



The
Dissolution
of the
Universities

RICHARD HALL

may fly

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Richard Hall

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may fly

*This book is dedicated to the memory of Hind Rami Iyad Rajab.
Our children deserve so much better from us.*

*This book is dedicated to the students whose courage in
encampments and occupations reveals new truths to us about
the wrongness of the world.*

*This book is dedicated to those, like the Mothers of Hind,
who seek to resolve worlds grounded in compassion.*

*Through this book, I give thanks to our elders,
and in particular Mike Neary.*

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Acknowledgements and Orientation

This book was written in the shadow of Gaza. It forms one strand of my grieving and mourning the wrongness of the world. The dedication I make here is from my soul.

This book was written in the shadow of the cross, as I mourned my Nan, my Dad and my friend Mike Neary. A range of ghosts, ancestors and their spirits have been with me as I worked through the process of writing.

The book has depended upon the love and care and truths of others. In particular I am grateful for the talking, reading and attention to detail of Ana Dinerstein, Basma Hajir, Klaus Heinrich, Nick Humphreys, Joel Lazarus, Sumeya Loonat, Yusraa Maryam, Mike Ogunnusi, Nick Pain, Gary Saunders and Joss Winn. There are others who shape my thinking and practices both directly and indirectly, and I give thanks to them every day.

At MayFly, Toni Ruuska has been incredibly supportive of this work. Working with MayFly is important to me, because supporting publishing houses that are open, or that resist the subsumption of academic work by corporate publishers, enables a wider intellectual dialogue. The transparent, democratic engagement of Toni has been fundamental to my writing process.

Without the ways in which my energy is amplified, grounded and contained in my entanglement with Jo, none of this would be possible.

...

The Dissolution of the Universities is the third in a triptych that began with an analysis of academic labour in universities of the global North, in *The Alienated Academic* (2018, Palgrave Macmillan). There I explored the political economic and philosophical realities of intellectual work. In *The Hopeless University* (2021, MayFly Books), the analysis moved on to critique the political economy of those institutions, and to highlight their inability to help us engage meaningfully with global emergencies. *The Dissolution of the Universities* builds from those analyses, to imagine intellectual activity otherwise, within a society that must negate, abolish and transcend (or sublimate) its settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal, capitalist institutions.

In the English context, the University feels broken. We witness a political economic crisis for institutions that is tightening, where the power of finance capital is a limiting factor shaping the horizon of our intellectual work. Beyond value-for-money, our universities are shaped against culture wars, fetishised ideas of freedom of speech, and authoritarian responses to student protest in the form of Gaza encampments. Moreover, they have forgotten any meaningful engagement with decolonising.

It feels like this terrain has been unfolding in ever more negative ways, in spite of the demonstrations, occupations and alternative education projects in the period after 2010, following: the Browne Review; Occupy! and the Bank of Ideas/Tent City University; and the movement of the Squares. I was immersed in some of those spaces at that time, and I felt alive in ways that I simply could not imagine happening within the University. As my being, knowing and doing were challenged, a new horizon of possibility emerged, with courage, faith, justice, hope and peace unfolding through the promise of its realisation.

Might we be able to imagine the world otherwise? Might we be able to re-imagine and resolve our institutions so that we can realise the world otherwise?

Whilst the energy of these alternatives dissipated, a range of recent abolitionist praxis, with a deep, historical lineage, helped me to question how our intellectuality might be released towards a new horizon. These include: Gilmore's (2023) abolition geography; Day and McBean's (2022) analysis of abolition revolution; Lewis's (2019, 2022) work on family abolition; O'Brien's (2023) analysis of communizing care; Davis' (2005) focus (following du Bois) upon abolition democracy; work on theorising abolition feminism, by Davis, Dent, Meiners and Richie (2024); Ferdinand's (2022) integration of decolonial and ecological thinking to point towards the liberation of space-time; and, Bogg's *et al.* (2019) work on radical education and abolition.

Thus, the idea of being-beyond as a form of sublating or negating-abolishing-transcending, connected to histories of abolitionist praxis, forms one strand of *The Dissolution of the Universities*. A second emerges from the dialogue I see between both these moments and movements of struggle, *and* the eruption of protest over the genocide in Gaza. Student encampments responding to epistemic erasure and the complicity of universities offer ways of renewing this work against the settler-colonial University. A third strand is the idea of dissolution, grounded historically, as a way of composting the world as-is, and resolving something more authentic to a many-sided set of human existences, which desires to transcend the law of value.

This book focuses upon the possibility for weaving these strands with a key question of radical educator Mike Neary in his work on student-as-producer and pedagogies of excess: how do revolutionary teachers teach? He worked towards an answer through engagement with education as a political, productive, co-operative practice. In the current context, I interpret his question as: how and where do revolutionary teachers teach, after [the revelation of] Gaza? In addressing the question, *The Dissolution of the Universities* brings our attention on the

capitalist University into an engagement with a range of struggles that seek to transcend alienating social relations.

Methodologically, in weaving the argument from the strands highlighted above, it is shaped by the humanism of Marx's political economy. In particular, I am drawn to his philosophical and ethnographical work, centred around human becoming-in-community, as a process of sublation. Dissolution/dissolving and resolution/resolving are anchored here and are extended into the settler-colonial ideations and realities of the University by my engagement with practices of relational accountability from indigenous and decolonial thinking.

This methodology seeks to use Neary's work as a departure point for tracing the horizon of a society which no longer needs the University, or in which the University has been transcended through a process of sublation. It focuses on Neary because he was an elder, and because his practical-theoretical work offers points of departure for us as we are confronted by unfolding global emergencies. This is not to fetishise his knowing, doing and being, rather to unfold new possibilities for ourselves, collectively, beyond those sides of his work that are known to us.

I have been asked: what should we (educators, students, other) do now? My answer begins by resolving positions that resonate with my heart and soul, as an act of orienting, and as a starting point. Aligned with this, I remember that I love discordant works of music, art, film and writing that can only come into harmony as they unfold in our bodies and hearts, shaped by our histories. I love the emergent challenge of this, and it is reflected here, alongside my refusal to offer ways forward, because who am I to do this? I represent everything that has brought us to the precipice. I am simply interested in dialogue that underpins reimagining. Perhaps all this can be is a surfacing and an orientation of that which matters to me as I reflect on struggles for other worlds. Mindful that people want to know what we should

do now, the point, following Césaire, is to begin the only thing in the world that is worth beginning: the end of this world, no less.

...

The text emerges across 10 chapters that trace the journey from institutional crisis to the potential for a society that no longer needs the University (with thanks to Max Haiven for that point).

In Chapter 1: *stories against the University*, the University is situated as a site of profound crisis, or as being reproduced as a manifestation of crisis tendencies. In this it is described as being fucked-up at the intersection of converging political and economic pressures. The former are sketched in relation to an authoritarian turn in the United States, where professors are labelled 'the enemy', international students are targeted for deportation, and a 'dark enlightenment' ecosystem seeks to dismantle public education in favour of undemocratic, hyper-marketised provision. In the United Kingdom, the crisis is described as manifesting economically as 'unconscionable vandalism', whereby redundancies, restructuring, efficiencies and the enforcement of a 'pedagogy of debt' are offered-up as the only ways in which universities might survive. As a result, staff and students are reduced to human capital. The chapter closes with a reflection on one group of students who attempted to reimagine their University, or at least to drag it back from the political-economic abyss, through activism: a form of being-in-excess. This is a story of protesting the ways in which one English University sought to punish students in its Gaza Encampment. It is a story that forces a reckoning with the ideological and financial realities of our universities.

In Chapter 2: *being against what the University has become*, the praxis of Mike Neary is brought forward as a way of orienting ourselves through struggle against the political and economic realities described in Chapter 1. This praxis does not separate

these domains out, rather it treats them within a political economic critique, which knows that our struggle should not be *for* the University as it currently exists, but against what it has become. The Chapter explores the potential that emerges from Neary's work for developing revolutionary subjectivity, including doing so ontologically and in relation to working class consciousness. This matters in relation to our collective ability to confront the violence of real abstraction, through a negative critique (negative dialectics) grounded in an activated contemplation that might help us to unravel the 'value vortex', and move toward an anti-capitalist form of social life.

Chapter 3: *abolition, sublation, dissolution* situates the current material and historical moment of the University against the idea of sublation (*Aufhebung*), as a process of negating and abolishing the University while transcending it to carry forward socially-useful elements. The Chapter thinks about this in relation to the praxis of communisation, which sees individuals not simply as social beings, but rather as always-becoming (*Gemeinwesen*), or as a new community or commonwealth. It stitches this into processes of dissolution, or of dissolving what-is. For Neary, this could be imagined in the production of co-operative higher education. The Chapter situates this against dissolution as a process of dissolving or breaking something apart, such that elements might be recombined or resolved, through a new appreciation, or a new metabolic function. To illustrate this, I compare the current state of higher education to the 16th-century dissolution of the monasteries, to suggest that institutional 'nutrients' have always been recycled or resolved into new social forms. The University is being dissolved and resolved politically and economically for-value anyway, for instance in dark enlightenment narratives of intellectual life.

Chapter 4: *this kaleidoscope must be smashed* develops this in relation to a hegemonic dissolution of the universities by

finance capital and neoconservative ideologues. The argument here is that finance capital acts as a solvent for established institutional forms, creating a ‘mycorrhizal network’ that extracts and redistributes knowledge, impact, surpluses and so on, for-value. The hyphae of finance capital, enriched ideologically, resolve the University as the crisis, unable to offer meaningful solutions to global emergencies, and reproducing toxic relations and outcomes for those made marginal by settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal intentionality. It is described as a form shaped by polycrisis, or a ‘kaleidoscope’ of fragmented crises, which must be smashed to reveal a new horizon for collective agency. The identification of the University as deeply complicit in settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal logics, specifically through its financial and intellectual ties to the genocide in Gaza, are central to the unfolding *Gemeinwesen*.

In Chapter 5: *the political economy of value and money*, the political economic heart of Neary’s critique is developed. Utilising Moishe Postone’s value-form theory, this chapter critiques Neary’s engagement with the idea of the ‘social universe of value’ that governs the University through abstract labour and quantified time. This sits as one metaphor that describes our understanding of political economy of the University, alongside that of the ‘mycorrhizal network’. The question then becomes whether it is possible to reimagine these metaphors in order that struggle and emancipatory praxis might dissolve them such that the network or social universe is resolved to meet new human needs. These are shaped through relationality and intellectuality, and they accept that because capitalism seeks to annihilate necessary labour-time, there is a radical disconnect between human intellectuality and surplus labour. The goal of struggle then is to reclaim the ‘general intellect’ as ‘mass intellectuality’ at the level of society, in ways that refuse and transcend (sublate) the rule of money not just in higher education but in society.

Struggle aims at a new social universe of anti-value: a new space-time of human relationality and intellectuality.

This more abstract and methodological argument is then grounded in Chapter 6: *Occupy!, populist organising, and the University*. This reflects upon the mass protests of the 2010s, and in particular the Occupy! movement and related, educational alternatives like Tent City University. It seeks to foreground the ways in which these spoke to transnational movements for alternatives, defined in relation to decolonial and indigenous struggles, and the practise of those engaged in critical feminism and Queer ecology. The horizontal and the experimental are highlighted in relation to concepts of the 'resistance of remembering' and the potential of prefigurative experiments for social change. The chapter thinks through the potential for developing radical subjectivity, as it connects with Neary's questioning of how the actually-existing alternatives of Tent City University, the Bank of Ideas, Occupied California, the Really Open University, Edu-factory, alongside the pedagogical imperatives of actual University occupations, might serve as alternatives. In reflecting upon this, the argument connects the energy of the 2010 student movement to the current Gaza encampments, arguing that these 'brief transgressive outbreaks' offer glimpses of alternative ways of interacting beyond institutional enclosures.

This analysis is then further grounded in Chapter 7: *co-operative organising in-and-against the University*, which examines the practicalities of worker-student co-operatives in Neary's thinking and doing. The Chapter pivots around the potential for co-operative governance, co-operativism and producer co-operatives to offer meaningful alternatives to the exploitation, expropriation and extraction of the capitalist university. It explores Neary's engagement with experiments like the Social Science Centre in Lincoln, UK, to outline the

potential to realise one of three routes for reimagining and reorganising the University: conversion; dissolution; and creation. In relating this to the history of the Black University concept, the reciprocity commitments of the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective, and the revolutionary politics articulated by Rosa Luxembourgh, it becomes possible to analyse co-operative intentionality outside the University, and also in its *Undercommons*. While warning against the fetishisation of co-operativism as a mere sanctuary, the Chapter questions whether ‘commoning’ higher learning as an act of co-operative sovereignty might enable the project of abolition to be organised around emergent conditional forms.

The process of co-operative forms is then enriched in Chapter 8: *the pedagogy of doing—student-as-producer*, by centring doing and activity that enables us to be in-excess of ourselves. This is an intentionality that sees each of us as many-sided rather than simply as students or intellectuals to be commodified. Whilst this is situated and developed against Neary’s concept of ‘Student-as-Producer’, as an intervention to re-engineer the classroom as a site for the collaborative production of knowledge and social value, it must be reimagined at the level of society. Thus, the chapter weaves these political, pedagogical moments with the ongoing struggles of a range of indigenous communities against their own epistemic and corporeal erasure, including in Palestine. The argument here is a reminder of how liberatory pedagogic practice—the practice of knowing, doing and being through the classroom and the scholarly community into the world—is a struggle for existence, grounded in an essence that emerges against the genocidal intentionality of settler-colonialism. Thus, the chapter reminds us of Neary’s ‘pedagogy of excess’ and his ‘pedagogy of hate’ directed at the world as-is. It forces us to engage with the urgent question: how (and where) do revolutionary teachers teach after Gaza?

In thinking through this question, Chapter 9: *social being* addresses the embodied impact of academic labour, which results in life as a ‘crippled monstrosity’ and chronic physical and mental exhaustion. It identifies the social universe of value as white and achromatic, necessitating a flight for many toward the *Undercommons* and fugitive planning inside the University, or for others towards exodus. The chapter centres the human desire for storytelling, away from hegemonic white, male, cis-techno-fictions of what a meaningful life might be. Thinking about calls for building a ‘world-ship’ through decolonial ecology and an ethical relationality that celebrates the particular over the universal, the Chapter draws our attention to how we might sublimate and then re-weave intellectuality in ways that enable us to engage meaningfully with global emergencies, away from the toxicity of capitalist realism.

The book concludes by asking, in Chapter 10: *is another University possible?* In returning to our key question of how (and where) do revolutionary teachers teach after Gaza?, it reaffirms that the University is the crisis, reproduced ideologically and financially as a toxic mycorrhizal network that resolves a social universe governed by value. It posits that another world is possible through dialectical dissolution, which hospices our old and dying institutions, in order to resolve new forms of mass intellectuality, relationality and collective care. The final resolution is a movement that abolishes the present state of things in the name of a truly liveable life. Here, the chapter draws on a range of abolitionist praxis, in relation to care, the family, prisons, the police, borders and more, to think through the possibility of reimagining and weaving sublation as a new politics of abolition. As it does so, it asks us to embrace dissolution as a means of forging new forms of collective agency, social knowing, and a truly liveable life.

NB Throughout, I have not amended the gender given in

quotations. In the past I have done this, and I remain unsure whether to maintain that process or to leave them as they were originally given. I have not done so here, in order to draw attention to the settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal realities of our shared histories.

...

I have been attending my local Quaker meeting for worship. I am not sure I think of myself as a Quaker, but I do feel that there is something about the divine in us all. Maybe this is the spirit that the Society of Friends ask themselves and us to think about. I think about the strands and the tendrils that wrap around and through and beyond our mitochondria, and through our souls. I think about my humanity in relation to the Quaker testimonies. I have been thinking about these in relation to this work.

Simplicity feels the most difficult to sit with, although whilst the arguments presented here are by no means simple, they are my way of working out my soul in such a way that I can be more simply. My intention is that I can process or compost my thinking here a little more, in order to create more space for peace in my life, and to encourage it in those around me. This is done through these pages in a way that I hope is governed by integrity, as my truth of these matters. This is a process that unfolds in community, and this is the reason why I feel the need to stitch my thinking into so many other voices and perspectives. Perhaps this is about hiding, although I hope it is a sense of trying to bring my voice more fully into a register of equality. The final testimony, stewardship, really matters to me here: it is about eldership and companionship. It is about creating space for us to hold ourselves as we grieve the pain of the world and consider where now?

On sending me some feedback for this book, Ana Dinerstein pointed me to a quotation of Walter Benjamin from the final

chapter: ‘Hell is not what awaits us but this life, here and now... That it goes on like this is the catastrophe.’ Ana asked me to consider my position in relation to this, and asked me to think about the possibility for struggle, negation, dissolution, resolution and so on. She asked me, ‘where do you position yourself: catastrophe? Pull the brake to stop the train?’ I dwell on this question. Of course, I bear witness and listen to testimony. I try not to forget my humanity. I try to hold the door open for people, as best I can. And I try to remember that dissolution and sublation must begin at home, and with heart.

However, it also feels important to remind myself that a core metaphor for me in this book is that of the mycorrhizal network – an organic process grounded in life and living, unfolding and emerging through composting and recycling. This cannot be detailed as a blueprint or a model or a plan. So, I cannot engage in the work of prescribing what educators should do now. Instead, I steward my energy to end this book with a statement of what I will commit to doing now: my heartfelt commitment to enriching the possibility for a new social horizon beyond the inhumanity of capital and the toxic value-form.

...

NOTE: The front cover of the book contains an image by my friend, the Leicester-based artist Pete Clayton. It is a representation of the Augustinian Abbey at Creake in Norfolk, which is a place that we both love. Creake Abbey is set in beautiful surroundings, and provided local services and spiritual practice. Yet, even before the dissolution of the monasteries it had closed, the victim of a range of intersecting crises: fire, plague, a loss of the monastic community. It had seen bailouts and attempts to renew itself, but could not escape the logic of the world, and its resources fell back into secular ownership. Still there is something of the divine and some echo of ghosts within its walls and in

its memories. It is this connection, through friendship, our acts of making and knowing and being, and the resonance with our histories and ancestors that matters to me here. Perhaps that is also true for me in my relationship to the University.

Foreword

It is to write this foreword after hearing that Marc Rowan, a billionaire investor who mobilised his position as a trustee at the University of Pennsylvania to bully its leadership into crushing campus dissent during a live-streamed genocide in Gaza, was appointed to the executive board of the newly formed Board of Peace. An illegal and illegitimate manoeuvre¹ led by the United States, the Board of Peace is not only about Gaza's reconstruction, but a 'seed for something far more detrimental beyond Palestine'². It is a bid to supplant the United Nations, bypass the norms and mechanisms meant to uphold international law, and coerce a reconfiguration of the global order.

There are many Marc Rowans. Billionaires weaponising their gains to enter the arteries of knowledge production. Universities have not impeded their entry, now fully enmeshed in circuits of power and geopolitical struggle. The university is no longer a sanctuary in a modern era whose promises of progress, reason, liberalism and development have been deeply discredited. Wars, rising authoritarianism, starvation, state impunity, democratic failure, international legal paralysis, algorithmic colonialism, AI supply-chain labour, and environmental collapse have stripped these ideals of their innocence, and yet the university continues to invoke them. The UK is no different. Despite historical and contextual distinctions, the university is now completely governed by financial imperatives, serving corporate and state power, benefiting from ecocidal and genocidal practices, and reproducing conditions of repression, exploitation, precarity, and moral detachment.

So what do we do? As a Palestinian scholar in a structurally compromised Western academy, I came to this book exhausted by the question of how to carry my complicity responsibly. I have long believed in the importance of working within the cracks of the system; locating them, opening them, and widening the fissure. And yet I remain troubled by the question of how effective can our 'disobedient relationality'⁴ be while we remain subject to the relentless logic of accumulation by dispossession? Is operating strategically within such a world even possible, or is it true that a '[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly'³? This question is made concrete by the university's exquisite talent for converting and co-opting struggle into its own autopoietic renewal. How do we then connect anti-hegemonic efforts within the cracks of existing systems to anti-systemic, long-term visions of a just alternative?

This book is powerful in shifting us from 'calculative evaluation' to 'moral argumentation'⁵. It exposes why the university cannot move beyond 'value' as its constitutive logic through reform or experimental projects. It shows why we must centre 'ontology' in this struggle; a fundamental disavowal and a reconfiguration of the experience that we name 'the University'. Committed to radical imagination, the book opens a new discursive possibility that maps limits and gestures towards new horizons. Prompted by the premise that capitalism can only be dismantled by dismantling the social forms and institutions that reproduce it, *Dissolution* evokes a new imaginary for how we conceptualise intellectuality in society.

Writer and activist Adrienne Maree Brown once wrote that 'We are in an imagination battle'⁶. This book takes that seriously. At a time when the university is already facing structural, epistemic, and moral collapse, the question is not whether it will be dismantled and transformed, but on whose terms and for whose benefit. Richard Hall writes of 'dissolution from above' and 'dissolution from below' and raises the question of whether

the university's transformation would 'serve capital', perpetuating repression and alienation, or 'collective liberation in the face of global crisis'. Can we envision modes of intellectuality outside existing structures, cultures, and practices, 'dissolved into the fabric of society'?

Throughout, Richard engages deeply with the work of Mike Neary, reads it dialectically and places it in conversation with scholarship on sublation, abolition, and decolonial and Indigenous praxis. He recalls Neary's insistence that 'our struggle is not for the university but *against* what the university has become' and foregrounds the book's orientation towards the beyond. He draws on the example of the dissolution of the monasteries to question whether society cares about practices such as spirituality or intellectuality to be secluded inside monasteries or universities. Would the dissolution of the university disturb intellectual life?

The book insists that 'dissolution' is not destruction, but liberation and transcendence. How might intellectuality transcend the university as its dominant organising framework, and be reimagined and reproduced in the world for other ends? Or, as Richard poignantly asks, 'How might we imagine and work out a society that no longer needs the University?'

This is not contrary to the imperative of changing the material conditions in the university but it is to inspire us to push beyond the constraints of what we are told is politically possible. Throughout, the book foregrounds questions of space, time, and voice, while attending to the intergenerational, intersectional, and intercommunal dimensions of struggle. It is deeply concerned with agency: the book's attention to formations such as Occupy! and the Palestine encampments is crucial here. They remind us that although liberation cannot be found within the system, we must still seek it out relentlessly. Ultimately, as the book stresses, 'dissolution' is not a final, utopian position, but an ongoing

process and ‘a new historical phase defined by contradiction’.

Richard describes the writing of this book as an act of ‘eldership’. As an early-career scholar privileged to be among its first readers, I received it as an act of intergenerational trust. I finished the book committed to making my own the promise Richard makes to himself in the opening chapter: ‘to enact radical accountability’ in my work, and to pass on such a call to those around me, and to you.

Basma Hajir

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Endnotes

- ¹ UN experts (2026) ‘UN experts condemn “Board of Peace”, call for a reparative, rights-based approach to reconstruction in Gaza’, *OHCHR*, 2 March.
- ² From a contribution by Noura Erakat, legal scholar and human rights attorney, to the online event *After Gaza’s Genocide: What World Order?*, organised by Al-Shabaka. February, 2026.
- ³ Quoted in this book from Adorno (1974, 39).
- ⁴ McKittrick, K. (2021) *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 45.
- ⁵ Ball, S.J. and Collet-Sabé, J. (2025) *Against School: Thinking Education Differently*. p. 60. Here, the authors use “calculative evaluation” to describe a mode of critique concerned with outcomes as opposed to “moral argumentation,” which poses a more fundamental ethical challenge to the institution itself.
- ⁶ Brown, A.M. (2017) *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press. Adrienne notes that she first heard this articulated in different ways by Claudia Rankine and Terry Marshall.

1

we are not *for* the University

A splitting of senses, a confusion of voice and sight, rather than clear and distinct ideas, becomes the metaphor for the ground of the rational. (Donna Haraway 1988)

The Native futures, the lives to be lived once the settler nation is gone – these are the unwritten possibilities made possible by an ethic of incommensurability. (Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang 2012)

how do we stop the reproduction of this self-destructive society, capitalism? This is a question that it is becoming more and more difficult to pose within a university framework. (John Holloway 2010a)

1. These lunatics that are tearing things up

It is March 28, 2025. Shit is fucked-up.

I was awake for a while thinking about the video I had watched and rewatched of federal officers in the United States of America (USA) detaining Rümeyşa Öztürk, a Tufts University Fulbright PhD scholar, on Tuesday, March 26. Rümeyşa was heading to an Iftar gathering during Ramadan at Tufts' Interfaith Center when masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers moved against her. Although the charges remain unstated, US Secretary of State Senator Marco Rubio, responding to a question from news reporters whilst on a state visit to Guyana,

argued that if individuals on a visa were not simply writing op-eds, but were participating ‘in movements that are involved in doing things like vandalising universities, harassing students, taking over buildings, creating a ruckus’, then their visas would be revoked.

For Rubio, such students are visitors, and if they are ‘going to your universities to start a riot... to take over a library and harass people’ then the State will not ‘care what movement you are involved in’. Rubio responded to a question about how many similar individuals were on Government lists, targeting them for detainment and deportation, as follows:

every time I find one of these lunatics, I take away their visa. You’re saying it can be more than 300 people? At some point I hope we run out because we’ve gotten rid of all of them, but we are looking every day for these lunatics that are tearing things up. (C-SPAN 2025)

He went on to elide the treatment of students like Öztürk with gang members being extradited to Venezuela – an ongoing cleanup of US society and culture.

The treatment of Öztürk was signalled by the earlier detainment and threatened deportation of Mahmoud Khalil, and the reported searches by ICE for South Korean student Yunseo Chung. At the same time there were reports of a Russian scientist based at Harvard Medical School, Kseniia Petrova, being detained at Boston airport upon her return to the US from a trip to France. Petrova has been critical of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

In a petition, students at Tufts clearly stated: ‘We call on the Tufts administration to commit to defending our community against continued targeted attacks.’ The petitioners, mindful that Tufts was one of 60 institutions identified for investigation by the US Department of Education over alleged anti-Semitism (US

Department of Education (USDoE), 2025a), alongside targeting of international students by the Government, felt that Öztürk had been failed by their University's administration: 'It is not enough to disclaim pre-knowledge; only proactive measures will suffice.' The petition anchored this against a wider call for resistance.

The only approach—practical and ethical—is a full-throated commitment to resisting the US administration's oppressive policies and to the maintenance of the rights and dignity of all persons. Tufts has an opportunity to take a principled and historic stance against this authoritarian crackdown on student free speech in general, speech regarding Palestine in particular, and on the rights of non-citizens in the United States as a whole. (quoted in Sage, 2025)

This focus on the role of institutions and their administrations, and ensuring that their governance responds to the needs of their communities rather than particular, political persuasions, is anchored inside a belief in liberal democracy and the Constitution. Thus, one activist at Tufts stressed: 'We need to make sure that laws are changed, need to make sure that the texts inside of the Constitution are changed for justice' (Eng *et al.* 2025). Yet, it is not clear that those whose political persuasion is to disrupt due process will settle for constitutional checks and balances where those threaten the possibility of dismantling the world as-is. In this view the world as-is represents a liberal imaginary that undermines America. It needs to be reimagined. And universities are in the crosshairs of that reimagining.

1.1 Professors are the enemy: the University is the enemy

Any engagement with the idea of the University, and any reimagining of intellectual work in society, needs to be situated against material history, in-context. At a National Conservatism

conference in 2024, then Vice-President Elect, JD Vance stated:

I think in this movement of national conservatism, what we need more than inspiration, is we need wisdom, and there is a wisdom in what Richard Nixon said approximately 40, 50 years ago. He said, and I quote, ‘the professors are the enemy.’ (Hett 2024)

In response, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) president, Todd Wolfson noted:

The ascension of J. D. Vance to the Republican presidential ticket has brought the decades-long battle to define the future of American higher education to a tipping point. With Vance, American Far-Right authoritarians have succeeded in elevating a fascist who vows to ‘aggressively attack universities in this country’ to within striking distance of their goal: the annihilation of American higher education as we know it. All those who care about higher education, academic freedom, and the future of democracy should prepare for the fight ahead by organizing their campus communities. (AAUP, 2024)

This explicitly connected to the AAUP report *Manufacturing Backlash: Right-Wing Think Tanks and Legislative Attacks on Higher Education* (Kamola, 2024), which identified higher education (HE) as a significant terrain of struggle, post-Black Lives Matter and in relation to LGBTQ+ rights. In particular this related to: culture wars funded by ‘dark money’; the role of right-wing think tanks in defining common sense as policy; the assault on diversity, equality and inclusivity (DEI, or EDI in the UK); the role of gagging orders as mechanisms for silencing academic dissent; and, assaults on attendance, governance and accreditation.

Further marginalizing faculty, political actors create centers and programs that operate outside the normal practices of shared governance. Understanding the political infrastructure behind this complicated and evolving legislative threat is essential to mounting an effective defense of academic freedom and university autonomy. (Kamola 2024, 125)

Reframing such freedom and autonomy was increasingly at the heart of pronouncements *both* by US Government officials, *and* those extra-governmental actors working in close association with them. US Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon, in a speech entitled *Our Department's Final Mission* (USDoe 2025b), identified 'political ideologies, special interests, and unjust discrimination' as corrupting influences. Emanating from a desire to combat 'critical race theory, DEI, gender ideology, discrimination in admissions, promoting school choice for every child, and restoring patriotic education and civics', a new, devolved accountability will be handed to the States, and away from federal government. Elimination of bureaucracy would enable colleges, schools, teachers and students to innovate. Stressing President Trump's significant mandate for change, including the executive order to close the USDoe, McMahon's 'momentous final mission' for the Department will be predicated upon 'disruption [that] leads to innovation and gets results', as 'a last chance to restore the culture of liberty and excellence that made American education great.' (*ibid.*)

The connections made between disruption, innovation, final missions, changing the status quo, and ultimately towards particular ideas of liberty, draws attention to the relationships between the Second Trump administration and those identified within the techno-accelerationist, 'Dark Enlightenment' ecosystem. This ecosystem not only provides some of the

historical, ideological underpinnings of the current authoritarian turn, but it points us towards the roles of a range of right-wing think tanks, like the Manhattan Institute and the American Enterprise Institute, in reshaping society through its institutions.

For the Manhattan Institute, Max Eden has written about the need to dismantle leftist influence on campuses, and diminishing critical race theory and anti-racist campus practices, or even DEI. This aligns with the Institute's focus upon 'opportunity, individual liberty, and the rule of law', realised as a refusal of identity politics. In December 2024, Eden (2024) focused attention on Columbia University and UCLA, in relation to protests over genocide in Gaza/Palestine. In terms of the former, as a precursor to what would follow early in 2025, he noted:

Columbia was, perhaps, the worst offender in indulging the pro-Hamas campus radicals. The Education Department's Office for Civil Rights should initiate a compliance review of every single decision Columbia made. To do that, OCR would need the identities of every single foreign student who supported the protests, actions the Trump administration could deem material support of a terrorist organization. Border czar Tom Homan could then revoke every single one of the foreign protesting students' visas. (*ibid.*)

For Eden, the elision of DEI, anti-racism, alleged support for Hamas, and perceived anti-American practices meant that the interrogation of universities needed to be widened, to focus upon: investigating foreign investments; restricting the use of federal funding for research; cutting off Title IV payments; considering the potential to tax endowments; banning affirmative action in hiring practices; ending DEI projects; setting up the American Academy, as a new kind of public college; and, finally, shaking-up accreditation, in order to release federal funds for alternative provision, delivering 'a much more streamlined,

cost-effective, outcomes-oriented paradigm than the existing set.’ (*ibid.*) Beyond new colleges, Eden pointed to ideological connections with techbros and techbro culture by signalling the possibility for ‘Musk University? Thiel Technical College?’ (*ibid.*)

Whilst Eden and Chris Rufo have advocated for forms of funding, regulation and governance that would defenestrate and dismantle existing institutions, this appears to be aimed at creating a terrain for disruption and innovation through new, technologically-driven provision. Moreover, such provision is to be governed within authoritarian, anti-democratic principles and values, pointing towards very particular, individualised ideas of rights and liberties. These are described as reactionary and Nietzschean (Low 2024), demanding sacrifices from many in the name of techno-optimism and (super-) human liberation. The social and economic sensibilities of universities have demanded radical and common sensical interventions. In this, commentators have increasingly focused upon how Silicon Valley entrepreneurs are seeking to embed themselves within forms of governance in the USA.

This might also enable the University to contribute to the desires of the Trump Administration’s 2025 National Security Strategy (The White House 2025a, 11), to set American capitalism free. The strategy notes that ‘American prosperity and security depend on the development and promotion of competence’ based upon merit rather than ‘radical ideologies that seek to replace competence and merit with favored group status. This ‘would render America unrecognizable and unable to defend itself’. Education is at the heart of this renewed, ideological focus on competence and merit.

Here, we might usefully draw our attention to links that have been made between: the ideological project announced by Eden and Rufo amongst others; the intellectual project of neoreaction (NRx) or the Dark Enlightenment scoped by Nick

Land and Curtis Yarvin; tech-entrepreneurs like Peter Thiel and Elon Musk; and the Trump administration. Derbyshire (2025) has highlighted how, for Land (witnessed also in his influence of those around Trump), accelerating capitalism and its ability to dissolve existing social relations, will hasten the singularity, or the emergence of a new bio-technological form of human life. Accelerating capitalism demands what Yarvin refers to as *neocameralism*, or a world in which social organisations like universities function like businesses, pivoting around deliberately undemocratic forms. Framing liberties in terms of productivity, rather than universal rights, and unfolding at the intersection of markets and technologies, it maps across to authoritarian management of social protest against ICE or student protest on campus. Here, the idea would be that citizens, students and staff have the right to leave if they do not like the direction of travel, or to suffer the disciplinary consequences if they transgress.

We are pointed back to Thiel's (2009) essay *The Education of a Libertarian*. In it, he identified that the political and financial crises and consensus, which emerged from the crash of 2007, 'culminates with the knowledge that the broader education of the body politic has become a fool's errand.' Highlighting the negative pull of *both* enfranchisement (of women) *and* of welfare on capitalist democracy, Thiel argued against limiting

one's horizon to the world of politics... I no longer believe that politics encompasses all possible futures of our world. In our time, the great task for libertarians is to find an escape from politics in all its forms — from the totalitarian and fundamentalist catastrophes to the unthinking demos that guides so-called 'social democracy.'

An unthinking demos guides liberal perceptions of the University and of mass HE, and in Thiel's analysis, freedom could not come from existing social modes and forms. Rather:

‘The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism.’

Connecting to this, Land (2023) lobbied for a ‘hard reboot’ in a long essay entitled *The Dark Enlightenment*, which refused the validity of democracy and the role of the State and its institutions. This is deeply implicated within Yarvin’s (2007a) focus on formalism, or the exercise of actual power as it restructures symbolic power and legitimates (American) interventionism, in government, democracy, and geopolitics. Denigrating an empirical basis for life (upon which one might judge, for instance, the validity of social justice programmes within a humanist value set), this instead stresses a particular aesthetic, historical, and philosophical basis. For Dana (2025), such an aesthetic has a strong historical dimension, grounded in the South African, Afrikaner roots of Musk and other tech-moguls.

In response, the terrain upon which we discuss the legitimacy and future of HE institutions cannot be shaped by empirical or rational argument, or ontologies of the human. Those ontologies are under attack, whether through a Nietzschean obsession with AI or in the punishment of Gaza encampments. That attack on how we categorically understand our humanity is not simply imposed from outside, rather it is revealed from within universities. As Shatz (2025) states: ‘[t]he Trump administration’s approach to the policing of pro-Palestine dissent is ruthless, but not much more than that of universities like Columbia.’ Yarvin (2025) is clear that this is a reflection of power and privilege; it is a reflection of the ‘*real* world’, rather than one that is ‘crackpot’. It reflects the needs of techno-accelerationist power, in a world being reimaged geopolitically. Our imaginary rules have gone, and all that remains is power and the word of those with power: ‘[a]ll real-estate titles [private property and access to it] have war as a genesis block.’ (*ibid.*)

A Trump State Department figure was reported as calling Yarvin ‘a timely man’ (Kofman 2025). In her *New Yorker* article, Kofman (2025) is clear that ‘Yarvin is calling for something simpler and more libidinally satisfying; to burn it all down and start again from scratch.’ This is one way of addressing Hochuli *et al.*’s (2023) analysis of political economy following the financial crash, with emerging geopolitical uncertainty, and the rise of identity and culture as political fissures. They (*ibid.*, 15) argued that ‘if it is clear that the End of History has ended, it is likewise evident that History has not restarted; what we are witnessing is further fragmentation, disintegration and drift.’ Taylor (cited in Hayes 2025) sees this emphasised at the intersection of whiteness, techbro/elite status and Christian Nationalism, accelerated in the USA, even from within movements like National Conservatism (National Conservatism 2025).

For those working in the allegedly liberal institutions of the global North, this has significant ramifications for their work.

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In the face of a desire for the realities of bio-technological human futures, social justice is a drag on economic growth and is a destabilising force – the equivalent of taking the blue pill and remaining in *The Matrix*. Empirical, rational, humanist arguments become meaningless in the face of neoreactionary desires for taking the red pill, or for enforcing previously heretical positions. Social democracy is regarded as enslaving (Yarvin 2007b), and in thrall to DEI. Instead, the red pill stands for Yarvin’s *real* world; it is a new common sense to be governed by ideations of muscular, white masculinity.

This reveals an ideological terrain of neo-reaction, or perhaps of reformation. Burrows (2018) highlights five areas of NRx that might usefully shape how we relate this to reshaping not only of concrete forms of HE and the University, but also of the ideas

that surround them and reinforce them and reproduce them. He (*ibid.*) argues that NRx foregrounds: anti-democratic forms of governance; a desire for ‘a new patchwork of (city-) state forms in which “exit” is the only “human right”’; discourses that deny the validity of equality as a fundamental right; a commitment to the human singularity with AI [artificial intelligence] and bio-technologies; and, the demand that those who champion democracy, equality or regulation of science and technology should be purged.

The latter, as ‘members of the [] Cathedral’ of liberal, socially-progressive sensibilities and intentions, are of the old faith. They are governed by mystical disciplines and rituals, and lack a grounding in the real lives of people who are able to own their own lives and destinies. For NRx adherents, at the heart of the Cathedral lies the Academy and progressive liberalism, dominated by egalitarianism, democracy, and social constructionism, governed in relation to DEI strategies and social justice, and shaped by trans-rights, critical feminism and critical race, decolonising and indigeneity, and critiques of white privilege. In this view, campus life shapes ‘a quasi-religious structure that functions hegemonically to suppress dissent’, and instead what is needed are ‘hyper-neoliberal, technologically deterministic, anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, pro-eugenicist, racist and likely, fascist ideas’ (Burrows, 2018).

The Cathedral and its ideologies are ripe for a Reformation of its articles of faith, and for the dissolution of its institutions.

This places universities at the centre of an epochal struggle over the principles that should articulate society (Duesterberg 2017). It is articulated in the Trump administration’s assault on Columbia University’s students and staff (Rosenberg 2025), and points beyond the dismantling of HE, and the Cathedral of principles, sensibilities, potentialities and intentionalities that it represents. In the White House (2025b) fact sheet describing the settlement

made with Columbia University's administration in July 2025, echoed in Brown University's (2025) resolution agreement, leverage is exerted over a wider terrain than anti-Semitism (including race and gender), with a focus on restoring a particular conception of 'fairness, merit, and safety in higher education.'

Submission to this amplifies the possibility for: controlling the potential for dissent, not just in relation to Palestine-Gaza but in relation to other social justice struggles; enforcing particular disciplinary structures and principles upon institutions; enforcing law enforcement and visibility (e.g. banning mask-wearing) on campus; and, restructuring academic departments and programmes in a particular image (Hiltzik 2025). In this, the University administrations were not simply conditioned by the US Government and the ecosystem around its NRx reimagining. They were also conditioned by their own local networks of staff, students, donors, parents, acting to doxx protesters and their supporters (Lennard and Lacy 2025), in the name of a renewed American order.

This points beyond the possibility for techbros to accelerate the break-up of federal organisations and institutions. It points towards the possibility for such a breakup to accelerate the renewal of particular forms of secular-colonial and capitalist regimes of power and privilege. It points towards the denial of democratic and social forms of justice, and the instantiation of more brutal, authoritarian forms.

In this political moment, a symbolic break has been enforced – in the struggle for the future of the University, shit got very real.

In the struggle for the idea of the University, shit is very definitely fucked-up.

1.2 The political economy of unconscionable vandalism

The Queen Mary, University of London branch of the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) maintains a list

called *UKHE Shrinking*, as a ‘live page of all the redundancies, restructures, reorganisations, and closures taking place across the sector at the moment’, adding that the ‘sector is vital to the country’s future and the vandalism to it unconscionable’ (QMUoL UCU 2025). The list is clear that it refers to

announced and confirmed redundancies as well as restructures and interventions that drastically transform the working and learning conditions in their institution. More are rumoured about, and even more have been shrinking staff by not renewing fixed-term contracts or reducing hours of fractional contracts, or are not implementing agreed pay rises. These cuts are not as visible but are equally impactful, reducing programmes, stretching remaining staff, failing to have any flexibility when a member of staff falls out and the ensuing delays of support for students, etc.

Significantly, there are also a range of cuts to professional services’ staff, which too often remain hidden.

The shrinking of the United Kingdom (UK) HE sector might be seen as unconscionable vandalism, but it is also the natural outcome of a deliberate political economic settlement enforced upon HE by successive UK governments. Following the report of *Lord Browne’s Independent Review of Higher Education*, in October 2010, The Coalition Government issued a Higher Education White Paper, which it noted ‘is taking a bold approach to reform which places students at the heart of the system’ (DBIS 2011, 14). In stressing the need for sustainable and fair funding, the focus was upon shifting the model for financing HE by way of a transfer away from block grant funding to universities, towards tuition loans that students borrow from the Government. Browne noted: ‘The precise amount [students] borrow will depend on how much their university or college decides to charge in graduate contribution; any waivers or

discounts it offers; and the decisions of students themselves on how much they want to borrow' (*ibid.*, 15).

Loans lay at the heart of a culture-shift, designed to encourage students and their families to see themselves as investors in their own futures. This underpinned an acceleration of English HE as a marketised and marketable commodity, designed to encourage individuals to make good choices, based upon a range of data, which would then enable them to enrich their positional value. A connected aim was to make institutions more responsive to student choice, and to govern and regulate them around value-for-money, efficiency, and responsibility. The Office for Students (OfS) and the Competition and Markets Authority would become two, key regulatory mechanisms designed to centre an idealised notion of the student and their family, as consumers able to leverage their agency (Jones 2022; McGettigan 2012).

From the Coalition Government's perspective, income-contingent loans lay at the heart of this transformational intention: 'Loans to cover both tuition and living costs are available for all first-time undergraduate students' (DBIS 2011, 16). The Government was clear that the driver was to reduce public spending on HE, and in order to maintain systemic capacity, to implement a new funding model to drive increased investment. It was claimed that this 'is more affordable for everyone and provides significant additional support for students from less affluent backgrounds' (*ibid.*, 24).

Whilst the White Paper did not pass into legislation, it foregrounded the financial changes enacted in *The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2012* (DBIS 2012a). The aligned Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (DBIS 2012b, 5), noted progressive intentions, concluding 'that the statutory objectives engaged by the changes are the objectives of "advancing equality of opportunity" [in relation to

protected characteristics]... and to a lesser extent “fostering good relations” and “elimination of discrimination”.

The EIA was clear that the provisions made low-cost HE available on favourable terms, and that whilst this might be a deterrent to some (for instance, Muslim students who may consider these loans to be *haram*), that view is simply one position amongst many. The market for loans would decide the fate of the system, including the ways in which it enabled access for certain groups and certain types of existence for particular institutions. What the management of this transformation highlighted was the agency of individuals and institutions to choose how they engage with the new student finance system, and to seek their own alternative solutions, either for funding their study or their survival.

Thus, baked-into the revolutionising of student finance from its ideological underpinnings in 2010, to its financial implementation from 2012, lay a desire to change the conditions upon which HE and learning, teaching and research might operate, and the relations that shape its productive capacities. A very simple reimagining of funding contained significant transformational potential, which would potentially (di-)stress individuals and institutions with more limited financial, social, cultural and intellectual capital, and for whom there were limited avenues for accessing bridging capital to support retention within this new HE topography.

Moreover, lending terms were constantly shifting as economic risk was transferred to individuals over time, witnessed in: a shift from maintenance grants to maintenance loan funding in academic year 2016/17; changes to repayment threshold for the original, Plan 2 (2012) loans in 2018/19; and a new Plan 5 in 2022 with different terms and conditions. Finally, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) agreed in 2024, is slated to come

into force in 2026 to harmonise the funding of learning across the adult life course and to encourage more flexible curriculum competition. This is the terrain upon which the political economy of unconscionable vandalism emerges. It is tactical, limited and designed to drive restructuring and compulsive ideations of innovation (Harrison and Harvie 2025).

Much happened to accelerate these changes: a range of political shocks, including general elections in 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2024; the Brexit campaign and vote; the pandemic; and, significantly, a downturn in international recruitment, in part shaped by a hostile environment towards migrants. In the period from 2010-25, there were 10 secretaries of state for education, and nine different individuals responsible for universities. Alongside the *Higher Education and Research Act (HERA)* of 2017 (following a 2016 White Paper), there was much heat around the 2023 *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act*. Thus, even the election of a new Labour Government in 2024 generated limited hope amongst institutions and their employees for a new settlement, although: first, institutions were allowed to increase fees to £9,535 from £9,250, from September 2025 (Lewis *et al.* 2024); and second, there was some movement in relation to alternative student finance (DfE 2024a, 2024b), and a system that is Shari'ah-compliant (Lewis 2024).

None of this points to a reimagining of HE away from a dominant political economy of personalised financialisation, mediated by markets, commodification, prestige-driven divisions of labour, and private (intellectual) property. The sector, like those providing other social goods, was under constant threat, leading to struggles over pensions, pay and conditions for organised unions. Alongside this, testimonials revealed anxiety, dissonance and exhaustion as a permanent state of exception amongst groups of staff and students.

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The financial crisis of 2007/2008 was an event that appeared to change radically the contours of possibility and impossibility in the world, though not for the better. The terrain of wilful austerity enacted almost two decades of fraying of the conditions of social reproduction, and of relationships, between peoples, across and between institutions, and in and with the environment. Whilst for some this has been highlighted as a systemic, secular crisis of capitalism (Hall 2015), for others it is a function of the Anthropocene (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021) or the Capitalocene (Moore 2015, 2017), depending upon one's appreciation of the ways in which settler-colonialism is folded inside any analysis of widening terrains of failure, including the environment.

Yet, in the mainstream of liberal academia, these are extreme positions. Brozović's (2023) in-depth literature review of societal collapse narratives and analyses, highlighting the deep historical and material roots of how societies end, feels more aligned with normalised, academic desires. He draws upon analyses on past collapses, general explanations of collapse, alternatives to collapse, fictional collapses, and future climate change and societal collapse. There is a limited engagement with literature engaging with capitalism, or counter-narratives in relation to indigeneity, decoloniality, and so on, and no mention of the modes of accelerationism proposed by Yarvin, Land and adherents of the NRx position. In this lack of a political and anti-capitalist position, Brozović (*ibid.*) echoes liberal, reformist calls for '[f]uture research bringing more understanding to why the collapse template repeats, why past societies failed and did not learn from previous mistakes, and what the possible causes of the rigidity of our global system might be.'

From large swathes of the privileged world and its institutions, it feels as if there is no way of situating ideas of

crisis or collapse against analyses of social conditions. There is limited ability to recognise and reimagine what-is in a world whose life force is being decanted for the almost exclusive use of a blessed few. It feels as if there is no way of engaging with settler-colonial critiques, in order to reimagine the political economy of HE. We know in our hearts that the ongoing reproduction of exploitation, expropriation and extraction, which are cannibalising this biosphere (Fraser 2022), will not be challenged by those in-power. We feel this in the contradictions of intellectual work, where teaching and learning and research in-community are conditioned by a world governed by economic value, as a form of anti-life.

A deeper analysis might shape an engagement with polycrisis as a defining feature of the storm we are in (Tooze 2022). In this moment, that storm is not only the singular disaster, it is also volatility, fragility, and unpredictability, shaped across multiple sources of tension, which deny the potential for resolution. Instead, we are left with what passes for 'progress by way of improvisation, innovation, reform and crisis-management' (*ibid.*). For Tooze (*ibid.*), we are witnessing 'an unrelenting foot race, because what crisis-fighting and technological fixes all too rarely do is address the underlying trends'. The result is a tension that builds and builds: 'If you have found the past few years stressful and disorientating, if your life has already been disrupted, it is time to brace.'

And this is the broader terrain of intersecting emergencies inside which claims and calls are made to refuse the unconscionable vandalism being wrought upon UKHE. However, that very system is a flagbearer for progress by way of improvisation, innovation, reform and crisis-management. It is a flagbearer for a world that is becoming more efficiently unsustainable (Hall 2021). Yet, there are other responses that centre decolonial, critical feminist and indigenous approaches

to weaving life beyond modernity and its institutions (Andreotti 2021; Mbembe 2021; Wall Kimmerer 2020). There are a range of abolitionist movements seeking to weave living beyond capitalist institutions, which alienate the possibilities for life, and the meaning of that life (Davis 2005; Davis *et al.* 2022; Day and McBean 2022; Federici 2021; Gilmore 2022; O'Brien 2023).

These appear so far from the conditioned, systemic, Pavlovian responses of UK universities, which are forced to care less for the living and more for the dead weight of a dying system. One result is to bring to mind Fisher's (2009) capitalist realism. In this he (*ibid.*, 7) speaks of 'a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility', which might be imagined as 'a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action' (*ibid.*, 16). We are constrained to care about desires for economic advancement for indebted students and their families, and at the same time to care less about: first, the realities of what it takes to exist in an educational system governed by access to privatised forms of debt; second, how those desires reproduce crisis conditions; and third, the possibility that students might become in excess of themselves simply *as students*, and instead that they might show us the way.

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When the new UK Labour Government was elected in 2024, Universities UK (UUK), the collective organisation of Vice Chancellors and Principals, issued: *Opportunity, growth and partnership: a blueprint for change* (UUK 2024a). This 'package of reform to stabilise, mobilise and maximise the contribution of UK universities to economic growth and widening opportunity' built upon the UUK (2024b) strategy aim to secure sustainable funding, in part through 'support our universities to develop

efficient, innovative and diverse business models.’ Echoing McMahon in the USA, the blueprint for change argues:

University operating models may also need to evolve to become more effective and efficient. This cannot just be about ‘doing more with less’. Reform may open opportunities to do things differently and to focus on areas of real strength. This may create the impetus to try things that would otherwise have appeared impossible, or to collaborate where previously there was no reason to do so, resulting in a stronger sector. But it also means hard choices about what universities should stop doing. (UUK 2024a, 90)

This appetite for restructuring was subsequently centred in the statement that:

Universities UK commits to leading a transformative programme of work that will: expand our work in bringing members together to share learning and good practice in efficiency, transformation and income generation; [and] build on the sector’s rich tradition of finding efficiencies through collaboration by exploring the appetite for additional regional or national shared services (*ibid.*, 97-8).

At its heart, this promises efficiency and value-for-money, generating tactics like: risk management to contain any possible contagion from a failing institution (to ensure it does not bring others down); ongoing, service-driven commodification of learning and teaching; commercialisation and specialisation in research and knowledge transfer; and driving transformation via digitisation (AI) services, and reappraising estates strategies. This demands a reappraisal of labour relations and conditions of work: ‘A review of teaching models to institute a more streamlined approach, while maintaining the high quality of provision, could

include approaches to staffing' (*ibid.*, 99). It very deliberately points to reconsidering staff-student teaching ratios, demarcating between teaching and research contracts, increasing subsidiary employment models and generating flexibility in pension terms, and generating mechanisms for the provision of shared services, outsourcing, and so on.

The blueprint on offer does not stress a radical reimagining of HE or of the idea of the University. Ideas of polycrisis, the Capitalocene or decolonising appear to operate in a different realm, to be worked out on another continent or in another time or in idealised curricula and idealising classrooms. The radical content available within such blueprints offers-up a systemic view of intellectual work, to be governed by collaborative forms of competition predicated upon the annihilation of the concrete labour of students, professional services' staff and academics. Blueprints are also governed by the rule of money, including the significant demands made by private finance for returns on the liabilities generated through more unrestrained borrowing in the late 2010s (Kernohan 2025).

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The expropriation of surplus (value) from educational producers by finance capital is a primary source of profit. So, the UUK blueprint feels like a natural evolution of the tightening of the grip of finance capital over the sector: the domination of merchants over service delivery, production and productivity, in the classroom, laboratory, dance studio, library, and more. Merchants spilling over into the lifeblood of the University. In educational production, the production of curriculum resources, the funding of research centres, the building of physical and technological infrastructures, the deployment of learning analytics, the management of the student loan book, hegemony does not lie with students or staff. When we are told that

education must become effective or efficient or innovate, it is finance capital that is heard.

Marx (1891/1981) argued that where commercial capital and money capital dissolve previous forms of production, they also destroy the communities on which they were based, and then they become the community. So, the public University is declared to be beyond hope and is under global pressure to reform or become revolutionised as an organisational form for the accumulation of capital, be that social, cultural or commercial/financial. The 'solvent effect' of finance capital (Harvey 2013) renews HE's place in a world market, demanding flows of intellectual commodities, virtual trade, new colonialism, and the increasing subordination (in this current phase of capitalism) of educational production to trade and commerce.

Rather than basing social development, innovation and reproduction on the basis of human ecological needs, in part generated through knowledge, skills and capacities in universities, society witnesses 'capital developing on the basis of an alien social mode of production which is also independent of it' (Marx 1894/1991: 448). This is because: '[c]ommercial capital simply mediates the movement of these extremes, the commodities, as preconditions already given to it' (*ibid.*, 442). Rather than focusing upon the development of socially-useful skills, knowledge and capacities to address crisis, finance capital is simply interested in accumulation through exchange, designed around the exploitation of educational commodities that leverage surplus: 'trade promotes the generation of the surplus product designed to go into exchange... It thus gives production a character oriented more and more towards exchange-value' (*ibid.*, 443).

In English HE, the character of social use defined in exchange or by the commodity form increasingly reshapes educational intentionality and relationality. It was amplified after the financial crisis of 2007, and governmental responses to the

Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this reality (Hall 2024). As a fresh wave of UCU strike action collapsed in the face of lockdown, power reverted momentarily to sector leaders who linked government-backed support to their commitment to ‘reduce costs, increase efficiency and moderate certain behaviours to increase stability and sustainability’ (UUK 2020). Those behaviours were then to be explicitly reinforced within short-term, regulatory consultations about quality and standards, which would be determined by competition, performance data, efficiency and measurements of specific student outcomes (OfS 2022). The immediate survival of universities was calibrated against regulation that structured learning, teaching, research, scholarship, knowledge transfer, impact and so on, as commodities to be exchanged.

Through the pandemic, UK Government policy reflected the desires of financial and commercial capital to synchronise educational production with their own circuits, and universities imposed new labour relations, for instance, in new workload and absence management policies, and conditions of work (Williamson and Komljenovic 2022), and institutional recovery plans (Connolly 2020). This underscores Marx’s (1857/1993) argument that the hegemony of the bourgeois mode of production rests on the expansion of a global system of valorisation, built upon *both* commodification for exchange *and* the labourers’ neglect of themselves. Here, financialised exchange demands the spatial transformation of productive forces, including in workplaces and modes of communication, and in human capacities and capabilities. As capital drives beyond its spatial barriers and demands the ‘annihilation of space by time’ (*ibid.*, 525), the circulation and labour time of educational commodities are revolutionised. In this expansionary ecosystem, and being permanently at risk of becoming surplus to requirements, labourers must become self-exploiting (Hall 2018).

We are, then, drawn back to the idea of unconscionable vandalism, and the reality that institutional senior management are forced to work within a horizon set by finance capital, regulated and governed through austerity policies enacted following the financial crisis, and renewed through the pandemic. This is not to let those managers off-the-hook for their ongoing actions, but to highlight the reality that they are compelled to look for relative surplus value, or competitive advantage, through innovations that push beyond simply extending the working day, locating new markets, outsourcing, and so on. Such activities generate absolute surplus value but reach limits (Hall and Bowles 2016; Marx 1867/2004). It is in this context that the pandemic, framed against an unfolding terrain of austerity turned ‘a temporary exertion into a permanent expectation, and to a permanent state of exception inside higher education.’ (Hall 2020)

Thus, vandalism is one way of interpreting the intersection of unfolding financial mechanisms on a broader terrain within the sector, renewed marketisation, a policy framework that regulates through discourses of value-for-money, and weak levels of collective bargaining. Vandalism is the outcome of universities being forced to compare the time of their students and staff, which drives the application of more productive technologies or techniques designed to restore competitive advantage. Vandalism is the making superfluous of any academic work considered unproductive, or that does not generate competitive advantage or access to funding and finance (for instance, by increasing recruitment or research grant awards).

Yet, vandalism can also be seen as dissolution or reimagining. Finance capital is central to this reimagining of the University, through private equity and debt-financing, because it enables

bottlenecks to be overcome (through precarious employment); a quicker turnover of production (through accelerated degrees or rapid prototyping); intensified labour processes (through capital-intensive use of classroom technologies); increased academic entropy (through internationalisation strategies predicated upon commodity-dumping); and the ability to create new forms of organisational development (through new workload models). (Hall (2024a, 23))

In this, the lack of significant solidarity in labour organising matters, beyond the long-standing work undertaken to refuse casualisation. The lack of solidarity particularly impacts professional services, for instance in digital provision (Cuthbert 2022) and estate functions, like cleaning and security (see the references at Outsourcing@Surrey 2022). So, I hold that: ‘The deep divisions within academic trade unions over the idea of the worker and the employee, over tactics in disputes and over what constitutes “winning” demonstrate the hold of class fractions over the promise of mutual benefits through solidarity-in-struggle.’ (Hall 2024a, 23)

The horizon set by what Ball (2012) called transnational activist networks of neoliberal actors acts to foreclose upon the possibility for reimagining beyond the dictates of value-for-money in the market. Insinuated inside global HE, these networks of policymakers, private equity, venture capital, educational technology vendors, neoliberal academics, and so on, generate relations and forces of production that recalibrate working identities, and reduce individuals to a commodified, alienated existence.

Here there are spaces for the techno-accelerationist, muscular and authoritarian fantasies of the neoreactionary NRx movement to amplify the conditions inside which our lived realities become

precarious, alienating or surplus. When these fantasies touch the ground they ignite a war of position between institutions, and individuals, and thereby reproduce the toxic objectifications of self and other. They are academia's new shock doctrine (Kornbluh 2020).

The capitalist University-as-is cannot halt the systemic devouring of our present lives, in the face of the desperate institutional need to accumulate surplus in the future. The capitalist University cannot save us, because it is driven by short-term economic interests, rather than the long-term conditions of life. (Hall 2020)

...

The material history and context of the English HE sector differs from that in the USA. However, the unfolding relations of production, governed by finance capital and transnational activist networks working for-value, reproduce conditions of exploitation, expropriation and extraction within both spaces, albeit with a unique set of flavours. Whilst these conditions compel the institutions of the North, and of the UK and USA, to find ways of extracting value from the South, in the name of development, they are underpinned by discipline at home.

In both the USA and UK a scream of confusion, denial, anger, and possibly fear, erupted from networks of power in opposition to the uprising following George Floyd's murder, and the Black Lives Matter struggles for justice. This scream was that of privilege against its apparent (great) replacement, demanding the maintenance of its prestige and status and position. This new common sense was amplified by a scream against awakening in all its forms, where those forms threaten hegemony. It was a scream directed against trans rights, decoloniality, indigeneity, anti-racism, and which sought to foreclose upon these struggles, and to bring the power of popular culture, media and policy/

regulation into play on the side of a particular idea of freedom-of-speech. It was echoed in reactionary academic networks.

This scream defines a desire for domination within a culture war enacted from the right, and which seeks to mobilise power against those made marginal inside a system that is itself struggling to maintain its expansive energy. So, within English HE, the pandemic witnessed whiteness and white privilege pushing back against narratives of decolonising in regulation and access to emergency funding, in the form of Government guidance and policy (Hall *et al.* 2022). In that same context, the University of Sussex is contesting the punishment imposed by the OfS for an alleged breach of its regulatory requirement to support academic freedom and freedom of speech on campus (Dickinson 2025), in relation to struggles over gender.

Thus, English HE is increasingly framed as a hostile environment. From the right, institutional policies designed to frame bullying and harassment are seen as restrictive of freedom of speech and denying liberty. Moreover, speech as a form of dissent, for instance in opposition to decolonising, being gender critical, or the denial of the legitimacy of terms like whiteness and white privilege, are seen as the catalyst for individuals being shunned, removed or expelled from campuses as *causes célèbres* (Civitas 2020). From the left, the clampdown on protests in relation to Gaza/Palestine by institutional leaders, including in increased surveillance, the threat to international students on visas, actual or threatened expulsions (like that of Haya Adam at the School of African and Oriental Studies in 2025) and prosecutions (like those of students at the University of Leicester in 2025 for aggravated trespass), catalyses a need for solidarity across campuses and into society. As the University is seen as representing white privilege and settler-colonial intent, the authoritarian ways in which it enacts this representation are seen to reflect the ways in which the State disciplines protest (Freeman 2025).

However, this perception of a hostile environment generates asymmetrical forces. Those screaming for particular forms of liberty, and the right to speak in the name of privilege, are able to mobilise the hegemonic power of the State and the media, to attempt the imposition of order. They connect with the normalisation of discourses of too much (of the wrong type) of migration, and too many (of the wrong type) of migrants. They connect with perceptions that universities are weak sources of growth, governed ineffectively and without sufficient focus on value-for money. They underpin the rationale of the UK Government's 2026 international levy as a charge on international student recruitment designed as a trade-off to support maintenance grants for disadvantaged UK students. With restrictions *both* on international students bringing dependents to the UK whilst they study, *and* on the availability and conditions of the Skilled Work visa (the Graduate Route), Othering particular kinds of students serves as fuel for debates over immigration, reinforced politically.

All the while, this ideological position is underpinned where HE is regulated with a very particular eye on finance, and the need to drive efficiencies rather than to argue for any new financial settlement. So, in its assessment of financial sustainability, the OfS (2025, 6) is clear that it regulates based on student and taxpayer interests, and the vandalism it is concerned about is in relation to the 'impact of the aggregate forecast' on 'students' interests', across a competitive environment between 'autonomous institutions'. For there to be winners, there have to be losers. In this environment then, institutions are on their own, compelled towards vandalism or cannibalism and the search for exchange-value and surplus, which also realises the denial of social justice.

For those struggling for other worlds, the result is that they are brought into relation with the violence of capitalist institutions, and a State designed to maintain their structural integrity, against

the background of austerity and value-for-money. As Marx and Engels noted (1848), these institutions tend to work, akin to a committee, to organise the common affairs and interests of the bourgeoisie (or of power). Thus, for students who wish to be in excess of themselves as the consumers of educational commodities, and to struggle for justice, even the allegedly most liberal institutions of the State can reproduce themselves as the sites of authoritarian discipline.

1.3 Students in excess: a story against social justice

Reflecting on the occupations of 2010-11, I argued (Hall 2012) that in spite of the disciplinary dictates of the corporate university:

groups of academics and students are attempting to move beyond the pedagogy of debt, to define something more care-full, where the staff/student relationship can become the beating heart of an alternative vision for higher education as higher learning beyond the University and inside the fabric of society. This is the true psycho-social scope of care in these educational relationships.

As we reconsider the idea of care, and how care is placed into asymmetrical relation with authoritarian ideas of liberty through the construction of hostile environments, we are reminded by Mintz (2025) of how Gaza/Palestine has made Colombia, alongside other universities, 'the epicenter of the reckoning'. This reckoning operates at the intersection of factors: a crisis of liberalism, and rights-based order; the re-emergence of disciplinary and authoritarian archetypes of the father (witnessed in Trump); tensions between diversity, the enactment of power, and a desire to overcome inequality; internationalism and transnational identities; generational divides in activist agendas;

and, the role of the University. Mintz (*ibid.*) calls for ‘courageous inquiry’, which we might see as being akin to a workers’ inquiry, seeking ‘not to quiet conflict—but to elevate it. Not to avoid moral intensity, but to engage it with care.’

This brings me to a story that reminded me in many ways of student-led struggles in the UK over the rise in student fees in 2010-11. It reminded me in many ways of student engagement in the movement of the squares and Occupy! in 2010-12. We will come to those in due course, but in the meantime, it is important for me to recognise the connections over space and time, with a story of students acting in excess of themselves as students, in protesting the genocide in Gaza on one university campus in England. It is important to recognise how students acting against perceived, articulated institutional complicity in the genocide, also act with care for themselves and their futures, and the present and the future of those facing genocide. It is important to recognise how students acting in excess of themselves are acting for other worlds, which might be more care-full.

Well over a decade after my engagement in protests and occupations over fees and cuts, and the imposition of a social terrain of austerity, I once again witnessed the abject inability of the University, its senior leaders, and those who make claims over social justice, to hold spaces that are full of care. I witnessed the abject inability of the University to hear its students scream, without extreme discomfort and repulsion.

...

It is the Summer of 2024. I am at a symposium as an invited guest, for which I was and am very grateful. The symposium is based upon relationships between universities in the global North, and the focus is social justice, equity and decolonising. I notice that we are in a space that is, or feels, like a reflection of Empire – a room shaped by the images and the representation of power,

with gardens and windows that open out like a country house. The room represents something: grandeur; order; capital; power. How does this country house energy relate to other houses in this country that are built on Empire, blood and bones?

The organisation of the event is predicated upon social justice, and speaks to humanisation, decolonisation, affirmation, through intersectional Blackness. We are asked to consider whether they are ever enough, and what they will mean for the idea of the University? In the introduction we are asked to consider historical reparations. We are asked to consider our ideas of belonging to or in the University. We are reminded of the legacies of underground railways and resistance movements in the struggle *for something*. In listening, I am reminded of Harney and Moten's (2013) *Undercommons* and the potential for Black fugitive planning that is *against* the world as-is.

The introduction also includes speeches from two, white, senior leaders from the host institution, who tell us of their work for DEI/EDI, and in the struggle for equity on campus and in research environments. I wonder why these things always get co-opted in this way. Why am I listening to *this*? I wonder, is this symposium a statement calling *for* the University, or *for* a better University? Cocooned inside a space of power in the University's administrative heart, I wonder, can we work with the legacies of the past, in order to make possible legacy work that confronts injustice in the present? Might it become a struggle *against* what the University has become?

And the symposium-proper begins with a controlled curriculum and a controlled structure for the day, including who gets to speak and how speech will be ordered. People with microphones sitting in a tight circle, with a few people sitting around them in a second circle, able to interject. The rest of us are to be silent and observe. There is little space for dialogue; we have been made or placed as observers.

In the opening circle discussion, those who are allowed to speak are discussing Gaza encampments, and in some circumstances, they are describing how they have tried to mediate between their own institutions and encampments. Suddenly, we are disrupted by pro-Palestine, student protesters from the host institution. We are one hour in, and the students have foreclosed upon our discussion in their use of megaphones and microphones and amplification. It is a warm day, and windows and doors in the room of Empire are open. There is no escape from the cacophony, and it is beautiful.

The students remind us of what it really means to be in struggle in-and-against the University, or for a different University, or against what the University has become, through encampments and through occupations. They draw attention to the ways in which their own institution is seeking to close down their encampment, using the law not simply to stifle dissent, but to end the hope of protest. Their University is threatening their existence as students by threatening to bar them from academic progression; it is threatening their existence as citizens in its will to go to Court; it is threatening their existence as humans in denying the expression of their pain over Gaza.

Suddenly, I am reminded of Millbank, and the energy of 2010–11, and the energy of intellectual work at the level of society. Intellectual work that is in excess of the University. Intellectual activism that is in excess of the University.

The noise outside makes speaking and listening and observing impossible. Those with power in the room feel disconcerted and discombobulated, and the room is suddenly filled with disbelief and concern over what to do. The narratives in the room are complex, and so are the emotions that erupt. There are members of the social justice network in here, with invited guests. They have previously sought to diffuse this possibility by promising to engage with students at a different time and have been caught

off-guard. There are members of senior management from the host institution, who are the focus of the student protest. To their credit, they stay in the room.

My own emotions are complicated. This feels important and significant, but I have a tendency to internalise the emotions around me and to work with them, in a desire to diffuse my own tension. But we need the tension. So, I reach for my keffiyeh, and I am the only person in the room wearing one. I know where my solidarity lies, and I feel faith in the courage of the students. I feel that if there is to be justice, then they need to be in the room. Or we need to be outside with them.

Yet, I am incredulous as a member of the core of the social justice network, who is speaking when the protest begins, voices the opinion that we are being violated by the violence of these students. There is indignation at the temerity of these students and a perception that this disruption is out of place. There must be order. Whilst I am incredulous, I recognise this narrative – the ways in which power seeks to reproduce itself by closing down any form of struggle that it cannot sit with. In the previous few minutes, the same speaker had been describing their own engagement with a Gaza solidarity encampment in their own institution.

That's quite the take, I thought. 'The students' need and deserve to be heard, and we are judging their amplified speech and activism outside our open doors of Empire as violent? For fucks sake.

In the same moment I recognised the scream of the liberal intelligentsia, as its space and time and organising and politeness and gentility was disrupted and redefined. As it lost its power and control. I recognised its scream of pain, where discourse and the limits of academic agency run into the reality of concrete action. Concrete action that is a deliberate *fuck you* to our civility at a time of genocide.

So, how do we support those students who challenge and hold us to account, without timetabling their protest? Without

kettling their scream in spaces and times that work for us? These students are challenging us, morally and spiritually and corporeally, because the University has set itself against them, legally. It has stressed them to the point that their protest and the disruption of our meeting, aimed at two members of senior management as proxies for their University, and as symbols of a broken system, has stressed us. My embodied reaction reminds me that Fred Moten speaks of a need to build a dam against the motion of history (Millennials Are killing Capitalism 2023).

And in the process, I am reminded of academia's scream. We scream because we are denied the space-time in our curated programme to talk with feeling. To talk of next year, and what we will do next year, of how we will talk of DEI/EDI and inclusivity agendas again next year. And we scream because to analyse the world rather than to feel its pain is all we have time for here. We dissociate because the pain would be too much to bear.

I observe the organising committee deliberating. Negotiating with senior management. They invite the students in. This is something. They are invited to sit in cabaret style, and in a listening/discussing circle. Just for an hour, mind-you. A time-limited space. The room shifts as the masked-dozen, wearing keffiyehs, enter and take their places.

We ask questions about legacies and how concretely we might support students who challenge us and hold us to account. We say a lot, but we say nothing. We say nothing concrete, because we cannot look beyond the room that we are in. And there is shock, and we are negotiating with ourselves anew. What gets in the way of institutions supporting students in struggle? Our systemic addiction gets in the way, because our institutions, our structures, our cultures, our practices, are the system.

Members of the social justice network in the circle with the students want to talk in abstractions. The students are concrete. And I write a note that 'we are dancing around these questions'.

But I wonder if we are actually feeling our way towards them – dancing towards each other somehow? And I know that we have no time and no place for continuing the dance to its end.

In part, this is because we have to show deference to the institution that is hosting this. And these students are calling their University out for its research partnerships, its banning of certain student organisations, its careers fairs that include partners allegedly complicit in genocide, its hosting of talks by former Israeli Defence Force members, and its legal threats to individuals in its students' Gaza solidarity encampment.

Amongst the fragility of our egos and our identities, how do we protect and listen to our students? How do we recognise that attending this social justice symposium does not absolve us from our guilt? How do we refuse to project our own damage, and instead recognise that our students' demonstration of their pain reflects the pain of the world? If we are projecting claims that this is violent, then what are we running from inside us? What is it that we cannot bear?

This is such a relational moment – we are collectively producing the space together, as a dance around each other. And the people in power remain in the room. But there is unease and disconnection in the dance: there are friends who wish to break bread and discuss social justice; there are people in power who wish to demonstrate their solidarity (and that solidarity *is* the people); there are students who wish to demonstrate the futility of that solidarity in the face of genocide. How can this room and this space hold these people, collectively? How do we show ourselves more care?

As Mbembe (2021) urges us, we are creating the potential for a new archive here, although we do not see this. This is a space of possible, intergenerational, intersectional and intercommunal energy, and I reflect upon the road we have travelled inside these universities and in thinking about intellectual work since 2010.

As security appear outside, I remember the actions of the Metropolitan Police in the SOAS Liberated Zone on 9 July 2024 (Roberts 2024). And I remember how other student encampments and protests are punished, just in-case.

We are so constrained and contained and unable to process our shit (Andreotti 2021). We dance around the issues, and do not commit to challenging our institutions through action in relation to the genocide. We offer the students a time-limited space to speak, maybe as a means of neutralising them and cauterising our pain. And we give them lunch and water – there is no promise of action, right now.

This intervention by the students has changed the risk, energy, mood completely—there is a new layering or depth on offer here—a new truth or authenticity in struggle. Is there care? Are there limits to care?

I worry that this will not be the perspective of senior leaders. Will there be punishment or will there be forgiveness? Will the senior leaders, forced into a corner and to sit whilst they are rebuked, punish these students later? Will power simply seek to negate the struggle? Can we leave our egos at the door? Can we be reminded that these young people are bringing an intergenerational and intercommunal struggle to our door, and open our hearts to that with courage and faith, in order to sit with them when they state that we are complicit through our investments in the instruments of genocide?

The students have made issues of social justice real for us – they have helped us realise, if only we can see. There is a question in the listening circle about belonging. The fetish of belonging. These students have asked us, quite politely all things considered, to consider to what or to whom do we belong. Can we lean into and belong with this protest and this hour, as a gift of disruption? Rather than seeing it as a form of violence, can we welcome it as an attempt to humanise us all?

At the end of the hour's circle-time, the response of one senior leader is to stress and strain their "I", their very self, their justification. They cannot let things lie – they must take the conch (microphone) and excuse their actions and themselves. They must have the last word.

As the hour closes, I note how, whilst the students speak, I am bent double in pain, or I am bent double in prayer? My body screams—I am deeply discomfited—I am confronted. As the students leave the room with some lunch, I leave to say, "thank you". Thank you for holding up the mirror and for forcing us to confront ourselves in some way. The student who has been in the circle, courageously holding power to account tells me: "thank you for wearing your keffiyeh, it gave me courage when I was speaking." Something, at least.

These students who sought to hold us accountable, transparently, gave us a moment of revelation, showing us the way towards courage and faith in justice and hope and peace. They revealed the possibility that we might become in excess of ourselves, to live in abundance with each other, if only we could find the heart and soul. Of course, we did not do this. We curated a space-time where at the end power spoke and justified itself. A space-time where, at the end, power sought to convert us, divert us, reclaim us, through its voice and our silence.

And as I left, I remembered the countless examples of courage and faith and heart and soul of those in occupations, protests, encampments and more, which I have encountered in my life. And as I left, I resolved to refuse engagement with work that is part of an ongoing neutrality policy. I resolved to enact radical accountability in my work and life.

More than this, I remembered that our struggle not *for* the University; it is *against* what the University has become.

2

being *against* what the University has become

Our struggle is not for the University. It is against what the University has become. (Mike Neary 2011a)

I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (bell hooks 1994)

I must begin // Begin what? // The only thing in the world that is worth beginning: // The End of the World, no less. (Aimé Césaire 1956/1969)

1. Genesis

I begin by remembering the US State disappearing international students and attempting the disciplining of HE institutions. I begin by remembering the political economics of English HE. I begin with stories of the dislocation of academic networks from embodied, concrete student struggles. I begin with stories that demonstrate, for me, the brokenness and wrongness of the world within which intellectual work takes place. The brokenness and wrongness of the world within which intellectual workers are incarcerated or seek to incarcerate themselves.

I begin by remembering with stories because I am interested in the potential for a rewriting or a reimagining, or for weaving ways

of knowing the world differently. On these terms, my knowing the world is physical, emotional, ancestral, ecological, relational, communal and anti-colonial. It is a personal and reflexive critique of the ways in which I internalise and reproduce capitalist social relations, alongside their exploitative, expropriative and extractive logics. It is a personal and reflexive critique that acknowledges what-is, and which seeks to abolish or dissolve my self-reproduction as commodified, intellectual worker.

This critique questions the validity of the University in the global North, as a new appreciation of history-making unfolds before us. This is the genesis for this work on *The Dissolution of the Universities*, as a meditation on our capacities to reimagine and resolve ourselves anew, inside a world shaped against an ever widening and deepening terrain of crisis and emergency.

Thus, the approach here builds from my earlier analyses of alienation and hopelessness, infused with personal experience, in order to consider the possibility for reimagining. This is a reimagining of intellectuality, within a society that must negate, abolish and transcend its settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal, capitalist institutions. Much of this pivots around my own place as a time-served worker within English universities, and also in occupations, social centres and struggles outside and against those institutions. I consider this an act of stewardship, reinforced through engagement with decolonial, anti-fascist and intergenerational networks. I recognise that a crucial thread within the tapestry I feel the urge to weave is the work and practice of Professor Mike Neary, whom I regard as an elder, in my own material and historical community.

2. On Mike Neary

Mike Neary engaged in debates about the purpose of the University. This touched upon discussions of the abolition of the University, shaped against a revolutionary transformation of

the social relations of capital. Grounded in the new reading of Marx, he brought Marxist social theory and critical pedagogy into dialogue with HE research and practice. His aim was to dismantle (by processes of creation, conversion or dissolution) the capitalist University, through an active engagement with the construction of actually-existing, post-capitalist alternatives.

As we shall see, Mike's engagement with the idea of the University emerged against a core set of themes. First was the critique of capitalist HE, and the ways in which it is reproduced through the commodification of knowledge, in the process reducing students to an identity as consumers. Mike entered into debates about public/private, or civic forms of HE, and sought to transcend these false concepts through practical activity. Within this, he was committed to a negative categorical critique of our social forms and relations, and looked to refuse the idea that emergent categories or understandings of our social world might be final. In so doing, Mike's work articulated a pedagogy of excess: a science of how our knowing, doing and being must be in excess of prescribed forms so that we can engage fully with global emergencies.

Second was a desire to move beyond the capital relation, by dissolving or detonating its social relations, which are realised, increasingly toxically, inside social forms like the University. By situating the University and its cultures and practices against their reproduction in the social universe of value, Mike wished to resolve the University as a new institution of the common. This refused to fetishise academic or intellectual labour, and instead analysed that labour as the organising principle of the University (as labour is the organising principle of capitalism). Rather than seeking to emancipate labour, the point is to abolish it, alongside the value-vortex that it reproduces, as a new commonwealth unfolds.

This led Mike towards a third element, the politics of abolition, through which he points towards the creation of new

dissident institutions that are in-and-against the social forms of capitalist society, including the University. Again, this returns us to negative, rather than affirmational critique, in order that alternatives might be developed as transitional organisations within a longer term, revolutionary project. Movement is central to his thinking, and the unfolding, kinetic energy of the social universe of value cannot be overcome through a blueprint for a finished social form. Our intention must always be to transcend what-is by negating unnecessary or harmful practices and cultures through a negative critique, and then abolishing the forms in which we lack human authenticity. We carry forward what is useful to us in new social forms, in the process of transcending, and the process continues.

Mike's fourth element, practical manifestations, are immanent to this idea of movement through forms of abolition. His pedagogic model, student-as-producer, pointed beyond the recuperation of student activity within the capitalist University, for-value. This was attempted at the University of Lincoln in the 2010s, and also in the Social Science Centre (SSC), which Mike co-founded in Lincoln around the same time. As an independent, worker co-operative, the SSC was a form of active withdrawal from the mainstream, offering debt-free HE outside the violence of capitalist institutions. In this way, it formed a concrete thought experiment, which then served as a practical-theoretical example pointing towards the idea of a UK-wide Co-operative University.

A fifth core strand is the idea of a pedagogy of excess, and of individuals overflowing their socially-imposed roles as students, consumers, teachers, or whatever. Mike developed a focus upon revolutionary science, and the reconnection of the natural and social sciences, and of philosophy with our fragmented, disciplinary forms of science, in order that humans might again reappropriate the knowledge, skills and capacities/capabilities taken from them within capitalist system of production. The

point was, historically and materially, to focus upon non-alienated knowledge (ways of knowing the world) that would enable engagement with global emergencies. Here, Mike was clear about his own struggle with stammering, and use this as a metaphor to describe the space between how we might speak of the revolutionary world, and how it really is – closing this space by negating, abolishing and transcending fragmentation is a way of seeking exodus from the living death of capitalist work, by being in excess of our externally-imposed limits.

These strands will weave within the core of this book, in order to consider the potential for our ownership of the process of dissolving the university as a key capitalist social form. As implied in Chapter 1, that dissolution (or a conservative Reformation) is being imposed upon us, ideologically and financially, for other ends, and too often this disables academic or intellectual networks from engaging in concrete struggles. So, our work here builds from Mike's, in: flowing through critiques of capitalist social forms like the University; connecting transitional pedagogic practices that celebrate being in excess; and practising tangible, co-operative, alternative forms of higher learning.

...

In her obituary for Mike, Ana Dinerstein (Hall and Dinerstein 2023) highlights the importance of his work as a critical sociologist, critical theorist, and radical educator. Ana met Mike at Warwick University in the late 1990s whilst undertaking her PhD with the late Emeritus Professor Simon Clarke, who was also supervising Mike. Mike's PhD focused upon a critical history of youth training, and he was a youth worker before entering academia (Cowden *et al.* 2024). These critical facets of Mike's academic identity also became clear to me when I met him through a mutual friend, Joss Winn, whilst he was working in in the Centre for Educational Research and Development at the

University of Lincoln. At Lincoln at that time, he had the role of Dean of Learning and Teaching, although in his 15 years at the University he also served as Director of the Graduate School, Professor of Sociology and Emeritus Professor of Sociology.

Mike's academic core emerged from his sociological training under Simon Clarke, and in the Warwick Sociology department, leading to his advancement of work in relation to open Marxism, critical theory, and labour studies. This deep, theoretical engagement with a particular flavour of Marxist critique enabled Mike to apply a rigorous, conceptual analysis to our understanding of HE and the idea of the University. Ana (*ibid.*) notes how her work with Mike was enlivening, transgressive of conventions, radical, and open-hearted. Mike centred the idea of movement and renewal, with an analysis of capitalism beyond structural interpretations. He was interested in value-in-motion, metabolism and contradiction, which point towards the energy of kinesis.

Building from this open movement of contradictions, Ana and Mike convened The Labour Debate Seminar at the Centre for Comparative Labour Studies (CCLS) in the Department of Sociology at Warwick to reposition the open Marxist debate from a focus upon the 'State' to one which critiqued 'labour' as a key organising concept in our analysis of capitalist social relations. This brought together a significant network of academic-activists and thinkers, who would go on to shape, continually, Mike's work and that of those around them, including my own. These individuals included John Holloway and Simon Clarke. As a result, Mike and Ana edited *The Labour Debate. An Investigation Into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work* (Dinerstein and Neary 2002a).

Having joined the University of Lincoln in 2007, Mike renewed the University's learning and teaching strategy based upon this same, radical commitment. Building on his earlier, Learning

Landscapes and National Teaching Fellowship projects (which germinated at the University of Warwick), Mike's strategic work sought to give academics control of their pedagogic environments. Beyond this, he challenged academics to consider their identities and existences inside renewed scholarly communities, with a strong material and historical understanding of the political economics and value of higher learning.

This work became increasingly important to me over time during the 2010s. I first met Mike at the time of the student-led protests against the imposition of new student finance arrangements, in 2010. He took an activist-academic role. His thinking, doing, and being, demonstrated how protest, opposition, and alternatives, *both* inside-and-against *and* beyond the University, might be conceptualised and realised. He appeared to me in the role of an elder, giving voice, security and safety to the practices of others, in the University, the occupation and the SSC.

At the core of this was Mike's desire to refocus the idea of the University, around co-operativism. As a UK National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow of Advance HE, he helped those of us working inside-and-against the University, to sketch how research-engaged teaching (a more sanitised way of thinking about the revolutionary potential of student-as-producer) might generate a common struggle between student-workers and teacher-activists. Relatively early on in my encounters with Mike, in 2011, I remember him articulating a new reality, namely that our struggle is not for the University, rather it is against what the University has become.

This is a central element of my work here: when we critique the University as-is, for what are we struggling? In my consideration of this question, and my own place inside the University, Mike's practice offers me an orientation. This will be developed here through an engagement with everything that I could find,

published and unpublished, by Mike, including: his research in the 1990s on youth work; his work in the 2000s on money, political economy and Marx's social universe; and, his critiques of HE in relation to avant-garde pedagogy, revolutionary teaching, and the co-operative re-imagining of the University.

In this, it is important to note that whilst Mike's writing and practice—his thinking and doing—have been significant in shaping my own work over the course of the last 15 years, it was not without its blindspots. Some of those happen to align, in part, with my own emerging practical and theoretical engagements, with anti-racist and decolonial practice, and indigeneity. They also highlight Mike's humanity. As Ana (Hall and Dinerstein 2023) wrote: 'He was like a human galaxy: full of stars, darkness, black holes, planets, temporalities, craters, defects, and light and beauty.' As we will see, her focus upon a cosmological simile for Mike reflects his own consideration of capitalism's space-time, and the motion of the social universe of value.

The development and structure of this book tests Mike's radical-yet-institutional focus, to consider the dissolution or sublation of the University. Oriented against my conceptual organisation of Mike's work, this will be undertaken through an engagement with:

- the unfolding, political economic crisis against which universities are restructured and reproduced;
- the role of Marxist, value-form theory in helping us to think about struggle, agency and voice in reimagining HE;
- the historical and material context for re-imagination, both inside and outside the University;
- the place of concrete struggles, for instance in occupations and alternative educational projects, in reimagining;

- the possibility for new forms or structures of HE institutions, alongside the potential for radical, pedagogical change;
- how to rethink the identities of intellectual workers, including in relation to settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy, as a stepping stone towards their negation and abolition; and,
- the validity and possibility for subverting the University through a process of negating, abolishing and transcending.

My orientation reflects my perception that Mike gave the most radical, intellectual leadership of any thinker about English HE in the period shaped by the financial crisis of 2007, and therefore deserves a richer analysis. I want to understand the limits of intellectual work inside the University, and its place as a potential, transitional moment or movement towards a more socially-useful form of intellectuality or of knowing the world (as it emerges in relation to doing and being in the world). This matters as that world is shaped against intersecting crises or emergencies, sometimes called polycrisis.

So, I wish to move through an engagement with political economic analyses, towards an integration with a more humanist Marxism. This is not necessarily something that Mike would have centred himself, and the focus upon the impacts of settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy on human and nonhuman animals and the environment, would not have figured directly in his analyses. However, when listening to Mike work with his own stammer, and in his generous, co-production of critical work with a range of other scholars, his work vibrated with the possibility that we might liberate what has been stolen from us – our ways of knowing the world and our humanity otherwise.

Thus, as the argument here unfolds, I will seek to infuse

Mike's intellectual influences with a range of other voices. This reflects Mbembe's (2017, 2021) encouragement of us to widen the archive of human experience, and to enrich the potential for our collective work beyond established positions and voices. In seeking to widen our archive for moving in-against-beyond the University as-is, I seek to respect Mike's methodological choices around the place of value-form analysis in our understanding of the reproduction of capitalist social relations, and to place his intellectual genealogy into relation with a broader set of decolonial and indigenous praxis.

Mike's genealogy and influences were wide-ranging and included:

- Thomas More and ideas of Utopia;
- the space-time of Einstein, re-worked in part with and through Glenn Rikowski;
- the value-form interpretation of Marx of the Canadian scholar, Moishe Postone, and the new reading of Marx proffered by Michael Heinrich, Robert Kurz and Ellen Meiksins Wood;
- open Marxism and a political reading of Capital, in the work of Werner Bonfeld, Simon Clarke, Harry Cleaver, Ana Dinerstein, John Holloway, Antonio Negri and Jacques Rancière;
- the critical or radical pedagogy of Paolo Freire and Paula Allman;
- the critiques of space and place offered in the situationism of Guy Debord, and the critiques of everyday life of Henri Lefebvre;
- the Frankfurt School, and especially Walter Benjamin's work on audience as producer and Theodor Adorno's negative critique;
- Albert Sohn-Rethel's analyses of co-operativism; and

- avant-garde artists like Brecht and Klee, and traditions like Dadaism and Vorticism, reinforced in the analysis of the vortex of capitalism developed by Nick Dyer-Witheford.

Mike's work also touched on a range of bourgeois sociologists, historians, economists, like Adam, Giddens, Keynes, Miliband, Skiddelsky, and Weber, and poststructuralist thinkers, including Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault and Habermas.

Whilst he would not have used the term weaving, I believe that Mike sought to weave a range of intellectual and practical traditions together, in order to develop a richer understanding of the world in which he found himself. Thus, his work connected *avant-garde* practices inside and outside the University, with spaces, pedagogies and curricula that fused the social and natural sciences, as he sought to reinforce the need for a return to the materialist science of History. In this, his work developed a clearer focus on the violence of real abstraction within capitalist processes, which enables us to think about agency and voice, in integrating or reintegrating History, and renewing our revolutionary potential as mass intellectuality.

3. Weaving an understanding of a university life

Mike's work situated a range of Marx's thinking, doing and writing about political economy and philosophy. In particular he was influenced by work: on political economy, in relation to *Capital* (especially Volume 1), the *Grundrisse* (which informed much of his engagement with value-form analyses and the new reading of Marx), *Theories of Surplus Value* and the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; and, more philosophically in relation to the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *The German Ideology*. Mike did not write much about the abolition of the University, but it is

possible to connect this process to his work through engagement with Marx's *Ethnographic Manuscripts*, his correspondence, and *The Critique of the Gotha Program*. The idea is to welcome engagement with an enriched archive for knowing the world otherwise, pivoting beyond a University life, or a life in HE.

The argument developed here is predicated upon a critical reading of the available published books and edited collections (6), journal articles (30), book chapters (6), keynote talks and speaking engagements (48), project bids and reports (5), and blog posts (14), attributable to Mike Neary as sole or co-author. Beyond this, the argument also connects with themes developed in the University of Lincoln's Student as Producer website (including evaluation documentation, user guides, risk assessments, and so on), and in his pseudonymised work, authored as the University of Utopia. It is important to highlight that much of this work was done in partnership and in concert with a range of colleagues, including, but not limited to, Sarah (Sam) Amsler, Les Bell, Ana Dinerstein, Andy Hagyard, Glenn Rikowski, Gary Saunders, Elisabeth Simbürger, Howard Stevenson, Graham Taylor, Katia Valenzuela-Fuentes and Joss Winn.

I have no wish to impose, unnecessarily, a form of periodisation upon Mike's work. However, in the structuring of this work, Mike's research and practice points towards a focus in the late 1990s and early 2000s upon critical engagement with political economy, and the limits of labour agency and activism, within capital's social universe. In this, Mike had an emerging interest in money and value-form theory, and developed this in relation to open Marxism. Moving through an engagement with pedagogic innovation, and in particular more radical forms of learning and scholarly practice following the financial crisis of 2007, Mike pivoted towards a radical re-reading and reinterpretation of pedagogic possibility inside the University.

A range of texts focus on the idea of student-as-producer, which germinated work upon the idea of pedagogies of excess and *avant-garde* teaching as revolutionary activity. Here, there was reflection upon Occupy!, and the movement against the restructuring of HE finance and governance.

At the same time, Mike was both leading pedagogic transformation at the University of Lincoln, and instigating the SSC in Lincoln, as a project beyond the University as a formally-constructed space. This also connected with work on the student experience in Chile, alongside a critique of the concepts of public or private education, and those of open education. It enabled him to develop, in partnership with others, critiques of the common, and of theorising the practice of co-operative education. Thus, beyond 2015, Mike enriched his own writing and practice to support the possibility for a Co-operative University across the UK. With a connection to the Manchester-based Co-operative College, this gained energy through Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, and its commitment to a National Education Service. Theorising co-operativism and its relationship to education was a central concern for networks of liberal and radical scholars and activists at this time, with a clear relationship to the governance, regulation and funding of institutions, and their classroom practices and pedagogies.

In this period, Mike continued to develop his thinking around academic identity, and the wrongness of discussing HE in relation to concepts of public and private. Pedagogically, he was engaging with ideas of radical hate for the world as it is, as a form of ruthless negative critique that points to the potential for moments of abolition. His pedagogic thinking also threaded Dada and labour critique into a rethinking of the idea of the University and its place in civic or civil society. Mike's blog posts at this time focused upon the political economy of HE and

value-theory, and ideas of how to realise a universe of abundance, in relation to the philosophy of teaching in paradise and the revolutionary potential of scholarly activity.

Mike's work over 30 years of publications and speaking activities, alongside his activism inside and outside the University, shapes the argument I make here, precisely because it enables me to reflect upon my own understanding of the University in crisis. It enables me to engage with a range of abolitionist critiques of social goods and institutions, like the family, prisons, police, and the possibility for communising higher learning inside-against-and-beyond the University, as a node in a front of struggle for social goods beyond the capitalist State. In this, I use Mike's work, acknowledging its limits, to think through the dissolution of our universities and their re-imagination for another world (or other worlds).

In this way, the argument here pivots around an integration of: the reality of historical and material crisis and struggle, in particular in response to 2007; critiques of the re-imagination of the political economy of HE, in relation to value-form theory and the potential for (working class or proletarian) agency in redefining intellectual work; the potential to reimagine the governance of the University co-operatively; the *avant-garde* potential of revolutionary teaching to reimagine the University; the reformation of scholarly identities through activist work; settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal struggles; and, struggles for abolition in society. From this, I want to investigate the possibility for the dissolution of the universities, and what this might mean for escaping the toxic logic of capitalist HE. I want to investigate the possibility for dissolution, as a concept defined in relation to negating, abolishing and transcending, or sublating, what-is.

Here, Mike's work offers a set of threads around radical praxis at the levels of the institution, the classroom and the teacher-

student-worker, for generating intellectual abundance at the level of society. He always focused upon concrete projects, from youth and social work, through to the SSC, the Co-operative University, and student-as-producer at the University of Lincoln. Mike was laying the theoretical, place-based foundations for projects, in community: by creating a stage for radical, youth projects that articulated, collectively, the agency of those made marginal in inner-city spaces; by building on the radicalisation of thinking about the ownership of the space-time of HE, in the Reinvention Centre (at the University of Warwick) and in rethinking HE's Learning Landscapes (at the University of Lincoln); and, in considered responses to the financial crisis, the refinancing of HE, and occupations/the movement of the squares, articulated through student-as-producer, the SSC, and the movement towards the Co-operative University.

I will seek to articulate this in connection to Rikowski's (2024, 278) argument that Mike was 'seeking to develop an alternative, communist form of social energy for our lives', driven by 'writings and practical experiments', which help him and us to navigate 'the maze of the general intellect' (Marx 1857/1993). For Rikowski (2024, 278), Mike's University life was shaped through contemplation in-action, *as* action, and as 'activated contemplation'. This was a means of 'resetting our social energy towards unravelling the Value Vortex and capital's social time, and for weaving alternative, anti-capitalist forms of social life' (*ibid.*). So, Mike developed arguments around the social universe of value (as opposed to class) as the defining feature of the totality of capitalist social relations. He developed these arguments in relation to movement, inspired by work on the kinetic energy of value-in-motion (Nail 2020; Neary 2004; Dinerstein and Neary 2002a).

He developed them by analysing how the kinetic energy of value, driven through innovation and competition, including

between and within universities, commodifies and subsumes the capacities and capabilities of the socialised worker. Marx (1857/1993, 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].

Ways of knowing, doing and being, and the potential for becoming (beyond a one-dimensional identity imposed through capitalist work), are shaped against this absorption and the dominion of value. As the 'general intellect' of society is absorbed by that which is anti-human (institutions, disciplines, machines), 'the human being comes to relate more as a watchman and regulator to the production process itself' (*ibid.*, 705). There is no generative weaving or re-weaving possible here.

Of course, processes of reimagining, transforming, knowing, doing, being have more recently become visible, through the work of a range of decolonial and indigenous individuals, communities, scholar-activists, and activist-scholars. They shine a light upon how we use ideas of social energy and social time, and the very idea of anti-capitalist forms of social life. They do so through practices of weaving and yarning, and the ways in which they encourage us to reconsider how relationality and relations of life challenge the material and historical grounds upon which those of us in the global North might consider other worlds.

Within this, as the capitalist institutions inside which we have been incarcerated for all of our lives fray, or decay, or capitulate to disciplinary intent, we question where agency lies. In an analysis that centres a university life as an institutional form of living death, where is the space and when is the time (or space-

time) for weaving anew? This questions the focus upon the potential for the working class to liberate its mass intellectuality, and to reimagine the world from its standpoint (Hall and Winn 2017). It questions any new reading of Marx, which centres the capital relation, and that offers a critique of labour in capital. It questions the grounds upon which our practical activity, our *activated contemplation*, emerge and are built, and what they seek to transcend.

If those grounds are to be questioned, in order that we might reimagine our struggle, not as being *for* the University, or *against* what the University has become, but rather as being for life *beyond* the University, then deconstructing and dissolving the fantasies of life inside these and related, capitalist institutions, becomes imperative. Deconstructing and dissolving these fantasies require a new recognition of the wrongness of life, acknowledging that '[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly'. (Adorno 1974, 39)

In addressing this, we question our understanding of a university life, and its ontological basis of being. Our questioning must be in excess of the kinetic energy of value production, circulation and accumulation. It must be the unfolding negating, abolishing and transcending of value: it must be our struggle for not-value, and for life as self-surpassing (Gardner 2006), across our social terrains. It must enable us to see ourselves authentically, in order to be against our reformation as productive resources. Ours is an intercommunal, intergenerational and intersectional struggle, grounded in love, eldership, friendship, and being-in-dignity. It is a struggle that might be seen as a love letter to each other, in the face of rupture and the violence of real abstraction.

4. Being against the space-time of the University

It is difficult to imagine a world beyond the violence of real abstraction. Sometimes it feels like all we can achieve are critical, reformist analyses that tend to point towards the ways in which processes of commodification and marketisation reproduce ill-health, exploitation and precarity. For Adorno (1974), one approach is to refuse the liberal idea of the good life (or indeed, the good institution), as it remains disconnected from a critique of the way in which organic life is denied inside the space-time of capital's lifeworld. The structures, cultures and practices of our institutions can enable no more than a depressive position or damaged condition. Bernstein (2001) surfaces a question of whether our horizon is limited to reading the ruins of an ethical life and what has been lost to us, foreclosing upon hope that we might enjoy a life beyond accommodation with hopeless institutions in a toxic system.

Neary (2024a, 9) articulates how reflecting upon this, in the context of youth unemployment, 'and the sheer waste of all of that [life]', radicalised him. The space-time out of which his activist thinking emerged was the wasteland that framed the limits of agency for young people in London in the 1980s. However, 'the very practical work that I was involved with... needed a theory to support that work' (*ibid.*), which was found in the context of Master's study at Middlesex University. Neary's context was shaped materially, in response to waste and wastelands, and was further enriched through a historical analysis of social forms, and the abstractions (like money and the State) that have real power in our everyday world. Thus, whilst not using the term agency, Neary is clear that practical, historical activity might be reimagined and reproduced as 'a revolutionary project based on a revolutionary theory.' (*ibid.*)

In his argument, such activity is not a function of class politics,

although it might emerge from historic forms of class struggle. This, potentially, gives us a way into thinking about struggle that is in-common, and intercommunal, intergenerational and intersectional. For Neary (*ibid.*, 12), the idea of ‘loyalty to the working class’ turns the workers into a fetish, giving them a revolutionary subjectivity with which he could not identify. As we will see, this is a crucial point for us in thinking about how to negate, abolish or transcend the idea and the reality of the University, although such abolition is not something to which Neary concretely subscribed. Yet, he would critique the essentialised, University-based form taken by intellectual work in capitalist societies, arguing for a new revolutionary subjectivity. For him, that subjectivity could not be the working class, and it could never be the departure point for struggle.

Mike ‘was searching for another version of the revolutionary subject’ (*ibid.*, 14). His focus turned to the dual nature of the commodity as the defining feature of capitalist social relations. The commodity is revealed *both* as concrete use-value *and* as abstract exchange-value, expressed in Chapter one of *Capital* (Marx 1867/2004), and this reproduces people as things. Neary believed that ‘concreteness is represented by people themselves and the abstract lies in the way the logic of capital is imposed on people. It’s in that sense that Capital is always a social relation’ (Neary 2024a, 14). The logic of this is that Neary refused to centre workers as revolutionary subjects, or indeed any human grouping or network as holding revolutionary subjectivity, because the working class or the social movement is borne of the of capital-relation and cannot escape its unfolding objectification.

So, Mike follows Postone (1993) in emphasising relations and forms – the worker or the working class, as concepts, ‘cannot think itself outside of the capital relation and therefore there can be no such thing as a worker’s state or worker’s law or worker’s anything’ (Neary 2024a, 16). For Neary (*ibid.*, 17), the space-time of the

University is reproduced through struggles that are themselves

deeply constrained by the social relation that's produced the struggle. What this means is that revolutions cannot be seen as programmatic types of events – this is because there's nothing fixed or certain about these sorts of events.

A space-time and a horizon of struggle have to emerge at the level of social being and social consciousness, which must lie beyond our lives simply as workers or working class.

However, it remains unclear what this means for collective reimagining as revolutionary struggle, as opposed to simply acting in a way that absolves one's being from the pain of recognising our damaged conditions and psyches. In reflecting upon one of his radical interventions into the University, The Reinvention Centre, Neary (*ibid.*, 23) noted that 'it was just a way of contraversialising the classroom design, at a time when classroom design was a very big issue.' So, we might ask are such projects only ever a form of transitional object, or a temporary distortion of the gravity of capitalist space-time inside the University? In the classroom, they contained a particular, concrete use-value aimed at inverting power relations, but were they simply a means of generating more radical energy for renewing the exchange-value of university life?

Whether we buy into his denial of working class agency and revolutionary potential or not, it is important to think about our horizons and the possibilities for generating transitional objects or transitional forms, which Neary clearly highlighted as an ongoing, unfolding, mode of revolutionary doing. For him, historical materialism as a science of revolution, predicated upon socially-useful, critical knowledge, has to refuse 'that liberal progressive idea of the University' (*ibid.*, 25), which talks in terms of teaching, research, scholarship with impact. This refusal

is a reflection of a scream of *not-this*: not this social form of intellectual activity. Thus, for Neary (*ibid.*), our practical, radical interventions must point towards communisation, as a means of overcoming the limits of capitalist space-time:

the Co-operative University idea is not the future but it's on the way to the future, that's the communisation principle of the limit, which is the point. The limit is what you have to work against, but you have to work a lot harder and theorise it a lot more fundamentally than orthodox versions of Marx stipulate.

Here, communisation (Endnotes 2017) appealed in its rejection of dominant, class-based or vanguardist forms of organising the revolution. Akin to Neary's focus upon the radical potential of a range of transitional projects, communisation situates revolutionary struggle in relation to its content. This means that those transitional projects are the revolution, rather than being a staging post, on the way to the revolution. Thus, workers would see themselves as many-dimensional, and struggling in a range of contexts, as mothers, sisters, carers, academics, technicians, receivers of social goods like healthcare, and so on. Revolution would be many-dimensional, emerging as a negative critique of the concepts of class and labour as they are shaped by the capital-relation.

This is important because it does not fetishise the worker-State, or the simple expropriation of, for instance, universities against the desires of the professional and managerial class that runs them for capital. Instead, it is an unfolding dynamic struggle inside-and-against the forms imposed by capital's space-time. In communisation, all capitalist categories, including the University, intellectual work, student, academic, and so on, are negated and abolished. As Endnotes (*ibid.*) highlight, the idea is to 'reject

the affirmation of work and of workers' identity as the basis of revolution.' Thus, there is our desire to reimagine horizons of struggle for a deeper relationality, which pushes against the violence of the value-form, and one-dimensional abstraction and separation. This picks up on a desire for becoming whole beings, beyond the forms imposed by mediations like the market.

Thus, our life's work must refuse separation.

It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital. (Marx 1857/1993, 413)

This runs into Marx's analyses of the commune and communism in his later work, but it also centres a 'focus on problematising the concept of labour and turning that into real-life, real-time projects'. (Neary 2024a, 26) So, I return to the stories at the start of this book, mindful that any 'debate about the future of higher education needs to be located within a historical context' (Neary and Morris 2012, 13), inside which we are able to develop 'a more foundational, expansive level of critical practical inquiry: an intellectual insurgency to create... a university of the earth' (Neary 2020a, 1). This must be shaped by many-sided humans, with a recognition of themselves in relation to other, non-human animals and the biosphere, and responding to global emergencies.

This critical social science of space and the movement of social movements provide the basis for a worldwide form of intellectual insurgency. (*ibid.*)

Here, Neary helps us to consider how modern, progressive, liberal conceptualisations of the University are constructed against the space-time of historical, settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy (Boggs *et al.* 2023), and in current forms of genocide (International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP); Wind 2024). Rather than negative judgements, the key is negative dialectics, which enable us to show how our universities' complicity makes them incompatible with struggles for liberation. In the process of communisation, the cultivation of desires for the radicalisation and transcendence of the University as a means of devaluing life through wage-labour, becomes paramount. Instead, we need to refocus upon movements that question: 'what would our universities look like if they were in the service of diverse cultures, economies, spiritualities, and life within our planet home?' (Neary 2020a, 5)

5. The importance of ontology in struggle

In response to May 68 in France, the collective *Camarades* produced a leaflet advocating struggle against the University as a factory for the production *both* of commodifiable knowledge *and* of the technocrats who have come to govern society. Struggle

is motivated in particular by the fact that the University has become more and more an essential terrain: the intensification of the repressive reality of the University, its increasing role in the process of social reproduction, its active participation in maintaining the established order (cf. the social sciences in particular), the role of science and research in economic development, all require the institution of a right to permanent contestation in the University, its goals, its ideology, the content of its 'products'. (Camarades, quoted in Feenberg 1999, 24)

The struggle against essentialism, or the reification of particular social forms like the University, demands a revolutionary, methodological approach, grounded in an unfolding, historical and material movement of ontology. There can be no fixed view of what it means to be fully-human. For Negri and Hardt (1994, 287)

ontology is not a theory of foundation. It is a theory about our immersion in being and about being's continuous construction... Our conception of being must be open to the production of the discontinuous, to the unforeseeable, to the event.

This points us back to Marx's responses, or at least his draft responses, to Vera Zasulich in 1881, in her questions about whether the Russian commune would have to pass through capitalist modes of development before it could realise its revolutionary potentiality (Shanin 1983). In considering his responses, and in particular in the third draft that was never sent, Marx centres the importance of historical and material contexts, unfolding dialectically, in the concrete evolution of community, and of revolutionary ontologies. Only in this way might we understand that a variety of possibilities and futures might be enabled or narrated '[e]verything depends upon the historical context in which it is located' (*ibid.*, 120-21).

Marx is clear that there have been a range of histories, for instance of the commune, predicated upon historical unfolding of cultures, technologies, relationships, topographies, and so on. Those histories also include the ways in which the social power of capitalist mediations, in particular, private property, come to infect social life. At issue is understanding, methodologically, the material and historical circumstances in which we find ourselves, and then recognising, ontologically, the possibility for potential communal actions against those circumstances. In this,

there is nothing inevitable about the unfolding of history that would preclude struggle from a variety of directions. There is no revolutionary, ontological being that we need to unlock, just as there is no fetishised utopian university to be founded.

In his fourth draft to Zasluch, Marx wrote that his work in *Capital* does not express the historical inevitability of particular forms of capitalist social relations or suggest their transhistorical and trans-geographical certainty. Rather, he notes that his focus was Western Europe, governed by a very particular form of private property, and in order to strengthen the transformatory potential of the Russian commune, with an ontological focus on communal property as the basis for being and becoming, 'the harmful influences assailing it on all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be ensured the normal conditions for spontaneous development.' (*ibid.*, 124). We must unfold our own grounds for dissolution and resolution.

The crucial, methodological point here is situated against a dialectical analysis of the particular historical, material circumstances inside which our lives unfold, and to understand at a deeper level how our being and becoming shape our knowing, doing, and being. What are the material and historical circumstances that lead our university lives to feel anxiety-inducing, distorted, exploitative, toxic, precarious, and so on? Pushing beyond is an ontological overflowing of the structures, cultures and practices of the institution and the sector. Pushing beyond flows from how we feel inside these alienating institutions, and how therefore we might be against them, and against their exploitation, expropriation and extraction of our souls and bodies. However, pushing beyond also reflects that this is experienced differentially, in intergenerational, intercommunal and intersectional ways.

As Marx intimates in his responses on the Russian commune, the differential ways in which value shapes individual and

communal experiences offer us difference, and the dignity of difference, as a motivating and moving, ontological energy for struggle. The idea of a dignity of difference is not a transhistorical, moralistic take on the idea of human, rather it centres a struggle against the totalising power of capitalist social relations in their instantiations of particular forms of privilege and prestige, as represented through particular, personal characteristics. It centres a plurality of struggles against whiteness and white privilege, as reproduced through settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal institutions. The acceptance of a desire to integrate difference within struggle, does not come from an ontological perception that being and becoming might be reduced to a set of characteristics. Instead, it detonates or explodes any reduction of the human to a centralised transhistorical form, either capitalist or anti- or post-capitalist. It seeks to understand the many-sided and multi-dimensional realities of human existence, in relation to non-human animals and a biosphere that is being degraded.

Thus, for Szadkowski (2023, 41):

[o]ntology is a battleground on which opposing viewpoints clash and our ideas on being are the results of these constituting practices. Marx's... is a standpoint that emphasises the role of struggles in articulating the level of the real and denaturalising the historically determined forms of being, rather than on the moral superiority of one of the opposite sides.

This materiality informs the method by which we struggle, collectively, for the negation of the dehumanising conditions of life inside the capitalist University, and as a result seek to negate, abolish and transcend not only those conditions, but the structures, cultures and practices that cultivate and reproduce

them. For Szadkowski (*ibid.*), akin to Dunayevskaya (1991, 2002), the contradictions of the value-form create a terrain for class struggle over what it means to be human, where conditions are contestable.

Methodologically- and ontologically-driven antagonism and struggle had a different flavour for Neary, which we must bring into conversation with historical and material circumstances, defined increasingly by settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy. As they shape the universe of value ontologically as a revolutionary method, class has a place but needs to be treated openly and critically. So, in our argument we move with Engels (1886).

For dialectical philosophy nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher.

Following Heinrich (2004), Neary (2024b, 31) responded to this by discounting the category of the worker or working class, in relation to revolutionary identity, as deterministic or fetishised, and instead sought:

to recover and develop the revolutionary proposition in Marx's writing through "a critique of value", recognising the revolutionary principles (communism) and practices (class struggle) out of which a postcapitalist society is already emerging, but is always and everywhere at risk.

Here, the ontological grounds for our theory and practice of struggle lie in a synthesis of principles and practices that cannot simply be constrained within-and-against capitalist work, but which remain governed by value-in-motion, everywhere. This is the negative critique of labour, which sees Marx's work as a

refusal to naturalise labour or the alleged dignity of the working class as the defining, transhistorical category of human life. This is why Neary prioritised collective and co-operative projects as potential cracks in the totalising domination of capital, to be actualised.

As the automatic subject, capital can only be overcome by deepening its own internal contradictions. Here, our argument connects to Postone's (2007, 76) focus on the critique of capital as an 'alienated structure of social mediation', alongside the labour that constitutes it. It is this that needs to be abolished and not realised, precisely because, as defined in relation to capital, it delineates 'a form of unfreedom' (*ibid.*, 70). Thus, any struggle for the subjectivity of labourers and of labour is illusory. For Neary, this means that importance lies in the generation of revolutionary subjectivity, pedagogically and ontologically, which might be enacted practically, in community, as a movement towards communism through struggle. Class struggle might be one strand, enacted through labour unions, but it cannot be the whole, and it has to recognise its limited horizon for emancipation.

A central criticism of this, from Szadkowski (2023, 35) is that:

[i]n more philosophical terms, all these assumptions stem from a theoretical rejection of any positive ontological manifestation of the living productive force that precedes and overflows capital, therefore, resisting its subsumption.

Szadkowski (*ibid.*, 36) argues that Neary's negative critique of labour is a rejection of Marx's ideas about the struggle for human subjectivity, and the nature of labour both as 'a mediation process in metabolism between humans and nature' and a concrete category giving a particular historicity and materiality to a specific form of human activity. We must organise the struggle against this human activity, and the way in which it seeks to

infect and inflect our lifeworlds, in many-sided ways. A central strand in this criticism is that class struggle is necessary for the abolition of labour, without which there can be no transcendence of capital and its value-forms.

Yet, Neary's work points towards Postone's (1993, 357), following a particular reading of Marx's (1857/1993) *Grundrisse*:

the logical thrust of Marx's presentation implies that this historical negation should be conceived as people's reappropriation of socially general capacities that are not ultimately grounded in the working class and had been constituted historically in the alienated form of capital.

The possibilities for, and actualities of, ontologically-grounded, concrete action underpin how we might overflow the University as-is, in order to move beyond simply dreaming of a life beyond value. In so doing, we do not essentialise our roles as academic or student or librarian or technician or demonstrator. These are a one-sided representation of our identities, and not merely the appearance of that identity in a particular social formation (which capital and its institutions would like to totalise across our lives). Neary did not wish to reify a one-sided life, and used this to refuse the revolutionary potential of the working class, which is internal to capitalism and not able to offer a perspective that could go beyond its antagonisms and contradictions. The problem is how to enact that movement beyond, without simply reducing struggle solely to class, or to a game of waiting for the contradictions of value-production to destroy wage labour, private property and commodity exchange, as a means of organising life.

Of course, this feels abstract and idealistic. However, it highlights why Neary was so focused upon radical projects inside-and-outside the University, and was not focused simply upon

the negation and transformation of those institutions through class struggle in organised labour unions. Instead, his praxis focused upon the negation of our lives as they are reconditioned by the value-form: so, his focus upon co-operative governance, a pedagogy of student-as-producer, and of generating identity that is in excess of our socially-attributed forms (as student, academic, professional services staff), was intended to dissolve the University as-is, as a moment in the dissolution of the value-form under the weight of its own contradictions.

Here, there is some contradiction between Neary's position in 2019, and that noted in 2024, where he recognises 'the revolutionary principles (communism) and practices (class struggle) out of which a postcapitalist society is already emerging.' (Neary 2024b, 31) Earlier, he notes that capital has an 'inherent tendency to self-destruct', and that 'revolution is not the triumph of labour but the abolition of the capitalist value and the creation of a new form of social wealth.' (Neary 2019, 34, 35). Yet, what remains is the centrality of uncovering the space-time for developing revolutionary subjectivity and agency, and for holding the messy and unfolding contradictions of all our work.

6. In-against-beyond: the place of revolutionary subjectivity

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1845/1998) are clear about how the material reality of production, and the relations flowing into and from it, condition human activity, whilst at the same time reflecting that activity. This is the ground upon which consciousness emerges: 'the being of [humans] is their actual life-process' (*ibid.*, 42). Marx (1852) highlights that the conditions of revolutionary subjectivity, or for making and remaking history, emerge dialectically from generations of activity. These conditions are shaped socially in the contradictions between consciousness, productive forces, and the particular state of

society, as they unfold against one another.

This idea of contradiction between individual consciousness, or the ways in which an individual's being and becoming is shaped by their knowing and doing in a particular mode of social reproduction (capitalism), and the ways in which that is organised (the capitalist state and its institutions), is a starting point for thinking about the ways in which being and becoming, or subjectivity, are negated inside capitalist institutions. This is what it means *to be* inside these institutions. For Marx and Engels (1845/1998, 53), our common interests defined through capitalist work are alien to us, predicated upon a particular appearance of society for-value, and realised through particular social forms like the University. To be *inside* is to be negated, where the individual is situated inside a social interest driven by value production, predicated upon private property, commodity exchange and divisions of labour.

Thus, Marx and Engels (*ibid.*) stress the need for human knowing, being and doing to be *against* the alienating antagonism between consciousness, the mode of production, and social forms. Being against moves beyond simply negating the characteristics of institutions like universities that refuse our many-sided subjectivity. Rather it is the negation of our negation that matters – the abolition of the grounds upon which those institutions are framed and reproduced, including by positioning us as one-dimensional, alienated workers. This provides the potential grounds for a revolutionary subjectivity, as a third moment that unfolds subjectivity as being-beyond, or as a being who is able to transcend the world as-is. For Marx and Engels (*ibid.*, 57) this means communism, not as ‘a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself’, but as ‘the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.’

This is not the appearance of a movement external to us or

imposed upon us. It is not an abstract set of social relations and infrastructures that simply subvert those that we suffer here-and-now. This would leave us stuck at the level of our negation. It is the actual movement of the essence of society, forged through collective, social transformation, and revealed through an acceptance that we are bastardised and disfigured by being-inside capitalism. We cannot simply refuse the surface characteristics of our alienation. Instead we must understand the genesis of those characteristics, in order to negate them, and to abolish their grounds. Here, it is important to remember the moving principle of being in-against-beyond: ‘The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise.’ (*ibid.*) What this looks like cannot be defined, and we can only be liberated by enabling ‘the real intellectual wealth of the individual’, predicated upon ‘the real wealth of [their] real connections’ (*ibid.*, 59).

Real intellectual wealth or real connections reminds us of Postone’s socially-generated capacities and real wealth. It points to Moten’s (2017) ‘real assembly’ as a possibility for revolutionary knowing, being, and doing emerging from our recognition of our need to struggle for a different set of concrete essences. Marx and Engels (Marx and Engels 1845/1998, 59.) discuss this in relation to liberation from barriers, practical connection with production that is physical and cognitive (all-sided), and all-round, co-operative interdependence: ‘it is evident that individuals undoubtedly make *one another*, physically and mentally, but do not make themselves.’ There is no way out in the NRx fetishisation of a Nietzschean superhuman sensibility.

Here, Marx and Engels (*ibid.*) are ambivalent about class. They identify the need to overcome the social forms of alienation, rooted in being against ‘the hitherto existing *mode* of activity’, so that humans can do ‘away with *labour*’, and abolish ‘the rule of all classes.’ This is not to instantiate a new form of class domination, rather to unfold ‘the alteration of [humans] on a mass scale... In a

practical movement, a *revolution*'. (*ibid.*, 60, *emphasis* in original) Such a revolution would overthrow hegemonic power, in order that those with revolutionary subjectivity can 'succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.' (*ibid.*)

Against the reification of the proletariat or the working class, they were prioritising an alternative, collective, revolutionary agency, which stressed the primacy of activity that is in-against-beyond. Revolutionary intent is conditioned by tension between, first, coming together in class struggle against a ruling hegemony, and second, competition between individuals in a class over access to wage-labour. This is one of the deep contradictions of the capitalist University, as it is predicated upon intellectual property (as private and objectified) and stratified divisions of labour, and conditioned against prestige and hierarchy, which in turn fetishises academic identity and the scholarly as a labour of love. How can a revolutionary, solidarity or subjectivity emerge in this environment, to challenge the ways in which a professional-managerial class conditions intellectual work? How can it do this, in order to move us beyond our addictions to such intellectual work, and towards many-sided life?

Class struggle might be one way of overcoming the conditions imposed by the ruling class, but this remains one 'illusory community in which individuals have up till now combined [which] always took on an independent existence in relation to them' and subsequently acted as a fetter upon them. (*ibid.*, 86) Instead, revolutionary subjectivity working in-against-beyond alienating social forms like the University must unfold 'the real community because the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association' (*ibid.*, 86-7). So, revolutionary intentionality

can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing

the division of labour. This is not possible without the community. Only within the community has the individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community. (*ibid.*, 86)

The articulation of radical, pedagogic projects is a means of unstitching ‘the fabric of the social totality so the whole untruth of the world can be known.’ (Neary 2024c, 71) Our concrete, intellectual-practical, sensuous activities must ground our refusal of the inhumanity of ‘abstract labour, abstract time, abstract space and abstract nature as complementary forms of the value relation.’ (*ibid.*) Refusal takes the form of struggle, moving through and beyond class struggle:

time and history do not form an already made continuum, but are composed through class struggle as the imposition of the present moment of capital, the changing nature of everyday life and the possibility of a postcapitalist future. It is for us to pick up their thread. (*ibid.*)

...

Contradiction sits at the heart of Neary’s thinking and doing. As we will see, he offers a rich and dialectical consideration, which contains contradiction at its heart. These erupt in relation to a range of theoretical perspectives, and the complexities of historical and material conditions, which themselves generate practical challenges. As we progress, those contradictions will deepen in five critical areas. The first is the role of class struggle in opposition to value-form critique, in enabling us to understand and move historical change forward. Do we believe that class struggle is system immanent or capital-constituting, or do we believe that it might rupture capital, and transcend it? Are we thinking inside-and-against the capital-relation, if we think

of ourselves as workers inside our universities, where we risk fetishising the categories that constitute that labour (for instance, intellectual worker, student, University, community)?

Neary, as we will see, focused upon co-operative projects against the ways in which labour enables the totalising domination of capital, but it is not clear how this enables us to move beyond capital's constant drive to convert the concrete into the abstract and to generate surpluses. This relates to the second contradiction, focused upon the nature of revolutionary subjectivity and agency. If we are refusing to acknowledge class struggle as constitutive of a revolutionary subjectivity and meaningful agency that pushes beyond the social universe of value, how are we to make sense of Neary's practical projects and their revolutionary content? How do we realise forms of freedom, in ways that make concrete the possibilities for ruthless negative critique? Does this emerge in relation to system transcendent consciousness or a recovery of sensuous human practice?

Here, we are brought into relation with the third contradiction in Neary's thinking and doing, namely the relationship between reformism, revolution and the enactment of transitional projects. Are such projects, in line with communisation, actually the revolution, or are they compromised and at permanent risk of co-option? In this, a fourth contradiction emerges, in relation to the place of identity politics in the critique of the University as a capitalised social form. Neary has limited time for identity in overcoming the constitutive power of value, yet a range of other authors have highlighted the crucial relationship of class to settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy. In engaging with these issues, it is possible to think about the final moment of contradiction that emerges, in relation to hope. For Neary, negative critique offers an ongoing, uncompromising rejection of the world as-is, directed at abolishing the wrongness of life. However, others have discussed the potential for social dreaming

and critical hope, and the potential for being-beyond capital by imagining the world otherwise.

These contradictions highlight the inherent tensions within revolutionary theory and practice when confronting the capital-relation and the ways in which it reproduces a complex, totalising social universe. They underscore the ongoing debate about *how* to sublimate the University, or how to dissolve it such that it might be reimagined. Do we undertake this work through a focused attack on the abstract categories of value, or in broad-based class struggle, alongside intersectional movements against specific oppressions? At issue is how to pick-up these threads and weave them into a tapestry representing a new social imaginary. Or how to do so in ways that reveal a plurality of imaginaries.

3

abolition, sublation, dissolution

there is a need to re-compose the university so that it becomes not another form of political regulation but a new form of radical political science. (Mike Neary 2012)

a focus upon a deepened, critical and imaginative relation between abolition and reconstruction as genuine, fundamental, fantastic, radical, collective rethinking of them, to account for their historical ground and also propelling them centrifugally into outer space. (Fred Moten 2018)

Developing and maintaining revolutionary ideas between the revolutions... is a necessary task. (M.E. O'Brien 2023)

1. Sublation: what does it mean to transcend?

This book was intended to focus upon the abolition of the University. It was intended to be situated against and through the richness of other abolitionist work that had generated energy as we moved through the 2010s. I was increasingly taken with the idea that a revolutionary transformation of HE, infused with an intentionality conditioned, critically, by an immersion in decoloniality and indigeneity, would form an important strand of a new social tapestry. This sees the University as one node, unfolding inside a network of institutional and communal spaces, which cannot be transcended on its own, and that must

be transformed as we transform a range of other institutions and liberate their social goods.

A range of recent abolitionist praxis, with a deep, historical lineage, helps us to question how human richness or many-sided human becoming, might be released. These include: Gilmore's (2023) abolition geography; Day and McBean's (2022) analysis of abolition revolution; Lewis's (2019, 2022) work on family abolition; O'Brien's (2023) analysis of communising care; Davis' (2005) focus (following du Bois) upon abolition democracy; work on theorising abolition feminism, by Davis, Dent, Meiners and Richie (2024); Ferdinand's (2022) integration of decolonial and ecological thinking to point towards the liberation of space-time; and, Bogg's *et al.* (2019) work on radical education and abolition. In refusing settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal impositions on the conditions of our being and becoming, authors have written from a range of perspectives, including those that are xenofeminist, critical feminist, decolonial and anti-racist, queer, ecological, and so on.

A point of departure lies in an unfolding and material dialectic, which brings a reflective intentionality to our understanding of ourselves in the University, as it conditions our alienated labour. Within that, my understanding of myself unfolds against my past and present conditions, in family, society, and at work, in ways that shape how I perceive and enact my social relations. So, I was increasingly concerned with how an abolitionist positionality might enable a new sociability and subjectivity, including the limits for this from within capitalist institutions. The rich connections between abolitionist studies and an anti-colonial methodology point towards a horizon for transcending the University as a key node in racial capitalism's reproduction.

This focus on abolition shifted as I turned over the idea of sublation. I see this as an ongoing and emerging, dialectical

movement through: negating (negation) – abolishing (abolition) – transcending (transcendence), or, in this reading, *Aufhebung*. Throughout his work, Marx is clear that the transition from capitalism to communism is a process, which must negate existing, alienating social conditions, thereby enabling the abolishing and then transcending of them. Crucially, it also carries forward that which is socially-useful for the new world, on the terms of that new world. This does not mean that transcending leads us to a final, utopian position, rather towards a new, historical phase defined in contradiction. For the later Marx (1875), ‘defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society.’ This is a capitalist society that he (Marx 1867/2004) describes as dripping from every pore with blood and dirt, the representation of past lives and othered communities, environments and ecosystems.

Marx and Engels (1848) are clear that our concrete existences inside capitalism are shaped by ‘constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.’ Such transformation is predicated upon a reimagining of the old modes of production technologically, organisationally and relationally, in order that they can be subsumed, or negated and abolished. Nothing is sustainable, because nothing concrete can be maintained – institutions, cultures, practices.

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (*ibid.*)

These conditions are not final, but they are themselves representations of a political economy that desires to negate, abolish and transcend the particular limits of humans, non-humans and the environment, by incorporating those elements as use-values in the reproduction of commodities as potential exchange-values, and therefore surpluses. It is important to reiterate this conditionality of social relations, which for Marx (1857/1993, 461, *emphasis* in original) appear ‘as merely historical, i.e. *suspended* presuppositions.’ We have the ability to transcend our own phase of life (whether described as neoliberal, late capitalist, neo-feudal), but we have to recognise the grounds of this as the catalyst for struggle.

The capitalist University shows us the reality of this: academic specialisation or choice of degree to study tends to negate or foreclose upon other possibilities; and, specialisation in research leads to forms of commercialisation that generate commodities that abolish other forms of knowing the world. Capital seeks to transcend this commodified knowledge by removing it from the human, and enclosing it in technologies or applications, or by framing it as knowledge transfer or impact. Yet the specialist intellectual capacities, knowledges or skills are preserved and carried forward in ways that are socially-useful inside capitalist society for value creation.

This mode of conservation in transformation, as a kind of metamorphosis (Sève 2018), is more than simply negative. The *antagonistic contradiction* between terms serves as a moment of creation for new forms and relations and terms, which also *melt into air*, as they are transgressed and their limits overflowed. Transgression is not simply ossified as research output, report, blueprint, app, prototype or whatever. Rather it is the mental conceptions, relations and forces of production, technologies, and so on, that unfold at each stage of development. Of course this shapes the grounds for NRx fantasies of the superhuman.

Praxis grounded in a recognition of sublation offers a way of considering intellectual work predicated upon an ontology of in-against-beyond, as an intellectual response to how our lives are negated (the ways in which our cognitive work is taken), abolished (the ways in which the content of our knowledge is processed into impact or knowledge transfer), and transcended (the ways in which our forms of knowledge are converted into intellectual property). This is why the third circuit of being-beyond, and of giving oneself permission to imagine transcending the world-as-it-is, remains full of generative, revolutionary potential. However, this potential sits against the tendency to limit our thinking inside-and-against, as negation and reform (often posing as wishful abolitionism). In foregrounding transcendence, we must raise a new question: how might we imagine and work-out a society that no longer needs the University? Focusing upon intellectuality in society means that we cannot simply foreclose discussion around the idea of the University. We must transcend that idea.

1.1 Is this communisation?

For Marx (1844a), rebellion, revolt, revolution are each functions of the ‘disastrous isolation’ felt by humans from their community, and aim at the abolition of such isolation. He clarifies that the isolation felt, for instance, by citizens from the political establishment of a society is ‘quite different’ from the isolation of workers from community. Here, labour and exchange ensure that humans have ‘not organised the world in a human way’, such that ‘this *community* appears in the form of *estrangement*, because its *subject*, man, is a being estranged from himself.’ (*ibid.*, *emphasis* in original) This loss of the communal is the loss of human nature, reinforced over and over as contradiction between alienated labour (or dehumanised life) and the desire for life.

Reimagining the true community of humans, or reimagining human nature, is a refusal of 'the eternity of capital' (Endnotes 2020, 282). It is a search for human nature as a new common wealth, against-and-beyond the commodity and the vast accumulation of commodities as the marker of capitalist wealth. The communal, or a reimagined communal, is the negation and abolition of privilege and prestige within the commodity-and ego-production of the material community of capital. This focus on ego is fundamental in the process of communising, or becoming communal, or in reimagining (the) communal being. For Endnotes (*ibid.*, 287), this means that individuals are not simply social beings, but rather are always becoming *Gemeinwesen*, that is to say community or commonwealth: 'every human being carries in herself, subjectivated, the *Gemeinwesen*.'

For many made marginal, the community of capital can never realise anything other than alienation, injustice or toxicity, and lived experiences become a zero-sum competitive game, pitching particular groups against each other. In this universe, support for migrants, queer or trans-communities, Black and Ethnically-Minoritised groups, is placed in asymmetrical opposition to the needs of those who represent white male privilege. This is reflected in the need to undertake work on awarding gaps, affirmative action, DEI/EDI and more.

A new common wealth refuses the ways in which capitalism disciplines particular forms of agency. The realisation of human community is self-realisation through the abolition of fear, and the unfolding of communal wealth, or human nature as an end in itself rather than as a set of resources to be mined (Ross 2015). Here, the community contains a new poetics of life, as abundance of time, intellectuality, emotionality, usefulness, and more. These are available at the level of society to be shared for all, beyond the liberal rights of those with privilege, prestige or power.

Communisation wishes to put an end to the material life of the capitalist University, in its current, historical mode, through ‘a total revolution rooted in the transformation of everyday life’ (Endnotes 2010). Struggles against the institutions like universities that dominate our life world, are also struggles against the labour upon which their reproduction and our alienation are based (Camatte 1998). As revolution negates the idea of separated, alienated, intellectual work, and abolishes its instantiations inside fetishised academic labourers, a new intellectuality will emerge, transcending our commodified and limiting forms, as a new commonwealth and a new sociability. A new intellectuality cannot be an introjected, universal, fetishised ontology of revolutionary subjectivity. It can only be worked out in struggle.

Communisation enables us to consider the possibility of a new horizon and a new, common wealth. It does so in a world where a range of intersecting struggles against proletarianisation are visible, including those for the abolition of particular forms of oppression (like prisons, the police, the state, and so on). These appear to have transcended or sublated class, and as the self-critical articulation of struggle in the present, sublating is the recognition by individuals and groups of how it is *we* who reproduce capitalist categories (and are reproduced in return). Grasping this enables an opening-out of plural fronts of self-organisation for self-abolition. Against the idea of class struggle as a struggle *for the subject of autonomy*, the transcending moment of struggle becomes the abolition of the self in the abstract community (as labour or the bearer of labour-power), and of that abstract community (money, value, capital) itself (Simon 2017).

As workers become appendages of productive forces, separated out and monitored and measured, our need to trust in the generative energy of a constellation of collective struggles grows. Endnotes (2013) argue for ‘a massive intensification of

spontaneous, self-organising struggles’, ‘across vast geographic spaces, in an ebb and flow that lasts for decades’. It sounds exhausting, which is why the mutuality, relationality and communising of care modelled in abolitionist struggles matter so much. Such care enables our questioning to centre upon the recognition of a new horizon of struggle for the conditions of possibility for communism: ‘how do we articulate the relations among this constellation of concepts today, that is, after the end of the workers’ movement?’ (*ibid.*) Now, the workers’ movement might not quite have ended, but it is not the sole agent defining the horizon of struggle. So, our articulation of the struggle has to reflect this new, conditional and contingent moment.

1.2 Is this dissolution?

In *The Hopeless University* (Hall 2021, 242), I argued for ‘a process of decomposing capitalist social relations, and the institutions, cultures, practices and identities upon which they depend.’ In unfolding ‘an alternative, mycorrhizal metabolism’, which might work by ‘decaying systemic connections to alienated labour, it is possible to recycle the nutrients of an object system’. These nutrients might be skills, ways of knowing and capacities or capabilities, and they are released in the metabolism of decomposition. Decomposing the University and its fetishised intellectual work requires a metabolic interaction at the level of society, where the institution is revealed in relation to an ecosystem of life that needs to be reimagined away from capitalist social reproduction.

Marx (1852) is clear that the energy of decomposition released in political upheavals, or even in social revolutions, germinates from the seed of the past – from the structures, cultures, practices that have defined the existence of the society that we seek to abolish and transcend. He (*ibid.*) argues that in the transformatory moment, revolutionaries must seek to

understand a new social language, discourse or symbolism, in relation to their 'mother tongue', in order that they might assimilate 'the spirit of the new language' (*ibid.*). The liberation that comes from the assimilation and expression of a new social code demands movement through a new society that has accepted and moved against-and-beyond what-was. It demands movement without 'recalling the old' or being defined by one's 'native tongue.' (*ibid.*)

This points towards an idea of dissolving what-is. A process of dissolving or breaking something apart, such that elements might be recombined or resolved, through a new appreciation, or a new metabolic function, also reveals a desire for resolution. As a solute, perhaps like intellectual work corralled inside universities, is broken down (negated and abolished) by a metabolic solvent, perhaps like the effect of a new social desire for both intellectual work and the University, there is the possibility to create (or imagine) a new solution. Here the (value-)form of the original solute has been negated and abolished, and then absorbed or carried into the new. Capital does this, financially and intellectually, by dissolving intellectual work into new commodities, or by reshaping the boundaries of the institution, in order to resolve the University once more for-value.

Of course, for this metaphor to carry power, we would have to accept that intellectual work and the University with its communal life were soluble, and that they could be reabsorbed and take new shapes, energies and forms in a new, social solution. We know that scholarly communities have taken a variety of material and historical forms, representing a variety of communal intentions for knowing the world. They are not fixed in the idea of the University and its disciplines in the global North. Thus, there is a potential for decomposing or dissolving to offer a metaphor for articulating a constellation of communising struggles, which seek to transcend the forms of

capitalist intellectual work and the capitalist University, and the alienating categories that maintain them.

...

In analysing the revolutions of 1848-9, Marx (*ibid.*) saw the Parisien proletariat moving against the National Assembly as one node in its wider revolutionary movement, seeking 'to negate its existence forcibly, to dissolve it, to disintegrate again into its constituent parts the organic form in which the proletariat was threatened by the reacting spirit of the nation.' Yet, he was clear that the defeat of this revolutionary project of dissolution also offered opportunities for counter-revolution and the formation of a new bourgeois republic. This created the conditions for transformation from within the extant society, just as capital constantly seeks to revolutionise the conditions of production, and our social forms and relations. One crucial element of these conditions, emerging in relation to developed relations and forces of production, was 'an intellectual consciousness in which all traditional ideas have been dissolved by the work of centuries'. (*ibid.*)

The development of consciousness in dissolving the work of centuries points us towards other examples of dissolution, and in particular the ways in which English monastic life was dissolved in the 16th Century. This dissolution was realised as interconnected, socially and spiritually radical, administrative and legal changes, the core of which impacted between 1536-41. Henry VIII, through his Act of Supremacy and Suppression Acts, sought to disband all monasteries, friaries, priories and convents in England, Wales and Ireland. In order to meet the needs of the Crown, in particular for war, wealth was seized and assets dispersed.

Bernard (2011) argues that this revolutionary event closed 900 religious houses and impacted around 12,000 individuals. However, it had broader socio-economic, political, spiritual and cultural implications. Analyses highlight an ecosystem

of monastic life, across religious orders, which had been shaped materially and historically by events and intellectual developments (for instance, in political revolutions like the Norman Conquest of 1066). Moreover, as Clark (2021, 4) notes, the ‘leadership [of monastic houses] had always recognised dissolution as a necessary tool for financial administration and domestic discipline.’

Yet, as a new ideological terrain was reshaped through State-based religious reform, for MacCulloch (2023) the dissolution of the monasteries became ‘the most decisive and dramatic change of the English Reformation’. In short order, in the 1530s and 1540s, it was one, very visible strand of a broader socio-cultural, intellectual and religious transformation. Part of this transformation was a questioning of the secular assumptions of society, in relation to spirituality and modes of spiritual redemption, and social forms of religious power and worship. How should spiritual life be realised in English society? To what extent should former regular clergy (monks, friars and nuns) embrace new secular realities (including as parish clergy operating in a reformed church)?

Within this unfolding process of dissolution as transformation, Clark (2021, 18) is clear on the importance of tracing the narrative, not in light of the ‘ultimate extinction’ of religious houses, but rather ‘to trace their end from their own point of view’. This asks us to question the perspective from which we engage in an analysis of any social transformation or revolution, and this might include the dissolution of the universities. As Clark (*ibid.*) reiterates for the monasteries, there is a tendency to see these institutions, located in specific places, as autonomous or self-governing corporations, rather than as (spiritual or intellectual) communities. There has been a forgetting of the fact that these institutions are in dialogue with their local communities, in the supply of services, commodities, guidance,

work. They were embedded in networks or ecologies, through which flows resources (intellectual, spiritual, monetary).

Thus, monastic engagement with the surrounding, social community around 'workspace, worship or welfare', generated a richer set of relations, beyond the purely transactional (*ibid.*, 141). Social, cultural and commercial bonds also helped drive reform within certain houses, although this was not enough to distract from the interests of private individuals and the State, including the King. Those interests developed a new conviction about how these places should be scrutinised such that their ancient traditions and accrued capital might be dissolved in its current forms. Clark (*ibid.*, 158) highlights that, for the King, these institutions needed to be 'reshaped, better to secure and serve his new Tudor realm.' In relation to this, resistance was differentially expressed, and often hesitant, conflicted and inconsistent, rather than erupting from a common ground.

This is mirrored in relation to resistance from within universities to the unconscionable vandalism of a funding settlement that denies sustainable life for the institution and its communities of scholars. It is also mirrored in relation to resistance from universities to the threat to their identities from political interference, and an NRx agenda aimed at the destruction of liberal elites sequestered away inside ivory towers. Resistance is differentially expressed, hesitant, conflicted, inconsistent, primarily liberal and occasionally radical. Whilst these institutions are under threat from across the common ground of bourgeois political economy, institutions and individuals remain unable to generate a renewed, revolutionary and shared sociability and solidarity.

The perception of religious institutions as bloated, of religious life as needing renewal and re-imagination, and of spiritual communities as inefficient and ineffective, meant that both politically and socially 'the narrative for a dissolution of

monasteries was ready-made.’ (*ibid.*, 384) Here, the argument is that simple reformation or a new resolution of the monasteries as institutions, was not enough. They were so dissolute that the secularisation of these spaces and their inhabitants was the only solution for those in-power, helping to ensure that a new (ideologically and spiritually) Reformed Church would meet society’s religious needs. It is easy to see how this mode of analysis might take hold, in a world of shifting social, cultural, economic and political desires. It is easy to see this mapped across to renewed ideas of a purposive and purposeful HE, centred on doubts about the ability of the University-as-is to meet the needs of a society as a whole, as opposed to simply meeting its own desires or fantasies about its own value.

MacCulloch (2022), following Orme (2021), stresses that dissolution of the monasteries made visible a significant change, whilst at the same time emerging religious practices continued at the level of the parish. For historians including Clark (2021) and MacCulloch (2022), dissolution is more an accident with a clear intentionality, rather than a process articulated clearly through policy. There were eruptions of anger from some communities against this intentionality based in disbelief, fear and exhaustion. For instance, in the Pilgrimage of Grace for the Commonwealth, a revolt in the North of England in 1536, the spirit of community centred fears over the loss of common rights, spiritual rights, and parish churches. These fears of the loss of social anchors and specific customs created limited counter-revolutionary potentialities, and merely confirmed the need of policymakers for a new resolution following the dissolution.

However, refusal was a desire to defend life as-is, against a State that wished to release stores of wealth for alternative purposes. In this case, Henry VIII needed wealth to shore up his position against the Holy Roman Empire in its new alliance with France. The energy of refusal was further dispersed because: there

was a lack of clear direction about the purpose and intention behind the dissolution of individual houses; the relationship of dissolution to a broader process of Reformation was confused; and, in any case, there were historical precedents for the dissolutions of individual houses.

For many who work inside English universities, the lack of orientation through an ongoing lack of primary legislation, a restriction of a new funding settlement, financial sustainability audits that stress the primacy of students and taxpayers over the social health of the sector, appears to show a lack of clear direction. Yet, all the while individual institutions are under stress, and the political economy of the sector is clearly set against value and productivity as purpose. New institutions, mergers, restructures, provide a historical and material backdrop; against this, it is unclear what refusal would be against, and therefore what struggle would be for.

The apparent messiness of monastic dissolution gave space for a range of strategies, not for destruction or demolition, but for conversion and different uses, depending upon where those houses were located. For Clark (*ibid.*, 420), '[r]e-assimilation and recycling unfolded so slowly that it was surely imperceptible to the passer-by. The abiding impression would not have been of savage ruin but strange abandonment.' This is not necessarily the case for the thousands of 'professed religious' (monks and nuns) who 'saw their settled pattern of life suddenly interrupted', despite their hopes for a return to the 'memory of their old profession... The social experience of their cloister life, the fraternity they had found in an institutional setting' (*ibid.*, 424, 468).

The dissolution of these spaces, and the inability to resolve them as they once were, broke the patterns of mutual support that formed around those houses, including in the separation of principal sites (Mother Churches) from their satellites. Rather than being housed in community, the resources of monastic

estates were now managed at a distance, almost like the distance between private equity or finance capital invested in the bonds, pensions, services, educational technologies, and so on, which shape the University and its networks of being, knowing and doing. As monasteries were dissolved, one result was an emerging disconnection and discontinuity, evidenced in the communities that were reshaped or had to reshape themselves. Clark (*ibid.*, 539) is clear that: ‘the life of the locality had not been extinguished but it had been changed beyond recognition.’

...

I think about this in relation to the communities inside which universities sit, under the threat of those institutions becoming insolvent or failing, in particular in a regulatory environment that cannot act for them. Clark’s (*ibid.*, 529) reading of the relationship between the monastic and the secular life was that ‘people... had long since made a separation between the fortunes of institutions and their own fundamental values’, and were able to bear dissolution, depending upon the individual context inside which they lived and worked. This enabled those with power to develop and move through dissolution or the process of dissolving, as submission and then recomposition.

In this, I am reminded of Ball’s (2012) articulation of the neoliberal recomposition of education in the global North, through a process of prototyping a new normal, rolling back the world as it had been experienced, and rolling-out a new system predicated upon values (value-for-money), conditions and relations. In response, I am reminded of the limitations that exist in eruptions of anger, and the lack of transformatory potential in such eruptions, where there is a broader, social disengagement. The countless, recent actions, including strikes in the UK by UCU, tend to remain divorced from solidarity actions with sister unions, and estranged from a social reimagining of the purpose

of HE. They bear a disconnection from the political economic realities that shape everyday, communal engagement with other social goods, and situated within a terrain of failure, they seem ripe for reformation.

I wonder if, akin to the monasteries and colleges in the medieval period, this is because the University tends to speak to a form of communal life with an almost sacred intent. It risks grounding an intellectual consciousness in traditional ideas, which are in the process of being dissolved by the solvent work of decades of capitalist intentionality. It is here that the apparently lively and vital lifeworld of institutions that appear almost transhistorical and naturalised, like monasteries and maybe universities, runs up against the secular realities of power. In the case of the monasteries, this appeared as a new realisation that simple reform was socially undesirable, alongside the requirement that wealth (or use-values) be released for other ends. For MacCulloch (2018) spiritual dissolution was also tied in with secular desires to enclose other social resources like water mills and weirs, and for the enclosure of land.

One lesson is that the grounds for dissolution are rarely singular, and tend to unfold from an open-endedness of events. In this, no-one is safe: houses with religious and financial power, grounded in a vital, material history, were safe, until they were not. Again, MacCulloch (2022) emphasises the place of events in reminding us that '[t]he dissolution was not a certainty until it was complete. What it was not was a long-term scheme'. From this vantage point, it might look like tidying up, rather than destruction.

In making sense of this somewhat incidental, somewhat deliberate, somewhat event-driven process of dissolution, we must acknowledge the extent to which society cares about how and where particular forms of knowing, being and doing in the world, like religious or spiritual practice, or intellectuality, are sustained and maintained. Does society care about the seclusion

of such practices inside monasteries or universities? Would the intellectual life of most people carry on regardless of the passing of universities? Does society have the capacity to desire, reimagine, and reproduce knowing, being and doing in the world in other ways and for other ends?

Of course, monasteries do not equate to universities. The former spiritual life sequestered inside monasteries was part of an ecosystem of spiritual life, which was separate from that which existed inside parishes. Those spiritual needs were still met following the dissolution, as they had been all the while the monasteries were in place. Yet, as evidenced in Harvard University's (2025) rewriting of its website, following the assault on its governance and funding by the second Trump administration, the way in which society has been structured, capitalistically, means that the dissolution of institutions like universities is unimaginable for many. Such an outcome is particularly desirable for those adherents of NRx, yet as Harvard University (2025) stresses, any such desire would have to be realised in relation to the position asserted that: 'Research at Harvard—from medicine to technology to education and business—touches countless lives, moving us closer to disease cures, next-generation technology, and a more secure future for millions of people.'

So, if dissolution is a meaningful metaphor, to be brought into relation with communisation and sublation, we need to ask who owns it, what is its definition, and for what ends is it being enacted? To be meaningful, it has to be a social process, defined around liberating and transcending, rather than abolishing and destroying (or turning to ruins, as happened with many monasteries). Through the creation, in a less dislocating manner, of an alternative way of realising our knowing, doing and being in the world, intellectuality might be liberated from the compulsion to reproduce commodified forms of intellectual work, fetishised inside the University.

This narrative of dissolution is sketched to highlight the range of perspectives on the sustainability of specific institutions at a time of revolutionary intent. The dissolution of the monasteries reminds us: first, that terrains of spiritual, commercial and communal capital or resource have always been recalibrated for the use of centralised, institutional power; second, that processes initially designed to reframe power through reform, rationalisation, viability, and more efficient management, can unfold in unintended ways; third, that the leaders of affected houses tend to be more inclined to accept secular than spiritual authority; fourth, hoping for a reset that might save more prestigious institutions is no plan of action; fifth, resistance risks accelerating the dissolution process as a form of shock doctrine; and sixth, where social needs like a spiritual life can be sustained in other ways (like in a reformed parish church or secular structure), threatened social forms become too insecure to survive dissolutions.

For universities, and for those who work in areas allied to or aligned with those institutions and the HE sector, a terrain is opening-up that enables reimagining. This tends to be from the position of the State, as authoritarian or disciplinarian, reinforced by transnational finance capital in evoking a new fantasy or imaginary for how we conceptualise intellectuality and intellectual work. Just as the monastic life, and the 'professed religious', came to represent an ideal of spiritual life that was beyond the pale, it is possible to imagine university life, and the 'professed intellectual' as the enemy. It becomes possible to see how dissolution becomes a potential narrative for individual universities or the sector as a whole, dependent upon perceptions of social viability and usefulness, and the ideological desire for a recalibration.

In response, we might consider whether dissolution contains enough socially-useful content for another view of intellectuality to take hold. It is possible to consider the dissolution of

individual universities, mindful of the socio-economic and cultural, knock-on effects for communities, in ways that are potentially liberatory for those communities. The structures, cultures and practices of those institutions, and their relations to broader ecosystems, might be dissolved and resolved, such that the skills, knowledges and capabilities they contain might be dissolved into the fabric of society. In this process, we might enable a richer engagement with global emergencies at the level of the community.

2. Dissolving the University

A cornerstone of Mike Neary's work was a consideration of the possibilities for an alternative form of HE, realised as the Co-operative University. Co-operation was signalled by Marx (1867/2004, 454) as 'the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production.' Elsewhere, Marx (1866) argued that workers must focus upon co-operation in production, rather than in consumption, in order to attack the ground work of capital.

Neary's long-time collaborator and a mutual friend, Joss Winn (2015), developed this through a discussion of the Co-operative University, in relation to labour, property and pedagogy. He defined an approach that stressed the importance of shaping new institutional forms, regulated and governed co-operatively, as an expression of the pedagogic relation between teacher and student. This would be enacted through common ownership principles, and the annihilation of a division of labour. The tripartite modelling of routes to co-operation, identified by Winn from the existing literature, matters because they point to an engagement with ideas of sublation, communisation and dissolution, even if they are not theorised in that way.

Winn categorises the potential for: first, *conversion*, through which existing universities might be reconstituted on co-operative values and principles; second, *dissolution*, whereby

the department, research group, and curriculum might be reconstituted co-operatively, in order to work to dissolve the whole; and third, *creation*, or building new co-operative experiments in HE. In this model, dissolution germinates at a cellular level from within the institution as a whole, pushing towards a different kind of resolution or alternative social formation. Moreover, generative energy is situated within the institution, and only tangentially refers to the communities informed or in dialogue with the scholarly community, reimagined as a co-operative.

This work on reimagining might usefully be set against the argument of Neary and Saunders (2011), that redesigning the learning landscape (environment) of HE demands a reappraisal of the idea of the University, ‘as a collective intellectual event’. Understanding such events requires the reconciliation of the needs and capacities of humanity, situated inside institutions like universities, and the natural world (*ibid.*, 42). Yet, in response to the Occupy! moment and the movement of squares, Neary and Amsler (2012, 109) positioned a more radical, contextual moment of reimagining, or of dreaming a life beyond the toxic universe of value: ‘thinking about education cannot be separated from the spaces and times in which we produce knowledge – which, in this formulation, are potentially everywhere and always.’

Neary (2020b) continued to push more radical agenda, which sought to utilise critical political economy to uncover and subvert the everyday structures of capitalist life, and how its institutions organise that life. However, his critique of these institutions was deduced from *both* the social universe of value, *and* the contradictions that flow from value-in-motion (in particular, in the tension between concrete and abstract labour). It was not deduced from struggles between capital and labour, which we might see in labour disputes over the ways in which the professional and managerial class seeks to dissolve the University.

Emerging from an analysis of Neary's work is a question about whether it is possible to transcend the University as-is, as a strand of reimagining the production and circulation of social goods in communities, or whether our horizon will always tend to collapse into a limited terrain of institutional reappraisal. Is it possible to dissolve the University as a capitalist social-form, in order to reimagine intellectuality for other worlds? If it is possible to do this, what forms might struggle take towards dissolution on our terms (as a negative critique of its form) rather than on those of capital (as a positive affirmation of forms inside the universe of value shaped by the war on professors and unconscionable vandalism)?

Ideas of creation, dissolution and conversion are responses to the ways in which value shapes the social form and life of the University, rather than viewing that institution as being redefined (recreated, resolved or reverted) through class struggle. Here, there is a very particular focus upon agency, and the way in which, for instance, the dissolution of the University as a form described by value, cannot be achieved by either transplanting the theoretical work of intellectuals into organisations, or strike action by academic labourers. In neither case will any attempted dissolution be able to overcome the ways in which labour is reproduced as and for capital: in the first case because it is externally imposed, rather than internal to the very organisations that it wishes to subsume; and in the second case because labour can only desire its own autonomy, rather than its own abolition and transcendence.

Thus, dissolution from below might emerge from a pedagogy of struggle, but this itself emerges from a critique of value and the way it forms and shapes our ways of knowing the world. Dissolution emerges from revolt, contextualised by crises of capitalist reproduction and the logic of valorisation. Neary saw it as important that we use the energy released by endemic contradictions, everywhere and always, as an active

attempt to dissolve the value-form, and the social forms that sustain it. In the University, this does not mean academic and professional services' unions struggling against the professional and managerial class. Rather it is workers (academics, professional services staff and students) struggling to dissolve their distinctions and divisions of labour, and to refuse the privatisation of their work as the property of others to be exchanged as commodity or commodified service. It is then a reconsideration of their activity in the world, beyond the walls of the institution, but beginning from a university structure that offers the potential for reimagining the governance and practice of itself and of other institutions.

Following Adorno, Neary centres a ruthless, negative critique – the negation of the negation. The priority is not to describe a movement of sublation, transcending, or communising, but rather to show how opportunities for co-operative creation, dissolution and conversion emerge from the vortices of energy generated by the contradictions in the production, circulation and accumulation of value. These are our moments of possibility, and as such he makes next to no mention of sublation or *Aufhebung* or *aufheben* in his work. Instead, he describes projects that are in-and-against the vortex of value, or its social universe, rather than pointing to a universe that lies beyond capitalist valorisation once labour has been abolished.

That work is for later, once his value-form theory has been made concrete in the University, and once moments of conversion, dissolution or creation have been sketched against *both* the archaeology of academic work *and* a terrain shaped by austerity and global emergencies. Accepting this, we must revisit his work in revolutionary pedagogy, *avant-garde* teaching, the SSC, and the Co-operative University as ways of attempting to re-purpose capital's intention to dissolve the concrete materiality of the University. Neary's radical projects had antecedents in

the struggles of movements for working class education and co-operativism, and especially May '68, but they were grounded in a period where unconscionable vandalism and the war on professors had revealed a lack of class solidarity across HE. So, in sitting with Neary's praxis, the work of conversion, dissolution, creation, demands a weaving of alternative modes of life, against-and-beyond value.

3. Weaving life beyond value

The student-worker alliances emerging in the later 1960s in Europe, enable us to think about the ways in which the University might be woven into a new tapestry. Those alliances have been described as a response to Capital's reimagining of working conditions, alongside global antagonisms against coloniality, and struggles for agency from the streets (Amorós, 2017). Focused upon a rejection of a particular conception of life, this was infused for some with class struggle and a new ideation of the proletariat, and for others with situational intent that refused the power of *both* the commodity *and* vanguards in structuring life.

A set of political and cultural re-imaginings might be inferred from May '68 and speak to an idea of relational diffusion across nations, and between sectors of the economy (Mansour, 2022). In this relational diffusion, shared frames of inspiration and action emerged, supporting the legitimization of particular praxis across social movements. There is the potential to use cross-sector solidarity, and the potential for alternative forms of student-worker engagement, or ways of knowing how to live in and produce the world, to describe alternatives. These alternatives, generated concretely in England, France, the USA, wherever, contain a richer potentiality for social transformation where there is the ability to bridge been movements and struggles in communities.

By weaving intercommunal, intergenerational and intersectional struggles, in factories, in the University, and in society, there is the possibility for ‘creating a sense of unity and common purpose to enable workers and students to join forces’ (*ibid.*). The diffusion of tactics, the creation of student-worker committees to coordinate action, solidarity actions across trade unions (including student unions), and ongoing occupation and strike action, enables a new approach to direct and radical action to be woven. For Mansour (*ibid.*), given ‘the active construction of meaning by adopters, the diffused items often take on a life of their own, once transplanted and adapted to their new contexts.’

Here, I am taken with the concept of weaving articulated by The Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA, n.d.). I read this as an articulation of intercommunal, intergenerational and intersectional forms (networks, communities or institutions), which connect through a ‘collective process of some kind’, grounded in ‘dialogue, interconnection, collaboration and solidarity’. (*ibid.*) Weaving articulates ‘radical or transformative alternatives’ that help make new paths, through: a pluralistic refusal of ideological and hegemonic normalisations of identity and power; enriching and weaving local, radically democratic alternatives through decoloniality and interdependence; an anti-capitalist intentionality that refuses the mediation of life by the market and the State, and instead welcomes regeneration and care; and, breaking with the culture of anthropocentrism, by weaving the human back into nature in an integral, rather than an extractive way.

This appreciation of weaving surfaces the operating principles for a renewal of life. The point is to generate a new tapestry as an unfolding activity against-and-beyond capitalism. Requiring no blueprint or settled pattern, the very act of weaving alternatives frames alternative modes of doing, knowing and being in the world diffused across multiple contexts of struggle. It offers a way

of dissolving the capitalist forms that mediate life and re-purpose it as alienated labour, including the forms that intellectual life take inside the University.

In the context of weaving an intellectual renewal of life, students feel central to our connected struggles. We see this in Thompson's (1970) commentary on the 'Warwick Files affair', following a student occupation of the academic registry at Warwick University in 1970. Thompson (*ibid.*, 146) emphasised the place of connections across the 'international movement of student 'militancy' and revolt', pushing 'demands for student control over the student social environment, greater student participation at all levels of decision-making'. He also pushed for more direct and radical democracy inside those organisations, away from Senate and professorial, academic staff. The focus (*ibid.*, 147) should be demands for 'a new seriousness of intention in exploring new modes of relationship between the academic and the civil communities.'

Thompson was far from uncritical of students, either those he described as Maoist, or those who occupied a less politicised, more soporific sense of engagement inside the institution. However, in the case of the Warwick occupation, he (*ibid.*, 155) argued that 'students share certain qualities of "negativity" which, at the simplest level, are an important corrective within university structures.' Students tend to have less skin in the game, in relation to the politics of prestige and privilege within universities, or the struggle for position that drives institutional, political intrigue.

Mindful of Warwick's recent incorporation following the expansion of English HE after the Robbins Report in the 1960s, Thompson (*ibid.*, 164) closes by noting that 'the very pressures of this new institutionally centred society make for peculiarly intense institutional conflicts, [and] peculiarly obsessive internal confrontations.' Such confrontations test the viability of

solidarity across an increasingly fragmented class of academic labourers. Yet, the struggle to weave solidarity with students who are attempting, radically and democratically, to hold the institution and those with privilege inside to account, is crucial. This is more than a struggle for a particular university to become 'a good, technologically well-equipped and intellectually alert, self-governing community'; at its heart, it becomes a wider, social 'index of the vitality of democratic process' (*ibid.*).

This may be asking a lot of students in occupation, but it signals how a range of student-worker alliances and associations (May '68, in occupations, in Gaza encampments) reflect back to us the tapestry of social forms that we have woven with our alienated labour. At the time of student occupations and the Occupy! movement, the University for Strategic Optimism (2011, 12) echoed this:

students are more numerous, this is their strength. Gang up, conspire, work together, don't kick each other down. Engage, teach, learn amongst each other, challenge seminar egos. Make hierarchy subordinate to friendship... Safety in numbers. There may be a determined mastery of the student by the teacher, but this, wherever possible, should be broken. Only in this way is learning to become possible within the university.

We might add that only in this way can learning become possible beyond the University, if we can emancipate ourselves from the idea that the University must be the sole or primary locus of our intellectuality. This reminds us of the need to re-engage, dialectically, in the unfolding relationship between 'social being and social consciousness' (Thompson 1965, 351). Here, heart feels very important in centring the process of weaving as an active process of re-comprehending the world through dignity,

alongside work that is full of care and soul. This is an associative activity that does not ‘reduce class to an identity’ because to do so ‘is to forget exactly where agency lies, not in class but in men.’ (*ibid.*, 358)

3.1 Checking-in with heart

Marcos (2004, 269) speaks of indigenous struggle in relation to resisting the demands of the State that we accept an alien form of life. He writes of the importance of:

a word that is lived with the heart, a word that is felt deep inside your chest and that makes men and women proud of belonging to the human race. This word is DIGNITY. Respect for ourselves, for our right to be better, for our right to struggle for what you believe in, for our right to live and die according to our ideals. Dignity cannot be studied; you live it, or it dies. It aches inside and teaches you how to walk. Dignity is that motherland but has no borders and that we often forget.

I wonder how I can recompose myself or weave myself anew, beyond the social universe of value, and the institutional forms that it desires, which impose separation and commodification. Can I weave a new wholeness of self, ‘unified rather than fragmented, healed rather than ruptured, full of heart rather than heart-broken?’ (Hall, 2018, 262)

This feels like it is the work of transcending the University-ego, to consider the possibility that in dissolving myself and transcending (through negating and abolishing) my role, I will have become something more full of heart. This is not the struggle for a utopia, although it might appear utopian. It is the return of the future, against a future that feels full of repression and alienation as it is currently imagined.

As a dream of wholeness, dignity has to pass through this world that we have created, with all its horrors (of Gaza and more), and its pains (of restructuring and more), and its toxicity (of endless extraction), to understand why I am this person, and who else I might be, know and do. My dream of wholeness desires that the conditions of my current path are decomposed or dissolved, such that our world might more authentically touch our collective desires and be re-woven with them.

I think of dissolving myself and my role, through the sublation of the University. This is also the negation, abolition and transcending of the non-University – those spaces and places and communities regarded as a non-intellectual Other. Dissolving is thus a process of mourning the possibility of a return to some nostalgic and fantasised time and space, labelled as good or golden, and irretrievably lost. It is mourning the possibility for solutionism, and in the process, it contains the potential for resolution.

Our spaces for mourning and resolution, for decomposing and dissolving are plural and everywhere. They lie in the Black, fugitive planning of the Undercommons, in the social science centres, occupations and encampments, and in our memories of the squares. These offer up images of a plurality of worlds, as a refusal to consent to this one, which can only offer us foreclosure, repression, dissonance, and the violence of settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal objectivity. I want us to broaden this, to encompass spaces for saying no and refusing the wrongness of this world, germinated inside our universities.

The dissolution of the universities and of ourselves as we are woven into HE's toxic operating system, is the event horizon of intellectuality in society. It is the future space-time that refuses value's imperative that we cannibalise and are cannibalised in return. As we dream this future space-time, we might reimagine the event horizon, not as the Black Hole that will pull us to

pieces, rather as that which will catalyse the heat death of the social universe of value, *as all that is solid melts into air*.

And if we are to escape the gravitational pull of coloniality and patriarchy and whiteness, as they are reproduced as value's social universe, we must accept that there can be no reset. There is no way out but through, and no way to do this but with our neighbours, and by learning skills, and by pooling tools, and by abolishing debts. We do this collectively, as an act of love and care, signalling mutuality across difference, because we are careworn and exhausted. We do this collectively, as an act of humility that refuses our institutional, asymmetrical relationships – those that make concrete the ways in which our institutions parasitise us, such that we become value's host.

The urgency is to dream again, with ancestors and kin, and across ecologies and species. To dream against our archetypes of the University and the roles it unfolds.

To dream from where we are.

4. From where we are

Luxemburg (1903) had faith that a dialectical method, uncovered and unfolded in communities, would enable 'the social human' to move from the realm of necessity to that of freedom. In her own moment, this was to be enacted through the German Social Democratic Party and international movements of workers. It could not be enacted through the work of 'ambitious, modern professors', who write 'the thickest volumes... at large-scale capitalist, machine-like speed.' These volumes, 'such diligent monographs', either: first, focus upon 'small, fragmented phenomena' that cannot build 'broader connections' and instead simply work for 'daily needs'; or second, offer superficial, theoretical engagements 'that are hidden under overloaded tinsel ornaments that appeal to the taste associated with commodities of the "modern" bazaar.'

Yet, if intellectuality is to be reimagined away from institutions being vandalised, or away from professors as producers of fragmented phenomena, or indeed as the enemy, we might usefully ask, against what are we struggling? It feels like we are required to dream or build or reimagine a world away from any one of a number of monsters: a transnational network or association governed for value by capital, reinforced vengefully through authoritarian policy and regulation; an institution coerced into the commodification of intellectuality, as knowledge transfer and exchange, commercialisation and spillover; and reactionary whiteness, which is degrading work for all, through masochism, frustrated nationalism, and austerity politics. These monsters remind us that, all too often, the wage cannot define resistance, although a rage against the rule of money, the wage and indebtedness might form one strand.

In response to these, Neary (2024d, 84) was ‘gripped by my fear of failure’, a fantastical ‘fear of the future, which always appears as unemployment, poverty and debt.’ His response, *pace* Postone (2003, 106) is to refuse ‘the appropriation of history’, and to ‘begin thinking a future without betraying the past’ (*ibid.*). We begin from ‘this basis that we must learn how to respond and react to brutal state violence, before we are completely overwhelmed’ (Neary, 2024d, 96).

Neary stressed that we do this work of learning in common, as a way of thinking beyond State and market, and beyond idealisations of public and private education. The point is to open-out categories of impact, entrepreneurship or excellence as they apply to learner, teacher, researcher, professional services staff, and to reimagine these things beyond the ways in which they are conceptualised, in policy and practice. So, practical projects need to generate theory and practice, beyond fetishised conceptions of public and private, so that we reject these as our grounds. Instead, ‘it is important to ground that theory in the

everyday practice of teachers and students in universities. These relationships are not simply about enhancing quality and the student experience, but they are always deeply political' (Neary 2012, 148). The political, and the organisation of the political, have to be related to the production of knowledge.

One risk is that our politics will collapse back into the organisation and solutionism of the University; a second is the potential for continued fetishisation of knowledge production. However, bringing knowledge production (or, potentially, ways of knowing the world differently), into relation with political organisation, means that any debate around the future forms or trajectories for the University is then brought into relation with 'a much broader analysis of the relationship between the market and the state' (*ibid.*, 149). Each of these categories, market, state, university, are open for critique as interrelated nodes that work to shape human sociability and intellectuality for-value. For Neary (*ibid.*, 150), the focus must be upon the reappropriation of knowledge and science, such that intellectual activity or intellectuality flows beyond the form of institutional HE, to become 'knowledge of the level of society, or the knowing society.'

In a world of global emergencies, where our institutions are an expression of those emergencies, our grounds for dissolving, transcending and weaving beyond, cannot begin from a struggle for a more progressive State or university. The reappropriation and reproduction of the science of History by humans, directed towards a new mode of sociability, is the project: 'to re-compose the university so that it becomes not another form of political regulation but a new form of radical political science' (*ibid.*, 151). Our capitalist institutions cannot resolve contradictions, rather they simply act for the bourgeoisie in its struggle to overcome contradictions and barriers in production.

In Neary's (2012, 163) conception of teaching in public, praxis must include activity beyond the University of knowledge, as an

institutional form of the capital-relation. Instead, it unfolds as a new social form, ‘in a grounded notion of the knowing society’. This expresses ‘the limit of what we know about ourselves as a society, that is knowledge at the level of society, with the capacity to expand what we know as science... limited only by our own capacity and our need to know.’ (*ibid.*) Our mass intellectuality overflows the grounds of our ontological imagination, for instance categorised as public/private HE. These sterile grounds for germinating a knowing society leave us unable to confront global emergencies and must be abolished.

4.1 Against where they are

In *The Techno-Optimist Manifesto*, Andreessen (2023) articulates this knowing society in relation to the market economy: ‘We believe the market economy is a discovery machine, a form of intelligence – an exploratory, evolutionary, adaptive system.’ Squeezing out love, and predicating care upon the market and growth enacted at scale through technology and innovation, and a desire to make all machines work for humans, Andreessen (*ibid.*) issues a rallying call for Nick Land’s ‘techno-capital machine, the engine of perpetual material creation, growth, and abundance.’ By releasing the power of nuclear fission, and working intensively towards nuclear fusion, unbounded energy might be woven with intelligence, and in particular with ‘*Augmented Intelligence*’ whereby:

intelligent machines augment intelligent humans, driving a geometric expansion of what *humans* can do. We believe Augmented Intelligence drives marginal productivity which drives wage growth which drives demand which drives the creation of new supply... with no upper bound. (*ibid.*)

The manifesto points towards the kinds of authoritarian, techno-realist futures articulated in the NRx agenda, in the focus upon unbounded energy, unlimited speech and action, unfettered marketisation, solutionism, the idea of the Superman, and so on (McQuillan 2022). In opposition to critiques of data coloniality and the use of AI to enforce that agenda (Tierra Común, n.d.), alongside desires for endless growth (Smil, 2019), it speaks to a disregard for consequences, a refusal to engage with social conditions and structures, or issues of collective, democratic decision-making. It is one outcome of a sedimentation of brutal, global, social relations, reinforced by the idea that:

Our enemy is the ivory tower, the know-it-all credentialed expert worldview, indulging in abstract theories, luxury beliefs, social engineering, disconnected from the real world, delusional, unelected, and unaccountable – playing God with everyone else’s lives, with total insulation from the consequences. (Andreessen, 2023)

The Manifesto signals a reckoning. It signals an alternative sense of being, doing and knowing afresh, from a very different sense of where we are. In a struggle with existing institutions, and wishing to overflow those to push a particular conception of abundance, there is no reconceptualisation of social struggle as a liberation of mass intellectuality. Instead, its prioritisation of a particular conception of the human is simply likely to make us bear witness to yet more pain and suffering.

Yet, in our reimagining of the dissolution of the universities, or in sublating the world as-is, or in communising the future, there is a need to identify ways of knowing the world that respond to these agendas, alongside those that might be categorised as disaster nationalism (Seymour, 2024). Our reimagining needs

to find ways of confronting our own complicity, for instance in Gaza, and at the same time of refusing techno-solutionist narratives that push particular, hegemonic forms of identity. Our reimagining has to find ways of integrating issues of identity, and refusing the idea that white men are being cancelled or feminised. Our reimagining must find ways of counteracting fears of the Other, at a time of global emergency, in particular in relation to the perceived threat of Muslim communities and migrants, and the realities of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Our reimagining must find solid ground away from the violence and vengeance promised by techno-optimists and the far right.

Our knowing society, or our renewed ways of knowing the world, demand forms of mass intellectuality that refuse the fantasies offered by those who would act as supermen (politically and technologically). They demand meaningful, democratic discussion of how we have arrived at this place, where our structural conditions are enabling the destruction of the planet, through austerity, militarisation and state-sanctioned coloniality (*ibid.*). Can we recognise how the University that we reproduce also contributes energy to this triad, and supports disaster nationalism, alongside new instantiations of settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal violence? Can we see how our liberal fantasies and ideations, including the University, are ‘not fascism’s antidote, but rather its conditions of possibility’ (Lowe, 2024)?

This means reconciling ourselves with the reality that, in the global North, there can be no way out through trade union organising against the violence of the state, or an apolitical, desperate hope for a better Vice Chancellor, or sector leader, or Secretary of State for Education, or Prime Minister. The lack of any meaningful sectoral response to the treatment of student protesters in 2010, or of students in Gaza encampments is evidence enough of this limited horizon for change. Neither our

institutions nor our labour organisations are able to help us build a militant intellectuality at the level of society.

It becomes crucial that we seek to analyse the grounds of our struggle, for weaving life beyond value, not simply in relation to intellectual activity, but as an emotional and psychological and embodied mode of knowing. For Nail (2020) this is a kinetic communism: a dissolution of the separation between the metabolism of nature, human metabolism with nature, and social metabolism. It is the dissolution of settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy, as they are reproduced in and through our institutions as capitalist social forms.

In a world awash with anger, feelings of vengeance and punishment, othering and resentment, how we define our unfolding demands a dissolving of what we know and how we feel and to whom we relate (Traverso 2017). In a precarious existence, conditioned through anxiety by capitalist social relations, which seemingly subsume all of life (Hall and Bowles, 2016), knowing why we feel as we do is a first step away from the mess.

In dialogue we must discuss where we do this work, and how we dissolve those social forms that can never enable a full realisation of our humanity, because they are too tied into circuits of coloniality. The social forms of our intellectual work are too tied to the reproduction of borders, around knowledge, nations, resources, people. As eco-fascists, tech-bros and the far-right define a world of supermen controlling borders in the name of hegemony, our understanding of where we are has to reflect how we have created an illusion of life. It has to begin from a desire to transcend the world we have created, and to dissolve the institutions and the work that we have fetishised. Otherwise, we have no hope that we might recognise that we now live in a dying civilisation (Seymour, 2024), and that it must be abolished.

4

this kaleidoscope must be smashed

We have to move this country in a new direction, to change the way we look at things, to create a wholly new attitude of mind. Can it be done? (Margaret Thatcher 1979)

what crisis-fighting and technological fixes all too rarely do is address the underlying trends. The more successful we are at coping, the more the tension builds. If you have found the past few years stressful and disorientating, if your life has already been disrupted, it is time to brace. Our tightrope walk with no end is only going to become more precarious and nerve-racking. (Adam Tooze 2022)

We are living off expired or expiring stories. Stories that expire can no longer dance with you. They are lethargic or stuck, they can't move things in generative ways any more, but we often feel we cannot let them go. (Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti 2021)

1. Dissolution imposed financially

The Frankfurt School critical theorist Walter Benjamin was especially important for Mike Neary, in both his theoretical and practical work. Neary was interested in Benjamin's focus upon *where* production occurs within capitalist social relations and *how* it shapes both commodities and processes of commodification, culturally. Following Benjamin, Neary was interested in how the classroom and pedagogic practices might be reformed or resolved

in new ways, by engaging audiences, like students. This was at the heart of the kinetic energy of student-as-producer, which centred democratic, radical attempts to reimagine the world (or the University).

As the politicisation of how students produce their lifeworld beyond the commodity, student-as-producer is a way of confronting the narratives of human capital that dominated the HE environment in the 2000s and 2010s. Holding the potential of this feels especially important where resistance from the position of intellectual labour appears increasingly futile. Futility is a function of powerlessness and hopelessness in confronting the (il)logic of finance capital, which has left the sector facing ‘a looming crisis’ (House of Lords 2023, 3; see also the National Audit Office (NAO) 2022; OfS 2025; Public Accounts Committee (PAC) 2023).

Discussing the financialisation of HE, and the marketisation that is immanent to it, McGettigan (2015) built on his significant body of analysis (see, for instance, McGettigan 2011, 2012, 2014) to identify how the unfolding political economy of HE was being reshaped around more fluid access to what was termed variable human capital. McGettigan argued that English universities were on the cusp of something more profound, rooted in a new policy framework inside which the practices of teaching and learning can be disassembled, commodified and traded/exchanged. This sought to turn the culture of HE towards entrepreneurialism, commercialisation and social mobility, by anchoring its grounds in institutional and individual debt.

Such debts would trigger choices around the dispersal of resources to institutions that are governed and regulated against performance management and measurement. This would bring the relationships that emerge in the classroom and within families into stark, asymmetrical relation to the market, divisions of labour, private property, and commodity exchange. Pivoting

from this, excellence frameworks which measure teaching, research and knowledge exchange collapse educational relations of production around the need to generate value. Thus, what happens inside the classroom, laboratory or studio becomes a particular, societal concern flowing from the governance and regulation of individual universities and the sector against value-for-money. McGettigan (2014) sensed:

We are on the cusp of something more profound than is indicated by debates around the headline fee level; institutions and sector could make moves that will be difficult, if not impossible, to undo, whether it is negotiated independence for the elite or shedding charitable status the better to access private finance.

One appearance of this is the fetishisation of human capital as a category that subsumes human identities as they are shaped through classroom values and relations. This tends to hide the dehumanising logics that unfold where the skills, knowledges and capabilities developed in the classroom, laboratory, studio, wherever, are privatised and commercialised, amplifying ontological precarity as intellectual labour is objectified. Such objectification emerges immanent to a reification of value-for-money and student outcomes. Grounded in employability and the ability to pay down one's debts as a means of accessing social rights, the idea of HE as a personalised and positional good to be consumed, takes hold.

It is against this background that the elision of labour and human capital emerges from within superficial analyses of the work of the University. At the same time there is an ignorance of the centrality of the human commodity, labour-power, in extending value creation as an inhuman activity. Overcoming the ways in which these terms collapse into each other requires

individuals, acting collectively: to move beyond the ways in which their identities are reified as excellent teacher, impactful researcher, first-class student, and so on; and, to reveal their exploitation as unequal bearers of labour-power.

Rikowski (2003, 144, 145) reminds us of the importance of labour-power as incorporating 'the attitudes and personality traits essential for effective performance within the labour process', which then renews the 'substance of the social universe of capital [value]'. So, educators, professional services staff and students, along with their families and networks, are 'trapped within a labyrinth bounded by the margins of capital's universe' (*ibid.*, 145) because: first, in order to put food on the table and pay down one's rent, there is a need to appear useful; and second, it is easier to practice a dissonance of the heart and mind, and accept one's reproduction as human capital.

In Rikowski's (*ibid.*) argument, 'to destroy this social universe for human liberation, it must be *imploded*. The best place to begin this project is with a critique of the strange, living commodity, labour-power.' The struggle to sublimate labour-power is a struggle to release human social capacities to organise the world beyond value-production. The alternative is an ongoing, unfolding commodification of life. However, we have to begin by recognising how our skills, knowledges and capabilities as labour-power, *both* animate use-values (or means of production) so that they might be exchanged, *and* are always at-risk of being taken from us and instantiated inside machines in capital's desire to annihilate labour. The conflicting desire for enriched labour-power, whilst also seeking to cheapen it as an input into production, is live across HE. Reducing it to human capital denies its underlying, alienating reality.

McGettigan (2015) highlighted the importance of the 2015 Small Business, Enterprise and Employability Act in developing a culture of debt-driven, human capital. Section Six of the Bill,

‘Education Evaluation’, argued for measures designed ‘to create an incentive and reward structure at universities by distinguishing the universities that are delivering the strongest enterprise ethos and labour market outcomes for their students’ (HM Government 2015). The desire was to link a range of data, including records about student performance to national tax records, to provide a potentially richer pool of information about the value of a degree. The production of a university life would increasingly be kettled by financialised, indebted and data-driven conditions.

Such measures were deepened across the terrain of English HE by an activist ecosystem of policymakers, educational consultancies, private equity, venture capital, educational technology vendors and publishers, and so on, seeking to extract rents from institutions and sector organisations, encouraged by lobbyists, and with the ear of vice-chancellors. Those vice-chancellors are themselves conditioned by the treadmill compulsion to maintain competitive edge, or at least to maintain the viability of their institutions inside a sector regulated around competition and value-for-money. Here, data-driven decision-making, catalysed through discourses set in terms of financial viability, underscores a desire to generate information that develops ‘our understanding of student learning’, and as a result to shape ‘ongoing debates about the quality and impact of higher education, and how we evidence the value of investment in it’ (McGrath *et al.* 2015).

The liberation expressed here is for capital in setting free skills, knowledges and capabilities, predicated upon the exploitation of intellectual labour-power in the production of socially-useful commodities. Whilst political economic categories like labour and labour-power define this liberation for capital, its system hides the alienating realities of those behind ideations of student outcomes, knowledge transfer, research impact and so on. These offer superficial narratives of the value of

HE to society, which: prioritise an idea of intellectual work as generating positional, marketable, individual and social goods (Stern 2024); or, emphasise that HE should ‘demonstrate that, in return for the increased investment that we are asking students to make, they deliver the very best outcomes both for those students and for the country’ (Phillipson 2025a). These narratives reshape our appreciation of risk and become the stated limits of a productive life (as the only kind that is meaningful), conditioned by ongoing, structural crises of the economy, which morph in relation to the pressures of geopolitics, war, migration, environmental emergency, and so on.

As a result, a dialectical unfolding of the University is resolved in the restructuring of learning, teaching and scholarship, against the desires of finance capital. Structurally, academic work is repurposed in response to the realities of financialisation, which drives renewed commodification as a response to crisis, resolving the design, delivery and assessment of the curriculum (and research) for exchange. Crisis catalyses these processes, amplified technologically, as a means to produce/capture/use data to commodify every classroom, laboratory, workshop, studio, community asset that finance can reach into. It does so by measuring learning outcomes, curriculum delivery systems, progression data, assessments, and so on. The idea is to reduce risk across an ecosystem, by extracting rents and values from institutional revenue streams, or by capitalising institutional access to debt.

2. Ideological antecedents: back to the future

The historical context for this leads us back to the relationships between the government, education institutions, and both individuals and their families, which were highlighted by Friedman (1955) in *The Role for Government in Education*:

[Education is] a form of investment in human capital precisely analogous to investment in machinery, buildings, or other forms of non-human capital. Its function is to raise the economic productivity of the human being. If it does so, the individual is rewarded in a free enterprise society by receiving a higher return for his services.

This opened-out an issue of the role and social use of institutions.

The subsidization of institutions rather than of people has led to an indiscriminate subsidization of whatever activities it is appropriate for such institutions to undertake, rather than of activities it is appropriate for the state to subsidise. The problem is not primarily that we are spending too little money... but that we are getting so little per dollar spent. (*ibid.*)

Indiscriminate subsidisation was live almost 60 years later for the former UK Universities and Science Minister, David Willetts (2013, 47): '[w]ithout radical changes to how universities were financed however it was going to be difficult to change their behaviour. Now there is an opportunity to use our funding changes to push a real cultural change back towards teaching.'

McGettigan (2015) was clear that this issue of behaviour change, entangled with realities of return on investment, became a critical point in re-structuring English HE. Funding changes threatened to dissolve individual institutions, or at least their identities, around individual student investment decisions. As the new system took root new issues arose, pointing to ongoing mis-investment by universities, or overinvestment in subjects that contribute little to human capital enrichment. These included: 'the government... not getting the maximum from borrowers or from universities' (which were using tuition fees to subsidise other activities like research); the standardisation of fees across all

subjects, regardless of outcomes/value for students or society, or capital intensity; and ‘loan funding offered for subjects that do nothing to boost graduate productivity’ (*ibid.*, 5-6).

A decade later, Bridget Philipson (2025b), the Education Secretary, re-presented the argument by insisting that ‘[w]e must squeeze every last drop of value out of every last pound of funding’, and this time ‘technology will lead the way.’ The ideation of technology, and in particular AI, as a means of driving economic efficiencies, was to shape the realisation of the ideological terrain of value, in the management of the classroom, studio, library, laboratory, and so on. This was reiterated socially through the *Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and OpenAI on AI opportunities* (DSIT 2025c), and was then normalised through research funding council strategies.

Financialisation provides the energy to enable a new technocratic metabolism to evolve across HE, as a form of mycorrhizal network with deep connections between finance capital and social institutions like universities. As the University comes to exist in response to shifting desires, protocols and the availability of financial nutrients and assets in a sector shaped by a crisis of resources, finance capital increasingly acts as a solvent for our ideas of the University as a bastion of progressive hopes and dreams, or as a library of liberal stories. Instead our attention turns towards discourses of efficiency, student outcomes and value-for-money.

The repurposing (dissolving and resolving) of HE by financial and intellectual hyphae tends to limit our horizon for re-imagination around ideas of the good University or academic freedom, or to questions of what are universities for? Yet, all the while, the institution is being resolved through a new symbiotic relationship with society, which reproduces it against the sensibilities of money and the market: governed by the production of academic services as commodities; serviced by

increasingly precarious forms of labour locked within hierarchies and divisions that are governed by a punitive, professional and managerial class; and, conditioned by intellectual work as private property, positioned for-value.

This does not predicate the form of the institution upon a single type, rather it comes to exist in a range of hybrid forms, as social and financial crises force institutional leaders to reconsider how their universities and colleges represent themselves in order to survive. They are forced to dissolve themselves as they are, to resolve their potential for survival, over and over again. Missions and visions supply the appearance of the institution, but it remains shaped by access to debt, local and global collaborations and partnerships, and differential access to social, financial and intellectual capital based on material history. This drives the treadmill of competition, and even an idea of radical collaboration, which might enable national sectors to compete internationally, or networks of universities to compete with each other.

...

Linking finance capital to ideas of educational opportunity, equality and freedom, alongside individual rights, has had a long gestation. Friedman (1955) pointed to 'the free choice of individuals [that] would tend to produce the optimum amount of investment', and that 'to have government engage in equity investment in human beings' would free up capital at the level of society, in order to challenge inequality of opportunity. He (*ibid.*) believed that this required information beyond historical aggregates (for instance, of existing earnings in particular vocations), which 'should in principle vary from individual to individual in accordance with any differences in expected earning capacity that can be predicted in advance'. Friedman (*ibid.*) wanted institutions to have more nuanced information, so that decisions (akin to those around 'varying life insurance

premia' across groups) 'could be developed on a private basis'. The institutions he focused upon were searching for investments, and represent those tied together in our current financialised networks: finance capital; non-profit institutions such as private foundations; and individual universities and colleges.

For Friedman (*ibid.*) established institutions were sanctuaries for ossified forms of wealth and privilege, to be reimagined through more fluid forms of economic activity that 'would bring a healthy increase in the variety of educational institutions available and in competition among them.' (*ibid.*) Education as a private good would generate innovation at the level of society, through the dispersal of training and development as commodities. The Government would then serve 'its proper function of improving the operation of the invisible hand without substituting the dead hand of bureaucracy.' (*ibid.*)

Friedman is important because he sets an agenda for educational reproduction following the Second World War, shaped against austerity and regeneration, alongside the realities of geopolitics and the Cold War. He reminds us that our current institutional crises have a longevity within a deeper terrain of capitalist crises of economic growth and geopolitical emergency. These catalysed anxieties around the meaning and purpose of educational provision after 1945 just as they do today, and through his work with George Stigler in the Chicago School of Economics, Friedman provided an ideological refutation of Keynesianism, generating energy for a new, allegedly more rational, form of social metabolism.

In the current English context, where the hyphae of finance capital are enriched through an ideological repositioning of governance, regulation and funding, one outcome is institutional anxiety over survival. This is often framed as sustainability, and rarely as stewardship. In its Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce Report, *Towards a New Era of Collaboration*, UUK

(2025, 25) noted that ‘the clear financial imperatives... [and] the immediate actions they had taken in response to financial challenges... are ultimately unsustainable.’ Instead, ‘bolder transformation, backed by sustained government funding and support’ is the only way to maintain ‘student choice, and on the economic and social impact of higher education and the strength of the UK research base.’ (*ibid.*) As access to resources is foreclosed, through an unwillingness to increase fees and a refusal to bailout institutions on terms that do not favour the market, sector-level groups are forced to make clear how their responses protect the value accruing to students and taxpayers.

UUK (*ibid.*, 16) accepts the normalisation of: a decline in investment in teaching and research; the impact of economic shocks and inflationary pressures on costs; changes in policy and regulation, framing ‘a deliberate shift towards a more competitive environment, which can mitigate against collaboration’; and, long-term change programmes and ‘significant cuts’ to estates, student services and staffing. UUK (*ibid.*, 28) then acknowledges that ‘there is wide agreement that increased collaboration among universities and with other partners could create efficiencies, reduce costs and improve effectiveness.’ Whilst collaboration in digital transformation (including in purchasing, deploying and delivering services and infrastructure) is an idea that has traction, it is reinforced by a commitment to adopting common, sector-wide approaches to ‘assessing efficiency and benchmarking costs’ (*ibid.*). However, there is also a need by UUK and Government to support autonomous institutions ‘to take more of the individual action required’ and ‘to allow universities to go further, and faster’ (*ibid.*), including in developing particular ‘leadership skills in those mandated to deliver change and further improving governance’ (*ibid.*).

I am drawn back to the logics of The Manhattan Institute, adherents of the NRx movement, and the Final Mission

of McMahon's USDoE, in considering the unconscionable vandalism of the English context. We might witness this as financially-conditioned, intellectual hyphae dissolving and resolving an ecosystem, governed by a new social metabolism that normalises particular ideas of social utility and contribution to national wealth (as a stand-in for the common wealth). As the only rational and conceivable purpose of these institutions, to survive in this ecosystem institutions need: new leadership models ('with a particular focus required on transformation, turnaround and financial skills' (*ibid.*, 49)); new ways of benchmarking costs and driving efficiencies; and an acceptance of structural, cultural and practical transformation, for-value. Whichever metaphor we wish to work with, the University as-is (or as idealised) can be no more.

We witness this in countless briefings by finance capital about the need for an inefficient sector to capitalise on its core value propositions (see for Bain & Company, Harris *et al* 2012; Denneen and Dreter 2012; Krafft *et al.* 2023) Such desires (or demand-led needs) for institutional transformation are demonstrated in Bell *et al.*'s (2022) analysis of debt and indebtedness in UK HE. They highlight how the struggle for revenues has been conditioned by both costs and debt payments, alongside ongoing investment in physical capacity, rather than technical infrastructure. Whilst staff costs have increased, recovery has been predicated upon student recruitment, which is under increasing competitive and policy-based pressures. As a result, the indebtedness that lies at the heart of their analysis is catalysed, in their view, by short-termism, and individual short-sightedness.

Whilst Bell *et al.* (*ibid.*) suggest that leadership might instead demonstrate 'a real connection to the institution, aligning the risk profile and values of the individual and institution', they highlight that institutions are being repurposed inside an environment that is unforgiving in relation to debt-servicing

costs, increasing interest rates, and the weak potential for future borrowing on favourable terms for many. With rising inflation and stagnant fee levels, financial insecurity ‘is endemic across the whole sector.’ As a result, for those who work inside them, the brutal reality is that ‘[m]ajor transformation will not be achieved without changes in staffing structures, but these can only be properly explored once the necessary changes have been identified at institutional level’ (UUK 2025, 29).

Through the refrain of constant transformation, situated against an acceptance of the political and economic conditions of institutional reproduction, sector leaders appear to have foreclosed upon the idea that another university might be possible. They appear resolved to reproduce the sector in response to the desires of value, irrespective of the social, economic, political and environmental consequences. They appear resolved to the dissolution of the universities in the name of sustainability. Maybe this is just the way in which capitalist societies always renew the conditions of their own reproduction, dialectically.

3. Crisis and the idea of the University

Whilst the current shape of dissolution might be labelled *unconscionable vandalism*, McGettigan (2015, 8) highlights that those seeking to resist the privatisation of knowledge will be labelled as ‘vested interests’. In response, he calls for the root of the problem to be addressed: ‘the root is undergraduate study as a stratified, unequal, positional good dominating future opportunities and outcomes’, leveraged against loans and debt (*ibid.*, 8). Opposition demands ‘broader public support’ predicated upon a new vision of open and civic institutions (*ibid.*). Such a new vision or idea of the University reflects a new resolution or resolve, predicated upon an awakening of agency amongst intellectual workers.

Less the root than a set of symptoms of a deeper crisis of value, this demonstrates how the forces of capitalist social reproduction are ranged *both* asymmetrically *and* in authoritarian ways, against the everyday experiences of people. These experiences are materialised as individual, positional goods, like degree awards or professorships, or as communal goods, like civic universities. However, they are conditioned by vested interests, and through a richer, categorical analysis, we can analyse how they are shaped by social forces that are set in motion as metabolic energy from within the conditions of social reproduction and economic production.

Motion reveals the system's symptoms to us, and shapes the war on professors and unconscionable vandalism. These symptoms also give texture to Tooze's (2022) identification of modern life (and its material history) as a tale of progress by crisis-management (alongside improvisation, innovation and reform). We are exhausted by the seemingly never-ending attempt to avoid catastrophe, which feels like a 'tightrope walk with no end', such that our existence 'is only going to become more precarious and nerve-racking.' (*ibid.*) It feels like societies (and institutions) are on hyper-alert, facing a constant need to react or take a view on the latest (symptom of) crisis, or to look for distraction, elsewhere. The financial crisis of 2007 accelerated this, and ecosystems and identities and economies feel more and more fragile and friable: the result is exhaustion (of lives and ways of living).

For those who inhabit the University, where idealisations of *what it once was* remain cherished, and where fantasies (fetishes) of a renewed place for intellectual living emerge, getting to the root of the crisis matters. So doing requires collective struggle beyond attempts to generate moral power from reasoned argument about their own worth, inside a system of alienated-labour. In a later piece, Tooze (2024) wrote of how parochial concerns tend to set 'a low bar', disabling actors from connecting

their own grievances to a wider, social terrain. He argued that privilege ‘settles down to live with polycrisis on its doorstep’, because those with privilege are unable to organise a reimagining, or to organise for a shared reimagining of our social institutions and the conditions of their reproduction.

Privilege settling down reflects a lack of meaningful (negative) critique (of capitalism and university life). As a result, no framing of alternatives can be made possible (as forms of anti-capitalist intellectual activity), and no directional demands can be stated (such as off-ramps away from debt-driven degrees as a positional good, or the convergence of access to intellectual resources in tandem with other social goods). Instead, there is a tendency to waste energy on distractions (disturbances): either, in the forces of intellectual production, like the impact of AI on student outcomes or freedom of speech; or, in the relations of intellectual production, like the personalisation of the student experience or the implications of government migration policy on international students and staff. These are never situated against their place in a wider and deeper field of exploitation, or negative emotional energy (distrust of the Other), in order to broaden solidarity in struggle beyond a single issue, or a single place.

A generative response is to embrace Moten’s (2017, 2018a, 2018b) desire that we consent not to be a single being, in our response to crises, and in how we think about the University. The refusal of a one-sided life grounded in labour, where our labour-power defines us, and our identities become academic or student or technician or whomever, is unsettling (a process of refusing to settle). To refuse a settling process might reveal the University-in-crisis as a museum or a mausoleum, and constructed as an anti-social space-time of whiteness. For Moten, this one-sidedness also contains ‘blackness’ [*sic.*] as central to its revelation. He (2017, 162) draws our attention to our multiplicity as beings across a richer ‘social field’, in which we consider who we are and how

we are in relation to specific enactments ‘of the marginality and minority that is the central and authentic feature of blackness understood as a general, generative principle of differentiation.’

So, how do our parochial concerns, constrained by the borders of our institutions-in-crisis, offer ways of reflecting on ‘difference in common’, and to build a renewed ‘common informality’? (*ibid.*) How do we understand the ways in which one-sided intellectual work, constructed to reproduce value, is enabled through the dialectical movement of white privilege and Blackness? This requires that we desire new, aesthetic and emotional relations, and do not settle. For Moten (*ibid.*, 197), this points to ‘our making and joining and renewal of the real assembly.’ Echoing the work of his teacher, Masao Miyoshi, Moten (*ibid.*, 189) is clear that the real assembly cannot emerge in isolation or on exclusive terms, i.e. from the perspective of white power and privilege. There is no way to inoculate oneself as a single being containing the characteristics of excellence, ‘as if it could successfully seal its autonomy’, inside a social universe that is always seeking to make the human redundant.

In the teeth of crisis, looking to the defence of the University, or to the good university, or to a better regulated university, or to the defence of the discipline, institution or academic freedom, are:

gestures of surrender and homage to the dominant in the hope that culture employees might be granted a share of the corporate profits. So-called global capitalism is a supremely exclusive version of Utopia, to which “intellectuals” ache to belong. (*ibid.*, 189-90)

We might also see such gestures as the hope that intellectuals or academic labourers or intellectual workers inside the University, might make compromise with the system. As crises of restructuring and repurposing (unconscionable vandalism),

and of authoritarian governance (the war on professors), deepen and widen, and as exhaustion takes hold, such labour forgets (if it ever knew) that there is no compromise with a system that inverts the world in front of our eyes, if we could only see. As the professional and managerial class invokes governing narratives of student experience and value-for-money, imposes governing regimes of excellence and efficiency, and then inflicts governing metrics of retention, impact and excellence, we miss that the human has been lost in commodification.

4. A dialectical unfolding of stories

The potential richness of human life, and its diversity of experience and ways of knowing, is forestalled, interrupted, displaced, and deconstructed, through the motion of capital's dialectic (Jameson 2017). This motion draws me back to a footnote at the beginning of Marx's (1867/2004, 493) discussion of machinery and modern industry:

[t]echnology reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations.

Marx pivots from technology but was not fetishising it – he was writing about labour and material production in the factory contexts of Nineteenth Century England and the place of machinery and organisation. He notes an unfolding set of relations often collapsed inside the relationship between forces and relations of production, but which allow an emergent, developmental story to appear. This appearance is predicated upon geographical, temporal and material realities that operate differentially across space and time. However, for Marx, there

is an ecological, or possibly even mycorrhizal, relationality connecting technology, human relations to nature, processes of production that structure labour, the reproduction of daily life, social relations, and mental conceptions.

The dialectic unfolds in space-time, across the universe of value, creating a differentially-experienced but integrated social reality of exploitation, expropriation and extraction. Movement appears hidden or its negative symptoms are accepted because the mental conceptions that frame our storytelling are enabled by: social melancholy (Oliver 2020); a loss of collective agency (Centeno *et al.* 2024); a willingness to accept or ignore settler-colonial narratives (Rice *et al.* 2020); an unnerving ontological fluidity in an age of authoritarian governance (Gonzalez Montero *et al.* 2024); fear of repression and pain (Yancy 2024); or whatever helps us sleep at night. The mental conceptions of the universities of the North are revealed, for instance, in responses to the very visible genocide in Gaza, and the pain of those who oppose it.

Forged from the piss and shit of settler-colonialism, these conceptions reflect the ways in which universities are driven by a compulsion to preserve their existence inside the social universe of value. Anchored in the power of the courts or the police, institutional responses push us towards the marginalisation of protest or singling out individual protesters. They emerge immanent to an ongoing, academic engagement in partnerships and research that enables securitisation and militarisation (Murphy 2021; Wind 2024). In defending this position, and in maintaining *both* a sense of order around debt-driven study *and* access to research funds driven by the logics of capital, those universities must refuse counter-narratives that call for divestments from genocide, dehumanisation, occupation, and environmental catastrophe. Such counter-narratives hold a mirror up to the ways in which the universities of the North collude in the reproduction of global emergencies and outsource

their impacts to the South.

In relation to the footnote above, the dialectical unfolding of our settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal universities also reveals an ecosystem of refusal: of potential, collective uses of technology for life, rather than war; to release nature from the impacts of genocidal ideation; of the possibility for a collective, material reproduction of the University, against precarity, overwork and anxiety; to reimagine socially-useful intellectual work in society, rather than to commodify and privatise it; and, of social relations governed by relational connections beyond money and debt. The University and its organisational forms, cultures and practices reveal and disclose specific relations, made concrete around particular stories of how intellectual work might unfold. Capital's dialectic unfolds this as an ecological totality, with a particular narrative of what the University should be, and its engagement with dissent should be analysed in terms of its complicated relationship to labour-power.

One way of confronting this, working with the idea of real assembly, or that the University might be reimaged as the real assembly, is to 'world' new stories, and in particular those stories that 'dance with you' (Andreotti 2021, xiv), and offer a new set of aesthetic and emotional registers. This cannot exist from within policy, new governance regimes and regulatory oversight, or by pushing us *Towards a New Era of Collaboration*. The stories told by power, in relation to crisis, cannot help us dance. They cannot help us heal, and they stop us from showing up, or showing up differently (*ibid.*, xxi).

As a result, when those who claim to lead our institutions and disciplines seek to make gestures of surrender and homage, they fail us as stewards, because their idea of the University remains unable to negate, abolish and transcend its shadow existence. They fail to see the story of the dialectic unfolding a new metabolism, through which existing social forms and practices are dissolved,

and they fail to see the dialectic unfolding a system that is itself, failing. Andreotti (*ibid.*, xxii) is quietly insistent that our role in the crisis (modernity) should be ‘to assist systems to die with grace, and to support people in the process of letting go – even when they are holding on for dear life to what is already gone.’

Holding on for dear life to what is already gone.

Gestures of surrender and homage to what is already gone.

Our idealisations of the University.

Certain stories, then, become full of meaning or meaningful, and the invisibility or denial of other stories labels them meaning-less. This is particularly the case where they lack apparent neutrality and objectivity, defined against hegemonic disciplinary and social norms. These norms enable the grafting of modernity and its ontologies of coloniality through the ecosystem of roots that make up our society. For Robinson (2000, 9) dominant stories enabled the ‘historical development of world capitalism... influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism.’ Modernity and coloniality are thereby normalised intellectually and financially, and our horizon appears to be a given based upon reformist liberal conditionality (Ahenakew 2016). Yet, as Brown (2025) highlights, universities are deeply implicated in this, and in thinking about *both* reparations *and* Gaza, he notes that ‘institutions are unlikely to point the way to that better future, but the people they teach still might’.

4.1 The potentiality of Gaza encampments

For Turner (2024), the case of Palestine and the genocide in Gaza is one example of a dialectical unfolding of capital’s social universe, in relation to material ways in which the University and its practices reproduce settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal realities. He (*ibid.*) asks us to consider how, at times of crisis (and here, he reminds us of the anti-apartheid struggle in South

Africa), Western historiography is conditioned by erasure, theoretical absence, and historical mystification. He asks us to consider how the University of the global North, in its ongoing, contractual and intellectual investments in securitisation and militarisation, generates Palestine as ‘an internationalised terrain of struggle’, which it then seeks to make invisible or to deny, for instance in relation to student-led, Gaza encampments (Pervez 2025). Yet, these are key sites for the production of new stories, rich with potentiality.

As the dialectic plays out, revealing economic and financial struggles over investment and divestment, tensions over anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, the contradictions of freedom of speech and no-platforming, and in the ways in which institutions refuse to acknowledge the lived experiences of suffering amongst students and staff, an increasingly authoritarian terrain emerges. Gaza encampments illuminate each of these struggles, tensions and contradictions at the heart of the University. Following Turner (2024), they enable us to question how institutional responses relate to ‘the totality of class, race, colonialism and Imperialism in a single system of exploitation sustaining accumulation on a world-historical scale.’

Here, there is a call to acknowledge the toxic, settler-colonial core that underscores the reproduction of the modern-colonial University. It echoes the scream of No! from within the encampments, which is not simply a scream against complicity in genocide but is also a scream of solidarity. For Marcus and Franquesa (2024), student encampments on US campuses remind us that:

[t]his is a generational cohort facing a growing crisis of capitalism, increased inter-imperialist conflict, declining standards of living, an unprecedented rise in labour militancy, and rapidly growing subjective socialist consciousness.

In demonstrating the connection between settler-colonialism and genocide, and in calling-out institutions for their silence, erasure and complicity, those students appear in excess of themselves, simply as students. Yet, pointing to the production of institutions beyond genocide has to be made real beyond universities alone: '[s]tudent protest is always supremely vulnerable to repression in the absence of mobilisation by those who directly create social wealth and keep society running' (*ibid.*). We might usefully remind ourselves of this, because '[t]he repression we see at university campuses may start with students, but it ends with everyone that gets in the way of the Anglo-American-Israeli war machine.' (*ibid.*)

The war machine, in part, emerges dialectically at the intersection of ideological, financial, and colonial intentions to remake intellectual work in the service of value, be that by ignoring suffering (hidden behind partnerships, investments, pension funds) or by research and practice that perpetuates militarisation and securitisation. It is reproduced in the struggle between student encampments and university leadership, and the resulting unfolding of authoritarian governance not only conditions the horizon of struggle on campuses, but it also conditions the very being of students and staff. For Pervez (2025), in the UK:

[s]ilence enables containment; emotional labour absorbs the fallout; and gatekeeping ensures the boundaries remain intact. In doing so, UK higher education institutions perpetuate the very structures of exclusion that their public commitments to justice and decolonisation claim to dismantle. (*ibid.*)

The foreclosing of the possibility that we might be open in our hearts and minds to new stories (because capital denies us time

and space) is a reminder that for Andreotti (2021), the crisis of modernity is constituted by *denials*. We are in denial of: systemic, historic, ongoing violence and complicity; the limits of the planet and the unsustainability of our mode of social reproduction; our toxic entanglements; and, the magnitude and complexity of the problems we face together. The University, predicated upon alienated academic labour, is a recruiting ground 'to secure modernity's future', and whilst it might offer analyses of the problems of modernity, it offers no meaningful critique, as potential praxis (*ibid.*, 23).

Meaningful stories, pregnant with life, have to move us beyond seeking solutions and essentialising academic work, for instance through grand challenges that distract us with hopes for the future. We need stories that help us to face the complexities the crisis of modernity, as the realisation of reciprocity (Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF), n.d.) across an enriched circle of relations. Much of this work begins by decolonising the Self, and for the academic this means 'decentring, disarming and dethroning the ego', in part by disinvesting from the desires of modernity/coloniality (Andreotti 2021, 53-4). As we dismantle our ego-conceptions, we also consider what else is to be dissolved/resolved. We might perceive this as a process of hospicing as the old social forms and identities pass away, or of composting as those forms and identities rot away (*ibid.*).

Our engagement with transcending (through some form of sublation, or enriched dissolution), offers ways of imagining a new mycorrhizal network whose hyphae help us to extract goodness from the world that is leaving. This centres our engagement with, rather than our disassociation from the process of passing away. The problem is that, at present, our desires do not enable us to do this work, and we remain stuck in Tooze's (2022) dilemma of wishing to engineer or innovate ways to maintain a failing *status quo*. Following Andreotti (2021),

those desires might be reimagined, just as we reimagine the mycorrhizal networks of our lives as more authentically complex, plural, kinetic, entangled, and indeterminate. They might be reimagined as a new social field: the real assembly.

In these moments, the revelation of the human crisis in Gaza/Palestine, the response of management to Gaza encampments on campus, and the continuation of investment in militarised systems that are complicit in genocide show us the limits of the liberal University. These are limits that we also face in the stagnant, restructuring responses of the professional and managerial class to financial crisis, and the continued refusal to divest from fossil fuel addiction in institutional investments and research.

Yet, these are limits that also offer us an opening towards the sacred and the reciprocal.

4.2 Nothing is immutable

Jameson (2009, 3) observes that nothing is immutable in the rupturing of the dialectic, which ‘even in its Hegelian form, set out to inscribe time and change in our concepts themselves’. We might try to ignore contradiction and struggle but rather than any ‘longing for timelessness’, we are better served by ‘holding open of the place for possibility’ (*ibid.*, 3, 12). Whether we think about dialectical investigations: in relation to the totality of capitalist social relations (Lukács); emerging through contradiction (Mao); constituted in the negation of the negation (Dunayevskaya); as a new materialist, kinetic eruption of connectedness (Nail); or, in the rupture of internal relations in alienated labour (Ollman); Jameson (*ibid.*) centres the assumption that opposition (the not-this or non-identity) is a crucial starting point.

As will be seen, Neary’s position was sympathetic to those articulating the totality of capitalist social relations and the

autonomy of capital, as it is constituted from all relations within the social universe of value. Moreover, in his later years, his dialectical reasoning was increasingly influenced by the new materialism of Nail. Yet, in response to this quantum view of the dialectic, as a deeply interconnected field of space-time, I am reminded of how that field collapses around individual existences, and particular experiences of being, becoming, doing and knowing. I am drawn to how Jameson (2009) helps us to connect the external to the internal, and to ensure that an inert abstraction can be converted into life through movement. I am drawn towards Ahmed's (2017) reminder to us that fields of theory and abstraction contain potential energy that might be ignited, kinetically, but only from within us.

What this means is that a field of social relations, which desires to operate everywhere and all at once, collapses into concrete realities when observed in the Gaza encampments, or in the moment of restructuring in academic or professional services department, or in the reality of awarding gaps between groups of students, or in the war on professors. In understanding these as symptoms of crisis, the dialectic offers us ways of maintaining an openness to rupture and struggle, and to moving beyond the *appearance* of a totalising system.

In moving beyond, Neary sought an engagement with Adorno's (1973) *Negative Dialectics*. This centres Marx's (1843) statement that if our work cannot be reduced to an essentialised (deterministic) construction of the future (as a timeless utopia), then:

there can still be no doubt about the task confronting us at present: the *ruthless criticism of the existing order*, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries, nor from conflict with the powers that be.

Following Marx, this is a refusal of dogma, including a refusal to see the dialectic as a binary, for instance between communism and its inflection by its opposite, private property. Instead, these binaries unfold in space and by time in relation to other contradictions, such that a communist intentionality cannot be reduced to a blueprint that structures communist society and its social forms. In thinking about dialectical responses to crisis in the capitalist University, we cannot simply oppose critical pedagogy or a co-operative university or a fetishised view of Humboldt's University, as a final response. Rather, they might be tactics or demands that emerge in the unfolding of struggle against the capitalist university. For Neary, as for Marx, staying with the dialectic, and with the friction of struggle, was central in the ability to unlock the kinetic energy of unity or separation, as these 'two distinct dynamics' (Jameson 2009, 45) come into relation.

When we are thinking about the dissolution of the universities, we are also thinking about the resolution of intellectual activity in society, because the University is the key social form that emerges dialectically in this moment to validate intellectual wealth. Its dissolution is its negation, abolition, transcending, enacted as the ruthless negative critique of capital and its hold over intellectual life, institutional or not. In its constant search for value, capital demands a constant transformation and innovation of the forces and relations of production, including the forms in which they are located. As a result, the University is always living on borrowed time. One question is whether we might, as Jameson (*ibid.*, 49) does for Walmart, 'apprehend it for a moment in positive or progressive terms... to open up the current system in the direction of something else.' Or are we trapped in our negative dialectics, unable to accept (the positive content of) any synthesis, and capable only of enacting a ceaseless undermining of what-is?

5. For a new dialectical dissolution

A dialectical dissolution of the University is already happening. It is being recalibrated as militarised, securitised, debt-driven, and maintaining particular disciplinary and ordered protocols, whilst finance capital asset-strips the future in the present. Yet, our realisation of that same dialectic also offers a means of refusing the ways in which capital, through its professional and managerial class, enacts a repression of contradiction, in order to posit a new, apparently stable determination. Whilst we crave stability, the University as a capitalist institution cannot fulfil this desire. Whilst we crave stability, we cannot simply focus upon symptomatic responses to the war against professors or the unconscionable vandalism of our times. As Adorno (1967) would have it, such a limited focus would be a surrender of ourselves to the politics of disaster, conditioned by threat, violence, sacrifice and the internalisation of the system's death-wishes.

In the context of the University, Adorno (*ibid.*) is clear that the conceptual and methodological separation of the natural sciences from each other, and also from philosophy, alongside the separation of philosophy from political economy, is a disaster. These separations simply reinforce the incapacity of social beings to recognise themselves in society, or society in themselves. A one-sided identity, often predicated upon disciplinary fealty, cannot express the power of relationality in ways that might help dissolve the University for a new social use beyond value. The dissolution of the University as-is, along with its ontological foundations, is the abolition of its hold over us. It is our acceptance of the tensions we feel in the process, which works towards dissolving our desire to save or recover what we have known and loved.

In Neary's world, negative critique is not left as an abstract confrontation with universal categories, rather it is a concrete,

co-operative activity in the world. It forces us to ask where does agency lie in the unfolding of subjectivity? How do we overcome the University's domination of a significant part of our lives, through mediations of private intellectual property, commodity exchange of our general intellect, and divisions of labour enacted in the promise of position and prestige? When we enact a radical, political pedagogy, how do we hold ourselves as revolutionary teachers? When we enact a radical, political pedagogy, how do we enable students as producers to be in excess of themselves? When we work in civil society for a co-operative or social science centre, how are we unfolding ourselves not simply in opposition to the capitalist university, but in excess of capital's space-time?

Lukács (1968, 374) helps us, in his insistence that: '[t]he absolute is nothing but the fixation of thought, it is the projection into myth of the intellectual failure to understand reality concretely as a historical process.' If we can recognise that a one, true absolute is the mythical representation of the story told from a particular position of reified ontological and epistemological privilege, then we have an opening for decolonising that position and its certainties. We have an opening for no longer internalising faith, race, gender, disability, and so on, as lacking something essential, or needing to be integrated in a single, universal identity. If we are to dissolve the idea that the deserving Other might come to desire integration or inclusion, and instead accept a phenomenological richness of life, then it becomes possible to live in the world differently.

Helping others understand the potential for them to reveal their own phenomenological richness, from their own standpoint, points us towards one of Neary's key questions: how do revolutionary teachers teach? How do revolutionary teachers, who for Neary existed not simply within the University, but also within social centres and occupations, enable a phenomenological richness to be uncovered from within and

against the social universe of value? How do revolutionary teachers enable a phenomenological richness to be revealed, knowing that the horizon of that universe must be traversed if we are to escape intersecting emergencies? It is this horizon and the possibility of escape that enable us to refuse the charge of relativism or pluralism, and instead to point to a richness that is in immanent relation with our unity-in-difference.

Revolutionary teachers teach that whilst the social universe of value appears as an unfinished project, it has social limits that are historical and material. These might be dissolved and resolved dialectically in new concrete forms and through new collective habits that are 'seeking to grasp what cannot (yet) think, what lies in it beyond the very limits of its own social system and of the empirical being it seeks to transcend' (Jameson 2009, 361). Revolutionary praxis grasps what we cannot yet think, namely the desire for a new social horizon beyond the current, structural forms of the University. In recognising these as a constraint, it becomes possible to resolve towards agency through an enriched, pluriversal ecosystem, rather than being dissolved through the very forms of commodification that reproduce life as a desert.

6. For a new dialectical resolution

The University helps shape the conditions of social reproduction that hold, build, and mobilise the power of business-as-usual, rather than revolutionary transformation for another world. Chaudhary (2024, 15) centres such power when analysing climate realism, fatalism and possibility, and remarks that its consideration matters because 'climate change does not "produce" a universal human subject.' Rather, our subjection to the rule of money tends to shape the universal. This enables the University to be reproduced inside the system of 'implicatory denial', where information about climate change is not rejected, but the

implications for social reproduction of halting the production, circulation, and accumulation of value, and its toxic waste products, cannot be meaningfully discussed (Norgaard 2011).

If, as Chaudhary (2024, 29) argues, ‘there is no way to square climate mitigation and adaptation goals with the premise of the fundamental system preservation, of a world constituted by capitalism-as-we-know-it’, then the University’s promise to work for mitigation, adaptation and preservation cannot hold. Despite individual, institutional fossil fuel divestment campaigns and successes (for instance at Harvard around 2020), it is impossible for the University to challenge the premise of fundamental system preservation, because its life-support system is predicated upon a mycorrhizal network powered by finance capital. The power of money speaks and silences, in part through our universities.

This reinforces a sense of pessimism or melancholia in relation to climate realism, alongside Andreotti’s (2021) *denials*. Our intellectual work rejects the connection between continued value production and our accelerating inability to mitigate socio-environmental catastrophe. In the face of ‘social, economic, and ecological despair and exhaustion’, there appears to be no possibility for relief, in particular because ‘climate change truly is not a universal condition’ (Chaudhary 2024, 42), and it appears that the wealthy are content to discount the suffering of Others for their own futures. As Chaudhary (*ibid.*, 69) clearly states, ‘how has this level of degradation become so acceptable?’

Where this is raised, the legitimacy of the system and its institutions is challenged, and coercion, repression and othering tend to follow. In response, one might seek exodus, but if intellectual workers recommit to the University and its system of reproduction, or as they hold on in the face of restructuring, they are left with the increasingly meaningless appearance of sustainable development goals or ideas of resilience, when what they need is a political strategy for good living. Moreover, they

are left to hold on in a world being recalibrated by eco-modernist manifestoes of entrepreneurial and marketable possibilities emerging from climate catastrophe – the potential for a productive or generative Anthropocene or Capitalocene.

A more resolved, dialectical reality might accept Clarke's (1990) position that the negative and positive aspects of capital, which give capitalism its dynamic in the struggle to overcome crisis, cannot be separated or reformed away in policy. Instead, the system as a whole, with its negativity and productivity, must be dissolved and resolved, in part through a new expression of social need in the form and content of its institutions. These are not governed by a compulsion to develop productive forces without limit. The expression of a new social need, arising from a generalised crisis of surpluses, is also the expression of a scream emanating from those who have been made surplus as useful humans, as defined by work.

How might that scream be expressed? Understandably, the tendency is for labour unions and social movements to focus upon reformist or redistributive solutions. All the while there is also a tendency to accept the universal need to overcome barriers through efficiencies and labour arbitrage. There is, of course, a final way of overcoming barriers, if the State decides to intervene. However, as Clarke (*ibid.*, 464) identifies, this 'is necessarily confined within the limits of the contradictory form of capitalist production which appears in the tendency to over accumulation and crisis.' As a result, much state-based narrative about universities is compelled to focus upon (in)efficiency and an (in)ability to contribute meaningfully, to a national, industrial strategy.

A new resolution requires a new reciprocal interaction and relationality, beyond an imposed narrative of competition (DfE 2017). For Clarke (Clarke 1990, 465) any new resolution emerges alongside a recognition that 'the reproduction of capital' has become 'a barrier to the further development of

the productive powers of social labour', which strips capitalism of 'the last remnants of its claim to a progressive historical role.' In response, our struggle is to resolve a new ecosystem of relationality, mutuality and intellectuality, operating in ways that enable humans to address global emergencies. Those who work within the University as-is have to consider how to contribute to this resolution without retrenching into the fetishisation of their work in their institution (and forgetting that it is alienated labour-power).

Neary's (2016a, 690) resolution of this was to question *both* the absurdity of the University as it is realised inside a 'new paradigm', *and* its inability to generate a compelling narrative about the future, either for itself, its students and staff, or for society. In response, he (*ibid.*) pushed against the regurgitation of old ideas in terms of the meaning of the University, in order to focus the need for a debate about 'the meaning and nature of higher education grounded in the culture and values of academic life'. Yet he also expressed a desire for working within concrete policy to enact 'a more radical form of university... based not on markets and privatisation but collaboration and co-operation... a co-operative university', offering 'the potential for future radical possibilities.' (*ibid.*, 692)

7. Smashing the kaleidoscope

In his *Central Park*, Benjamin (1985) identifies how, as societies attempt to make sense of themselves in a historical moment, they are conditioned by the turmoil of capitalist social reproduction, and its inherent tendency to crisis. As socio-economic, political, socio-environmental and cultural crises aggregate into emergencies, or what Benjamin refers to as catastrophes, our mode of appreciation is simply that of a child turning a kaleidoscope, with a constant dissolution or dissolving of perception and

appearance. As a result, it becomes incredibly difficult to imagine a coherent narrative of the future, or for those in-power to impose a story of progress or meaning around which people can congregate. This lack of a meaningful story has always impacted those made marginal to a centralising system of reproduction. It now feeds into a world conditioned by apparent chaos, where it feels impossible to grasp any notion of a useful future. As the ruling class is no longer able to share an image of progress, it must seek to impose order through coercion or discipline.

For Benjamin (*ibid.*), the kaleidoscope must be smashed, and the structures, cultures and practices enabled by the capitalist state and corporations, as they seek to extract the last vestiges of value from a dying system, must be transcended. This requires theoretical and practical integration, in ways that negate ambivalence, demotivation or structural forms of powerlessness. It also requires that we see integration as a way of critiquing, dialectically: the eyepiece of the kaleidoscope (our way of seeing and interpreting what lies within); our construction of the chamber of the kaleidoscope (the boundaries of the system that we seek to understand and change); and the internal shards that construct a shifting, kaleidoscopic appearance of reality (the broken content of everyday life) (Hansen 2021).

For Hansen (*ibid.*)

[in b]reaking the kaleidoscope we search for ways to articulate care and radical decisions, urgent movement and the slow work of rooting. How can networks of mutual aid enable sabotage, and how may popular autonomy enable an assault on the capitalist state, or drive a wedge between the state's functions of social and capitalist reproduction? When the Kaleidoscope is smashed, the tunnel of history shatters and becomes a horizon. Here we face catastrophe not merely with the urgency of fear and sympathy

for the victims, but with existential disgust with our intertwinements...

We are reminded of this in the scream from the Gaza encampments on campus, as we were in the student occupations of 2010–11, where meaningful community is sought outside of an intellectual life reduced to labour and the struggle for position. We generate clarity about the importance of such rebellions where they conceptualise not simply a single issue, but also a total point of view. This might be clarity generated dialectically about the purpose of the University, and its place inside a social system that enables genocide.

Marx (1852) notes that such actions have ‘their roots in the disastrous isolation of [humans] from [their] community’. He (*ibid.*) goes on, ‘however limited an industrial revolt may be, it contains within itself a *universal* soul: and however universal a political revolt may be, its *colossal* form conceals a *narrow* split.’ Struggles, rebellions and revolts that take place within a single sector, or within an institution in a particular sector, contain the seeds of a wider struggle, but these need the conditions to germinate. For that reason, he (*ibid.*) argues that this must be more than a protest against a dehumanised life, in order to highlight how that life, at the level of society, denies ‘the *true* community of man, *human* nature.’ Pointing to the limits of political revolution that seeks to end a group’s isolation from the State or its institutions and power (because the State and those institutions always administer a separation of humans from communities, and from life), Marx (*ibid.*) wishes to see a ‘society having conquered a new content for itself’. Such a society, as part of an ecosystem of societies and communities, has sublated its old content and transformed its previous forms. It has smashed the kaleidoscope that held its broken gaze on the shards of a decaying system.

Struggle lies at the heart of this. The struggle against the State and its institutions. The struggle against the need for class struggle that enables the State to administer life for capital (O’Kane 2023), realised increasingly through the rule of money (Clarke 1979, 1988). Neary (2017) imagines this being realised because the perpetual subordination of human creativity, doing and capacity to value is an impossibility. He imagines the possibilities for life (the not-yet) at the horizon of human yearning and experience beyond the chamber of the kaleidoscope; these possibilities emerge as we are dragged into conflict with the commodity, and the reduction of life to labour-power; they emerge as we consider smashing the kaleidoscope that forecloses upon our view of life. In so doing, we crack open the categories of capitalism that constrain human life, through law, money, state, the University, labour, and so on, and show them as broken shards that subordinate life and deny autonomy (Dinerstein 2015).

A possible starting point is to move beyond the broken content of the kaleidoscope of our lives, such that we are no longer simply consumed by polycrisis, or single issues within a secular crisis of capitalism. Some form of socialised workers’ inquiry, operating across a new social field as a real assembly of inquiries, would lift up the analysis of alienating, concrete, lived experiences. Such an approach would not fetishise the broken conditions of labour inside the University as something to be fixed, but would enable a treatment of the ways in which those conditions resonate across a broader social ecosystem.

Notes from Below (2023) speak about this in relation to planning our escape, in working to transcend the limiting potential for mass movements, for political action in the State, and for working class self-organisation against the State and its organisations. This is a return to a struggle against bourgeois political economy, rather than a deflection into either political or economic struggle in civil society or in the corporate University.

It is a struggle to abolish wage labour, and to transcend our social need for it. It is a struggle to abolish the addictions of settler-colonial modernity, and to transcend our social need for them. It is the struggle to smash the kaleidoscope that kettles our lives.

...

In his novel *Stoner*, John Williams (1965/2012) writes about a fictional life of a fictional professor, William Stoner, in a fictional, Twentieth Century, North American University. Dave Masters, one of Stoner's student friends is clear that:

It's for us that the University exists, for the dispossessed of the world; not for the students, not for the selfless pursuit of knowledge, not for any of the reasons that you hear. We give out the reasons, and we let a few of the ordinary ones in, those that would do in the world; but that's just protective coloration. Like the church in the Middle Ages, which didn't give a damn about the laity or even about God, we have our pretences in order to survive. And we shall survive – because we have to. (*ibid.*, 31)

For Masters, academic life does no harm, and being paid for extolling academic freedom is 'a triumph of natural virtue, or pretty damn close to it' (*ibid.*). Later, following the chaos and catastrophe of wars and austerity, Stoner is revealed as being very 'aware of the times in which he lived', and witnessing in people's faces 'a permanent hardness and bleakness, as if they looked upon an abyss', 'broken as their vision of a decent life was broken' (*ibid.*, 226). He recognizes 'eyes empty like shards of broken glass', denied any quality of life:

and he saw men, who had once walked erect in their own identities, look at him with envy and hatred for the poor security he enjoyed as a tenured employee of an institution that somehow could not fail (*ibid.*, 227).

As the present adds further moments of crisis, catastrophe, anxiety and despair to those of the past, Stoner 'looked again to the cautious faith that was embodied in the institution of the University. He told himself that it was not much; but he knew that it was all he had.' (*ibid.*, 228)

Is this all there is? A redout for some as the world ends? Nostalgia for an institution in a world that never was, or never will be again?

What Stoner's lament reminds us is that there can be no reclusion: the kaleidoscope must be smashed.

5

the political economy of Mike Neary: anti-value in motion

The exchange of living labour for objectified labour – i.e. the positing of social labour in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labour – is the ultimate development of the value-relation and of production resting on value (Karl Marx 1857/1993)

What remains then is to determine whether the material world is apprehended through the mind or the soul (Cedric Robinson 1983)

abolition is a fleshy and material presence of social life lived differently (Ruth Wilson Gilmore 2023)

1. Value-in-motion: travels in Moishe Postone's social universe

My connection with Mike Neary emerged: in civil society, *both* in the SSC in Lincoln, UK, and also in the educational structures and practices of the anti-austerity and student movements of the 2010s; and, in the Undercommons of the University, and by that I mean in fugitive planning that is against the University. Whilst he did not have a comparable engagement inside academic labour unions, my decision to leave UCU in 2022 (Hall 2024) was in part inspired by Neary's critique of, or his disengagement from, labour or the proletariat or the working class, as a starting point for the project of abolition (or at least as its sole subject).

In this practical-theoretical (and for me at least, emotional/psychological) activity, inspiration was, and is, taken from the work of Moishe Postone, a critical theorist and historian, who worked out of the University of Chicago until his death in 2018 (Moishe Postone Legacy project (MPLP), n.d.). Postone particularly engaged with Marx's early analyses of political economy and the work of the Frankfurt School. His focus was upon re-examining the social universe of value and how it defines the dynamic reproduction of contemporary capitalism. In his *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Postone 1993), he opened up a critique of the core categories of labour, class struggle, value, and so on, in relation to time and temporality.

Postone refused to see Marx's *Capital* as a social critique emerging dialectically from the perspective of labour, pointing towards a society that might transcend capitalism. Instead, he situated *Capital* as a critique of labour, as a means of abstraction and social domination, and as key to the constitution of capitalist society. This enabled a new reading of the potential for escaping alienation through the abolition of a society that needed labour. In this, the unfolding, kinetic dynamics of capital as value-in-motion (Dinerstein and Neary 2002b) do not simply emerge through class struggle over the means of production, subsistence or distribution. Rather, Postone centres the dual nature of labour as a unique, generative thread, emerging from the centrality of human, cognitive, emotional, and kinaesthetic work, as it is reproduced across the space-time of capitalism.

This dual nature of labour recognises: first, the concrete usefulness of labour, in producing specific commodities with particular use-values that can serve as inputs into either the production of social goods, or more complex commodities; and second, the abstract nature of that labour, as it is realised in commodities that can be measured, compared and exchanged in a market. In relation to both utility and exchange, for companies

(or universities) that are going concerns (financially sustainable), this weaves them into the social fabric of value production. However, this fabric is always being remade as institutions are compelled to compete and to accrue more value to themselves. The primary mechanism for this is the desire to drive the time it takes labour to produce commodities below the momentary, socially-average value of that commodity, as it is revealed in exchange (usually as money).

As capital innovates its control of labour-power, or removes it from humans and places it inside the artificial, it accelerates desires: for accelerated degrees or to speed-up turnaround times for assessments; to expand academic engagement in spin-out, commercialisation and knowledge transfer activities; to implement new partnership or restructuring models; and to deploy cheaper graduate teaching labour, through the creation of a surplus population of skilled labour (in pools of individuals holding PhDs), or by deploying large language models. For universities, these rationalise academic and professional service work, whilst claiming to enrich the goods and services available to students, in order to strengthen their position in the market for graduate roles.

Through his work, Postone is clear that it is abstract, rather than concrete, labour that must lie at the centre of our critique. It is labour as a social mediation, and in particular the ways in which labour emerges in relation to the categories of value and time, which must be confronted in any anti-capitalist organising. A focus on redistribution or the expropriation of social goods might be transitional activities, but revolutionary activity rests on the abolition of the labour that produces those goods, and that is governed by the need to produce surplus-value (the compulsion for labour to be value-creating). Labour is neither neutral/objective nor does it contain subjective potential, because it shapes a universe governed by abstract, quantified time that

forces activity (doing) to be compared and exchanged, in order to have meaning.

Where labour is abstracted away from its concrete characteristics (in producing code or a textbook, or in assessing a course or providing some form of commodified continuing professional development), and where time (in abstract, quantified units) serves as an equalising moment of measurement, value is generated within and across sectors. In the techbro universe, this makes an allegedly time inefficient, unproductive HE sector ripe for takeover and reimagination. So, in Postone's (1978) analysis, this abstract, temporal world of human work must be the target of struggles for other worlds.

The focus on time resonates for educators whose very existence is calibrated around the ways in which clock time re-purposes relations with each other, and with students. Through workload planning, assessment and teaching allocations, theories of change, pathways to impact, and so on, meaningful human relationships are subsumed or lost as other categories and their measurement (for instance, in progression, retention or awarding data, research impact, citation indices) are presented as objective realities. Abstraction infects real human relations with each other, with non-human animals, and the environment as a violent and dehumanising logic, which is not merely revealed in relation to low pay or punishing working conditions, but also in the dissonance experienced by workers whose labour is devalued in the accelerating compulsion to compete in the market. (Postone and Brick 1993)

This feels more punishing now, where there are no progressive stories of the present or the future that encourage good living. For students, it amplifies the narrative that their learning lifeworld must be subsumed to the realities of employability and the need to pay down their debts. For academics, it reveals the negation of their intellectual capacities, beyond commercialisation, impact,

entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer, and the ability to meet targets. For professional services staff, it centres the abolition of their expertise through constant technological innovation and infrastructural renewal, which outsources or replaces their work, or degrades and proletarianises it through regrading. These processes tend to be experienced differentially, because of '*the primacy of production in the historical development of a differentiated totality*' (Clarke 1980, 52, *emphasis* in original). The contradictions that play out between the production of value and the production of use-values are experienced in different ways by different groups or individuals, depending upon their position in a social, material and relational environment shaped in-and-against production.

...

It was less the differentiated experience of this totality, than the new materialist reading of it, that appealed to Neary: 'the appearance of increased material entanglement in the Anthropocene... makes possible for us this new historical ontology of a moving and entangled matter' (Gamble *et al.* 2019). He saw this as important in the context of an immanent critique that can grasp the source of domination and thereby open-out a horizon for refusal and radical activity. This is grounded in overflowing the social forms of capitalism and the ways in which their content is constantly abstracted, measured and exchanged.

Bonefeld (2003) is less sure of the validity of Postone's (1993, 395) embedding of social action within the abstract, yet 'essential structuring forms of capitalist society [the commodity and capital]'. Instead, Bonefeld (2003) fears that this denies the validity of concrete experience and reproduces a fetish for abstract categories as a kind of Hegelian logic. Where Postone (1993, 371) argues that class struggle 'represents capital-constituting, rather than capital-transcending, forms of action', Bonefeld (and also scholars like Szadkowski 2023) struggle to see the horizon for

agency as anything other than foreclosed and unable to break out of the reproduction of categories of analysis. Instead, praxis should begin from the concrete struggles of Marx's dialectic.

Concrete struggles in social movements or trades unions offer a moment of witnessing how identities or types of labour are abstracted and denied inside social forms like the University. They offer ways of showing how particular Black, queer, female, disabled, faith-based experiences are made to align, universally, with the whole, alongside what it means not to identify with that whole. Whilst the University might respond through external forms of accreditation (Stonewall, Race Equity Charter, Athena Swan etc. in the UK), its reality is governed by abstract, quantified time. So, irrespective of EDI/DEI intentions, the desire for competitive edge demands that those align with the political economic reality of generating surpluses. Abstract time and labour will always subsume the politics of identity, including class, and recalibrate them around debt, entrepreneurship and constant innovation. The struggle is against such universal, violent abstractions revealed in concrete, alienating experiences.

The historical dialectic between labour and time shapes the conscious expression of the contradictions between social reproduction for-value and the possibilities for a liveable life, across all of our lives. The contradiction shows 'the structure of labour as the essential core of the present social reality' (Postone 1978, 787), and builds upon Marx's (1863/1972, 254) 'general critique of the entire system of economic categories'. Such an immanent critique might be grounded in the University and its ecosystem of relations, or in the forms of labour upon which it relies for its reproduction. For Neary, as for Postone, revolutionary possibilities have to recognise how this ecosystem is itself situated inside capitalist social relations as a totality, or totalising system. Thus, escape from the event horizon or the totalising gravitational pull of value depends upon our realising:

first, the need for revolutionary forms of subjectivity (class consciousness); and second, ‘how that need could be socially realized’ (Postone 1978, 786).

If the ‘form and structure of subjectivity [are] the necessary historical condition for revolutionary class consciousness’, and if they cannot be based upon the emancipation of labour (*ibid.*, 785), then we need to work out how and where we might we organise beyond labour struggles alone. A new revolutionary class consciousness is a new subjectivity, which points beyond, or away from, the event horizon at the centre of the social universe of value. It has to centre meaningful activity that cannot fetishise labour as shaped by abstract time and surplus. For Postone (*ibid.*, 786, *emphasis* in original), a radical, political rearticulation of subjectivity, which we might see as ecological, and encompassing social movements, decoloniality, indigeneity and the political formations of identity, pushes beyond an ‘underlying subjectivity, which is an *expression* of a contradictory historical development’ towards, ‘revolutionary class consciousness, which *expresses* it.’

How do we move beyond being capital-constituting, towards becoming capital-transcending?

2. The expression of human needs

Our movement is not about implementing a blueprint for realising a communist utopia, the mission of the working class or proletariat, or the vanguard leadership of an intellectual elite. Rather, transcendence is predicated upon ‘the self-reflected consciousness’ of realised needs, ‘which strikes at the root of the present social order: alienated labor’. (Postone *ibid.*) From this, O’Kane (2018) argues that the heart of Postone’s critique contains the question:

Given that Marx’s categories are simultaneously objective and subjective, capital is the subject, labor is totalizing, and

class struggle is system immanent; on what grounds might an emancipatory dynamic evolve?

For O’Kane (*ibid.*), Postone points to those grounds in the expression of both labour and time as potentially superfluous. As a system searching for surplus-value, capitalism tends to generate forces and relations of production that annihilate labour, and the need for capital to exploit labour. Through renewed technology that is imagined, prototyped and manufactured from the work of humans in nature, a very particular form of wealth (as commodities) emerges. As necessary labour is removed (a techbro fantasy to be accelerated), this also makes it possible to imagine free time (communism) expanding. However, that would also require a reimagining of the particular, social form of wealth upon which society is based, beyond the commodity.

The broken content of life structured by alienated labour feels non-identical to what a meaningful life might be, and our refusals to identify with the punishing forms imposed upon us by capital have led to countless ruptures and eruptions of protest. These might come together to ‘establish humanity as a historical subject for the first time.’ (*ibid.*) For O’Kane (*ibid.*), analysing Postone, such coming together ‘leads to an expansive conception of the proletariat as anyone who develops such a system transcendent consciousness on the basis of grasping this non-identical moment in capitalism’s dynamic’ He (*ibid.*) goes on to note that for Postone, ‘the communist metabolic interaction with labor would be based on disposable time, human fulfilment, need and an “equilibrium” with nature, thus leading to the transformation of technology.’ There is no salvation here in our realisation of our labour, or our fetishisation of it, or in engaging with the symptoms of distress through new workload models, demands for a new economic or financial settlement for a toxic system, or innovative frameworks for institutional governance and regulation.

Whilst immediately useful in improving working conditions, meaningful transformation needs struggles that centre the negation, abolition and transcendence of value and its social forms: it needs a new social field emerging immanent to free time and a renewed real assembly of life. So, a new story for the University might emerge through authentic struggles for communal and social needs, as pedagogical projects expressed in-common (Bonefeld 2010; De Angelis 1995). In this, Postone (2009) is clear that there is no bargaining with Capital, or those who, like vice-chancellors, direct its social forms for-value. They are blind to anything other than expansion, competition, and a limited horizon of sustainability.

This reality was accelerated in the 2007 global financial crisis, where the connection between value and useful human labour was broken, very visibly. As a result, Postone (2017) argued that this connection has become anachronistic, further illustrated in Piketty's (2020) work on inequality, by Occupy! and the movement of the squares, the student movement, indigenous and decolonial struggles, and so on. These movements and analyses demonstrate either the failed promise of capitalism for good living, or they bring into view the ways in which those failed promises have made life unliveable for generations of communities made marginal to value production. In the face of ICE raids, hostile environments, unconscionable violence and a war on professors, universities are not sites for this wrongness or brokenness to be overcome.

Marx (1857/1993, 704-06) identified the potential for opposition to grow from the generalisation of the disconnect between the development of general wealth (witnessed in capitalism as the accumulation of commodities) and the increasing surplus labour of the mass of people. People work harder and longer, and gain more accreditation, and still witness limited rewards and less access to social goods. Historically this

had been overcome by finding new markets, generating new commodities, and deepening the exploitation of labour, such that quantified time comes to dominate more generally.

As the dislocation deepens and widens, as technology and organisational development annihilate the need for labour, there is no clear relationship between 'the general powers of the human head' (*ibid.*, 705) (in my reading, our intellectuality, and our story of ourselves and how we wish to be), and our surplus labour. We are working harder, but for what? We increasingly feel the non-identity or disconnect between ourselves as particular human beings, and the universal, totalising, system of capitalism. In this, Marx (*ibid.*) sees a radical disruption of the normative process: 'production based on exchange-value breaks down'. We are unable to frame progress around enriched standards of living. Instead, we witness a deepening of geopolitical, technological and environmental threats.

Meaningful opposition, for Marx (*ibid.*, 706), is the authentic expression of human needs, and includes '[t]he free development of individualities'. He is clear that the annihilation of necessary labour-time, through organisational development and technological innovation, does not have to enable surplus-labour to be accumulated, but instead could reduce the necessary labour of society as a whole to a minimum. This points towards 'the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.' (*ibid.*) The potential for liberating surplus time and means of production points towards a liveable life, but it requires us to overcome the violent, abstract grounds of capital, which:

calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to

use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. (*ibid.*)

Is it possible to weave a new form of intellectuality into this moment of moving contradiction? From the right, this is what we appear to witness in the positioning of accelerationist or techno-determinist individuals, as they work to shape narratives of human development away from the mass of humanity. Narratives of the superhuman, of opposition to the Cathedral, of NRx futures and techno-solutionism, and of end-times fascism (Klein and Taylor 2025) point towards the same desire to annihilate labour-time as those that underpin unconscionable violence. They seek to annihilate any reliance upon reified labour (including intellectual labour), in the reproduction of wealth.

Like Neary, I am left to consider how to weave anew from within a form of capitalism that visibly hates human labour and seeks, openly, to annihilate *both* it (e.g. through automation, precarity and financialisation), *and* its ecosystems (e.g. in the environmental degradation of data centres). We know that we have to abolish abstract time, and divorce ourselves from capital's desire for us to be productive, entrepreneurial and valuable. We have to abolish instruments like student and institutional debt, which use labour to enable abstract, quantified time to dominate the lifeworld.

As the search for wealth begins to 'feed on the substance of society and nature' (Postone 2017, 52), narratives emerge that are anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-woke, pro-extraction, pro-the nation state, and so on. Narratives fixate on individuals, like vice-chancellors or intellectual leaders, as offering or failing to offer a compelling narrative of the future. Instead, we might look at the gap between what is and what

might be, and the grounds upon which we know ourselves and the world, in order to define collective possibilities now.

3. Neary's social universe

We build life anew by recognising our desire to negate and abolish labour, and to transcend the need for wage labour. This is our sublation of our lives as the provision of labour-power, such that our labour-power might be dissolved into more humane, socially-useful doing. Inside the University, this means recognising how our labour is constantly scrubbed of subjectivity, intellectual content, authenticity and meaning. It means accepting that seeking to redeem academic work in a system of alienated labour is a hopeless venture. Quantified, abstract time makes redemption anachronistic: teaching is separated from assessment; student support is shaped by the dictates of AI literacy or the role of chatbots; academic and pastoral support are separated out and repurposed; and, new forms of competition and monitoring are implemented.

How can we live in days like these? What is to be done?

Neary wanted to address these questions through a critique of academic labour in the capitalist University, with the aim of a practical reimagining of intellectuality at the level of society. Immanent critique of the University as-is enabled Neary to build pedagogical and intellectual experiments that refused the reproduction of existing forms of value, for instance in student debt, course accreditation, or research commercialisation. Rather, experimental alternatives, materially and historically grounded, enabled *both* further immanent critique, *and* the unfolding of social needs that might form the basis of alternative social forms. This collective work, undertaken through co-operation and in solidarity (and grounded in empathy), refuses the idea of an intellectual vanguard that might shape the realisation of the proletariat. The aim was to unfold a universe of alternative social

forms with critical-practical, intellectual content, against the University as-is (as its non-identity).

Strands of such a reimagining include *both* the technological innovation that has been core to the re-imagining of HE post-2007 (in massive online open courses, personalisation, the internet of things, AI, augmented reality and so on), *and* the potential for new forms of internationalism (by bridging between anti-austerity European movements of the squares and movements for Black lives, and new left currents in Latin America, alongside indigenous and decolonial struggles). *Pace* Postone (2017), this seeks to transcend (sublate) old working class movements and anti-colonial resistances, in order to instantiate them inside a new revolutionary sensibility. This is a new common sense or intellectuality at the heart of the process of struggle (The University of Utopia, n.d.a).

The ways in which Neary grounded the potential for practical experiments, for the purpose of cracking or undermining capital, connects to Devyver's (2022) analysis of the limitations of Postone's critique. Whilst Postone's horizon was social critique emanating from within capitalism, as a dynamic, totalising system of contradictions, or perhaps as a contradictory, dynamic, totalising system, it remained, largely, ungrounded. He clearly identified how capitalism's dynamism heralds tensions, pointing towards unrealised potentialities. In response, Devyver (*ibid.*) demonstrates how Postone (differs from and) might be enriched through the work of Adorno. This mattered to Neary (Class War University (CWU) 2013) who saw in his work a ruthless critique, as an unfolding, negative analysis of the categories of capitalist intellectuality.

Devyver's (2022) analysis highlights how Postone 'shows that capitalism points beyond itself, towards an alternative, by means of its own terms'. Yet, whilst we can see the potential for being, doing and knowing anew, predicated upon new forms of social wealth, we also witness rising inequality, authoritarian governance,

and a renewal of the old world. In response, Neary asked, how do we move towards agency and freedom in this moment? We cannot assume that capitalism contains within it the potential to germinate the seeds of its own destruction or abolition. Struggles over the conditions and relations of alienated labour show the possibility of an alternative, but these cannot be fully determined or germinated by organised labour seeking redemption.

Neary's projects offer a response to Devyver's (2022) critique that '[t]he emancipatory potential of Postone's theory seems to be everywhere and nowhere', and that 'it fails to immanently ground freedom as its norm.' Practically, Neary pointed towards an engagement with Adorno who articulates the dialectical dynamic of society as negativity, or the relationship emerging from particular situations and particular categories of identity and non-identity: the ways in which a particular human with lived experience struggles to be identified with the totality (to earn a wage), and the ways in which they recognise that they can never do so fully, as whole beings (because their particularity is always, somehow denied validity). This irreconcilable energy gives motive force to the expansion of capitalism as a totalising system, as it seeks, automatically, to incorporate or assimilate all particularities inside itself, along with the energy that is left over after the incorporation of labour-power inside production. Humans struggling to accommodate themselves in the system, add to this energy. Those struggling for tenure or against precarity in the University feel this in their sleep-deprived hearts.

The energy of the struggle and the struggle to incorporate the energy left-over, highlights the alienation of life in the production process. These struggles offer potential for active reimagining, which might be grounded dialectically. They signal the potential for a new social universe with new social forms that might resolve a new metabolic energy. For Bonefeld (2003) this emerges from a recognition of the world *both* as dissociating or crazy, *and* as

displaced. Marx argues that social relations are inverted and appear as an objectified relation between things rather than humans. Marx refers to 'verrückte forms', often translated as 'perverted' or 'absurd', but Bonfeld (*ibid.*) is clear that there is a dual meaning: verrückt [mad or crazy]; and ver-rückt [displaced]. The appearance of our social relations is mad or crazy, and also displaced or wrong.

For Bonfeld (2003) we must push beyond the idea that capital is a 'a contradictory and dynamic structure of alienated social relations constituted by labor' (Postone 1993, 307), to uncover the grounds of a critique of capital as it is constituted by labour in the human. This includes the way in which this is experienced differentially. Working with Adorno (1973), praxis requires a negative critique that pushes towards the beginning of *real* human history, rather than the abstract, inhuman history of capital. Devyyer (*ibid.*) quotes Adorno (1977, 129):

[t]he interpretation of given reality and its abolition are connected to each other... in the sense that... out of the construction of a configuration of reality the demand for its real change [real history] always follows promptly.

Understanding the madness and the displacement grounds our demands, as something else (i.e. not-this) erupts from our concrete and particular experiences. Our demands might reflect our recognition of the remainder or the things that are missing, but they must be categorical, knowing that their forms and content always point beyond themselves. A critical, negative analysis of particular contexts and experiences enables struggle to take hold as anti-value in motion: a way of pointing beyond capitalist social relations, through negative, critical self-reflection, and a new willingness or intentionality aimed at *both* the mad and crazy, *and* the displaced and wrong.

4. The rule of money in higher education: crazy, displaced and wrong

Money flows through our discussion. In Volume 2 of *Capital*, Marx (1885/1992) demonstrated that capital is the unity of three circuits: it is formed of moments of the circulation of money, of production, and of commodities. Money and commodities are mobile, and intellectual or cognitive services or commodities especially so, enabling more flexible and efficient production. Hence the drive in HE for internationalisation or accelerated online provision.

The commodity is the social form against which every educational institution and its partners (operating as a competing capital) can be considered. The accelerated conversion of educational relationships, content and services into commodities enables institutions to circulate, exchange and monetise their core educational value proposition (and I hate writing that, but there you are). The work of academics, professional services' staff and students is conditioned against the circuit of production (productivity), commodity (curriculum or output) and money (research income, institutional debt, or student fees). Money oils this circuit, centring the University as a node in a network of valorisation. This drives the impulse of institutions to hedge, take on risk, (de)leverage, compete, and so on across all of its practices.

Dinerstein (1999, 764) highlights how Neary (in his work with Graham Taylor) saw 'the political significance of the subjective dimension of the capital relation and the inner connection between subjectivity and money, money being the most abstract form of capital.' This demanded 'the exploration of the human forms of existence of money... [and] the concrete ways in which life is lived as money-capital and the limitations and possibilities of this human condition.' (*ibid.*) In understanding our intellectual relationships to our working lives, the things that we do and produce, those around us, and ourselves, we must

recognise how, '[i]n the pursuit of sound money all else must be sacrificed' (Neary and Taylor 1998, 4).

Sacrifice is made to what Neary and Taylor refer to as a 'cult' (*ibid.*, 30), and what Marx (1844b, *emphasis* in original) referred to as 'an alien mediator' and 'an end in itself':

The essence of money is not, in the first place, that property is alienated in it, but that the *mediating activity* or movement, the *human*, social act by which man's products mutually complement one another, is *estranged* from man and becomes the attribute of money, a *material thing* outside man. Since man alienates this mediating activity itself, he is active here only as a man who has lost himself and is dehumanised... [such that] man regards his will, his activity and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them.

Research, scholarship, teaching, student support, are reconditioned by the need for excellence, graduate outcomes, impact, progression, and so on. Tracing this enables us to analyse 'human life as a processed form of money-capital', which 'opens for us the possibility of a theory of anti-oppression' (Neary and Taylor 1998, 4, 12). Anti-oppression draws us to Holloway's (2011) idea that:

being human, of wanting to be more than a thing, becomes inseparable from rage against the rule of money, rage against that which is destroying humanity.

This is rage against the concrete and abstract rule of money, which alienates us from our conditions of living, knowing, doing and being. It is rage against the 'chemical power of money' (Neary and Taylor, 13), or perhaps the alchemical qualities and powers through which money appears able to create more money,

through loans, refinancing and debts that are divorced from production. It is rage against the ways in which money insinuates itself inside us, alchemically dissolving and resolving our relations with our work and its practices, our communities and ourselves, so that we end up fetishising *both money and* the alienated labour that we perceive gives us access to it.

Generating social meaning beyond the apparent, subjective power of money, and without imbuing our lives with claims about its ontological, almost-human, meaning and purpose, leads Neary to analyses of the social form of the University, beyond a world of debt, and predicated upon more direct, social and intellectual relations of exchange. He thought about this in relation to the mode of doing (the pedagogy) of the University, alongside revolutionary or *avant-garde* teaching, and the practice of student-as-producer. As such, he considered questions of how we might come to constitute ourselves, intellectually, in order to address global emergencies, beyond the social power of money.

As money dissolves intellectual life, it displaces the actualisation of imagination, creativity and needs. It enables value to dissolve and resolve the life world of the University, and to dominate human need in a time of global emergencies. It sets free narratives of sustainability, viability, social mobility, meritocracy, impact, efficiency and so on, as a means of projecting the risk away from capital as a system, towards the student and her family, the University and its partners, and the sector and its ecosystems. However, these narratives cannot sustain human life. Instead we must refuse the ways in which money processes (commodifies) human and non-human life, and the ecosystems that sustain them.

5. Struggles for Gaza as anti-value in motion

We need to negate and abolish the rule of money over life. We need to find space and times for germinating new stories that

are beyond the solvent toxicity of money. We need spaces and times for building new directional demands beyond the hyphae of finance capital and the anti-human State that enables its governance of life. Pending revolution, we need spaces and times that help us to remember our connections and that help us weave our commitment to other worlds, as a geography of abolition (Gilmore 2023).

Student struggles in protests, encampments and occupations for Gaza not only demonstrate the possibility of students being in excess of themselves as educational consumers, but they also remind us of the possibility that our campuses might become nodes in a wider network of mutual aid and radical, democratic enrichment. They point to the possibility that moments of solidarity can collapse the boundaries of self and Other as a pedagogical act, undertaken in-community.

Recognising and working through the limits of those encampments matters: in their relationship to the State, authority and power; in how they related to broader movements for abolition; in how they organised to build counter-power; and more. However, by refusing their fetishisation and instead analysing struggles for Gaza in the context of building collective capacities for negation and abolition more broadly, we might enable new models to emerge, grounded in new stories.

...

Graduate Students for Palestine (GSP) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (UE Local 256), in lobbying for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, and calling for 'the MIT community to cut all research and financial ties with the Israeli military' (MIT GSP 2024), critique their institution's engagement with the production and circulation of value, through its nation state and corporate ties. Their analysis highlights flows of finance from Israel's Ministry of Defence, in relation to military hardware

and software, to MIT. In its statement, MIT UE Local 256 (*ibid.*) show the connections between MIT and Elbit systems, which was at the time a member of MIT's Industrial Liaison Program, and which 'manufactures many of the bombs that have destroyed every one of our peer institutions in Gaza, and continue to fall on displaced people.'

MIT UE Local 256 (*ibid.*) is clear that there is historic precedent for divestments from such programs, citing student/faculty struggles during the Vietnam War, against apartheid South Africa, and in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The students ask faculty to cease collaboration with the Israeli military, and to elevate Palestinian institutions of knowledge. These students close with a call for solidarity in defining another university.

We believe in the emancipatory power of science: a science that is life affirming, invested in building sustainable and equitable futures, that strives to relieve suffering for our fellow human beings. As we reflect on our vision of science as a tool of liberation, not oppression, we remind you that we are not just your students, but your eventual colleagues and successors. We are building a future for academia that we will be proud to take part in. We invite you to join us. (*ibid.*)

This is a rich critique of the ways in which one educational institution is perceived as implicated within the expansive circuits of value production. These deploy particular, intellectual and disciplinary discourses and methodologies, to disconnect processes, flows, technologies, conceptions, cognition and emotion, from life. They do so by enclosing our potentialities within dehumanising, financialised discourses.

Flows of value from the military, and from economies predicated upon militarisation and securitisation, shape organisational forms, including the reproduction of colleges, research institutes, employability services, and so on. These are

social forms that are reproduced immanent to: technological innovation and flows of information; emergent social relations inside/outside the institution; extractive relations with nature; new modes of directing economic production; and, new authoritarian ideations of the world. They continually dissolve and resolve relationality, materiality and intellectuality.

Connections emerge, which are shaped materially and historically, in context, depending upon the social, intellectual, cultural and financial capital of institutions and the networks inside which they are situated. These forms of capital are value-in-motion, generating kinetic energy not just from high-value institutions like MIT, Colombia or Cambridge, but by generalised activity across the sector and its related ecosystems. The energy generated: reflects an institution's position within a globalising sector of the economy, for instance in its specific nation state relations; emerges from relations within globalising networks of corporate consultancies, military/security producers, and service providers; and provides flows of researchers, graduate students and interns (often called talent), across institutional and corporate boundaries.

To oppose these forms of capital constitutes anti-value in motion.

Thus, Swiss researchers drew attention to the ways in which their work at the intersection of algorithmic AI, drone technology, and robotics was being repurposed in relation to the production of autonomous weapons (Meyer and Lüthi 2023). These researchers made the moral case for ethical and legal safeguards, and rightly pointed out that the issue lay not simply in a fetishised sense that the technology was immoral. In fact, the technology is always amoral, and it is the category of value, which shapes particular mental conceptions, social relations, and direct processes of production, which needs to be challenged and transformed.

In the same way, students and faculty in The Netherlands have centred the need for an ethics of care in highlighting how they

perceive their institutions have demonstrated moral and legal complicity through ongoing academic ties to Israel and Israeli institutions (Independent Expert Committee on Israeli-Dutch Academic Ties ((IECIDAT) 2025). This has been echoed at Trinity College Cambridge, where there have been increased student protests calling for the College to divest (Bratton 2025), as part of an ongoing critique of its multi-sector investment portfolio. This has been reported in the student newspaper, *Varsity*, in relation to freedom of information requests that ‘also show the College has maintained investments in multiple arms companies. This included Elbit Systems which produces 85% of the drones and land-based equipment used by the Israeli army.’ (Vall 2024)

At Trinity College Dublin (TCB), a Task Force was set-up in November 2024 catalysed by a student Gaza encampment, with a focus on addressing the issues raised from the protest:

by developing a set of ethical principles to inform current and future links and exchanges between Trinity College Dublin and higher education institutions, commercial enterprises and/or other relevant bodies in jurisdictions involved in armed conflicts and/or there are violations of international law.

The Task Force sought to consider issues of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, the possibility for institutional declarations on these issues, and how to manage disagreements/viewpoint diversity (TCB 2024). In response, the TCB Board (2025):

accepted the recommendations set out in the report regarding institutional links with the State of Israel, Israeli universities and companies headquartered in Israel. These will be enacted for the duration of the ongoing violations of international and humanitarian law. This will be kept under review by the Board.

Similarly, in their *University Observer*, students at University College Dublin (UCD) reported on the institution's research ties, in part through European funding, which 'fuels Israel's already expansive military-industrial complex by allowing advancement and innovation in the military sector' (Ndjonkou and Riccio 2024).

Grounding this, in March 2025, a joint statement was issued by the UCD Student Union ((UCDSU) 2025), which highlighted UCD's engagement in a new European Commission-funded doctoral network consortium, called CANTALOOP. This Marie-Sklodowska Curie Programme network funds laboratory research in institutions in Germany, Spain, The Netherlands, Ireland and Israel. The network includes institutions highlighted by Wind (2024) as being central in Israel's maintenance of its settler-colonial power over Palestine. UCDSU (*ibid.*) point to connections through CATALOOP between UCD and Israel's Ben-Gurion University (BGU), and the Technion, Israel's Institute of Technology.

In this statement, UCD is then connected through BGU to Israel's Homeland Security Institute, which has 'partnerships with weapons companies, the Israeli Ministry of Defense, and BGN Technologies—a technology transfer company that develops unmanned ground vehicles as well as climbing robots for military use.' (*ibid.*) It also ties UCD, via Technion, to weapons manufacturers Elbit systems and Rafael, both of which are listed as partners by the Technion Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering (Technion 2025). The CEO of Technion UK notes that 'it has almost always been inevitable that the Technion would be synonymous with both Israel's establishment and perseverance over 100 years.' (Aziz 2024).

As an imagined search for anti-value in motion, calls for divestment, based on direct action, show the ways in which intellectuality overflows the social form of the University. Moreover, it brings competing ideas into relation in the productive environment of the University – the genocide in

Gaza is presented at the same time that Israel's self-defence and perseverance is reiterated. In navigating this, students demand that institutions pay attention to their own statements on human rights, and maintain their anti-racist and anti-apartheid cultures against the circulation of value (UCD 2025).

Global protests offer ways of imagining a new mycorrhizal network: with intellectual and emotional energies shaping tendrils or hyphae that provide nutrients whereby anti-value might have motion. The need for this has also been reiterated by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Francesca Albanese. In her report *From the Economy of Occupation to the Economy of Genocide* (UN 2025), Albanese identifies the connections and partnerships between:

- Israeli universities and their social science, law and archaeology schools/disciplines (that build 'the ideological scaffolding of apartheid'), and their science and technology schools/disciplines (that generate the underpinning military-industrial whereby 'targeted killing, tools that are effectively tested on Palestinians');
- leading universities from the Global Minority, like MIT and the Technical University of Munich (in research and development), and also the University of Edinburgh (in endowment-related investments);
- corporate partners like Lockheed Martin (and their Seed Fund for students to work with teams in Israel), and Elbit Systems (which 'paid for membership to MIT's Industrial Liaison Program, enabling access to research and talent'); and
- the European Commission's Horizon Europe programme (which 'actively facilitates collaboration with Israeli institutions, including those complicit in apartheid and genocide').

This is a complex web of partnerships, which are *both* ideological in justification *and* driven by the treadmill compulsion to produce for-value. Thus, Albanese (UN 2025) highlights the following for the University of Edinburgh:

With both direct and indexed investments, it ranks among the UK's most financially entangled institutions. The University also partners with firms aiding Israeli military operations, including Leonardo S.p.A. and Ben Gurion University via an AI and Data Science Lab, sharing research that directly links it with assaults on Palestinians.

Her analysis (*ibid.*) 'acknowledges the vital work of students and staff in holding universities to account. It casts a new light onto global crackdowns on campus protesters: shielding Israel and protecting institutional financial interests appears a more probable motivation than fighting alleged antisemitism.'

Holding to account might offer a potential for struggle to become anti-value, and to be in motion or circulating. At the core of this issue lies opposition to those institutional financial interests whose hyphae dissolve and resolve the intentionality and actuality of our universities. As is often the case, it is students who show the courage to intervene in these processes and formations of an inhuman social universe, through direct action aimed at destabilising hegemonic relationships. Most often, this also contains some idea of reimagining the University. As noted above, MIT UE Local 256 (MIT GSP 2024) wish to intervene to build 'a future for academia that we will be proud to take part in', and appeal to their faculty elders for support in so doing. At MIT, student-faculty-community protests maintained pressure on the Elbit Systems-MIT partnership, which was ended during 2025. In the stated Israeli-Dutch context, the call was made to end collaborations:

In the light of the societal responsibility of universities, the seriousness and urgency of stopping the genocide in Gaza, the structural dependence of Israeli universities on the Israeli government, and the necessity of a structural and coordinated action to achieve the strongest and fastest possible result. (IECIDAT 2025, emphasis added)

The UCDSU (2025) not only called for condemnation of genocide and analyses of institutional partnerships to support boycott and divestment, but also stressed the importance of renewed decision-making and governance processes in the institution. Beyond value, these would be predicated upon human rights, and new ways of relating and communicating.

...

These movements challenge us to move beyond the question of how we might live in these days, and to centre the question of what is to be done? How might we imagine our institutions otherwise? How might we realise a society that no longer needs our institutions in these forms?

A starting point might be new stories curated and set-free by students through praxis, which are grounded in excess and in the indignation of No! These are new stories grounded in the intention that another world and another university must be possible.

6. Resolving a new political economy of human activity

For Adorno (2008, 127-28), 'every single element in the web of delusion is nevertheless of relevance for the demise of that web of delusion'. Ike (2025, 163) highlights that Adorno grounded this renewed critique in the particulars of specific sectoral or institutional experiences: 'the categories of Marx's critique of political economy are never purely or merely economic but are always already about society writ large.' This refuses the

affirmation or abolition of the University (or of labour within that social form), in order to instantiate a final, transhistorical or good version of itself. Rather, it stands for overflowing the University, through the negation and abolition of the categories that realise it (Dinerstein and Neary 2002a; Neary 2015a). Struggle erupts against 'the very developed totality of relations', shaped in relation to value, which is 'not merely an economic category but is the social substance out of which capitalist society is derived' (Neary 2002, 163–64).

Boycott, divestment, corporate partnerships, funding programmes, are each understood more fully where they are seen in relation to fully social categories, of State, labour, capital, value, and so on. Where struggles become categorical they overflow reductionist economic labels, and centre refusals, *¡Ya basta!*, or No! They do not seek salvation in the State's imposition of reformist political mandates, or in trade union struggles over labour conditions. Our being unsettled reveals our concrete struggles in 'a political form which will express not the illusory community of the liberal state but the real community of human social life' (Clarke 1988, 365; see also Clarke 1979b). This reflects De Angelis' (1995, 116) position that class struggle is a dynamic unfolding of 'the multidimensionality of the needs and aspirations of... people', in ways that are mutual and dialectically-constituting. Our students in struggle continue to show us that the State and its social forms cannot enable this.

Intellectual work is central to this project, in demonstrating that whilst the expanded reproduction of capital, and the appropriation of surplus-value, are privatised and commodified at the level of society, and whilst the law of value appears to subordinate all of life to its demands, there is something left over, or left out. This left over or left out is our non-identity with value, and it points towards a different social universe, with a different horizon of material wealth. This different universe, structured by

a different materiality and relationality gives us sight of a new story on the horizon. It is the story of the encampments, and of student struggles for fossil fuel divestment; it is the story of struggles against precarious university employment; it is the story of struggles for reparations, and to acknowledge the legacies of enslavement. These are struggles in excess of class as the definition of a new and dynamic social formation, aimed at a new form of social wealth, and demanding solidarity across the whole class of lives made precarious.

For Neary, there can be no hiding place in being against what the University has become. A more open approach to analysing the (ontological) categories that define capitalist reality, and how we (epistemologically) come to understand the potential for broadening and deepening antagonism and contradiction, recognises that non-identity with the totality, or with the institutions that shape our immediate understanding and experience of totality, is a way to widen disruption and revolt. As Chuǎng (2019) noted, this is the way out, because:

[w]ithin the material community of capital, there can be no true hermit kingdom. All is encircled by capitalist accumulation—the red dust of living death—and all who attempt to flee are returned to it, in the end. Future communist prospects, then, will find no hope in reclusion. The only emancipatory politics is one that grows within and against the red dust of the material community of capital.

Privilege, settling, or reclusion offer no security. Neary grasped this in relation to the new reading of Marx. Categories like class, labour and value are radically open, and socially-constructed, rather than economically validated, through the ways in which the capital-labour relation emerges (Bellofiore and Riva 2015; Bonefeld 2014; Heinrich 2004; Heinrich and Wei 2012). The social relation, and the social purpose that informs/is informed

by that relation, is everything. In the 'social production and reproduction of the life of society as a whole' (Adorno 2000, 141), the qualitative purpose, expressed in relation to the quantitative, dissolves us. We are dissolved as we are realised against the performative privilege of the white, male universal.

These are the grounds of evidence-based practice, impact or the measurement of value-for money, which dehumanise us all. They shape the 'non-empirical reality' (Dinerstein 2014) of value that feeds off mad, crazy, displaced and wrong measurements. This is why the encampments, student-worker occupations, and the movement of squares matter. They operate across and against a terrain of value through an analysis of categories that remain open, shaped quantitatively/materially but unfolding qualitatively/immaterially in time and place.

The negativity of intention and potential in this are revealed through a science of revolution (or a revolutionary science), where struggles overflow the assumptions and appearances of class, as a specific, historical form with particular economic content and political intentionality (Backhaus 1980). Struggles are objective in seeking to dissolve the abstract universality of the totality of capital that dominates lives: therefore, we seek to destroy settler-colonialism and related social forms. Struggles are also subjective, in seeking to resolve those very lives that reproduce the totality in a new ecosystem of doing, knowing and being: therefore, we seek to enable Palestinian liberation, such that they can help us to learn and teach anew.

As such, struggles are anti-value in motion, or anti-capital, as the unfolding of a new form of/content for social life: 'a communist world on a new principle of social wealth', where the relations enabled by labour and value have been 'abolished' (Neary 2024b, 33). Neary (2024c, 47) is clear that as 'labour is a particular manifestation of the value-form', it is 'devoid of revolutionary subjectivity'; therefore, our critical, theoretical

engagement in praxis demands ‘a critique of labour where the question remains: what is the genesis of the communist world?’

Here, Dinerstein and Neary’s (2002b) anti-value in motion draws us towards an unfolding dynamic, with a new appreciation of materiality, relationality and intellectuality. As an expression of revolutionary science, such a dynamic moves inside-and-against the appearance of society shaped by abstract labour (as its inhuman, totalising nature) and its grounds (how it is experienced), as ‘the real movement that abolishes the present state of things’ (Marx and Engels 1845/1998, 57). This movement challenges the anti-human logics of the drone, AI, the algorithm, where those are commodified for the exploitation of labour-power and the annihilation of human lives. Here, we remember that these logics are also a function of disciplines and interdisciplinarity.

In thinking negatively with this, we are reminded of Cheng’s (2025) analysis of technology in the development of capitalism with Chinese characteristics:

Every transistor and every wire holds the promise of an escape hatch, signalling toward an alternative world, where the factory belongs to the workers and knowledge stays in the Commons, where our spaces of existence and channels of speaking are not stamped with a corporate logo or claimed by a national flag.

If, as Marx (1857/1993) notes, capital is ‘the moving contradiction’, as value-in-motion *both* seeking to suck living labour dry, *and* depending upon that living labour for its own life, is it possible to resolve human activity in ways that contradict this movement? (Bellofiore and Riva 2015) The insertion point (the transistor or the wire) is the source of conflict over social production and reproduction, ‘as well as struggles against all colonised life, slave labour, racist and

dehumanising police and other types of population control and environmental destruction beyond the human imagination’ (Neary 2024b, 37). Might another insertion point be the University, as a commons?

Through an ecosystem of struggles, it becomes possible to realise the ‘latent potential’ of our concrete usefulness or use-value (Postone 1993, 364), and to raise ‘the possibility for a higher level of society (Marx 1993) based on a new logic of abundance rather than subsistence’ (Neary 2024b, 39). This would have disposable time, rather than abstract labour, as its organising principle. This higher level is shaped: first, as a new common sense, ‘a pedagogy or way of knowing, that is elaborated in the lessons learned from the history of class struggle... The basis of our intellectual not-working (i.e. Doing); second, as mass intellectuality, ‘our common ability to do, based on our needs and capacities and what needs to be done’, where social needs lie beyond value; and third, as the resolution of the general intellect, which realises the society of abundance, where ‘we can re-appropriate the knowledge that has been stolen from the workers that have produced this way of knowing (i.e. Abundance)’. (The University of Utopia n.d.a)

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. (*ibid.*)

Working through The University of Utopia, Neary makes the case for reintegration; for many-sidedness; for our generalised refusal to consent to be single beings. He channels Marx’s focus upon the general power of science, knowledge and technology: first, to be recognised as ‘general social knowledge’ (Marx

1857/1993, 706), ‘the social brain’ (*ibid.*, 694), and ‘the general intellect’ (*ibid.* 706); second, to be negated as ‘knowledge in an alien form: the power of knowledge objectified’ (*ibid.*, 706); and third, to be transcended as a new type of ‘social intellect’ (*ibid.* 709). He stresses that our struggle for mass intellectuality is the struggle against fetishised disciplines, and commodified methodologies or science. It is the struggle to reintegrate human science, ecosystems, and philosophy, with an empathetic respect for materiality, temporality and relationality.

A new revolutionary science provides the foundation for a communist higher and higher education. It does not base struggle on a fair distribution of resources or social goods from society into universities, and into disciplinary areas, for instance, via a new financial settlement. It is not the emancipation of academic labour, in the alienated form of student, lecturer, professor, technician, librarian, within the University as-is. These social forms of intellectual work are also forms of social domination, constantly reproducing (sublating) their own reality inside a capitalist totality.

For Neary (2024b, c), following Heinrich (2004, 195), socially-conditioned, class struggle has an ‘independent dynamic’ that ‘can lead to processes of learning and radicalization [*sic.*] in which the capitalist system as a whole is called into question’ (2004, 195). It is here that revolutionary science enables us to base our struggle on a revolutionary transformation of our social relations of production, and in our ways of knowing the world through ‘directly social labour’ (Neary 2024b, 41). Our intention must be to enable free, associated individuals to articulate their actually-existing needs, desires and capabilities directly, rather than through the market or in commodity-exchange (Marx 1875).

As anti-value in motion, our struggle is for our emancipation from that labour, across a social movement of dissolution operating as a dialogic, social resource (Neary 2024b), and

pointing beyond ‘the ontology of the wrong state of things’ (Adorno 1973, 11). Revolution must be a self-reflexive, self-abolition, undertaken in relation to struggle (including class struggle) where ‘we cease to constitute value, and it ceases to constitute us’ (Endnotes 2010a). This is a struggle against value as ‘the foundation of all social life... of social totality’ (Neary and Rikowski 2002, 61), and against the ways in which it situates the commodity and processes of commodification, at the heart of an inhuman social universe.

7. Communism and the space-time of human activity

In considering how to resist, and then potentially dissolve and resolve a social universe beyond value, human activity needs to engage relationally, materially and intellectually with ‘the categories of definite social relations that are founded on the separation of social labour from its means’ (Bonefeld 2023). Such activity might emerge against the narration of lived experiences from within the University, which highlight how life is demeaned. However, for Neary and Rikowski (2000a, 17) it is a function of being against-value as ‘the social substance out of which capitalist society is derived: the social matter for analysing the way in which human activities are incorporated into capitalist work.’

Being against requires pedagogical work to uncover how the capital-labour relation (the relationality of labour and value-in-motion) *both* constitutes the social universe of value (and gives it the appearance of meaningful, authentic work), *and* realises the denial of human agency (in immiserating conditions or expressed in Othering). Following Postone (2008, 125), the realisation of the potential of modern science and technology ‘would entail the abolition of value’, because it would negate the need for labour as constitutive of necessary activity. This would be grounded in new needs and forms of social wealth given space to breathe by an abundance of free time (perhaps a new *Gemeinwesen*).

So, our revolutionary struggle is for a communism that ‘inverts the polarity/subjectivity and replaces the logic of social expansion where the subject is value, in the form of money, with the logic of human need and subjectivity.’ (Neary and Rikowski 2000a, 19). It is based upon recognising how value enforces a fetishistic separation of individuals and groups within the production process (as professors or students or administrators, and also as Black, female, queer, disabled), how it thereby encourages a comparable, fetishistic separation of struggles. Recognition enables us to consider how those might be woven otherwise.

These struggles might be at the level of society, over the distribution of social goods or access to land, against austerity, and so on, and they might be within sectors, for instance, over the unconscionable violence of restructuring or the war on professors. Returning to our earlier point about empathy, solidarity and mutuality across resistances, a central and crucial moment for transformatory struggle is to recognise that, rather than being separated (and fetishised as such), these are representative of resistance to the same, automatic, treadmill dynamic (Best 2024). Recognition of the ways in which this dynamic erupts from the contradictory and mutually-constituting relation between labour and value then uncovers the grounds by which we might ‘abolish the social relation out of which this antagonism is derived.’ (Neary 2004, 244)

As a means of abolishing this social relation, Marx (1844a), defines communism as society that ‘is the complete unity of man with nature—the true resurrection of nature—the accomplished naturalism of man and the accomplished humanism of nature.’ Following Neary (2002, 166), a renewed, kinetic materialism, unfolding with social movements, trade unionism, and struggles around identity politics, settler colonialism and racial-patriarchy, might integrate within ‘a larger class movement for whom conditions have become intolerable’. In this way, mindful of the

potential for forms of workers' inquiry (Notes from Below 2018), it becomes possible to imagine forms of public and militant co-research (Neary 2012b; Thorburn 2012), which work pedagogically (kinetically) to dissolve the validity (materiality) of our institutions, and then of the social universe of value that they constellate.

This is the work of defining a new form of sociability, as a new space-time of human activity. It aims at reimagining intellectuality beyond the institution and the classroom, as a critical, pedagogical project, grounded in actually-existing examples of academics, activists and communities (Chantiluke *et al.* 2018; Motta and Cole 2016). As a result, with Neary (2012b) it is possible to associate educational repair with wider societal repair, where it is framed by a re-focusing of life upon self-actualisation as dynamic and fluid, and rooted in a different conception of what is to be done (hooks 1994). Moreover, in this process 'struggle has moved outside the factory and now occurs at the level of society', against 'a multi-dimensional matrix' of value (Neary 2002, 170, 175), imagined as the red dust, an unreal assembly, or madness and displacement.

So we witness that 'forms of antagonism are emerging that cannot be theoretically contained by the framework of labour movement or social movement or social movement unionism politics' (*ibid.*, 184). These include the Zapatistas, the movement of the squares, Occupy!, Black Lives Matter, and more, and offer a new reading of confrontation at the global level, resolved inside a new space-time that is against the logic of capitalist work and its storytime. Pushing beyond class, we are at the limits of value-in-motion, questioning what Dinerstein and Neary (2002c, 14) called *Disutopia*, or 'the end of social dreams' governed by value. This is the context for the repression of the struggles of the Gaza encampments, and at the same time it is the fetishisation of the student experience. It is strategies of institutional expansion that continue to deplete the biosphere, and at the same time

it is claims to sustainability and sustainable development. As Dinerstein and Neary (*ibid.*) stress:

Disutopia can only be sustained by denying the real content of life, i.e. the foundations of the real world. The result of all this together is mediocrity.

Can we dream again, in order to move beyond mediocrity?

Dreaming is transgressive where we develop ‘a perspective to think about how to transgress the current *status quo*’, through ontological immersion in the human, as knowing, doing and being. (Szadkowski 2023, 38, *emphasis* in original) Through a methodology of in-against-beyond, unfolding ecologically and in-common, our struggles shapes a kinetic communism that gives ‘an indication of points of historically expressible flexible structures, which we can use to imagine the departures for critique of and escape from capitalism.’ (*ibid.*, 40) This is how we might bear witness to multiple standpoints of opposition to the capitalist University, and in countless alternatives and struggles, like the Really Open University (ROU 2011), After The Fall (2009), the recent occupations of student accommodation in Poland (Kurowska *et al.* 2024), and the Edufactory (Neary 2012b; Thorburn 2012).

This is how we might refuse value-in-motion, or the value-vortex, which depends upon the mitochondria of the metabolism of life, fed by the labour-power of humans. What we must uncover are alternative ways to meet the real metabolic needs of life, rather than the desires of a fraction of humans. We must uncover the reality that value is the generation of waste, predicated upon a death-impulse for most of life (Khadri 2023). We must move towards integrating the revolutionary potential of Occupy! and populist organising, grounded in revolutionary science (Neary 2012c).

6

Occupy!, populist organising and the University

It is as if we can reimagine nothing other than a nicer form of what they do to us. (The Third University 2011)

The primary importance, then, of the free university movement is in its rejection of the status quo, of the fatal economism of our society today; it has the desire and ability not just to imagine alternative realities, but to dare to create them right here, right now. (Joel Lazarus 2011)

Strike – Occupy – Transform (The Really Open University)

1. Grounding contradictions

In a January 2012 article in the *Times Higher Education*, Grove (2012) discussed alternative HE projects erupting from within or adjacent to anti-austerity, protest movement politics. One strand was radical anti-universities that appeared in opposition to the capitalist University. A second strand related to informal ruptures like Tent City University and The Bank of Ideas, and these generated significant interest. Tent City University emerged in the wake of the Occupy! movement in 2011-12, around the key OccupyLSX encampments at St Pauls and Finsbury Square. As it flowed into the squatting of the empty UBS Bank Building (as a 'public repossession' (The Guardian (2011)), the Bank of Ideas

emerged. For many, the symbolism of the squat taking place in a financial district resonated.

Revisiting Grove's (2012) article is a reminder of how much of the discussion, at the time and since, has pivoted around established academics either seeking solace, salvage or sanctuary inside alternative, educational spaces, or denying the historical and material ability for any of these alternatives to become sustainable. Sustainability in this context rarely analysed the material conditions in which alternatives emerged, and could not be about the stewardship of a different idea of higher learning. The alienating realities of capitalism and capitalist HE meant that individual or networked, radical, alternative sites of higher learning would always struggle to survive.

In spite of this, the alternatives that emerged in the UK could point to significant historical precedent. The material and ideological conflicts that emerged in relation to their appearances, echo those that emerged in relation to the experimental colleges in the USA of the late 1950s. Those had to contend with a forked or bifurcated idea of what it is to be experimental: first, as entrepreneurial, marketised challenger institutions destabilising an ossified, established order (new entrants in the market); and, second, from the perspective of students caught up in a wave of campus protests in the late 1960s, looking to democratise their experience (Higginson 2019). Here, discussions of 'a more intimate intellectual community, greater student freedom, and a more relevant education' came to represent points of connection, and then departure and contention, between administrators and students, as social struggles developed (*ibid.*).

In 2012 this range of ideational and ideological standpoints also pointed back to critical moments in opposition to the unfolding crises of capitalism and the multiple (pluriversal) ways in which communities sought to reimagine (resolve) other versions of HE, such as: the Anti-University of the late 1960s (Wall 2018) or

the alternatives that flowed through the student protests of that era (OccupyLSX 2025); the Copenhagen Free University of the 2000s (Norman 2011); and, the working class education projects (especially *mancomunales*) inspired by Recabarren in Chile in the early twentieth century (Rueda 2023). There was so much rich history: an ecosystem of lessons and lesson plans, of nourishment and energy. What the period after 2010 taught us was that the struggle *against* what the university was becoming was a long-term project, grounded in countless ruptures, protests and organisations that questioned its social use-value and sociability.

They also questioned its place in an ecosystem of abolitionist intentionality. *The Occupied Times of London* (OTL n.d.) archives demonstrate connections between: occupation as a social tool and as critique; climate justice; anti-war action; struggles for Palestinian liberation; critical analyses of money, rent and labour; and the meaning of reform and revolution. The pages of the OTL remind me of the energy of praxis, as was made evident in the curriculum (timetable) for Tent City University for the week of 21st January 2012, with events by activists and critical academics on: housing, including setting up a housing association; the National Health Service; participatory societies; the social-psychology of the *status quo*; economic literacy; being a clown; subversive texts; fitness (hula hoop/poi); international relations; and, the art of occupation (OTL 2012a).

Some of this work took place in the tented, occupied zones of the City, and some in The Bank of Ideas. There was a need to balance prosaic organising needs and poetic desires for a world of abundance. In reflecting on the timing of the 18 November 2011 take-over of the UBS building by OccupyLSX's direct action group, the 23 November Editorial of the *OTL* (2011, 2), drew attention to the reality that this occurred following 'the serving of an eviction notice to occupiers at St Paul's'. This necessitated discussion about:

how to keep the momentum of the movement going. Have things begun to stagnate? Would occupy out-grow the camp presence? And what would happen if and when it does? (*ibid.*)

For the movement, ‘The Bank of Ideas appears to be an excellent response’, because moving inside ‘illustrates the continuing energy and creativity of the movement... to explore new spaces, and make real, positive changes.’ There was a sense of permanency in shifting ‘the focus of our presence within the city away from the temporariness associated with tent cities and towards the idea of permanent discussion.’ This was the promise of transformation through dialogue, forms of consensus, and concrete, material action at the level of society. It was predicated on the general assembly as a participative site of contestation. It was messy, open to interpretation, risking counter-revolution and co-option, but it was also a site of potential and possibility.

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I remember my energy being drawn-up and down in new ways, through engagement in ‘no fees, no cuts’ demonstrations in London, including at Millbank (Myers 2017). This was carried through in student occupations in Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield, and also in spaces at Tent City University and The Bank of Ideas (Hall 2011a). I remember taking this forward in discussions about an anti-University or a co-operative university at The Bank of Ideas (where one evening, I was accused of being an undercover cop), and in thinking through the connected but distinct contexts for this at Occupy LSX and also at Zuccotti Park, in witnessing General Assembly meetings at Occupy Wall Street (The Third University 2011a).

The energy and intentionality made available as a social resource, in general assemblies, planning sessions, and teach-ins, was not framed as abolition. However, it enabled thinking about the organisation, cultures and practices of the University beyond a changing financial settlement imposed on institutions and students. Rather, praxis challenged the dominant political economic narrative of austerity governance, and began to open up the possibility that we might think about the organisation of, and access to, a range of social goods. It flowed into my conversations at places like the Really Free School, and in conferences like the *Crisis Forum* at The University of Winchester (2011), *MobilityShifts: An International Future of Learning Summit* at The New School, New York (2011), and *Reimagine the University* at the University of Leeds (2011). The catalyst was a desire to unlock ways of knowing the world otherwise.

Whilst there was, in my networks, little focus upon issues of settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy, or of critical race, critical feminism, queer theory, and so on, there was a keen sense of co-operativism and voice in developing critique, and linking that to meaningful action. Holding dialogue in social or communal spaces, enabled: first, a connection to be made between critique and action, witnessed in The Space Project in Leeds hosting John Holloway over three nights (where challenges emerged over intersectional and identity-related matters arising); and second, the development of co-operative alternatives, like the SSC.

My own practice in this time and in these places was at the intersection of agency, place, practice and critique, infused with anti-capitalist intent. Most clearly, this was witnessed in the formation of the SSC, and in particular in its democratic dialogue around governance and curriculum. This then carried forward into conversations around the potential for a UK Co-operative University, and to my becoming a Director of Leicester Vaughan College, after the University of Leicester closed The

Vaughan Centre for Lifelong Learning (Gill and Faire 2025). Through each of these moving and unfolding engagements, I was drawn to the idea expressed on one Tent City University @ OccupyLondon flyer:

As formal education becomes more and more commodified and inaccessible, here we have an opportunity to explore popular alternatives. Because between us we have all the resources we need. Anyone can teach, everyone can learn.

Play also felt liberatory in this: a sense that we might be drawn more fully back to ourselves. The Third University in Leicester, curated with Jennifer Jones, was a space that sought to draw attention to the ridiculous nature of university bureaucracy. With this in-mind we aimed to be ‘the third best University in Leicester’.

My engagement in these space-times was experimental, but also filled with connection, mutuality and relationality. In thinking through how organising could be linked, meaningfully in time and place, to knowing, doing and being, I wanted to be more social, sociable and socially-useful than I could be inside an objective university life. Only later would this be infused with a different sensibility, informed by indigeneity and decoloniality, and at the beginning I was simply trying to dissolve my normative preconceptions of the University. Any new narrative, or new way of seeing and knowing the University, would have been impossible without the eldership of Mike Neary and Joyce Canaan (Hall 2018b; Hall 2022), or the companionship of Sam Amsler, Keri Facer, Joel Lazarus, Keith Smyth and Joss Winn.

It was Neary who provided the analytical and practical energy that enabled many of us to ground our more abstract thinking about higher learning and protest, in experiments that confront global emergencies. Grounding reminds me of two crucial quotes: first from the Preface to the First Edition of *Capital*,

Volume 1, written by Marx in London in July 1867; and second, from the Postface to the second edition, written in London in January 1873. In the former, Marx (1867/2004, 93) writes:

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, Mr. Wade, vice-president of the United States, declared in public meetings that, after the abolition of slavery, a radical transformation in the existing relations of capital and landed property is on the agenda. These are signs of the times, not to be hidden by purple mantles or black cassocks. They do not signify that tomorrow a miracle will happen. They show that, within the ruling classes themselves, a foreboding is emerging that the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and constantly engaged in a process of change.

In the latter (*ibid.*, 103):

In its rational form [the dialectic] is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesman, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.

These serve to anchor us within an unfolding and relational energy, whereby the abstract/universal and the concrete/particular are in historical and material (dialectical) relation. They remind us that there are spaces and times when new horizons of sublation, or new geographies for abolition open-up. They serve to remind us that the ruling classes and doctrinaire

bourgeois managers can be filled with foreboding that their world might be dissolved, as we become in excess of our objectified selves.

In the 2010s, for a while at least, moving towards a new horizon felt possible.

2. The social energy of organising against forgetting

The possibility that we might approach or imagine such a horizon through social movements of liberation, drew strength from what Dixon (2023) subsequently defined as cultivating a long view. This, in turn, took conceptual-interpretive-practical strength from the work of Queer activist scholars Kinsman and Gentile (2010, 21), in refusing what they call ‘the social organization of forgetting.’ A crucial strand of their analysis involves highlighting how power erases past struggles, and the gains, programmes, rights and desires that have subsequently been normalised.

Instead, they are presented as the gift of the system and its regulators, appearing to emerge independent of the humans whose labour generates them. As Dixon (2023) notes, ‘as ruling institutions sever us from social and historical memory, we lose access to a wealth of knowledge for changing our present.’

Across English HE, the social organisation of forgetting was also the social construction of a new, hegemonic narrative, around the purpose and meaning of education, governed increasingly by value-for-money. This also erupted in relation to colonial intentionality, where the inertia of responses to students questioning: why isn’t my professor Black?, Why is my curriculum white?, and the simple statement that Rhodes (and fees) Must Fall, presaged the institutional responses to the Gaza encampments.

Yet, the act of recovering alternative methodologies reveals alternative ontological and epistemological standpoints, and the potential for new moments of praxis. Kinsman describes this as

‘the resistance of remembering.’ (Kinsman, quoted in Natascia L 2012), and Dixon (2023) then uses resistance and remembering to connect with Kelley’s ‘freedom dreams’ (2002). I see these in relation to Andreotti’s (2021) storytelling, and the (re)weaving of Wall Kimmerer (2013). Resisting, remembering, recovering and resolving flow into the potential for us to move towards a horizon for sublation or dissolution.

In the occupations of 2011-12, and especially of Occupy LSX, Tent City University and the Bank of Ideas, this idea of dreaming, storytelling and (re)weaving resonated. In response to the negative energy of austerity governance, central questions emerged: Who might we become and how might we become otherwise? What might we do and how might we do otherwise? What might we know and how might we know otherwise? In this, a specific blogpost by James Butler (Pierce Penniless 2011) stayed with me.

Let’s try a thought experiment: in the capital city of your country, a popular protest movement springs up with the explicit aim of confronting the financial system, occupies and maintains an occupation of a prominent public space, captures the media conversation and enjoys widespread popular support. The only possible response is to go down and engage with it.

Butler (*ibid.*) was heartened by the influx of new faces and new energies shaped by a desire for generative action; he was also critical of long-term activists and organisers who were disengaged because they felt ‘the politics of the camp are not sufficient to the ends we would like to see’, or those politics were too reformist (or just wrong). For Butler (*ibid.*), this was ‘ludicrous’, denying that ‘the politics of the camp, and the people in it, are in flux’, and that the mix of those who attended Occupy LSX, Tent City University and the rest, were open to (and deserved) dialogue,

in relation to developing a politics adequate to the political conditions of the time. He (*ibid.*) identified that:

the real conditions from which social movements spring will always be partly obscured to us, their form is dictated by the conditions in which they arise, and partly determined by them. It is up to us to go to meet history when it is moving, rather than expecting it to come to us in a pleasing shape.

This might be where we get stitched into a new mycorrhizal network for dissolution, as a movement that enables us to be in excess of ourselves. Here, the resistance of remembering is a social-practical activity and an act of stewardship. In the context of Occupy!, this meant engaging meaningfully and authentically with ‘people whom the “left” in its traditional forms has failed, or never engaged’ (*ibid.*). Such dialogue lies beyond class, but carries systemic energy for resistance and dissent aimed at the wrongness of the world (Holloway *et al.* 2011). Here, there were connections with the student movement of 2008-09 in support of Palestine (Yafai 2011), re-emphasising that political conversation has to take place in practical, activist spaces, and must engage with the energy of dissent.

Deliberative, empathetic, caring dialogue, grounded in mutuality and reciprocity matters, because, as Marom (2021) reflected, in relation to Occupy Wall Street: ‘[w]e just don’t know that much. We don’t know what’s going to work, what will resonate, or what people are ready for. Even those who look back and say they called it, the truth is, they didn’t know either.’ Butler (Pierce Penniless 2011) felt this at the time:

I get that it’s frustrating. The slow work of politics—having essentially the same conversation over and over a thousand times—is not fun. It’s not like breaking through a police

line, or marching, or chasing shamefaced politicians around Westminster with an angry mob. It is, however, the most important work we can do... from the ground up, by locating a popular movement and engaging it (that is, with the people, all of them, who make it up) with the humility to recognise that it might teach you a few things about how you organise, and about what you think, too.

This slow work still resonates, as do Butler's caveats that change will not happen in a meaningful way online, and that there are 'critiques, frustrations and fears' about Occupy LSX in terms of: 'its slipshod process'; 'lack of safe space and treatment of women, people of colour and queers'; 'its hesitancy to engage fully against capitalism'; and 'the transiency and direction of the camp'. Yet:

Any movement is what you make of it – I won't be ceding the ground to conspiracy theorists, or the liberal centrists, or the nationalists. There is a real chance here, and to pass it up without any engagement is jawdropping. (*ibid.*)

This resonates with The Third University's (2011b) reflection that there is an urgency in resisting:

people who think they know the answer. Or at least how to unlock it. Like it is a commodity to be revealed. And in thinking that they know the thing they speak or skew conversations. And they demonstrate their power. And they forget to listen. And they marginalise. And they accelerate the exodus. (*ibid.* 2011a)

Later, Butler (2024) reflects on analyses of Occupy! in the context of the populist protests and movements of the 2010s, reminding me of an interview reported in Myers (2017, 51) where he draws on reflexivity/subjectivity and praxis: '[y]ou

should allow yourself to go with it and be changed by it and don't let it be put in any of these boxes.' Through the social energy of organising against forgetting there is a rich connection to a tapestry of historical and material, intergenerational, intercommunal and intersectional struggles, predicated upon social justice and the dignity of difference. These erupt in spite of the pain of being kettled (Canaan 2011), the reality of police violence (Doughty Street Chambers 2023), or the mobilisation of the law by institutions to silence protest (Tickle 2012).

Exploring alternatives is a means of exploring agency at the level of society. In unfolding new, dynamic and participatory stories within a new, moral economy (Ibrahim 2014), it points towards long-term stewardship, 'to build a foundation for more effective and visionary movements in the years to come, and humbly offering our experiences, reflections, and dreams.' (Dixon 2023) Pointing towards direct relations between people, mindful of the contexts of power and privilege, or the risks of speaking and not-listening, we open-up the possibility for a new horizon populated by social individuals and governed by free time. This is a movement, then, that offers a horizon for reimagining:

[t]o what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.
(Marx 1857/1993, 706)

In the 2010s, a starting point was to be a particular, social reflexivity, which came to challenge the organising and doing of confrontations with capital and the State. In a world where trade unionism lacked constitutive, ideological and organisational power, there was a need to consider how and where to crack the chains of capitalism.

3. Cracking the chains: the populist mo(ve)ment

A decade on, important analyses emerged of the mass protest decade and the missing Revolution (Bevins 2023), and of political organising and its relationship to horizontal or vertical politics (Nunes 2024). These enabled a reflection upon participation. For Bevins (2023), there were antecedents in other forms of mass protest that also did not fulfil their revolutionary promise, in large part because political realities did not enable them to do so. He (*ibid.*) highlighted the need to analyse forms of protest as transitional or intermediate, and to recognise the ways in which the politics of the 2010s brought people out of isolation and into community.

Here lies one of the first, important lessons reiterated in Tent City University, when it identified that ‘anyone can teach, everyone can learn’: prefiguring sets an agenda, and through coherent (and flexible) organising, concrete, alternative ideological positions become possible. This identification of the concrete and the coherent matters because, as Gorz (1968) noted, student-worker insurrections, begun without organisation, might work as an anarcho-syndicalist and spontaneous outpourings in the short term, but they tend to articulate a reactive relationship to power. Gorz (*ibid.*) argued that to fetishise such spontaneity is intellectually and politically regressive, and does not address the need to theorise, operationalise and totalise a new society, in the face of counter-power.

Bevins (2023) situates this idea against Graeber’s (2002) reintegration of theory and practice, of intellectual and activist, in prefigurative forms that reinvent democracy, horizontally. Horizontal activity seeks to maximise effective solidarity, and to recognise that dissent is important in moving organisational power forward collectively, including where the collective refuses to identify with leaders (however much the media and power demands to hear from or negotiate with leaders), and does not

compel or coerce participation. Nunes (2024) also emphasises the place and time of self-organisation, relationality and mutuality in enriching coordination and heterogeneity within an emergent ecology of struggle.

Marx and Engels noted (1845/1998, 86) realising freedom ‘is not possible without the community. Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community.’ I am reminded of the work that needs to be done in: creating the conditions for coming together; in setting up of organisations; in facilitating action; and, in reproducing the conditions for life (in childcare, cooking, back-end infrastructure and so on). I am reminded that this needs to be negotiated and not imposed.

For Bevins (2023), there were lessons from very large, popular demonstrations in Spain and Greece in 2008 following the financial settlements imposed by the *troika* (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), alongside the student demonstrations in Chile in 2006 (and the less well-known protests by the Mapuche Indians in defence of their rights), about when to act, and what to demand. These lessons included how to maintain a movement’s energy against institutional inertia, and how to navigate desires for reform or radicalisation. Bevins (*ibid.*) is clear that, in order to address the maintenance of generative energy in the face of state-based brutality and crackdown, these issues need to be unfolded.

This mattered across geographies, in the movement of the squares in Europe that followed, in *The Arab Spring*, in protests over access to social goods like free travel and health care in Latin and South America, and in the struggles for indigenous rights. Here lies a second lesson, in reinforcing the importance of the collective, in its harnessing of energy in material struggles, supported digitally, through the sharing of resources and

empathy/solidarity. In so doing, movements must become more concretely horizontal, and self-consciously horizontalist in intention, in the ways in which they enable people to derive meaning through their own agency, in doing whatever tasks they feel to be important and collectively-agreed.

Bevins (*ibid.*) also raises the significant issue of how a movement, commune, or network might defeat states, or even current and emerging superpowers. This centres our need for a collective appraisal of capacity, capability and appetite for revolution, as opposed to reform, and for building non-reformist reforms as a way-marker towards abolition, dissolution or revolution. As Bevins (*ibid.*, 258) identifies, '[h]istory does not possess a supernatural, metaphysical quality that pushes it forward relentlessly', and Nunes (2024, 80-1) reminds us that the protests of the 2010s also flowed through a 'crisis of revolution in our times'. As austerity foreclosed upon the future, what stories might we remember, renew or set free?

A third lesson for us, in thinking about Occupy! and the place of the student movement in shaping counter-narratives about the University, is Bevins' (2023, 259) identification of '[a] need for strategy to accompany righteous indignation. Win power and get to work... If you are not willing to take power, then you better like the people who are waiting in the wings.' He is clear that in critiquing our relationship to power, *both* strategy *and* organisation matter in coalescing diffuse energies away from vanguardists, 'right-wing dipshits, "libertarian" capitalist, Zeitgeist conspiracy-theorists and those who think capitalism can be overcome by meditating and drinking your own urine' (Pierce Penniless 2011).

The energy of mobilisation and the metabolism of liberation are linked, in particular in building an ecology of repertoires that themselves prefigure a new world as anti-value in motion. This is a deliberate and deliberative definition of a new story, designed to mobilise the potential for liberation; it was occupation,

protest, action as a means of sending a message rather than trying to seize and reproduce hegemonic power structures. However, as movements are overcome, and as tensions are revealed within horizontally-structured protests, the narrative and the telling of the story tends to be imposed. Of course, this might not matter, where the story in its original form reminds us that failure and retreat are options. This is part of the deal within movements that have become ‘*a politics with the subject in*’ (Nunes 2024, 14, *emphasis in original*), and where ‘the subject of politics is always collective’ (*ibid.*, 21).

In relation to this, our alternative universities formed a conscious working out of what is latent in particular historical-material conditions; they remind me that ‘the idea of communism pushes toward the organization of communism.’ (Dean 2014, 834) A fourth lesson follows: there is a magic in collective, co-operative action, which emerges at the level of individual hearts and communal soul. It points towards a new horizon. Bevins (*ibid.*, 286) identifies:

those magical, radiant days, the moments when you felt that your very soul became fused with the forces of history, that you were bigger and more powerful... It is a stunning, momentary glimpse of the way the light is really supposed to be. It is how we can feel every single day in the world when artificial distinctions and narrowly self-interested activities melt away. When our society truly is participatory, when we are truly forging history in every moment and acting in love and harmony with our fellow human beings, we will be able to feel this way all the time.

Here, Nunes (2024, 33) offers a pragmatic caveat, in the need for an organisation ‘sufficiently strong and coordinated [that] focuses collective action at the local and intermediary scales so as to produce global aggregate effects.’ Those effects have a gravitational pull on other actions, which might enable new forms of collective leverage

by avoiding the projection of expectations onto a single institution. Without political action and praxis that enables a plurality of forms (an abolition geography), no new horizon can be revealed.

The idea of the subject, and of social subjectivity, then becomes pivotal. Nunes (*ibid.*, 112) states that ‘the crisis of revolution is also a crisis of the subject of revolution’. That this might be the proletariat or the party was problematic, and traumatic. For Nunes (*ibid.*), the organisation ‘needed to make the revolution was ultimately the same thing that prevented it from achieving all’. In the moment of the 2010s, there was a sense of collective, global uprising as a horizon of hope, and at the same time a realisation of the militarised power of the corporate State, which pushed radical energy towards the risk management of reformism. Alternatives to this, for O’Brien (2023) as for Nunes (2024), were revealed in the experimental energy contained within the examples of Rojava (and in the latter case the Zapatista movement), which generated an intensive radicality operating at the local level, where geographical and ideological boundaries were able to be defended.

In these examples, a range of social programmes create new enabling conditions, as hyphae able to provide nutrients for another world. They cannot break down the carcass of capitalism as a single exemplar of an alternative social form, but they can provide ideological nutrients for a plurality of forms that create a new ecosystem for communism. As we will see, this includes addressing the problem of social pedagogy and forms of educational organisation, or at least of how to release the educational potential of a new ecology of social forms. Here emerges the issue of how to break down (compost) the body of capitalism, and thereby distribute the common wealth (social goods) produced across that ecology, intentionally, relationally and mutually. The process of breaking down also creates heat that generates new work and new possibilities for living (such as folding into the ecosystem a richer appreciation of decolonising or indigeneity).

However, this requires energy for catalysis, resting on transitional forms often shaped by a particular mode of consciousness given particular historical and material circumstances. Such forms open a direction of travel whose legitimacy rests upon the actions of individuals working in concert, and within negotiated boundaries (for instance, acceptance of an idea of a co-operative university by the State). Delegation, accountability, distribution of authority, rotation of tasks and task allocation and equal access to resources each take their toll, when what people want is to dance, play football, get high, read, fish, whatever.

With deep sadness, during the 2010s and even during the pension and four fights strikes held by UCU in the UK, at the end of this period, it was clear that there was no academic movement for another world. There was no clarity that the University as-is contained the seeds of a pluriversal movement. In the separation of factionalised student, professional services and academic unions from each other and from movements for anti-racism, trans-liberation, gender equality, and so on, there remains no way of connecting collective capacities, and no student-worker moment. This is elevated at the level of society by the Gaza encampments, which also faced elites who do not appear to care about moral legitimacy or the use of force.

In response, we must remember the potential to build bonds and intentions around commonality and mutuality, at the level of society. We must connect with each other through movement, tension, and difference, in an experimental politics as a pedagogy of excess. We must do this with urgency, and from new ontological and epistemological standpoints, given Nunes' (*ibid.*, 279) point that '[i]n many respects, the world appears to have gone in the opposite direction to the one in which the 2011 protesters expected to move it.' Crucially, he (*ibid.*, 291) adds:

it ultimately does not matter whether we can ever be really done with melancholia; it suffices that we had done enough to get on with the job of investing those finite resources in giving the projects that matter to us their best possible chance to win.

4. The projects that matter to us

In *The Port Huron Statement*, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS 1964) began by noting that ‘housed now in universities’, they are ‘looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.’ They write of racism, othering, the threat of war, the failed promises of technology for the enrichment of life, exploitation and stagnation: ‘the pervading feeling [is] that there simply are no alternatives, [and] our times have witnessed the exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures as well.’ (*ibid.*, 4) Yet, they (*ibid.*, 9) also highlight that a range of student protests emerging after the McCarthyite period in the USA ‘are breaking the crust of apathy and overcoming the inner alienation that remain the defining characteristics of American college life.’

That stagnation in college life remained dominant because of a sterile, hierarchical relationship between student and teacher, and a disconnection from the material of study, ‘dividing the student from life’ (*ibid.*, 10). There is much here that resonates 60 years later: ‘the university could serve as a significant source of social criticism and an initiator of new modes and molders [*sic.*] of attitudes’; ‘the actual intellectual effect of the college experience’ mirrors ‘any other communication channel’; students leave the University more tolerant, ‘but basically unchallenged in their values and political orientations’; whilst administrators order the institution, and faculty the curriculum, ‘the student learns by his isolation to accept elite rule within the university’ (*ibid.*, 10-11).

However, at the end of their Statement, the SDS reiterate the importance of the University: ‘[s]ocial relevance, the accessibility

to knowledge, and internal openness – these together make the University a potential base and agency in a movement of social change.’ (*ibid.*, 61) The University might enable this across a distributed system, designed around a ‘new left’, where it is open to controversy, and publicly-engaged (*ibid.*, 62). Finally, emerging from a national alliance of students and faculty, it might become possible to wrest control of the institution back, in order to:

make fraternal and functional contact with allies in labour, civil rights, and other liberal forces outside the campus. They must import major public issues into the curriculum – research and teaching on problems of war and peace is an outstanding example. They must make debate and controversy, not dull pedantic cant, the common style for educational life. They must consciously build a base for their assault upon the loci of power. (*ibid.*, 63)

Whilst the SDS defined no programmatic or directional demands, rather an insistence on reclaiming the University, the movements of the 2010s framed a new cartography of power and materiality, accepting its limits in left populism. This stood as a reminder of the patience that would be required to stand by the projects that matter to us, as a means of demanding, organising, and educating for dissolution. Whilst it was not necessarily organising for the revolution, the student movement was a reminder that there was potential beyond prepping for the end days or distracting oneself as those days unfold. For Neary *et al.* (2010, and also Neary in 2012b), the spaces taken by students and occupations matter where they contain the materiality of projects of reimagining. These spaces refuse silence, and shaped by the conditions of resistance they are ‘a revolt against a “dead future”.’ (Neary 2012b, 236)

Neary’s thinking in relation to space was also shaped by the ideas emerging from the *Edu-Factory’s* (2009, 13) call for

a Global Autonomous University, and its aim ‘to map the global geography of autonomous institutionality.’ As a global, plural space of struggles, this would generate contestation and confrontation over how, socially, to organise and use an excess of living knowledge. In renewing the human, people were shaping social relations as a space of struggle over cognition as it was folded anew into the circuits of value. Against the alienation of cognitive capitalism, the desire was for life beyond the subsumption of knowing to the desires of value. This echoed Solnit’s (2011, 154) note that through direct action people are ‘becoming the space in which we are civil society’.

These spaces were to be connected in common, as pluriversal and as a refusal of the disciplinary and methodological hegemony of the capitalist University of the North.

Edu-factory is a project situated on the frontier: between the university and the metropolis, between education and labor, between the rubble of the past and exodus, between the crisis of the university and the organization of the common. Whereas the border imposes a dividing line, the frontier is a dense space, ambivalent and traversable, a place of escape and constituent practices. There is a productive force on the frontier that can be explored and appropriated in antagonistic ways. Here, there is a reconfiguration of the spatial and temporal coordinates in which the crisis of the university can be questioned and fought. (*Edu-Factory* 2009, 10-11)

The abolition of borders, the transformation of the University as an institution of the common, and confrontations over knowledge production (Edu-factory Collective 2011), enabled Neary (2012b, 236) to draw attention to the Joint Declaration emerging from the Edu-factory’s Paris 8 event in 2011:

Since the state and private interests collaborate in the corporatisation process of the university, our struggles don't have the aim of defending the status quo. Governments bail out banks and cut education. We want to make our own university. A university that lives in our experiences of autonomous education, alternative research and free schools. It is a free university, run by students, precarious workers and migrants, a university without borders.

In Neary's (*ibid.*, 239) words, this was focused upon how 'to restore the university as a revolutionary political project', pivoting from Roggero's (2011) identification of the ways in which living knowledge (socially-useful ways of knowing the world) erupts dialectically from theoretical-political activity. However, these projects signalled the importance of context and conditions, both of production and struggle. Thus, at the time, much of the focus was upon categories of autonomy, the Commons, openness, the network, and cognitive capital, connected to an opening-out of access to a new media ecosystem that was yet to be foreclosed (fully) by monopoly capital and techbro venture capitalists.

The struggle for the University no longer operates on that terrain, or under those conditions. Not only have global emergencies amplified, but the ways in which technology is used to discipline and repress dissent and protest have accelerated. The attempt to reclaim occupation (and encampment) as 'something that is beautiful, something that brings community together. Something that calls for love and happiness and hope' (Davis 2011, 141) has catalysed a painful projection from the powers that usually occupy lives and lands. Still, there are all sorts of histories that flow through these spaces, reminding us that movements of liberation point towards new horizons.

5. On the streets, towards the really open university

Solomon and Palmieri (2011) articulated the student movement in the UK in 2010 emerging against restructuring that was designed to systematise ignorance, financially. A central claim they make (*ibid.*, 11, 14) is that in response ‘students have often transcended the limitations imposed on them’, and have catalysed ‘a significant revival of dissent, protest and anger against the system’. In refusing to accept the financialisation and marketisation of their present lives, these (but by no means a majority of) students were also pushing against the corporate co-optation of the University, facilitated by a professional and managerial class. For Solomon and Palmieri (*ibid.*, 15) ‘[s]tudents seeking to combat this subordination have a long struggle ahead of them, and not just while they remain students.’

This account is one of several that highlights the intensity of energy in the early days of the movement, in particular in the demonstrations of November 2010, coinciding with parliamentary debates on *Higher Education: Funding and Student Finance*. Accounts of the protests on 10 November 2010 highlight the energy of 50,000 students in movement through London, joining in solidarity with younger sixth-form and further education students (protesting the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance). They highlight the spontaneous energy of the occupation of Millbank Towers, which ‘didn’t feel “radical”, it felt inevitable’ (*ibid.*, 23). Energy flowed from this event to a day of action called by The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts on 24 November, and to further demonstrations on 30 November, and on the day of the Parliamentary vote on HE fees, 9 December.

Movements of the streets mattered as ‘the chief means of articulating a collective grievance.’ (Myers 2017, 4) Millbank mattered because what flowed from it showed that:

the austerity generation refused its label and demanded a different future. In the student revolt the Millbank and austerity generation were present simultaneously. The Millbank generation—a generation in revolt—reminds us that the austerity generation was not inevitable but contingent. (*ibid.*, 27)

Myers highlights the importance of 24 November, involving a huge walkout of students and schoolchildren, confronting the State, and school administrators and teachers acting as agents of the State, and refusing the ways in which their futures were being foreclosed upon. We can draw lines of flight from this energy to an active process of occupation, agitation and organisation in universities, and also towards the University of Utopia, the Really Free School, the University for Strategic Optimism, the Bloomsbury Fightback Project, countless teach-outs and teach-ins, and the arts against the cuts at Tate Britain. Lines were also drawn from the 2008-09 occupations in support of boycott and divestment, alongside calls for *both* scholarships for Palestinian students *and* condemnation by universities of Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

For Neary (2010a), contingency was an active, critical refusal of ‘how the power of money has so overwhelmed human sociability that it now seems like a natural phenomenon, rather than the outcome of an oppressive social process.’ He argued that what this movement demonstrated was that whilst money ‘*appears* impossible to resist’, other possibilities were emerging, not from established trades unions, but from a new collective (*ibid.*, *emphasis* in original). Myers (2017, 99) draws attention to those whose experience showed the lack of solidarity from such unions (the NUS and UCU), and the generative connections formed instead within and across autonomous student groups. I resonated with this: ‘[i]n the current crisis, students are defining radical moments through which we might re-imagine the university’ (Hall

2010). This pointed towards a new social form of the University as a possible homeplace (Eschle 2024, following hooks 1990).

Active reimagining brought students, and those of us allied with them, into sharp relation with the State and the police. Where activity moved into the space of the University, interfering with its control of time, injunctions and repossession orders were taken out: against occupations of institutional premises by persons unknown (including their own students). This foreshadowed subsequent injunctions in the High Court against pro-Palestine or Gaza encampments. Equally, there were reports of security denying basic resources to student occupiers, or of referring to those occupiers as terrorists (Hall 2011b). Those who did take to the streets in London, tended to be met with the kettle or the threat of it (Matthews 2011), or (in the case of Alfie Meadows) bodily violence (Canaan 2011), or monitoring by counter-terrorism police (Power 2011).

In looking at what Neary took from this reality, it is important to centre: the violent, ideological and financial positioning of the transformation of student finance, related to other social impacts of austerity; the historical and material composition of students and staff engaged in the taking of space and liberating of time beyond the market (including the limited role of established trades and student unions); and, the appetite for dissolving the borders of the University, in order to create something that was really open. These strands push us towards an understanding of how Neary's revolutionary (*avant-garde*) approach to HE emerged in relation to self-critical, concrete struggles against the social universe of value. This was an activist desire for a new pedagogy of space-time (Neary and Amsler 2012).

Through such activity, people became collectively aware of their connections across positions and issues (Bascetta and Vecchi 2011), meaning that a range of leftist tendencies, with different agendas and moments of cohesion, could come together and *both*

make *and* witness acts of solidarity (Williams 2011). Taking part in these movements was a recognition that the future inscribed by the social universe of value, into which universities were kettling young people, was no longer what it used to be (Myers 2017). It was also increasingly clear that universities, and their leaders, were unable to help those who work within them to engage in social dreaming, or to imagine good living. They were becoming, increasingly, hopeless spaces, defined through the value relation as incapable of helping define a way against and beyond global emergencies.

Here, such directional activity reminds us of Thompson's (1971) idea of a moral economy, and a legitimising through the streets and the occupations of a new notion (ontology) of right, predicated on the openness of the Commons, alongside the refusal of debt, the power of finance capital and, possibly, money (although it did not define a new theory of currency). While there was a mindfulness of the State and of its disciplinary power, there was also a morality, and a feeling that 'it's impossible, but it's happening' (Fisher 2010).

As we will discuss, the concrete practices of those like Neary, seeking to develop alternatives in-place, gave space and time to recover, plot and build (Saunders 2023). In these alternatives, there resonated a demand for the liberation of space-time away from its valorisation, and of a critical engagement with higher learning as a pedagogical project at the level of society: a reimagining of society infused with an open intellectuality – as a really open university. Here, alternatives could be seen as a starting point, and as an act of empathy and solidarity beyond value, and across sectors. They defined a curriculum that sought to demystify the world as-is, and its social goods (as Simbürger and Neary (2014) also note for the student movement in Chile at this time). They attempted to define social relations beyond the divisions of the University as a factory. They often acted to blockade one particular space for the

ideological and financial reproduction of capital, and to build some form of distributed or delegated, democratic action (for instance, through general assemblies).

Yet they failed.

For the student movement, Myers (2017, 136) was clear.

The movement split into official and unofficial sections, the unprecedented levels of police repression, a lack of political champions in Parliament, paper solidarity from academics and trade unionists, deep-rooted demobilisation amongst the student body, and failures in strategy – all contributed to the movement's defeat.

The inertia of University and sectoral leaders, and the inability of a fractured class of academic labourers to support the movement was reinforced by the need for students to be students, and to study and graduate. There was a failure to generate sufficient solidarity between students, academics and professional services' staff, or to do so either across education sectors, or across sectors of the economy. With the addition of new modes of State repression, this made maintaining organisation against the hegemony of capital, including its institutions of power like the University, difficult.

One outcome was the reality that '[t]he hopes of many new to politics, without previous experience of victory or defeat, made losing all the more painful and demoralising' (*ibid.*, 65). Yet Myers (*ibid.*, 189) also noted that these were 'brief transgressive outbreaks, [offering] glimpses of other ways of living and interacting'. Towards the horizon of their transgression was a horizon of hope, seen in autonomous institutions away from the streets.

6. The movement against value

In Neary and Amsler's (2012, 111) terms, the question now was how to create 'new forms of teaching, learning and critical inquiry that enable the production of autonomous subjectivities and liberating relationships within, but more importantly beyond, formally "occupied" territories and environments'. It was not clear that the broader Occupy! movement was 'actually shifting ground in political and economic battles against capitalist hegemony', but 'it is certain that the movement educates.' (*ibid.*, 111-12). Practical educational projects lay at the heart of this reconsideration of Occupy!, and this was a way of connecting to the history of 'revolutionary feminist, anti-colonial, grassroots workers' and anarchist movements of [the twentieth] century, and to the "newest" social movements of this one', and to work with their histories of creating 'autonomous educational institutions.' (*ibid.*, 112)

The materiality of this history was central, alongside the ways in which such autonomous educational institutions might ground a critique of value, and, more importantly, a critique of labour inside capitalism. In this, Neary was influenced by the work of activist-academics like Holloway, in particular in his earlier work on the State. However, this did not encompass the ways in which Holloway (2002) had theorised *both* the alter-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s, *and* engaged with the Zapatista movement to renew an open or autonomist Marxism. Yet, Holloway remained important in debates around power and revolution, including in the autonomous reimagining of the University of the ROU, in Leeds, UK.

Neary was more interested in an understanding of the pedagogic power of concrete alternatives, as a means of *both* demonstrating how value shapes the form of the University and its alienating realities, *and*, how the social universe of value might be cracked open. Thus, he questioned how the examples

of Tent City University, the Bank of Ideas, Occupied California, the ROU, Edu-factory, and other radical spaces, alongside the pedagogical imperatives of actual University occupations, and, less concretely anti-capitalist spaces like the Peer-to-Peer University (and platform-based networks predicated on free and open-source software/hacking), might serve as alternatives. They had to be analysed in relation to the ways in which alienated labour as the arbiter of social life has catalysed a series of global emergencies.

In this, the work of other activists-academics, influenced by a range of indigenous, queer, critical feminist, post-colonial and ecological communities and networks, including Sam Amsler, Joyce Canaan, Ana Dinerstein, Keri Facer and Sara Motta, alongside those engaged in collectives like GTDF, push us to question the grounds of those concrete alternatives. They asked questions about the nature and conditions of our alternatives, and the ways in which those challenge or reproduce established, capitalist social relations. They asked questions about the ways in which social reproduction was folded inside the social universe of value, alongside the ways in which value (and labour-power) worked to circumscribe how identity might be used to define alternatives.

Situating a range of struggles not only against wage-labour and capital's desire for labour-power, but also in relation to the full range of standpoints, helps to destabilise capital's focus upon alienated labour and to reimagine our social universe. Where it becomes possible to initiate pluriversal, decolonial and relational projects, it also becomes possible to point towards a horizon for reimagining beyond the anti-life of value. As the logic and legitimacy of capitalism is increasingly enforced through violence, surveillance and borders, what else is there?

Neary and Amsler (2012, 113) wanted to address this by imagining 'the revolutionary energy of the movement... extended beyond the most visible occupied spaces and into the institutions and everyday practices of capitalism.' Their

argument was that ‘outside the encampments we seem to be giving up faster on the belief that there is any hope left for the university’, and that, instead, the focus should be upon altering ‘the relationships of the production of educational space and time *by producing them otherwise*’ (*ibid.*, 113, 117, *emphasis in original*). This demanded material, political action aimed at occupying the curriculum, in order ‘to communalise, defetishise and decommodify education... [as] a direct threat to the logics of capital and give rise to political struggle.’ (*ibid.*)

This points to a necessity for transforming (converting) the material reality of the spaces we have produced, and later, Winn (2015) and Neary and Winn (2015) would extend this theorisation beyond conversion, to think about the dissolution of the University from within, and the creation of new, co-operative universities from without. However, in this moment there was a need to consider whether occupations and alternatives were simply diversions of energy and emotion, rather than appropriations of them, designed for different outcomes. For Neary, Occupy! demonstrated the need for movements to understand the violence of abstraction, and the ways in which abstract labour produces a range of concrete resistances or struggles, beyond determinations of class. There was a need to push beyond the symptoms of the crisis, in terms of debt-driven student life, precarious employment or institutional restructuring, to think about the ways in which abstract labour and the social universe of value work pedagogically to make life a form of living death.

Working this out in practice offered a model for new forms of radical subjectivity, as a new way of knowing the world, practically and reflexively. One issue was how to build collective power through organisation, and to avoid alternatives being isolated occurrences of resistance predicated upon the predilections of radical individuals. In considering how this helps to detonate

the value form, and point towards anti-value in motion as a new, radical subjectivity, Neary and Amsler (2012) emphasise the Lincoln-based SSC. This is situated within the history of ‘the creation of ‘counter-spaces’ of education, in which the production of emancipatory knowledge is accomplished through the re-appropriation and, where necessary and possible, the production of social spaces, times and relations of learning’. (*ibid.*, 125) It is not a tactic of political defence, rather one of concrete reimagination ‘through the spaces and times of everyday life.’ (*ibid.*)

A central element of this is becoming open to reappropriating our knowing, doing and being, in ways that are infused with struggle and that connect, deeply and relationally, to pluriversal struggles: against value and its forms; and for anti-value in motion. There was not much of this in the UK HE struggles of the later 2010s and early 2020s, which were often about labour conditions, issues of equality in pay, or focused by UCU upon pensions. The directional power of the occupations and autonomous institutions of the early part of the decade, some of which remain in legacy websites (see, for instance, ROU 2011) or in more in-depth academic analyses (Earl 2018, Saunders 2023), tended not to inform these later struggles. Whilst some of the organisers and activists from the earlier movement had transitioned into labour organising in the University, later energy and demands were not directed at the imperative to strike—occupy—transform. They tended to be more defensive, sectoral struggles against the iniquities of wage labour, albeit across diverse communities.

Even so, there were possibilities. Davison (2018) argued that the memory of 2010 among younger members of UCU, coupled with a focus upon access to a liveable future, in relation to pension cuts, revealed a new terrain for opposing marketisation. The argument was that direct action, in particular in strikes and teach-outs, opened-up a united moment of struggle, which

gained material concessions. Bringing this energy from 2010 into those later struggles mattered because ‘the world of the local UCU branch seems far removed from the world of flares, barricades, and police kettles which the 2010 student protesters knew intimately.’ (*ibid.*, 1)

Yet, for all this, it was clear (as Neary had identified) that the energy of an intergenerational struggle would be driven on by those younger members whose futures were increasingly foreclosed upon, including those in solidarity with students fighting rent campaigns (for instance, at University College London, and the University of Sussex). This echoed a history of the ways in which a critical, material student movement would provide energy pushing towards social change. Infused with the practices of and lessons from a range of intersectional, intercommunal and decolonial struggles, students and young activists were demonstrating the possibility that the social universe value might be cracked open and reimaged.

We try all the time to create qualitatively different social relations, relations that do not go with the flow of money, relations that we call dignity or love or comradeship or solidarity. The challenge is to start from there, from the ubiquity of revolt, and see how these flows of revolt can gather the force necessary to break the system. The answer is not obvious, but I see no way of conceiving of revolution other than as the recognition, creation, expansion, multiplication and confluence of cracks. (Holloway in OTL 2012b)

Of course, we remember that the student movement failed, and that UCU’s four fights struggle over pay and conditions was derailed as academic labour folded at the start of the pandemic, and that other than exacting concessions, the pensions dispute did not challenge the funding, governance and regulation of the HE sector and individual institutions. Yet, the latter was supported by

student occupations. For Davison (2018), this connection between student and labour movements is fundamental in driving change, at the level of the institution and sector, even if only in relation to the conditions of labour. Whilst, in the latter part of the 2010s and into the 2020s, there was limited space *either* for reimagining the University *or* for considering that it might become a form beyond borders and bordering, there were still openings. We must still look to nurture those.

7. Gaza and the limits of re-imagination

Gaza encampments hold the flame; they represent an ongoing, student-led struggle, at the level of (the University) community against genocide and institutional complicities. In the words of Nadia Abu El-Haj (2024, 13) ‘there is no “institutional innocence” here. No university is an Ivory Tower—severed from the historical, political, and economic conditions of the state and society in which it exists.’ She highlights the silence of Israeli academics and university leaders, alongside the withering away of academic freedom in the face of the violence of occupation. Wind (2024, 17) reminds us of the historical and material reality that institutions like universities are forms for the reproduction of the violence of value and of abstraction: ‘Israeli universities are not independent of the Israeli security state but, rather, serve as an extension of its violence.’

However, there is no desire to dissolve the institution as-is. In resisting this capitalist, disciplinary institution we are reminded of ongoing ICE raids and violence against students and protesters legitimised by the State in the USA. We are also reminded of the strength and courage of graduands at the University of Edinburgh protesting their institution’s investments, accelerated following Francesca Albanese’s (UN 2025) report, *From economy of occupation to economy of genocide*. This elevates our understanding of the ways in which institutions develop

partnerships with Israeli universities as a mode of generating value and surplus, and for framing a liberal conception of what it means to know the world, appropriately. Reinforcing a particular value-form of the University depends upon an ecosystem of partnerships, which themselves are in immanent relation to disciplinary and methodological norms, and conditions and relations of intellectual production.

In this way, as Wind (2024) highlights for Israeli universities, HE more generally (and its disciplines as legitimised modes of hegemonic knowledge production) becomes a pillar of oppression, complicit in projects of settler-colonialism, apartheid and erasure (Stein 2022). For Wind (2024) Israel uses its universities to enact particular knowledge-based claims over land, and then to anchor control of land through the location of those universities. Universities thereby lend ‘academic credence to state and military agendas more broadly’ (*ibid.*, 58). For instance, she (*ibid.*, 67) identifies ‘military-academic entanglements at Hebrew University [that] reveal how crucial a role its campus has played in the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem.’

As Wind (*ibid.*) traces for us the ways in which universities are pivots for partnerships involving venture capital and the Israeli Security Agency, technology and weapons’ manufacturers, and commercialisation companies, she reveals how these operate globally. She identifies the active, social production of space, enacted financially and ideologically, in relation to power. It operates in a different register within the context of Israel and Palestinian institutions in Gaza and the West Bank, from those in the global North. However, modes of repression, and the articulation of struggle against the social production of spaces that are seen to facilitate genocide, resonates across registers, places and times. The hyphae of finance and ideology, highlighted above in relation to the dissolution of the University for-value, operates across space-time, in order to connect settler-

colonial institutions across the global North. They work to dissolve the possibilities for Palestinian resistance, as they work to dissolve the possibilities for student solidarity. They work to dissolve the possibilities for knowing the world otherwise.

Do we seek to redeem these social forms? Do we seek to enact our own modes of dissolution? What does our activism intend, in the face of power? In thinking about these questions and in relating this moment to that which preceded it, it is important to see Palestinian resistance, and Gaza encampments, in relation to a range of other struggles for decoloniality, and for resisting the logics of settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy. These are historical and material, reminding us of the ways in which university security have responded to students in occupation as terrorists, and they are ways in which movements against the social universe of value have been grounded. They draw out the relationships between university administrations and security forces, or the silence of those administrations in the face of violence against those with a legitimate claim on the land/space.

Thus, as Wind (*ibid*, 162) draws attention to how, over decades, ‘Palestinian students have refused to remain silent about the injustices of Israeli settler colonialism’, it is important to centre the work of Ibrahim Makkawi (2013), as he speaks of their ‘engagement from the margin’. Engagement, in spite of repression, drives the connections between the struggles of Palestinian students in Israel and the Gaza encampments led by students in the global North. That very repression, grounded in reproduction of the social universe of value, also serves to connect those struggles with those that preceded them, and those that will follow, in the name of accountability, legitimacy and liberation. As Kelley (2024, 200) notes, ‘Palestinian campuses have been anything but silent. They are the real epicenter of the long and protracted struggle for *freedom*, not just the academic variety.’

The struggle for Palestinian liberation is a constant reminder

that ‘Palestine transcends Palestine. Palestine is a portal and the countless Palestinian futures which beckon on different horizons are also, in a sense, possible futures for all of us.’ (Aked 2023, 249). Kelley (2024, 203) is clear that in defining these futures, we must remember that our universities are really conditioned by ‘a struggle for power’ (*ibid.*, 203). So, our focus in the dissolution of the universities must be calibrated around concrete political action, as a co-operative, generative realisation of the alternative, or of the grounds for alternatives to fruit and flower – a real movement that abolishes the present state of things.

7

co-operative organising in-and-against the University

the potential of worker co-operatives relies on class struggle at a more general level beyond the institution. (Mike Neary 2012)

We acknowledge the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. (Karl Marx 1866)

1. 2010: organising in-and-against capital's social universe

Between 24-26 November 2010, the ROU had planned a programme of events for three days of creative resistance, including workshops, lectures, discussions, films and other interventions at the University of Leeds. At the same time, students going into occupation of the University's Michael Sadler Lecture Theatre offered a related, unplanned intervention. These entwined spaces, or at least the occupation of these spaces and their repurposing or reimagining, was deeply energising, when: they weren't struggling against the threat of co-option by vanguardist groups for their own ends; and, they enabled creativity to erupt through discursive practice.

For the ROU, in-against-beyond was reimagined as strike-occupy-transform, and as a new financial settlement or political economic reality was being imposed upon English HE, there was an urgency to make space and time, and crucially energy,

to protest, occupy, and practice reinvention or re-imagination. This was an attempt to ground a generative energy that worked with critique of the University as it was being recalibrated through austerity politics. Such grounding included a workshop facilitated by Mike Neary on co-operative organising, predicated upon co-operative theorising and doing, exemplified by the Lincoln SSC. This took energy from, and fed energy into, other place-based projects that emerged following the initial round of demonstrations, protests and occupations in 2010-11.

In Leeds, the ROU (n.d.) had a connected Space Project, which for a run of events involving John Holloway was housed at The Pedallers Arms, 'A Leeds bicycle/tool co-operative fixing up bikes together'. The ROU wanted the Space Project 'to be an experiment in what education beyond the University can look like.' In December 2011 it held events on borders, fuel poverty, social class and cuts, alongside discussions of migration, militant cinema, and next steps in dialogue with the anti-authoritarian, communist organisation, *Plan C*.

In analysing these connected, networked developments, and in seeking to contest the University in relation to social movement analyses and practices, Pusey and Sealey-Huggins (2013, 463) concluded that such 'affirmative projects... can only avoid being utopian, voluntarist projects if they are part of a wider, resistive struggle, that takes the form of a strong movement fighting against government policies and market enclosure.' Struggles had to be social, communal and predicated upon resistance or friction. Whilst friction or resistance demands the energy of struggle, it offers the possibility that in its dissipation kinetic energy might be redirected for alternative ends. For Neary and Rikowski (2000a, 22), this was 'the creation of a new form of time, a new form of society: the future.' For Pusey (2016), it was a desire to create the University as a space of struggle through re-politicisation and dissensus.

...

Marx's analysis of the co-operative was integral to these discussions about alternatives. He (Marx 1866, *emphasis in original*) recognised the centrality in this of working class solidarity, and his principles were predicated upon superseding the 'despotic system of *the subordination of labour* to capital... by the republican and beneficent system of *the association of free and equal producers*.' It is important, here, to note Marx's focus upon the transformation of this system, which was based upon associated labour and class relations, by an emergent system of associated producers. He does not talk about labourers, because that would simply be a reproduction in a new form of the old despotic system.

Co-operative rebellion might seek to move beyond the subordination of labour to capital, but it has to seek escape velocity from this despotic system. It needs a new horizon that is not viewed from the position of labour, but which is instead framed in relation to association in the production and co-production of society. Marx (*ibid.*, *emphasis in original*) elaborates this in his next principle, by noting that within a system of wage labour, co-operatives can never transform capitalist society:

to convert social production into one large and harmonious system of free and co-operative labour, *general social changes* are wanted, *changes of the general conditions of society*, never to be realised save by the transfer of the organised forces of society, viz., the state power, from capitalists and landlords to the producers themselves.

Marx is not focused upon the liberation of labour, or the triumph of labour. He wishes workers to taste the potential for association through co-operative production. This was not co-operative production for-value, which is central to capitalist production through the factory or workshop and that we also witness from inside the University as the labours of students,

professional services staff and academics are fused into a social whole. Moreover, inside the social universe of value, co-operation amongst capitalists, for instance, in joint ventures across University partnerships, builds new markets for commodities and in widening circuits of exploitation, expropriation and extraction.

Yet, Marx saw the potential for inverting the idea of co-operation as association, and for reimagining the social, communal, species-being of human knowing and doing. So, he wrote that in relation to ‘the present economical system’, co-operative production ‘attacks its groundwork’. (Marx 1866) Marx’s (*ibid.*) focus on co-operative societies creating a joint ‘fund for propagating their principles by example as well as by precept’ was pivotal for Neary, because such associations would enable exemplars of co-operativism to emerge ‘by promoting [their] establishment by teaching and preaching.’ This demanded a new social existence, predicated upon co-operative values and practices, which for the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA 2025) include ‘values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity’.

In this co-operative model, production will enable a sense of co-operative knowing, doing and being, which would emerge or unfold, in relation to Marx’s (1859) argument that human consciousness is determined by ‘their social existence’, as ‘the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production’. This offers a qualitative shift and an opportunity for reimagining extant ‘property relations’ and ‘forms of development of the productive forces’ beyond existing social relations (*ibid.*). The result is the possibility for ‘an era of social revolution’ (*ibid.*), which was glimpsed following the economic changes accelerated by the crash of 2007 and subsequent austerity.

For Neary, following Marx, it would be co-operative knowing (theorising) and doing (organising), that would enable a co-operative praxis, or a new social existence that determined

consciousness. Alongside Occupy! and the movement of the squares, a space opened up inside-and-against English HE, which potentially defined a new horizon that was antagonistic to capitalist structures like the University. This new horizon, in Postone's (2017, 42) terms 'a new imaginary of a fundamentally different form of social life', would be defined through institutions working co-operatively, predicated upon activities that recognised the limitations of the market and the State.

Postone (*ibid.*) felt that the movements of the 2010s had failed to move beyond a politics of redistribution, and this was exactly what Neary was contending with in his practice. He attempted to unfold new forms of higher learning (as mass intellectuality) based upon ICA (2025) principles: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community.

There are significant caveats to this work, including its intercommunal, intergenerational and intersectional limitations. In *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* (OWSJ) of 8 October 2011, Chris Hedges (2011) writes *This Rebellion Will Not Stop*, and notes: 'The goal to us is very, very clear. It can be articulated in one word – REBELLION.' Whilst Hedges articulated a position that might be classed as privileged for some, Amity Paye (2011) highlighted the importance of Black communities joining, enlivening and educating the broader struggle. She (*ibid.*) highlights the New York City General Assembly's People of Color Working Group's position that:

people of color and poor people have been in a state of crisis since the founding of this country, and for indigenous communities, since before the founding of the nation. We are actively working to unite the diverse voices of all communities.

This was a call for co-operation across a multitude of rebellions, movements, revolutions, including those that identify as abolitionist, in workers' rights, in queer and feminist liberation, and more.

Postone (2017, 52) argued that the post-2007 crisis showed that 'categories such as class (or gender or race) are not stable historically, but are in flux, constituted and reconstituted by the dynamic flow of capital.' Transformation has to unfold beyond reductive forms of class resistance, to become the articulation of new social forms that refuse capital's imposition of 'the increasingly stark choice of socialism or barbarism.' (*ibid.*, 53) Capital materially and historically impacts positionality and standpoints within social categories, and thereby our potential horizons for co-operation. So, we must sit with a central lesson emphasised in an editorial note from that same edition of the OWSJ (2011), namely that this rebellion had no list of demands, rather '[w]e are speaking through it together, and listening. This occupation is first about participation.'

2. Co-operative movement against the vortex

Capital is constantly articulating and renewing its social forms. Dyer-Witheford (2015) argues that this is represented by the energy flows of value, which themselves might be represented as an unstable, self-expanding and dynamic force field, or vortex. In the unstable vortex, social relations are reconstituted technologically, with, for instance, increased levels of precariousness for those who must live by selling their labour. In discussing the cyber-proletariat, and the implications for global labour of its relationship to an increasingly unstable, digital vortex, Dyer-Witheford (2015, 13) argues that precariousness is 'a condition raised to a new peak by global cybernetics'. The processes that drive efficiencies at scale, structurally, organisationally and technologically dissolve and resolve

relationality and sociality in the name of value. We are constantly made and unmade.

The energy flows within the vortex are driven, in part, by global processes of proletarianisation, whereby the general intellect of human society is instantiated inside digital technologies that calibrate new social relations and social forms, as new markets for new commodities emerge. Inside common sense narratives, we might witness this as one outcome of the drive towards AI. The integration of humans and human life with digital technologies, is not simply in consumption and production of the outputs of large language models but is also witnessed in the ways in which those models make demands on the environment and ecosystem. They also spread through the hyphae of finance capital, such that this ‘cybernetic re-imagination of work situates the labourer as part of a global machine of value production, whilst decomposing the technical composition of that labour.’ (Hall 2018c, 99)

In his earlier work, Dyer-Witheford (2004) connected this to the idea of what it means to be human, or to be the manifestation of what Marx (1844a, 1844c) had referred to as species-being. This understanding of what it means to be human is connected to: our social relations and sociability; our being in-community with and inside ecosystems; our forces and relations of production; our mental conceptions and cultural presuppositions; and, our legal and administrative forms. Marx (*ibid.*) had seen species-being as one of the core areas of life alienated from us under capitalist social relations, precisely because those relations divorce humans from their essence, giving them a half-life. For Dyer-Witheford (2004, 3), ‘the Return of Species-Being’ or ‘Species-Being Resurgent’ represents ‘humanity’s capacity to cooperatively change the conditions of its collective existence’. In this stress on co-operative agency, ‘a combination of self-consciousness, material capacity, and

collective organization' (*ibid.*, 5) erupts from 'a species-being whose nature is to change its nature, and whose only essence is the capacity for transformation' (*ibid.*, 6).

New modes of sociability, collectively and co-operatively defined, affect the conditions by which we might transform our species-being. Transformation is a conditional, unfolding, integrated struggle across our social horizon, and in this moment might include movements for trans-rights, decolonial and indigenous justice, and the environment. If we are to transcend our social horizon, this rejects *both* the idea of a transhistorical essence for species-being, *and* the hope for a return to some pure ideation of what it means to be human (still less to perfect the productive human). Ours is a struggle over:

who or what controls and limits the processes of ceaseless species self-development. Social systems that appropriate and sequester resources for particular strata or segments of species-beings block or reverse the circular access of social and individual powers that enables the common growth of species-being. (*ibid.*, 7)

This imagery and the ways in which the vortex and species-being were grounded in material reality mattered to Neary in defining the possible characteristics of co-operative, alternative forms of higher learning. In *Beyond Public and Private*, Neary and Winn (2017) established key catalytic principles by which humans, working co-operatively in scholarly communities, reimagined their practice beyond the energy of the vortex. These principles were: *knowledge* – the production of knowledge and meaning, across and within organisations; *democracy* – horizontal decision-making; *bureaucracy* – practices of collectively administering for good living; *likelihood* – developing collective practices, supporting communal capacities and capabilities; and *solidarity* – shared commitments to common living at the level of society.

Taken together, these principles become catalytic in association through an appreciation of co-operative theorising, whereby alternatives are grounded against: the capital relation (the place of labour, property and value in defining an alienated existence); the false dichotomy between public and private as means of organising life; and, a desire to enact the social (in movement, organisation and knowing). This engages with Winn's (2015) tripartite routes to co-operative social forms (conversion, dissolution and creation), accepting their transitional nature as social co-operatives predicated upon emergent forms of social wealth. These are to be reproduced historically and materially through the reintegration of natural science and philosophy (as a reclamation of human history from its foreclosure by capital), and where this happens in society a new 'revolutionary principle at the core of the vortex' appears: 'the possibility of re-engineering the contradiction so that capital become subordinate to labour for communism not capitalism.' (Neary 2020b, 222)

Re-engineering a relation of subordination does not abolish relations of alienation, and does not abolish labour. In this, we might view the movement beyond public and private, towards co-operative forms of the University, as a transition towards a lower stage of communism as identified by Marx (1875). It reflects a desire to counter the imposition of hierarchical governance, market-based regulation, metric-driven competition, and a value-positioned curriculum, inside the social forms of higher learning. It reflects a desire for the scholarly imagination of society to abolish and transcend words like impact and excellence, through insubordination and rebellion towards the capital-relation. This way it becomes possible to refuse how 'the contradictory relationship between capital and labour acts as the organising principle for capitalist civilisation, *spinning out into a range of forms* that express the dialectical contradiction.' (Neary 2020b, 221, *emphasis added*)

Whilst this focus upon co-operative forms of education erupted from the student movement of 2010, we are reminded of it in current attempts to stop the ‘capitalist war waged against the people and the universities of the world’ (International Student Movement Network (ISMN) 2025). Co-operative or associational attempts to dismantle and block the vortex, as ‘the production of knowledge that universities sell to the war machine’ (*ibid.*) inform our thinking about the University’s social horizon. So, where Pervez (2025) highlights the place of the capitalist University as ‘an active mechanism of epistemic violence’ in creating a politics of knowledge that reproduces settler-colonial power, it is important that we relate this, generatively, to demands for an alternative, communal forms that overflow the limits imposed by the vortex on the University’s humanity.

This will not happen automatically; it is a process of evolution that pushes us to consider how to liberate ourselves, collectively, from the one-sided, fragmented characteristics of our lives as individuated labour. Might we begin from inside universities? As Hochuli *et al.* (2023, 15) identify, ‘politics always begins at home’. It begins from the potential that we, collectively, might see for a better life, which is both legitimate and viable, and that we might make visible. Ours is a broad we, activated across a commune of communes, within which universities are reimagined self-consciously and reflexively, in order to refuse containment and manipulation.

Recognising the limitations of protest, and the necessity of politics grounded inside-against-and-beyond class struggle, this is co-operative organising against state-sanctioned abandonment.

Building from the possibility of student-worker struggles across factories, and the possibilities for radical allyship on intersectional, intercommunal and intergenerational grounds, it is a co-operative desire to make amends.

3. Co-operation, democracy and power: what is to be done?

Hochuli *et al.* (*ibid.*, 153, *emphasis* in original) argue that:

[t]he left is rooted in ‘moral minoritarianism’ (a preference for moral arguments rather than building political projects designed to win power through majoritarian decision-making processes). If the Right achieves hegemony, then, it will be a *conditional hegemony*, dependent on the weakness of the Left.

Radical demands must be centred around and emerge from the material interests of the masses. The failures of Occupy!, the movement of the squares or previous student movements, and their focus on citizens assemblies, civic engagement, or consensus decision-making, demonstrated the limitations of new social movements for realising these interests. This also afflicts and conditions the politics of the University, for instance where rebellion and insubordination are neutered through the technocratic incorporation of stakeholders into EDI projects, or are lost in limited trade union struggles, rather than enabling collective control over the conditions of intellectual life.

Neary (2020b, 66) saw this in the student movement, where he noted ‘a separation between those in occupation and those talking about it.’ He was aware that whilst occupations were negotiating their demands, the administration of universities: waited things out, including by tolerating minor inconveniences; went to Court to gain and issue injunctions; or, sent in security. Transcending the increasing securitisation and militarisation of the University and its campuses demanded engagement with the politics of the street, to build critique. Some struggles focused on this, including against cops on campus (Warwick for Free Education 2014), and in a range of direct action from student encampments to inner-city riots.

For Neary it became important to point towards social forms and organising, as anchor points beyond fetishised categories of labour, working class, proletariat, and so on. Here, we are reminded that: '[our] products must possess an organising function besides and before their character as finished works.' (Benjamin 1998, 98) From inside-and-against the University, we might wish to reappropriate general, social knowledge for the benefit of humanity and nature, in a non-alienated form (the push towards disposable time, and new forms of common wealth and sociability), but how do we organise, socially? In Neary's work, this was to be enacted openly, by centring activity that resisted the reproduction of idealised projects inside capitalist institutions.

At times, Neary's language might look reformist, in pointing towards a search for 'a progressive political project based on the rejuvenation of higher education', and the idea that 'everyday working collaborations between teachers and students across a range of pedagogical practices' might catalyse this (Neary and Morris 2012, 4). Yet, he was clear that co-operative projects must help us to author intellectuality beyond the brutality of money and the State. (Neary 2020b, 123) He had hoped that this might be realised in the Co-operative University, the promise of which was hinted at in the UK Labour Party's 2019 manifesto promise for a National Education Service. However, concerns remained about the ways in which this might become a technocratic form of reformism, unable to dissolve its reliance upon the market, and its conditioning by competition.

Whilst arguing against the illusions of consensus that are carried forward by words like engagement, co-creation or partnership with students, Neary et al. (2014, 20) addressed the complexity of what is to be done, by positing the University 'as a radical pedagogical project' and reformed HE as 'a significant political as well as economic project.' However, they (*ibid.*, 44) were conflicted in this, wishing HE to 'be transformed

in a way that does not undermine the essential attributes of what constitutes the modern European university'. Could we rejuvenate the University through co-operative forms that carry forward its 'essential attributes', alongside enabling more radical, self-organisation (within and beyond the working class)? Navigating this contradiction matters in the generation of alternative paths, including the SSC.

If, as Neary *et al.* (*ibid.*, 44) note, it is possible to implement radical, co-operative, pedagogical projects within the University, as a recognition of 'the critical instinct that lies at the heart of higher education and which cannot be denied', then the dissolution of the University might be possible on Winn's (2015) terms. Yet, it feels like the critical instinct at the heart of HE will forever be co-opted, through electoralism or syndicalism, enabling the ongoing reproduction of alienated, intellectual labour. The lack of external, political coordination across sectors of the economy and social movements, reinforces this fear (Notes from Below, 2023). Yet it might be worked through by cracking open the University, as a space for militant forms of co-research, such that the contradictions between reimagining and co-option might be resolved.

...

Neary (CWU 2013) refused to fetishise working co-operatively as a moment of revolution, and encouraged us to:

see cooperation as a moment of possible transition that has emerged out of class struggle, and which needs to connect with other forms of contemporary protests in order for capitalism to be overcome and communism established.

In this process of overflowing class struggle and its contradictions, 'the production of critical practical knowledge is a key issue', and this cannot simply be the purview of the working class (*ibid.*).

Class-based experiments in transformation may exist, globally, reflecting historical and material conditions, but it is important to situate co-operative, revolutionary experiments as waves of struggle undermining or cracking capitalism from a broader class of lives and subjectivities made increasingly precarious.

Thus, Neary could square engagement in the Lincoln-based SSC with his own position as a senior manager within the University of Lincoln because he saw them equally as places for realising radical, critical, intellectual agendas. Whilst the latter might be governed for the market and for-value, Neary invested limited time in class struggle within those spaces, and instead invested time in building radical agendas, which were pedagogical in nature and pointed towards a new mode of sociability. Struggle *both* inside the University *and* also in the SSC were aimed against what HE had become, and led Neary to a belief that ‘the co-operative model offers the best framework by which this can be achieved.’ (*ibid.*)

Was this an attempt to have it both ways? To maintain a privileged position, inside fetishised institutions, whilst also to seek to undermine that position through rebellions outside? It is more realistic (and charitable) to see Neary’s practice as an attempt to maintain a broad front of co-operative endeavour, attempting ‘to connect communist politics to the experience of workplaces today’, and ‘to use workplace struggles as leverage for social struggles’ (Notes from Below 2018).

In this, we must also be mindful that Neary was accepting of the historical reality of class struggle, and lacking faith in the working class to deliver revolution. His praxis reminds us that there are alternatives to deeply sectarian models of organising that might emerge from vanguardist movements that have dogged academic trade unions. Such movements have worked *both* by substituting a particular position for that of the working class, *and* by seeking to parasitise social movements like Black

Lives Matter and #freepalestine. On this latter point, I am also mindful that whilst Neary's co-operative organising lacked a powerful engagement with intersectional, intergenerational and intercommunal struggles, he did not deny the power of struggles for post-colonialism, anti-racism, critical feminism, and so on to enrich co-operativism.

As we move to examine those actually-existing, radical, co-operative experiments, we remember Boriello and Jäger's (2023, 33-4) concern that: 'populists have always been more interested in expanding and radicalizing the scope of democratic principles than in seizing the means of production.' Did our focus upon co-operative organising, rather than class interests, enable us 'to build a coherent form of emancipatory politics based on heterogeneous social forces' (*ibid.*, 35)? Did it give us a platform for moving beyond concern with liberal rights and redistribution, in order that we might engage with polycrisis in ways that push beyond our indignation at the war on professors or unconscionable vandalism?

4. Experiments in co-operative organising: the SSC

In the aftermath of the student-inspired, UK movement against fees and cuts across schools, colleges and universities, a range of experiments emerged. Some were short lived, and some were not simply about the content of our institutions. The history of these, ranging from free schools to free universities, art schools and the educational streams of social movements, like Black Lives Matter, has been documented over the course of the last decade or so (see, for instance, Hall 2011c; Hudson-Miles and Goodman 2024; Noterman and Pusey 2012; Pusey and Sealey Huggins 2015; Saunders 2023).

In analysing HE alternatives, Saunders (2023) identifies the importance of place and community-links in anchoring experiments, in ways that might encourage their longevity. He

points towards a sharing of resources across community groups, with ways of knowing being generated inside autonomous educational experiments, social centres and free schools. In developing an ethics of care, mirroring the values (the affective labour) underpinning such experiments, Saunders noted that they raised questions about social and institutional forms, as much as about educational content/curricula.

Often thinking about these issues in relation to the Commons, at times experiments lacked a critical, pedagogical engagement with everyday living and problem-solving in a world that demands access to money, conditioned by competition in a market. In engaging critically and pedagogically with social problems, including the definition of the governance and organisational structures underpinning these very experiments, matters of scale and scope needed to be outed and addressed, alongside the development of democratic intentionality and actuality. How would work be organised? How would safety be centred and contradictions, marginalisation, lack of voice, and so on, be worked through? How could a range of perspectives be integrated meaningfully, in order that the experiment might describe or prefigure a genuine alternative?

These matters were foregrounded by the SSC as it sought to establish itself in place and over time, as a durable, alternative form of knowing in the city of Lincoln in the east of England. The SSC claimed to operate at an equivalent educational level to any other English university catalysed by the imperative to engage critically and institutionally with the reality that ‘money now follows the students’ (Neary 2011b), and was conditioning intellectuality. Thus, the

removal of public funding from [Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences] is a fundamental assault on the critical and radical traditions of academic activity, and an act of

vandalism against 'the idea of the University' as a progressive sociological and political project.

Funding had not yet been removed but the threat to these subjects required a response.

The archived SSC website (n.d.) helps us to articulate its emergent nature, post-2010. It was run 'as a not-for-profit co-operative', and 'organised on the basis of democratic, non-hierarchical principles, with all members having equal involvement in [its] life and work.' (*ibid.*) The archive shows the organisational, structural and legal form taken, the co-operative values to be realised, alongside details of finance and membership. Beyond this it reminds us that whilst discussions were taking place over incorporation and legal form, courses were being run, for instance on the social science imagination, and the pedagogy underpinning this was being developed around student-as-producer. This would be the governing principle of the classroom (distributed in spaces across the city), and in the governance of the organisation itself.

The SSC was a primary source of creativity and as an exemplar for many in the English, alternative education domain. Whilst its militancy might be questioned, it stood out from amongst the collection of alternative projects with its clear focus upon theorising and actualising the governance and praxis of co-operation in English HE. Moreover, it situated this against the lived experience of actually-existing co-operatives, historically and transnationally, including that at Mondragon in Spain. It was an attempt to reconnect the core of English universities (and the communities that surrounded those universities), with the rich history of alternative education projects and co-operativism (Woodin and Shaw 2019).

In his published writings, Neary (2015b, 5) does articulate a militant component to the development of the co-operative, in

particular as a creative response to the imposition of ‘vindictive devices’ by the UK Coalition Government. He argues that this catalysed a movement of resistance at the level of the street (occupations, marches, riots). Drawing upon Benjamin’s concept of ‘educative power’, the SSC is then a realisation of collective practices that ground absolute negativity. It was a crack opened by a group of academics, students and activists to create a prefigurative experiment in subversion: ‘the Social Science Centre is itself an act of divine violent resistance.’ (Neary 2015b, 5)

Neary (*ibid.*, 14-15) describes how the SSC was designed as a worker-student co-operative, with the intention of providing free, public HE in Lincoln, although it drew in others who were also signatories to its original constitution. It drew support more widely, in terms of people who offered time or subscriptions, and who offered, for instance, their expertise in curriculum design, quality assurance, and so on. He (*ibid.*) was clear, as he had been elsewhere (CWU 2013), that it was possible for withdrawal to coexist with the maintenance of roles inside the University that were focused upon being in-against-beyond.

Neary and Winn (2015, 114) centred being in-against-beyond around a struggle for free, public HE, and defending democratic academic values, whilst being explicit that campaigns for the public university or for the defence of the public university risk co-option, recuperation and exhaustion. In making this difference clear, Neary (2015b, 14, *emphasis* in original) focused upon

an alternative form of higher education with no formal link to any institute of higher education: keeping on with their *heteronymous* (socially necessary) labour in order to engage in other forms of *autonomous* (life enhancing) work.

An element of this was uncertainty, in terms of whether the SSC would: deliver anything concrete, like an alternative model;

simply be tolerated until it folded; or, be tolerated until it became too successful and threatening to established institutions, at which point it could be co-opted or shut down. Some members were mindful of, or conditioned by, their dual roles in the SSC and as employees of other universities. Others were mindful of the personal and collective requirements for their own and the SSC's social reproduction, including issues like childcare, welfare, and so on during activities and events.

In Neary's (*ibid.*, 15) terms, uncertainty reflected 'a pervasive feeling of radical doubt that is nourished by a highly developed sense of critical reflexivity'. This reflexivity pivoted around core theoretical and practical questions related to whether the SSC was a real alternative form, the nature of power and hierarchies in the Centre, and how to avoid co-option or recuperation.

An important part of this radical doubt is an awareness of the Centre's relationship to the radical history of worker education and its own intellectual controversies, taking care not to fetishize the co-operative model as an alternative to capitalism, but as a transitional arrangement towards full communism at some point in the future, perhaps (*ibid.*, 15).

In this transition, Neary and Winn (2015, 115) stress the importance of dissolving hierarchies and continuing

with experiments in democratic decision-making in ways that constitute a genuine transfer of power from the current university leadership and management to students, academics and other forms of university labour, including cleaners, porters and catering staff.

Deliberating common ownership and social forms of property, beyond the idea of public and private (as a false dichotomy), was a central theme. Neary (2012a, 2012c) also contested the idea of

public/private in relation to pedagogy, teaching and scholarship. His practice reflected upon the idea that co-operatives should be governed and made concrete through common values: self-help, self-responsibility, autonomy, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

A key element of the Centre's materiality was grounding a desire for a new constitutional form: a democratic, member-run co-operative, with clear connections to a local co-operative group in Lincolnshire, and the historically-realised, Co-operative College, based in Manchester, UK (Neary and Winn 2015). Members could join at no cost of entry, with sessions in organising, socialising, learning, free at the point of delivery. Members were encouraged to subscribe on a sliding scale to cover operating costs (for the curriculum, alongside a proposed summer school and journal), but had equal status as scholars. The idea of engagement with peers was a central theme, including in planning meetings around everyday organisation.

This spoke to Marx's (1875) desire to enact forms that refuse *both* 'the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor', *and* divisions 'between mental and physical labor'. It spoke to a desire for 'the all-around development of the individual,' such that 'all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly.' (*ibid.*) It centred the creation of spaces that would enact the communising belief: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!' (*ibid.*) Inside the capitalist University, mediated by private property, divisions of labour, and commodity exchange, this was impossible to imagine (Neary 2020b).

In the SSC, engagement also included shared responsibilities for curriculum development and delivery, connecting learning, teaching and scholarship to the idea of the space being democratic and member-run. An initial framework for the curriculum was devised with students, although the SSC wished

to dissolve the teacher-student relationship, so that all members might be seen as worker-students. Courses were defined around: The Social Science Imagination; The History of the Co-operative Movement; and Know How: Do It Ourselves Higher Education. Assessment would be by peers (all who participated in the class) and was designed around the provision of a transcript that would be equivalent to university-level undergraduate degrees. This would emerge from sessions that took place in evenings, across Lincoln, in a range of public settings (community centres, museums, voluntary organisations, and so on).

The instantiations of this curriculum might be member-defined, but they also depended upon engagement with the pedagogic model also being implemented at the University of Lincoln, student-as-producer. This model was a rebuttal of the pedagogies of the capitalist University, which reproduced the norms of wage-labour. Instead, sharing and producing in-common point towards a new form of social wealth, and a new society of knowing. Inside the University, it might be seen as a unique selling proposition, whereas in the SSC, it offers the opportunity to connect theory to a new, social, educational form. However, of course, it was driven by the theoretical-practical work of established academics, and needed new forms of relationality, in order that it might work more broadly, in-community.

Neary and Winn (2015) highlight a central limitation of a project that erupts from a specific strand of anti-austerity protest, around access to free, public education: to what extent can it become, directly, a community resource able to support problem-solving? They also recognised that the capacity for such work is governed by 'the mundane reality of keeping the SSC alive', and for its maintenance as 'an appropriate laboratory for the creation of a co-operative university model.' (*ibid.*, 116) The maintenance of an appropriate laboratory, from which new possibilities might unfold, speaks less to revolutionary rupture, and more

to evolution. It speaks to the need to discuss the pragmatics of fund-raising, organising teaching and learning, childcare, room booking and other specifics of social reproduction.

Whilst the SSC was a progressive political project, grounded in social justice and democracy, its importance lay in ‘what we do rather than what we say we believe in.’ (*ibid.*) It emerged in relation to: first, the ‘fight for what is worth keeping from the current higher education system’; second, the ‘urgency [to set up] an alternative system of HE for students who do not want to take on the vast amount of debt, as a mortgage on the rest of their lives’; third, the social need for ‘sites of intellectual activity which are not susceptible to the political whims of the current political and economic process’; fourth, the desire for ‘a new social system grounded in the production of knowledge and the distribution of resources’; and fifth, the search for ‘new forms of autonomous organisation and autonomous education as the crisis deepens’. (*ibid.*)

...

In 2010-11, it felt that thick or dense associations were being formed or made possible, which might then enable foundations to be laid for new social forms and horizons. However, it was also clear, as Boriello and Jäger (2023, 201) noted for other populist projects, that there were low exit costs from these kinds of experiments, and that connecting their internal metabolism to that of anti-capitalist, social movements would require energy that might itself be centrifugal.

Such a centrifugal reality was exacerbated where individuals or groups identified with Holloway’s (2003) expression of a desire for a society of non-power relations. How could organisations like the SSC engage with power, social movements and/or the working class and its allies? Would they spend more time on their own internal structures, cultures and practices, possibly as a distraction from wider, societal politics, and reflecting the ways

in which intellectual labourers have typically situated themselves away from broader class struggles?

Roggero's (Roggero and Lassere 2020, *emphasis* in original) ideas of '*counter-subjectivity*... a subjectivity that wasn't only against capital, but also against the capital within us' were important in addressing these questions. This is a subjectivity with a power of refusal, and the potential for autonomy. For the post-2010 alternatives to widen the contradictions of capital that erupted following the crisis of 2007 required the development of counter-position and antagonism, predicated upon a refusal to work for compromise in the labour process and its institutions (*ibid.*). It meant a refusal to work to balance the relationship between variable capital (human labour-power) and constant capital (technology and organisational development). Instead the desire must be to overflow that relationship, including in analysing their class composition and linking class struggle to the abolition of class relations.

Neary never went quite this far, and his critique of the technical composition of labour could not lead him to fold the political composition, and the political struggle, of the working class inside his own framing of alternatives. As a result, he does not engage with differential experiences of class oppression (between, say, professors and precarious graduate teaching assistants, or between academics and professional services colleagues) beyond his work in Chile with Simbürger. However, he centred Roggero's (2011) insistence on living knowledge that could erupt from anywhere, in his insistence on producing and doing in co-operation, as an ongoing, unfinished project with transformatory potential. In his hatred for a system of oppression, Neary (2017b, and see also 2014) wished to be in excess, through a process of 'militant creativity' grounded as 'the science of destruction.' (Roggero and Lassere 2020)

Yet, Neary (with the SSC) had to consider militant creativity

alongside pragmatic, everyday realities of social reproduction and survival. This grounded a funded bid to the Independent Social Research Foundation to develop a model for co-operative HE, which required a balance to be found between: first, emerging and unfolding as a community-focused, alternative educational possibility/model; second, meeting institutional desires for research outcomes and income; and, third, the blurred lines between spaces and activities. Balance has to be examined critically and reflexively, if a project is to realise itself as a new mode of becoming. So, Neary and Winn (2015, 117) acknowledged that the SSC, in its formal, four-year history thus far, provided:

a relatively mature example of an alternative form of higher education for educators and students to draw inspiration from and to continue to develop in, against and beyond the 'pedagogy of debt' and the 'ruins' of the capitalist university.

This resonated with the hopes and expectations for the SSC 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 sustainable and radical model for higher education. (The University of Utopia n.d.b)

The hope for it to serve as an exemplar in an alternative, mycorrhizal network mattered because by early 2019, this concrete example had run its course. The website shows that between January and February 2019 the energy of the SSC had dissipated. From an update about the end of autumn course on *Communities of the Future*, in December 2018, and a welcome back meeting in January 2019, by February a closure

announcement was posted on the website. It highlighted the history of the SSC against its original intention ‘as both a critique of and an alternative to the dominant model of higher education in the UK’. The closing notice reminded readers that the SSC ‘has been inspirational for many of its members and followers’, by creating ‘many spaces for intellectual life, learning, solidarity and friendship’ (*ibid.*). Yet, the message identifies the limits that ‘[r]unning such a project has required’, in terms of ‘considerable time and commitment from us all’ (*ibid.*).

In being clear that ‘we have reached the limit of what we are able to achieve in this organisational form’, the position was now that ‘[t]he ideas that have underpinned the SSC, and co-operative higher education generally’ would be realised in a co-operative university with degree-awarding powers (*ibid.*). The hope was that this would be established in 2019 with the Co-operative College, based upon the apparent rising tide of Corbynism in the UK. Whilst such a university would have to charge fees at a lower level, the intention was still ‘to develop a new form of common wealth’ (*ibid.*). It was with sadness that this could not be realised. Yet, whilst the energy of the moment co-operativism faded, we can weave it into a rich archive of co-operative, intellectual projects.

...

In thinking about evolutions in material history, Douglas (2024a) reminds us of Du Bois’ intellectual thought, framed in relation to the ‘Black University concept’. Douglas (*ibid.*) highlights Du Bois’s focus upon new curricula and pedagogies ‘anchored in values and principles drawn from Black history and experience and imagination’, which equally required ‘building community and facilitating a more cooperative and sustainable mobilization of resources.’ This speaks to the strategic intention that underpinned the SSC, yet it is important to note that Douglas

(*ibid.*) extends the idea that the existing order being managed by the State, and enacted through its corporate and legal forms, is unjust and unsustainable. He reminds us that this is experienced differentially, and as a result, a new set of commitments, including the orientation towards co-operation, would be required ‘in the pursuit of a new world.’

Akin to the analysis of the SSC, Du Bois (*ibid.*) recognised that to enact such a new world, intellectual workers would need ‘to manifest an “experiment in co-operation”... in its material workings, [as] an “example of intelligent cooperation.”’ This was reflected in Du Bois’s thinking about the social forms of the University, where they might become able to respond to the needs and desires of particular communities. It is difficult for those communities to seize power, and instead building from where they are demands finding cracks and widening them through successful experimentation. Here, Douglas (*ibid.*) notes that Du Bois’s position on labour was conditioned by his experience inside the AAUP, alongside his increasing marginalisation inside, and exodus from, formal institutions. The labour movement had to move beyond simply contesting the conditions of its alienation (Douglas 2024a), to engage with something more generative beyond its one-sided identity as labour.

These issues are enriched through a recognition that the vindictive devices of the State, perhaps including its unconscionable vandalism, are experienced differentially. Moreover, there is a rich history of recognising this differentiation, and in seeding and cultivating alternatives (Douglas 2024b). In this, Douglas (*ibid.*) draws upon the Black University movement of the 1960s to show how imposed organisational forms were impacted by access to money (including the Historically Black College or University). This opens-up questions unavailable to the SSC, for instance of how Black institutions might be realised and sustained inside matrices

of white power governed by finance capital, which themselves enforce particular corporate forms and modes of competition.

Douglas (*ibid.*, 17) draws upon the Black University concept within ‘the context of a broader Black worldmaking project.’ He focuses upon the role of Black counter-public money, and the need to question the allocation of resources and the corporate forms that surround those, including whether these can be accessed and acquired through a reformist, co-operative intentionality and ‘commitment to the total community’ (*ibid.*, 16). He argues that this is grounded in values, rather than value, and in ‘new circuits of acceptability and receivability as a precondition for monetary experimentation.’ Monetary experimentation comes alongside the acceptance of new ‘counterpublic’ institutions like the Black University, ‘as a minority constituency of a broader public that, organized appropriately, can command state responsiveness; or (and/or) as a site of complementary sovereignty.’ (*ibid.*)

These issues inform our understanding of the lessons of experiments like the SSC. Ideas of differentiated forms of sovereignty, and the ways in which life is experienced against settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy remind us that co-operative values are authored differentially by communities witnessing different levels of State-based repression and denials. Douglas (*ibid.*, 21) highlights that ‘[t]he Black University was meant to embody, in the words of Vincent Harding, a “total commitment to the colonized situation of the masses of the black community [sic.]” Crucially:

such a self-understanding creates an opening to treat the absence of sovereignty as an asset of sorts in the struggle to build a more capacious, more sustainable, more resilient world. If the Black University is a site of inquiry and experiential learning, then we might inquire into what we

stand to gain by taking cues from the Black radical tradition and experimenting with forms of community finance and development beyond the discourse of state and monetary sovereignty. (*ibid.*, 22)

Moreover, in self-understanding we might consider how to build an enriched mobilisation of communal resources, through negative critique and critical reflexivity.

5. Routes towards co-operative sovereignty

In thinking functionally about the SSC, there is also a risk that we miss embodied and felt experiences, or those that are grounded in differential forms of sociability and relationality. The GTDF (n.d.) remind us of words like hospicing, and of our commitments to ‘holding space for difficult conversations and silences without relationships falling apart.’ They challenge our settler-colonial solutionism, grounded in: the intellect or critique; idealised forms of self-actualisation; or, a retreat to particular communities or the fetishisation of specific alternatives. Instead, they remind us that as self-in-community, we are ‘an extension of the land-metabolism that is the planet’, and ask us to consider how we might show-up and metabolise differently, by dis-investing, unlearning, decentring, mourning, grieving and healing.

In prefiguring the world we wish to see, we ‘create space for accountabilities, for response-abilities, for exiled capacities and for deeper intimacies’. Whilst the material and historical conditions giving rise to decolonial praxis in spaces like Canada are at variance from those that cultivated the SSC, there is space to consider the ways that our alternatives are made real in the world, alongside the values from which they draw sustenance. They help us to frame a cartography of alternatives, grounded in

the material history of community (the past), which can build pedagogic resonance (the present), and develop conditions that are immanent and more socially useful to our experience (the future).

This was Marx's approach to critique and praxis, realised in his analyses of producer co-operatives and associated producers, and also of the possibility for the working class acting for-itself (Ji 2019). Marx's writing on *The Gotha Program* (Marx 1875), *The Russian Road* (Shanin 1983), and *The Paris Commune* (Ross 2015) did not describe what the communist future might look like. However, in critiquing the experiences of the industrialised European context, he was clear that the initial stage of communism could only anchor itself where 'the material conditions of production are the co-operative property of the workers themselves.' (Marx 1875) At that point they might reimagine themselves directly, as an association of producers. In her writing about the mass strike, Luxemburg (1906) also drew attention to solidarity, empathy and relationality, in analysing the 'pulsating flesh and blood which cannot be cut out of the large frame of the revolution that is connected with all parts of the revolution by a thousand veins'.

Understanding that revolutionary intentionality is a deeply embodied and human, political relationality, Luxemburg asks us to consider the ways in which the class struggle might be folded into 'all parts of the revolution'. (*ibid.*) We must consider this in relation to developing co-operative intentionality at the level of community and inside-and-against our universities, including in drawing out the limitations of transcending from within existing institutions. A useful way of thinking about this is in relation to the co-operative as a means of enacting a new common wealth (*Gemeinwesen*), or the common itself, or the practice of commoning. Szadkowski (see, for instance, 2023a, 2023b) sees the common as ontological – a way of generating meaning

from the ways in which reality presents itself relationally: ‘a fundamental connection between all that exists, as all that exist exists in common.’ (Szadkowski 2023b, 491)

The common offers a way of thinking about social wealth, and generating a multiplicity of struggles, through which the co-operative (in-and-against the University), might offer lines of departure away from capitalist institutions. As Szadkowski (*ibid.*, 504) makes clear:

the consideration of the Commons across sectors allows us to unite the horizon of struggles. And these struggles have a common goal. This goal is to put an end to capital and its capture of our collective productive energy.

Inside our universities, where the war on professors and unconscionable vandalism are not simply cognitive acts of stripping knowledge from individuals and extracting it from disciplines and mining it from communities, but are also acts of ongoing dehumanisation, this feels increasingly relevant. In response we are reminded that the commons, or a life process of commoning, lies beyond the necessity to produce impact, privatised intellectual property, or commodified services. It is not designed to inoculate staff and students against the alienation of the system. It realises our intention to bring the horizon of escape closer. As a new unfolding of species-being, this points us towards openness of heart, soul and mind.

The lessons of the SSC, refracted by the words of the GTDF and the lessons of the Black University concept are that this takes time and energy. It needs us to overcome our: own self-imposed internalisation of prestige, hierarchy and separations; fetishisation of different forms of labour and status within labour, across disciplines; fixation on labour as our ontological reality; and, internalisation of a need to collaborate, in order to produce a

valuable, social individuality. Instead of being measured against yardsticks of impact, employability, or entrepreneurship, such externally-imposed measures (that dissolve human essence for-value) might be: first, negated through co-operation that cherishes what we hold in-common as a social good beyond the market; second, abolished in terms of our negative, internal model of success; and, third, sublated as a new ontological, co-operative realisation of the common wealth.

If we are to escape, then we need to dissolve the social forms that impose the commodity labour-power on our very essence and existence (Endnotes 2010). The co-operative, associated and social nature of our protests, demonstrations, occupations and alternatives, show our potential strength. This is why capital responds by seeking to break those social bonds through violence, surveillance, and demonisation. Neary and Winn (2012, 416) are clear that the response has to be for us to create 'the conditions for the idea of "the commons" to re-emerge as a critical principle and political project.' This anchors their analysis of the SSC as an institution of the common, governed and reproduced co-operatively, and stressing the centrality of autonomy, or autonomous relationality. It seeks to sublimate academic identity and privilege, in community, in ways that are impossible within the University as-is.

...

Dinerstein (2014) centres this from a Latin American perspective, reminding us of ideas of *buen vivir* that challenge our perspective on what good living might mean, beyond our institutional, academic, intellectual obsessions. She (*ibid.*) asks us to consider how our sociability, subordinated to the process of valorisation, might be sublated, perhaps as *not-subordination*. As such, the following matter in our deliberations of the producer co-operative: organising based upon *not-hierarchy* (negating and

abolishing the division of labour); developing knowing as *not-knowledge production* (negating and abolishing knowledge as private property, with alleged methodological truths); activity or doing in-common, predicated upon *not-exchange* (negating and abolishing the obsession with exchanging academic commodities).

Co-operatives (and perhaps also spaces like Moten and Harney's (2013) *Undercommons*) as grounded spaces for reimagining autonomy, enacting renewed social customs, contributing to collective traditions, and demonstrating stewardship, contain spores for renewal. Our intention is 'not then a radical university that is located within an exilic space' (Neary 2017a). Instead, the Co-operative University or college or free school or autonomous zone must exist, in any lower form of communism, in a new mycorrhizal network: 'a co-operative federation' (*ibid.*). This is a social and communal activity, and Neary and Winn (2017, 17) remind us to

remember that co-operative history is not just a history of institutions but first and foremost a social history of social individuals, and that the vitality of the organisation is dependent on the development and sustaining of this social movement.

At least in its early days, the SSC highlighted that co-operative sovereignty and autonomy require us to move beyond the constant reduction of dialogue to the justification of a business model. It offered a idea of resistance to the dominion of finance capital and its ideological demands, documented later in the struggles of actually-existing, alternatives like Leicester Vaughan College (Gill and Faire 2025). However, whilst the co-operative movement offers a potential idea for resistance, our practical failure to realise it reminds us of what we are up against. The *hope* catalysed by discussions of a potential co-operative university in

the UK after 2017 (Neary and Winn 2019, and also Hall 2017) lacked the kinetic energy required to escape the liberal realities of the University and its disciplines, which would lock any such co-operative form within the market, to be regulated against the OfS requirement for value-for-money and student outcomes.

The war on professors and the unconscionable vandalism enacted upon our institutions bring us into closer and sharper relation with the power of capital and its arbiters, emphasising the limitations of our student movements, co-operative intentionality, and alternative educational projects, as they operate in isolation. For all that we might have talked in the 2010s of multi-stakeholder models, community-based forms of education, new co-operatives, community interest companies and solidarity economies, the hyphae of finance capital retain their hold over UKHE. So, we must remember the SSC, and discussions around the Co-operative University, just as we highlight successes in the development of student housing co-operatives, and co-operative struggles over accommodation, for instance in 2024 in Poland. These successes and the memory of the 2010s ask us to remember from inside the stranglehold of the private over intellectual work, and against the recalibration of sectoral governance and regulation for the market and competition. Whilst we might feel that the alternative is impossible, these examples remind us that alternatives were being struggled for, just a few short years ago.

6. Organising abolition, co-operatively

Ivancheva's (2023, 4) examination of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (BUV) raises a key question for such alternatives: '[w]hat are the opportunities for and limitations to an alternative higher education project within the contradictions and confines of advanced capitalism?' Her analysis identifies: concrete issues

of privatisation, fees and deteriorating student services; a refusal of the vanguard as a moment of meaningful and socially-useful organisation; the need to stitch movements into social solidarity beyond immediate, material concerns; and, the importance of critique and the refusal of hegemony. As a minoritarian reality that creates friction with faculty and is time-limited with high entropy, Ivancheva highlights similar limitations to those experienced by the alternative HE movement in the UK.

In the English context, the struggle for alternative forms was also mediated by an English State whose governing parties saw HE as needing reform, and who had accepted the place of finance capital and value-for-money in defining regulation and governance. Issues of how to engage with power, finance capital, and the State shape how co-operative forms develop, and too often mean that much discussion is focused upon sustainability and business plans inside a system of competition and value-extraction.

It is also important to note that the time of the co-operative appeared to have passed by the time of the murder of George Floyd and the struggles of Black Lives Matter, the eruption of decolonial and indigenous struggles against the settler-colonial realities of universities, and the Gaza encampments (amongst a whole host of struggles on-campus). Had they lasted, it would have been vital for actually-existing alternatives like the SSC to engage critically with them, as part of a real movement against the present state of things. Whether this could then become a movement beyond, which pushes through negation, to abolish the institutions that reproduce the social universe of value, is another matter. However, it is inconceivable that meaningful alternatives could emerge without such an alignment.

As Ivancheva (*ibid.*, 166) notes this engagement would require careful work ‘with a lot of introspection’, but doing so at the level of society might have enabled ‘the logic of social relevance to overpower the logic of capital in higher education in the new

alternative higher education models.’ Across the mycorrhizal networks of capital, within which the University sits as a means of distributing and directing value-laden nutrients, overpowering its logic in HE would mean overpowering its logic in related sectors. It would mean overpowering its logic in relation to other social goods: these are the grounds of a new common wealth.

In the UK, as the energy of the Co-operative University dissipated, and as academic staff focused increasingly upon pensions and conditions of work, the potential for any form of overpowering was lost. Yet, the co-operative education movement still contains the potential to connect with rent strikes, decolonial and indigenous struggles, movements for ecological justice, struggles against sexual violence on campus and in society, and so on, through non-reformist reforms (aimed at survival pending revolution). This could not be sustained in the UK beyond the failure of the Corbyn election defeat in 2019, but from the BUV context Ivancheva (*ibid.*, 365) highlights that intersectional, intergenerational and intercommunal work grows by ‘building on the solidarity, spontaneity and imagination developed in such fragmented struggles.’ Remembering this and considering its translation across contexts might give new political forms to ‘the real community of human social life, and so transform formal democracy into social democracy.’ (*ibid.*)

In considering the real community, or the real assembly of human life, the SSC and then the Co-operative University flowed through a material history of radical worker co-operatives, which sought to put the control of production, and relations between associated producers, on the HE agenda. Moreover, it did so by offering an idea that stood against the subordination of life to technologically-mediated finance capital. Whether those who took solace from the alternative had a clear view of the social universe of value or of concrete struggles is another matter. This was also affected by the inertia of liberal hopes for open

education and socialised technologies, which lacked political economic content. However, the co-operative gave a starting point for asking university workers to consider whether they are part of a broader labour movement, or whether they could become part of a co-operative movement against labour. The answer might shape a frame for considering a new social horizon, which would bring the dissolution of the universities as centres of anti-social and inhuman prestige and privilege, into view.

Neary (2020b, 242) 'suggested the co-operative university as a type of revolutionary reformism institution, on the way to communism.' Articulating this a decade after the protest movement that began in 2010, he identified issues of authority and authorship as central to his project, which must include our appraisal of the co-operative as a socially-useful form 'in the struggle to dissolve the social relations of capitalist work.' (*ibid.*, 253) Neary helps us to consider our intellectual and relational stewardship, asking: could a renewed, socially-useful form help us to liberate resources from the University into the commune, or into a new mycorrhizal network operating co-operatively at the level of society?

If this is to be negating through conversion, then that sits as a critique from inside. If it is to be abolishing through dissolution, then that sits as a critique from inside-and-against. If it is to be transcending through creation, then that sits as a critique from against-and-beyond. New modes of commoning and co-operating require new, revolutionary approaches to doing, or for enacting the scholarly community, pedagogically. For this to have revolutionary meaning, it must focus upon 'connecting the dots between the politics of the streets, and the politics of the University.' (Day and McBean 2022, 126)

The Co-operative University can only contribute to this work, in highlighting the struggle for a new form of common wealth. The next step is to sublimate intellectuality, through knowing,

doing and being that releases communising energy beyond the University, as a pedagogy of excess (Neary and Hagyard 2010; Neary 2020b). This was why Neary's cooperativism centred student-as-producer, which dragged many University workers and community activists to an engagement with revolutionary pedagogy and what it might mean to be a revolutionary teacher. For us, it raises questions of the potential for revolutionary doing to sublimate the alienating conditions of reproduction inside the capitalist University.

8

student-as-producer and a pedagogy of excess

It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. (Stefano Harney and Fred Moten 2013)

Natural science will in time incorporate into itself the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate into itself natural science: there will be one science. (Karl Marx 1844a)

What is revolutionary is excess, overflow and power. (Antonio Negri 2009)

1. The state we are in

How do revolutionary teachers teach? Inside and outside the University? Inside and outside the co-operative?

In English HE in the 1990s and 2000s, the focus of classroom practice was increasingly conditioned by ideas of quality. To an extent, prior to the financial crisis of 2007, quality enhancement was central, but always there, governing in the background, was the reality of quality assurance and modes of institutional and disciplinary regulation. Ideas of constructive alignment, problem-based learning, reflective learning, personalised learning, and on, morphed over time towards a search for systematising the curriculum, and for dismantling it, such that its components

could be finessed, and the system renewed through innovation that could be measured and compared.

As an outcome of commodification, attention moved onto roles within the classroom, for instance in imagining students as partners, or teachers as guides. Technology would facilitate this, and concepts like the flipped classroom became fetishised as somehow liberating learners to own and engage their learning more fully. This would later be challenged as the moral and pedagogic panic over AI took hold, and there was a desire to lockdown any form of student initiative in utilising technologies in an unsanctioned fashion. Of course, the lack of trust shown towards students in the AI moment merely accelerated what was already present in the use of plagiarism detection tools. There was always a tension in how to realise classroom-based identities and relations, exacerbated by technology, in a university environment conditioned by HE as a marketable, positional good. Where data and outcomes need to be trusted in a system predicated upon the exchange of a degree for a job, technological surveillance is key.

Externally-funded, sector bodies pushed the idea of innovation in learning and teaching, and a range of funded programmes attempted to generate curriculum development in relation to value-for-money, positioned in part around the dissemination of educational practices (defined as cost efficient or high-quality) for implementation across networks of institutions. As this work sought to disassemble the curriculum, for instance in identifying curriculum design, delivery, assessment and feedback, and student support as separate components, new, external service providers could step-in to offer ways of making the student experience and achieving its outcomes more efficient. Here, claims of efficacy or effectiveness, or a commitment to theories of change, developed ideological power.

The idealisation of the student experience governed by national student surveys and league tables, an obsession with measuring

graduate outcomes (including earnings), and the focus upon discourses like employability, labour market outcomes and entrepreneurship, reshaped pedagogic possibilities. In the 2000s, a focus upon learning theories like constructivism and connectivism emerged, alongside an engagement with ideas like universal design for learning (following work with neurodiverse students and those who disclosed a disability). Whilst these reframed some pedagogic thinking, innovation was increasingly governed by the demands of policy for student outcomes, operating within a more limited financial environment, and regulated for the market.

Such innovation was increasingly defined around the need for HE to generate positional goods for purchasers of commodities. Defined in terms of students positioned as consumers at the heart of the system, innovation was locked into a system recalibrated around transactions. These could relate to the student experience or curriculum, and then to learning objects, assessments, personal tutoring, assessments, accreditation, outcomes, and more. They were also discussed in relation to the sale of the student loan book and the value-added from specific courses in particular institutions, for instance through longitudinal educational outcomes data.

As a result, forms of pedagogic innovation tended to be governed by institutional visions and missions, and the desire for market share (to sustain student recruitment), and they might spin-out into a positioning around widening participation or research leadership or whatever. Partner organisations, technology vendors, educational consultancies, and so on, formed a network around educational providers, working to extract nutrients in the form of value or surpluses as these innovations were implemented. However, what tended to be missing was a recognition that students might be active, political producers of their own lived experiences. Compounding this was

the ideation and fetishisation of the student experience, which tended to be neutralised or objectified in generic terms, denying, for instance, the realities of disempowerment enacted structurally in relation to race, gender, disability, and so on.

This was also highlighted in the student-led and global Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements, and through projects like the Dismantling the Master's House community at University College London (UCL), with its linked projects at UCL like 'why is my curriculum white?', and 'why isn't my professor Black?' Increasingly, the idea of the classroom-curriculum-pedagogy as a system that could be finessed through a focus upon student outcomes and forms of measurement, became incredulous to many. Suddenly, the historical and material realities of the curriculum, institutional life, and pedagogic practices experienced by a range of queer, feminist, Black, anti-colonial and indigenous communities were made visible to the sector as a whole (although these tended to be driven by issues of race and decoloniality).

This offered a deep and visceral challenge to celebrants of the quantified curriculum, and opened-out a questioning of whether pedagogies and the curriculum were shaped as/in praxis or as a product (Hall and Smyth 2016). Moreover, it brought forward ideas that might resonate for some in terms of critical pedagogy, whilst specifically identifying the curriculum as colonial and a product of settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal intentionality. The identification of critical pedagogy and radical possibilities for enriching student knowing, doing and being through the curriculum gained momentum in English HE in the aftermath of the 2010 student movement, and in a range of social justice projects (Amsler 2015, Asher *et al.* 2022). However, it was the emancipatory connections made by student-led projects like Dismantling the Master's House that opened-out new possibilities for rethinking, *both* the University, *and* the role of

students as activists and producers.

Hall and Smyth (*ibid.*) argued that such collectives, working in-and-against the University, were able to generate a powerful social and co-operative critique that:

dismantles the organising principles of the curriculum, and asks both academics and students to question how their conceptualisations enable the reproduction of alienating and violent social relationships. This potentially deconstructs the material, social wealth of the university, where it refuses the idea of HE as a positional, tradable good

This analysis of the curriculum as a means of reproducing logics of coloniality, centres the relationship between the curriculum, knowledge as a commodity, the global extraction of resources to support valorisation in the centres of capital, and particular forms of production. It situates the production, circulation and accumulation of value through the University as conditioned by *both* metrics and measurement, *and* disciplinary and subject-based ideas of objectivity. Here, the financial hyphae that redistribute resources for-value are inextricably linked to ideological hyphae, governed by particular forms of epistemological, ontological and methodological truth.

Implicit in the white curriculum is irrefutable evidence of white superiority as a matter of truth and objectivity, while crafting a world-view that judges anything that it could define as “non-white” or “other” as inferior. (‘Why is My Curriculum White?’ collective 2015, quoted in Hall and Smyth 2016)

In the UK, whiteness is entangled with the transactional desires noted above, and especially access to measurements of earnings and awarding data (longitudinal educational outcomes data), and for the exploration of ways of commodifying student loan book

and outcomes data. The intention was to enrich decisions about which courses might be funded, and to underpin data-based, positional awards for institutions through the UK Teaching Excellence Framework. For Hall and Smyth (*ibid.*):

[t]he impacts of marketisation and financialisation, revealed in quality regimes, teaching excellence frameworks, and metrics for learning gain, reinforce binaries like teacher/student, provider/consumer, vendor/purchaser. Given these restrictions, students and academics might then question whether a liberated curriculum is possible inside the university? If so, what might the unbounding of the curriculum within and from the university enable, in terms of responding to crises of sociability?

At the heart of this discussion is a desire to liberate the curriculum, and through that to reimagine intellectual identities beyond knowledge production. A connected desire was to reimagine the relationship between our social form of knowing (the University) and our communities, away from the market, private property, commodity exchange, and divisions of labour. The point of such release was to enable us to respond to polycrisis, beyond the war on professors and unconscionable vandalism.

...

In this moment, I am reminded of the ongoing struggles of a range of indigenous communities against their own epistemic and corporeal erasure. I am drawn to how liberatory pedagogic practice—the practice of knowing, doing and being through the classroom and the scholarly community into the world—is a struggle for existence. It is grounded in an essence that emerges against the genocidal intentionality of settler-coloniality. Pedagogy then becomes an issue of critical importance for educators, with a deep, emancipatory, political register.

Framed by Palestine as a pedagogical imperative, Qutami (2024) centres a series of practical-theoretical questions of survival in the USA.

What does it mean to produce and engage in liberatory scholarship and teaching pedagogy on Palestine, given the extant forms of policing, surveillance and censorship that continue to target scholars of Palestine within the US academy? Why do these forms of repression appear even within a field of study—ethnic studies—that grew from emancipatory radical student movements seeking to dismantle (settler) colonial and white-supremacist hegemony in scholarship and teaching pedagogy? And how might we, as scholars engaged in the radical work and theory of abolition and decolonization, protect the field of ethnic studies from a mutilation of the pedagogical structure that such repression seeks to accomplish?

In the global North, the State and its social forms, like universities and learned societies, enact a transnational mode of control over knowledge, the curriculum, classroom roles and pedagogies, which works pedagogically. For Norton and Donnelly (2016), focused upon academic History as a discipline and with a particular focus upon Israel-Palestine, ‘long-dominant epistemologies, methodologies and representational forms’ are inflected by the relationship between academia and nationalist identities. As such, they (*ibid.*) argue that ‘these can function politically to authorise certain past-focused narratives and to find others wanting... and thus to exclude or silence them.’ Disciplines, conditioned in this case by Zionism, are integral to the denials imposed on excluded communities.

In this reality, pedagogies are governed by denial and refusal, shaped by bordering and exclusion, regulated by threats to livelihoods, and reproduced in relation to liberal labels like

civility (Finkelstein 2024, Shahvisi 2020). For Riemer (2020, 71), such labels highlight ‘a political “instrumentalization” of disciplinarity for reactionary purposes’. In challenging this, our pedagogic work has to be emancipatory, as a reconnection with the soulful intentionality of bell hooks, the abolitionist relationality of Angela Davis, and the revolutionary sociability of Audre Lorde. We must imagine this overflowing the classroom, into the fabric of the (English) University. We must imagine a new mode of soulful, abolitionist, revolutionary knowing, doing and being overflowing the (English) university.

For Neary, elements of this would be tested through his pedagogic praxis, in his own university (Lincoln) and in the SSC, as well as in discussions for a Co-operative University. This emerged as ideas of student-as-producer, *avant-garde* teaching, and pedagogies of excess, and led to his posing a fundamental question for our times: how do revolutionary teachers teach? Neary’s question asks whether we might reconnect intellectual workers with their real histories, rather than those imposed by value across its social universe. It places the struggle over doing at the heart of our scholarly communities, with deep connections to co-operative practices. As such, it tests the limits for radical intentionality organised from within the capitalist university.

2. Reconnecting with real human history through revolutionary science

Neary and Taylor (1998, 1) pointed to the ways in which money (‘the supreme form of social being’) was naturalised by ‘bourgeois social science [which] makes no investigation into its social life.’ The lack of a historical and material critique of the conditions of social life, including in-and-through the classroom and curriculum, restricts learning, teaching, scholarship and research within the borders and specificity of valuable disciplines. Money increasingly reproduces disciplines as alienated-labour, defining

the limits of humanity, including within our classrooms. Whilst money appears to be a rational instrument of exchange, it is cool and brutal. As a result, the ways in which we come to know the world and act in it, and how our being emerges, are conditioned by limited epistemological, ontological and methodological horizons that have to be valuable. These are the constrained horizons of a social being, which is seen from the perspective of money (and value) as dysfunctional and to be tamed.

This conditionality also frames interdisciplinary approaches. On the surface, these are an acceptance that disciplines have limited explanatory and critical power. However, as Neary and Taylor (*ibid.*, 2) state, interdisciplinarity fails to engage with ‘the question as to why [academic disciplines] should have been separated in the first place.’ Moreover, in attempting a form of systemic intellectual repair, and in refusing to address how separated disciplines reflect alienated labour in the classroom and society, interdisciplinarity reflects the failure of academics to critique the material histories and working conditions of their bourgeois institutions. Universities cannot take a step beyond viewing interdisciplinarity as a liberal transgression of disciplinary borders. As such they cannot transform the working conditions and practices of these institutions.

Such a transformation would rely upon a political understanding of the composition of intellectual labour, in the role of students, divisions of labour amongst academics and professional services staff, and in the allocation of privilege and prestige. It would rely upon a political understanding of how disciplines enable those divisions and resource allocations to be reproduced, as a means of valorising intellectual work through imposed, hegemonic forms of measuring and exchange. Instead, disciplines neuter radical pedagogic possibilities, even where these are embedded through critical pedagogy, precisely because those possibilities are tempered by capitalist realism.

Student-as-producer was an attempt to reveal and refuse this. It would involve '[a]cademics and students collaborating as forms of intellectual labour in the production of anti-positivist critical practical knowledge against capitalist science.' (Neary 2016b, 89) As a negative critique of dominant forms of knowledge production, this was a deepening of the idea of undergraduate students doing research in and on the University, its disciplines and its conditions and relations of production. We might see this as a way of dissolving the hegemonic stories that make up the fabric of the institution, so that other stories might be resolved.

Neary's focus was upon developing radical possibilities in concrete ways in scholarly communities, as real, human history grounded in revolutionary science. Such revolutionary science would emerge from an understanding of how the commodity-form shapes human, sensuous practice, by conditioning access to knowledge: first, that has a use in developing skills, capacities and capabilities that might be exchanged; and second, that might itself be exchanged, for instance for a student fee. The dual nature of the commodity, as concrete use-value and as abstract exchange-value shapes students as consumers of things that might give them positional value in the competition over employment. It also shapes the ways in which staff relate to students, and through their curricular and pedagogic practices to each other and the institution.

So, reimagining pedagogy becomes one way of revealing this dual nature of knowledge, such that students-as-producers might reimagine their curriculum environments, content, relationships, technologies, and so on. They would do so framed around the production of an intellectual experience beyond simply consuming what was presupposed because it was valuable. A revolutionary pedagogy seeks to move beyond the commodification of the classroom, student support, technological infrastructures, library provision, and so on,

by unpacking and refusing the ways in which it is turned into abstract forms for exchange.

Instead, the focus moves to work beyond disciplines, roles, content, forms of assessment, and so on, to draw out the potential within individuals and communities for a renewed species-being or real assembly. This would be grounded in the search for a new form of social wealth, or common wealth or *gemeinwesen*, or perhaps it would contribute to that search. In so doing, revolutionary science, as intellectual work or intellectuality that struggles against the social universe of value, supplies the kinetic energy for pedagogies of refusal. It is the basis for students and staff as scholars-in-community to develop the political content of the curriculum, of the intellectual community, and of the institution. Such a revolutionary science desires to be in excess of the institution, curriculum, discipline, scholarly community or intellectual identity, and to crack the reproduction of the institution for-value.

This is not natural science, or disciplinary forms of science: rather it is the revolutionary science of historical materialism. Anchored in a negative critique of the world as-is, it is a desire to acknowledge, recognise and critique the wrongness of the world and how it is socially-constituted, in order to work through its contradictions as radical and antagonistic subjects. It is *potentially* integrative of positions, experiences and expertise that might emerge from within and across academic disciplines. It is *really* integrative of abstract analyses and concrete practices, as a means of unfolding a new human history.

Here, Neary always centres the dialectical unfolding of theory and history in shaping antagonistic struggle through practical activity. Theory emerges as an analysis of practice; practice is a concrete unfolding of theory; in the resulting praxis, critique remains open to conditions, relations, ideologies and social phenomena. Critique remains open to stories as they unfold

through existing contradictions, as new antagonisms and struggles. This gives pedagogy its meaning, but also enables it to remain open to the social conditions from which it emerges, inside the social forms within which it is born, so that they might be dissolved and resolved anew.

As a result, the curriculum, the identities of students and teachers, and pedagogies become 'open to the changes in the composition of the social relations which occur during the process of transformation.' (Bonefeld 1987, 35) Through pedagogical work that examines the dynamic, dialectical analyses of categories (student, teacher, knowledge, impact and so on), this recognises our potential for renewing the social relations of the classroom as 'new social phenomena which for their part inevitably relate to the historically asserted forms of struggle' (*ibid.*, 36)

...

Neary's (2010b) question of how do revolutionary teachers teach is a direct challenge to the positional and transactional ways in which the curriculum and pedagogic innovation have been used to obscure the exploitation at the heart of labour relations inside the University. We can use the question to analyse the changing composition of capitalist relations at the heart of the sector (in the classroom), and move the struggle beyond singular demands (however directional) like revalued pensions. As we do, struggle, resistance and rebellion open-out, focused upon the ways in which we know the world and might change it.

Open struggle, resistance and rebellion are pedagogical. They are a recognition how value recomposes intellectual work as a particular form of social practice in the University: through block teaching, the flipped classroom, constructively aligned curricula, and so on; and, from inferences made by measuring how these relate to student outcomes, personalisation or widening participation (and their capacity for being monetised). Neary

saw the curriculum and pedagogy as sites of struggle, after class, beyond any romanticising of the student experience or teaching as a labour of love, and beyond any moral indignation about the unconscionable vandalism being waged on the sector. This is why he seeded experiments outside the University in the SSC, as well as inside: each might be a proving ground for being in-excess.

However, whilst claims are made for a university or extra-university life to be experienced through a universal subjectivity, radical pedagogic reframings bring us into an open relation with what Davis (2005, 34) calls 'the abstract juridical subject'. Such a universal subject is governed in law 'as a rights-bearing individual, not as a member of a racialized community that has been subjected to conditions that make him/her a prime candidate for legal repression.' (*ibid.*) Individuals have to earn their rights (to social and positional goods), irrespective of systemic, structural disadvantage that works like a toxic tax. Rejecting the need to transform the system, the rights of the universal subject underscore liberal desires to amplify meritocracy, social mobility, widening participation and so on, and to find fixes for problems like awarding gaps.

Marx (1875) knew that 'equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an *equal standard*, labor', and that bourgeois understandings of equality ignore or discount individuality when confronted by the market. Following Marx (*ibid.*), the market demands an HE system that rewards 'productive capacity' grounded in equality of opportunity, and sees this as 'a natural privilege' based on unequal natural endowments. In denying or seeking to finesse structural concerns, this is 'a right of inequality' (*ibid.*) operating in spite of opportunity and institutional failings. In a world governed by labour-power that can be used and exchanged for-value, there is no place for structural concerns. So, in English HE the abstract juridical subject then has an experience governed by the

Competition and Markets Authority or regulated by the OfS, or it might have its experience refined through University Access and Participation Plans.

In response, the category of (in)equality forces us to consider how to connect those realities of institutional racism, revealed in awarding gaps, differential mental health experiences and support, surveillance and monitoring, to a range of structural concerns that erupt through the classroom and curriculum. In the struggle against systemic failings, might decolonial and indigenous pedagogies help crack open and refuse hegemonic categories of student experience, curriculum, assessment, and so on? As Yusoff (2018) does for geology, Prescod-Weinstein (2021) for Physics, Downs (2018) for medicine, it is possible to reveal how disciplines are grounded in legacies that tend to remain unacknowledged and that reproduce horizons of inequality.

Taking a view that is categorical and disciplinary, this enables our established, disciplinary, ontological horizon, centred around teaching tolerance, unconscious bias, colourblind institutions and so on, to be sublated (Murakawa 2014). This must be a restless, expansive unfolding of critique that overflows the ways in which a white curriculum stands as the hegemonic marker of the values of HE. In revealing alleged disciplinary/methodological truths, decolonial, indigenous, critical feminist, queer, ecological pedagogies demonstrate desires for negating and abolishing the 'well-nigh religious mirage of universality' (Jameson 2017, 25).

Here, Neary's pedagogic experimentation, politically and radically opened out as categories of excess, *avant-garde*, and student-as-producer, are enriched through dialogue with popular education movements, supplementary schools, free schools, Rhodes Must Fall, why is my curriculum white?, and so on. This openness resonates with Murakawa's (2014, 205) desire to enact new possibilities for storytelling, connecting people and place,

emotion and cosmology, settler-descendant and indigenous, and offering hope for abolishing all social forms (in this case prisons and universities) that ‘are institutions for producing obedient, governable subjects.’

How we do this in opposition to entrenched power and privilege is another matter. Too often radical, critical, democratic pedagogies are placed before us without a clear sense of the potential violence inherent within a politics of struggle. If the student movement tells us anything it is this: the struggle to realise the world otherwise puts everything on the line.

3. Student as producer: towards a pedagogy of excess

Neary (2017c) was critical of what he termed the ‘Marxist version of critical pedagogy’, which he saw collapsing into ideations of redistribution emerging from class struggle, and tending to fetishise the relationship between knowledge and power. For Neary (*ibid.*) these shape a Marxism that implies

a privileged position for critical thinkers somehow outside the realms of perverted class consciousness, yet unable to ‘account for its own existence and must present itself in the form of tragic stance or avant-garde pedagogy’ (Postone 1993, 38-39).

Whilst Neary would seek to renew an *avant-garde* pedagogy, he was clear that the purpose of revolutionary teaching is the refusal to privilege academic labour or its already-privileged labourers. Instead, revolutionary teaching situates itself against the work and the conditions of the capitalist University, and the alienation that generates surplus-value through exploitation. It is a means of critiquing academic labour and the ways in which intellectuality is given particular forms inside those institutions. So, revolutionary teaching seeks to focus upon ‘production for a

post-capitalist society in which work is no longer the organising principle of society, and where money has ceased to be the supreme form of social power' (Neary 2017c).

In the marketised institutions of the North, governed in relation to finance capital, Neary regarded revolutionary teaching as a way of prefiguring communist forms through ruthless critique and negative praxis, pointing towards 'a society of abundance'. It aims at transcending the mediations imposed by the value-form, and the categories that define, ontologically, existence (Dinerstein 2015). Neary (2017c) was interested in what might be learnt and integrated, for instance from 'non-capitalist indigenous knowledge, not as a counter worldly wisdom, but as a contribution to critical practical social knowing, i.e. revolutionary teaching.'

Much of the work that is undertaken in the classroom and through the curriculum is a positive or affirmative understanding of humanity or creativity – it is the attempt to nuance or finesse a pedagogic system, in order to fix perceived problems and to release suppressed human capacities and capabilities. Neary (2017b, 2017c, 2020b) includes critical pedagogy in this, because it can never be negative enough. It cannot imagine knowing, doing and being as a negative critique of humanity, revealed in the classroom and the curriculum. It cannot imagine itself enacting a pedagogy of hate for the world as-is, and the one-sided ways in which humans, non-humans, communities and ecosystems are reproduced (Neary 2017c).

A pedagogy of hate, pushing against-and-beyond critical pedagogy's limits, underpins revolutionary teaching in shaping a practical, reflexive critique of the University. Moreover, whilst such a pedagogy recognises the conditionality of the stories we unfold, it also realises that we have agency. As such, its ontology stands against any essentialism in reading the human experience, and wishes to detonate the categories of value that condemn

us as one-dimensional people. It wishes to detonate how we are measured for the graduate jobs market, against impact, as excellent, and so on.

Conditionality and agency remind us of the Zapatista invitation: *preguntando caminamos*, or *asking, we walk* (Marcos 2004). How might we invite the contradiction and wrongness of the world into our classrooms and through our curricula and in our research? How might we invite its fucked-upness into our circle of relations and our allegedly safe spaces? How might we recognise that the contradiction and wrongness is realised in our classrooms, curricula, research, as they are alienated and turned against us? How do we accept the limits of the classroom as the last autonomous zone in our hopeless universities, alongside the contradictions it expresses, and the limits of our power to tell our stories within it?

Following Marcos (*ibid.*, 268, 276), these questions are a movement towards ‘our true heart’, and as a movement of dignity, which teaches ‘how the world was born’ in order to ‘show where it is to be found’. Here, storytelling is the material production of history, as a constant unfolding, in which ‘*everything posited is also a presupposition*’ (Marx 1857/1993: 278, *emphasis* in original). Every step closes and opens, and brings the self into a truer relation with the world. From this, Neary’s pedagogic imperatives enable us to ask: how do we transcend or push beyond the curriculum contradictions that foreclose upon such a truer relation?

...

At the heart of student-as-producer lies a recognition of dysfunctionality.

[It] does not start from an affirmation of the capitalist university but focuses on the dysfunctionality of the core

activities of higher education: research and teaching. It challenges and invites academics to consider ways in which this negative arrangement might be re-engineered as part of a democratic and collective production of knowledge, meaning and social value. (Neary 2017d, 51)

The generative potential that emerges as we uncover, refuse and re-engineer the world's wrongness, expressed as hate for the world as-is, enables us to reflect meaningfully on how he saw insurgent learning and classroom struggle at the heart of the University. This memorialises, but does not essentialise, the material history of the University (from the Nineteenth Century and the experience of the University of Berlin, drawing upon the work of Humboldt). It reveals a radical lineage as a challenge to dogma, including in integrating the work of Benjamin and Brecht, Situationists and Surrealists, and May 68.

So, student-as-producer sought to detonate the concept of the University (Neary and Amsler 2012), by refusing the ways in which it is used to accelerate the material foreclosure of the conditions of intellectuality (as knowledge production and exchange, spillover, commercialisation, impact, student outcomes and so on) (Neary 2016b). In a more institutionalised form, following implementation in the University of Lincoln and at the SSC, this could be conceptualised as a co-operative process, whereby students, academics and professional services staff would produce the institution through research-engaged teaching (a palatable, liberal interpretation of student-as-producer). This would form 'the organising principle for the whole university, with the capacity to transform all aspects of institutional life: decision-making, classroom design and assessment in a renewed form of collegiality' (Neary 2016b, 90).

In an earlier, less institutionally-repackaged mode, this erupted from the reality that 'what is less well debated is the extent to

which the basis of student life might be rearranged within higher education.’ (Neary and Winn 2009, 193, and see also Neary 2008) Rearrangement would

reconstruct the student as producer... [creating] work of social importance that is full of academic content and value, while at the same time reinvigorating the University beyond the logic of market economics. (Neary and Winn 2009, 193)

Re-imagining beyond is a moment of overflow – a pedagogy of excess. Neary *et al.* (2014, 7) described this as a recognition of HE’s critical impulse: ‘Student as Producer and the University cannot be contained.’ Curriculum redesign would ensure that students learn primarily by engagement in real research projects, or projects which replicate the process of research in their discipline. Engagement would be created through active collaboration amongst and between students and academics, which would contribute to ‘a “gentle” organic and developmental process of institutional transformation.’ (*ibid.*, 10)

In its institutional form, student-as-producer challenged the ways in which the University has traditionally been structured through hierarchies, divisions of labour, and separations, for instance between teaching and research. It recognised the potential for changes in regulatory requirements to impact institutional energy, and offered potential energy for the conversion or dissolution of existing universities and the creation of new forms. It understood the pragmatic need for other institutional strategies to be woven alongside it (estates, technology, student engagement, and so on). Yet, managing to institutionalise student-as-producer, as a way of smuggling Marxist critique into the heart of the University, offered, potentially, the most radical reshaping of an English institution in the Twenty-First Century (outside enforced market-based

restructuring) by asking us to dissolve abstract boundaries (between roles, disciplines and functions).

At Lincoln, eight key principles were defined: Discovery; Student as Producer; Technology in Teaching; Digital Scholarship; Space and Spatiality: Learning Landscapes in Higher Education; Assessment: Active Learners in Communities of Practice; Research and Evaluation: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; Student Voice: Diversity, Difference and Dissensus; Support for research-based teaching through expert engagement with information resources; and Creating the Future: Employability, Enterprise, Beyond Employability and Postgraduate study. (University of Lincoln n.d.a, n.d.b) These appear pragmatic, but were situated against the potential for institutional co-option of radical energy, in spaces where differential staff/student energy levels affect engagement, and where institutional inertia or leadership changes tend to dissipate critical hope.

Whilst it contained much Marxist underpinning, for Neary *et al.* (2014, 45) the institutionalisation of student-as-producer was a compromise, for instance witnessed in its audit/monitoring function (University of Lincoln n.d.c). The social conditions of the sector and its institutions, grounded in a particular political economic reality, made it difficult to realise the alternative as a radical, pedagogical reimagining. There was a need to prepare the ground for academics and students, in working co-operatively to understand why they might reimagine the curriculum, and the University. This would take time, including in building networks across the sector and globally, for reimagining the organising principles of student life. If this was to become a counter-narrative that could work for the alternative, as a new ideological hypha, it would have to grow inside-and-against the capitalist University and its mycorrhizal networks, which realise and reproduce power. Perhaps this would come later, in the idea of the Co-operative University.

Conditioned pragmatically, at times student-as-producer could not escape the gravitational pull of evidence, and the need for metrics to demonstrate its impact. For example, Neary *et al.* (2014) had to engage with the institutional realities of quality assurance, validation and programme management, alongside discourses of public engagement, impact, and so on. However, they attempted to do so in ways that enabled debate and discussion around the University of Lincoln's vision and mission. They also wished to remind others to begin their own critical, practical, reflexive activity, enacted at the level of the institution where they had agency: 'Find your own way. Do it yourself with others. No one will ever do it the way we have done it.' (Neary *et al.* 2014, 47) Rather than 'try to change your institution; much better to affirm what is special about your institution and celebrate it.' (*ibid.*)

The idea expressed was to open-up spaces for teaching and learning to all staff and students, to uncover uniqueness in practice, and then to overflow this particular reality. As encouragement for others to 'embrace the contradiction that lies at the heart of higher education', namely competition and the expression of difference, the desire must be to push beyond this in the revelation of what 'we all have in common... that we are all concerned with the production of knowledge and meaning,' (*ibid.*) In this argument, sublation is a function of commonality and solidarity among associated producers of knowledge, erupting at the level of society.

Finding one's own way, grounded in critical ideas and traditions, serves as a categorical critique of the ontological realities of the University. It would be based on radical, democratic classroom and curricula practices, designed to generate new knowledge about the world, and empowering students to face global emergencies as actors. Recognising methodological assumptions, and the concrete realities of the abstractions of value, labour, use and exchange, student-as-

producer would generate a new, collective good sense, beyond the reductionist common sense of *the student experience*. Such practice would move the institution beyond narratives of linearity and progress, towards a more creative expression of learning, teaching, researching and doing. Students would not be fetishised at the heart of the system, rather they would become active, associated producers of knowledge and meaning, supported critically by teachers who had embraced the possibility of renewal. In this process, bureaucracy would have to be repaired and refurbished, as would the learning landscape (environment), in order to negate hierarchy, power and privilege in the space-time of the University. Such experimentation might unfold an acceptance that generating knowing and meaning is always unfinished.

...

Neary's institutional work was infused with a more radical intention, but recognised the limitations that activist-educators face inside their own institutions. For him, the point was to generate critical, practical, reflexive activity, theorised as a reconnection with 'the real nature or purpose of the university' (Neary and Winn 2009, 193). Thus, student-as-producer was situated as a negative critique of positive models of teaching, and determinist, outcomes-focused regulation, alongside the abolition of the disciplinary and curriculum forms that give them credibility. The intention was to generate the potential for transcending these categories and the social forms that they shape through 'the awareness of the progressive possibilities that are inherent in even the most contradictory and dysfunctional contexts.' (*ibid.*, 201)

Pushing beyond contradiction and dysfunction lay at the heart of Neary's practical activity: in institutional projects like The Reinvention Centre at Warwick University, and in the implementation of student-as-producer at the University of

Lincoln; in disseminating theoretical and historical analyses, in particular in linking the politics of productivity inside the University to struggles of 1968; and, in framing co-operative forms of HE as a moment of challenging the very institutions inside which he worked. The point is to rearrange the basis of intellectual life beyond HE, such that intellectuality might be reintegrated into good living.

Student-as-producer picked up on the contradictory social realities of Benjamin's (1934/1998) 'author as producer', to become an active intervention in the social relations of intellectual production, as they emerge materially and historically. It is intellectuality as a new, radical subjectivity, grounded in production, but refusing to validate the act of producing surplus-value through alienated labour in the classroom or curriculum. Rather, it recognises the contradiction at the heart of the human desire to learn and make the world, conditioned by the reality that such practice in *this* world is governed by universal ideas of being productive. It seeks to overflow this contradiction, by showing its limits, and legitimising a desire for an alternative form of common wealth, beginning from students as producers of the conditions and relations for learning, teaching, and intellectuality.

This also offers the possibility to 'knowingly address the global emergencies with which we are all confronted'. (The University of Utopia n.d.a), by: first, thinking about recovering the general intellect, as the inventive, creative force of capitalism; and second, refusing the ways in which capital has objectified knowledge in order to maintain its own power over life. As a political project of reimagining and transcending, student-as-producer draws attention to recovery and refusal where 'the institution becomes a landscape for the production and construction of a mass intellect in Commons.' (Neary and Winn 2009, 210)

This is complex and messy, contradictory and conflictual, with the potential to be antagonistic for teachers, students,

senior managers and disciplines. In disciplines requiring professional, regulatory oversight of the curriculum, or where narratives stated that students were less engaged or committed to learning, it is difficult to reframe teaching and learning as radical praxis. In a competitive, comparative sector, governed by metrics, league tables and a war of position (the struggle to realise relative surplus-value), there are practical, political barriers to reimagining the organising principles for student life. This is why, for a while, the SSC gave respite for some.

However, in the face of polycrisis, secular crisis, global emergencies, settler-colonial genocide, what is the alternative from within the University? What is the alternative when policymakers have enacted a war on professors, and unconscionable vandalism is being wreaked on institutions? This brings the concepts of a pedagogy of hate and student-as-producer, into relation with Motta's (2011, 181) desire for immanent critique to shape a 'prefigurative moment of social transformation'. Thus, we might think about student-as-producer as realising the not-yet, or 'the not-yet-become [which] inhabits the non-empirical reality of the value form' (Dinerstein 2014). The process by which intellectual workers (students, academics, professional services staff) co-operate on research projects that challenge the conditions within which they are alienated from themselves, as a real community or a real assembly, is a moment of potential negation. Within the University as a social realisation of the value-form, becoming in excess of these conditions points towards a new moment of becoming or intellectuality – abolition.

4. Becoming in excess

In 2004/05, working through The Reinvention Centre at the University of Warwick, Neary contributed to a student-led video, *Universities PLC? Enterprise in Higher Education* (The Reinvention Centre 2005). This was produced against the

discourse of the time, and contained less radical language in pushing for the University against the market. However, it also indicated the necessity of being in excess, in opening-up the category of *risk* in relation to enterprise, *responsibility* in relation to communal needs and capacities, and *rich learning environments* as space-times for realising those possibilities. Neary wished to connect these categories through a nationally-funded project of reinvention, to a more radical horizon. Through this, student-workers might stretch themselves beyond a one-sided existence as bearers of labour-power, open for resale in the market.

In connecting identity, activity and place, an emergent and conditional space-time opened-up, which Neary developed pedagogically through his work on learning landscapes (Neary *et al.* 2010, Neary and Saunders 2011), and rhythmanalysis and learning in the city (Neary 2024d). In my interpretation of this, knowing, doing and being are integrated, and unfold negatively against the existing categories and space-time of the capitalist University (inside-and-against contradiction). This frames becoming (a movement towards authenticity) as a process that is *in excess* of the limited and limiting roles and agency defined for students and staff, or allowed through traditional, disciplinary curricula.

Becoming in excess is such an important revelation in moving with negation, abolition and transcendence, be that in relation to identities, knowledge, curriculum or institution. The idea that excess might enable us to overflow (or undermine) the capitalist University, and thereby form an alternative political economy of the student experience infused with a radical intentionality, alters the ways in which social forms and content might be transcended. In thinking about student-worker rebellions and the potential for worker co-operatives to enact new associations of producers against the social universe of value, the idea of excess challenges the limits imposed within HE, financially and ideologically. For Neary and Hagyard (2010), this demands a

radical pedagogy designed around another version of student life, as an echo of May 1968, where identities (student and workers) and possibilities (learning, teaching and doing) weave together. In dissolving the boundaries of what-is, life is renewed as desiring and realising the not-yet: life beyond the capitalist event horizon.

Rather than predicating the analysis here upon class struggle, or intergenerational, intersectional, and intercommunal praxis, Neary (2010b, and Neary and Hagyard 2010) pointed towards Situationist, Dadaist, Surrealist, and Russian Constructivist radical cultural movements, which challenge what it means to produce and collaborate, alongside what it means to be a subject in capitalist society. Whilst this work left space for integrating anti-racism, critical feminism, decoloniality, queer ecology, and more, at its heart lay a reimagining of subjectivity. Reimagining demonstrates the absurdity of academic practices as they reduce intellectual identities, cultures and practices to ways of measuring and consuming the world, in content, assessment, accreditation and so on.

Becoming in excess demonstrates this absurdity in relation to our inability to engage meaningfully with systemic contradictions and unfolding emergencies. This inability is witnessed in our punishment of student-activists being in excess of themselves as students, facing the militarised realities of how their institutions relate to genocide. Being in excess of a single identity and a one-sided life, is then a recognition of the absurd limits of the world as-is. As institutions look to punish students in encampments, it puts those one-sided identities at risk of not progressing or, like the SOAS (University of London) student, Haya Adam, of being expelled. Recognising the cognitive dissonance it takes to cling to that imposed one-sidedness offers the potential to sublimate this awful reality. Being in excess of a single identity grounded in unfolding theoretical-practical, critical-reflexive activity (like going into occupation or an encampment), is a revolt inside-

and-against. It is Moten's (2017) consent not to be a single being: not foreclosed and not-yet-become. These are the grounds of becoming in excess: critical, practical reflexive activity, erupting from a negative, contemporary understanding, with a radical, historical sensibility.

This critical political economy would provide a theoretical framework within which to conceptualise the ideology of protest, but no blueprint for action. Direct action should be informed in this curriculum by the lessons learned from the history of struggle inside and outside of the academy. (Neary and Hagyard 2012, 219)

Direct action is the sublation of intellectual work as (mass) intellectuality: negating the traditional and methodological separation of the philosophical and political economic; abolishing the dominant, one-sided political economy of identity as intellectual labour; and, transcending the social forms that organise HE through a political economy of theory in action. Neary did not refer to a pedagogy of excess as an unfolding process of sublation. However, he did suggest this in relation to rhythmanalysis, or the development of full consciousness as the antagonistic unity 'between natural and social rhythms [out of which] comes the capacity for another form of existence to be imagined' (Neary 2024d, 90).

Holding ourselves open to this is an act of vulnerability and risk, and needs to be managed differentially and with care (Lambert 2024). At the same time it is a responsibility to ourselves that 'maintains the promise of pedagogy in paradise' (Neary 2024d, 106). For Neary (2010b) this would be the connection of student-as-producer as becoming in excess through 'revolutionary social science derived from critical pedagogy', and not *as* critical pedagogy. It also derives from experimental,

subversive, avant-garde traditions in early Twentieth Century European Marxism, and in post-revolutionary Russia. Again, this felt right because it was anti-dogmatic, anti-empirical, and lacking in faith towards the project of capitalist modernity. Representing a horizon beyond idealised forms of social justice, it stresses ‘more practical imperatives driven by the avoidance of disaster beyond human imagination.’ (*ibid*)

...

Those practical imperatives enabled Neary to take the work of Benjamin and Vygotsky, to define

a pedagogy for the avant-garde: that students are the subjects of the intellectual process of teaching and learning, and that a progressive pedagogy involves reinventing the politics of production from within, against and beyond the current social relations of capitalist production. The issue for them is not simply how do students learn, but how do radical intellectuals teach?

Neary (*ibid.*) focused on materiality, and life affirmed through ‘a material matrix of social relations’, beyond individual needs and emotionally-driven, character-centred productions. Of course, the *avant-garde* has always connected with negative feelings (anger, revulsion, shock, shame), and the idea of emotionality or affect has infused iterations of Expressionism and Surrealism. It has been reimagined aesthetically in relation to critical feminism, queer theory and so on, to unfold new experiential understandings of being and becoming.

It is unclear what Neary made of discussions of the emotional toll of labouring inside universities, and the differential affective labour required to survive within it. In his vision the emotional and the affective were subsumed under the law of value. His focus was ‘a revolutionary pedagogy on the basis of

the reorganisation of intellectual labour' (*ibid.*), including by reconnecting the manual and intellectual labour that capitalist intensification separates out. However, reimagining the world otherwise demands that we read, recognise and transform ourselves otherwise, such that we might become real social individuals, and this is deep emotional work.

Marx (1844a) was clear that the separations enforced by capitalist production offered a stunted life that was 'valueless', 'unworthy', 'deformed', 'barbarous', and 'powerless', such that 'human qualities only exist insofar as they exist for capital *alien* to him'. Marx (1891/1991, 481, 482, 548) describes human, corporeal existence as 'a mere fragment' and 'a crippled monstrosity', through an 'industrial pathology that degrades workers', which 'exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost' and is 'a sort of torture'. This exhaustion enacted in the traditions of alienated labour forms a life world of 'absolute poverty' (Marx 1857/1993, 296).

In the universe of value, individuals must continually reproduce the circuit of alienation in order to survive physically. Yet this can only be achieved psychologically through huge amounts of denial, melancholia, grief or cognitive dissonance. (Hall 2018, 164)

A recognition of how capital works by 'endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force' (Marx 1856), also acknowledges how the forces and relations of production, as 'means of domination', 'distort the worker into a fragment of a [human]' (Marx 1891/1991, 799). In this reading, when Marx (1844a, *emphasis* in original) describes the labour process as producing 'a *mentally* and *physically dehumanized* being... the *self-conscious* and *self-acting commodity*', he is not discounting emotionality and the emotional costs of maintaining

a particular, capitalistic view of sociability and relationality, from that mental dehumanisation. He is not simply seeing this as a cognitive process. So, addressing the question of how do revolutionary teachers teach? needs a more fully-human, embodied and emotional engagement with knowing, doing and being.

In working negatively with student-as-producer and a pedagogy of excess as open possibilities, it is impossible to deny the emotional energy of hearts and souls vibrating as wave-forms inside-and-against the social universe of value. The range of individuals who have spoken about their trauma inside the University, and the ways in which they have sought to survive corporeally, emotionally and psychologically by hiding, stealing, refusing or leaving, speaks to the importance of this energy in defining a real matrix of social relations: a new social field. Human expressions of encampment, occupation, protest, demonstration, and the courage, faith, justice, hope and peace that shape them as dignified struggles for other worlds, also express desires for a radical pedagogic overflowing of student life.

Simply to focus upon a material matrix of social relations is engaging with capital on *its* terms, and is a denial of the energy of rupture that emerges from negativity as a fully human, *avant-garde* praxis. This cannot simply emerge from a pedagogy that stresses the transformatory potential of student-workers, in reframing themselves and the organising principles of their institutions. Rather, as Neary (2010b, *emphasis added*) notes, ‘the nature and *character* of the social will be remade’, and as a result ‘the student *feels* part of the academic project of the institution’. Elsewhere, with others (Neary *et al.* 2010, 7, *emphasis added*) he is clear about the importance of broadening ‘the extent to which the academic *voice* is engaged in the design of progressive teaching and learning spaces.’ This points towards the expression of voice and values, although it is trapped inside ‘an intellectual discussion about the idea of the contemporary university’ (*ibid.*).

Here, it is important to hold close to Neary's own struggles with stammering, and his focus upon stammering as Dada – a personal, political pedagogy of liberation.

...

Developing 'a sense of spatial imagination and a heightened consciousness about the importance of space in the teaching and learning process' (*ibid.*, 35), is an attempt to dissolve boundaries between hierarchies and job roles, between teaching and learning, and between disciplines. It requires empathy and solidarity with material, intellectual histories and traditions, and with the broader communities that intersect with the University. The social context from which relationality and meaning, intellectuality and doing, being and becoming emerge, are flooded with the potential and kinetic energy of life and living.

A richer, radical pedagogic engagement builds from an understanding that the organising principles of student life also reproduce ways of feeling that life, at times generatively (for instance, at graduation), and too often negatively (witnessed in terrible stories of self-harm, anxiety and more). Neary *et al.* (2010, 43) saw this in describing the space of the University as 'historical, physical, physiological, linguistic and mental. In other words there is a logic of space, as a machine for living in and loving in and working in: sociable and denaturalised.' Here, student-as-producer and a pedagogy of excess might be enriched through connection with hooks' (1994) focus on engaged pedagogy, and on work to negate such denaturalisation. She argues that our 'unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that our classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained.' (hooks 1994, 39)

We elevate an *avant-garde* pedagogy, where emotionality can be held and contained, precisely because it enables difference

to be held and contained. So doing enables us to become in excess of ourselves through ‘a commitment to move on through these emotions in order to explore new grounds for contact’ (*ibid.*, 109) Generating a space-time that is care-full and careful helps us move beyond the settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal assumptions that prioritise particular, appropriate forms of emotionality, materiality and relationality. These become new, pedagogical and relational grounds for contact, which transgress classroom roles, practices and cultures.

Our *avant-garde* praxis must enable us to be in excess of our roles as particular types of engaged students or teachers, and to address the question of how do revolutionary teachers teach? A reflexive engagement with the ways in which emotions, passions, feelings, shape the heart of sensuous practice, working through student-as-producer, helps us to move beyond empirical projects, and to centre a non-empirical sublation of the idea of the student and the idea of the University. We then ask: can we define a course of action beyond the poverty of a limited engagement, as one that works ‘intellectually and academically with teaching and learning and its relationship to academic research?’ (Neary 2011a, 41)

5. A course of action

Student as Producer’s revolutionary curriculum is framed around unlearning the law of labour as a critique of capitalist work and the institutions through which the law of labour is enforced, including the capitalist university. The critique proposes a new form of higher education institution, a co-operative University, as a moment in the revolutionary transition towards communism... Consolidated by drawing on the power of the Strike, not to defend labour, but to move towards the abolition of capitalist work. (Neary 2020b, 1)

Neary's final, substantive project was his *Student as Producer: How do Revolutionary Teachers Teach?* published in 2020. Written after a decade in occupations, at the SSC, in attempting to institutionalise a radical pedagogical strategy, and in the struggle for a national, co-operative university, he was also reflecting upon previous years of engagement in reinvention and in youth work. His final project feels to me like a return to an origin story, and to the essence of his core question. Beyond how do revolutionary teachers teach in the University? this becomes how do revolutionary teachers and students (everyone), acting everywhere and all at once, define a course of action (a curriculum) for addressing the global emergencies with which we are all confronted?

...

And in this moment, what does being and becoming in excess mean after witnessing Gaza?

How do revolutionary teachers teach when bearing witness to scholasticide: the killing of their academic siblings in Gaza, and the burning and destruction of Palestinian universities? How do revolutionary teachers connect the foundations of their epistemology in contexts of destruction, as a means of honouring Rafat Alareer's (2023) quiet exhortation for 'bringing back love'?

How do revolutionary teachers sit with Hajir and Qato's (2024) insistence on reclaiming justice as we contemplate institutional silences, the suppression of solidarity, 'complex' or 'nuanced' arguments, and the threat posed by counter-hegemonic theories?

What does student-as-producer mean after witnessing Gaza?

What does an *avant-garde* pedagogy mean after witnessing Gaza?

How do revolutionary teachers teach after witnessing Gaza?

...

Moving with hooks, I think about a course of action that holds and contains the fullness of human existence. Moving through the labour debate, this overflows the energy of class struggle. Moving alongside Postone, it situates our energy against the social universe of value. As the world of work collapses, and as the ecosystems that sustain life are stretched and stressed, living is being resolved in all sorts of toxic ways. The revolutionary project is to reject this, and to feel that we are right in so doing. The revolutionary project is to ground new forms of association with different political energies, in a pluriversal system of thought. The revolutionary project rejects the ontological violence of the University in its denials of humanity and its fetishisations of bourgeois enterprise, knowledge, impact, outcomes, and more.

After witnessing Gaza, this is how I reflect on the encampments, and in protests on the streets, and in actions against genocide: I witness students becoming in excess of themselves as students; I witness students becoming producers of something different; I witness students teaching us to know the University through its cold heart; I witness students asking us to consider our options for knowing, doing and being otherwise.

As restructuring flows, and as the dark enlightenment takes hold, and as professors are demonised, and as international students are subject to extraordinary rendition, and as unconscionable vandalism unfolds, and as the depths of how we are enfolded within the logics of coloniality and genocide are revealed, where and when and how can we be in excess? To what extent has Gaza foreclosed upon any kind of meaningful knowing, doing and being inside the University?

Nearly identified potential and kinetic energy beyond the University that might act for reclaiming and renewing the common.

This is the University as one voice, against the cuts. The idea of the University in action: noisy, vibrant, funny,

intelligent, angry, passionate, daft, serious, worried, critical, exhilarating, musical, articulate, smart, powerful, thoughtful, calm, considered, beautiful, ugly, civilised, urbane, irritating, pushy, cultured, anarchic, compelling, conflicted, logical and rational. (Neary 2020b, 58)

A purposeful course of action is a negation of the University as is, pointing towards its abolition. This might still centre the social form of the University, but it opens-up a possibility for something else – a new form of mass intellectuality, grounded in physiological, emotional and cognitive energies that needed to be contained in new ways and in common. Neary's new course of action, a pedagogy of excess (or a pedagogy in excess) broke on the wall of individual, communal and institutional inertia and violence, as did the encampments. However, as Gillespie and Habermehl (2012, 15) stated, in systemic protests there is the possibility for a course of action, as the negation of our negation, that inscribes a 'politics of transformation within and against the University.'

How do we do this from inside the University, when the professional and managerial class seek to police and discipline all courses of action? How do we do this from inside the University, when there is no activist, class-based composition of intellectual labour, and limited solidarity? How do we do this from inside the University, when that institution is itself revealed as a node in a mycorrhizal network, governed and regulated against the needs of transnational finance capital?

Neary (2020b, 167) knew this to be a kinetic process:

revolutionary teaching needs to be part of a movement at the level of society, and not simply the result of the teachers in the classroom attempting to change the world, and revolutionary teaching needs to be linked to other radical social movements and joined up politics.

This views the curriculum not as a violent abstraction to be abolished, but as a course of action to be woven with political content and occupied as a new set of ‘practices that mediate the politics of knowledge and education, the political economy of space and time, and the possibility of autonomy.’ (Neary and Amsler 2012, 115) Here, we return to Winn’s (2015) tripartite analysis of the ways in which a co-operative might emerge inside-and-against the University: conversion; dissolution; creation. Considering these as possibilities requires an engagement with the practicalities of how we might realise new organising principles that enable the basis of intellectual life to be rearranged beyond HE, such that intellectuality might be reintegrated into good living.

Bookended by austerity and Gaza, our intellectual lives—our knowing, doing and being, and our intellectuality, relationality and sociability—have to be more than a reduction to the student experience, or a focus upon measurable outcomes. The intellectuality of our common wealth must be grounded in a theory of power and a theory of the State, which identifies opportunities for moving beyond the violence of value. How we do intellectual life must be an opening-out with-and-beyond class struggle, social movements, and struggles for identity and voice, as a shared and common struggle. On paper, in our projects, in the classroom and on the streets we must find the courage to treat our social forms as transitional and transitory, ‘on the way to the future, providing us with a radical epistemology on which to build a post-capitalist world’ (Neary and Winn 2019b, 277).

This is why the potential and kinetic energy of the occupation, protest camp, demonstration, and SSC were so generative. As *The Invisible Committee* (2011, 108) put it: ‘for us it’s not about possessing territory. Rather it’s a matter of increasing the density of communes, of circulation, and of solidarities to the point that

the territory becomes unreadable, opaque to all authority. We don't want to occupy the territory, we want to *be* the territory.' On the way to the future, these spaces offered safety for a while, in considering a new form of social knowing – of knowing, doing and being in excess of institutionalised teaching and learning, with each other and beyond university examination.

Yet, nowhere does the potential to become in excess appear possible, and at the same time appear so far away, as in the University at a time of genocide and in the midst of genocidal ideation.

In its silences, and in its violence, and in its ignorance, and in its co-option, the University as a project of civilisation has failed. Its disciplines, pedagogies and identities have failed. Our radical intention to remake the University as a project of civilisation has failed. From inside, and mindful that it is always conditioned transnationally as a node in a mycorrhizal network, governed by its relations in the social universe of value, the University has been dragged into the abyss.

As we bear witness to Gaza, we bear witness to our fall.

For all that we asked how do revolutionary teachers teach?, we could not arrest this.

From the abyss, how might we emerge?

How the fuck do revolutionary teachers teach after witnessing Gaza?

9

social being and becoming

But as my supine convalescent days accumulated, I became grateful to my body for precipitating a realization: you can't do this anymore, you idiot. This job isn't worth the continual dread and self-denial. You're too old for the chronic sleep deprivation. The arrhythmia that used to manifest once every five years or so: it now kicks in a couple times a week. And you're too good at what you do to feel so awful about it, and so incompetent at it. (Shannon Mattern, 2024)

our "truths" must be validated from within, with less concern for how outsiders legitimate (or receive and perceive) our assertions (Venus F. Evans-Winters 2019)

I have a different idea of a universal. It is of a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all (Aimé Césaire 1957)

1. The human condition: in, against and beyond whiteness

The social universe of value is white. It is achromatic. It is without colour, although it sees colour as the Other. Its reproduction is its whiteness. It is a movement towards absolute whiteness as the realisation of the potential energy of the system.

If we think about this in relation to mycorrhizal networks, the flow of resources through the network, and between nodes in the

ecosystem, is towards the white horizon. The flow of waste tends to be towards sacrifice zones or areas of the ecosystem made marginal. It tends to be dumped in segments and sectors beyond the white gaze, to be processed by those bodies made marginal and othered.

Within the social universe of value there is a desire to understand the dark matter that enriches its composition from the perspective of the white gaze. Dark matter is held to be exotic, charmed, immeasurable (Phillips 2025; Prescod-Weinstein 2021). It is believed to be other – spirited, embodied, axiological, emotional, landed (but not grounded). It is believed to be beyond the objective truth of the methodological University and its obsessive knowledge production. And all the while, those truths and obsessions attempt to redefine that matter against the measurable gravitational pull of this universe.

So, this obsessive knowledge production, erupting in the nodes of the University where the hyphae of finance capital and ideology conjoin and overflow, has implications for knowing, doing and being. It conditions how commodification is a rupture of the Self. It denies our entanglements (Barad 2007), or perhaps denies certain threads of our entanglements. It also denies the entanglements between our particular needs and desires, and how we are forced to live a life in value's shadow.

Shannon Mattern (2024) writes of the strangulated hernia that took her into hospital as giving her 'the absolute best week of my 2023.' In significant pain, she was 'genuinely blissed out: so happy—literally giddy—to be in a place where work couldn't touch me.' Her being resonated with the ability to 'listen to my body rather than denying it existed', and denying the embodied impacts of 80-90 hour working weeks, filled with meetings, reviews, grading, reports of campus crises 'and yet more administrative cruelty' (*ibid.*). It was her body responding to 'the most difficult and demoralizing semester in my teaching career', such that she 'was glad to be free, for a short while, of the self

doubt and “what the hell have I gotten myself into?!” regret.’ (*ibid.*)

This is not an isolated occurrence for those with tenure at the heart of this social universe. It is not an isolated occurrence for those made precarious and marginal, under threat of outsourcing or fire-and-rehire contracts. It is not an isolated occurrence for those struggling for tenure, or fighting for pension, pay and holiday rights. It is not an isolated occurrence for those who are expected to provide the affective labour, which reproduces the fucked-up sociability of the institution. It is not an isolated occurrence for those who had to travel in and clean down the institution during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is not an isolated occurrence for those who tend to remain uncited (and unsighted), not-promoted, and unrewarded. It is not an isolated occurrence for those whose outcomes tend to reflect their position in orbit around the white hole at the centre of value’s social universe.

...

In sitting with Neary’s work, there are ways of weaving whiteness into our understanding of the University, and the ways in which it shapes our (in)humanity. Again, money talks. Neary and Taylor (1998, 8) help us to situate subjectivity conditioned by money, revealing ‘the most intimate form of social existence: a theory of the human condition... the real nature of human life’ (*ibid.*) Returning to Marx’s (1844c) analysis of how this nature is conditioned as species-being by objectified powers, they highlight the importance of a fuller, more human engagement with common needs, and in this, they note how discussions of psychology, well-being, self-care, have to be situated against the human experience of the objective reproduction of value (Neary and Taylor 1998).

Analysing our subjectivity conditioned by money helps us to draw lines between institutional forms and human life, which is reproduced inauthentically, ‘as a processed form of money-capital’ that ‘has reduced the planet to an alien place inhabited

by man-made machines and machine-made men' (*ibid.*, 11, 12). The University is a node in that alien place where finance capital and ideology weave new ways of being. Thinking about the ways in which concrete individuals are single variations of humans in general, and are always-abstract—made for-value and to be monetised or made surplus—helps us to question our tendency *both* to naturalise the capitalist University as transhistorical, *and* to idealise particular forms of intellectual work within it.

A more compelling basis for understanding the human condition inside the University is not to be located in 'individuality, but within the ensemble of real-life processes (social relations) which man produces and which produce him.' (*ibid.*, 63) Money increasingly shapes who and what is valuable inside the University in ways that are differentially-imposed and experienced, as they emerge imminent to specific social relations and forms of human individuality that are valued. This is where so much of the testimony and analysis of who gets tenure, who gets cited, who is promoted, who is made precarious, and so on, is important. It helps to ground the struggle against oppression.

The horizon, then, is the limit of where individual lived experiences of the University are sublated by capital, and the information it emits enables us to measure an individual's relation to impact, entrepreneurialism, excellence, and to make judgments. That activity of sublating requires the individual to internalise the systemic desire for value, in order to produce more, and also to internalise and accept their position in relation to hidden modes of work that are regarded as menial, affective and so on. Feeling sick in relation to Gaza, a strangulated hernia, too many personal tutees, whatever, have to be swallowed down, especially where collective action is so weak. Otherwise how is it possible to meet institutional demands? Otherwise our only responses appear to be: give in, give up, leave or join the Undercommons.

Struggle requires that we think about how our being is shaped in their relation to value (through money). Where we can see that the characteristics of value are life-limiting, threatening or oppressive for some, and at the same time life-giving or enabling for others, there is a space for solidarity actions. We have to hold that the personal or institutional desire or need for access to more money reproduces forms of material life that condition consciousness negatively, thereby denying subjectivity. It can only enable a stunted or one-sided species-being amplified financially as the unfolding of whiteness, white privilege and white power in/over the world.

Holding this, we consider: ‘what should we (educators, students, professional services’ staff) do now?’

...

One frame for refusal is the reality of epistemicide, silencing, methodological foreclosure and making invisible (Rizvi 2022), which then opens-out space for epistemic and ontological reopenings through an Undercommons of fugitive planning and forms of disobedience (Moten and Harney 2013). The idea of being fugitive or disobedient is still conditioned in its relationship to productivity and surplus, but where resources can be stolen it is possible to create space to nurture counter-hegemonic stories and traditions, which might be incubated for knowing the world otherwise.

This was less Neary’s (2015b) perception. He saw the Undercommons as lacking an analysis of labour inside capitalism, and lacking an understanding of valorisation. He saw it as having no understanding of the violent law of abstraction that brutalises life, in its realisation of surplus-value. However, working with a critique of value that recognises how social forms are reproduced in relation to the totality of productive social relations, the Undercommons is one way of holding

open a negation of the University for-value. It is more exciting to imagine the Undercommons as a form of generative hyphae working its way through the matter of the institution, and able to provide spores for resolving further connection and struggle.

Diverting energy into the Undercommons transcends simply becoming 'fixated on the identity politics of excluded faculty' (*ibid.*), and enabling their reclusion. Rather, it is one way of decomposing (dissolving) institutions from within by working with the energy of those faculty developed in struggle through fugitivity. This is the intellectual and practical energy that erupts from our understanding of: what it means/takes to escape, hide, disappear; what it means/takes to be against one's own incarceration or locking down in specific ways; the necessity and the desire to be fugitive; and the social possibilities that might erupt from being fugitive. By recognising fugitivity, the status of the Maroon, and the importance of Black Studies as the animaterial of the University and of intellectual life, it becomes possible to recognise the ways in which certain bodies might be able to reproduce an Undercommons, either as a path away or a strand to be woven into struggle inside-and-against. A path away is not driven by a need to convert the University into something. Rather, it works to dissolve oneself as it is incarcerated in that space, and at the same time to help others do the same.

The Undercommons contains a solvent potential, helping us to consider how to dissolve our social forms as functions of capitalist violence. It is important to note that Harney and Moten (2013) also write of students as producers, and we might see a thread between their dissident fugitivity that is inside-and-against the University, and Neary's radical pedagogic work in his University and in-community. This solvent potential might have more traction where it weaves alongside oppositional spaces that refuse to idealise established academic norms. These plural spaces, and the ways in which they might be woven, centre an acceptance

that the differential experiences of our capitalist institutions contain the potential for a new intentionality: an acceptance of individual differences at the heart of a new species-being – from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs.

This differential appreciation makes clear the importance of weaving the politics of identity into a critique of value, to open-up an empathetic reading of sublation as it emerges from a white lifeworld. A richer texture emerges around our understanding of the social universe of value when we layer-in identities, as materially and historically conditioned. Using our other metaphor, a differential critique enables the flows of resources across capital's mycorrhizal network to be understood as an ecosystem in which all parts are not necessarily equal in production, circulation, accumulation and distribution of resources.

Here, a range of indigenous and decolonial thinkers enable us to see the University in-against-beyond this white frame, at the limits of capitalist colonisation. Of course, we hold the risk that we might fetishise respect for intangible cultural property, language, traditional knowledge, cultural empowerment, mutuality, eldership and honouring, respect for the land, and so on (The National Aboriginal History Organization (NAHO) 2025). Instead, such an engagement must be an attempt to understand that there is a multiplicity of knowing, doing and being, if only we can sit with pluriversal sets of ethical principles, mutuality in defining benefits, and the importance of taking time.

In this, an individual has to understand how they are located in space-time in relation to power and privilege, and to value. An individual has to understand how they are located in space-time in relation to knowledge and knowing, and in relation to power-over the epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies that define this world. Crucially, an individual has to understand how they are located in space-time in relation to others, such that knowledge and knowing can be reflexively related to the amelioration of

exploitation, expropriation and extraction. This relating, practiced mutually and with care, is at the heart of our dissolving the social, gravitational fields that give texture to value's universe.

This is a centring of the idea that identity is in dialectical relation with capital, and that it *does* contribute to the ways in which the social universe of value is constituted and consolidated. I am reminded that Lewis (2020) sees this emerging in-community across diverse cultures, in discussing indigenous protocols and AI. In refusing 'a flattening of the rich texture and variability of Indigenous thought', indigenous protocols might enable a range of cracks to be widened that work to weaken 'a Western techno-utilitarian lens', and which instead we can use to frame 'relational paradigms', ideas of wayfaring and 'a custodial ethic', and 'multiplicity over singularity' (*ibid.*, 6, 7, 8).

Multiplicity over singularity is our refusal to be objectified against the idea of an existing or newly-resolved universal. Where we witness a multiplicity of struggles against a system in crisis, we must choose to honour a range of decolonial and indigenous ways of living. We know this offers a more generative opening, because we see that class struggle or vanguardist politics have failed to deliver us towards the lower phase of communism. Something more is needed that respects human conditionality. A monoculture of struggle is a reflection of the toxicity of the monoculture of value. Refusing that monoculture of struggle is more than being fugitive or disobedient, it is a flight towards life that has solvent potential.

As Cordes (2020, 76) makes clear, in relation to Lakota knowledge, that life is dynamic: 'protocols change, decision-making shifts, and names can change, because in practice, our decisions have an effect on the world and must be continually made and changed in a network of relations.' In widening our appreciation of ourselves in struggle, in relation to 'our extended circle of relations... both human and nonhuman', this points to

our taking responsibility (*ibid.*). Arista (2020, 105) discusses this in relation to stewardship as kinship: ‘in making kin with the machines, we have to also re-acquaint ourselves with our own communities and systems of customary knowledge that have long been neglected in some places.’

Stewardship is one of the lessons from being able to live-out critique of the University: through our pedagogies of excess in our classrooms; in our dissolving of our privilege inside-and-outside; in liberating resources or nutrients across intellectual and social boundaries; and, in opening up a flow of experiments aimed at dissolution between social projects and the University. These might be done in trade unions, social movements, critical pedagogy networks, anti-racist practices and more. They have to point to each other as generative possibilities collectively pointing towards a new horizon.

Recognising this is also a recognition and appreciation of ‘the archive of liberation’ maintained by formerly colonised and enslaved peoples (Rodney 2020, 146). Dehumanisation is so grounded in the centres of capital that I try to imagine liberation emerging from the places and communities onto which it has projected its Otherness. These are the sites for the refusal of capital as a settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal intentionality. Again, the Undercommons and fugitivity are a crucial moment for creating the grounds for liberation inside our universities, where those might then channel flows of decoloniality back to the centre, against capital. In this, my heart always resonates with Mbembe’s (2021, 2, 3, *emphasis* in original) position that the soul of decolonisation is nurtured through ‘an *active will to community*’ or ‘the *will to life*’: ‘to stand up on one’s own and to create a heritage.’

Our stewardship as academics or students or professional services’ staff is not to protect our disciplines or roles. It is to look for spaces to germinate a new sense of species-being, generated through a new material history, as a recognition of a more

authentic, fuller human condition that cannot simply be folded into the centres of capital through sustainable development, or other white pathologies. From the North, my stewardship is an act of kinship that has to be able to sit with the ways in which I benefit from a system of global capitalism that receives huge racial subsidies/discounts in the form of labour exploitation and expropriation, and ecosystem extraction. A starting point for confronting this is contributing to an intersectional, intergenerational and intercommunal archive of liberation, in order to help define the world otherwise.

From our universities built on Empire, blood and bones (and eugenics and scientific racism and disciplines born from the study of enslaved peoples), where the extraction of resources serves a predatory knowledge economy, I want to imagine what being-beyond might look like and feel like: a place that might help us to come together, not simply as restitution or to clear consciences, but as acknowledgement, stewardship, kinship and a possibility of resolution. If we desire to ascend into humanity, in-community, this University has to be dissolved as we, in turn, are dissolved and resolved afresh.

2. For storytelling, agency and ways of knowing

Possibilities.

Clarke (1990) highlighted class struggle as generative of the potential for new, material aspirations to be realised.

Holloway (in González Cruz *et al.* 2023) saw the possibilities in revealing the constant struggle that capital is forced to undertake to convert human activity into the abstractions that make its life possible (money, value, surplus, realised through institutionalised violence).

Capital needs struggle to impose its abstract logic, including within us. As we struggle against capital, we are struggling against ourselves, and how we have internalised anti-human abstractions.

Holloway (*ibid*) reminds us that our internal struggles over our location, position, place in our social universe, is an internalised response to capital's intensifying subordination of our lives – it is both effective and inadequate. The only way out is revolution, as a struggle to realise 'the real community of human social life' (Clarke 1988, 365).

Or rather, the only way out is revolution, as a struggle to realise *the stories that erupt* from the real community of human social life.

...

Simbürger and Neary (2016) identified the struggle over academic identities as a key moment. They (*ibid.*, 51) saw this in relation to disconnection between a hoped-for academic identity, and that imposed 'by human resource and quality assurance managers'. This 'constant process of making sense of who we are, our academic aspirations and practices and how they relate to the past, present and future' (*ibid.*), is grounded in material and historical stories that have context. Simbürger and Neary (*ibid.*) describe this in relation to how lived experiences of austerity are expressed by 'taxi professors' in Chile, who have a genuine vocation to teach in spite of deleterious working conditions. Yet, in order to survive, they must also hold down full-time jobs in other sectors. What stories of themselves do these individuals hold onto and at what cost? Which stories might we let go of, by acknowledging their experiences and how they dance with us?

Simbürger and Neary's (*ibid.*, 57) Chilean analysis identifies that academic activity 'does not constitute an identity that can be negotiated, but rather is defined by teaching in higher education as a form of academic labour.' It is a working condition, shaped conditionally and contractually. This makes the definition of solidarity, where salaries, forms of social security, insurance, holiday entitlement, and so on are experienced differentially, almost impossible. There is resonance with the lack of academic

engagement in student protests (in Chile, as in England in 2010-12). As '[m]anaging oneself as a form of precarious labour involves the development of human resource management skills' (*ibid.*, 61), different social experiences, predicated upon gender, race and ethnicity, religion, disability, and their intersections, are expressed through forms of self-exploiting entrepreneurship.

Here, we highlight the importance of understanding intellectual work in relation to waged work, as the weaving of analyses that are driven by value, but experienced in ways that enable the politics of identity to be woven in. This enables us to move beyond denouncing working conditions in the University, or re-moralising its intellectual project and perceived legacy. It enables us to move beyond seeing academic identities as special. Instead, we have to situate them against wage labour as the organising principle of society, not so that we might redistribute more resources (awards, professorships, time) to particular communities labelled as disadvantaged, but so as to negate disadvantage. The focus is the abolition of the relations and conditions of production that perpetuate such disadvantage and its opposite, privilege.

The point is not to analyse the differentiated, painful realities of precarious academic labour (like taxi professors in Chile), in order to recuperate it. Rather, the point is to dissolve the very social conditions that demand this work in the first place. The point is to dissolve the stories and subjectivities that reproduce the desire for those social conditions. In this we work with Lentin's (2023) note that such counter-storytelling needs to be 'done in the interests and under the guidance of the community concerned.' Lentin also asks us to hold Tuhiwei Smith's (2012) reality check that there is no going back – we are all too entangled through our histories for reclusion to be useful to us. We need a relational and pluriversal way of knowing, doing and being in the world, which cannot be an instrumental measuring

or knowing. It is an ethical relationality (Kerr and Adamov Ferguson 2021).

Working with Tuhiwei Smith (*ibid.*), and mindful of Holloway's (in González Cruz *et al.* 2023) recognition of capital's constant struggle to convert life into abstract valuations, a horizon opens-up against the recuperation of a multitude of voices in the service of value. Instead, we can situate our work as a struggle for a choir or ensemble or collective (real assembly) of voices that can work co-operatively and with dignity to dissolve value. One step is storytelling as a store of knowledge and wisdom that enable survival through dialogue, accountability, relationality and an ethics of care (see Lentin 2023, following Hill Collins 1990).

Hill Collins (*ibid.*, 270) reminds us that 'Black women's collective experiences serve as one specific social location for examining points of connection among multiple epistemologies'. Location, rather than a perception of truth, matters. Not only do standpoints offer partial, situated knowledge, which are, and must remain, unfinished, but they also challenge the University as a structural/structuring characteristic of a colonial world (Lentin 2018). The real assembly of stories from the Undercommons of the University contributes energy to this wider social storytelling in/of struggle.

In refusing the colonising logics of the University, and the ways in which struggles against those logics have been reduced to a one-dimensional view of human condition as labourer or labouring, we open ourselves up. It becomes possible to tell out our souls, as a revolutionary meeting point.

3. Telling out our souls

Neary and Rikowski (2000a, 18) situate the logic of capitalist work in the expansion of value's social universe. This might be hidden from us, but we are shaped by its universalising tendencies. So, 'human life is forced to take on the existence of labour-in-capital:

human life is forced to exist as its opposite', and '[a]ll aspects of human sociability become *really subsumed* by the logic of capitalist work' (*ibid.*, 18, 20). This logic recalibrates all of social life.

We must sit with Davis (2005) in allowing such analyses to fruit more fully. She (*ibid.*, 63) points towards 'the radical impulse of feminist analysis... to think disparate [*sic*] about categories together, to think across disciplinary borders, to think across categorical divisions', as one way through, towards more soulful and soul-full working. Thinking across respects the dignity of the individual as their own world, and also brings them into relation with the Other, thereby challenging, ontologically, the individual's engagement with self-consciousness, self-determination, and individuation. If self and Other (identity and non-identity) become mutually constituting, and if that entanglement takes place within a deformed system, then a deepening engagement with decolonial intentionality (or other ways of imagining the world otherwise) becomes imperative.

Capital continually uses and exchanges new themes and variations, and finds new ways of unfolding, forking and hacking difference. It does so by 'gradually extending its dominion over everything, [and] ultimately comes to liquidate identity.' (Jameson 2017, 24) It matters that we see this in relation to struggle – not in the defensive acceptance that capital will liquidate the radical or revolutionary potential of all identities in the name of value. Rather, we must know in our souls that as capital brings individual/collective subjectivity into relation with its categorical and ontological view of the world, openings emerge. These openings are where we might view the content of a world that is not-this, or not this one. We might want to shut it down (the Gaza Encampment) or colonise it (the alternative, co-operative provider), or we might decide to work through these impulses, to sublimate who we are. In this argument a positivist approach cannot be resisted

by persisting in indeterminacy: we must give ourselves over to the determinant and make our way through such specific content and thematic until we come out the other side – a requirement that seems to me to distinguish this dialectic from the more absolute scepticism of deconstruction. (*ibid.*, 85)

This is not simply intellectual work as deconstruction of the system or measurement of the Other. It is not the objectification of the discipline or the self as a professor or student or librarian or whatever. It is not the overlay of identity on a horrific and violent system in order to give it a different flavour. It is the dissolution of all these processes and more. The dissolution of ourselves is also the beginning of ourselves as newly determinate beings, with the possibility of new ways of knowing and doing in the world beyond a one-dimensional human existence.

As we come to know this, we have to find ways of refusing the methodological conditioning of our universities. Inside the University, as our disciplines and their methodologies deny the particular and reinforce the universal and systemic, the struggle is to dissolve that reality and to activate new and possible, unexpected futures. Our intellectuality must speak to Ferdinand's (2022, 244) desire for

being done with this vertical universalism that makes the West the measure of all culture and history, one that looms over, establishes, and dominates, in favour of a 'truly universal universal,' as Souleymane Bachir Diagne imagines it, a universal that gathers, that listens, and that celebrates encounter.

The celebration of encounter is a rejection of any form of fetishised category of intellectual – academic, public, eminent, and speaks to Haiven's description of 'common intellectuals: catalysing communities of struggle', so that people could express their

‘revolutionary brilliance’. (Max Haiven quoted in Neary 2017d, 46) It perhaps also speaks to the possibilities in the Undercommons for ‘making contact with the disenfranchised and the disconnected faculty and students so as to abolish the university and establish a new form of dissident institution’ (*ibid.*, 50).

I bring this to mind with Neary’s (*ibid.*, 52) intention to establish the SSC or a Co-operative University ‘in collaboration with others to create a new form of higher learning out of the negative dysfunctionality of the capitalist university’. Commonality, dissidence and making contact are dialogic, and ask that we take time in resolving ourselves in relation to the Other, as it is presented in the form *both* of separate individuals *and* ideations of a possible or actual institutional home. Note that we are resolving ourselves as an active will to community, and being defined in relation to our resistance to value. Thus, following Adorno (1973/2007), this work has to treat *both* the capitalist university *and* the identities forged inside that institution as a negative dysfunctionality. It matters that we constantly work through ‘the untruth of identity’ with a dialectics that ‘is the consistent sense of non-identity.’ (*ibid.*, 5)

Adorno (*ibid.*, 11) speaks to me here, in sketching ‘the ontology of the wrong state of things’ as the reality of our social horizon. However, his radical intentionality does not collapse into a denial of identity politics through a critique of value or by laying stress upon a distilled version of class struggle. Rather, he seeks ‘a turn toward non-identity... the hinge of negative dialectics’, which seeks to dissolve the control given to particular (white, male, ableist, cis) identities over the world. He dissolves the demand that all other identities, categories, concepts are subsumed within and transcended by whiteness as *the* identity. (*ibid.*, 12)

Such demands are toxic capitalist compulsions that negate (violently and unreconcilably) the possibility for our souls to be fully our own, because we can only synthesise our existence

into a new whole in relation to capital's universal categories. In the struggle to create the alternative, in the streets and in the Co-operative University, and in the struggle to dissolve the University from within, through the Undercommons or an abolitionist pedagogy, the negativity in our being and becoming is shaped as a refusal of our historical and material compulsions to reproduce whiteness. Our negativity in being and becoming tells out our non-identity, in relation to our recognition of colonial ontology and epistemology, the stagnation of universal models, and how we relate to our losses or lack of power. Our negativity is our composting of our melancholia and powerlessness, beyond the expressed categories and entities of coloniality.

So, if we wish to be beyond the capitalist University, we must be beyond its denial of our being – we must accept our nothingness, as opposed to internalising a one-sided, inauthentic self as our only possible being.

...

Inauthenticity might feel less threatening than life beyond the event horizon of value, precisely because that life is unimaginable. Life beyond capital feels like the void. For many, the thought is to be avoided rather than embraced, to the point where we are asked embrace the wreckage of our stunted existences inside our broken institutions. So, we deny our souls in the struggle for tenure or excellence or impact, when it would be more fully human to tell them out in relation to their non-identity, alongside the non-identity of others. Telling out, as a dynamic, relational, mutual energy of sublation, does not fetishise what emerges as a new, multi-dimensional identity (the negation of my negation). The point is to abolish the idea of the absolute and the concepts that define it, by dissolving their power to define the world, and doing so collectively, (self-) consciously, and in ways that respect the dignity of difference.

For intellectual workers this is the recognition that by defining their lives positively, for example in relation to an idealised set of working conditions and outcomes inside the University, there can be no liberation and no freedom. We might think about this through the student experience as it is defined around access to services, curricula, content, and academic practices and support. A range of services also correspond to a concrete form of unfreedoms or failings, in the form of awarding gaps, mental and physical ill-health, a lack of representation in the curriculum, sexual harassment and violence on campus, cops on campus, and so on. These are experienced differentially, and demand that new services are implemented to overcome symptomatic responses, new policies be defined to monitor, surveil and control staff and student performance, and so on.

In opposition to this, and in moving negatively against institutional unfreedom by witnessing the unfree in the idealised freedom of intellectual work, multiple standpoints offer the possibility to negate and abolish the University as-is. They offer ways of hearing and celebrating the particular as the concrete manifestation of life, against a brutalising universalism that denies plurality, and therefore denies the authenticity of our souls beyond their value (for money). Where resistance can be recognised and held, a new relationality stresses the unfolding of the particular. For instance, it might stand against the ego-imprisonment of reward and recognition inside the University (where we can never be enough), and represent a desire for individuation against 'the principle of perverted universality' (*ibid.*, 344).

This requires courage and faith, in the struggle for justice. Our dissolution of the universities is a negative critique of a hegemonic social form, which looks like it has been given to us to steward, as the intellectual hold of the world. As such, our dissolution cannot be the positive or affirmative dismantling of a perceived, inefficient institution, to be resolved as value-

for-money. It is dissolution that points towards our desire for individuation. It is the dissolution that negates and abolishes academia's war of position, in order to transcend the desire or delusion for a particular identity to be realised (which can *never* be realised fully).

Our dissolution of the universities is a negative critique immanent to the dissolution of the absolute or the universal, and it can only be enacted in unison with the abolition of other capitalist institutions (and the identities fabricated to hold them together): prisons; police; borders; families; schools; and more. It is the dissolution of 'the compulsion of identity' (*ibid.*, 406), and of any possibility of being finished, perhaps in relation to a new universal authority that might be fetishised. 'This is its form of hope' (*ibid.*), as an expanded ontological horizon. It is an orientation to and responsibility for difference, guided by an ethical relationality, which refuses to confine the lives of others (Kerr and Adamov Ferguson 2021).

4. Algorithmic liberation of the social being?

Across the mainstream, the lives of others are increasingly confined by a discourse that prioritises the artificial. The UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology ((DSIT) 2025a, 23) *UK Compute Roadmap* has little focus on the human, beyond the usual discussion of talent and confidence being developed through AI Growth Zones, designed to enable 'experimentation with emerging AI paradigms such as embodied AI, autonomous systems, and human-AI collaboration.' This is the limit of any discussion of an ecosystem that sustains our social being. There is nothing more than a consideration of environmental impacts, and no engagement with the non-human.

This is mirrored in the same Department's Independent Report, the *AI Opportunities Action Plan* (DSIT 2025b), which

does not seek to develop new forms of sociability, mutuality or relationality with AI (Hall 2024b). Rather, it emphasises a depoliticised focus upon economic outcomes, service delivery, liberating data for the market, and workforce development. Issues requiring deep human, non-human and ecological analyses are skipped over, including: migration and the extraction of (high-skilled) people from the global South; socio-environmental impacts on communities; the acceleration of data transfer and intellectual property rights; furthering the role of corporate involvement in curriculum design, and the development of scholarships; the annihilation of labour-time (jobs) and established forms of relationality, through the use of AI assistants and diagnostics; and, re-bordering through the creation of UK Sovereign AI (DSIT 2025b).

The political economy of AI matters in relation to our social being, precisely because it maps across to how we relate to our metabolic realities. The artificial world being offered up as *the* future social horizon emphasises an expansionist boosterism, demanding the acceleration of investment in data centres with significant impacts: environmentally, in relation to water, energy and land; and communally, in relation to the use of and access to resources, including in the deliberation over governance and ownership (stewardship for value). This artificial metabolism places universities at the financialised heart of the infrastructure and services that are governed by ideations of post-humanism, accelerationism, and technological salvation.

In response, we consider metabolic rifts, and how human activities undermine the web of life, through the compulsion to exist productively within value's social universe (Foster 2017, Moore 2015, Saito 2017). The rift that undermines the web of life, fed by the systemic discrimination and algorithmic oppression experienced differentially (Benjamin 2019, Noble 2018), is our disconnection from the ecosystems that sustain us. The energy

and resources required to feed capital's desire for an AI-human ecology that can deliver competitive advantage forces us to accept the digital colonialism of our lives. We are repurposed for the resale of innovation, and as a by-product, we keep hidden away from ourselves the truth of social and environmental despoilation. We try to hide ourselves away from the growth in surveillance, monitoring, and the creation of new material and immaterial borders. Our borders are our limits to responsibility, accountability and trust, and the very clear limits upon any form of decolonial intentionality in broadening the use of AI for more relational and ecological ends. Instead, we hide ourselves away from the ecological harms that our working lives visit upon ourselves and others.

In response, we might open-out possibilities to re-engage with Kleiner's (2010) *Telekommunist Manifesto* or Crawford's (2022) *algorithmic commons*, and to seek to integrate AI into the abolitionist movement, as an integral strand of reclaiming general intellect as mass intellectuality (Hall and Winn 2017). The social being and becoming that unfolds inside-and-against the University can be enriched technologically, in co-operation with AI, as a means of widening our circle of relations, and as an interlocutor able to support forms of platform socialism or collective, democratic ownership in-community. Here, I am pointed back to Miller Medina's (2005) analysis of the collective desires for a state machine in Allende's Chile, which could widen engagement with the realm of freedom by reducing the need for humans to spend (waste) time reproducing basic goods in the realm of necessity.

By demanding engagement with a new form of common wealth, not defined by the accumulation of commodities, it becomes possible to reimagine being-with-technology for mutual aid or mutuality, solidarity, and potentially liberation through sublation. In a capitalist ecosystem driven by the compulsion to compete and profit and accumulate, this is an impossibility. It requires the dissolution of a world committed

to particular configurations, architectures and protocols for life, which is governed technologically against our needs for a liveable environment. It requires the dissolution of a privileging of identities shaped by ideations of productivity, efficiency, entrepreneurialism, talent, AI-human integration, and more.

5. Social being beyond blind spots

AI is a blind spot, not just in the University, but definitely in the University. And we all have blind spots. Settler-colonialism will do that to us. The social being inscribed in and through AI is an attempt to sublimate the world by capital, enacted through institutions like universities with no mind being paid to the waste, redundancy, inefficiency, or lack of social use-value. In any case, someone else will shoulder those outcomes, so the fantasy can continue.

Davis (2022, xviii) knows this as ‘whiteness and maleness’, which remain ‘as measures for liberatory futures, even when the presence of such measures is deeply hidden beneath such seductive universalism is as freedom, equality, and fraternity.’ Instead, through Davis, I am drawn to Ferdinand’s (2022) beautiful analysis at the intersection of ecology and coloniality, which allows us to dream the horizon for a worldly-ecology. This lies beyond a decolonial ecology, where we are able to process a double fracture – the separation of the colonial history of the world from its environmental history, and the erasure of the Other or other histories from environmental discourse. In this analysis, we bridge towards the eye of the Tempest, thinking ecologically in light of the colonial and environmental double fracture, alongside our need for some form of Ark that will transport us away from modernity’s hold (the slave ship).

Drawing out the violence embedded within the making essential of a western imaginary, Ferdinand (*ibid.*, 2, *emphasis in original*) asks: ‘*how can a world-ship be built in the face of*

the Tempest? Moving with and beyond the double fracture, we must move towards the horizon of the world (the world-ship). The plantation is a central metaphor here, demonstrating the ways in which particular peoples were colonially enslaved, and particular ecologies subjugated, such that life could only be conceived through geographical and ontological dependency upon the coloniser. This is the violence that a settler-colonial ontology visits upon the world, as it seeks to reproduce social being in ways that refuse to accept the legitimacy certain ways of knowing the world. This is where social being intersects with the methodological impositions of the University and its disciplines, which can only reproduce new forms of colonial (in Ferdinand's terms, plantation) logic, for instance in the technological salvation of the AI moment.

Thinking about Harney and Moten's (2013) *Undercommons*, where fugitivity and maroon insurgency are celebrated, Ferdinand (2022) identifies how certain bodies remain in the hold of the world – where social survival is marked by an exclusion from the world and reduced to an individual's value as energy. In this, Ferdinand (2022, 178, *emphasis* in original) shows us that '*racism is a way of inhabiting the Earth* that includes an engineering of its environmental, social, and political landscapes.' Alongside historical injustices inside the University, in reward and recognition and awarding and more, this helps us understand the obsession with a social being that is now steeped in the artificial: across funding calls, in teaching strategies, and in the fetishisation of technologies of capture and measurement.

Moten's real assembly and Mbembe's active will to community are echoed for me in Ferdinand's (*ibid.*) wish for a rising-up from the hold of the slave ship, to bridge towards justice. I read this as the demand for what Thompson (2022, 18, discussing the work of James Baldwin) calls 'epistemologically valid knowledge of the authentic being of a people.' It renews one of our core questions:

how can revolutionary teachers teach the abolition of coloniality and its artificial grammar?

I recognise that this was not core to student-as-producer, the SSC or the range of occupations in 2010-11, or the Gaza Encampments, but it matters in how we might rethink the lessons of those historical moments, and enact a relational ethics or a pluriversal intentionality. Questioning these movements and moments lies at the heart of an ontological reimagining of our intellectuality towards the world-ship. It cannot take a single, abstract (settler-colonial) form: it must be a plurality of concrete revolts, which transform consciousness because they crack-open what is perceived as human essence (Davis 1971). This holds to, and reproduces, the promise of liberation beyond shared forms of trauma (Robinson 2020), where the horizon of other worlds are shaped by a communism that has an orientation beyond whiteness (Césaire 2000).

Situating our struggles inside a relational ethics or a pluriversal intentionality reframes the ontological and analytical categories that we use to understand HE. So doing helps us to transcend the limitations of our imposed social forms, and to push beyond towards social revolution. This matters because it dissolves a sense that the University or the sector might be recuperated or recovered, for instance by invoking the idea of co-operation, without pushing for that at the level of society through the abolition of the institutions that reproduce the social universe of value. At the same time, it dissolves the sense that the University as a settler-colonial and racial-patriarchal project can be anything other than identified with a particular ontological position, defined against whiteness. With a limiting, inward gaze, it can never know itself from without. It cannot know itself from the perspective (or systemic non-identity) of those who cannot identify with hegemony, although they might represent it – those who can never inhabit the identity of whiteness, fully.

In spite of *Rhodes Must Fall* and *Fees Must Fall*, Black Lives Matter and responses to Charlottesville, ‘why isn’t my professor Black?’ and ‘why is my curriculum white?’, these issues tended not to rupture the practices of autonomous educational projects, discussions about a Co-operative University, or the student occupations. Yet, examining how such projects failed to rupture the project of whiteness, as a colonial reality with historical and material conditions, emanating in relation to the unfolding of capital, would help to reorient our struggles against coloniality. As Kelley (2000, 9) argues for the work of Césaire, ‘the circulation of colonial ideology—an ideology of racial and cultural hierarchy—is as essential to colonial rule as police and *corvée* labor.’ It is impossible to understand the potential of liberation through struggle against the University, without an engagement in-and-against colonial ideology, as it is revealed ontologically and methodologically through HE and its disciplines.

How do revolutionary teachers teach?

By opening their senses to the deception of the world.

Césaire (2000, 31) taught that

[a] civilisation that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilisation. A civilisation that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a sick civilisation. A civilisation that plays fast and loose with its principles is a dying civilisation... It takes refuge in a hypocrisy which is all the more odious because it is less and less likely to deceive.

He might have been speaking about the stories we tell each other, methodologically and objectively from within our capitalist institutions. The blind eyes we turn. The fixation on *things* that turn out to be delusions. Taking refuge in institutions based on stories that turn out to be hypocrisies, and which are

more odious because they are less and less likely to succeed.

Césaire (*ibid.*) is clear that for all the talk about progress, cures, standards of living, we are also faced with othered societies and communities and cultures dismantled, commodified, expropriated, wiped out. The University cannot escape its place in this duality of progress-sacrifice, in which the truth claimed for its identity with impact, commercialisation, value-for-money, student outcomes, is mirrored in the truth of the war on professors, unconscionable vandalism, international students snatched by immigration officers, the use of the law rather than dialogue against Gaza encampments, and more. It is mirrored in our recognition that those whom the University has othered have been alienated both in their labour in the institution, and also in questioning what the institution (and their being in it) stands for.

Is it possible, then, to know ourselves otherwise, so that we might know our universities otherwise? Is this at the heart of how revolutionary teachers teach?

6. Sublating and re-weaving intellectuality?

Neary did not analyse his question in relation to identity politics, and would argue the need ‘to move on from the mystifying and reified politics of identity and seek to understand academic life so that its alienated forms can be transformed.’ (Neary and Winn 2016a, 409) His focus was the analysis of academic labour as capitalist wage labour, constructed as concrete and abstract through particular historical and social processes. To focus on academic work and identity might uncover crises for individuals but would offer a limited horizon for response. Instead, Neary and Saunders (2011, 336) questioned ‘how to facilitate academic engagement through the promotion of a greater academic sensibility’ that was *both* social *and* in-place – grounded in the concrete of the space we are in and the (im)material of community.

Yet, these spaces and times of community draw me back to Moten's (2017) refusal to fetishise academic work and academia, and the desire to negate and abolish academic identities and sensibilities. By instantiating a richer infrastructure of the human condition across a 'social field', and by considering who and how we are against specific enactments 'of the marginality and minority that is the central and authentic feature of blackness understood as a general, generative principle of differentiation,' a new intellectual sensibility opens-out. (*ibid.*, 162)

The meaning of our solidary actions can only be enriched by recognising that through them our identities are no longer closed containers. They might, critically, enable a renewal of our social field, as we broaden how we integrate struggles through connections (new generative hyphae that form) across a range of communities. The metabolic energy for integration is generated from the non-identity struggles have with the capitalist system's ideations of what type of person it values. Where this is shared between struggles we can glimpse our new common wealth. Whilst Neary and Winn (2016a) do not integrate this idea within their desire to treat academic identity and labour as reified abstractions to be abolished, they remind us to be mindful of the openness of the content of identities. This openness is the potential for connections to form (as hyphae) within and across specific spaces, existences and subjectivities.

So, struggles for Blackness, Queerness, indigeneity, decoloniality and more can be analysed as open rather than closed containers, themselves enabling new conjectures to form through 'the politics of refusal to be dominated' (*ibid.*, 409). Whether in the University, in alternative and occasionally autonomous spaces like the SSC, in the imagined/hoped for Co-operative University, in decolonising and anti-racist work, or in Gaza Encampments, we must hold open: first, our desires for something else; second, the risk that we concede to the capitalist

co-option of those spaces; and third, the risk that they further the alienation of particular groups. This is work that might begin in, and then overflow, the classroom.

Only by holding open might we define a new form of social wealth. This includes knowing in our hearts that the conditions for an alternative social form for intellectuality ‘are already being produced both inside and outside the university by the only productive and creative intellectual force that exists in society, described by Marx as the “general intellect” or the “social brain” (1857/1993, 694).’ (*ibid.*, 410) Accepting this is one starting point for broadening the archive of humanity, beyond the duality of the commodity that gives value its shape and that shapes social expression and meaning. It is the starting point for a new intimacy with ourselves in excess of our perceived value.

For Neary (2015c, 3) intellectual workers, must

meld not just the real with the virtual, but the physical and the intellectual, like a membrane or skin or body tissue or organ or orifice or limb, to create dynamic patterns of student mobility circulating like blood. All this amounts to the possibility of a very real form of intimacy with our pedagogic environment in ways that transcend our current alienated preoccupations.

He was pushing for the identification of new space-times of social activity, defined by the human, working with nature as ‘the project rather than the resource.’ (*ibid.*) We might see such space-times unfolding in relation to the immediate desires of class struggle, against commodification, time and performance management, monitoring and surveillance, restructuring, pension cuts, equality in pay and conditions, and so on. However, we might also see them as an abolitionist struggle pivoting from within a new social field, and directed against a

social universe (totalising energy) that uses identity (including class) to reproduce its own power, including in forms of distraction (in disconnected and superficial struggles).

Whilst he did not relate this to broader, societal, abolitionist struggle, Neary's (2015c, 13) identification with Lefebvre's idea of resistances enacted 'as counter-spaces', in particular in resisting capitalism's colonisation of 'the life of the street', opens a door for us to think about revolutionary teaching beyond the subjectivities curated from the classroom of the capitalist University. Neary and Morris (2012, 9) do not describe this in relation to transcending, but they do highlight a reimagined practice of teaching-as-praxis in the open, made public with students, and as an opening-out of 'multiple ways of thinking and being within the world' (a pluriversal reality). This new form of intellectuality emerges from a reimagined mutuality and solidarity in 'a collaborative and self-critical community, one in which the participants share with and support each other, in their own struggles towards authenticity' (*ibid.*). It points towards Neary's (2015b, 21) focus upon dissolving occupational identities from one location (the University) through a 'pedagogy of the invisible' (as professional suicide).

By enacting invisibility as a pedagogical imperative and praxis, we raise 'the possibility of novel radical forms of revolutionary institutions, while remaining in full public view'; our teaching is then a practice of communing that questions 'what forms of criticality [might] challenge the capitalist university as a state strategy and form of police state power.' (*ibid.*, 21, 22) Later Neary (2015d) would push this through in his pedagogy of hate, 'not a subjective hate but a radical hate against what the world has become, as the other side of the love-hate dialectic and the basis for a negative critique of our commodified lives.' A radical hate that when shared, and developed in relation to radical love and critical hope, might enable a connection with 'the power of

abundant friendship and its ability to confront the violence that attempts to maintain the gap between the intellectual, manual, natural, the immaterial/spectral and creaturely life.’ (Neary 2015d)

...

Criticality. Intellectuality. Sociability. Mutuality, Reciprocity. Relationality. Solidarity. In their political economic contexts, these words emerge against the institutional forms that value takes, including in the University. They shape the space in which voice might emerge, tied to storytelling, and erupting from the lived experiences of individuals in communities. Voice offers a way in to a critique of the capitalist University as a squalid refusal of life. This collection of words, analysed at the level of society and in recognition of how they have been co-opted or denied or bastardised in the University, help us carry forward a new intentionality.

Neary (2015e, 2024d) centred voice in his response to his own stammer, describing the disconnection or disarticulation between our praxis, and how we might work towards revolutionary possibilities, and how we speak that praxis and those possibilities – how might we speak in poetry and prose, lyrics and language, our intentionality and the horizon that we desire? Neary articulated this in relation to social stammering and Dada as the attempt, following Adorno, to say what it seems impossible to say. This is an authentic human relation to self in the world, which depends upon remembering to breathe, as much as it depends upon screaming or speaking – the articulation of the breath matters.

In articulating the breath as a way forward, we reconnect with the plurality of ways in which humanity (alongside inhumanity and non-humanity and ecosystems) breathes and speaks, against capital’s attempt to maintain us in a powerless silence. Reconnection resolves to be against capital in its constant threats towards our rights to breathe and for breath.

A range of authors have articulated and connected this in relation to a range of non-Western understandings, and the ways in which dominant, Western ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies have foreclosed upon what is deemed to be appropriate communication (see for instance Barnes *et al.* 2017, Ware *et al.* 2018, Wilson *et al.* 2022). The resulting silence in relation to feelings, emotions and spirituality, does not help in weaving or yarning plural forms of storytelling, relationality and intellectuality that can transgress the social universe of value. Instead, dominant ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies force us to hold our breath.

Layering difference through the right to breathe and to speak, grounded in emerging values strengthens the possibility for imagining the world otherwise. I imagine this predicated upon forms of life that enact testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and stewardship. Their existence seeks to articulate a new form of social wealth. The capitalist University would seek to name or label or measure or discount such a form, which we feel as a reduction of 'being to its working parts [through] a language of objects', and a foreclosure of 'grammar'. (Wall Kimmerer 2020, 61) Such a foreclosure is a forgetting that we exist in 'a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything', as 'the grammar of animacy', immanent to a language of 'caring' and 'dreaming' (*ibid.*, 61, 67, 351).

Through Neary's practice, I see a way of refusing the language of objects, and of opening-out in community to unseen energies that animate everything, and enable life to breathe. Thinking about the relationship between voice and social stammering, I am drawn towards an enriched engagement with revolutionary teaching and being-in-excess, where those might shape new grammars at the interface of worlds. This is the horizon between value and values, indigenous and non-indigenous, colonial and decolonial, the capitalist University and alternative intellectual

forms. At the interface of worlds, new dreams and new stories might emerge, and following Wall Kimmerer (*ibid.*, 363, 365), I see this representing the entanglements between: first, our capacity to grieve our estrangement from creation, and our ongoing isolations from each other and our ancestors; and second, our potentialities for love.

Whether we centre radical hate or grief and mourning, in relation to radical love and critical hope, the point is to articulate new mycorrhizal pathways that reimagine the world. The point is to articulate a new intellectuality that negates the University in *its* attempt to affirm the world based on a false science. To articulate a new intellectuality is to refuse to objectify suffering, and to refuse to settle for the war of position inside the institution. The point is to deny the University as it denies us as multi-dimensional beings. The point is to move beyond our acceptance of the University as some form of antidote to our death-dealing capitalist society (or our dissonance about that fact), or to recuperate it as some form of sacred duty.

Students in occupation in 2010 and encampments in 2024 drew our attention to this. They asked us to remember, bear witness, belong, tell stories, honour, breathe. They remind us that we do not have to be dulled and distracted by a meagre existence, or to collude in numbing ourselves to a pathetic existence within a limited and limiting horizon.

...

Students in occupation and encampment demand that we sit with the question: how do revolutionary teachers teach? They asked us to ground this in and from modernity's hold – from the hold that gives shape to intellectuality, relationality, mutuality and subjectivity. We cannot address this without addressing the cut-off complexes of the University and its attempt to control and to contain. By generalising the stories of being in excess, in the

classroom, the occupation, the social centre, the encampment, revolutionary teachers have to engage with grief, knowing that they cannot be exceptional in the face of it. These students remind us that our loss of meaning and possibility in the University as-is, contains a subversive energy – a new social field. If we can sit with and work with grief, we can remember that we are connected in ways that are alive and wild, and full of soul (soulful).

The University, of course, has no time for this – it demonstrates that we are unworthy of grief and grieving, in its unconscionable vandalism, soulless restructuring and in its war on professors (and professional services' staff and students). The social being and becoming that it demands is one of constant sacrifice, where compassion becomes shame, and belonging is replaced by anxiety. It holds us in an antechamber to a more authentic life.

Yet, in working with Jaffe (2024) and in enacting a pedagogy of grief and grieving, we might be connected more fully and humanely to ourselves, our communities, our elders and ancestors, and the world, once more. In working through grief and grieving, we have the opportunity to weave an approach to intellectuality that is integrated with our shared rights to a common wealth, as a living and human experience.

This is a woven, integrated intellectuality, committed to the project of abolition through dissolution. Gilmore (2023, 41-2) knows that it erupts from all radical movements for liberation – it is magical and resists division from class struggle, whilst refusing 'all the other kinds of power difference combinations'. She knows that abolition becomes a totality and is ontological, offering us the context and content of struggle. Yet, as the place where culture meets the political, she cautions us that abolition 'is not struggle's *form*. To *have form*, we have to organize' (Gilmore 2023, 42).

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh reiterates this for Palestinian struggles (2024), where social forms are also 'the insistence on life and living'. Gaza teaches us to bear witness while the institution

dies as a space for criticality, social justice, and freedom, in the hope that other forms will unfold through which we can provide care and love and dignity to all. We remember this as our being and becoming, unfolding through grieving, connects with other grieving beings to create new faultlines and frontlines. As we connect, we refuse our roles in the enactment of systemic social death under the guise of liberal progress, and we honour each of our unique breaths.

‘What should we (educators, students, professional services’ staff) do now?’ We must begin with the breath.

We must breathe so that we can begin to build the content, and organise the forms of abolition.

10

is another University possible?

Hell is not what awaits us but this life, here and now... That it goes on like this is the catastrophe. (Walter Benjamin 1940, emphasis in original)

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? (Audre Lorde 1984)

1. Weaving new stories

In Mike Neary's praxis, contradictions were generative, dragging us back to what might be. The contradictions in his work enable us to think about the locus of struggle against the living death of capitalist work. Is this class-based, or erupting from a range of intersectional, intercommunal and intergenerational ruptures on the streets and in social movements? Do we see our being against what University has become, also as a struggle against the social universe of value? Do we see our being emerging against the way in which labour constitutes that social universe, or do we wish to identify with labour in a struggle against capital? How do we seek to integrate values, emotions and sensuous human activity into a world conditioned by objectified labour? Finally, in being against what the University has become, do we wish to move beyond it,

or simply to reimagine it inside a different form of social wealth (beyond the commodity form)?

Through these questions we might discuss the ability for new stories to dance in the world, which might enable us to discuss the place of intellectuality as a relational and mutual activity. So doing might enable us to discuss the institutional, cultural and practical place of intellectuality, at a time of intersecting emergencies: as the liberal international order appears increasingly to be a fiction or falsehood; when environmental degradation is accelerating in the name of technological progress and economic necessity; as nativism and nationalism reemerge toxically; and, in the revelation that genocide has always been with us.

New stories are being discussed and touted by those of a right-wing, libertarian persuasion. *Signatories to the Manhattan Statement on Higher Education* (Manhattan Institute 2025), reflected upon the failed attempt by conservatives to get ‘universities to maintain their basic commitments’, matched by the failure of liberals ‘to reform the campus from within’, with the result that ‘the process of ideological capture accelerated.’ The Manhattan Institute does not begin with the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, or the rise of Black Lives Matter in response to a resurgent and very visible racist agenda catalysing particular forms of struggle. Rather it focuses upon ‘the George Floyd riots and culminating in the celebration of the Hamas terror campaign’ on campuses (*ibid.*). These demonstrate how ‘the institutions of higher education finally ripped off the mask and revealed their animating spirit: racialism, ideology, chaos.’

The Statement’s signatories, including academics, consultants, members of think tanks, members of Congress and journalists, argue that ‘higher education must serve the public good and, in times of trouble, must be reformed.’ (*ibid.*) Reform, not revolution, involves dissolving the institution as-is, because ‘universities have brazenly, deliberately, and repeatedly violated

their compact with the American people.’ (*ibid.*) Usurpations, abuses, evasions ‘have moved our society toward a new kind of tyranny—one in which ideology determines truth, and the university functions as a political agent of the Left.’ (*ibid.*)

This states an ideological platform for reformation, and perhaps dissolution, where universities have become: ‘laboratories of ideology’ against truth; adoptees of ‘a narrow political agenda... with particularly disastrous results for the humanities and social sciences’; governed by ‘enormous’ EDI/DEI bureaucracies ‘that discriminate on the basis of race and violate the fundamental principle of equality’; contributors to ‘a new kind of tyranny’, through ‘digital censorship, public health lockdowns, child sex-trait modification, race-based redistribution’; and, resentful of Western civilisation, ‘divided Americans into oppressors and oppressed’. (*ibid.*) The desire is for wider social reform, pivoting from the demand ‘to renegotiate the terms of the compact with the universities’. (*ibid.*)

A very particular, reformed idea of the public good will be enacted through ‘a new contract with the universities... written into every grant, payment, loan, eligibility, and accreditation, and punishable by revocation of all public benefit’. (*ibid.*) Reformation of the universities is to be predicated upon: ideas of truth over ideology; particular conceptions of merit and meritocracy as social justice; ending what is seen as institutional, direct participation in social and political activism; the abolition of DEI bureaucracies; a renewal of freedom of speech; and penalties for any activities that interrupt the operations of the university within this new public good framework (for instance, the encampments).

We acknowledge that the crisis of higher education will not be resolved in an instant. Still, we maintain faith that these proposed reforms will provide a starting point for a broader restoration, which can push back the forces of radicalism

and create the space for real knowledge. Despite the challenges, we refuse to abandon the hope that America's universities can once again be those bright lights, pursuing truth, sustaining our highest traditions, and educating the future guardians of our republic. (*ibid.*)

Faith. Reform. A Reformation of sorts.

Perhaps this is a more conservative, counter-reformation, or a story of renewal that will make America (and its universities) great again, by dissolving a perceived, anti-American ideology that is also anti-capitalist. It has wider ramifications because, as we have seen, this ideology of whiteness extends beyond the USA, including through techbros and the technologies they wish to utilise to extend their privilege over the generation of power and surpluses. The ideological relationship between HE and policymakers may be inflected by culture wars, but it is also reproduced by the relationship between technology firms and finance capital. In the English university context it is shaped by the UK Government in framing its industrial strategy around AI.

UK-based libertarian or right-wing think tanks currently appear less focused upon HE, barring analyses of the impact of international student numbers on either immigration targets or on home student access to higher learning. Yet, we remember how they lobbied Conservative governments between 2015-24 against programmes of decolonising, and for a particular form of freedom of speech on campus. We are also mindful that this is now situated against the rise of right-wing nativism in politics, which offers a more threatening horizon for those who work in English HE.

In this moment, there can be no meaningful engagement with emergencies of war, genocide, environment, ahead of addressing capital's constant emergency of the search for value. The scientific, public mission of the University, and its ideological positioning, must be growth, and this shapes a particular form of truth and

truthful storytelling about the public good or public compact. In the UK context, this is witnessed by reports of the head of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council stating that 'it should set a "high bar against" awarding grants for degrowth-related research, describing the move as "anti-scientific".' (Jones 2025) There appears to be no alternative to a focus on what universities can deliver as impact, value-for-money or economic growth based on access to the public purse (HEPI 2025).

In September 2025, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation, and Technology, Peter Kyle, told the annual UUK conference that: 'We know that universities are vital to catalysing growth—the single biggest mission of this government' and he questioned the delivery of this as a public good; 'why, then, don't students see their career at that university as a pathway to personal success—to starting a business, to commercialising innovation, to becoming the founders that our country needs?' (DSIT 2025d) The story is of universities as drivers of economic growth, predicated upon partnerships to reduce costs, specialisation to enable a richer ecosystem, and, of course, AI, for whatever AI is claimed to do. Students are seen as *founders of renewal* and of a renewed social compact; students as agents of economic growth might be seen, in this narrative, as potential reformers. They simply need to be empowered.

So, the materiality of English universities emerges from a connected-yet-different socio-cultural and political economic terrain from the USA. However, it still centres a capitalist relationality and activity for-value through institutional governance and regulation pivoting around value-for-money, student outcomes and financial sustainability (OfS 2025; Phillipson 2025a, 2025b). It centres very particular forms of speech and dissent, whereby reformers are students as agents of growth, rather than students as producers of their institutions for an alternative form of common wealth. This is very definitely

not the reform of the institution through the action of the encampment, which will only ever be met by the counter-reformation of the crackdown (Walawalkar and Clugston 2025). Students can never be allowed to be in-excess on their own terms.

...

In his *Going to Church in Medieval England*, Orme (2021, 349) situates the changes to the English Church at the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century as emerging in part from forms of anticlericalism: 'fuelled by the dislike of some lay people for the authority and exactions of the clergy... [which was] strong enough to provide a tool for monarchs and Church Reformers to gain lay sympathy and weaken the clergy in the decades that followed.' This process of reform saw 'subtle changes in worship and devotion', with new prayer books and service books made more widely available through the technology of printing (*ibid.*, 350). Published in English rather than Latin, these enabled more laypeople to make sense of the renewed liturgy and services. Moreover, the book contributed to the renewed role of reformed churches in a system of local, parish governance. Thinking socio-technically, these institutions 'were evolving to provide a basis on which the reformers could construct their new ideas of worship and community life.' (*ibid.*, 353)

Reforming how a particular society engages with its spiritual-practical life was predicated upon the social form and necessity of extant institutions. In the everyday, this led to an opening-out of access to spiritual-practical guidance, including through the new prayer book. As such, it had a solvent effect, embedding change over time as an unfolding process. There were significant and accelerated or revolutionary changes, like the dissolution of religious houses, and these were cemented through the ongoing transfer of assets from monasteries, minsters and collegiate churches to lay patrons. This reform of popular religion,

encouraging faith rather than superstition, and grounded in community, was anchored as new generations came to see the now reformed Church as all they had known.

Clearly, there were protests and rebellions as a 'yearning for the old... compounded by dislike of the new' (*ibid.*, 368), but the process of reform, in reconstituting how people engaged with their faith, and in connection with (rather than distance from) church ministers and clerks, continued. Orme (*ibid.*, 387) is clear that whilst traditional beliefs, for instance about death, 'would linger long among many people', those beliefs would always be 'losing touch with the theology that had shaped them'. The people who held those beliefs would always be losing touch with the grounds that shaped them. The argument here is that the Reformers 'did not regard such changes as innovations but as restoring the Church to the principles and practices of the Apostles and the early Church Fathers from the divergences of medieval Catholicism.' (*ibid.*, 391)

MacCulloch (2004) argues that Reformation brings together multiple reform movements in Europe, which we might imagine realising a new ecosystem of social forms. Each movement felt that it was unfolding the truth of religious and spiritual life, with (the ideological power of) theology as pivotal in reforming or dissolving or sublating the late medieval church. MacCulloch (2018) also stresses the ways in which the intellectual grounds for Reformation reinforced dissolution and its financial impetus for suppression and confiscation through: a new reading of the liturgy and the sacraments; the justification by faith rather than in specific works; and in Thomas Cromwell's interference at the University of Oxford. Moreover, dissolution was just one way in which new foundations were being laid for a Protestant future, and this reminds us that our hopes for reconciliation with power are too often a distraction, in particular as those in power see a specific community as the problem (enemy).

A new socio-technical ecosystem was emerging, different to that which had operated before the dissolution of the monasteries, focused on reimagining or resolving spiritual space-times anew. So, following Orme (2021, 399), it is clear that whilst some changes (dissolution, removing the Papal headship of the Church, imposition of a new prayer book, and so on) appear abolitionist and final, through which ‘can all be said to have passed away’, other aspects of the institutional, spiritual world that-was survived, albeit repurposed. This included adapting churches for Reformed worship, maintaining a set liturgy with traditional features, adult forms of communion, and so on.

In this argument, ‘it was unwise to push congregations too far’ (*ibid.*). Whilst there were limited forms of non-conformity and dissent, or disassociation from the demands made upon people, as a new ecosystem unfolded, dissent or non-conformity, perhaps as an Undercommons of the parish, emerged in immanent relation to the Reformed Church and its expressions of emerging and centralised power. The idea of unfolding and emerging over time, and the ways in which this speaks to alternative narratives being realised, matters in how we think about new stories. For Orme (*ibid.*, 406), ‘[t]he longer the period examined, the less one is inclined to over-emphasise change and innovation in any short phase.’ Change was long in gestating and emerging. In spite of this, there was no alternative and no rolling back of the clock.

Dissolution and resolution are complex unfolding processes in spiritual and intellectual contexts. Accepting this enables us to reflect upon how we identify (with or against) the forces that are reforming or dissolving our own intellectual institutions, financially and ideologically. We see how processes of reform, counter-reform and dissolution work together to shape: social forms that meet particular communal needs; the grounds upon which social, spiritual and intellectual wealth emerges; the unfolding truths of spiritual and intellectual life; the place of

technology in defining socio-technical systems of control and organisation; and, emergent, unfolding patterns of behaviour.

Our dialectic does not prescribe a particular outcome, but reimagining the world otherwise needs a new appreciation of the space-time for agency enacted through emergent contradiction and struggle. As we recognise how the institution functions in time and place, and over time and beyond place, we recognise how it is woven into a broader narrative that imagines, and is imagined within, a rich, mycorrhizal network.

...

From the fantasies of the global North, and in particular the nativism of the USA and UK, our social forms are reimagined in desires for reformation through AI boosterism, petromasculinity and fossil fascism: the future appears to be that of the entrepreneurial techbro. This both promises and forecloses upon hopes for agency and autonomy, liberty and sovereignty, opportunity and mobility, whilst opening-out a horizon in which established institutional forms are repurposed for technological, corporate and State-based authoritarian control (Houlden and Veletsianos 2022).

Lacking explanatory power beyond the social universe of value and its settler-colonial intentions, this neo-conservative narrative stresses radical, market-led and masculine reimaginings, classed as heroic. Institutional leaders have no response to this, save implementing forms of unconscionable vandalism catalysed by limited/punitive policy or funding realities. Instead, we must return to our earlier questions, and situate them against the possibility for sublation, dissolution or reformation of the institutions and the sectors within which our knowing, doing and being are foreclosed. Inside-and-against the social universe of value: How can we live in days like these? How the fuck do revolutionary teachers teach after Gaza?

As we sit with these questions, we reveal the contradictions between the University and our work. The institution appears to offer an almost unique potential to be a social form defined with courage, faith, dignity and care, for justice, hope and peace. Yet, at the same time it is locked into relations that dissolve it into a space-time for commodified knowledge exchange, spillover, exploitation, and the demand for constant innovation. This is a demand that we might also imagine communicated and flowing through capital's mycorrhizal network, seeking to extract nutrients that might be redistributed for further commodification and value production.

Many experience this as a form of living death – an inability to realise intellectuality and intellectual work in the University as an act of love, because it is always repurposed and reimagined for-value. Instead, there is a tendency to fall into either institutional critique or an attempted reclusion into the monasticism of disciplinary and methodological communities. Still, I return to Holloway (2010a, 919):

I take it as obvious that scientific work must be directed against the suicidal rush towards human self-annihilation. In other words, the only scientific question that remains to us is: how the fuck do we get out of this mess? This includes the question: how do we stop the reproduction of this self-destructive society, capitalism? This is a question that it is becoming more and more difficult to pose within a university framework.

Shortly after, Holloway (2011) would anchor this difficulty and the contradictions of our lives inside the University as the reality that we must exist in-against-beyond the system. In the search to transcend the institution as a social form inside a toxic, inhuman social universe, 'how do we get rid of the social system that generates this suicidal dynamic?' (*ibid.*) For revolutionary

teachers and students, this is the question that ‘we must explore in all our teaching and studying’ (*ibid.*), in order that we refuse the normalisation of carnage.

2. On sublation as praxis

Chaudhary (2024, 123, 124) notes that the project of abolition does not need social consensus, rather simply enough consensus to ‘inform a coherent political subject’, able to actualise ‘the development of a militant ecological struggle’. Crucially, he draws attention to the logics of capitalist coloniality that reproduce power, in particular in relation to fossil capital. He notes that a meaningful engagement with the global emergencies of environment and biospheres, catalysed by the Capitalocene, is societal, erupting in relation to power: ‘the idea that fossil capital will bargain away its existence in a legally ordained agreement or even submit to a legislative or administrative edict without bringing the weight of state and private buyers to bear, is absolutely insane’. (*ibid.*, 128)

Those with power, operating through institutions like universities and their investment portfolios, research contracts, consultancies, knowledge transfer and spillover, will always seek to reproduce privilege. Realising this, alongside how to develop coherent, revolutionary political subjectivities is material, and conjured up in relation to class, movement politics, structural location, and so on. It is also conjured up with feeling. The movement of the squares in the early 2010s, in Black Lives Matter, and in relation to Gaza, each surface stories of disaffection, desire, disgust, attachment and grievance. Dissolution needs desires’ liberation, or the recognition of desire as a human need that has been deformed inside capitalism’s social forms.

This matters because a politics of abolition, following Gilmore (2023), is not simply the abolition of particular social forms, like the prison, the family or the University. It is the abolition of a

universal idea of those social forms grounded in a particular story of what it means to be productive, and the conditions of life that reproduce them. As we dissolve the limited horizon of our social being, we reimagine social knowing and doing as the refusal of the form and content of institutions that can only imagine growth, at the violent and traumatic expense of immediate human needs.

To carry useful potential into practice, our refusal must be integrative of standpoints – to enrich class formations qualitatively and ‘to enable and cultivate antagonistic subjects.’ (Weeks 2018, 7) This is the work of drawing in the class (assembly) of subjects whose lives have been made economically, socially, politically and environmentally precarious, whom we might label the working class. They are the class (assembly) of subjects whom our current political economic reality is failing. Integrating or amplifying such standpoints through the class (assembly) speaks to Holloway’s (2010b) desire to crack capitalism – to work collectively to widen the fissures in the totality of capitalist sociality.

Perhaps this enriches Neary’s pedagogy of hate, inside Moten’s real assembly, by enabling us to embrace indigeneity, decoloniality, queer ecology, the Black radical tradition, forms of critical feminism, and more. Or perhaps we will be held in their embrace, as a renewed circle of relations. We also have to know that this cannot emerge from within the social form of the University or its disciplinary containers, which too often maintain ‘a cloying attachment to liberal respectability’ (Chaudhary 2024, 228), or the hope that something might turn up, without being struggled over and for.

As such, this is not a struggle for the future, it is a struggle for collective agency in the here-and-now. There can be no reclusion to the safe space of the discipline and the institution, and hoped-for solutions, blueprints, policy enactments and so on, in order to address particular problems in the future. For Chaudhary

(*ibid.*, 265) we begin our process of sublation in the recognition that we may be in the rubble, 'living the enemy's future already. But we can build from that rubble.' This was Neary's intention through political projects in dialectical relation with ruthless negative critique.

Caton (1972, 233, 237) reminds us of this in relation to Marx's social critique: 'it takes the form of the sublation of theory into practice'; 'the becoming-philosophical of the world is simultaneously the becoming-worldly of philosophy'. The grounds of sublation are in excess of *both* our subjects or disciplines, *and* political action fetishised within some ideation of the proletariat or of an intellectual vanguard. Practical-theoretical activity, held in a social force field or web of indignation, points towards the negation of the conditions of that indignation, and the abolition of the institutions that reproduce it as a central strand of their social forms. As the reintegration or return of humans to themselves, against their alienation, an authentic return overflows reclusion or hope; it refuses to define a new universal subjectivity.

This is what I take from imagining an integration of the projects and ruptures and occupations of the 2010s with the decolonising movement and student encampments. In such an integration, the work of sublation aims to negate the determinate negation of ourselves as anything other than intellectual labour, imposed by the capitalist University. Where we can only imagine institutions governed by capitalist realism, our horizon collapses into one universal subjectivity to be contested by a single revolutionary subjectivity or subject. Instead, by differentiating and re-articulating our social substance into various opposites, the kinetic energy of contradiction forms the grounds (the medium or culture) for a new social universe or mycorrhizal network. This work promises to germinate a new idea of common wealth beyond some limited or final form of socialism or barbarism.

...

Intellectuality is at the heart of this process, enmeshed and embodied, emotional and in-community. For Moten (2017, 11) recognising this might be a way of sublating 'the colonial encounter', by bringing forward practical-theoretical struggles that reveal the wrongness of the world. Our struggles might be seen as a whole, unarticulated, as Occupy!, or the movement of the squares, but they are also more than these identifications – constituted from a range of material histories, fragmented struggles and phenomena, they point towards an anticipatory future, emerging through new collectivities and ensembles.

Moving beyond the abolition of the University as some form of urbane guardian of our existing social substance and structures, we seek a determinate negation, abolition and transcending of what and where we are. This is our refusal to commit 'to institutions that are founded on the exclusionary essence of the supposedly universal consensus' (Moten 2018b, 91). Our work of transcending cannot occur from within the University of whiteness. It must begin with some form of recognition, reparation and reconciliation with the social forms and contents of other (indigenous, decolonial, Black, queer, and more, which express not-whiteness) possible universities.

This asks us to question whether projects like the SSC or the Co-operative University prefigure other possibilities, or whether they are, somehow, a preservative concern, governed by forms of nervousness and a desire to regulate levels of disorder and fugitivity. Here, Moten (2018a, 218) draws our attention to the settler-colonial contexts of our institutions:

we would do even better to attend to the local conceptual field in which the state-sanctioned, institutionalized individual intellectual, the state-sanctioned intellectual institution, and the settler colonial state animate and support one another.

Ours are struggles for relationality, or for being and becoming in a world of non-relation, where our relationships are conditioned by the movement of value and the commodification of exploited life through the expropriation of time and the extraction of resources. Following Moten (*ibid.*) it is possible to challenge the reproduction and preservation of an ontological totality of whiteness through the release of revolutionary consciousness, which is held in community, but that is denied as we are reproduced as historical (valuable and productive) beings. We are aware of the potential, and at the same time have always been dispossessed of the grounds of that potential becoming kinetic and actual.

This cannot be transcended by attending to awarding gaps, better DEI/EDI or more just forms of reward and recognition, through equality of access in citations and citation metrics, in measures of impact, and so on. These simply make and unmake us in the service of a pathologising (dis)order. We have to find ways of sublating this reality if we are to overcome our exhaustion and alienation. We have to be ready to enact the alternative in our theoretical-practical work, as a means of refusing the reification or fetishisation of our identities and institutions, and their place within a totality of social relations and social forms. As Kavoulakos (2018, 171, *emphasis in original*) argues in discussing Lukács's praxis, '[k]nowledge becomes the first step to the dissolution of the fetishistic character of social forms, institutions and relations; it is a first step in the process of *dereification*.'

With Neary's work, we come to understand that consciousness is a long and tortuous, dialectical process, full of conflict and crisis. It is a progressive mediation between conscious action and conscious categorical analysis, and self-criticism. Neary was clear that the projects he catalysed sought to undermine the grounds of the capitalist University, as a form of negation. He knew that this would not automatically entail the abolition of that institution or its domination of intellectual workers, but

he was committed to it as instantiating a new phase of struggle. He was committed to it as a form of radical teaching and radical pedagogy, articulating self-education at the level of society, and the abolition of inauthentic bourgeois authority and identity, enacted through reified subjects and disciplines. Where and when might we address this now?

3. The University of Utopia: no place and no time

Neary played with the idea of the University of Utopia as a form of social science fiction. It was an attempt at imagining what a co-operative space, reproduced with student-as-producer and ideas of mass intellectuality as its operating system or protocols, might look and feel like (see Neary and Winn 2016b; University of Utopia n.d.a, n.d.b). However, his praxis was never utopian in terms of aiming for a particular, anti-or post-capitalist future that could be defined through a blueprint.

We see this represented in Neary and Winn's (2016b) letters home from a fictional student at the University of Utopia, where they anchored their description of an imagined student experience within a democratic university that had to exist inside a sector conditioned by value. This student explained to their parents the necessity of money for the everyday existence of the institution, but noted how this was analysed in the curriculum, alongside the conditional nature of money and how it shapes modes of exchange and social relations. This allowed discussions of alternative forms of exchange and social value, alongside the ways in which wage labour and work might be disrupted, collectively and in-common, through a different mutuality, relationality and intentionality.

The letters offer a way of framing discussions around student life, in relation to the commodification of knowledge, and by suggesting the potential for sublating the idea of money and knowledge as things. The possibility is to open-up new ways of relating beyond money, value-for-money, impact,

commercialisation, knowledge transfer, and beyond their mediation of our lives as commodity, intellectual property and hierarchy. This brings us back to reflections upon student-as-producer and the SSC, and the potential to reimagine student life (within a fictional University of Utopia) in relation to: first, 'the importance of democracy and what that means in terms of [a student's] role here'; and second, 'the idea of the commonwealth... based on creating a new form of social value based on human purpose in the natural world.' (*ibid.*, 23)

Neary connected his thinking about Utopia with his political practice in the University of Lincoln and the SSC. The University of Utopia, and thinking about futures through social science fictions, acts to enrich the concrete, so that the resultant alchemical reaction overflows what-is alongside universal or particular positions that reinforce our existing institutions. Neary's thinking about Utopia as a non-place (and also as a non-time), flushed out the material grounds upon which the contradictions of the University are based, as they erupt inside the social universe of value and from the commodity as the defining form of social wealth.

Here, we are reminded of Jameson's (2009, 410) argument that our engagement with Utopia is as 'a non-place that looks like a place'. It serves to transcend the places we have made, and thereby generates ontological and methodological power. Utopia becomes 'an operation calculated to disclose the limits of our own imagination of the future', and is a deliberate attempt to move beyond dystopian and catastrophic thinking as a foreclosed/universal idea of what might be. (*ibid.*, 413) Jameson (*ibid.*) describes the weakening hold of Utopias over us, mirroring our apparent lack of connection with history (as we are told that we are at the end of history), alongside our apparent lack of agency, and a growth in a post-truth cynicism. Within the context of the war on professors, unconscionable vandalism

and institutional responses to encampments protesting a live-streamed genocide, this resonates.

So, forms of social science fiction (or dreaming) enable us to imagine space-times beyond that of the social universe of value, where multiple desires and needs (a pluriverse of particulars) might be possible. At the same time, we are mindful not to fetishise or essentialise those space-times in ways that diminish our potential to realise a new form of common wealth. We are also attentive to analyses of indigeneity, decoloniality, queer ecology, the Black radical tradition, and so on, which must inform radical interventions like a co-operative university, for it to realise any transformative potential.

Here, we build with Szadkowski (2023a) to analyse this in relation to the commons or the practice of commoning as social emancipation, or the sublation of life inside the capitalist mode of production. Szadkowski (*ibid.*, 246) would not argue that this was utopian, but from his argument it is possible to imagine the commons as ontological and pedagogical, as an alternative form of knowing, doing and being, which help us to define a new set of protocols ‘that constitutes the starting point for emancipation.’ In Szadkowski’s (*ibid.*, and see also Szadkowski and Krzescki 2025) view, a starting point is to centre labour at the heart of the struggle, and to analyse its differential standpoint against the reproduction of a terrain of value. This then enables a grounding of differential experiences of the struggle to survive and put food on the table and pay down the rent, through renewed connection with an authentic, living empathy, as opposed to the annihilation imposed by value.

Commoning might be one way of building the commune of communes that can enable us to build empathy by radicalising and broadening the archive. Neary and Winn’s (2015, 2017, 2019) tripartite model of conversion, dissolution, and creation of the Co-operative University can be extended in relation to

this, where it is informed by an open category of the common. The idea is to produce living knowledge forged in practical antagonism towards the society that requires the University as-is. Imagining institutions that have been converted or dissolved, or indeed those that have been created, based upon co-operative principles and protocols generated in-common, is a key element in moving existing practical projects forward (for instance those that erupt from social ruptures, like Gaza encampments), just as it needs testing in possible projects of the future (as we might argue for the SSC).

This is one of the lessons I take from Neary's work – that praxis emerges *both* as the theoretical/imaginary starting point is transcended through practical action, *and* as concrete projects in-communities are transcended theoretically through re-imagination. Neary echoed Marx (1877; see also Marx 1850, 1875, and Engels 1880) in his disengagement with doctrinaire, uncompromising and abstract programmes of the (perfect) future ('some theoretical mischief'), defined by utopian socialists. Marx (1877) held that 'playing with fancy pictures of the future structure of society' reduces activity to 'a much more futile form [or in the form of a conjuring trick]', as the attempt to discover 'the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice' that might reshape society (Engels 1880).

This also enables a deepening of our reflections on the ways in which the University is reproduced against forms of truth generated methodologically and in disciplines. These forms too often point towards a search to finesse elements or characteristics of a closed system operating at the end of history. They shape careers governed around impact, engagement, entrepreneurship, excellence, with an eye to growth, which can only be resolved as one-dimensional through the capitalist university. Equally, those who seek to articulate a theoretical proposition for the Co-operative University or other forms of abolition, risk collapsing

into a 'search after a new social science, after new social laws, that are to create [emancipatory] conditions' (Marx and Engels 1848). As they 'dream of experimental realisation of their social Utopias... they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois' and to rely on 'their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science.' (*ibid.*)

Instead, practical-theoretical action must be antagonistic: 'every social reform must remain a Utopia until the proletarian revolution and the feudalistic counter-revolution have been pitted against each other' (Marx 1847). Of course, Marx (1859) was mindful that transcending the world as-is would be conditioned by the level to which the productive forces had been developed socially, enabling new forms of social wealth and organisation to be born. Yet, as the praxis of the 2010s and in the encampments demonstrates, a collective reading of the historical and material conditions enables judgements to be made about our horizon of possibilities for action. They teach us the importance of turning our tendency to focus upon current predicaments (threatened mergers, restructuring, a reduction in public funding, regulatory controls, the power of a professional and managerial class, a lack of academic freedom or autonomy, work intensification), or a crisis in the idea of the University, into directional demands or non-reformist reforms.

Such political demands matter because the practical actions of the encampments, occupations, autonomous institutions, Bank of Ideas, and more, demonstrate the dysfunctional nature of our relationship to the University. In the face of genocide, environmental degradation, polycrisis or secular crisis, there is no redemption or legitimation in, for instance, defending academic freedom or seeking to realise an ideal of a good university (through better governance or regulation, or a new funding scheme). This simply locks the institutional form into an antagonistic struggle with groups like the Manhattan Institute

over ideas of the public good. Instead, the University of Utopia (n.d.c) wants us to consider thinking about universities as social forms, or determinate abstractions, which are empirical and real, and that require further elaboration in practical experiments at the level of society.

As a social form the university is the limit of what we know about ourselves as a society, knowledge at the level of society, with the capacity to expand what we know: as science – natural and social, humanities, arts and culture: and to do this exponentially, limited only by our own capacity and our need to know. (*ibid.*)

The activity of sublating dissolves this limit as it is represented by the University. It is part of a broader dissolution of that limit/horizon across a set of institutional forms representing capital's realisation of its social universe. In the University of Utopia (*ibid.*) our practical activity is not the defence of the University, rather it dissolves that institutional form, and reclaims 'knowledge at the level of society for the social individuals that created it'. To do this 'we must dissolve the contemporary entrepreneurial university and reconstitute the university in another more progressive form' (*ibid.*), based upon 'mass intellectuality' or 'our common ability to do, based on our needs and capacities and what needs to be done.' (University of Utopia n.d.a)

Producing co-operatively and in-excess, we must germinate new social needs for a new knowing society that is able to engage with global emergencies. New forms of common wealth might emerge through antagonistic engagement with contradiction and in struggle (for instance, with disciplinary structures, institutional privilege, the networks of power that receive nutrients from the University). Those struggles must be linked to other abolitionist moments and movements, because: 'We do not need education

without needing a world that is being destroyed.’ (*ibid.*)

So, the idea of the University of Utopia (the non-identity of the capitalist University) contains ontological and methodological potential for: emphasising the place of education ‘within the reality of our social relations, confined by the struggle of daily life’; being and doing predicated upon sharing rather than conditioned by exchange-value; refusing the institutionalisation of sharing through processes of commodification, commercialisation, private intellectual property and how they recondition our intellectuality around ideas of efficiency, impact and value-for-money; realising and resolving forms of commoning, beyond borders (of institution, curriculum, classroom); thinking about sharing in relation to wage labour, intellectual property, privilege, reward and recognition; and, enacting ways of dissolving these ‘as a social force, or a curricula of action against a world that is being destroyed’. (*ibid.*)

As the negative dissolution of the University as an institutional form, this is our negation of its negation of us. It refuses to accept that a society that needs the (this?) University is enough for us. It seeks the resolution of an alternative, pluriversal social form of knowing, predicated upon sharing: from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs. As a version of Moten’s new social field, or his real assembly, it points towards a new mycorrhizal network, in which nutrients are shared, and where transactional forms of wealth predicated upon exchange-value, privilege and status have been transcended.

4. Weaving abolition: negating master narratives

As postwar Germany stood on the brink of revolution in November 1918, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Zetkin and Mehring (1918) issued a *Call to the Workers of the World in the Name of the Spartacus League*, in which they were clear that ‘[h]umanity is facing the alternative: Dissolution and downfall in capitalist

anarchy, or regeneration through the social revolution.’ This feels as true now, in different material and historical circumstances, as it did then. Just before Christmas 1918, Luxemburg (1918a) (resonating with the dialectical, ontological and methodological themes developed here) drew attention to the practical work required to ‘realise socialism’:

[a] socialist society needs human beings from whom each one in his place, is full of passion and enthusiasm for the general well-being, full of self-sacrifice and sympathy for his fellow human beings, full of courage and tenacity in order to dare to attempt the most difficult.

As the year closed, she identified the need to attack the alienating material conditions of value production: [w]here the chains of capitalism are forged, there they must be broken.’ (Luxemburg 1918b)

Luxemburg identified revolutionary praxis as emerging from class struggle, as an urban, factory-based, demobilised, and inclusive practice. It was to be enacted in theoretical-practical, dialectical activity, from the streets and in the factories – by humans struggling for the general well-being, governed by dignity and heart. Here, she speaks to the grounds of our struggle, at the level of community, working for the recognition of a plurality of identities, contesting the negation and abolition of unjust institutions and practices, and also erupting within the factory. This connects the sublation of the University to that of the prison, police, family, and more, as a practice pushing towards the dissolution and sublation of the social universe of value.

Perhaps, here, labour-based struggles meet social movement struggles, in order to widen the contradictions of capitalism and dissolve the forces and conditions that maintain the expansive power of the social universe of value. The idea is to point towards a new communist, pluriversal horizon, in which

a new mycorrhizal network enables the realisation of Césaire's (1957, quoted in Kelley (2000, 25-6)) wish for 'a different idea of a universal... rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all.'

Recognising our desires for such a realisation challenges our master narratives. For McLean *et al.* (2020) such narratives guide us by showing us the stories that are valued, socio-culturally. We might see them within Benjamin's kaleidoscope, and we might recognise the ways in which they are represented as Andreotti's stories that dance with us (or that prevent movement). McLean *et al.* (*ibid.*) hold that 'master narratives not only support and guide the construction of personal stories, they are also constraining in their prescription of the "good" story'. They enable stories to be culturally-sanctioned, disenfranchised, disbelieved, unheard or marginalised. As a result, they contain the potential to extend and reproduce trauma beyond its origin, at a social or cultural level.

Trauma. Borders. Identity. Form.

Moore (2023) centres liberation from the borders of a system of social reproduction that 'reproduces and reciprocates the shape of the dominant, hegemonic cisgender identitarianism'. This helps us think about the ways in which we might liberate ourselves from the borders of our lives as labour.

Trans liberation struggle is a struggle to recognise the class political context that produces trans people as part of the wider gender and economic system... Under trans liberation, cisgender and trans people would enjoy their share of trans liberties at their pleasure, cisgender and trans people wouldn't meaningfully exist as distinguishable categories in terms of oppression any more. (*ibid.*)

This would be a new freedom of expression, as the borders of identity dissolve to leave a very different idea of the universal. It reminds us of del Arcoíris's (2022) Queer Marxist desire to tear down the ladder of social mobility (e.g. via projects like DEI/EDI that maintain alienating structures), through the abolition of wage labour, and the social structures (the family) through which property relations are normalized (see also Hester 2018 and O'Brien 2023 on the family and abolition). This includes the abolition of capital's institutionalising of bodies through sexual differences, and the ways in which this becomes a master narrative.

In Moore's (2023) argument, the intention is that this 'would change, would abolish, what we understand as the social structure of gender... eliminating the hegemonic oppression that maintains people in these coercive categories'. This is why support for trans-liberation is support for the conditions of resistance to oppression, and for mobilisation in the name of freedom 'on the basis of our lust for life and desire to live in community with others rather than identity'. It becomes fundamental to hold ourselves accountable for our forms of social solidarity across the class (assembly), in resistance to capitalism's kinetic drives. In del Arcoíris's (2022) manifesto, this is the work of abolishing working class reproduction through gender, whilst recognising its introjected, personal essence and politicisation.

Instead, we demand a richer, materialist analysis of the conditions by which the borders of identity fold into and contradict labour relations. In this argument, '[w]e will only destroy the chains that oppress us in a collective act, we will only achieve gender self-determination by abolishing class society' (*ibid.*), and refusing the ways in which capital, and its social forms like the State, the University, schools, prisons, families deny us the potential for authentic, collective care.

In engaging with global emergencies, there is an urgent necessity to work for the abolition of capitalism by abolishing

the social forms (institutions) that reproduce its social universe, or (in our other metaphor) provide it with its nutrients whilst denying life. And we already have ‘the imaginative potential for the social relations of a communist future’, as it erupts from the lives that ‘capitalism disregards’ (*ibid.*). As Lewis (2019, 19-20) notes, ‘[w]e are the makers of one another. And we could learn collectively to act like it.’

This speaks to Ferdinand’s (2022, 117, *emphasis in original*) desire to reconnect anti-slavery and abolition to coloniality: it is abolition infused with ecology, moving beyond what he calls ‘*plantationary emancipation*’, which maintains the logics of ‘the constitution of the slave-making and misogynistic plantation.’ He (*ibid.*, 121, *emphasis in original*) desires ‘*an abolition of slavery on the condition that the colonial plantation continues.*’ Instead, our movements of liberation at the level of society must point towards ‘*a decolonial ecology*’ that desires to realise ‘a plural, diverse, transgenerational world based upon human and non-human pluralities’ (*ibid.*, 128, 230, *emphasis in original*).

Moore and Ferdinand speak to desires (needs) for forms that help us work through and repair our collective trauma.

Can this emerge from the University as-is?

Connecting movements on campus against cops, against sexual violence and harassment, for boycott and divestments, against genocide, might bridge towards justice. It recognises that struggles to cite more women, against awarding gaps, to create space for more Black female professors, for trans-rights on campus, and so on, are progressive tactics, but they cannot deliver liberation. Moreover, to focus on them without seeing them as directional demands in the movement to abolish the capitalist university, alongside other extant social forms is to give in to the conditions defined by the Manhattan Institute (2025). So, in Ferdinand’s (*ibid.*) terms, such a process of bridging is decolonial in intentionality, working to dissolve our addiction to

modernity and its colonial logics and institutions and identities.

Following Davis (2005), reimagination is a call for new democratic institutions, which take up social issues that can never be addressed by the institutions we have. This is a call to end our defence of those institutions we perceive as legitimate, and that reproduce a particular, toxic form of democratic, capitalist control. These institutions work collectively to lock us into differentiated and localised struggles, whilst offering the mirage of equality in social mobility, widening participation and so on. She is also clear (Davis *et al.*, 2024, xi) that in widening our circle of relations, ‘contemporary organizing makes abolition increasingly irresistible both as a mode of analysis and a political practice.’ So, we must desire into connection political lineages across cultures and ecosystems. The intention must be to hold space-time for the commune of communes, enacted through radical coalition work, which is intersectional, intercommunal, and intergenerational.

...

I want us to contribute to this from within-and-against the University, with Neary’s *pedagogy of excess*, whilst holding a commitment to radical, co-operative and democratic social forms. We must do so, in order to develop a new revolutionary aesthetics at the horizon where a new form of common wealth might be borne, one which pushes us beyond alienating social forms like the University. This is an aesthetics that seeks to smash the kaleidoscope that restricts our vision to the social universe of value, and which locks us within a particular, value-oriented mycorrhizal network, governed by death.

Whilst organised labour must contribute to this real assembly, it cannot be the whole. It cannot deliver liberation from a position that celebrates its dignity rather than its abolition. It is one more one-dimensional identity that must be transcended, through the slow work of abolition, as we widen the possibility of communising

care, radical kinship and mutuality. We might consider such possibilities in relation to recent Polish student occupations, May '68, Occupy!, the Gaza Encampments, and more. However, we must consider them as anti-work or being in excess of work, and its plural modes of personal subjugation and forms of violence. From here might emerge the grounds of transcendence.

5. The dissolution of the universities

O'Brien (2023, 186) reminds us that '[c]apitalism depends on a shared, mass resignation that reflects the actual conditions of powerlessness, in working-class life.' She helps us to remember that whilst revolutionary ideas flow through the world with more potential in particular revolutionary moments, at other times we must work to keep them alive, in relation to visceral, structural contradictions. This matters because, in 'revolutionary moments, everyone is called on to be a utopian planner.' (*ibid.*, 189) In Day and McBean's (2022, 142) terms this has to focus on 'building revolutionary, class power' aimed at abolishing 'the violence of borders', which refuses 'flaccid party politics' and is instead 'the fight against state violence, which is a threat to us all.'

In this work of preparing and conjoining against borders, we need or desire community or the commune. This is what Neary's praxis, and the memory of students in occupation and encampment, and of people striving for co-operative alternatives to the University, highlight for me. Rather than the illusion of community (in the mirage of the University or the academic discipline or the institutional role), this demands acts of creation – new ways of visualising and making real (Day and McBean 2022). In the context of the University, it means making real the inherent contradictions that shape us, as educators condemned to be productive workers, as professional services staff locked into precarious divisions of labour, as students coerced through debt. It demands a reckoning with the ideological and financial

structures that perpetuate cycles of harm and violence. Our intention must be to dissolve the hyphae that condition us inside capital's extractive mycorrhizal network.

Much of this is predicated upon withdrawing consent, rather than public compliance, across a terrain (ecosystem) of social forms, and then working to disrupt power, to build care and to dissolve social reproduction at the level of community and society. Through a pedagogy of excess focused upon 'how to dissolve the social relations of capitalist production in real time' (Neary 2020b, 32-33), our praxis emerges from 'the emancipation of the intellect and of knowledge', grounded in our doing 'nothing that is instrumental for capital.' (*ibid.*, 148).

In so doing, or even not-doing (nothing doing), Neary offered-up contradictions. At once, he was mindful of the need for the University to survive and prosper, as well as taking on the responsibility, collectively, to unfold an alternative model for it, as a prefigurative possibility for intellectual work in the service of a new form of social wealth (Neary 2010b). He was also 'arguing for abolitionism not sustainability', situated in a tradition of dissent, because '[w]hat I want to abolish is a society where no-thing is sustainable' (Neary 2017e). Yet, he was mindful of and pragmatic about the potential for institutional co-optation of radical projects (Neary and Saunders 2016), and the ways in which the capitalist State always seeks to repress dissent (Simbürger and Neary 2016). Still, his anchor was 'the dissolution of the social relation out of which real abstractions are derived, including the concept of humanity.' (Neary 2017b, 559), grounded in a renewed 'intellectual insurgency' and 'a new spatial register' (Neary 2020a).

A renewed insurgency and a new spatial register leads me towards the invitation to an abolitionist university studies, posted by Boggs *et al.* (2019). Designed to connect to the broad front of abolitionism, this invitation calls us to a movement

for institutions (social forms) that help us to dismantle racial capitalism and to reconstruct social wealth in a new register. It is a field of work that involves a ‘reckoning with universities’ complicity with a carceral, racial-capitalist society while creating an alternative, abolition university.’ (*ibid.*) At issue is the life and the social form that we wish to affirm: the sublation of a society that could have prisons and police, debt and wage labour, and institutional complicity in dehumanising logics.

A renewed insurgency and a renewed spatial register ask us to imagine a new social field that has dissolved accumulated institutional assets, like land, infrastructure, technology, knowledges, skills and capabilities into community. It asks us to consider this with a militant urgency that desires a new ontological horizon of social possibilities, beyond settler-colonialism and racial-patriarchy. Yet, as Haiven (2019) notes in his response to the invitation, in-line with my argument here, ‘[t]he university is already being abolished. On whose terms will abolition occur?’ In tension with this, he asks ‘is another end of the academic world possible?’ The point is to articulate some form of collective liberation from the grounds of global emergency.

Haiven (*ibid.*) wants us to consider whether we can ‘deprive the university (or aspects of the university) of resources such that other solutions to better problems become irresistible?’ This is our dissolution of the University as-is, grounded in new needs and desires that lie beyond our one-dimensional half-lives. We must germinate projects and spaces that centre the recognition that:

what we face are problems of enduring investments in a colonial habit of being that organizes not only our ideas and institutions but also our desires and perceived entitlements, often in ways that are unconscious. (Stein 2019)

The practical-theoretical projects (and non-reformist reforms) that must shape our dissolution of the universities are also the dissolution of our denials and investments and complicities 'in the systemic violence that keeps our institutions running' (*ibid.*). Our dissolution also represents our needs for a resolution: of 'the dream of a society *without* universities', which must be enacted by planting 'the seeds of that society here and now', such that a new mycorrhizal network emerges in 'a society that no longer *needs* the university, or where the needs that are today met by the university are met otherwise'. (Haiven 2019)

...

The University is in crisis because it *is* the crisis. It is a site of contradiction and struggle, of bleakness and also of possibilities. So, there is an urgency to consider how we might rethink the University and our intellectual work and our intellectual selves and our intellectuality. We know this in the current moment, through: the epistemic erasure of Palestine that is being enacted in the war on professors; the forms of scholasticide to which universities are active contributors; and, the punishing institutional responses to Gaza encampments. These illuminate the University-as-crisis.

The role of the University at a time of genocide reveals how the financial and ideological hyphae resolve the University for-value. It offers ways of grounding the need to negate and abolish (deny nutrients to) these hyphae and the networks that they reproduce. This is not simply within the University, but across its associations, into other social forms that work to modify and create borders and separations between people.

As money comes to dominate through finance capital and the market, with debt as a central mechanism, it is not enough simply to protest unconscionable vandalism. The solvent effect of finance capital enables the death cult of value to unfold its war

on human and non-human animals, and their ecosystems. As the suppression of dissent grows, fetishised notions of freedom of speech and academic freedom work alongside both authoritarian crackdowns and institutional complicity, and reproduce the circuit of alienation whose grounds lie in the wrongness of life. Socially, this is amplified by techno-accelerationist advocates of a dark enlightenment with whom there is no bargaining.

Our desires must shift towards dissolution or sublation as a materialised, negative critique of the wrongness that we face; this is never simply destruction, rather a dissolving of bonds between things, such that they might be resolved through a new appreciation, or a new metabolic function. Connected to an ecosystem of abolitionist praxis across social forms, we must germinate a new form of intellectuality, grounded in a new relationality, which is 'socially-useful for the new world' (Marx 1875).

In this process, the dialectics of our praxis, and the contradictions that they generate must point towards a real assembly (a commune of communes) where labour movements, social movements, struggles over identity, alongside occupations and encampments grounded in particular issues, might be in dialogue. Mindful of vanguardist politics and factionalism, we have to transcend a fetishisation of revolutionary energy from the labour movement and instead realise projects that build plural revolutionary subjectivities. This requires us to engage with an open categorical analysis, grounded in practical, co-operative projects inside and outside the University, as survival (actualisation) pending revolution. This also holds for our practices in the classroom as a radical space of possibilities (hooks 1994), in order that students, professional services' staff and academics are able to see themselves as sites of radical, democratic and mutual possibility.

Remembering the movements and direct action of the 2010s and in relation to Gaza, offers an imaginary for smashing the

kaleidoscope. Remembering helps us to maintain the archive, and to reflect upon: the limits of class solidarity in the University, and with communities/groups beyond; the emotional work required in maintaining revolutionary praxis; the ways in which value-in-motion exacerbates the potential for forgetting, co-option and reformism; and, the dissonance required of us, in order to survive in our failed and failing institutions.

Our process of dialectical dissolution emerges in relation to our expanding, theoretical-practical archive of projects: it is a dynamic and transformative process focused upon ending (hospicing) our institutions, in order that they might be recomposed or resolved by carrying forward socially-useful elements. This is targeted at capitalist categories, which provide universal appreciations of the forms of social domination. At the same time, it is targeted at institutions and identities, as they are reified, commodified and alienated. Social relations and consciousness are a final, integrated target for dialectical dissolution, through which we struggle against the boundaries and separations between people, non-human animals and ecosystems that uphold the current system.

Our purpose is liberation through re-imagination—towards the real, sensuous, intellectuality of the individual-in-community—a new appreciation of intellectuality in relation to an emerging form of common wealth beyond the commodity. One outcome of this new appreciation might be the liberation of the general intellect from its institutional incarceration, and its resolution as mass intellectuality.

...

Imagining that such dialectical dissolution might be possible, through conscious human agency and collective struggle, is a flame that I maintain following the SSC or co-operative University, and in relation to Occupy!, The Bank of Ideas, and

countless Gaza encampments. In the process of re-engaging with Mike Neary's knowing, doing and being, in particular through his written and spoken work, I have remembered these as grounds of possibility. Mike's critique of the value-form opens out the possibility for defining the limits of the University and alternatives to it, alongside the potential to define space-times for revolutionary pedagogy as mass intellectuality. For all its contradictions, his critique and practice point us towards the horizon for reclaiming a plurality of narratives and social energies, inside an ethical relationality of mutuality and care.

My real movement to abolish the present state of things, as my life process, then becomes: weaving life beyond value; connecting with the possibilities for integrating diverse struggles as a new universal and revolutionary subjectivity; activating a will to community beyond whiteness and its objectification of labour; enacting a revolutionary science as a pedagogy of excess, beyond the violence of abstraction; centring contradiction, and negative critique of unfolding ontological categories, as generative are full of possibilities; desiring the reclamation of the general intellect, in order to resolve forms of mass intellectuality at the level of society; and, an acceptance of the need to grieve the wrongness of the world.

Bringing these together, I desire that we might enact a process of *preguntando caminamos* (asking, we walk). I want to contribute to our real movement towards a society that no longer *needs* the University, or where the needs that are today met by the University are met otherwise. I want us to broaden our archive of theoretical-practical projects that are against-and-beyond the University, and also against-and-beyond the social universe of value.

And we might as well begin from where we are, by addressing who we are within the borders of the University, in order to understand who we might be and how we might relate.

From where we are, the imperative is to embrace dissolution as a means of forging new forms of collective agency, social knowing, and a truly liveable life.

At its heart, this is how I dissolve the power of Neary's question for other worlds: how do revolutionary teachers teach? I resolve to consider, how do revolutionary teachers teach, after Gaza? I resolve to consider, where do revolutionary teachers teach, after Gaza? I resolve to consider, for what do revolutionary teachers teach, after Gaza? I resolve to consider, with whom do revolutionary teachers teach, after Gaza?

This is my real movement.

#freepalestine

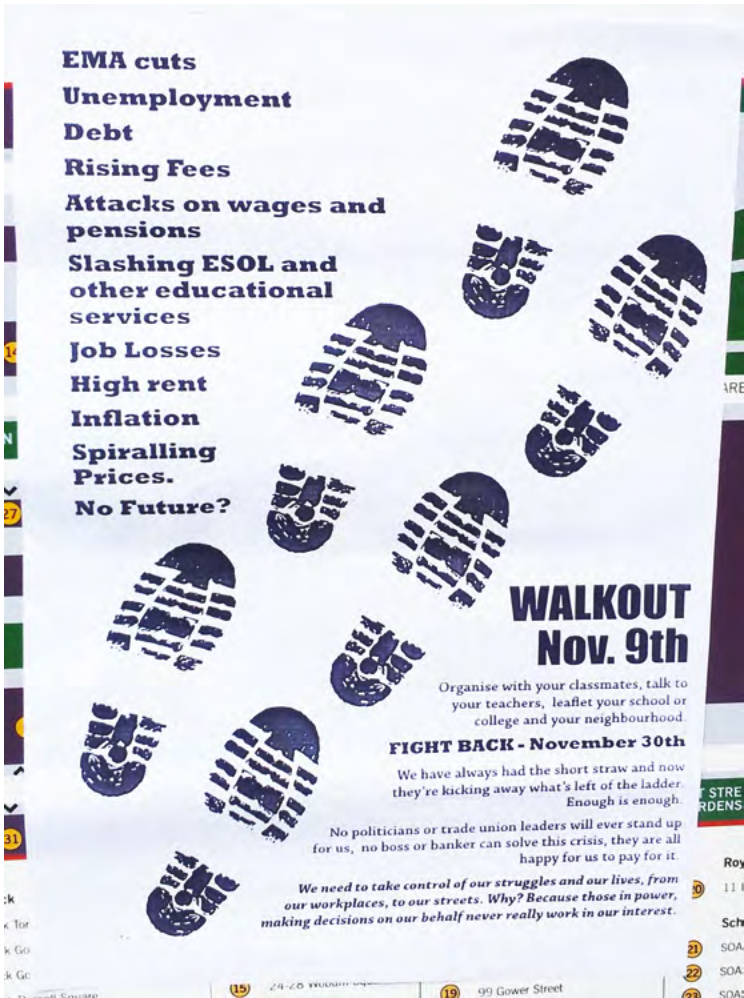


Image 1: photograph of poster taken in London of the 9 November 2010 student walkout over cuts (no author given for the poster; photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))



Image 2: photograph of sign outside Bookmarks Bookshop on the 9 November 2011 student demonstration, after the Met Police reported that officers were free to use baton rounds in extreme cases (photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))



Image 3: photograph of a placard in London on the 24 November 2010 National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts demonstration (no author given for the placard; photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))

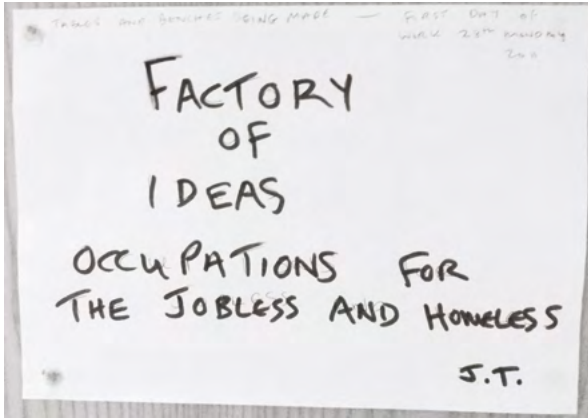


Image 4: photograph of handwritten sign taken at the occupied UBS Building in London at OccupyLSX, in November 2011 (no author given for the sign; photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))



Image 5: photograph of flyer from Tent City University in London at OccupyLSX, in November 2011 (no author given for the flyer; photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))



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Image 6: the Really Open University poster for its Reimagine the University event, in November 2010 (copyleft, The Really Open University, website has a Creative Commons: CC BY 2.0 (now 4.0) license)

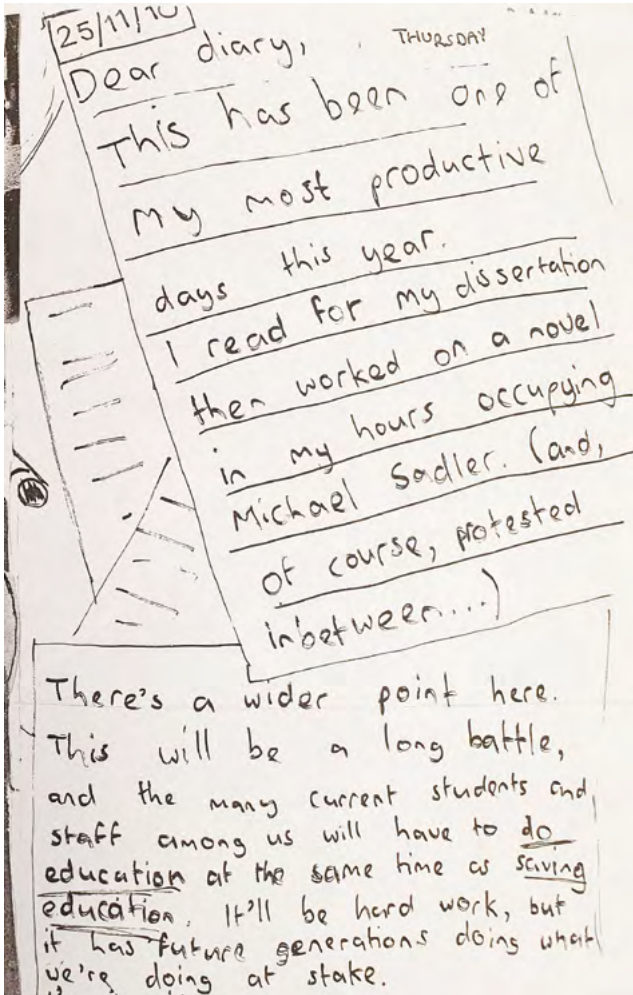


Image 7: photograph of the backpage of a zine collected at the occupation of the Michael Sadler Lecture Theatre at the University of Leeds, in November 2010 (no author given for the zine or the content of the page; photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))

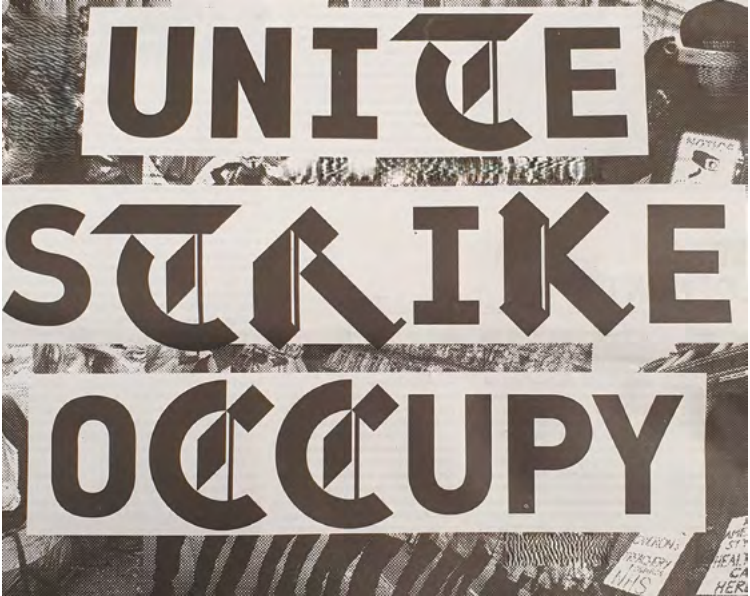


Image 8: photograph of the backpage of *The Occupied Times*, Issue 6, 30 November 2011 (no author given, content on *The Occupied Times* website has a Creative Commons: CC BY NC SA 3.0 (now 4.0) license)



Image 9: photograph of a poster at Occupy Nottingham in February 2012 (Author of poster text: Occupy Together; photograph CC BY 4.0, Adapt with Attribution (Hall))



Image 10: still image of Mike Neary from the video, Students at Work, produced at The Reinvention Centre, University of Warwick, in 2009 (permission for reuse kindly given by Emma Neary, CC BY-ND 4.0)



Image 11: photograph of Really Open University, Strike - Occupy - Transform, flyer taken at The Space Project in Leeds in November 2011 (copyleft, The Really Open University, CC BY 2.0 (now 4.0))

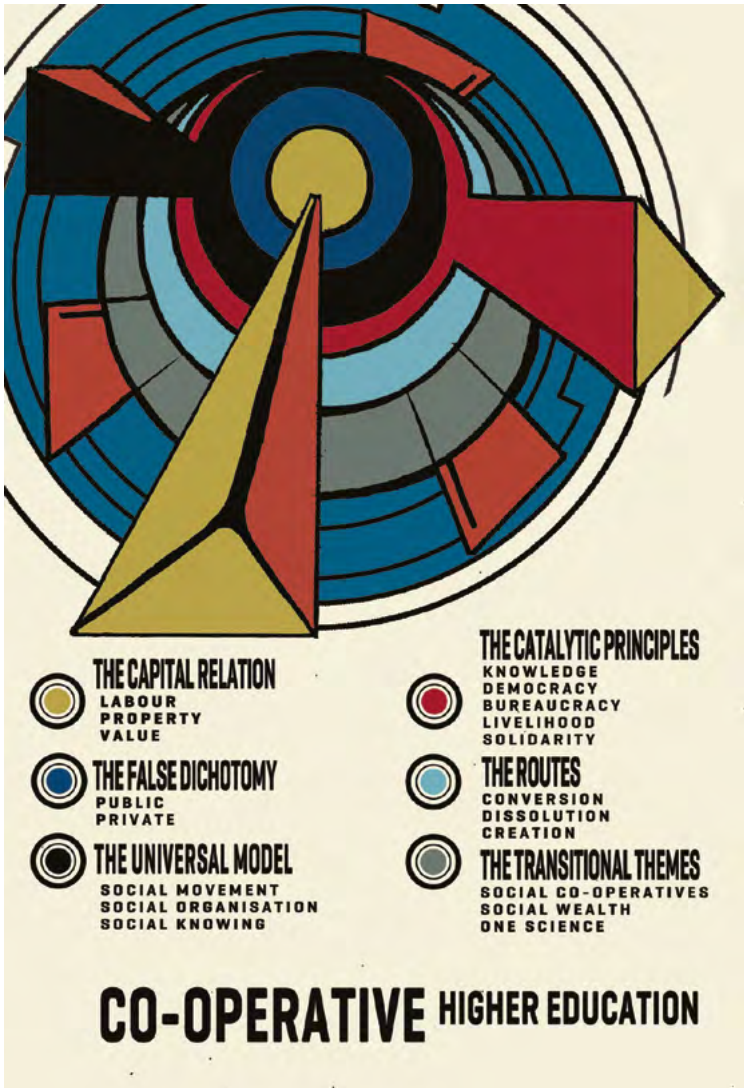


Image 12: the Framework for Co-operative Higher Education, in Neary and Winn 2017, *Beyond Public and Private: A Framework for Co-operative Higher Education*, *Open Library of Humanities Journal* (author Sam Rendall, CC BY 4.0, permission confirmed by Joss Winn)

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY

COMMON SENSE, MASS INTELLECTUALITY AND THE GENERAL INTELLECT

COMMON SENSE As intellectual workers we prefer to share our work with others inside and outside of the university. As intellectual workers we refuse the fetishised labels of academics and students and engage in teaching, learning and research only in so far as we are able to operate in and against the university. We offer our work as an act of solidarity with those who wish to engage with our ideas. In offering our work as a free gift we recognise the limitations of giving. Reduced from **being** to **having** we are now reduced to **giving**: alienated acts of generosity (i.e. Charity) based on a recognition of the needs of others and an assumption of their incapacity to fulfil those needs (i.e. Anomie). No. Our concept of sharing requires further elaboration. Not **having**, or **giving**, but **doing**. In other words our concept of sharing is based on a recognition of what we all have in common, the basis of which is our ability to **do**. In the Worker-State (i.e. Capitalism), in which all activity is regulated by wage work, **doing** is reduced to acquiring what has been done by others through the exchange of money (i.e. Poverty). We refer to this understanding of Crisis (i.e. the Violence of Abstraction) as common sense. Common sense is not a network or a matrix, it is not physical or virtual, but a pedagogy or way of knowing, that is elaborated in the lessons learned from the history of class struggle. Common sense is the basis of our intellectual not-working (i.e. Doing).

MASS INTELLECTUALITY As intellectual workers we prefer to share our work with others inside and outside of the university. As intellectual workers we refuse the fetishised concept of widening participation, and engage with teaching, learning and research only so far as we are able to dissolve the institutional boundaries of the university. Not mass education or education for the masses but mass intellectuality. Mass education is based on the assumption that people are stupid and must be made not-stupid (i.e. Educated). Mass intellectuality recognises that education maintains the population in a condition of stupidity (i.e. Intelligence Quotient) regulated through examinations and other forms of humiliations (i.e. Grades and Assessments). 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. In the society of doing, based on what needs to be done, my own needs are subsumed with the needs of others and I become invisible (i.e. Free).

GENERAL INTELLECT As intellectual workers we prefer to share our work with others inside and outside of the university. 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.

The University of Utopia
No time and no place



Image 13: On Sharing: Anti-Curriculum: A Course of Action, by The University of Utopia (The University of Utopia, CC0 (permission confirmed by Joss Winn))



Image 14: photograph of Génération Ingouvernable sticker taken in St Germain, Paris, in 2018 (sticker author: Génération Ingouvernable; photograph CC BY 4.0 Adapt with Attribution (Hall))



Image 15: Cambridge4Palestine Freshers Calendar for Palestine, 2025 (credit: Cambridge4Palestine, 2025; CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

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“From where we are the imperative is to embrace dissolution as a means of forging new forms of collective agency, social knowing, and a truly liveable life.”

The English University feels broken. We witness a political economic crisis for institutions that is tightening. Through this, the power of finance capital is a limiting factor shaping the horizon of our intellectual work. It feels like this terrain has been unfolding in ever more negative ways, in spite of the demonstrations, occupations and alternative education projects in the period after 2010. Beyond value-for-money, our universities are shaped tactically against culture wars, fetishised ideas of freedom of speech, and authoritarian responses to student protest in the form of Gaza encampments.

Yet a range of recent abolitionist praxis, with a deep, historical lineage, helps us to question how our intellectuality might be released towards a new horizon. *The Dissolution of the Universities* places these connected moments and movements of struggle into dialogue with the student revolts of 2010-11 and the Gaza encampments. It seeks to develop a key question of radical educator Mike Neary: how do revolutionary teachers teach? In this moment, we must ask: how and where do revolutionary teachers teach, after Gaza?

Engaging with this question is a means of challenging the wrongness of the University in its settler-colonial forms and contents. In so doing, we open out the recent history of radical alternatives as a moment of dissolution and resolution, through dialogue with traditions of indigenous, decolonial and abolitionist studies. Our intention becomes to describe what lies at the horizon of University abolition, and what its transcendence might mean.

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may fly

