour), on the other. The disparity between the accumulation of historical time and the objectification of immediate labour time becomes more pronounced as scientific knowledge is increasingly materialized in production [...] a growing disparity separates the conditions for the production of material wealth from those for the generation of value (Postone 1996, 297).

This demands that academic labour is analysed in terms of the crisis of value formation on a global terrain (Cleaver 1993; 2002; Jappe 2014). This might enable those collective organisations of tenured and non-tenured academic labourers to find moments of co-operation and solidarity. This is not to reify academic labour in its concrete forms or uses, or willingly to accept its subsumption inside the circuits of exchange. However, the recalibration of the skills, practices and knowledge of academics and students, whose labour is at once concrete and abstract, useful and used for exchange, is occurring at a time when the secular crisis of capitalism means that stable forms of accumulation cannot be reinstated (Cleaver 1993). This secular crisis is transnational, and is economic, social and political, with environmental symptoms that are material and historical. It may be that the transnational, associational form of capitalist development points towards an alternative possibility, in which academic labour might be dissolved inside-and-through society, as mass intellectuality.

6. On academic labour and the potential for mass intellectuality

The argument that academic labour is increasingly rooted in global exploitation also has connections to points of academic/student commonality and solidarity. These points of solidarity demonstrate the potential that labour has to be socially useful and thereby liberated as a common treasury. This potential focuses upon collective liberation from the domination of abstract time and the recovery of a task-oriented life (Thompson 1967). It is also about refusing, in Postone’s (1996, 202) terms, a conception of time that is “uniform, continuous, homogenous [...] [and] empty of events”. Here, useful labour emerges through tasks and events

that reproduce society against-and-beyond value production. They are a form of sociability that do not occur within time, but instead structure and determine that time (Postone 1996, 201).

Realising the capacity of academics and students as scholars to see their labour in common, in order to think and to act co-operatively, and to overcome that labour, moves us beyond concerns over the fetishised production and ownership of academic labour. In this process, reclaiming the concept of living knowledge, or the liberation of the general intellect as a form of “mass intellectuality”, is important. Marx (1993b, 694) argued that the dynamics of capitalism meant: “the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital [machinery].”

Through innovation and competition, the technical and skilled labour of the socialised worker, operating in factories, corporations or schools, is subsumed inside machinery and techniques. Therefore, the “general intellect” of society is absorbed into capitalised technologies and techniques, in order to reduce labour costs and increase productivity. As a result, “the human being comes to relate more as a watchman and regulator to the production process itself” (Marx 1993b, 705).

However, as the University of Utopia (2014) argued, a reconsideration of the general intellect might form a point of departure where: “As intellectual workers we refuse the fetishised concept of the knowledge society and engage in teaching, learning and research only in so far as we can re-appropriate the knowledge that has been stolen from the workers that have produced this way of knowing (i.e. Abundance). In the society of abundance the university as an institutional form is dissolved, and becomes a social form or knowledge at the level of society (i.e. The General Intellect). It is only on this basis that we can knowingly address the global emergencies with which we are all confronted.”

A focus on the possibilities that emerge from co-operative work and activities, rooted in a flowering of alternative educational practices, point towards the development of socialised knowledge, or “mass intellectuality”, as a direct, social force of production. As the University of Utopia (2014) argued: “Mass intellectuality is based on our common ability to do, based on our needs and capacities and what needs to be done. What needs to be done raises doing from the level of the individual to the level of society.”

For Virno (2001), this sociability transcended organisational or technological determinism, or the fetishisation of social or individual entrepreneurialism, and instead focused upon “the depository of cognitive competences that cannot be objectified in machinery.” In this view, mass intellectuality emerges from: “the more generic attitudes of the mind [which] gain primary status as productive resources; these are the faculty of language, the disposition to learn, memory, the power of abstraction and relation and the tendency towards self-reflexivity [that form] the inexhaustible potential of language to execute contingent and unrepeatable statements. Like the intellect and memory, language is the most common and least ‘specialised’ conceivable given. A good example of mass intellectuality is the speaker, not the scientist. Mass intellectuality has nothing to do with a new “labour aristocracy”; it is actually its exact opposite” (Virno 2001).

These struggles for mass intellectuality are an attempt to build a counter-hegemonic position rooted in solidarity and sharing, and related to the social and co-operative use of the knowledge, skills and practices that are created through labour (Bologna 2014). This is deliberately opposed to the commodification, exchange, accumulation and valorisation of those knowledge, skills and practices by a transnational elite (Cleaver 2002; Virno 2001). Thus, liberating science and technology from inside-and-against capital’s competitive dynamics is central to moving *beyond* exploitation. Inside critical and co-operative (rather than co-opted) educational contexts, the processes of learning and teaching offer the chance to critique the purposes for which the general intellect is commodified rather than made public. They also offer the opportunity to reclaim and liberate the general intellect for co-operative use (Manzerolle 2010; Marx 2004).

From a re-evaluation of concrete and abstract academic labour as it relates to mass intellectuality, it becomes possible to focus on alternative educational practices that develop so-

cialised knowledge as a direct, social force of production. As Arvidsson (2008) argues, through such alternatives, attempts can be made to liberate science and technology across society, and to enable the “free availability of General Intellect in the social environment [which] means that capital cannot exercise a monopoly over this productive resource. It can be employed for autonomous or even subversive purposes.” Academic labour might act as one critical site in the struggle to recuperate the general intellect in-part through reclaiming public, cloud-based environments that enable globalised dissemination of knowledge at the edges of capitalist work, for example through education commons rooted in critical pedagogy (Bauwens and Iacomella 2012). It might also emerge from the use of digital technology inside the community-building of alternative educational settings like student occupations, co-operative centres or social science centres (Amsler and Neary 2012). These struggles offer the chance to critique the purposes for which the general intellect is commodified rather than made public.

However, there are caveats to a potential fetishisation of mass intellectuality as a category that might emancipate human relationships from their subsumption as forms of labour. One of these is that mass intellectuality needs to be situated through a critique of and response to crises that emerge from the contradictions of capitalism itself (Bologna 2014; Tomba and Bellofiore 2014). It is through this critique that a meaningful counter-narrative can emerge through class struggle, rather than through the multitudinous refusals of labour. Equally, a potential focus on the academic as a socialised worker who labours in the social factory, rather than the collectivised worker who labours and produces in industry, risks privileging a particular view of the working class (Tomba and Bellofiore 2014). Here, a re-focusing on the duality of the concrete/abstract realities of labour relations, along with the relations of production, is pivotal in developing counter-narratives (Jappe 2014). These might include the refusal of academic labour in formal educational institutions, the development of the academic commons, the use of free and open source software and copyfarleft licenses, the realisation of peer-to-peer networks (Bauwens and Iacomella 2012; Free, Libre, Open Knowledge [FLOK] Society 2014; Kleiner 2014).

7. Conclusion: towards the possibility of abolishing academic labour through mass intellectuality?

The links between commercial educational providers and universities, educators and students as producers and consumers of educational services, data and products, demonstrate hegemony and dependency. This complex interdependency is not reducible to fetishized ideas rooted in money via cost-savings or emancipation based on learning for a life of capitalist work. However, the extension of this hegemony across educational contexts through the subsumption of academic labour links to the mechanisms that ensures the reproduction of capital beyond its limits or barriers. Across a global educational terrain, the attempt by finance and commercial capital to synchronise educational production within their own circuits forms an uncomfortable symbiosis, as those engaged in a higher education that is being restructured by the dictates of finance capital and a new market can attest (Amsler and Neary 2012; Brook 2009; McGinn 2012).

The reaction of capital to the crisis of value production is important because it connects to Marx's (1993a) hints about how the associational phase of capital might itself open-up opportunities for alternative forms of socially-useful work or practice to emerge. These opportunities are global in scope, and are based on co-operative and democratic engagements in civil and political society that include the market, the State, the Commons, and voluntary organisations. This reflects the work of Bauwens and Iacomella (2012) on creating co-operative, pedagogical projects that might reveal alternatives to the idea of endless growth and material abundance linked to debt. Such alternatives need to critique the idea of immaterial scarcity framed by, for example, the Trans-Pacific Partnership/the Transatlantic Trade and Investments Partnership and global intellectual property law. They might also refuse the pseudo-abundance that encloses and destroys the biosphere. Bauwens and Iacomella (2012) argue

for a global alliance, between movements based on open and copyfarleft, ecology and social justice, and global emancipation.

Here academics might usefully ask, what activities are we collectively willing to bear and how might they be determined, governed and regulated? This demands that the range of academic labourers, including full and assistant professors, adjunct and sessional instructors, teacher assistants and so on are able to consider points of solidarity rather than division. The work emerging around the new co-operativism, and the intellectual underpinnings of pedagogies like student-as-producer (Amsler and Neary 2012) and of organisations like the Social Science Centre (2014), offer a way of framing and reconceptualising the potential pro/rollback/rollout phases of a co-operative alternative to neoliberalism. This work is also a way of challenging the reality of the competitive restructuring of public higher education, and the idea that the university is for-profit and valorisation. Here it is the spread of ideas across transnational activist networks of co-operators that might enable a reconnection of academic labour as labour across society, in a form that enables it to support mass intellectuality rather than private accumulation (Virno 2001; Winn 2014). As the Social Science Centre (2014) states, hope lies in the “possibilities for associational networks” that critique higher education policy and practice.

In this process, Winn’s (2014a) definition of co-operative governance as critical in defining associational networks offers an alternative, political and pedagogical space inside which academic labour might be repurposed for mass intellectuality. Winn (2014a) argues that fusing the democratic regulation of transnational worker co-operatives, with the circuits of production and distribution of the peer-to-peer economy, then points towards a counter-hegemonic, “open co-operative” set of possibilities. These form pedagogic moments that ground the open, democratic, autonomous, social focus of co-operatives that have education at their heart, inside a framework for the common ownership of the products, assets and commodities of those commodities. As Winn (2014a) argues: “the open licenses and governance structures of the ‘open coop[erative]’ are intended to create a substitute to the social role of money, in the sense that they create a different form and measure of reciprocal equivalence (money being the universal equivalence today). This seems like a good transitional step towards social relations which are not required to be based on any universal form of equivalence (i.e. From each according to their ability to each according to their needs: positive, non-reciprocity).”

The idea of the open co-operative is driven by solidarity borne of co-operative production rather than distribution and consumption. In terms of the relationship between academic labour and mass intellectuality, this connects to Amsler’s (2013) concept of the fearless and re-politicised university:

if we are to shape universities to be places in which we can actually teach and study and learn and be [...] we need to educate ourselves about the politics of higher education, advanced research, labour, intellectual culture, space and time. And we need to do this in a context in which thinking and speaking about the politics of any of these things is regarded as either a waste of time or a threat to economic productivity and institutional “reputation” [...] And we need to do this in an environment where perhaps many academics, by dint of profession or proclivity, have either no experience of political participation or activism, or no interest in social and economic politics at all. And we need to do all of this in an environment where many academics and some students are exhausted and insecure and are therefore in need of considerable self and collective care. It is at least a fourfold project. This should not be daunting; life is complex.

Amsler’s (2013) call for “a little more of a politicised relation to truth in affairs of education, knowledge and academic practice” is a form of bell hooks’ (1994) self-actualisation: a capacity to live more fully and deeply. This is a humane capacity that is also the capability to liberate time for solidarity actions and activities, rather than for exchange. Here, academic life is not driven by a commodity-valuation based on the domination of abstract time. Academic life is governed by time that is useful for social reproduction. It is not about impact metrics, performance management, assessment turnaround times, or workload management. Rather it is

based on personal and social relations that dissolve the barriers between work and life, and which enable the teacher and the student to form a pedagogical alliance for the collective, socially-negotiated overcoming of capital's power-over learning, teaching and the curriculum. This alliance, revealed inside-and-against abstract time, is the beginning and end of a pedagogical struggle for free time, and against abstract processes for value creation and accumulation.

This matters because as McGettigan (2014) notes there is an increasingly generalised democratic deficit inside institutions, in terms of the idea of the public, and the ways in which universities are financed, regulated and governed. This is a profound, qualitative shift that demands a political, pedagogical engagement rooted in governance. For Winn (2014b), there are three possible responses tied to academic production and governance.

1. *Conversion*: Constitute the university on co-operative values and principles.
2. *Dissolution*: Radicalise the university from the inside, starting with the relationship between academics and students.
3. *Creation*: Build experiments in higher education outside the financialised sector.

In each of these responses, whether academics can develop alternative methods of liberating knowing and knowledge and organisation that are beyond the space-time of value production and accumulation becomes critical. Winn's three responses are conditioned by the structural domination of wage labour, and the reality that the co-operative space has to exist inside the totalising relations of production of capitalist society. However, they offer alternative possibilities for liberating science and technology across society. Through a connection to fearless practices that are rooted in open co-operativism, these three responses might act as critical sites in a struggle for mass intellectuality in three ways. First in contributing to the reclamation of public, open environments that enable the globalised, socialised dissemination of knowledge (Kleiner 2014). Second, in connecting of a global set of educational commons rooted in critical pedagogy. Third, in developing governance structures that ground, critique and disseminate the community-building of alternative educational settings like student occupations, co-operative centres or social science centres (Amsler and Neary 2012).

Whether a focus on mass intellectuality and open co-operativism offers a potential transitional moment in the abolition of academic labour, is a moot point. However, the reconceptualisation of concrete and abstract academic labour through mass intellectuality and open co-operativism, forces academics to reflect on their relationship to the Commons, the State and its institutions, and civil society. These relationships are critical in trying to define a post-capitalism as a pedagogical, societal moment that is historically-rooted and material in nature. Here Cumbers' (2012, 156) argument that "there needs to be a more nuanced appreciation of the dynamic nature of spatial organization and governance under advanced capitalism [...]", aligns with the work of the FLOK Society (2014a) as it emerges from its *Open Letter to the Commoners*: "Imagine a society that is connected to open knowledge commons in every domain of human activity, based on free and open knowledge, code, and design that can be used by all citizens along with government and market players without the discrimination and disempowerment that follows from privatized knowledge."

The open knowledge commons as a site for mass intellectuality is a potential, really existing form of open co-operativism. Here the connection between academic labour and mass intellectuality is realised in the intellectual work of the FLOK Society's (2014b) *General Framework Document* to implement the Ecuadorian *National Plan for Good Living* (2009). This aims: "to trigger and coordinate a global participatory process and immediate national application for the change of productive matrix towards a society of open and common knowledge in Ecuador, resulting in 10 base documents for legislation and state policies (synchronized with the organic social code for the knowledge economy) as well as useful for the production networks of knowledge that already exist in Ecuador. The conceptual, philosophical and economic process and the historical and socio-cognitive context framework, the organizational principles governing the process, collaborative and communicative digital tools and advance planning of the whole process."

The issue is whether it is possible to use these forms of intellectual work as mass intellectuality, in order to reclaim the idea of the public, in the face of the crisis of value? Is it possible to reconsider pedagogically the relation between the concrete and the abstract as they are reproduced globally inside capitalism? Is it possible to liberate the democratic capability of academic labour, first as labour, and second as a transnational, collective activity inside open co-operatives, in order to reorient social production away from value and towards the possibility of governing and managing the production of everyday life in a participatory manner?

This process demands the negation of the reified nature of academic labour, so that social values rather than value are at the core of how society is reproduced. Here Amsler's focus on fearlessness connects to Cleaver's (1993) call for "[a] politics of alliance against capital [...] not only to accelerate the circulation of struggle from sector to sector of the class, but to do so in such a manner as to build a post-capitalist politics of difference without antagonism." A re-politicisation of academic labour may begin the process of overcoming its abstracted and fetishised nature. The starting point is the definition of a pedagogical moment that enables the characteristics that flow into and out of academic labour, in terms of value, money and the commodity, to be defined in another image of society and social production. Such a pedagogical moment needs to point towards the creation of open, participatory publics, potentially inside open co-operatives, in order to underpin the real movement, which abolishes the present state of things.

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