



Work

reconfigured

ephemera: theory & politics
in organization

What is *ephemera*: theory & politics in organization?

ephemera is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

theory

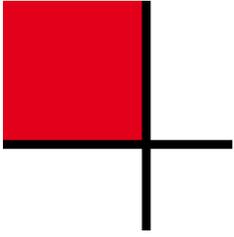
ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics

ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively depolitized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization

Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.



ephemera

theory & politics in organization

ephemera 20(4), Nov 2020

Work, reconfigured

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Published by the *ephemera* editorial collective: Bernadette Loacker, Birke Otto, Christian Garmann Johnsen, Christos Giotitsas, Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, Emil Husted, Justine Grønbæk Pors, Jette Sandager, Karolina Mikołajewska-Zajac, Kenneth Weir, Lena Olaison, Lisa Conrad, Márton Rácz, Mie Plotnikof, Nick Butler, Ozan Nadir Alakavuklar, Randi Heinrichs, Rowland Curtis, Yousra Rahmouni Elidrissi.

First published for free online at www.ephemerajournal.org.

ISSN (Online) 1473-2866

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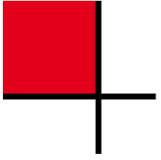


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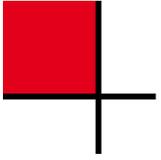
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Reconfiguring work and organizing for post-pandemic futures

Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, Ozan Nadir Alakavuklar, Emil Husted and Márton Rácz

Introduction

The editorial of this open issue of *ephemera* is written against the background of a major global pandemic. The disease known as COVID-19 is believed to have started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. It rapidly spread across the world the following months, with various restrictive measures put into place to flatten the curve of contagion. Besides losses of lives globally, the pandemic has caused severe economic contraction on a historic scale (Hevia and Neumeyer, 2020). After the seeming slow-down of the virus during June-August of 2020, many governments attempted to go back to 'normal' and restart their national economies. Since then, the virus has been spreading with new force and mutations, adding record numbers of contagion and deaths, and causing governments worldwide to implement new restrictions on work and social life. While the old 'normal' currently seems to be again far away (if not altogether lost), a return to it is not only implausible but also undesirable. What we need, instead, is a socio-ecological transformation.

COVID-19 has exposed the systematic preference of profit-making over life-making in capitalism (Bhattacharya in Jaffe, 2020). The obsession with economic growth, relentless capital accumulation, and anthropocentrism

have been destructive for the planet and livelihoods (Barca, 2020; Chertkovskaya and Paulsson, forthcoming). COVID-19 emerged as a result of the so-called zoonotic spillover – the transmission of a pathogen from a vertebrate to the human population. Although pandemics have happened before, industrial agriculture and wildlife trade contribute massively to the loss of biodiversity and make zoonotic spillovers more likely (Wallace, 2016).

Meanwhile, the climate crisis is as pertinent as ever and the pandemic gives a vivid example of what life in a warming world will look like (Malm, 2020). The (post-)neoliberal era is incapable of meeting the needs of societies, having privatized and underfunded health, education, and other public provisions. The pandemic has made more visible the inequalities related to class, race, and gender (Cole et al., 2020). Those who cannot access healthcare, those who cannot afford housing, those who do not have internet access, those with job and life insecurities – all suffer more in times of pandemic. Therefore, this crisis is also a crisis of the state and capital (Zanoni, 2020). A different set of compromises, negotiations, and impositions between the two and the civil society will determine the future after COVID-19 (Bhattacharya and Dale, 2020).

Across the world, the pandemic has made many of us rapidly change (at least for now) how we organize, work, and live. As *ephemera* (2020) argued earlier this year, the present constitutes a crucial moment for critical reflection and raises a series of urgent questions. What is our relationship with the family, community, environment and the state? How should we structure our work? How do we value essential work and workers? How are we going to live, work, and organize differently in a post-pandemic world?

Amidst the switch to all things digital, we have seen how digitalization allows flexibility for those of us in the privileged position to work from home in the first place. At the same time, the difficult task of combining work and care commitments has put pressure on most people, especially those with kids and relatives in need of extra support in this difficult time. This makes us remember, again, the role of care that has been transferred to elders, teachers, daycares, nursing homes, and domestic workers, and the gendered as well as racialized nature of these roles. Inevitably, the notions of work,

workplace and working have all been reconfigured (again). More importantly, the pandemic makes us reconsider the priorities in organizing the economy and society.

The contributions to this open issue all reflect on the themes of work, digitalization, and alternative organizing. Although they were all written before the pandemic, the current situation has not made them less relevant, but, on the contrary, has accelerated their urgency. The contributions critically reflect on the current trends in the capitalist mode of production, to which a new wave of digitalization and reorganization of work are key. This adds to the long-standing discussion of capitalism and work in *ephemera* (e.g. Beverungen et al., 2013; Butler et al., 2011; Chertkovskaya et al., 2013; Chertkovskaya et al., 2016). Many authors also address another theme that has been actively pursued by the journal – that of alternative organizing (e.g. Graziano and Trogal, 2019; Johnsen et al., 2017; Phillips and Jeanes, 2018; Stoborod and Swann, 2014). Here, the voices within the issue envision a different organization of our societies, rethinking work, leadership, management, and governance in profound and far-reaching ways.

Drawing on the contributions to this issue, the rest of the editorial will proceed as follows. We begin by reflecting on the new configurations of work and production. We then zoom in on the current trend of digitalization. The remaining part of the editorial reframes work and economy in terms of care and shows how resistance and action for alternatives can be organized. It is concluded with some examples of initiatives for socio-ecological transformation that were articulated during the pandemic.

New configurations of work and production

From the industrialization era to the sharing economy, alongside the major technological breakthroughs and innovations, the way work is organized has always been contested. While fads and fashions such as total quality management, lean management, or self-managing teams come and go, the conflict between those who produce value and those who appropriate value remains constant. The task ahead of us is a matter of configuring how we

manage this conflict and contestation in and around the notions of work and value (Hardt and Negri, 2018; Harvey, 2018). Through new configurations of work, value is produced and distributed in different ways. These new ways can enable capital accumulation, but also post-capitalist ways of organizing, as highlighted, for example, by the difference between the corporate-driven ‘sharing economy’ and worker-owned ‘platform cooperativism’ despite both using platforms to organize work (e.g. Scholz, 2016).

A handful of papers in the issue explore and theorize new configurations of work and production. One emerging trend is that of ‘collaborative economy’, with the idea of collaboration supposedly being key to it. Stefanie Faure and colleagues explore what collaboration means in such settings and observe a fundamental paradox at the center of this work trend. Collaboration, they argue, involves a noisy dialogue between heterogeneous actors, yet recent examples of collaborative workspaces such as makerspaces and incubators are often structured around strict rules for how to maintain a quiet working environment. Such workspaces are thus governed by what the authors call a ‘logic of silence’. People participating in the collaborative economy are caught in a strange situation in which they are ‘alone together’. Drawing empirical inspiration from a French coworking space, the authors set out to explore the role of silence, arguing that there is more to the phenomenon than what intuitively seems to be the case. Silence, they maintain, is more than just a default setting – it is a multifaceted condition, pregnant with social as well as political possibilities.

In contrast to the trend of collaborative economy, some inherently collaborative spaces are aggressively pushed towards competing and showing their worth in comparison to others. In an article on competitive measures in higher education, Christine Schwarz investigates the reconfiguration of academic work in the age of neoliberal capitalism. Drawing on a large study of so-called ‘competition designers’ (i.e. third space professionals within universities and business schools), Schwarz explores how they make sense of their own work and justify the introduction of competition into a setting that often resists simple quantification. The author’s conclusion is that these managers are caught in a number of dilemmas concerning responsibility, representation, skills, and sense-

making. On the one hand, the managers' response to these dilemmas serve to soften the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism. On the other hand, they expose and question the credibility of competition as a particular type of rationality in higher education.

Another work trend that has flourished in contemporary society is downshifting, as explored by Rachel L. Cockman and Laylah Pyke. Understood as a decision to scale down on work and consumption in order to have more time for family commitments (childcare in particular), downshifting has become a response to increasingly demanding work-lives where the boundary between labor and leisure is blurred to the point of non-existence. Cockman and Pyke's main objective is to provide a critical reading of the academic literature on downshifting, while reflecting on the emancipatory potential of this new trend. Pursuing that objective, the authors ask: is downshifting really the solution to increasingly demanding work-lives, or should we rather view it as a polarizing activity for the privileged few? Cockman and Pyke opt for the latter approach by viewing downshifting as a discursive strategy that solidifies a number of taken-for-granted assumptions about work and leisure.

Notably, configurations of work and production are changing in industrial spaces, too. In the final piece within this thematic section, Simon Schaupp and Ramon Diab explore the introduction of so-called 'cyberphysical systems' and the 'industrial internet of things' in manufacturing. These are tangible manifestations of what in Germany is known as 'Industrie 4.0'. This new digitally mediated regime of production is characterized by even greater automation and flexibility than previous modes of production, rendering it the technical equivalent of capital's self-organizing logic. As such, Schaupp and Diab describe the ongoing automation of industrial production as a process of cybernetization, in which conventional managerial control is replaced by increasing self-organization and immediate feedback. In this way, the entire production process becomes an autonomous system, circumventing traditional management-worker relations, and responding directly to the logic of capital. The article presents a number of challenges to the way we normally think about (industrial) organizations and how we typically theorize relations of production.

Digital transformations at work

What is brought to light in Schaupp and Diab's article is not only how 'industrie 4.0' overturns labor processes that have existed for half a century, and how this shift in capitalist modes of production introduces a new type of market-based control at the workplace. It also shows how much this particular production regime hinges on digital technology. Digitalization is often heralded by techno-optimists and mainstream management authors as inherently progressive waves of transformation that 'contain more goodness than anything else we know' (Kelly, 2010: 359). However, numerous empirical studies have shown that there is a darker side to the introduction of digital technology at the workplace (Plesner and Husted, 2020; Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2020). For instance, while some have pointed to the role of digitalization in accentuating unhealthy workplace conflicts (e.g. Upchurch and Grassman, 2016), others have emphasized the enormous potential for worker surveillance that is embedded in digital technologies (e.g. Ball and Wilson, 2000; Van Oort, 2018; Zuboff, 1988). Furthermore, a series of studies have investigated tech-based challenges to the professional identity of various occupational groups (e.g. Petrakaki et al., 2016; Plesner and Raviola, 2016), and how digitalization sometimes creates illusions of human emancipation (e.g. Ossewarde and Reijers, 2017) and workplace democracy (e.g. Turco, 2016). Finally, while digitalization is often presented as something 'immaterial' and magically enabled by technology, it comes with a substantial biophysical throughput, manifested as the incredible amounts of energy, materials, and waste that are needed to make digitalization happen (the Shift Project, 2019).

A handful of papers in this issue continue the empirical examination of digitalization's darker sides. With online distribution platforms becoming a common tool for organizing work, Ilana Gershon and Melissa Cefkin bring up the question of what actually happens to work when it is organized this way. For them, the neoliberal context – where digital platforms are positioned as offering autonomy to entrepreneurial workers and efficiency to corporations – is a starting point for looking into the new sociology of work, its challenges and contradictions. Using the case of IBM, the authors explore some key features of work (design, dissemination, and control) in intra-

organizational crowd-work initiatives and specifically in work distribution via open calls. Attention is brought to segmentation in work design, the nature of working with strangers, and disciplining through reputation mechanisms, among others, illuminating well-studied issues surrounding work in new circumstances.

Digitalization does not only aid in distributing work, but also helps program technology that can minimize or eliminate the use of human labor altogether. Stefan Laser and Alison Stowell observe this trend by examining the curious case of Apple's recycling robots (named Liam and Daisy). Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Germany, India, UK, and Ghana, the authors show how competing valuation systems are clashing within the highly complex area of e-waste management. Apple's robots devalue alternative modes of organizing waste (e.g. reassembling instead of recycling electronic gadgets) and make certain actors redundant (e.g. people working at local phone repair shops in developing countries) by utilizing opaque high-tech procedures for recycling old iPhones. Giving voice to some of these otherwise marginalized actors is Laser and Stowell's way of exposing the less glamorous side of corporate sustainability initiatives, but it also allows them to illustrate how tangible and specific waste management often is.

Corporate-driven and enabled by digitalization, platform capitalism and gig economy take away workers' control over the labor process through new configurations, which poses a challenge for resistance and labor struggle. In a first-hand account of working for the food delivery platform Deliveroo, Callum Cant presents us the initial attempts of organizing worker resistance in the times of algorithmic capitalism in the case of Deliveroo workers' strike in Brighton, UK. Cant conducts a labor process analysis of the Deliveroo platform and demonstrates not only the developments in the technical aspect of capital accumulation through the lean platform of Deliveroo, but also the political challenges of organizing class struggle from a workers' perspective. While the workers organize themselves for direct action through invisible organizations, with the assistance of in-person and digitally mediated communication, Cant's ethnographic account shows how

collective resistance can be fragile due to class fractions leading to a loss of control over the labor process by workers and limited gains.

Transformations of work towards digitalization, as this section has shown, are often designed to benefit capital, coming with precarious flexibility, substitution of workers by technology, and new forms of exploitation. Furthermore, digitalization aimed at producing more will come with higher biophysical throughput and might prevent possibilities for repair or waste prevention in the first place. It is a radically different understanding of work and economy that is needed for socio-ecological transformation, to which we now turn.

Transforming work and economy with care

Transforming work and economy for ecologically sustainable and socially just futures requires a fundamental change in the mode of production. Collective and democratic forms of ownership would reconnect workers to the means of production (Marx, 1867/1996), allowing to put justice and integrity at the core of the organizing of work. However, it is not enough to focus only on changing the relations of production. The very purpose of societies needs to be reoriented from profit-making to life-making, recognizing the sphere of social reproduction as essential for it (Barca, 2020; Fraser, 2014). This would have implications for the purpose of economies and work, with 'care' being a key concept to describe such a reorientation (Dengler, 2017). Instead of the current focus on perpetual expansion, the role of the economy would be to satisfy needs and ensure well-being. It is work that serves these purposes that would be valued most. At the same time, work would leave the social pedestal that it occupies today, defining much less how we are seen in society. It is no surprise that work has been at the center of demands for radically re-organizing our societies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to the capital-led trend of work digitalization outlined in the previous section, multiple voices have been calling for organizing work differently (e.g. Degrowth New Roots collective, 2020; Democratizing Work, 2020), which we address broadly in the

conclusion. Two studies in the issue also bring refreshing views concerning the relationship between work, care and economy.

Mariya Ivancheva and Kathryn Keating's article shows that repositioning care as a central activity in all human production and reproduction, within and outside paid labor, allows for a sharper critical analysis that helps to unpack potential venues of exploitation and liberation. For them, while precarity is usually opposed to stability, stable working and living conditions have historically been available to a minority of people engaged in productive work and free of care commitments, with the work of women and other marginalized groups often made more precarious, due to their labor not being given an equal value. Introducing the issue of precarious living conditions into the discussion of precarious labor, the authors argue, highlights how precarious lives of people with care responsibilities, who need flexibility in order to navigate their lives, can be destabilized by stability at work. The authors insist on the necessity to put solidarity, care, and love back into our workplaces in order to resist capitalist competitiveness and alienation, but also warn against the risk of such care labor being exploited by capitalist appropriation.

Enrico Beltramini's article, in turn, helps us to infer that for transforming work and the economy, we also need to transform the understanding of management, which is key to how work is organized and divided. Drawing on the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, Beltramini connects the practice of management to the notion of economy or 'oikonomia' (understood as household management) rather than to the notion of politics. Agamben's conceptualization of management as oikonomia allows it to be recast as a type of praxis that is inherently domestic rather than political. Arguing that management derives from economy, Agamben suggests that management is not knowledge or science, but action, belonging to the economic-administrative rather than the political-juridical paradigm. This reading of management helps to problematize the superior position of management in organizing work, and opens for more democratic organization of the latter. At the same time, it does not discharge the notion of management completely, leaving space for the role of management in the transformation to an economy based on care.

The art of resistance and action for alternatives

The capital-driven trends in reconfigurations of work are at odds with the alternative visions of work and economy based on care. The COVID-19 pandemic points to a crack in the system and creates a momentum to act for radical change. While collective action becomes highly difficult in the current situation, it is not impossible (Chattopadhyay et al., 2020). Throughout 2020, we have seen a whole range of powerful collective actions, within and outside workplaces – such as workers striking at Amazon to resist horrible working conditions, women in Poland fighting for their reproductive rights, and the Black Lives Matter campaigners demanding to defund the police. During this time, however, progressive visions and social movements have to compete with the interests of the state, capital, and reactionary movements (Pleyers, 2020). Thus, it becomes crucial to find ways to organize creatively, and also to join forces by forging activist alliances. For example, climate and labor movements should come together to argue for a type of climate action that also pursues transformation of economies and work, which would ensure a just transition (Barca and Leonardi, 2018). Three contributions to this issue can help inform such collective action by bringing attention to leadership work in social movements, to the often-problematic role of social media in movement campaigns, and to the importance of policies and governance.

In doing all this, it is crucial to reflect on collective actions and positionalities, acting upon any closures created in the process. Leadership, in particular, is an important but also sensitive terrain in social movement organizing. Ruth Simsa and Marion Totter's article delves into the challenges and complexities of 'good leadership' work in social movement organizations by drawing on the case of the Spanish Indignados movement (15M). In conversation with the critical leadership studies literature and by empirically referring to interviews with activists, the authors provide a freshening framing of leadership in social movement organizations, which is autonomous, reflexive, and rule-based. The authors argue that we need a nuanced perspective in relation to the perceptions of leaderless protests, since the activists and social movement organizations have their clear expectations and objectives not from particular individuals/leaders per se,

but from the function of leadership work that serves the needs of the activists.

A combination of different methods and tactics can be used in social movement action, from small-scale interconnected grassroots action to bigger campaigns, acting in physical spaces. Digital means for organizing can also be used for organizing and campaigning, and may prove particularly helpful in times of the pandemic. However, it is important to be aware of their limitations, including social acceleration and distraction associated with them, their embeddedness in structures of capital accumulation, and energy and material requirements for using technology. Frankie Mastrangelo's note problematizes the role of social media in social movements today, showing how even when directed at resistance it can contribute to neoliberal worldviews. This is shown using the example of the immigrants' rights movement in the US and, in particular, the digital campaign for solidarity with undocumented immigrants that unfolded after the election of Donald Trump in 2016. While the campaign articulated a powerful message and fostered a national conversation on the topic, it was also reproducing neoliberal reasoning, such as arguing for the rights of undocumented migrants via presenting them as pursuers of the American dream. Mastrangelo's analysis is by no means intended to undermine activists' efforts. Instead, it calls for activists to learn to detect and prevent reproduction of neoliberal assumptions and practices within social movements.

With policies at different levels arguably being necessary to make a transformation happen, efforts of movements also need to be made to separate policies of the state from those of capital (Koch, 2020), as well as to advance and popularize transformative policy proposals. The article by Lucy Ford and Gabriela Kuetting brings attention to the problem that despite biophysical and social limits to growth, global environmental governance such as the Sustainable Development Goals has economic growth and economy at the center. The authors argue that both scholarship and praxis surrounding this broad field need to recognize the limits to growth, and to devise governance mechanisms that would go to the root of the problem. The academic-activist discussion on degrowth, according to them, presents a

frame with a coherent set of values and ideas that can offer an important contribution to global environmental governance. Instances when the limits of growth are somewhat recognized within the discourse of institutions such as the World Bank and the OECD, in turn, point to cracks in mainstream rhetoric. It is important to act upon these cracks, whilst making sure not to lose the broader picture of the scope of change needed for socio-ecological transformation.

What is to be done for the ‘new normal’?

While there is a light at the end of the tunnel thanks to the research programs on vaccinations, we are still in the dark when it comes to the conditions of the post-pandemic world. The contributions in this issue, on the other hand, invite us to reconsider what kind of a ‘new normal’ we can construct through transformations of work, economy, care and organization, and they are not alone. In May 2020, an open letter titled *Work: Democratize firms, decommmodify, remediate* was published in various newspapers around the world (Democratizing work, 2020). Backed up by 6000 scholarly signatures, it argued for democratizing firms, decommodifying work, and remediating the environment (*ibid.*). The letter advocated saving certain sectors from the market, via schemes such as job guarantees, and democratizing workplaces, though without questioning the very ownership structure of these firms (Gerold et al., 2020). Calls for more fundamental transformations of work – and societies – are driven by degrowth and feminist voices as well as alliances between them (see also Paulson, 2020).

Published around the same time, the open letter of the degrowth movement was signed by more than 2000 activists and scholars and by multiple organizations (Degrowth New Roots collective, 2020). It advocated fostering collective forms of organizational ownership and argued to ‘radically reevaluate how much and what work is necessary for a good life for all’, including reduction of working time, just transition for workers from destructive industries and an emphasis on care work. The latter was most vocally articulated in yet another open letter from the Global Women’s Strike and Women of Color (2020), which called for a care income for ‘all

those, of every gender, who care for people, the urban and rural environment, and the natural world'. It stressed how work of care – invisible, mostly unpaid, with more than two thirds of it done by women – is crucial for the functioning of our societies, but never gets supported by governments. These two proposals complement each other and address the two splits characteristic of capitalist production. Locating work in collectively owned and run organizations restores the connection of workers to their means of production (Marx, 1867/1996). Care income, in turn, helps to reconnect the spheres of production and social reproduction (Barca, 2020; Fraser, 2014).

Furthermore, the degrowth movement letter included a broader demand to reorganize societies around the provision of basic needs and services, putting life at the center of societies and economies (Degrowth New Roots collective, 2020). As articulated in a statement by the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliances network that preceded it, this implies building 'a caring economy that democratizes all dimensions of life, delinks livelihood security from wage-work, equitably revalues both paid and unpaid care work and promotes its gender-just redistribution' (FaDA, 2020). There are many ways in which this can be done, with calls for a universal basic income, universal basic services, and a care income growing louder during the pandemic.

In response to the urgency of socio-ecological transformation, through various theoretical and practical interventions, this open issue indeed can help to address the question of 'what is to be done' in order to construct a new normal. Yet, the burning follow-up question of 'how is it to be done' clearly requires more answers from us all. In that sense, this issue invites scholars and activists to explore a number of pressing inquiries such as: How can we reconfigure work in a way that allows for flexibility and freedom without relying on sinister modes of disciplining and self-management? Or, how can we make digitalization work in the service of progressive ends and bypass problems of surveillance, polarization, acceleration and exacerbating environmental degradation? And finally, how might we build alternative modes of organization that can gain broad support and do not lend themselves easily to neoliberal co-optation? Such questions and concerns will obviously not be answered in the definitive any day soon, but pursuing

them is precisely what characterizes a society that is ready for a new era, in which solidarity and autonomy are finally reconciled.

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acknowledgement

As the issue editors we would like to thank our reviewers. Without their labour and support, this issue would not have happened.

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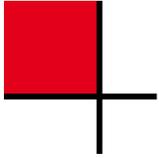
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From the smart factory to the self-organisation of capital: 'Industrie 4.0' as the cybernetisation of production

Simon Schaupp and Ramon Diab

abstract

Governments and private sectors have collaborated on national initiatives that will introduce 'cyberphysical systems' and the 'industrial internet of things' to the sphere of production in a new wave of capitalist development currently referred to in Germany as 'Industrie 4.0'. We refer to the historical and technical development of the means of control within the capitalist mode of production that began with scientific management, management cybernetics, digital process control, and now Industrie 4.0, as the *cybernetisation of production*. This article analyses the German context of Industrie 4.0 as a new regime of production. Data drawn from a series of semi-structured interviews with managers and engineers of Industrie 4.0 companies reveal current developments and future visions for the digital transformation of German industry. Based on these data and some theoretical considerations, we argue that Industrie 4.0 is designed to automate the self-organisation of industrial capital in 'smart factories'. This will shift the personal control of middle management toward the more direct and immediate cybernetic control of market forces over the production process. The article concludes that as direct labour and managerial labour is replicated, extended and/or entirely replaced with autonomous machines, the cybernetisation of production is advancing capital's real subsumption of the labour process toward capital's autonomisation from labour-power, which is creating new *autonomous forms of production*.

Introduction¹

The digital transformation of industrialised societies is projected to affect several sectors, including healthcare, business, government and consumption. However, it is industrial capitalists' appropriation of cyberphysical systems, the internet of things, big data and cloud technologies in the sphere of production that has received significant public attention, prompting responses ranging from business hype to new areas of academic research (Kirazli et al., 2015). The digitalisation² of manufacturing is driven by industrial capital's demand for even greater forms of 'flexibility' in the production process, which the sellers of advanced digital systems promise to deliver by further integrating digital and physical entities into 'cyberphysical systems'. Governments and private sectors have developed their own national initiatives to communicate and implement the digitalisation of manufacturing. For example, in the United States, the National Network for Manufacturing has enacted an initiative called 'Advanced Manufacturing Partnership 2.0', the United Kingdom has introduced 'Catapult-High Value Manufacturing', and China is pursuing its 'Made in China 2025' initiative. Private sector initiatives include the Industrial Internet Consortium in the United States and the Industrial Value Chain Initiative in Japan (Oks et al., 2017). This article focuses on the German context where this trend is referred to as 'Industrie 4.0'.

While it appears that previous industrial revolutions have been driven by the development of new forms of energy and the reorganisation of production, Industrie 4.0 involves digitalising and networking all industrial capital for the purpose of increasing various aspects of automation and cyberphysical control over the direct production process, management of the labour process, and feedback from industrial and consumer demand. This article begins with a historical review of the scientific, technical and management

1 This paper was submitted to *ephemera* in September 2017 and accepted for publication in October 2018. It was first published online in September 2019.

2 We distinguish between digitisation and digitalisation in the following sense: *Digitisation* describes the transformation of data into a digital form whereas *digitalisation* describes the process of restructuring social life around digital communication and media infrastructures (Seibt et al., 2019).

paradigms that have developed the human and non-human means of feedback over the labour process. We refer to this as the historical process of the *cybernetisation of production*, which creates new forms of *cybernetic work* and leads toward full automation of the labour process. As cyberphysical systems are rooted in the control logic of cybernetics, we therefore suggest that Industrie 4.0 is the technical realisation of capital's self-organisation, extending from the shop floor to the top floor of 'smart factories'.

The article then analyses empirical data from an ongoing research project to illustrate the historical continuity of Industrie 4.0 as part of the contemporary process of the cybernetisation of production. The empirical data stem from a series of 20 semi-structured 'comprehensive interviews' (Kaufmann, 2015). Interviewees were managers and engineers of companies based in the German high-tech industry areas of Bavaria and Baden Württemberg who consider themselves to be part of Industrie 4.0. The cases were selected to generate an overview of the vision pursued by engineers and managers of industrial organisations as exemplars of the digital transformations of Industrie 4.0. The data were analysed with the coding software *dedoose* according to the standards of qualitative content analysis. The code system followed the theoretical research question but was, in its concrete form, derived inductively from the material (Kuckartz, 2016). Drawing on the empirical data, we argue that the introduction of the industrial internet of things and cyberphysical systems to the sphere of production will advance industrial capital's self-organisation of the production process. Industrie 4.0 therefore could advance what Marx referred to as capital's real subsumption of the labour process toward a third and final stage that we refer to as capital's *autonomisation from labour-power*, which we suggest could lead to a new *autonomous mode of production*.

Industrie 4.0: A new production regime

In Germany, the label 'Industrie 4.0' was created by politicians, entrepreneurs and engineers who founded the public and private sector coalition 'Plattform Industrie 4.0'. This includes among others the German ministry for education and research and promotes the concept of an emerging fourth industrial

revolution. The German ending ‘-ie’ was internationally defended by its patriotic inventors, who coined the label, hoping to recapture raw materials produced in low-wage countries, and with that, an increase of profit margins. Fuchs has suggested that Industrie 4.0 is ultimately rooted in German industrial capital’s demand for lower labour costs, which it hopes to achieve through automation (Fuchs, 2018). As an example of what Fuchs has referred to as the new ‘digital German ideology’, a manager of an Industrie 4.0 company describes the overall mood in German industry as a ‘pioneering spirit, a revolutionary mood’ and divides the positions towards the trend into ‘hesitators versus entrepreneurs’. The German business magazine *Wirtschaftswoche* recommends investing in Industrie 4.0 enterprises and declares the development as non-negotiable. As noted by *Deloitte & Touche*: ‘the trend is irreversible: What can be connected, will be. The technical and economic logic will not allow anything else’ (Hajek, 2016: 75). Plattform Industrie 4.0 therefore expresses an ideology that has gained high performative power accompanied by a concrete, though protracted, digitalisation of industry.

The entanglement of state-driven ideology and the technological development of industry is best grasped by Burawoy’s (1985) notion of a *production regime*. According to Burawoy, a production regime refers to the intersection of state politics and the politics of production that regulates industry. By extension, we argue that, through the implementation of networked digital technologies, Industrie 4.0 is part of the historical process of the cybernetisation of production that represents the tendency of industrial capital to become increasingly autonomous from the labour-capital relation. This leads toward a cybernetic regime (Schaupp, 2017a). The following analysis develops this argument by discussing how middle managers became capital’s early means of delivering feedback to the labour process, which would eventually be replicated, extended and/or replaced with automation technologies as the means of cybernetic control over the labour process.

The cybernetisation of production

The introduction of scientific management to the assembly line in the early twentieth century focused initially on the production of a greater mass of products in the same or smaller amount of time by calculating the number of products produced within the labour process. Scientific management physically restricted options for deviating practices on the side of the workers and was therefore often quoted as the prime example for technical control (Edwards, 1979). At about the same time, large industrial companies began to introduce differentiated rules and procedures, fostering a top-down hierarchical order that was described as bureaucratic control (*ibid.*). Both technical and bureaucratic control became the basis for scientific management, which developed in the Fordist era as a result of the division of manual labour of production from the cognitive labour of management and planning (Braverman, 1974). The replication of this division of labour in turn further divided social development of the technical aspects of manual and cognitive labour.

Grids, graphs, and other informational tools for measuring the labour process provided management the means of objectifying, and thus representing, various aspects of the labour process in *data*. Scientific management included measurements of the labour process such as Taylor's 'time studies'. These measures would become coupled with the motion studies of Gilbreth when managers calculated the physical motion of the labour process in relation to the number of products produced in a given amount of time for the purpose of identifying inefficient activity (Gilbreth and Kent, 1921; Taylor, 1913). These forms of analyses were used for the systematic measurement of productivity in the labour process in order to physically alter it for the purpose of increasing productivity, and therefore, total output. The forms of managerial action taken as a result of these measures were therefore an early form of data-driven feedback. Hence, scientific management's systematic and detailed collection of data from the labour process foreshadowed the logic of cybernetic control in industrial production, but in a form more heavily reliant on human managers. Central hierarchical order, however, was still personified at its core by the figure of the manager, inspiring Edwards (1979: 132) to write about a 'managerial revolution'. In this respect, industrial capital developed

its own human means of control over the labour process through the division, reorganisation, and thus, development of the productive forces of labour in the historical stage of capital's real subsumption of the labour process. This meant that managers functioned as capital's means of control over the direct labour process through the open-loop of managerial feedback. Thus, we suggest that the development of managerial labour is capital's historical development of the means of enforcing the technical requirements of valorisation within the production process.

As Noble (2011) noted, the history of the 'automatic factory' began with the development of the process industries in the early twentieth century. These were developed on the principles of process control that were objectified in the development of industrial automation technologies that replicated, extended and/or replaced the labour-power of the direct production process. As Noble (2011: 59) described it, 'all continuous process production demanded unprecedented devices-sensors and effectors (actuators) for carefully monitoring and adjusting direct production operations too complex for complete human oversight and manual control'. However, early computerisation meant that process manufacturing still relied on the decisions of human operators to monitor and respond to the production process based on the information produced by computers, which is understood as an open-loop form of feedback. Hence, early process control was neither about physically restricting options – as in technical control – nor about bureaucratic top-down order. Rather, its primary goal was the development of computer monitoring combined with human control in the direct production process. With the development of closed-loop automation in the process industries, automation technologies that were produced and used as the means of control of the direct production process were developed to replicate, extend and/or replace the labour-power of managerial feedback.

The principles of control were later formalised with the development of cybernetics, an interdisciplinary science that was shaped by neurophysiology, information theory, statistical mechanics, psychiatry, physics, biology, anthropology and other sub-disciplines in the natural and social sciences (Kline, 2015). Cybernetics was conceived and promoted during the well-publicised Macy conferences in the post-wartime era of the late 1940s and

1950s by natural and social scientists such as Norbert Wiener, Claude Shannon, Ross Ashby, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson who had aspirations to develop it as a universal science of control and communication (Wiener, 1948). Early cybernetic theory was initially derived from observations on the self-organisation of biological systems that 'automatically' adapt to changes in the environment instead of first making a cognitive plan or hierarchical instruction. Its epistemology relied on models, analogies and other abstract representations of complex systems for the purpose of interdisciplinary comparison, including, for example, modelling the human nervous system as an electronic machine and vice versa.

At its core, cybernetics used prediction and filtering to combine communications and control engineering (Kline, 2015: 22). Feedback loops were designed to bring a given system to a state that cyberneticists call homeostasis. For this, at least two entities influence each other through mutual feedback until they reach a state of equilibrium. Homeostasis, however, was not conceptualised as a static optimum. Rather, homeostasis was considered a dynamic process of optimisation through adaptation, referred to as the *Viable System Model* (Beer, 1959). With the development of management cybernetics, industrial managers adapted cybernetic principles to the design and management of human communication in organisations, while engineers objectified the general principles of cybernetic control in the production of machines designed to replicate, extend and/or replace both the productive forces of labour and managerial feedback in industrial production.

Introduction of industrial cyberphysical systems to the production process

Contemporary automation technologies have been designed to introduce cyberphysical control to the direct labour process and connect it to higher level planning through digital networks, automated data collection, processing and feedback (Hirsch-Kreinsen, 2016: 2). Industrial cyberphysical systems (ICPS) were developed primarily by the engineering community and involve the integration of automation technologies with mechanical, electrical or chemical production processes (Feeney et al., 2017: 81). In the

1970s, the first industrial applications of cyberphysical systems were called ‘computer-integrated manufacturing’ (CIM). Another early application of ICPS was called ‘mechatronics’, which referred to the integration of mechanical processes and information technology (Jeschke et al., 2017). Finally, another closely related ICPS technology is ‘embedded systems’, which rely on a cyberphysical control relation between sensors that collect information from the physical environment and actuators that translate numerical values into physical effects (Marwedel, 2011).

We present two empirical examples of industrial cyberphysical systems that are being developed as part of Industrie 4.0 at the level of the labour-process. The first is a ‘smart glove’, a wearable cyberphysical system used for manual operations within the labour process. The smart glove contains a microcomputer attached to the back of the hand and sensors integrated within the sections designated for each finger. The control functions include barcode scanning, documentation of workflow, and feedback. As the developer explained, the smart glove was designed for a variety of purposes including:

To give the worker an instant feedback on his actions, on his working steps, so if an error occurs, if something happens, he gets informed directly on his body. I think that’s the best aspect of wearables in this case. As it is attached to his body, that means that he does not have to focus on some external screen, for his working station. He has the feedback in an instance whether it was the right part that he picked or the wrong part. We confirm the right parts and scan it into the system by green light and we have a buzzer, a sound, if something went wrong.

The developer emphasised the immediacy of cyberphysical feedback that the smart glove provides the worker. For example, a manager may be delayed in noticing the inefficient use of a screwdriver in a particular workflow, in which case there will be a lag between the current state of the workflow and the feedback needed to optimize the labour process. In contrast, if a worker is wearing the ‘smart glove’, it provides immediate haptic feedback to adjust the labour process instantaneously. Hence, instantaneous feedback from labour’s use of the means of production cyber-physically manages the physical motion of work in the labour process. The efficiencies gained by the introduction of cyberphysical systems to the direct labour process therefore appear due to the immediacy of cyberphysical feedback, which reduces ‘lag’ between input

events and feedback caused by slow data processing. From the developer's perspective, the immediacy of feedback enables more efficient self-organisation of the workflow, which he praised as one of the central benefits of his technology:

On the one hand, you can give the management more tools ... to optimise processes or to get a feeling of what is happening. And on the other hand, you give the worker more power for self-organised working. ... Because by giving him more information you can enable him in the end to organise his work better.

In the first step, the interviewee postulates management's demand for data about the labour process as the precondition for optimizing production. In the second step, he delegates this optimisation to the interplay of the worker and the glove. As the developer explained, the purpose behind introducing the smart glove to the labour process is not to suggest that, 'oh he [the worker] is not doing it right, but rather, to see how the worker makes his workarounds because there was maybe some misconception, something that you maybe have not thought of while designing the working station'. Thus, rather than develop the labour process from the interaction of human managers and workers, the interviewee describes a labour process that is developed from the interaction of cyberphysical systems and workers.

The second cyberphysical system is the 'smart workplace', a desk for industrial technical developers. The smart workplace is equipped with an integrated computer that tracks and documents every work step that is performed and automatically adjusts the workplace to the user, for example, by giving workers certain access rights and denying others. As the manager of the company that is both producing and using the smart workplace explained:

[The worker] gets the light he needs; he can access what he is allowed to access. If it is someone else, another light turns on, he cannot access the computer and everything remains closed. ... Or if I say, it's afternoon, from now on I need motivation light, then the computer does that, it adjusts the motivation light.

The control logic of the smart workstation is such that the work environment adjusts for each worker individually. The system registers the tasks the worker is given, it registers what the worker is actually doing, and it subsequently

automatically reacts to this input data with cyberphysical feedback. For example, if either the worker or the machine registers that performance is declining, the system may counter-steer performance by projecting a 'motivation light', or the system may physically restrict access to workstation features while enabling others. Thus, the smart workplace operates by entangling the employee within a bi-directional feedback loop that links worker status to the performance requirements of the production process.

In the interviews, managers and engineers referred to the cybernetic theory of control rather implicitly in most instances. In some cases, however, they explicitly stated the origin of their ideas. As one management consultant explained:

I think this [the cybernetic] model has to be there! At least in all instances where you don't have a simple homeostatic control circuit. In organisations and especially in management systems you have to apply the Viable Systems Model and I would say, digitalisation already goes in this direction.

The relation of these cyberphysical systems to workers and developers is such that feedback from these systems to the workers adjusts the workers' execution of tasks while feedback from the worker to the system adjusts the developer's work plans. On this point, the interviewees expressed ambivalence concerning worker autonomy with respect to our discussion of the 'smart workplace' for developers in mechanical engineering. For example, a manager emphasised the possibilities for traditional forms of surveillance and control that his technologies offer when he claimed, 'I track everything'. The tracking of all data suggests that digital process control does not seem to overcome the traditional model of surveillance, but actually enhances the technical possibilities of surveillance. The manager continued by stating, 'I was shocked myself' about the extent of surveillance that was technically possible, but he also stated that he didn't want to use the data for repression. Rather, the intention behind the technology was to develop the self-adjustment of the worker: to '*tune himself*' and to 'recognise for himself, I am worse than the others' (our emphasis). This paradoxically makes it possible for managers to use sensor technology to increase machine-driven surveillance and control over the labour process while increasing worker autonomy from human management.

The manager we interviewed expressed hope that the employee will engage in self-optimisation based on data-driven feedback. However, this is only possible if the employee is motivated in some way to actually work with the feedback the system provides. Indeed, the manager noted that the motivation to ‘tune oneself’ cannot be created through technology alone. Rather, motivation was conceptualised as an organisational achievement that is created through a process of reinforcement. The more the worker uses machine-managed autonomy responsibly, and in alignment with the goals of the organisation, the more likely the possibility of increasing worker autonomy from human management. As the manager explained:

On the one hand, we decide some things in advance, but on the other hand ... you can also report errors, you can intervene, you can make suggestions for improvement, you can do everything, but please, digitally.

This development strategy appears to target increasing technological control over the labour process while at the same time increasing the responsibility of labour. Hence, in management rhetoric, this apparent contradiction is expressed in the metaphor of the worker ‘tuning himself’ to the technology. Interestingly, workers as well as managers expressed a feeling that they may lose control over their own decisions to machines, which does not seem to be a coincidence.

Integration of the industrial internet of things with industrial cyberphysical systems

In contrast to the cyberphysical paradigm, the internet of things (IoT) paradigm originated in the computer science community. As it has been well documented, the Internet first began as a US military project with the development of the ARPANET nodes in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Levine, 2018). While these nodes were later expanded to the university system, and eventually, to the commercial sector, it was not until 1999 that the phrase ‘the internet of things’ was first used to refer to the use of computers for producing knowledge about ‘things’ and the efficiencies this knowledge could bring to industry. Early applications of the ‘industrial internet of things’ (IIoT) were used to organise and control the flow of data and people with technologies

such as product data management and product lifecycle management (Jeschke et al., 2017: 5). Therefore, ICPS refers to information technologies that are applied to the direct production process and the IIoT refers to information technologies that are applied to overall production planning and management and that may integrate with ICPS technologies. On this point, it has been suggested that the objective of the IIoT is to fully digitise and network all 'things' and processes in factories for the purpose of creating digital or 'smart factories' (Krumeich, 2016). Wang et al. conceptualize smart factories as a dual closed-loop system in which 'one loop consists of physical resources connected to a 'cloud', while the other loop consists of supervisory control terminals and cloud' (Wang et al., 2016: 159). This dual closed-loop system connects smart objects on the shop floor with control technologies at the management level which are in turn connected to global smart factory monitoring and control systems. With respect to the intended purpose of designing and implementing higher-level production planning systems in smart factories, the interviewees have stated that their systems will eliminate the influence of human managers in order to make production 'organise itself'.

One developer of a cyberphysical system – who aims to connect different levels of industrial control systems from the point of enterprise resource planning (ERP) to the point of control over individual operations – explained that the efficiency gains his system provides are specifically due to the replacement of human planning and decision making with automated data analytics:

*You don't have any management -influence. Especially with the keyword 'lot size one', it is exactly about this *planning organising itself*, that you always have enough material, that the material is there in time, that the machines are always running. Management decisions only occur if I either have a scarcity of resources or in case of some exceptional situations. (our emphasis)*

The claim here is that it is precisely the replacement of human production planning with automated data analytics that increases production efficiency. The IIoT may also reduce production time by predicting machine maintenance and by tailoring commodity production more precisely to the requirements of both industrial and consumer demand, which suggests that

Industrie 4.0 will automate several aspects of the lean manufacturing paradigm (Sanders et al., 2016).

As suggested by the interview data, the introduction of smart glove and smart workstation technologies to the labour process may be considered part of an overall development strategy of Industrie 4.0 that includes the automation of production planning. On this point, it is important to examine the relation between the 'self-organisation of the means of production' and its effect on the autonomy of labour within the production process. Interviewees have suggested that the design and implementation of machines that replace the organising function of human management is leading toward the self-organisation of labour. As one researcher who is developing a cyberphysical system for 'self-organised workforce allocation' noted:

Self-organisation on the technical level is an important topic. We focus on the need for humans and machines to communicate with each other in Industrie 4.0. Through the connection of sensors and actors a lot of self-steering becomes possible, theoretically. The machines will become ever more intelligent, so that for the employees the challenge will mainly be to follow how the participating systems have coordinated themselves, which states have been communicated and how did the intelligent software decide why to produce these orders in that way.

In this, however, the interviewee sees a big challenge,

...for the human being to stay on one level with technology. Because the technology controls in ever more intelligent ways and organises itself. How can the human being participate in this self-organisation? This actually is the central question. In [our project] the idea was that the employees just also organise themselves, almost as a supplement to the machinic or IT-self-steering.

Similar to the possibility of automating planning with artificial intelligence, these points illustrate the paradox of the subordination of human reflexivity to the technological rationalisation of the labour process on the one hand, and, on the other, the potential empowerment of labour as a result of increased participation in decision-making. Similar observations have led Dyer-Witheyford (2015: 51) to provocatively claim that '[t]he machine is not over and against the worker – because the worker is part of the machine'. As part of the process of the cybernetisation of production, the introduction of

ICPS and IIoT to the production process does appear to free labour on the shop floor from specific aspects of the organising function of human management while advancing capital's development of the machine management of labour. This appears to create new forms of human-machine integrated work, or *cybernetic work*.

Smart factory integration and autonomous production

The broader purpose of Industrie 4.0 within the current context of geopolitical and economic forces is to create 'more flexible organisations' that can 'better react to volatile markets'. This strategy aims to connect the production process more directly to market demand - which in turn necessarily implies heavier use of temporary and precarious employment and the 'flexibilisation' of labour. Hence, as an emerging regime of production, Industrie 4.0 resembles important aspects of another regime, which Burawoy (1985: 88-90) has called 'market despotism'. Thus, the short-term development goal of Industrie 4.0 is not only for the production process to become more technologically self-organised with the introduction of ICPS but also for production planning and management to become more rationalised with the introduction of the IIoT.

On this point, Steiner and Poledna note the rigidity of the classical 'automation pyramid' in which lower level systems focus on process controls and higher-level systems address production management (2016). Illustration 1 depicts a reconceptualisation of the automation pyramid that models the development and integration of networked digital control in smart factories. While enterprise resource planning systems such as SAP are typically based on a unidirectional flow of data and commands, the IIoT would create multi-directional feedback loops among all digital control systems. Thus, the development of smart factories would digitally integrate previously separated levels of control into one cybernetically-organised production process.

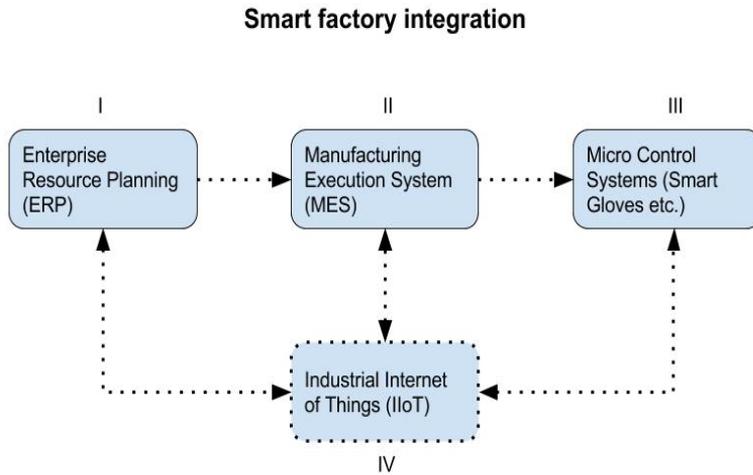


Illustration 1: Smart factory integration

In this model, ICPS are unified with the network capabilities of IIoT, which is envisioned to enable the entire production process to be self-organised (see illustration 1 above). As illustrated in the empirical data, digital control is no longer executed by an external source (e.g. such as a foreman or a video camera). Rather, control is integrated directly into the means of production equipped with sensor network technology, which is envisioned to automatically exchange data with planning systems on both meso (MES) and macro (ERP) levels. The integrated control of ICPS and IIoT in a smart factory would create a global system of planning and control in which the factory itself would become a cybernetic network of objects, humans and production processes based on the concept that ‘everything – ranging from local production processes up to global value chains shall be digitally connected and decentralised’ (Pfeiffer, 2015: 17). This would allow for big data collected from previously unconnected processes to be integrated and centrally controlled by automated databases and analytical software that generate a ‘digital thread’ of representation (McKinsey, 2015: 19) of the ‘moments of production’.

However, as previously noted, sensor technology also allows for classical forms of surveillance, which was highlighted in one of our interviews with a

works council member who noted the tendency of digitalisation toward 'total control'. This aspect has been most notably and thoroughly analysed by Zuboff (1988) as the dual capacity of information technology to both 'automate' and 'informate', and therefore deepen the managerial capacity to determine organisational behaviour. In our interviews, however, the engineers and managers did not envision that the primary purpose of digital control is to increase the human hierarchy of managerial power. On the contrary, the replacement of human production planning with automated data analytical machines, especially on the managerial level, appears to be one of their central goals. This obfuscates the possible replacement of the hierarchies of human management with hierarchies of machine management.

While the operation of smart factories may still require various forms of human management, engineering and other forms of cognitive labour for continued operation of the production process, such factories may also continue to rely on exploitation of labour involved in the direct production process as illustrated in the examples drawn from our empirical data. If the capitalist production process continues to require the exploitation of human labour, the cybernetisation of production might include automated data collection and processing that directly tracks the location, movement, and activity of workers in the labour process, or indirectly by collecting data produced from the use of digitised machinery, thereby potentially deepening labour exploitation.

However, there are visions of the self-organization of industrial capital reaching a point where labour-power is replaced entirely with machine-power in fully automated smart factories. This would require either retrofitting, or replacing entirely, all pre-existing machines with cyberphysical control systems (Roblek et al., 2016: 4) as well as digitalising and integrating cyberphysical control over the flow of all raw materials, production processes and produced commodities. Such a fully automated production process would involve all raw materials wirelessly transmitting instructions to surrounding machines that automatically and flexibly produce each commodity on demand and to specification (Siemens, 2013). We suggest that if the design and implementation of fully autonomous smart factories becomes ubiquitous to the point of raising the organic composition of capital, this process would

represent an advance of capital's real subsumption of the labour process toward a third and final stage of capital's autonomisation from labour-power³, the realisation of which could theoretically lead to the dissolution of the labour-capital relation.

Discussion

As we have outlined in this article, Industrie 4.0 is both a technological vision and a broader ideological program of German industry and state actors. It has emerged with high performative power and may eventually translate to the development of a new production regime. The development of this regime through the integration of ICPS and the IIoT within the sphere of production is what we refer to as the *cybernetisation of production*. In our interviews with engineers and managers, the stated outcomes of Industrie 4.0 were *immediate feedback* and *self-organisation*. Immediate feedback is enabled by the ubiquity of sensor technology and rapid data processing while self-organisation of the labour process is envisioned to be an outcome of this feedback. Digital cybernetic control did not introduce feedback to industrial production. Rather, its advancement has reduced the time gap between action and feedback to the point of real-time feedback. Hence, cyberphysical feedback is generated at the very instance of the evaluated action itself. It therefore intervenes directly into the production process rather than through quality control at the end of a production cycle. The engineers and managers we interviewed envisioned this as a process of self-regulation, in which production is linked directly to market feedback. As a result, managers envision a delegation of responsibility to the lower levels of the organisation and, perhaps more importantly, they envision the near elimination of production failures due to human-driven management, planning and hierarchical order (Raffetseder et al., 2017).

From the perspective of labour process theory, the introduction of technology to the labour process is traditionally interpreted as a tool of management to increase control over the workforce – or, to put it differently, to increase the

3 See Marx's (1973) description of the development of automation at the point of production in the *Grundrisse*, 704-706.

autonomy of management by decreasing the autonomy of manual labour. This is partly still the case with respect to cybernetic control, as it still includes all three elements of direction, evaluation and discipline, which, according to Edwards (1979: 18) manifests in different proportions in every system of hierarchical control of the labour process. Can we conclude that replacing the relation of managers to workers with a relation of cyberphysical systems to workers increases the 'responsible autonomy' of the workforce (Friedman, 1977)? We suggest that if the concept of responsible autonomy was based on the relation of supervisors to workers, then the replacement of managers with automated machines develops capital's autonomous control, and thus, the self-organisation of production based on a relation of networked cyberphysical machines to workers. The introduction of ICPS and the IIoT to the sphere of production cannot, therefore, be understood as an attempt to couple the agency of the worker to the will of the manager. Rather, the cybernetisation of production connects the entire organisation to the 'will of capital', precisely by eliminating the error-prone will of human managers and by connecting the production process more directly to market fluctuations.

It is important to keep in mind that the development of Industrie 4.0 will by no means unfold as a frictionless process. As David Noble (2011: 324) maintains:

...machines are never themselves the decisive forces of production, only their reflection. At every point, these technological developments are mediated by social power and domination, by irrational fantasies of omnipotence, by legitimating notions of progress, and by the contradictions rooted in the technological projects themselves and the social relations of production.

Indeed, the current status of Industrie 4.0 must be analysed as an emerging ideology that is currently found primarily in the heads of industrial capitalists, managers and technocrats rather than in a fully realised regime of production. Industrie 4.0 is very likely to encounter a wide array of organisational industrial variability, advances and regressions, starts and stops, dysfunctionalities, and various forms of worker resistance that challenge the logic of the cybernetisation of production. Middle managers could also potentially lose either organisational power, or their jobs entirely with the ubiquitous development of smart factories. Therefore, managers

could have an interest in using the digital technologies of process control for classical surveillance rather than for developing the autonomy of the labour process. Hence, as the cybernetisation of production could reduce the autonomy of both manual workers and managers, deviations from the optimistic visions that have been articulated in the interviews are to be expected from both sides.

Given these considerations, we suggest that in the short-term, the cybernetisation of production will continue to require a relative mix of the human agency of cybernetic work and human managerial forms of hierarchical control. In the long-term, however, a gradual realisation of full automation at the point of production would affect the rate of unemployment and therefore the domestic effective demand needed by industry to sustain revenues, a consequence that not only affects the social conditions of the working class but the very self-interests and sustainability of industrial and financial capital. Considering the scale of the digital transformation of industry, its subsequent effect on the transformation of class composition could be significant and far-reaching. It is for this reason that the broader effect of Industrie 4.0 on class conditions should be given broad and significant research attention.

When we asked a manager of a German automobile producer whether he sees any risk in the current digital transformation of their industry, he replied:

I don't see any problems for the company. These are rather societal problems. With all of this automation we might have to think about a basic income at some point.

When asked if there were any discussions about these issues within their company, he said there were not. Rather, he suggested these discussions would, 'only start when people can't afford our cars anymore'. However, there is still no empirical evidence for technological unemployment, at least in the German labour market. What can be proven empirically are drastic changes in working conditions, especially with respect to the intensification of work and further employee polarisation in terms of qualifications (Butollo et al., 2017). Thus, while the idea of a universal basic income has been put forward mostly from the side of employers, employees and unions may instead demand a

reduction in working hours to counterbalance the digital intensification of work.

On this front, future research might direct its attention to the relation between smart factory automation and the reduction or elimination of working hours, the effects of changes in employment on class composition and the growing political movement for a universal basic income. Finally, while this article has presented a preliminary examination of the cybernetisation of production, this is only a recent development that has been preceded historically by the digitalisation of the circulation and consumption sphere as the other two ‘moments of capital’ (Fuchs, 2013; Manzerolle and Kjösen, 2012). Further research into the cybernetisation of these other ‘moments of capital’ could yield critical insight into conceptualising the motion of the circuits of capital in relation to the motion of the circuits of big data, or the formation that has been referred to as a globally-interconnected ‘cybernetic capitalism’ (Diab, 2017; Dyer-Witthford, 2015; Schaupp, 2017b).

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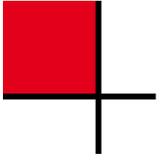
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Downshifting: Boundary management for the privileged few?

Rachel L Cockman and Laylah Pyke

abstract

Downshifting is presented in some parts of the academic literature as a strategy for individuals to take back control of their lives, by containing paid work and reaping the benefits in time and quality of life. In this critical reading of the literature, a Foucauldian power relations perspective is utilised in which downshifting is presented as a discursive strategy. By paying sustained attention to power relations, this paper makes visible and questions the taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding representations of downshifting and later draws on boundary theory to problematize its proclaimed emancipatory potential. It contributes to existing work-life theorising by suggesting that the emphasis on decision-making enables the obfuscation of the socio-political context of our lives, thus, we argue that existing inequalities will ensure that downshifting is a strategy only a few can achieve.

Introduction

Work-life balance is increasingly seen as both important and difficult to achieve as lives become more demanding and complex. This critical reading of the literature addresses one phenomenon that has emerged as a strategy for achieving work-life balance: downshifting. Downshifting is a concept in which the academic community appears to have little appetite, but which has nevertheless steadfastly remained of interest in the public domain. In popular accounts, downshifting is associated with a reduction in work and

consequent benefits in time and quality of life. Downshifting is understood to be a response to increasingly demanding working lives, in which simpler lives are sought involving reductions in income, consumption and environmental impacts (Gottberg, 2015; Kasdagli, 2014; Fergusson, 2016). At the heart of which are families, specifically the desires of downshiffters to spend more time with their children (Behson, 2014; McSmith, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2016).

This paper takes the form of a critical reading of the academic literature in which we aim to provide a critical reflection on the emancipatory framework that surrounds the representations of downshifting in this literature. The question we discuss is; is downshifting really a solution to increasingly demanding lives? Should we consider downshifting as positive and inclusive, or should we be alert to the possibility that it is ultimately an indicator of an increasingly polarized labour market and an option for the privileged few? This question will be explored by making visible the taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding representations of downshifting in the literature. To do so, downshifting is interrogated as a discursive strategy, in which multiple discursive elements compete and contradict one another to construct understandings and create space for alternatives (Foucault, 1976). We extend our critical reflection by theorising downshifting as a boundary management strategy. As such, we argue that the emancipatory ideals associated with downshifting, are unlikely to be achieved. In the next sections we outline our approach to the literature.

Power, discourse and downshifting

Within the work-life literature the notion of choice and of individuals as free and choosing subjects is inherent. People are understood to be 'both rational and transparent' to themselves (Deetz, 2003: 24). Thus, downshifting is understood to be a voluntary self-serving decision. Yet, if a power relations perspective is adopted, the notion of a free and choosing subject is shattered, for the subject and its desires are understood to be produced, the result of processes of power (Deetz, 2003; Butler, 1997; Oksala, 1998; Mayo, 2000; Foucault, 1982).

Within such a perspective discourses are understood to be both the result of power relations and to be themselves powerful. They are more than representational (Deetz, 2003; Foucault, 1986; Mumby, 2011), with the capacity to both constrain and enable thinking and actions (Ball, 2013, 2014; Danahar et al., 2000; Adams, 2012). They are situated, in and of their time, socially, historically, economically, politically, contextual. Discourses create the conditions for what is sayable, writeable, doable, thinkable, yet they are always incomplete, always fragmented, always offering space for alternative possibilities (Ball, 2013; Foucault, 1976, 1986).

Discourses are therefore, not prescriptive, but they both legitimise and marginalise. Foucault wrote that ‘we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies’ (1976: 100). Discourse analysis from this perspective, is interested in what discourses do, rather than the signs and language of which they are comprised (Ball, 2013; Foucault, 1986). It acknowledges that discursive strategies are fluid and unstable, comprised of competing and contradictory elements. It recognises that while they construct taken-for-granted understandings about whom and what is acceptable or appropriate, they also enable resistance and create opportunities for other understandings to be constructed (Foucault, 1976).

This perspective enables the work-life boundary to be held in tension and downshifting to be interrogated as a discursively produced object, comprised of competing discourses, brought together to achieve a multiplicity of outcomes, including the production of particular subjects. It recognises that identities both result from and enable, the exertion of power over others and ourselves (Foucault, 1980a, 1982).

Means of investigation

In order to consider our question: is downshifting really a solution to increasingly demanding lives? We began by identifying relevant academic literature. Keyword searches were made in library catalogues, using the term

‘downshifting’. Newspaper articles, reflections, books and ‘grey literature’ such as reports were included, as well as conventional academic journal articles. Dictionaries were excluded. The results were further filtered to include only those related to the fields of business and economics, sociology and social history, social sciences, psychology, women’s studies and journalism and communications. Because of the scarcity of empirical research and to allow for a more comprehensive account, additional searches were made of PhD theses and reference lists of key articles were also searched. Thus, multiple types of literature were included in this critical reading, making traditional meta-analytic strategies inappropriate (Earley, 2014). Instead, the literature was read and re-read as a whole in light of the initial question; what is downshifting?

Two strands of research were identified, that in which downshifting is understood to be a way to simplify lives by reducing consumption (Etzioni, 1998; Hamilton and Mail, 2003) and career or work downshifting in which the downshifter voluntarily ‘decreases the number of hours of employment’ (Nelson et al., 2007:144; see also Tan, 2000). In both, the notion of work-life balance is implicit and downshifting is understood to be a voluntary, personal decision, which benefits the individual and their families. However, adopting a power relations perspective challenges this interpretation of choice and highlights the derived organisational benefits. These insights led us to consider the implications of the broader work-life literature in relation to downshifting. Specifically, the work-life balance literature and boundary theory. Work-life balance, because of its implicit centrality within representations of downshifting and boundary theory, because it assumes that people try to strategically manage their lives in order to simplify them (Ferguson et al., 2015; Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009), an assumption clearly linked to notions of downshifting.

Given the limited academic interrogation of downshifting, we decided that our understandings could be extended further by reviewing the representations of downshifting in the academic literature in light of work-life balance and boundary theory. To do so, we extended the scope of the literature, within the parameters identified above, and further searches were conducted in which the terms work-life balance and boundary theory were

added (for example, downshifting, work-life balance; downshifting AND work-life balance). A total of 65 pieces of literature were included.

In considering the academic literature, we have understood downshifting to be a discursive strategy. This assumes that a number of discursive elements come into play in the creation of the idea of downshifting and of the identity of the downshifter which create implicit rules about whom can be considered a natural downshifter and the legitimate objectives achieved by downshifting. This is to understand downshifting as a Grand Discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), but not a totalising one. For this approach recognises the partiality of any discourse and the multiple ways in which they can be enacted to create space for resistance and refusal (Foucault, 1976; Hardy and Maguire, 2016). In Foucauldian terms, one might think of the 'degrees of rationalization' (Foucault, 1982: 223) of the discourse, how effective it is at producing desired results.

The exercise of power is not a naked fact, an institutional right, nor is it a structure which holds out or is smashed: it is elaborated, transformed, organized; it endows itself with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation. (Foucault, 1982: 223-224).

Thus, the discourse of downshifting attempts to produce particular results, but that does not mean that it will be successful; for it is always in the process of transformation. Consequently, this is not to suggest that there is a single downshifter identity, for Foucault challenged the notion of the homogenized self, fully knowing and knowable and instead offered us a way to theorise identities as partial and continuously produced. In which individuals have agency, but that agency is, itself, a site of struggle, embedded as individuals are in networks of power, between strategies of compliance and contestation (Oksala, 1998; Mayo, 2000; Foucault, 1982). This is an understanding of power as fluid and relational and of knowledge and power as integrated (Foucault, 1980b; Hardy and Clegg, 1999; Hardy and Maguire, 2016). 'It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power' (Foucault, 1980b: 52). To know, is not to be free from power, this departure from the emancipatory ideal of traditional critical studies (Hardy and Clegg, 1999), emphasises the disciplinary nature of the discourse of downshifting, to both

constrain and enable understandings of self, others and our place in the world. Emancipation in Foucauldian terms is focused on illuminating our subjectification (how the workings of power relations attempt to fix us in time and space (Townley, 1993)) so that we might seek alternative possibilities, 'to imagine and to build up what we could be' (Foucault, 1982: 216). This is not a search for our true selves for these are not hidden from us, our identities are not formed in our self-conscious but through interactions with discourses (Foucault, 2007a; Mayo, 2000). The discourse of downshifting is thus an effect and vehicle for power.

Directed by this understanding, our focus when reading the literature was to consider, within the representations presented: who is considered to be a natural downshifter? What are the legitimate objectives achieved by downshifting? Or, to put it another way, what taken-for-granted assumptions are being made about whom or what is acceptable or appropriate in downshifting terms?

We have been guided by Foucauldian notions regarding the disciplinary nature of discourse and governmentality, those techniques working to create managed and manageable populations (Foucault, 1982; Ahonen et al., 2014). In so doing, we have sought to highlight how the workings of power try to individualise problems and their solutions, for example, in the case of downshifting the problematic experiences of work, whilst simultaneously attempting to govern and regulate at a population level.

In the next section we analyse the downshifting literature in light of this approach, paying particular attention to the ways discipline and governmentality inform our critique. We begin by focusing on the connections between work-life balance and downshifting. This illustrates how downshifting is conceptualised as a way for individuals to manage their damaging experiences of paid work. We then develop this further, by considering in more detail how work is presented in the downshifting literature. Before exploring the representations of the workers who are most likely to be identified as legitimate downshifters, parents. We end this section by attending to the notion of consumption implicated in discussions of work within the downshifting literature. We then draw on boundary

theory to illustrate why the emancipatory ideals of downshifting, which have a tendency to be depicted in the literature, might not be achieved. Finally, we consider the contribution that a sustained focus on power relations can make to work-life theorising.

Work-life balance

As we read the academic downshifting literature in light of both work-life balance and boundary theory, we focused upon two key questions, within the representations of downshifting; who is considered to be a natural downshifter? What are the legitimate objectives achieved by downshifting?

Work-life balance/rebalance is said to be one of the key objectives of downshifting (Hamilton, 2010; Laabs, 1996). The downshifter is understood to be taking back control, containing paid work and its demands on their lives. The responsibility for creating the desired balance lies with the individual, they must decide which boundary tactic will enable them to achieve their objectives. In keeping with the current work-life balance discourse, the problems that are addressed by downshifting (such as long working hours and/or stress) are understood to be the individuals. Detrimental/unfriendly employee working practices remain unchallenged and are legitimated by the work-life balance discourse (Fleetwood, 2007; Eikhof et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2016). Dumas and Sanchez-Burks' (2015: 820) conclude that boundary management strategies serve 'one fundamental purpose from the perspective of the organisation – enhancing individual contributions to the workplace'. Similarly, Pedersen (2011) highlights the functionality of life outside of work, to the service of the organisation. Therefore, downshifting need not trouble the organisation (indeed they may be unaware that it is happening) and may well serve organisational needs for an effective labour force. Ironically, the boundary management strategy of the individual, used for personal benefits, may be far more advantageous to the organisation, which retains the individual, their experience and expertise, often at a reduced financial cost (given the boundary tactics associated with downshifting that are adopted such as; reduced working hours, declining promotions and so on).

Work, according to the work-life balance discourse is problematic, in so far as it has become too central in our lives (Hamilton and Mail, 2003; Blyton and Jenkins, 2012). Thus the potential for work to be other; satisfying, enjoyable and to provide refuge are often overlooked (Eikhof et al., 2007). As are the positive spillover effects of work such as; the development of friendships, community and pride (Blyton and Jenkins, 2012).

It is evident that this problematic view is also how work is considered in terms of downshifting. To downshift is to enrich your life beyond work. Conversely might it not also serve to reignite interest and enjoyment in work? To the benefit of not only the organisation but the individual. A distinction is made within the work-family literature, between positive spillover and enrichment. Both are understood to be bidirectional. However, positive spillover is considered to be an antecedent of enrichment. Enrichment is defined as the experiences of one domain affecting the quality of life of the other, thus, the positive spillover effects of work improve the quality of family-life (Masuda et al., 2012; Chan et al., 2016). If, therefore, work is considered to be enriching, might not downshifting negatively impact upon the quality of life within and beyond work?

Work-life balance is understood to be more inclusive; relevant to the needs of a broader range of people and pursuits than its predecessor family-friendly approaches (Dex and Smith, 2002; Doherty and Manfredi, 2006). However, examination of the debate suggests that this discourse is still constructed around the legitimacy of the needs of parents and in particular mothers (Eikhof et al., 2007; Ford and Collinson, 2011; Burnett et al., 2013; Gattrell et al., 2013). Indeed those who access work-life balance initiatives for other reasons are understood to be 'less committed and more likely to leave their organisations' (Waumsley et al., 2010: 4). The norm of the 'ideal worker', dedicated to work and unencumbered by other responsibilities is evident in this work-life balance discourse (Ellem, 2005; Aluko, 2009; Fujimoto et al., 2013; Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

The contradictory nature of discourse and discursive practices is highlighted here. On the one hand work-life balance is understood to be for all workers, on the other, norms and practices construct it as a need of a very particular

group of people. In downshifting terms, there is both anecdotal and empirical evidence of the relevance of the concept to a broader range of people than mothers, however, they are still constructed as legitimate downshifters (Chhetri et al., 2009). Perhaps, the continuing feminisation of work-life balance (Lewis et al., 2016), serves another function, to further delegitimise the need for changes to workplace practices (Aluko, 2009). As the enduring individualisation of needs and solutions, (including downshifting), to the damaging effects of work, facilitates the continuance of problematic workplace practices.

The seductive nature of work-life balance and the yearning it creates for a particular way of living, is itself powerful, as people survey themselves and monitor their attempts to maintain/achieve the identity of the perfectly balanced individual (Ford and Collinson, 2011). The utopian ideal, created by the downshifter identity is often not just about how lives are lived (connected to the consumptive discourse) but where they are lived (Thomas, 2008; Hamilton and Mail, 2003). The associations between downshifting and the simple living/voluntary simplicity movement are most evident at this end of the continuum of downshifting, in which people are understood to both give up work and move to pursue simpler lives (Etzioni, 1998; Hamilton and Mail, 2003).

The discourse of work-life balance associated with downshifting exhorts the individual to take responsibility for managing, (through containment), their damaging experiences of paid work and pitches downshifting as the solution. In this vein, downshifting can be conceptualised as privatised resistance, but as such it is likely to fail because the problems it is designed to address 'are fundamentally collective, social and political' (Thomas, 2008: 688).

Work

As we have seen in the discussions above, downshifting is understood in relation to work, without it, it does not make sense. This is further illustrated by the variety of ways in which boundaries are described within the downshifting literature; the distinctive boundary is always between work *and...something* else. Work and 'friendship, family and personal

development' (Levy, 2005: 176); work and leisure (Juniu, 2000; Nelson et al., 2007; Kennedy et al., 2013); work and life outside of work (Laabs, 1996); work and free time (Chhetri et al., 2009); work and family (Joyner, 2001). This 'work *and...*' perspective illuminates the centrality of work within understandings of downshifting.

The downshifting literature, like much of the boundary theory literature, documents work as greedy or unbounded and needing to be contained (Drake, 2001; Nelson et al., 2007; Juniu, 2000; Joyner, 2001; Thomas, 2008; Cohen, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2013; Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015). People are working too much and work is intensifying. Work is getting in the way of what people would rather be doing; spending time with friends, family and on leisure activities and is negatively impacting upon health (due to increasing levels of stress), families and communities (Kennedy et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2007). Work itself is undesirable. Yet work enables us to participate in these other activities (Juniu, 2000). This paradox, the necessity of undesired work, leads to an interpretation of downshifting as a trade-off, between work and life (Levy, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007). Downshifter remain active within the workforce, to differing extents, but their labour is understood to be functional, to serve their other life needs, roles and identities. While this might be construed as a preference for segmentation and the separation of work and life, borrowing another term from the work-family literature, role embracement, 'the zeal with which one enacts a role' in terms 'of energy and time' (Kossek et al., 1999: 106), downshifting can be interpreted as the embracement/investment in non-work roles by the downshifter, which does not necessarily mean that they are also engaged in the segmentation of roles – the construction of non-overlapping boundaries between them (*ibid.*). Downshifting might facilitate the downshifter to engage in integration practices such as the assimilation of their work and non-work identities (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013), or allowing the physical boundaries between work and lives to be permeable by, for example, using technology to work from home, or allowing work to interrupt non-work activities (Cannilla and Jones, 2011). Thus, downshifting, while often construed as a segmentation strategy may not necessarily be so. Indeed, it might be used by an individual to enable the segmentation of other lives

from work while simultaneously enabling the integration of these other lives into work. Strategies which might change as individuals negotiate the demands of their evolving situations (Cousins and Robey, 2015; Golden and Geisler, 2007).

The discourse of downshifting is focused around a sense of loss; something is missing/lacking in the downshifter's life and downshifting is a way to address this. Downshifting is thought of as a quest, a search for an alternative sense of purpose, or meaning in life, which can be achieved by turning away from work and emphasising other activities/areas of life (Levy, 2005; Drake, 2001). To strive for such a goal, is reminiscent of the search for one's true self (Oksala, 1998), which Foucault (1976, 2007b) argues is the modern illusion; an impossible task for individuals are never hidden from themselves and as such an endless one designed to discipline and create populations that can be managed. Therefore, while downshifting might be understood as an act of resistance to the demands of work and its negative impacts, it might also be construed as a re-inscription of governance linked to the state (see Foucault, 1982). Despite this, what the concept of downshifting does, is challenge our fundamental understandings of work, why people work and what the nature of that work should be. Work as a 'taken for granted social fact' (Casey, 2000: 573) is questioned. Downshifting allows space for alternative conceptions of work, such as Levy's (2005: 189) 'effortful engagement in difficult practices' to emerge.

Within the traditionally problematic conception of work portrayed in the downshifting literature, the question of who can downshift remains. For individuals are differentially located and rewarded within the labour market. While Hamilton and Mail (2003) argue that people from across the income spectrum engage in downshifting, downshifting is commonly associated with the economically wealthy:

They [downshifters] may be high-achievers, in the sense that they hold down prestigious jobs and accumulate a great deal of wealth. Yet they feel their lives lack point. (Levy, 2005: 178)

This would suggest the potential exclusivity of downshifting and the identity of downshifter. Perhaps economic disparities preclude certain groups of

people from downshifting? Hamilton and Mail's (2003) own research suggests that income effects the boundary tactics used, the reasons for downshifting and the experiences of the downshifter. Kennedy et al. (2013) highlight the relevance of class and race to enabling or inhibiting downshifting. Blyton and Jenkin's (2012) conclude that the adoption of part-time work (an often suggested downshifting tactic) may not achieve its desired outcomes. Their study suggests that for part-time work to be a success and result in the desired for balance, there are certain structural conditions of that work that need to be considered, including; the predictability of work patterns, affordable and timely access to work (in terms of distance to travel and the availability of travel options) and level of pay. It is reasonable then to propose that downshifting might be differentially experienced according to an individuals' position in relation to these conditions of work. This might explain the differing experiences of downshifting Hamilton and Mail (2003) discuss in their study and is commensurate with Jarvis's (1999) conclusion that what is possible in terms of managing boundaries is dependent upon our social and spatial networks; the people and places through which individuals access and offer support and knowledge. Choosing to downshift and it is always depicted as a choice, is discussed in terms of individual or family decisions, the potential influence of these wider socio-structural forces are most often ignored. Boundary theory and boundary management studies have been similarly criticised for their partiality, as organisational, cultural and regulatory specificities are overlooked (Piszczek and Berg, 2014; Cohen, 2010).

Families – parenting

As we read the literature, it became apparent that the workers who are most likely to be identified as legitimate downshifters are parents. A clear assumption underpinning the boundary work/tactics associated with downshifting is that people are spending too much of their time working and downshifting can help to address this. Spending more time with their children is identified as one of the key objectives of downshifters, both within academic and non-academic discourse (Hamilton and Mail, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2013; Behson, 2014; McSmith, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2016). Workers are differentiated by their parental status, to be a parent legitimates

your need to downshift. Conversely, to not have children, precludes others from legitimately identifying with the identity of downshifter. In this way understandings of life beyond work and its importance comes to be limited by the discourse. Within these representations of downshifting the parent is considered to be a natural downshifter. Their need to spend more time with their children is a legitimate downshifting objective.

Perhaps, downshifting also offers the opportunity to fulfil the increasingly 'classed, gendered and racialized' role of parent (Kirton, 2013: 662), including the capital accumulation of their children (*ibid.*). Thus, the downshifter's time spent with their children is designed to achieve something, it is instrumentalised with the future in mind. The role of parent is as open to the possibilities of self-surveillance and discipline as that of the identity of the perfectly balanced individual, or the consumer. Once again, it is possible to see how downshifting maybe understood as a re-inscription of governance linked to the state and the desire for managed and manageable populations (Foucault, 1982), for the parent is tasked with responsibility for the disciplining and competitive positioning of their child within a marketised economy (Kirton, 2013; Knudsen, 2011).

Consumption

In some representations of downshifting, it is presented as a response to increasingly demanding working lives, in which an important objective of the downshifter is to reduce their consumption and extract themselves, or, at the very least, decrease their engagement in the work-consumption cycle (Gottberg, 2015; Kasdagli, 2014; Fergusson, 2016; Drake, 2001; Etzioni, 1998; Hamilton and Mail, 2003; Szmigin, 2003; Juniu, 2000).

Consumption is understood in these representations to be problematic, at both a societal and individual level. Societies are understood to be undermined by the excessive individualism promoted by consumption, the subsequent demise in civic engagement and the consequent environmental damage (Nelson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2008). The consumption of products, services and goods is thought to be powerful, an act which has the potential to be addictive. Increasing levels of consumption drive the need for higher

income levels. Thus, the consumer is understood to be trapped in a relationship of power with consumption, in which consumption is the more powerful actor. To downshift then is to reassert power, to take back control and decentralise the role of consumption in our lives and in so doing to rethink our relationship with the source of our income (usually work) (Drake, 2001; Etzioni, 1998; Hamilton and Mail, 2003; Szmigin, 2003; Juniu, 2000).

However, this conceptualises a powerful (consumption) – powerless (consumer) relationship which contradicts a Foucauldian understanding of power relations (Hardy and Maguire, 2016). Instead let us think of consuming as an act in which people are ‘simultaneously undergoing and exercising power’ (Foucault, 1980a: 98). It is both the result of power over us (cultivating our desires to have more) as well as power with (in the act of consuming). Following Foucault (1982), the consumer is both the result and conditions of this power relationship. The downshifting literature presents the reassertion of non-consumptive priorities in an emancipatory light; individuals can break free from the cultural institution of consumption. Yet downshifter who engage in alternative practices of consumption have reported experiencing intense feelings of failure (Schreurs et al., 2012). The Foucauldian understanding of the consumer helps us to explore this perhaps unexpected experience, their subversion is problematic for it challenges their understandings of themselves. If they are not a traditional consumer for whom acquiring more is a validation of their success (*ibid.*), then who are they and how are they successful? As Sandiford and Seymour (2013) and Hoedemaekers (2016) conclude, consumption is implicated in the production of self.

Discussion

The question we asked at the beginning was; is downshifting really a solution to increasingly demanding lives? As we have seen, the literature has a tendency to depict downshifting in an emancipatory light, thus, downshifting is a way to; wrestle control from too much work or too much consumption, find a new purpose in life, or spend more time with our children. Drawing on boundary theory we will now argue that downshifting

can also be considered to be a boundary management strategy. As such, it is unlikely to achieve the emancipatory ideals purported, because an individual's decision cannot, by itself, address the broader socio-political experiences that the downshift is designed to address.

Boundary theory proposes that people construct and maintain boundaries around the different domains in their lives to simplify them (Ferguson et al., 2015; Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009). Boundaries are distinguished between the personal and the professional (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Golden and Geisler, 2007), work and family (Cousins and Robey, 2015; Kossek et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2009; Piszczek and Berg, 2014), work and life (Cohen, 2010; Cannilla and Jones, 2011) and work and home (Kossek et al., 1999; Fonner and Stache, 2012; Mustafa and Gold, 2013). These boundaries are understood to be social, spatial/physical and/or temporal in nature (Cohen, 2010; Fonner and Stache, 2012) and to vary in strength depending upon their permeability (Golden and Geisler, 2007; Cousins and Robey, 2015), how easily a person can engage in activities in more than one domain simultaneously (Chen et al., 2009; Ashforth et al., 2000; Ferguson et al., 2015) and flexibility (Cousins and Robey, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2015), 'the degree to which roles are tied to specific settings and times' (Chen et al., 2009: 83).

It is assumed that people and (to a lesser extent) organisations use boundary management strategies to segment or integrate the differing domains of their lives/their employees lives, to varying degrees (Golden and Geisler, 2007; Cousins and Robey, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2009; Fonner and Stache, 2012; Ashforth et al., 2000), as a way to manage their multiple roles or workplace identities (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015). It is also assumed that individuals have a general preference, either for segmentation of roles or identities; such as the containment of work, or the protection of the personal (Golden and Geisler, 2007); or integration of domains (Fonner and Stache, 2012; Piszczek and Berg, 2014).

A distinction can be drawn between boundary management strategy, understood 'to refer broadly to whether people integrate or segment' and boundary work or boundary tactics which refers to peoples' 'specific

behaviours within each of these strategies' (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015: 807; see also Kossek et al., 1999). Thus, downshifting might be thought of as a boundary management strategy, traditionally understood to achieve a segmentation of work-life domains, as people seek to slow down at work to improve other aspects of life (Laabs, 1996). The specific behaviours associated with downshifting, 'such as declining or not seeking promotions, reducing working hours, changing careers, or withdrawing from the workforce (Laabs, 1996)' (Cockman, 2015: 185), can be thought of as boundary work or boundary tactics.

While press and academic publications emphasise downshifting as a segmentation strategy, which enables people to manage their multiple roles, we earlier suggested that downshifting might be both a way to segment and to integrate lives, as well as to manage identities. Thus, the notion of general preferences associated with boundary management decision-making is challenged.

Like boundary management preferences, downshifting is sometimes thought of as existing on a continuum (Nelson et al., 2007). Etzioni (1998) for example, defined downshifters within his typology of voluntary simplicity practitioners. These were people he saw as subverting the consumerist culture. Downshifters, being the most moderate example, create an appearance of simplicity, but do not reduce their income, whereas holistic simplifiers, significantly alter both where and how they live (*ibid.*). In contrast, Hamilton and Mail (2003) proposed that downshifters make long-term changes to reduce both their income and consumption, sea-changers, give up work and move and voluntary simplifiers, like Etzioni's holistic simplifiers, are motivated by principle.

Within both the boundary management and downshifting literatures connections are made between choices and life satisfaction. Cannilla and Jones (2011) for example, propose that individuals can choose the boundary management tactics that offer them the best life satisfaction and 'recalibrate their choices' if the outcomes are not as expected. Satisfaction is, therefore, a choice individuals can make for themselves, if only they can make the right choices. Thus, the more knowledge accumulated about the different tactics

available, 'behavioral, temporal, physical, communicative' (*ibid*: 210), the better equipped they are to affect the desired for outcomes. The onus is on the individual, if they are not achieving what they want, it is because they are using the wrong tactics, or using them incorrectly. If only they can develop adequate knowledge, they can be satisfied with their lives. However, as Cohen (2010) and Blyton and Jenkins (2012) conclude, structural differences in the nature of work are implicated in a workers' ability to maintain boundaries, in particular their employment security/insecurity. As are the networks, both social and spatial, within which people are embedded (Jarvis, 1999). The development of knowledge is therefore insufficient to achieve the desired outcomes expected when using a boundary management tactic, including those associated with downshifting.

In downshifting terms, when confronted with a lack of evidence for the link between downshifting and life satisfaction Chhetri et al. (2009) suggest that it might be due to the internally driven nature of satisfaction. Thus, satisfaction cannot be accounted for because it is personal, individuals decide what is important/not to them. The rational, free and choosing subject is apparent in these understandings. In both the boundary management and downshifting literatures the individual/subject as responsible agent is clearly being constructed. As is an understanding of boundary management and tactics as an individualised strategy, in which individuality is understood to enable flexibility and consequently to result in the best possible outcomes. However, if the problem the strategy is designed to address is understood to be socially produced, it follows that it is unlikely to be solved by an individuals' response, irrespective of their level of knowledge. As Kennedy et al. (2013) conclude, downshifting might improve satisfaction but not in isolation, other 'networks of social support' are needed for the downshift to be successful in these terms. These other networks point to the importance of the location or position of the subject within their social, historical, economic and political context. Although Butler (1995) warned that the notion of subject positions can lead to a return to the idea of essential selves and here that is not intended, acknowledging that the position of the individual is integral to the power-knowledge nexus within which they come to understand themselves and each other, illustrates

how they are thus, a source of knowledge and power and a vehicle for knowledge and power. As others conclude, constructing boundary management strategies, as individual decision making practices is insufficient, as decisions intersect with broader socio-political experiences (Hardy and Sanders, 2015; Jarvis, 1999).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have made visible and questioned the taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding representations of downshifting. Drawing on boundary theory we problematized its proclaimed emancipatory potential and contributed to work-life theorising by arguing that downshifting is a boundary management strategy. The important implication of our contribution is that existing inequalities will ensure that it remains a strategy few can achieve. We, therefore, argue that work-life theorising can be expanded by paying sustained attention to power relations. Such a focus illustrates the necessity of consideration of the conditions within which individual decision-making choices are framed. The problematic conception of work and its need for containment, which are central to understandings in both the downshifting and boundary management literatures, obscure the questions and assumptions regarding work and its place in our lives that go beyond those of segmentation/integration within which they are often constructed. We contend that the concept of downshifting (despite its limitations) offers space for alternative understandings of work to emerge.

The discourse of downshifting is assembled from and intersects with, a number of other discourses including those of work, work-life balance, consumption and families. These discourses create rules and expectations about who can be considered an appropriate downshifter and what can be achieved by downshifting. The relatively limited academic interrogation this concept has received, is perhaps indicative of the lack of investigation of the use of boundary management tactics more broadly (Cannilla and Jones, 2011). This might have created greater space for resistance and refusal, as one would expect the 'degrees of rationalization' (Foucault, 1982: 223) of the discourse to be less pronounced. However, its construction from well-

established cultural institutions and norms has constrained opportunities, for example, parents and in particular mothers are construed as legitimate downshifters. Within discussions of downshifting and boundary management more broadly a deficit model of individuals is constructed who are exemplified by their lack of knowledge and understanding of boundary management tactics, consequently failing to make the right choices and unable to achieve their desired work-life balance, or curb their consumptive compulsions. The individual as rational choosing actor is responsible for conflict and dissatisfaction when it occurs. The framing of boundary management and downshifting in such terms enables the implications of the socio-political context to be ignored. Thus, the influence of the structural conditions of work (such as salary, access and working patterns), and social and spatial networks, to help or hinder the would-be downshifter can remain hidden.

At a time when populations in the west are experiencing declining labour market opportunities (Hardy and Sanders, 2015), increasing job insecurity across the workforce irrespective of occupational class (Gallie et al., 2016; see also Casey, 2000; Ramarajan and Reid, 2013) and job status insecurity (although this is particularly associated with lower occupational classes who have less influence over changes to their working conditions) (Gallie et al., 2016; Hyman et al., 2005). That this paper should call for attention to be given to the concept of boundary management strategies and in particular the notion of downshifting, might seem frivolous. However, these evolving employment relations suggest that individuals might seek alternative relationships with and understandings of, work (Casey, 2000), of which downshifting might be one such response.

Perhaps downshifting is an indicator of the increasing polarization of the labour market and of the depth and breadth of inequalities continuing to emerge. Both the downshifting and boundary management literatures suggest that downshifting is/will be experienced differentially, which is perhaps indicative of a hierarchy of downshifters. Associated with the intersection of their social, economic, political, racial and gendered positioning and the consequences therefore of the nature and structural conditions of their work and the 'choices' this affords. Given the breadth of

academic literature that discusses the limiting implications of gender, race and social class on occupational outcomes (Blyton and Jenkins, 2012; Catanzarite and Strober, 1993; Hooks, 2015; Savage et al., 2013), and the increasing recognition of their importance in questions of work-life balance (Gatrell et al., 2013), we suggest that these will have a considerable impact on an individuals' ability to downshift and their likely experiences of downshifting if it is undertaken. We have argued that for downshifting to achieve its proclaimed potential a number of important elements need to be considered including; the conditions of work, geographical location, and the people and places through which support and knowledge is accessed. All of which leads us to propose that downshifting is really a question of continuing white male privilege and their exploitation of 'individual gratifications' (Nelson et al., 2007: 144). Hooks (1995) wrote that dominant cultures privilege the interpretation of revolt, because it enables their values to remain centred. By interpreting downshifting as a revolt, a pushing back of cultural expectations, those expectations and values themselves remain unchallenged. Thus, we do not need to consider the existing structures, which enable and facilitate the exploitation and domination of others in daily life. The inequalities that shape our societies, enabling some to succeed at the expense of others. By recognising that downshifting is a 'choice' that so few in society can make successfully, downshifting no-longer seems like a revolt, because those who do so have benefited/do benefit, (knowingly or not), from the exploitation of others to be able to make and sustain that choice. Such an analysis warrants the simultaneous recognition of labour as both stable and influx, focusing attention on the inequalities that remain or are themselves being transformed and the roles that they play in boundary management decision-making. It also raises doubts about the theoretical and practical value of general preferences associated with boundary management strategies.

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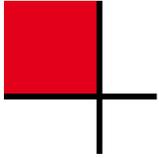
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Designers of competition at work: A neoliberal consensus-machine caught in the act

Christine Schwarz

abstract

This article examines how personnel entrusted with developing competitive tools deal with such tasks and how they reflect on them. What is their experience when competition is prescribed as the main solution to the problems confronting their organizations? The analysis of a subset of twelve interviews from a broader case study reveals that competition needs to be instituted in a bureaucratic manner. To begin with, the article provides a glimpse into how managers portray their work environment. After diagnosing an administratively staged bureaucratic competition, the article discusses how this occupational field of ‘third-space-professionals’ can be understood. On the one hand, the work of these (fictional) managers contributes towards smoothing the contradictions of neoliberalism; on the other hand, it questions the very credibility of such forms of rationalization.

A third species: Designers of competition

A warning from Josefa, a faculty manager, is only one example of the deep doubts of those whose job it is to install a more ‘rational’ distribution of budgets:

We have to be very careful, that the history of communist regimes is not repeated in the current management. We simply tolerate a system too much although, quite frankly, nobody believes in it. (Josefa, interview clipping from a study presented below)

The daily work of these so called ‘third space professionals’ (Whitchurch, 2008; 2015) and how they manage their work is mostly overlooked – when the entrepreneurial university is propagated as well as is criticized. Managers have become a standard in universities’ everyday life, whether they are quality-, research-, faculty- or controlling managers. Third space professionals (3SP) have to design, implement and re-design competitive tools in everyday organizational life. They are described as neither scientists nor administrators, but have to mix both: the world of process instructions with the world of creativity and thought.

Analysing these 3SP will offer interesting insights, as competition – understood as a process where somebody has to prove to be better than somebody else – has become a general template. In the working world of the 3SPs competition has the power to provide or cast doubt on evidence of people’s performance. This article analyses the sensemaking of those who can be conceived as ‘designers of competition’.¹ Analysing how they craft quantification and competition is also of great interest because while universities have to follow the general appeal of strategic market-driven management, they have to do this within traditional structures and rules set by political authorities (Bath and Smith, 2004; Eggins and MacDonald, 2003). Most research on this professional group highlights that knowledge about their occupational competence is rare (Kehm et al., 2010; Hasse and Krücken, 2013; Jenert and Brahm, 2010; Schwarz and Struhkamp, 2007), and that these blended roles need to be professionalized. In contrast to this perspective of permanent improvement, the article aims to understand how this occupational group handles and rationalizes to (prescribed) competition.

1 The term ‘designers of competition’ is preferred because it does not label and reduce the 3SPs as ‘only support staff’ (as one of my reviewers called them). Furthermore, traditional hierarchic distinctions (like academic – non-academic or research – teaching) are avoided.

Critical management research has already provided a lot of encouragements for being sceptical of popular management theories and that active reflection is needed (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003; Berglund, 2008; Oldenhof et al., 2013). The contribution of this article is to highlight the remarkable repertoires that the designers of competition develop to deal with the tensions, contradictions and instabilities by performance measurement systems. After some background information about this type of managers and the study's methodology, the empirical section will show how their daily activity is dominated by justification work. The symptom of a hardly justifiable bureaucratic competition will be discussed by consulting selected literature. Maybe Josefa's worries about losing the will to resist (mentioned above) can be addressed by some reflections from a study that will be presented here. The conclusion will consider alternatives to the mutated form of competition described here.

The new governance of universities: In need of a third space?

Since the 1970s, questions of governance, self-control and uncontrollability have been dominant topics in university research. The 'entrepreneurial university' (Clark, 1998; Foss and Gibson, 2015) was announced at the end of the 1990s, but it has become questionable how far business instruments can properly meet universities' tasks (Bogumil et al., 2013). Most of the current research of the 'new governance of universities' (Grande et al., 2013) states that while competitive techniques in universities are not effective (or show very demanding preconditions), they are often portrayed as being necessary because of the corresponding need to shrink budgets.

Over the last decade competing for public goods has become a big issue in the university system. In Germany, most universities received 'financial autonomy' in the mid 1990's, leading to greater responsibility for (albeit decreased) resources. However, universities remained dependent on ministerial bureaucracy, politics and internal committees and lobbies.

Therefore, at present, universities face pressure from several processes of performance measurement: benefit-based funding, target agreements, different kinds of evaluations and (enforced) competition. For the purpose of

finding adequate new steering tools and staff, much effort has been financially supported by the state – including the research project that is partly presented here. However, it has revealed much more than only control requirements as the people involved started to unfold their experiences, thoughts and doubts regarding the competition for resources.

Methodology: Competition designers on the research agenda

The research project ‘HidA’² was a qualitative case study about performance management and fights for recognition: It was carried out in seven German universities. Our task was to find out how performance management systems start to change people’s view on how they feel recognized in their work (Schwarz, 2017). While conducting the project the team (of three researchers) carried out 40 intensive conversations with different members of these universities (different federal states, size and excellence labels). Besides document analysis and participative observation guided interviews were conducted with experts and narrative interviews with teachers, researchers as well as administrative personnel (most about 90 minutes long). The material was transcribed and interpreted mainly through content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2002; Mostyn, 1985).

Among those 40 interviewees were twelve persons of four types of designers of competition: quality managers, controllers, faculty managers and administration presidents from three universities (anonymised as Redland, Greenland and Blueland). The figure below gives an overview of the interviewees’ affiliation to organizations, area of expertise and professional role.

2 The project was financed by the German Federal Ministry of Education (funding line ‘Leistungsbewertung in der Wissenschaft’).

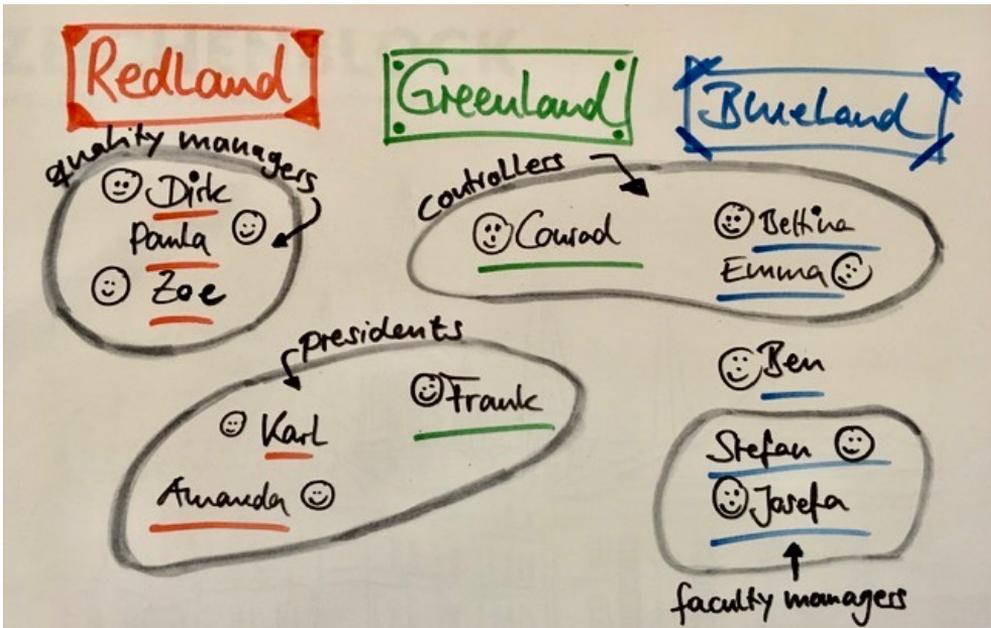


Figure 1: The 12 interviewees and their organizational and occupational affiliations

The interviews presented here show only a part of our empirical sampling, with a focus less on the recipients of competition (like professors, researchers and teachers) and more on the designers of competition. In this subset, three presidents/chancellors are included as they also held a special duty of care for the design of competition. The twelve designers of competition differ in some aspects, i.e. the conditions of their universities, their individual power positions, their professional backgrounds and why they have chosen more managerial rather than scientific tasks. The focus for analysing this subgroup was how they make sense of implementing competitive tools that are very disputed. Admittedly, this subset study is just a thin ice to portray the entirety of the competition designers. But this little piece of empirical research can illustrate that competition in practice is under heavy pressure.

The working world of competition designers

For the content analysis, five questions were chosen to map the self-descriptions of the competition designers:

- What do competition designers do in practice?
- How do the competition designers describe their professional role?
- What do they perceive as success or failure?
- Which skills do they view as essential for their job?
- How do they frame 'competition' and its purpose?

What competition designers do in practice? Transforming professors into dots

The competitive technologies of the different universities and their departments differ a lot. In Germany, universities have to present performance management data for their target agreement discussions with the ministry (approx. every 4 years). But the exact method of data collection and communication of data lies in the hands of the university board and at times several of their faculty managements. How performance is measured differs from university to university: a) the selection of indicators and their weightage, b) how much the performance measurement of a department has to be comparable to the others, and c) the amount of the bonus and where the bonus is taken from.

The most well-established performance indicators are: publication and citation indexes, amount and levels of third-party-funds for research ranking, amount of students and graduates as well as PhDs for the ranking of teaching.

'Every professor has become a little dot', faculty manager Stefan said with a smile, as he proudly presented the following chart in an interview. It illustrates one technique of publishing performance measurement and rewarding performance and is comparable to others used.

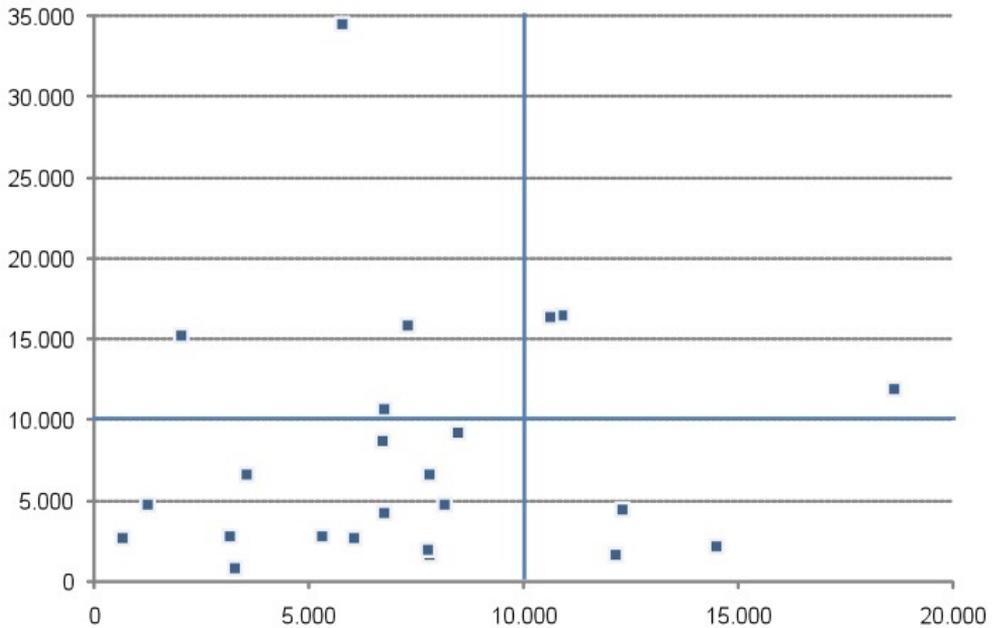


Figure 2: Rewards for research (max. € 35.000 per year) and for teaching (max. € 19.000)

This example of performance management reporting shows the annual results of the bonus payment each professor will receive concerning his or her measured activities in research (horizontal LOM-F) and teaching (vertical LOM-L).³ Stefan pulled out this chart to illustrate how important he finds it in terms of making results ‘transparent’. For him, it is essential that the affected winners and losers grapple with ‘the problem’ of finding an acceptable mode of distribution.

How relevant these numbers are for the distribution of finances varies in different universities. In our sample of three organizations, the percentage of performance related budget was between 1 and 15%. In addition to this internal competition, there is also the external competition between the universities within a federal state. It is not unusual that the two kinds of

³ LOM = German acronym for performance-based funding allocation („leistungsorientierte Mittelvergabe”). In this chart example the winner in research receives € 35.000 per year and € 8.000 for teaching and the winner in teaching receives € 19.000 and € 12.000 for researching.

competition cancel each other out. This calls steering effects into question, as we shall see later.

How do competition designers describe their role?

The following analysis was made by selecting and interpreting interview sections, in which competition designers express their roles or role conflicts. Without exception, all define their occupational role as finding a responsible way of handling the discrepancies between so-called 'financial autonomy' and coping with demands from ministerial administration. Five occupational roles have been qualified as in the following.

Controlling as the neutral delivery of data: The three controllers Conrad, Bettina und Emma initially present themselves as *neutral deliverers* of data: 'I define myself as an interface to decision makers' (Emma). They underline that they only intervene when severe misunderstandings of data and its interpretation arise, e.g. when 'certain ideas' (Bettina), which get anchored in the minds of people, turn out to be wrong when you interpret the data more thoroughly. They regard themselves as important decision-making aids and almost completely deny responsibility for the quality of decisions by arguing with divided responsibility: the more powerful leading managers sometimes make decisions that are based on the data that they have collected and prepared. However, all three feel bad when they are forced to interpret difficult or incomplete data (e.g. quantifying the weightage of how competitive third-party funds have been received or when data clearly suggests to shut down a whole discipline). They see their mission in 'making statistics more satisfying' (Conrad), e.g. when they are too fine-grained or de-contextualized for interpretation. When the measurement system is pushed to the limits, for example in the comparability of the approximately 300 disciplines, they try to compensate for the disadvantages through preventive communication with the people affected and act as mediators between conflicting stakeholders. Despite their claimed neutrality, they hold themselves as advocates for potential victims of quantification, for example when the effects of competition become unacceptable or when data is misused. When this occurs, they are proud to serve as socio-technical professionals who intervene in the name of better knowledge or as a kind of data moralists.

Quality managers as icebreaking consultants: Another variant of a competition designer are the three quality managers Paula, Zoe and their boss Dirk. They consistently formulate the credo of a consultant, whose aim is to support all performers by finding data that could be beneficial. In this partly missionary self-understanding as *consultant (or coach)*, they use their organizational knowledge for intermediating. Despite competition, they lobby for a culture of working together for a huge body of reliable data:

If you support this data collection system out of your own motivation and personnel budget for this whole year, you will definitely have a much stronger set of cards in the next funding round! (Dirk)

Like the controllers, they protest when data is used only as a facade rolling down presentation screens, or when data is hastily requested from the top management without proving its reliability or relevance. They try to convince their ‘customers’ (Paula) about the side-advantages of participating in competitions and quality controls as a kind of ‘sub-currency’ (Zoe). The boss of the quality management department, Dirk, illustrates his occupational role as an ‘icebreaker’ in his organization. He has to face resistance against performance management and untangle difficult situations, but also deal with the consequences of that situation in the immediate future. All the three quality managers describe their jobs as a Sisyphean task, where the most important skill is not to expect any respect or thanks for this contribution, although you are an important part of this huge machine of funding aid acquisition.

Faculty managers as defenders: The faculty managers, Josefa from the humanities and Stefan from a business school, could not be more diverse in their way of thinking about and acting with performance measurement and competition. However, what unites them is their strong fighting spirit to *protect their faculties* in the struggle for an appropriate measurement system. They describe their efforts to adapt the university-wide system to the needs of their academic disciplines as being like advocates of a collective faculty identity who have developed a concept of mapping assertions of identity by academic individuals. Josefa’s strategy is to show solidarity with groups that suffer from illegitimate penalties of competition. She has organized a university-wide survey about the performance management system and

gathered a majority for obtaining exception rules for minorities. She seems to be well networked, internally and externally, and steadfastly advocates for the educational mission against negative or incomprehensible effects of competition. Her warnings against accepting a mad system of competition culminate in comparing it with Former East Germany: ‘Everybody knew we all did not want the system anymore but we tolerated it too long’ (Josefa).

In contrast, Stefan defends his faculty by perfecting the system and, at the same time, by highlighting his faculty as excellent. We will learn later what he means by ‘healthy competition’, but for now we can say that Stefan argues almost stereotypically for competition, whereas Josefa pleads for solidarity. Another contrast is that Stefan claims to have a ‘strong service mentality’ for his faculty, while Josefa emphasises that she ‘is burning for the disciplines in my faculty, otherwise I could not protect them so well’. By the way, although they have very different attitudes they very much enjoy working together as respected colleagues.

Presidents as communicative connectors: Combining data with strategy. As members of university leaderships, Karl, Amanda and Frank present themselves as communicative connectors. ‘To lead with data’ is a metaphor that all three chose to illustrate how they realize their tasks. However, they agree this strategy only works if you have your ‘own strategic goals’ (Amanda, Karl) and a ‘strong will for a strategic leadership that you want to reach for your organization’ (Amanda). Gradually, a kind of cultural change or educational process can then take place (see below Amanda’s metaphor of horse breeding). The masterpiece of leading universities seems to be educating professors ‘smoothly and step by step’ (Amanda) to perceive themselves as top performers in a global scientific system for the sake of the universities’ survival in competition with others. The delicate issue here is that these strategic leaders have to accept that scientists mostly do not think of themselves as members of an organization and that many of them take advantage of the freedom of science. Because they often ‘buck’ when you address them as a member, you need ‘an awful lot of tact and sensibility. You have to learn and perfect this ability so that you find your own way of feeling good with it’ (Frank) and when you have it, you will step back from your electoral office and resume your professorship.

Referee and arbitrator: An individual case in our sample is Ben, Professor of Law and Economy and head of the Performance-Management-Board for six years. This commission monitored the performance management system, reacted to errors or critiques and was the authority that decided if system changes (e.g. in weighting factors or rules on exception) should be made. Ben reflected with honesty ‘what we do here in university is actually not real competition, not like international arenas anyway’. Nonetheless he enjoys a good reputation as a careful and fair referee and arbitrator and is committed to peacekeeping, even more than the presidents described above. Meeting the designers of competition shows that a range of diverse competences is addressed: As socio-technologists they objectify, consult, motivate, mediate, educate and also fight for own convictions. In doing so, it is enlightening to see how the designers of competition assume, reject and reclaim responsibility for the quantified performances.

In the following steps, these self-descriptions are flanked by the stories of success and failure narrated in the interviews. Unlike earlier, the actors are not differentiated by their occupational position but by the kinds of experiences with the limits of ‘the system’.

What do competition designers perceive as success and failure?

The designers of competition were not asked directly what they perceive as success and failure, but as the interviews were conducted as narratives, they provided a lot of every-day-experiences, exposing the ups and downs of working with the system and its recipients.

Building up and obtaining organizational knowledge: ‘Keeping the data-body up-to-date’ (Emma) is the most common success for all interviewees, because most of them are convinced that without this data-body it would be unmanageable to plan or do anything today. Data has become the ‘hard disk memory that we have to build in the faculties like hammered pegs’, Stefan explains, so that ‘old and feudal prerequisites are unthinkable today’, as resource decisions need to be substantiated by data. Even Josefa, the heavy critic of competition, points out that she profits a lot from using this ‘data

body' for the increased reporting duties and that she can gain time for 'more important work'.

Making differences visible: Although all interviewees were persuaded that 'money is no incentive for intrinsically motivated scientists' (Stefan), most of them argue that the system is suited to make difference visible – for whatever purpose. Regardless of how these quantified differences are published (via e-mail-newsletter or in a slide-show), 'you can feel that a lot happens with people, even if you cannot see it' (Karl). The fact that 'everybody wants to be sitting pretty' is something Stefan frequently experiences weeks after he publishes his ranking list (see chart 1 above). 'Very often the phone rings and sometimes I have to come up with a method of consolation', as a result, Stefan makes fun out of the painful situations of comparison. Controller Conrad freely admits that 'provoking people with bad data sometimes is healing', for example when a faculty manager realises that they have to lay off their young researchers before Christmas, just because they did not look up or even collect their data.

However, a refusal to be compared is not restricted to so-called 'low performers', as ex-president Karl emphasizes. He received a phone call from a young and internationally successful professor, requesting: 'Please stop this perverse joke of a reward! For that poor 12,000 Euro bonus I wouldn't do any research!' Even if making differences visible sometimes proves to be a painful act, most of the interviewees think it is productive, not least because it increases the responsiveness between the organization and its members.

The limits of comparability: The limits of comparability were a permanent topic in every interview. The greatest failure was seen in using indicators to compare the quality of teaching. Even the contest-affine Stefan pictured how he 'jumped into the lifeboat' after trying this:

After all, we said collectively, let's forget this quality factor in teaching. We cannot measure it anyhow and it causes only dispute! So, I admit we really shirked responsibility. Now we measure and reward only the number of students, although we know that this does not mean too much. (Stefan)

Hence, while a sophisticated system has been created for research, for teaching only the simple amount of students and graduates are measured. The measurability or 'rankability' of publications is another contentious point. Efforts to make the incomparable commensurable ended in a time-consuming splitting of the distinctions of disciplines. After a while, it was not justifiable, at least economically, and resulted in a series of disputes about the proposed quality scale for articles. Some faculties returned to ranking by length of articles, which all parties felt was a defeat but was held as not an arbitrary decision.

Concerning the benchmarks for measuring third-party funds, Josefa has a meticulous catalogue of arguments against them. Here, we can only show a couple of the most tortuous aspects for her: the general prioritisation of external funds according to how competitive or rare they are, is held to be illegitimate, because the density of external funders varies in the different disciplines (e.g. more competitive in more common subjects); furthermore, only funds granted and spent are measured and not how much effort was necessary to get these grants or what was done with them.

Growing discontent with the ways of comparing 'performance' was articulated in the interviews. But for now it can be stated that the more the differences in performances are made transparent and public, the more the opposing views on which differences are more relevant get into public discourse as well. This might even increase the responsiveness of the organization, even though this feels as a burden for all concerned.

Unintended and absent effects of competition: Without exception, all interviewees questioned if the system really achieved its (assumed) goals: to provide a rationale for budget distribution and to promote performance incentives. Good data reports are mostly used for a contract negotiation situation of professors. Stefan in particular describes his reaction on that topic as very lively. When he notices how 'astronomical sums are bargained with the data in backrooms' he often feels ill because he is the one who has to negotiate with professors who continually bargain for more money. In Stefan's words: 'assholes that would walk over dead bodies and would not even try to conceal this'. The system can be misused for deadweight effects,

because the university leadership expects ‘high volume projects from those very-good-data-kings’. The catalogue of intended and unintended ‘misuses’ could be continued. Misuse of competitive data does not seem to be a rule, but it is also no exception.

Other restrictions of the performance system are indicated by the unwanted consequences. This frequently leads to injustices and quarrels, mostly when journals and articles are ranked incomprehensibly. This happens regularly when comparing different sub-communities. Another negative effect is that all joint ‘performances’ (like social engagement or committee work) have no influence in data reports but are essential for the every-day practice of the organization. The most general (unintended) effect emphasized by many is the loss of significance of many ‘non-countable activities’ (Frank, Josefa, Emma). Ben worries ‘that the uncountable gets lost’ when meeting the new generation of professors: ‘our young puppies definitely orientate themselves on performance data’ (Ben). While Stefan welcomes this development, Ben has reservations about these junior staff. A fourth unintended effect is that through this orientation on excellence – at least in his discipline of law and economy – knowledge is gradually removed from its relevance for everyday-life

...of what avail is it, when the highest article in the ranking is read seriously by only three people worldwide? These other-directed personalities have to score more and more highly in niche-subjects to have any career prospects. This is very bad for the image of our academia in society and economy! (Ben)

No one else put this as sharply as Ben, but many others commented ironically on high-scorers in subjects they find obscure. In addition to these unintended effects and the absence of the main goal of providing incentives, there is also an example of the active avoidance of the intended effects of competition. Controller Conrad describes as an ‘ideal of controlling’ that incentives from the top of an organization should be passed on to its basic levels. But Conrad reasons that tough competition like that would, in reality, be unthinkable within the educational and academic sector:

We would never close a discipline because of its performance results, because our mission is to provide a wide range of disciplines. In addition, this internal

policy of protecting our wide spectrum makes us competitive to others.
(Conrad)

We can see here that there are several competitions competing with one another! For example, there is one marginal study program that would normally have been closed as a consequence of internal competition due to fewer students, but it is sustained to maintain external competition with other universities. In addition it is promoted by a huge business lobby, so 'we feed and pamper it' (Conrad) although it has had bad data for decades. Similar cases have been described by Frank and Karl.

Beside these efforts to manipulate competition (for the sake of the continuance of the organization), we can also spot what happens when the effects of competition are neither explicable nor communicable. The following dilemma was presented by Conrad, who had to explain to faculty authorities that they were going to lose half a million Euros in the next year, although their performance data was much better than last year:

You ask me how I remember this meeting? It is impossible to expect that somebody will amputate his own leg because the controlling department claims to have a more rational model! (Conrad)

This scenario acts as a precursor to the obviously increasing communication requirements outlined in the next section. All this leads us to conclude that the system that is held to be indispensable does not achieve its goal. Instead, it makes work life more complicated, especially because the designers of competition actively promote countermeasures in their own work within the system.

The costs of transparency: Questions of resources get tricky when a system claims to provide a more rational distribution of property. The most common resource aspects of the performance management system can be illustrated as follows.

The main resource problem of the distributing system is the staff budget needed, not only to establish and support the system but also to change it regularly because of the frequent 'readjustments induced by injustices of the system' (Emma). In addition, these changes are accompanied by lots of

committee work and communication loops. Half of the interviewees think this would be a 'necessary investment' (Amanda). To the other half, however, this represents a new mentality of consumption. In the name of a more rational handling of public goods, taxpayer's money is squandered. The following quote is only one example of this out of many:

Without batting an eye, only third party funds spent earn points! Can it really count as a *performance* to spent as much money as you can? No enterprise would act like! (Josefa)

Josefa is embarrassed that a university that tries to become more entrepreneurial behaves partly like a planned economy and partly like a compulsive gambler. All (except Stefan) observe an enormous slowdown of the organization by an 'expanding bureaucracy of quality' (Karl and in similar words Frank) that develops its own dynamic. This way of handling the contradictions of prescribed competition describes an interesting relation of managing competition and bureaucracy. Stefan wants to defend the system as transparent, and even if there might be critique of that, requests for changes or further explanations can be submitted. At the same time, the possibility of influencing the system already indicates risks for its neutrality, because if everybody can submit an application form, particularly annoying submitters can try to influence the system in their favour. Or, they can get themselves voted into the commission to shape the system in their interest. The character of this performance management system is a hybrid one, because making the system more transparent reveals dangers of it being held as a completely negotiable thing.

Which skills do competition designers view as essential?

A number of competences about what makes competition designers capable of doing their job can be collected from the interviewee's statements, where they describe being jammed between competition initiators and their target groups, the professors and other academic staff.

Communication skills and organizational knowledge: Equally important as the 'affinity with data' (Amanda) or the 'gift of being a friend of data' (Karl), is the ability to act with 'clever communication' (Frank). 'To work with

communication is important!', says Karl. There are many reasons for this, but mostly it is necessary to avoid quarrels and to recognise that critique of the competition system is possible to refine its practice.

Organizational knowledge seems to be another essential skill:

You have to be extremely experienced in the landscape of your university! You have to know every name and all kinds of sensitivities. You need to know not only with whom you need to talk, but also in which chronological order, in which choice of words and whom you tell with whom you already have talked – nothing else than this is needed most! (Josefa)

Quantification skills: Being 'friends of data' was often mentioned as an important skill of a designer of competition. However, the significance of this competence has a subsurface that is seldom made as explicit as in the following citations:

You have to recognize the limits of quantification immediately! We cannot progress in all competitive aspects like in every single pore. (Bettina)

A good controller's duty is to provide his knowledge about the relations and limits of quantifications too to avoid greater harm to the whole organization! (Conrad)

The dataflow that influences the decisions of the university leader and committees sometimes transforms during its flow into something that is not manageable anymore. It has nothing to do with reality anymore nor is it feasible. This is what you have to keep at the back of your mind as a good friend of data! (Karl)

The significant point seems to be that quantification skills include the competence to foresee the possible misuse of numbers! Frank puts this skill in words that highlight the relevant product that has to be produced collectively here: *legitimacy*.

At the end of this process chain, we sometimes have something that is supposed to be a legitimate system. But this does not necessarily mean that this system works!

How do they frame 'competition' and its purpose?

The last step of this empirical analysis shows the connotation of the term 'competition' in the interviews. Even if people do not always use this exact term, it can be analysed to see how they frame and sometimes assess competitive features.

Shaping and controlling organization through competition (Presidents): Using competitive tools to shape and control the university is the most important goal for the three presidents, but for all of them this has a two-fold nature. For Karl competition is explicitly only a means to shaping 'where an organization strategically wants to go'. But in contrast to the organizational visions that are mostly painted 'to lead with numbers' Karl believes that this involves a lot of risks and uncertainties, because numbers can only represent a small part of reality.

Scientific performance always remains partially hidden and we have to accept that. You can try to reduce this uncertainty just a little bit by checking the interpretation and relevance of the data. (Karl)

This is exactly what Karl claims to be doing in his job as a good leader: 'I decide on the basis of data but also on the basis of remaining uncertainties'. Frank states that, as a former professor in the industrial sector, competition is 'normal business'. After 25 years in university, he is still concerned about the lack of fiscal control and that money is

...still spent like in the medieval age. Just because somebody negotiated well 20 years ago, he continues to get twice as much as the performer next to him. (Frank)

The double-edged character of competition for Frank is that it is necessary to 'fasten the screws of competition' without producing too many losers, because this does not fit with the universities' mission to provide education and scientific knowledge. Furthermore, the organization obviously needs non-excellent members: 'In some stages of my career I benefitted a lot from magnificent ideas of so-called minor scientists' (Frank). He adds that to run a huge organization like a university you need to have a lot of non-high-performers.

Amanda wants to control by using competitive features but is caught between chairs. She illustrates a number of situations where she had to acquire the 'artistry' of managing academics. One very impressive image is that of 'horse breeding', which she chose to illustrate her fight to convince a range of deans to come to a decision regarding the selection of performance data for the system accreditation: 'The little horses were wildly hopping through the meadow and still didn't want to go into the stall!' The problem for her was not only showing them that a decision was urgently needed but also that they had to decide as a group, the representative body for the continuance of the 'their' organization. To make them realize this responsibility was 'a tremendous cultural shock for all those present'.

The three presidents all agree that somebody has to do the job to keep the university together as one organization but 'you should not expect that anybody would thank you for that'. The relevance of data extracted from the competition system would prove to work almost like a magic wand, since 'nothing convinces a heterogeneous quarrelling group as quickly as numbers' (Amanda).

Competition reward as (inflationary) currency (Faculty Managers): As already shown, the two faculty managers Josefa and Stefan have very opposite views on the sense that competition makes for their university. Both, however, use the metaphor of a new 'currency' that performance data has gained in the last ten years. For Josefa, the system is complete nonsense and we have explored her criticisms already (contradicting plurality of competitions, diversity of disciplines and irresponsible mode of consumerism). Her alternative suggestion of a 'holistic currency of measurement' that would include soft factors like solidarity inputs does not even convince herself. She does not have a plan or vision for improvement, so she concentrates instead on doing her job as attentively as possible.

Stefan is convinced that, 'when competition is outside, we have to bring it in'. However, as we have already seen, even he denies that the system reaches its goal, which is to promote an incentive for higher performance, because other 'screws' are more important. Because of this dilemma, it would be necessary to restrict competitive features in a clever way. Stefan compares this 'healthy

competition' in referring to a bestselling book on child education (Chua, 2011).

We shouldn't exhaust the competition slogan down to the last, like these excessive parents who stand on the sidelines in sports arenas music classes and threaten to burn their kid's cuddly toy! No, we want healthy competition in keeping the steam on the boiler just a bit, but all of time. (Stefan)

By looking at the performance data every month, he can tell participants where they can locate themselves. But Stefan also admits, resting in the metaphor of currency, that this 'stimulating effect has only limited reach in the long run because it is subject to creeping inflation'; because almost everybody tries to increase publications, every point for publication gets less value.

Both Faculty Managers have serious reservations (albeit to different degrees) about competition, but both fail to find alternatives despite keeping an eye on this risky tool.

Plural competitions as decision mixers (Quality Managers): The metaphor of 'data pots and pans' is often used to document the use of the competition system for the organization: 'Which strengths and weaknesses can a discipline indicate with each of the different repositories?' Dirk explains how you can make profit from bad evaluation results (like too many student dropouts) by using the data in a competition for external funds for teaching quality initiatives. For the quality team, 'bad data' is always a good and simple chance to interact with academics facing future improvements.

Rationality versus weather (Controllers): 'Putting budgeting on more rational footing' (Emma) is seen as the mission of the competition system and also for controlling. This is not a job made by data, but enables a permanent reality check to prevent wrong and destructive conclusions that would, for example, close down indispensable disciplines. Particularly striking for the controllers is that the density of data queries often changes. 'This might depend upon how heavily the actual leader or manager of an institute uses data for their decisions' (Emma). 'Two years ago I had to do statistical analysis for so many things and now the use of numbers decline very much in decisions' (Bettina).

They both agree that, like the weather, data queries are subject to fluctuations.

Like the seasons you know when there is a new round of competition. But how the season will be this year concerning the use of data is always a surprise!
(Bettina)

It would be interesting to analyse which factors determine whether data is requested or 'used' for decisions. It can be noted that a performance data system only *potentially* serves as support for decisions and also can complicate decision finding.

Proving (international) relevance: Becoming a civilization disease?. Ben, head of commission and referee, clearly states that competition for him is meant to show

...whether what I do in research is internationally relevant or not. Relevance can only be partially measured by numbers but needs also to prove that your research is at the trouble spots of economy, society or politics. And this remains vital! (Ben)

However, as Ben has a good insight into the 'hot spot' of the competition system and its changes, he says he is astonished and worried about, how quickly and strongly the significance of quantification has increased:

Our work is too diverse to let it be represented by dots! On no account can we translate this into signs! (Ben)

In his experience almost everybody suffers from this reduction to numbers. This would have the most fatal effects on the young researchers of the next generation, because for them 'it doesn't make sense to do something without earning credit points.' Ben advised me to stroll around the corridors of his institutes to watch 'the aliens' of young professors working there, which he described as highly ambitious, but soulless and without interest for anything except their success.

Summary: Competition designer's justification work

By summarizing the self-descriptions of the competition designers, a diverse picture of their workplaces emerged. The study has given a rough impression

of a how these professionals create meaning within the contradicting aims of designing competition. The classifications above were based on their subjective view and provide a range of recurring dilemmas for the interviewees. The staff obviously has to cope with doing justification work as well as compensating or minimizing the drawbacks of bureaucratic competition.

The responsibility dilemma: The role descriptions have shown a range of role conflicts. The designers' dilemma is that they obviously have to struggle to take responsibility for how they measure academic performances on the one hand while, on the other, they feel dependent on the ministry's stipulations. We have seen gradual processes between refusing to be seen as responsible (regarding yourself just as an 'interface') and acting like a passionate referee or defender.

The representation dilemma: Even if the German example might be a weak form of performance management compared to other nations, the implementation of 'LOM' has already caused quite a lot of argument over what could be the best quantified representation for educational and scientific performances. In particular, the two 'lifeboat'-experiences of Stefan showed that sometimes competition designers stop fighting for a good indicator and go back to the poorer indicator because the efforts to find a more precise indicator are held to be uneconomic. The dilemma is then to judge when to search for a better indicator and when it is not even worth the effort to search for one.

The skill dilemma: Crafting competition seems to be a strongly sought after but also multi-faceted competence. The three dominant skills (communication and quantification skills as well as organizational knowledge) of the competition designers illustrate a necessity: to compensate tensions and contradictions of performance management practice. Their dilemma is that they need to reduce conflicts in acting as intermediators but, at the same time, need to function as a kind of non-emphatic scientific institution or court.

The sense-making dilemma: Concerning the sense-making of competition the perceptions have shimmered between (1) 'we simply and without alternative

have to manage this system!’ and (2) ‘the system is endlessly questionable and sinister for the future generations too!’ So, the dilemma for the designers of competition is whether to take their profession seriously or not.

Finally, the complex justification efforts recognized in the empirical section can be addressed in the following discussion with selected literature from critical management research.

Justifying bureaucratic competition: What kind of management is this?

The study has shown that for the competition designers the challenge is not – as assumed in the beginning – that they have to provide competitive tools in a very bureaucratic way. This obviously seems to be manageable. The *key challenge* in the view of the competition designers is that they permanently have to justify things and procedures that are under heavy criticism – even from themselves.

The co-existence of economization and bureaucracy

In German Higher Education Policy, the giants of bureaucracy and economization have long been handled as natural enemies: Competition is primarily introduced as a remedy against too much bureaucracy or ineffectiveness. In almost every public sector area, internal or external competition is pushed as a cleaning instrument for many undesired forms of organizational or individual routines (Olsen, 2008; du Gay, 2000). An overall impression in our workplace visits was that bureaucracy and competition have fallen into dubious company; both giants might as well compete and sustain each other. This has been alleged as a specific kind of late capitalism, where bureaucracy and competition amalgamate. Ethnologist David Graeber has portrayed the congruence and co-existence of both: any form of competition and market-driven reforms would effect an increase in rules and regulations.

The iron law of liberalism states that any market reform, any government initiative to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing total number of regulations. (Graeber, 2015: 9)

The bureaucratic competition described here is *not fictional* but takes place in a twilight setting of people bargaining. Among the growing scientific approaches that criticize new governances of neo-liberalism, the post-cold-war diagnosis of the 'Audit Society' (Power, 1994; Miller and Power, 2013; see also Crouch, 2004; 2015) is often referred to. The empirical results presented here illustrate that quantification and competitive tools do not prove to be a controlled apparatus of power, although the budgets redistributed have not been small. Several uncertainties have been explored, especially the permanent struggles of being/not being responsible or representative, underlining a constant ambiguity and moving in a permanent crisis of legitimation. The crux of matter is that this kind of distribution bears an extreme non-binding character, while demonstrating that the new performance management is meant to enable more transparency and objectivity. It is not a cold and logical control apparatus of capitalism like in the visions of Crouch, Power and Graeber. Having learned a lot from these dystopias, it is time to finally explore what lies beyond competition as a general stencil for distribution.

So, what kind of management is this? Can this be qualified as only a fictional management technique, because people only pretend in public to develop the best tools for steering universities? I think that would be too easy and belittling.

Several situations of justification work have been described here, even some processes of self-persuasion and micro-resistance (Schwarz, 2017). A wide repertoire of literature is concerned with capitalism and its automatism of justifying itself as being natural or necessary (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947; Foucault, 1977; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2004; Chiapello and Bourguignon, 2005; Sennett, 2006). To reflect these aspects of managing and justifying dilemmas, some additional insights from (critical) management studies would be helpful. In the concluding section, some contemporary ideas are selected to grasp how this kind of management can be characterized. So, at last, what can we learn from the described experiences and reasoning? It might be useful to examine impacts for individuals as well as for perspectives on social action.

Competition design is no bullshit job but...

Graeber (2018) describes five types of 'bullshit jobs'. These jobs are so meaningless that they become psychologically destructive, especially when work ethics have become interrelated with self-worth in capitalism. The twelve competition managers not only seem to be confident and influential but their skills apparently also develop through the work of going through systemic contradictions as a collective. Graeber's (in my view) despicable diagnosis underestimates the staff a bit hastily. Deskilling perspectives misjudge that while dealing with such contradictory workplace requirements people also widen their skills including their reflection capability. Justification work has shown to be a demanding process of managing contradictions. In shifting the focus from the deskilling- to development-processes, questions of creative perseverance of the staff arise.

The discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of management generally is striking. Other empirical studies on middle managers as well looked behind the formal and official descriptions of these workplaces. They described these workplaces as 'empty labour' (Paulsen, 1914), 'myths of management' (Fleming, 2016) or 'managerial lives' in an 'imperfect world' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2016). How can we respond to this picture of people wasting their time in pretending 'to manage'?

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016) describe this superficiality and highlight dilemmas that are similar to those found here, in order to contrast popular management ideals with reality. They analyse 'managerial lives' from an identity approach to get insights from managers' 'inner world experiences'. Research on managers failing to shape a coherent self-image seems to be in vogue. The permanent trial of creating stable and reliable conditions of social order might be exhaustive and time consuming. However, the crucial point is that (young) professionals often take over distorted pictures of managerial life from popular management literature as a worthwhile future or role model. This can have dangerous consequences for them as well for the educational system: 'It is frustrating when you cannot work seriously with what you believe expresses part of who you are as a manager' (*ibid.*: 331). What is needed is a serious reflection about how people can find a more critical

learning mind-set in dealing with managerial work in contrast to unreliable ideals.

What is to be done: Perspectives and paradoxes

After having explored the disputed bureaucracy-competition-nexus, let us conclude by returning to the beginning. Josefa reminded us to not tolerate something that is considered wrong for too long and in too great an extent, as it was in the case of the GDR before 1989, where she was brought up. So, how are the conditions for action and resistance now? The analogy between neoliberal management and the end of the GDR-regime might not stand on all counts, but it is refreshingly thought-provoking. For it does strike a chord, when denying the contradictions within the system turns out an unbearable test of endurance – like a pain in the neck and in various bodily parts. The collective urge to peacefully break away seems inevitable, but how?

...by researching: Social research has become difficult as the density of contradictions grows in the course of attempts to make societies more rational. This perspective on the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947) is nothing new. But observing management – and if it is only for a period of time – as an anarchic form of control may not be strong enough to effect a new social movement, but it is an issue that should be considered by future management and organizational research, practice and teaching. Even recent organizational research has recommended to ‘fill a crucial intellectual gap’ (Arora-Jonsson et al., 2020: 19) by conceiving competition no longer as naturally given but as an ideological construction.

...by protesting: Concerning the current state of universities, plenty of protest movements around the globe try to protect and transform the public university with campaigns like: ‘Voices of researchers’ (EU), ‘British Council for Defence of Academic Freedom’, ‘Really Open University’, ‘Education not for sale’ (UK), ‘The Academic Manifesto’ (Netherlands), ‘Slow Science Manifesto’, ‘Hochschulwatch’ (Germany). Meanwhile, entire academic associations have disembarked from university rankings.

...by thinking of alternatives to competition: To reflect upon what *political implications* bureaucratic competition has, it is fruitful to take into consideration what has been beautifully described as ‘the limits of neoliberalism’ (Davies, 2014; see also Davies and Dunne, 2015). Competition has become an unbeaten ‘rhetorical and evaluative device’ (Davies and Dunne, 2015: 156). Having understood where the tremendous legitimating force lies, it is possible to conceive of alternatives – although they remain abstract as of now.

It might be concluded that the principle of competition, although permeated by disagreement, obviously still works as a makeshift consensus-machine. Increasingly, however, it reveals itself as obsolete, fragile and extremely dubious. Competition seems to be necessary as a moral and widely unquestioned principle, even if it proves absurd every day – yet it seems indispensable in the face of a public sector that poses as economically oriented and more capitalist than the keenest of neoliberals. So, this might be one reason why this kind of management consumes an awful lot of justification workers. The claims of competition themselves have changed historically from freedom and plurality to equality and justice into benefit, effectiveness and inequality. Davies and Dunne describe competition as a ‘mode of justification’ (*ibid.*: 156) that has mutated from a justification of ‘markets to a justification for business’ (Davies, 2014: 47). This mode of justification is powerful because it has ‘certain paradoxical qualities’ (*ibid.*: 199) like: the state can choose to be active or passive and ‘a paradoxical combination of equality and inequality’ (*ibid.*) is secure. The success of competitive dynamics lies in its capacity for ‘neoliberal rejoinders’ between visions of the collective and visions of the individual:

For instance, if a different vision of collective organization is proposed, the neoliberal rejoinder is that this must involve abandoning individual ‘choice’ or freedom. Or if a different vision of the individual is proposed, the neoliberal rejoinder is that this is unrealistic given the competitive global context. (Davies, 2014: 201)

Because of these neoliberal rejoinders, the permanent imperative for competition has become commonplace: on the one hand, competition seems not appealable but, on the other, it has this non-binding quality as seen in the

case studies. On this basis, it has become clear that it is necessary to ‘invent new visions of individual agency...and collective organization, at the same time’ (Davies, 2014: 201).

Therefore, the predicament is obvious. Whether people will develop a vision of a collective (being responsible for the individual) and individuals (being responsible for the collective) will remain an open issue for a while. Resistance to this kind of competition can be made visible in the search for different ways of practicing and looking at managerial work. This struggle from people within the system should not be overlooked – neither in practice nor in management research. In fact, competition has become uneconomic and out-of-date, a mere simulation of societal consensus. Its agency should yield to alternatives beyond playing off individualism and collectivity.

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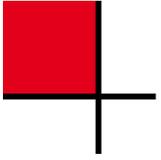
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Click for work: Rethinking work through online work distribution platforms

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abstract

Online work distribution platforms such as *Amazon Mechanical Turk* or *Uber* alter how work tasks are chosen or assigned. Put succinctly, instead of the employer choosing the employee, the worker chooses the task. Responses to these new technological possibilities for distributing tasks are all deeply influenced by the contemporary historical moment, which privileges approaches to workers that take them to be neoliberal market actors. In this article, we examine how these platforms interact with current ideas about work and contemporary configurations of work by altering the ways work is accomplished both within and outside of an organization through open calls. In particular, we focus on the challenges these platforms bring to the problems of coordination ever-present in any project of designing the work, disseminating the work, and controlling the work process.

Introduction

Work distribution platforms such as *Uber* or *Amazon Mechanical Turk* change how work is distributed, and thus encourage people to examine anew how work is defined and allocated. These platforms allow work to be distributed by ‘open-calls’ rather than by assignment or pre-defined job role requirements and commonly involve crowdwork and open source principles. They provide structures that significantly alter how work is organized, significantly enough to require that users re-examine what forms of social

organization can and should accompany work. Many view these platforms as harnessing new imaginaries of collaborative engagement. They allow participants to operate as if they do not have to subject themselves to a job position whose commitments and activities they may not wish to perform. That is, they offer a neoliberal take on an age-old question at the heart of work and organization studies: why would workers agree to subordinate themselves to others (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Burawoy, 1979; Weeks, 2011)? These platforms offer workers the chance to imagine themselves as autonomous entrepreneurial selves and thus reply to Boltanski and Chiapello's question: 'I don't have to'.

Inspired by observations of several work platforms, we offer this thought piece to suggest how online work platforms operate in contexts where neoliberal logics prevail. What happens to work that is performed through these mechanisms? While there is great diversity in platform structures, in this article we provide a conceptual framework for seeing the broad commonalities underlying how these platforms transform what work can and should be. These platforms do not merely extend existing work processes through piece work, but rather indicate changes at the level of how tasks are classified, made distinct, and performed.

In what follows, we first problematize work distribution platforms as exposing a contradiction at the heart of neoliberalism – that between the entrepreneurial self and the structure of the firm. We then provide a framework for seeing the commonalities that underlie these platforms. This framework is motivated by crowdwork and open-work experiments and efforts that took place wholly *inside* the confines of a large corporation, belying the expectations that these platforms are exclusively geared towards externalizing labor. Drawing on observations of these experiments, we explore three ways in which the work may be being reshaped through use of these mechanisms: (1) the design of work, (2) the dissemination of and access to work, and (3) the control, management and authority over work. While online work distribution platforms in general change the organization of work, these work practices are informed, as we discuss in conclusion, by participants' own neoliberal perspective on work which projects a tension between autonomy and firm efficiencies.

Problematizing work

By enabling participants to imagine themselves as entrepreneurial selves, work distribution platforms create a peculiarly neoliberal contradiction between the entrepreneurial self, as described by Michel Foucault (2004), and the benefits of the firm, as imagined by an early ordinal economist, Ronald Coase (1937), who influenced many neoliberal scholars.¹ Accepting the general neoliberal assumption that markets are the ideal form of social order, Coase (1937) asked: why have firms in the first place, since corporations do not operate internally according to market principles? He concluded that firms can lower transaction costs through the managerial organization of production, making firms more of an economically preferred route than the market for certain purposes (see also Benkler, 2002). In short, there is a tension between the strong appeal in not having a boss and the efficiencies of the firm. Our argument is that this tension, which accompanies online work distribution platforms, becomes visible when analyzing how these platforms re-organize work – the way work is designed, the ways in which it is distributed, and the ways in which it is controlled.

While open call work distribution is not a new phenomenon (for historical examples, see Nelson, 1990; Scholliers and Schwarz, 2003), these online platforms further validate Yochai Benkler's prescient insight that the digital has the potential to transform the firm/market distinctions Coase defined (Benkler, 2002; Coase, 1937). How is it that work distribution platforms accomplish this transformation? The appeal of work distribution platforms is grounded in currently dominant neoliberal sensibilities that encourage workers to view themselves as businesses in their own right, and thus makes subordination less desirable (Foucault 2004; Rose 1998). While these platforms align themselves well with contemporary ideological shifts in concepts of work, they also undercut many of the solutions that firms historically provided to the practical dilemmas of working with others. As we show, these platforms encapsulate a contradiction that is internal to

1 By engaging with Coase, we depart from much of the Foucauldian scholarship on the entrepreneurial self by asking how this self operates with a corporation (for other exceptions, see Swan and Fox, 2009).

neoliberalism, counterpoising the ideal of autonomy with Coase's re-affirmation of the firms' purpose. Thus these systems force people to revisit questions of coordination, cooperation, and collaboration present whenever working with others.

Work distribution platforms

Since the turn of the century, online work platforms have proliferated, enabling people to tender tasks of tremendously varied scope. Work distribution platforms allow both work requesters and work seekers to opt in to soliciting and selecting work assignments. Work assignments are made available broadly, rather than being assigned due to an organizational position. They use a range of market mechanisms as contractual forms, from fixed price bids to auctions to contests, and may include traditional hourly or salaried pay or outcome-based work (pay for results). This definition encompasses a broad range of open-call systems – we focus on those which rely on internet-based mechanisms to function. Depending on the platform, participants respond by claiming tasks, applying to be selected to perform work, or submitting results to a simple request or a contest. Some systems – such as *Mechanical Turk* or *Topcoder* – only support digital work. But not all the work performed is digital work. For instance, through *Task Rabbit* people can find others nearby to perform chores – helping cook for a party, or assembling furniture. Participatory systems common to citizen science efforts enable volunteers to use telescopes or other instruments to gather data on the skies, waters, or soil. In some systems the work is performed as a crowd, involving degrees of coordinated action. In others, any given effort can be performed singularly. Nonetheless, even when offline work occurs, the work distribution, contracting, and communication about tasks takes place online. They promise workers the freedom to work when, where, and on what they like.

These platforms vary widely in the nature of the task being distributed (Doan et al., 2011). Online marketplaces such as *Upwork* or *Freelancer.com* act as intermediaries to match work projects requiring certain skills with specific producers, such as getting legal work performed or software code written. *Mechanical Turk* is known for its decomponentization of work into tiny bits,

or microtasks such as translating ten words. Microtasks can be disseminated, claimed, and performed by people worldwide within minutes. At the other end of the spectrum, *InnoCentive* and *Kaggle* provide platforms through which other enterprises seek to solve large, complex challenges by soliciting submissions to contests. Even crowdfunding plays into these dynamics. People can identify work they would like to see undertaken, such as producing an artwork, and at the same time solicit investment in the form of others' time and money to get it done.

Work distribution platforms change how the workplace functions as a forum for facilitating connective action. Platform driven work acts to transcend and even displace forms of workplace sociality – forms that affect workers' experiences both positively and negatively – engendered by organizations. Participation in intra-organizational crowd and open work initiatives has prompted participants to reflect on their identity at work (Cefkin et al., 2014). It also puts into relief for workers the relative degree of commonality or distance from their fellow workers.

These platforms do not inherently undermine firms' boundaries, and can be used internally among full time employees. Open call work distribution is not synonymous with freelancing per se.² The cases that are used to illustrate our points here (and are described further below) are drawn from efforts inside of *IBM*. Yet while firm boundaries are in place, these platforms potentially undermine some of the benefits of firms by introducing market mechanisms for distributing the work.

Firm control, platform control and the nature of work tasks

Underlying these changes are questions of subordination and equity. Open call platforms presumably remove certain hierarchical relationships – the supervisor no longer assigns jobs, instead workers select for themselves the tasks they want to do. They may even make requests of others to do work for them. Champions of these platforms view this as providing more autonomy to workers (for a critique see e.g. Kingsley et al 2015; Rosenblat and Stark,

2 These platforms are not inherently synonymous with shedding jobs from companies, or with the freelancer market.

2016) and allowing workers to enter into more equitable relationships with each other. In this perspective, a temporally bound contract stands in for equity (Kittur et al., 2013; Malone, 2004). That workers are continuously choosing the work they do, and may even in turn ‘outsource’ tasks to others, is seen as evidence that they are working as equals among individuals who also can select tasks and structure their time on their own terms.

Neither the temporary contract, however short, nor the technological infrastructure supporting open calls, in themselves are harbingers of autonomy or equity. Instead, freedom or equity arises from the beliefs and often routinized practices shaping the use of technologies and the implementation of contracts. A platform’s structure is too underdetermined to produce freedom or equity on its own, and thus this prevalent interpretation of why some ways of distributing tasks are improvements is linked to widespread neoliberal views that corporations must change how they have functioned previously (Gillespie, 2010).

When people use open call platforms, they often do so while surrounded by neoliberal approaches to work. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue that a ‘market type of control’ emerges as firms increasingly attempt to create market conditions both within the context of the firm, and through various techniques for outsourcing work (2006: 82). Rather than using hierarchical relationships to discipline workers, companies turn to market competition as an effective motivating external force. They write: ‘Creating competition has replaced control of work by the directors of these units, who in return can rely on customer demand to exercise control that seems to issue no longer from them, but from the market’ (*ibid.*: 82). Open call platforms are prone to use markets to replace workplace hierarchies – relocating hierarchical processes into the technology (Irani, 2015). In some platforms, such as *99Designs* and *Topcoder*, competition determines who will get paid for the tasks that they do, and, in general, disciplines workers into performing in prescribed ways.

Open call platforms both resonate with strands of neoliberal beliefs about autonomy and work, and strengthen the intrusion of market-based interactions into firm transactions (see also Sundararajan, 2016). A long-

standing distinction between firm and markets among economists was most notably addressed by Ronald Coase in the early years of the neoliberal thought collective (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009). Coase explores what value firms offer over and above market transactions, asking what functions firms serve. He famously argued that firms exist because they lower transaction costs, in part by supplying workers with opportunities to build long-term relationships within a workplace, and experience solving sporadically occurring problems. Firms contain routines, infrastructure, and historical knowledge that make them desirable, especially if the alternative is economic activity organized solely through market transactions. Open call work distribution has the potential to undercut benefits firms traditionally offer by re-configuring how knowledge and resources circulate within firms. It often introduces more fleeting market transactions into what were previously relatively stable forms of production organized through managerial structures.³

Susan Leigh Star and Anselm Strauss (1999) prefigured many of the shifts that these platforms potentially engender when discussing how work evolves under capitalism:

At the extreme, if corporate management chooses to break work down into component tasks and remove it from the biography, job, or career of any particular individual, then it must be fully describable and in some sense rationalized. ...The kinds of work especially affected include tacit and contextual knowledge, the expertise acquired by old hands, and long-term teamwork. (1999: 11)

They argued that these transformations risked re-inscribing social inequalities into work practices, largely by valuing some tasks and rendering others categorically invisible or putatively inconsequential.

Each work platform has a structure that might coincide with dominant approaches to determining what work is valuable, although not all platforms

³ See also Julia Tomasetti's (2016) critique of how *Uber* inaccurately portrays its version of a work distribution platform in Coasian terms. She argues that Coasian views of the firm don't take into account the various ways in which contemporary firm organizations configure how knowledge and resources are distributed internally.

reinforce the same ideologies. For example, Irani has argued that since the microtasks of *Amazon Mechanical Turk* are so often designed to be as simple as possible, the platform becomes an infrastructure that produces:

the difference between ‘innovators’ and ‘menial’ symbolic workers. Programmers who manage thousands remain flexible tinkerers with few accountabilities. (Irani, 2015: 232)

Amazon Mechanical Turk functions to support emergent views of appropriate divisions of work in the knowledge economy in which innovation is linked to charisma and persuasion, and routine tasks are depreciated. Yet other platforms might structure how the tasks are organized so that the worker is chosen precisely because of their ability to perform complex and innovative work.

A framework for analyzing work in online distribution platforms

In this section we outline the features of work in work distribution platforms, focusing on three general components: 1) work design, 2) dissemination and access to work, and 3) authority and control. Before we elaborate on these three components, we briefly introduce the ethnographic material that informs our analysis.

Ethnographic inspirations

This article is principally a thought piece meant to suggest a framework for analyzing online work platforms in contexts where neoliberal ideologies dominate. The framework has been informed by studies Melissa Cefkin conducted with colleagues at IBM and draws upon them to illustrate the features of these platforms.⁴ They participated in several projects that experimented with intra-organizational crowd-work. Three projects in particular inform our narrative. One was a crowd-funding initiative run in a corporate research lab. Each lab member was granted a (virtual) sum of money that they could use to invest in projects proposed by their peers in a custom-designed platform that supported similar actions to the Kickstarter

4 All ethnographic quotes are drawn from this fieldwork.

platform. Cefkin and her colleagues studied how the project unfolded, including people's experiences as both proposers and investors.

The second project was a crowd-work system primarily for executing technical work such as software development. The system was designed to support work components expected to take between half a day and seven days of effort. Participants responded to open requests with bids on how they would accomplish the work and naming a 'price'. Workers throughout the company could participate, along with a set of pre-vetted external contract workers. Internal workers were invited with the encouragement that it was a chance to further develop skills or fill unused time (such as during a code-freeze in a development team). External workers were paid real dollars.

The third project was a 'marketplace' designed for peer-to-peer work exchange. Any participating member could post a request and others could offer to perform the work. The system was deployed among a select community of workers in the company, those trained in organizational change management methods. In this case, Cefkin and her colleagues designed and helped support the pilot of the system through a user-centered design approach.

Cefkin and her colleagues performed both interviews and observations as part of their applied research engagements. They did over 50 interviews with individuals participating in the efforts as both work requestors and work providers (by phone or in person where possible). They also observed meetings in which the leaders of the efforts discussed plans and statuses, reviewed documentation, and followed informal exchanges about the efforts when possible. Fieldnotes and/or meeting and interview transcripts were kept by researchers and analyzed in the context of the applied research projects. The research team met regularly to discuss observations and emerging themes as regards their applied interests, noting as well themes and observations that fell beyond their immediate interests. In addition to sharing the numerous conference presentations and publications that resulted from these efforts inside IBM with Gershon, Cefkin re-examined

these data, observations and analysis in conversation with Gershon, resulting in this piece.

Shifting how work is designed

The people who use these platforms to have work performed are themselves essential workers in the system. They must fashion a vision of the work so that it can be accomplished through the system's mechanisms. When people initiate tasks on work distribution platforms, they must consider how tasks are made into distinct units, as well as how to segment work, anticipating how the resulting products will travel and be recombined. The platforms are giving rise to new ways of designing work, either by componentizing work into bits and parts, or, alternatively, leaving tasks more holistically assembled in larger parts, an aspect often overlooked by critics (Anya, 2015). Contest mechanisms, for instance, enable requesters to specify desired results, freeing themselves up from identifying the parts of the work or even knowing what the parts are. The requesters leave it up to those who will perform the work to assemble or disassemble as they see fit. In engaging with this necessity to divide up tasks in new ways, workers could be understood as seeing the workplace more and more from the vantage point of a business seeking to enhance itself.

When studying a crowd-work system for software development, Cefkin et al. (2014) found that figuring out how to get quality work done was a significant challenge, partially because of dilemmas emerging from the intricacies of segmenting work. This is part of the invisible work of making crowd-work happen, and the downside of introducing market mechanisms into the firm (Anya, 2015; Cefkin et al., 2014). There is effort involved in specifying a request for unknown workers. This is particularly acute in cases where there are specific requirements for how the work is performed, such as some software development where strict standards and security protocols must be assured. In general, requesters cannot assume shared understandings about what terms mean or what typical steps to producing results would be (Suchman, 1995). As one work requester succinctly explained:

To a retained team member I can simply say, ‘scramble an egg’, whereas to a [crowd-work system] player, I have to say, ‘open the refrigerator’, ‘remove the egg carton’, ‘open the egg carton’, ‘remove one egg’, etc.

System users felt that every possible aspect of performing the tasks needed to be elaborated to get satisfactory results, forcing the worker requesting the task to perform work he himself would not previously have been required to perform.

Work at a distance, whether geographically, temporally or conceptually, often surprises participants with areas of knowledge and perception that have locally specified meanings, even where universal understandings were expected (Bailey et al., 2012; Guesling, 2013; Moore et al., 2014). For example, the seemingly straightforward task of extracting addresses from a set of data, as described by another work requester, revealed tacit assumptions she had made. She needed the data for integrating into a mass emailing. However she had not specified its purpose or preferred form of delivery in the work specs, so the results she got back were not properly formatted for her email system. They had to be significantly reworked, nearly negating any benefit she had gained in outsourcing the task. Members of her local team would have already known why she wanted this information and anticipated the best way of providing results had they performed the task rather than crowd sourced workers. A common lesson learned by new users, this example illustrates that scrambled eggs are never just scrambled eggs. Scrambled eggs could be for breakfast or for mixing into an emulsifier. They can be prepared hard or soft, plain or salted. Work activities are always already embedded in systems of meaning. The use of work distribution platforms within existing systems of work disrupt those meanings. People have to conceptualize and design work in new ways when unknown workers, with unanticipated experience and knowledge, are involved.

Segmenting tasks in new ways has some upsides as well as the aforementioned downsides. In their study of the peer-to-peer work exchange for organizational change management tasks, for example, Cefkin and her colleagues found that many participants viewed their chance to do work through the system as an opportunity to learn something new, something

outside their regular tasks as fixed by their workplaces' hierarchical and role-based division of work. This resonates with neoliberal corporate discourses advocating that workers should always be on the lookout for opportunities to enhance their skills. Yet in practice the platforms often thwart the users' hopes by not providing transportable evidence that the user has acquired a skill – to be hired outside the platform, one needs to be able to document that one has learned these skills in an appropriate and circulatable form (see also Gershon, 2017).

Workers could at times combine their existing knowledge and experience – in many instances, knowledge and experience requesters were unaware they possessed – with the work that was requested, giving rise to creative potential in designing and performing tasks. For example, a participant recognized that the task she signed up to complete, surveying people's adoption of a new program, would not be complete without a communication plan, something she felt especially excited to work on.⁵ In consultation with the requester, she expanded her scope to include that. During the crowdfunding effort, a scientist who was also a hobbyist fruit grower attempted to bolster a proposed project to create an employee garden by suggesting technologies and practices for soil improvement and watering.

Segmenting work in new ways also potentially creates new roles in the workplace. Media scholars have long observed that new technologies are often accompanied by new professions – telephone operators in the case of telephones (Fischer, 1992), or stenographers in the case of institutional shorthand machines (Inoue, 2011; Kittler, 1990). Work platforms are no exception. Depending on how the platform is organized, these platforms can be accompanied by people specializing in forms of dispute resolution or evaluation, although they are not always remunerated (Gillespie, 2010). When tasks are distributed in new ways, roles often emerge to assist participants in coordinating these new tasks, and addressing problems that spring up throughout the process.

5 This was only possible because of the platform's affordances, not all platforms allow this.

As these examples suggest, these work platforms encourage users to engage with what work entails as a conscious arrangement of tasks, one which can be segmented and re-combined in various ways. Determining just where a task starts and ends is work that both requesters and those performing the work face – should the task include removing the eggs from the carton or should that be a separate task for another worker? Might an adoption plan include a plan for communications too, or is that work that does not need to be done at all? When focusing on how these tasks are segmented, requesters also have to anticipate future uses of the results – some results will travel differently or combine in more limited ways than others. They have to develop new strategies for planning work and for envisioning the directions through which the work will circulate (Bailey et al., 2012). New forms of segmented tasks can also lead to unexpected consequences – previously unidentified talents might come to the fore and new work roles might emerge (Mikołajewska-Zajac, 2016). In practice, these work platforms don't simply connect work requesters and work performers in new ways, they challenge all involved to think anew about how tasks are segmented and combined in ways that transform all elements of how work is conceptualized and performed. They engage participants, in other words, as if they are in control of planning work. This brings the experience of operating as if oneself is a business into the very performance of tasks, and redefines the efficiencies a firm offers.

Transforming the dissemination of and access to work

One of the defining features of work distribution platforms is the open-call approach – announcing tasks broadly for people to select or apply to do. This mechanism overtly changes how work is disseminated and who can access it. *AirBnB* allows home-owners to become hoteliers. *Uber* allows non-professional 'drivers' to work as drivers using their own cars. People are encouraged to imagine themselves as bundles of assets and skills that they can bring to the marketplace – even people who have been highly constrained in having opportunities for work. Thus *Samasource* directs work from *Mechanical Turk* to poor women, youth, as well as residents in refugee camps who are less likely to find work, and may even be barred from local work opportunities (Fish and Srinivasan, 2011).

Even within organizations, these mechanisms provide people access to work that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to do. As noted above, Cefkin participated in designing and testing a system for exchanging work among dispersed and loosely affiliated employees all interested in organizational change management, a human resource allied practice that uses principles and theories from behavioral and social sciences to guide people in organizations through transitions. Though it is an increasingly professionalizing field, few dedicated positions for change management specialists exist, and work opportunities are uneven. The work exchange platform was designed to extend opportunities for performing change management related tasks. Participation was voluntary for company members. What drove participation? Some people mentioned that they welcomed the chance to do uncommon work. A participant in China explained that change management had barely taken hold in China and the work exchange provided her a chance to work on tasks directed to other parts of the world. She saw it as a chance to advance her knowledge and experience while using her time in a way that would be viewed as productive in the process.⁶ However, as a part of the company consulting division responsible for billable hours, she ran up against the limits of the platform which did not allow her to be compensated on par with her billable client work. When this member stopped participating, she acted from the same anxiety many consultants feel when too much ‘unbilled’ time can put them at risk of being laid off. Here bringing the market logic into the firm undercut the benefits Coase (1937) argued the firm potentially offers to develop knowledge for addressing sporadic problems.

From the perspective of those disseminating the work, work distribution platforms enable work performed that people would not know how or have the capacity to perform. This leads to more kinds of work being performed by strangers, work performed for us but by people with whom we have little or no knowledge or contact. At some level this is nothing new – few people likely know who drove the trucks that delivered food they buy at a grocery. But these mechanisms radically decrease the distance between someone and

6 Other participants, too, referenced the resume-building skills gained by participating in the system.

that stranger. Anyone can commission a complete stranger through a crowd-work system to build a website, or arrange a travel itinerary. They may be known only by an online alias if specified at all. This puts into sharp relief questions of qualification and the adequacy of training. Can you trust your *Uber* driver? Will the worker you hired understand exactly what ‘scramble the egg’ means?

Despite being premised on stranger-interactions, sustained connections do develop over time, both among workers (Gray et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2014; Salehi et al., 2015) and between workers and requesters. Cefkin observed a particularly interesting discussion among work requesters in the crowd-work platform she studied, who met weekly to discuss successes and challenges in using the system. Workers in the system use account names rather than real names.⁷ In one discussion, a manager raised an issue: the results she received from a crowd-worker were incomplete. Based on prior experience with this worker (known by his screen name), she felt certain that this was a simple error, the worker had uploaded the wrong document. And when she shared his account name, others agreed based on their own prior positive interactions with this worker. All became concerned as she indicated repeated messages to him through the system were going unanswered. Might something have happened to him? Might he have meanwhile gotten a full-time job and ‘left’ the platform? Might he be sick? Was there anyone who could find out who he (really) was and where he lived and check on him? Platform users quickly began to imagine a wider set of obligations because someone had begun to act in ways perceived as uncharacteristic to their previous platform-mediated interactions. They were quickly stymied in their efforts to act on these obligations by realizing

7 A number of work distribution platforms use the approach of screen-names. One reason is an attempt to avoid identifiers that could lead to bias. Another is to ensure that all activity has to happen through the system itself. Interactions brokered by the system but which move outside the system can no longer be monitored for their acquiescence to the terms of engagement. Salehi et al. (2015) describe having to address the implied risk by designing in even additional layers of anonymity to their *Dynamo* system, a community system developed to facilitate collective action by *Turkers* to protect any *Turker* who participated.

how much contact only through the platform limited off-platforms interactions.⁸

For many, the promise of these platforms is that the distribution of work will be less biased. As a speaker in a panel discussion on work distribution platforms expressed hopefully: 'It's about the work, it's not about whose ass I kiss around the water cooler'. At the same time, this introduces a level of uncertainty as well. One participant in the change management work exchange said:

I don't know their background. They don't know mine.... So it was kind of a leap of faith.

Later she added:

It's very rare for me to work with someone who has no idea of who I am. That is very brave of them.

This participant was reflecting on how much courage she felt it took to work without having met directly, with only the briefest of communication, and without having been specifically selected into, and vetted by, the manager's organization – precisely the actions that can lead to systematic biases in hiring and work distribution.

Yet here too the reality is complicated by system design elements and practices in using these systems, which can function to create new biases.⁹ Timing, for instance, can create imbalances in terms of who gets preferred access to work opportunities. In systems with global participation, it is not uncommon for new work requests to be opened during working hours. To the extent that a large portion of requests originate from the United States, this creates an advantage to those working in the US time zones since, in many cases, there is a bias towards the first to respond. Workers in other time zones may adjust their work schedules in hopes of accessing preferred

8 See Lampinen et al. (2015) for another example of how anonymity on a platform affected offline interactions and how people used the platform.

9 See Schor et.al. (2015) for a discussion of class bias in these systems.

gigs by working nights, thus, creating disjuncture with their local settings.¹⁰ This can be addressed by changing the systems' design: systems instead could hold back some jobs for releasing at other times – which risks creating a reverse bias. As Graham and Anwar (2018) explain: 'Clients located primarily in high-income countries can force workers from around the world (in rich and poor countries) to compete with one another in a giant labor market'.

Participation is heavily guided, in most cases, through profiles and reputation systems. This too can introduce imbalances into who secures preferred participation. For instance, frequent and longer-serving performers benefit from prior experience in the system which produces greater measurable traces of activity. It can be a challenge for newcomers to gain entry, just as those with less frequently called on skills and experience may be made less visible. Algorithms guide the selection of where and how to place inputs to the system. They determine, for example, which edits to prioritize in the event of changes to an entry in a crowdsourced resource such as *Wikipedia* or which item to rank at the top of a list. While numerous factors may be used in the design of the algorithms, most include an element of frequency or density of prior activity.

These work platforms are most well-known for how the platforms transform who has access to opportunities to work. Supposedly the platforms create a form of equality – anyone willing and able to work can earn money through these platforms, anyone willing to pay has access to work. Because connections are made virtually (and thus there is little information available about the offline identities), biases based on gender, age, race, and religion are that much harder to enact. It is not only that strangers are contracting with strangers, but little is known about these strangers other than their willingness to work or their willingness to pay for work.

The fantasy is that this will be a marketplace operating without the social ways in which people fashion identity. Ethnographic research on how these

10 See Aneesh (2006) for a discussion of the lived consequences of the 'temporal dissonance' created by efforts to create temporal integration across time zones.

platforms function in practice reveals how complicated enacting this ideal can be (Lampinnen et al., 2015; Schor et al., 2015). Interactions between strangers can change rapidly as people develop relationships through working together, relationships that, as our example shows, the platforms' structure can end up thwarting. In addition, the platforms might provide new paths towards connecting work requestors and work providers, but the work still needs to be performed and evaluated as work that was done well or not. Here the objective promise of a metric reputation can be at odds with how workers interact with each other to build up a history through common, intersubjective experiences. As platforms encourage evaluations to accrue, added barriers to newcomers emerge. Some workers also begin to feel tied to the platform, anchored because they have accrued a metric reputation that does not transfer easily to other platforms, a contrast with resumes that enable workers to transfer to another job. Stranger-interactions come with their own social conundrums, and even the solutions to these conundrums have complicated and unpredictable social consequences. While neoliberal ideals of a relatively unconstrained free market of business-to-business relations dominate, undercutting the advantages of a firm makes trying to operate through purely transactional norms of business hard to realize and sustain.

Reorganizing control, management, and authority

Open call work platforms potentially enable a wider range of participants to engage in tasks than traditional forms of hierarchical control allow. These platforms also engage a diverse range of contractual terms. In doing so, they change how work is controlled and managed.

In many ways, work requesters maintain strong control over what the work is and how it is performed. This is supported by a number of mechanisms designed into the systems. The platforms may enable specifying a given set of highly detailed procedures that workers must, in turn, ensure were followed. The smaller the task, in many cases, the more specified and constrained the means of performing the task. They may even include built-in tracking systems for monitoring time-on-tasks, as *UpWork* does. Indeed, comments in the discussion forums that commonly accompany any of these

platforms have historically referred to its big-brotherly presence. Another means of retaining control is by determining the terms by which final results are accepted. One risk to workers in contest and micro-task work sites is that people will perform work, but their work is rejected. There may be little or no explanation as to why nor a means of disputing these decisions (Irani and Silberman, 2013). Other systems, such as the technical crowd-work platform Cefkin and her colleagues (2014) studied, are designed to encourage clear acceptance and rejection policies and provide processes for appeal. While potentially increasing fairness, these elements also significantly increased the effort required of work requesters to manage work through the system. They demand that requesters specify all potential aspects of the work that could affect acceptance ('whoops, I failed to indicate that the egg needed to be removed from the carton before scrambling...') and the criteria for evaluation, exceeding the taken-for-granted understanding workers develop in person.

These risks are not absent in work outside these systems. It is not uncommon offline to have a breach of contract, to have to chase clients for payment, or to face never getting a sufficient explanation as to why work was rejected. Indeed the often short duration and/or limited scope of work common to many work distribution platforms may be felt by participants as a means to mitigate the risks of agreeing to any one job by spreading out opportunities. This ability to select and assemble a range of opportunities is considered one of the upsides to these systems. Workers claim a sense of control over how their work is evaluated by avoiding excessive lock into any specific client.

Workers regain authority, further, to select their own work. This may be of particular significance within organizations, with threats to managerial regimes of authority being one of the potentially more profound consequences of intra-organizational work platforms. Management is largely a system for commanding resources, including employees' time and efforts. Having systems that invite employees to choose freely what work they want to spend time on risks up ending that regime. Questions of authority and control emerge even in the seemingly simple question of whether and how a work distribution platform should involve managers in the work of their staff

in the system. In what way should a manager participate in their staff members' time and selections? This was a question Cefkin and her colleagues (2014) faced in helping design the work marketplace for change management professionals. Should a manager be asked to give explicit approval per work task, and if so, should the system be designed not to move a bid forward without manager approval? Should a manager be notified of their employee's participation, but lack a means to voice support or disapproval of the employee's effort within the system? Or should a manager not be notified at all?¹¹

Reputation mechanisms are one of the most direct forms of control built into these platforms. Reputation mechanisms are used to identify participants, and to measure their activity. A large number of reputation mechanisms are used across the platforms, from subjective evaluations of approval, such as the styles of ratings or 'liking' on sites such as *Yelp*, to measured participation rates. For workers, these ratings can signal the number of tasks applied to, selected for, completed, on-time work, and so on. Echoing what Cefkin found to be true in the crowd-work system for technical work, Martin et al. argue that reputation mechanisms often create hidden work for those completing tasks on *Amazon Mechanical Turk*:

Reputation management tactics are often defensive and the Turker shoulders the potential cost of the practice. These practices include ensuring they can do the work before accepting it, specialising in known tasks for specific requesters, getting training on tasks from coworkers, ensuring the completion code would load and so on. (2014: 10)

Currently, in *Mechanical Turk* workers bear the brunt of negotiating that reputation mechanisms work smoothly. This is not, however, a necessary feature of these platforms. On a number of platforms, it is possible for work

11 Cefkin and her team, together with their stakeholders, chose the second option, notification, expecting that it would force an on-going direct line of communication between employees and their management.

requesters also to be rated based on their responsiveness, effectiveness in specifying work, and so on.¹²

Reputation mechanisms are the most blatant of several ways in which work distribution platforms use market demand and competition to discipline workers (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). As other scholars have pointed out, workers are still being controlled and disciplined, but because this occurs through technological platforms that re-allocate and often obfuscate where the source of control might be located, workers have trouble determining who is responsible for what, and thus need to develop strategies when they want to change the working conditions or payment system enabled by these platforms (Crawford, 2016; Irani 2015; Irani and Silberman 2013). The autonomy these platforms seem to promise becomes elusive in the process. These shifts in how work is controlled and how it is harnessed through the shape and design of the work distribution systems raise concern for fairness, and can re-center debate on the relationship of workers to their work.

Conclusion

Open call work distribution platforms have entered the scene at a moment in which neoliberal logics dominate how many people understand ideal work relationships. The developers thus often promise that these platforms will encourage work relationships based on the imagined autonomy and equity that one supposedly has when the employment contract is viewed as a business-to-business contract. Some platforms such as *Uber* or *Lyft* notably make this central to their legal defense when workers sue them for misclassification. They have argued that they are not a firm providing transportation services, but rather a technology company enabling small business-owners, their drivers, to connect to customers (Tomasetti, 2016). These neoliberal takes on autonomy and equity are not inherent to the platforms, rather, these platforms are underdetermined enough that many different practices around distributing work exist. Yet these possibilities are all too often limited by organizational infrastructures already in place, and

12 See Arvidsson (2014) for a discussion of ethical potential for workers through reputations through these platforms.

widespread neoliberal understandings of how collaboration and work distribution should occur. This results in a tension between the promise of workers' autonomy and the efficiencies that a firm promises. This tension then shapes how these platforms are integrated into established work processes, influenced by users and companies' beliefs, organizational routines, and material infrastructures surrounding appropriate work relationships.

This neoliberal framing can obfuscate the multiple ways in which these platforms re-organize work both within and outside of firms. In particular, these new platforms lead users to return to age-old questions about authority, control, and the nature of tasks. As these platforms re-shape the social organization of work, they bring the market into the firm in ways that undercut what neoliberal theorists themselves understand to be the benefits of managerial controlled production. This creates social dilemmas for participants that must be resolved – dilemmas such as: how should one best segment or re-combine a set of tasks, or how does one evaluate the work or the worker? Many of the solutions that have emerged to address these dilemmas end up re-inscribing older problems that people have had with work, although in slightly newer packages (Suchman and Bishop, 2000). We specifically explored how discipline, surveillance, and competition still shape how workers are controlled in these systems, albeit now enabled through marketplace interactions that frame competition as a means to discipline and define workers, rather than through internal firm dynamics such as organizational hierarchies.

As new ways of distributing work become possible, people have to develop new skills for coordinating with strangers, and new techniques for circulating information and arranging tasks to accommodate a greater fluidity in who participates in work projects. This often involves erasing the benefits that Coase (1937) argued firms offered. As getting work done shifts away from a work contract that revolves around command and obedience, people will still have to address the problems of coordination ever-present in any project of planning the work, disseminating the work, and controlling the work process. Since this is a fundamentally social task, when the principle conceptual resources people have for thinking about these

processes are variants of a neoliberal logic, the solutions developed often encourage a belief that all engaged in this work process should be treated as businesses in their own right.

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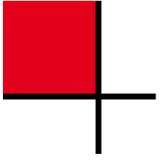
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The warehouse without walls: A workers' inquiry at Deliveroo

Callum Cant

abstract

This article focuses on the emergence of worker resistance at *Deliveroo*, a food delivery platform. By presenting the results of an eight-month workers' inquiry in Brighton it gives an initial account of work, self-organisation and resistance within a food delivery platform from the workers' point of view. The key focal points of this account are: the labour process and the use of technology therein; worker self-organisation via physically and digitally-mediated mass self-communication networks; and the use of those networks as a scaffolding for collective resistance utilising leverage tactics and strike action. These focal points are analysed in the light of class composition theory and the thought of Italian workerist Romano Alquati in particular. This article makes two contributions: first, it provides a first-hand account of the labour process at Deliveroo, and second, it provides an initial analysis of worker self-organisation and resistance within platform capitalism, and the new cycle of struggle that is resulting from it.

Introduction

A one-week wildcat strike by Deliveroo workers in London in August 2016 (Waters and Woodcock, 2017) marked the opening of a new cycle of struggle in 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek, 2017). This cycle has gone on to become transnational in its dimensions, spreading across Europe and involving thousands of workers (Cant, 2018). Platform labour is a large-scale

phenomenon that increasingly defines the future of work. 2.8 million people worked in the UK ‘gig economy’ in the year to August 2017, 700,000 of whom earned less than £7.50 an hour. 21% of those people worked for food delivery platforms such as Deliveroo (Lepanjuuri et al., 2018). As a result, evidence of emergent worker self-organisation and resistance in the sector deserves significant attention.

But that attention has been lacking, as the dynamics of work and worker self-organisation/resistance within food delivery platforms remain largely unexplored in the academic literature, with a few notable exceptions (Tassarini and Maccarrone, 2017; Vandaele, 2018). Research into platform capitalism has covered topics of algorithmic management (Lee et al., 2015; Rosenblat and Stark, 2016; Schildt, 2017; Warin, 2017; Wood et al., 2019), health and safety (Christie and Ward, 2018), gender and race (van Doorn, 2017), and employment relations (Healy et al., 2017; Poon, 2019), but has primarily done so from the point of view of capitalist managers or disinterested observers. A move towards the perspective of the working class is necessary if we are to understand the dynamics of worker resistance that have been revealed by the opening of this cycle of struggle in platform capitalism.¹

This article begins to accomplish that move by presenting the results of a workers’ inquiry into Deliveroo, a ‘geographically sticky’ (Graham and Woodcock, 2018) food delivery ‘lean platform’ (Srnicsek, 2017). The opening of this cycle of struggle is evidence that platforms like Deliveroo are now acting as laboratories for the development of forms of worker self-organisation and resistance on the basis of a new class composition. The underlying premise of this research is that in-depth inquiry at this point of development will offer not only technical insights into the development of the capitalist mode of production, but also political insights into the development of class struggle.

This article opens with a discussion of its theoretical and methodological basis, followed by an introduction to Deliveroo. After this the study presents

1 For more on the concept of cycles of struggle see Dyer-Witford (2015).

an ethnographic account of working at Deliveroo, focusing particularly on; the labour process and the use of technology therein; worker self-organisation via the creation of physical and digitally-mediated mass self-communication networks; and the use of those networks as a scaffolding for mobilisation and resistance utilising leverage tactics and strike action. Then the article moves onto a twofold examination of the technical class composition within Deliveroo by analysing the relation between platform capitalism and algorithmic management. Following Alquati's example it then moves on to analyse the political class composition created by workers through the process of 'invisible organisation' (Alquati, 2013). The role of both physically and digitally mediated mass self-communication networks in developing material connections developed between workers is examined, as is the way that this laid the groundwork for the mobilisation of collective resistance. Particular attention is paid to the process of unmediated working class self-organisation and innovations in leverage tactics throughout the informal dispute. Finally, the article reflects on the potentials for and limitations on the circulation of struggle within and beyond food delivery platforms.

Theory: Class composition

Italian workerism [operaismo] was a Marxist theoretical current which emerged in the early 1960s (see Wright, 2017). It was heterodox and internally divided from the start, but despite this division, a coherent theory of class composition emerged out of the kaleidoscope of debates, publications and practical initiatives that followed. Class composition is best understood as an objective process in two parts: the first is the organisation of labour-power as variable capital (technical composition), and the second is the self-organisation of labour-power as a working class against capital (political composition). In both forms, class composition is both product and producer of struggle over the social relations of the capitalist mode of production. The transition between technical and political composition is part of the leap that defines the working-class political viewpoint.

A turn towards the perspective of the working class and a contemporary investigation of the conditions of struggle on the new terrain of production can therefore find a number of theoretical weapons within workerism's armoury. One of the chief analysts of the conditions of struggle within the current was Romano Alquati, an Italian revolutionary whose work at FIAT and Olivetti was highly influential. Since 2013, Alquati's Anglophone legacy has developed significantly due to renewed interest in the theory and methods of workerism both in history (see Haider and Mohandesi, 2013) and practice (see Woodcock, 2017). Of particular relevance is Pasquinelli's insight that Alquati's work at Olivetti offers insights into self-valorising information circuits within the digital economy (Pasquinelli, 2015). On a wider front, workerism's continued relevance has been recently re-established by Wright in his analysis of the re-emergence of a cohesive international current of workerist research. This article draws on both Alquati specifically and workerism generally in order to apply the theory of class composition.

To compliment the inheritances of workerism, this article also draws upon recent work on techno-social developments in capitalist production. Nick Srnicek's big-picture theorisation of 'platform capitalism' is used throughout as a guiding set of arguments to be both followed and contested (Srnicek, 2017). The article also attempts to reorientate the concept of 'algorithmic management' (Lee et al., 2015; Rosenblat and Stark, 2016; Schildt, 2017; Wood et al., 2019) to begin an analysis of the role of algorithms in the labour process from the perspective of the working class.

Method: Workers' inquiry

Workers' inquiry is a method with its roots in Marx (1880) which was readopted and developed throughout the 20th century (Haider and Mohandesi, 2013; Woodcock, 2014). Italian workerism was particularly involved with the method's adaptation and reapplication. The different factions of workerism had different interpretations of what exactly this method entailed, with Raniero Panzeri arguing for one model (Panzeri, 1965) and Romano Alquati for another (Alquati, 1993; Roggero, 2014). However, again, a cohesive

method of workers' inquiry can be derived from these varied sources, as Woodcock (2017) has shown in practice.

In its simplest form, a workers' inquiry consists of active interventionist research into labour processes and the political struggles that emerge from them. This research can proceed via a variety of more or less orthodox research methods, ranging from surveys and interviews to ethnography. This article presents the results of an eight-month workers' inquiry into Deliveroo in Brighton, conducted between September 2016 and May 2017. I used the extended case method (Burawoy, 1998), an ethnographic method which aims to focus on specific case studies to derive general insights, in order to pursue workers' inquiry. Throughout the research process, I made interventions to support worker self-organisation, in line with Burawoy's (1998: 14) view that 'intervention is not only an unavoidable part of social research but a virtue to be exploited'. The goal of these interventions was to engage in a process of 'coresearch' (Roggero, 2014) and expand the empirical basis of the inquiry. However, the inquiry did not begin with a defined methodology. I began working at Deliveroo because I needed a flexible part-time second job to supplement the below-average wages I earned at a full-time job and because, in the wake of the six-day strike in London in July (Waters and Woodcock, 2017) I was aware of the potential for labour resistance at Deliveroo and wanted to understand the situation from below.

The logic for using the workers' inquiry to generate this understanding is as follows: many abstract models have been generated in an attempt to overcome the crisis induced by 'coercive pacification'. To take only one example, long-time U.S. labour lawyer Staughton Lynd has proposed a model of 'solidarity unionism' as a way forwards through the current crisis of working class disorganisation on the new terrain of production (Lynd, 2015). This model is situated as fundamentally antagonistic to the current practices of the big AFL-CIO business unions. Lynd's model of solidarity unionism builds on U.S. labour militant Stan Weir's analysis of 'informal work groups' (Weir, 2004). Lynd argues that these informal groups should always be utilised within organising model in the same way: they should act as the basis for worker committees, which are in turn always the correct political form for the circulation and escalation of 'the spark that leaps from person to

person' (Lynd, 2015:66). But such abstract generalisations are a shaky basis for organising strategies. The method of workers' inquiry differs from the 'solidarity unionism' approach because it starts from the assumption that the correct political form for working class self-organisation can only be determined in the reality of the workplace itself. Whilst the workerist approach to self-organisation on new terrain maintains a fundamental political sympathy with Lynd's vision, it begins from a different methodological standpoint. Political forms are not determined *apriori*: they have to be discovered. In part, this is the purpose of workers' inquiry. Built into the intention of the method is an attempt to find what political forms are being generated organically within the workplace and, to that end, how these can be connected to a wider class politics.

The application of the method of workers' inquiry to Deliveroo creates one potential point of confusion: the legal classification of Deliveroo couriers as self-employed independent contractors. Deliveroo workers are clearly flexible – doubly flexible in the same way that Marx (1967) said proletarians are doubly free; flexible to work or flexible to starve. This article proceeds on the basis that these flexible independent contractors are, in fact, still members of the working class, despite Deliveroo's misclassification.

Working for Deliveroo

Will Shu and Greg Orlowski founded Deliveroo in August 2012. The platform provides a food delivery service via an app. In the five years since it was founded, surplus capital seeking to find a return in a low interest rate environment has flooded into platforms (Srnicsek, 2017: 86). Deliveroo has been one of the main beneficiaries of this investment. According to the *Financial Times*, between 2013 and 2016, Deliveroo was by far the fastest growing company in Europe, with total revenue growth of 107,117% (Smith et al., 2018). As of February 22nd 2017, there were 15,000 Deliveroo bicycle/motorcycle couriers in the UK, working in over 100 cities and towns (Work and Pensions Committee, 2017). Deliveroo recorded an annual loss of £129.1 million (Titcomb, 2017) in 2016 and has yet to turn an annual profit. Deliveroo is one of the paradigmatic examples of the 'gig economy' model.

In September 2016, the process of getting a job with Deliveroo was very simple. I signed up online, got a call the same day, and set up a date to do a trial ride. The trial ride itself consisted of fifteen minutes of cycling under observation followed by a chat with the worker running the trial. I then signed a supplier agreement online, completed an online training course, picked up my delivery equipment from a storage unit in the city, and downloaded the app. The ten minutes I spent with a local manager at the storage unit was the only time I met with a formal manager at any point during my entire time working for Deliveroo. As soon as I had the app set up I could start work. In Brighton all couriers were on a total piece rate, meaning that there was no formal shift system and the pay was £4 per completed delivery.² I could work at any time between 11.45am to 11pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 11pm on Friday to Sunday.

When I wanted to work, I opened the app, logged in and selected ‘available for orders’. As soon as I did that, the app would instruct me to go to the zone centre and wait for an order. My location and availability began to be factored into the app, and when I was selected for an order I would get a notification. The app would tell me the location of the restaurant, and I would then accept or decline the order. If I accepted, as I usually did, I then cycled to the restaurant, locked up my bike, swiped on the app to indicate that I had arrived, and told the staff I was there. If I could not find the restaurant I had the option to call them through the app. I would then pick up the food, tapping on each item on the app to confirm it was in the order, and put it in my bag. The app would then tell me the customer’s location. I then unlocked my bike, cycled there and dropped off the food, swiping to confirm both arrival at the customer’s location and successful delivery. If I could not find the customer I had the option to call them through the app. At the end of this process I had earned £4 and was available for new orders once again. I then cycled back to the zone centre or, if I wanted to stop working, turned the app off. There were a number of potential variations on this basic sequence. You could refuse an

2 During my time at Deliveroo, I was aware of at least three other pay structures elsewhere in the country. There were two varieties of the hourly-paid shift pattern; £7 per hour plus £1 per delivery and £6 per hour plus £1 per delivery, and one other variety of the piece rate; £3.75 per drop.

order, get a double order, or encounter a problem with the order. If you refused an order you carried on waiting. If you got a double you simply picked up two sets of food rather than one from the same restaurant, delivered to two separate customer locations and earned two separate delivery fees. If you encountered a problem, you rang a call centre and talked to call centre workers about what to do. The process governing this cycle remained entirely opaque to courier workers, meaning that all we knew about how the app worked apart from the direct outputs was based on discussion, rumour and speculation.

In terms of standards, we were meant to accept 90% of orders and deliver them within a certain timeframe. Both of these standards were badly communicated. Workers did have their 'supplier agreements' terminated at times, meaning they couldn't work for Deliveroo any more, but the reasons were not officially communicated to the rest of the workforce, and word of mouth discussion amongst workers was understandably unreliable.

'Surges' were used to increase the availability of riders at peak times by offering temporary wage increases across the zone. Workers were notified by text if a surge was going to take place - usually if heavy rain was forecast, a weekend looked particularly busy, or during the breakfast periods on the weekend. The bonuses offered by a surge varied, from an extra £0.50 or £1 per delivery to an extra £10 after you completed ten deliveries. These surges were much more common in late 2016 when the workforce was smaller and the demand for labour higher. In early 2017 a 'pulse' system started to be trialled. This pulse was meant to indicate demand by showing order volume on a scale from low to very high. Some riders used this to determine when they should work, but comparisons at the zone centre showed that two different riders could have totally different pulse readings at any one time, and the variation between points on the scale could be rapid. More reliable were the weekly emailed (and later in-app) demand predictions.

Workers were paid on a fortnightly basis, and for the first £300 every rider earned, half the paycheque would be subtracted to cover the £150 equipment deposit. Some workers claimed that Deliveroo's payment system was

inaccurate, and that some weeks they were paid for fewer orders than they had actually completed.

All the in-person contact I had with other workers came through either chance encounters during the labour process itself (waiting at a restaurant, chatting at a traffic light etc.) or through meeting whilst waiting for orders at the zone centre. At first, I would rarely meet more than one or two other workers at the zone centre at any one time. But as September turned into October and October into November, every shift consisted of more and more time spent waiting. The groups waiting at the zone centre started to get bigger, and discussions started to get angrier.

Worker self-organisation and resistance in Brighton

The method of workers' inquiry has often been accompanied by a particular kind of reading and writing of 'proletarian documentary literature' (Hastings-King, 2014). This literature is composed of texts written and circulated by workers, primarily in the form of newspapers and bulletins. The process of inquiry at Deliveroo gave rise to another instance of this form: the *Rebel Roo*, a monthly bulletin written, edited and distributed by Deliveroo workers.

After I had been working for Deliveroo for two months, I was involved in the initial production and distribution of the *Rebel Roo*. This coincided with the drop off in relative order volume, and the increase in waiting time spent at the zone centre.

By issue 2 of *Rebel Roo*, published in December, a worker wrote about the impromptu meetings we were holding at our zone centre. The fall in wages had continued, and so had the rapid process of worker self-organisation. The WhatsApp networks and Facebook groups that connected the more regular workers had begun to take on a similar function to that of the zone centre. This organisation reached a turning point when a meeting was called for the 25th of January. Eighteen workers met with representatives of the *Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB)* union to discuss forming a union branch and taking action. This initial meeting was made up almost entirely of cyclists, but news of possible action spread fast. Within days a group of Brazilian moped

riders had taken the initiative. They bypassed the nascent union to call a two-hour strike for Saturday February 4th. The cyclists agreed to join the strike, and news of the action began to be spread at the zone centre and through online networks.

On Saturday roughly 100 strikers met for a demonstration and mass meeting at the Jubilee square zone centre before setting off as a flying picket across the city (Williams, 2017). During the meeting workers agreed to formally unionise with the IWGB and make three demands of the company. These were; an increase in the piece rate to £5 per drop, a recruitment freeze, and no victimisation of unionised riders. These demands were sent to Deliveroo by the IWGB with a two-week deadline for response. This initial mobilisation fed off a second wave of national momentum. After the initial outbreak of strikes in London in the summer of 2016, organisation was now spreading rapidly around the UK. The combined online and offline circulation of *Rebel Roo* had grown to over 1000 a month, enough to reach between 6-10% of the national workforce, and was making connections transnationally with workers in Italy, France and Germany. There were the beginnings of organisation in cities as socially and politically diverse as Bath, Middlesbrough, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Manchester and Glasgow. Key parts of the emerging platform workers' movement converged for discussions with each other and the Italian Si Cobas base union at the *Transnational Social Strike Platform's* assembly in London on the 11th of February. The movement seemed to be approaching a critical point.

When seven workers from Leeds were victimised, the *Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)*, the major union organising beyond Brighton and London, were keen to push for national strike action³. But there was hesitation elsewhere about the possibility of such an escalation. At the same time, the Brighton demands deadline came and went. However, workers decided not to escalate nationally, and maintained a local focus. A demonstration was planned in Brighton for the 14th of March, which brought together forty workers to demonstrate around the city (Walton, 2017). Another followed on the 1st of

3 The first national food platform strike action took place on October 4th 2018. (Marotta 2018; Woodcock and Hughes 2018).

April, which mobilised about twenty. Following these two mobilisations, Deliveroo workers initiated a coalition with workers from supermarkets and higher education to call a 'Precarious Mayday' demonstration, of a similar style to the *EuroMayDay* mobilisations of the mid 2000s (Foti, 2009). The coalition mobilised around 100 people (Thompson, 2017). Despite continued organising efforts, momentum had ebbed.

By the end of the inquiry in May, wages and conditions in Brighton had improved significantly from the low point in January. Two out of the three initial demands made by the IWGB had been met: there had been a temporary recruitment freeze, and no strikers had been victimised. Workers in Leeds also managed to win the reinstatement of victimised workers and forced Deliveroo to relocate the manager who had victimised them. However, the base of these struggles had fragmented, and successive mobilisations were declining in efficacy. A period of disorganisation set in, as the rapid turnover of workers diluted existing self-organisation.

Platform capitalism, algorithmic management and the labour process at Deliveroo

There are two fundamental characteristics of the organisation of labour at Deliveroo which need to be understood in order to grasp its technical class composition, and the potentials for the leap into worker self-organisation that result: platform capitalism and algorithmic management.

Platform Capitalism

Nick Srnicek (2017: 43-7) defines the model of platform capitalist companies through four key characteristics: first, they use 'digital infrastructures which enable two or more groups to interact' and position themselves to extract data; second, they rely upon 'network effects'; third, they cross-subsidise to provide some features below cost; and fourth, they embody a politics by shaping the ways in which interactions can take place.

More specifically, Srnicek provides a typography of platforms. Deliveroo is, in his schema, a 'lean platform'. The fundamental feature of these lean

platforms is the outsourcing of workers, fixed capital, maintenance costs and training; 'All that remains is a bare extractive minimum – control over the platform that enables a monopoly rent to be gained' (Srniczek, 2017: 76).

This view has influenced prominent trade unionists in the gig economy, such as James Farrar. Farrar is the general secretary of the *United Private Hire Drivers*, a branch of the IWGB and the largest national Uber union. He has argued that under platform capitalism 'workers supply the capital and labour' while the platforms have 'become corporate rent seekers' (Farrar, 2018). However, this argument contains a fundamental flaw. When Srniczek describes the bicycles and mopeds of Deliveroo workers as fixed capital he makes a categorical error. To understand the significance of the lean platform model, it is important to clarify the specific relation of that model to the categories of Marxist critique. So, what is capital? 'Capital is a sum of value that valorises itself, that executes the movement M-C-M¹' (Heinrich, 2012: 90). That is to say, capital is value that increases in size through the addition to itself of surplus-value produced by labour-power. Therefore, capital is a social relation that implies a specific class structure in the mode of production. Capital itself is divided into two parts: constant and variable. Marx defines constant capital as that part which 'does not, in the process of production, undergo any quantitative altering of value', and variable capital as that part, labour-power, which 'does, in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value' by producing an excess, surplus-value (1967:202). Constant capital is further subdivided into two parts: fixed and circulating. Fixed capital is that part of constant capital which outlasts one production cycle and is the 'means of labour', such as machinery. Circulating capital is that part of constant capital which is used up in one production cycle and is the 'object of labour', such as raw materials (Marx, 1978: 298).

So, to return to the bicycle of a Deliveroo worker: for it to be fixed capital, this commodity would have to be part of the sum of value that valorises itself through the addition of surplus-value. This worker would then be accessing the value produced by their own labour-power beyond just the portion paid in wages. Carpenters, chefs, cleaners; any workers who provide their own additional commodities when selling their labour-power would own part of the means of production. This would imply that these forms of work produce

a transformation in the class structure of capitalist production. This is not Srnicek's claim but is the outcome of his use of the categories of Marxist critique. Capital is a social relation, not a fixed object: a bicycle or a moped is only fixed capital if it is part of the sum of value that valorises itself through the addition of surplus-value.

So what is a Deliveroo workers' bike or moped, then, if not fixed capital? When Marx proposes $M-C-M^1$ as the general formula of capital, he opposes it to another formula: $C-M-C$. In this second cycle, a commodity (labour-power) is exchanged for a sum of value in the form of money (a wage) that is then exchanged for more commodities (means of subsistence) that are consumed, without any further exchange, to reproduce that first commodity (labour-power). This cycle of consumption, the general formula of working class reproduction under capitalism, demonstrates that commodities involved in the labour process but not in the capital relation should be understood as means of subsistence. Marx articulates the means of subsistence as a historically determined category, which involves everything from food to clothes and furniture. Transformations in the conditions of capitalist society, particularly the state of class struggle and the 'degree of civilisation' (Marx, 1969:168), determine what is contained within this category. The innovation of lean platforms is that they take advantage of a disorganisation of the contemporary working class to redefine the means of subsistence to include commodities like smartphones, bicycles and mopeds, but without increasing the value of the wage. This change takes the form of a demand on workers: in order to sell your labour-power, you must now augment it with other commodities. This demand leads to a downward pressure on any part of sum of value contained within the means of subsistence that is not dedicated to bare reproduction. Nick Dyer-Witherford's (2015) analysis of the role of mobile phones as 'inelastic' commodities, unavoidably necessary for accessing the precarious labour market in the developing world, is the exact parallel of this dynamic. Workers experience the expansion of the value of 'inelastic' commodities that make up the means of subsistence as an escalation in the quantitative cost of reproduction, not a qualitative shift in social relations. Lean platforms do not outsource fixed capital, instead, they participate in the regressive redefinition of the means of subsistence.

The second important feature of lean platforms is the classification of workers as self-employed independent contractors. When we signed our contracts with Deliveroo, every rider agreed to be classified as self-employed, even though most of us thought that was an obvious distortion of the truth. An IWGB survey showed that 87.1% of Deliveroo worker respondents believed that their independent contractor status was inaccurate (Independent Workers of Great Britain and Woodcock, 2017). Disregarding the question of legal categories, the class relationship of worker and capital remained the same. The purpose of this change in legal status was to push workers into a position where they are forced to work at an hourly wage below that enforced by the state. Again, the IWGB survey showed that workers understood this dynamic, with 92% responding that being classified as ‘self-employed’ resulted in them ‘being treated unfairly compared to an employee’ (*ibid.*). Without the mediation of minimum wage law the wage is determined primarily by the power relations between classes. This absence of the state had clear implications for the forms of organisation used to challenge and transform these relations.

Algorithmic Management

Algorithmic management was first defined as: ‘software algorithms that assume managerial functions and surrounding institutional devices that support algorithms in practice’ (Lee et al., 2015). The reorganisation of the labour process caused by the introduction of algorithmic management has material impacts on the technical class composition in food delivery platforms which are best understood by comparison both to human-managed courier delivery and other parts of the logistics sector. The form of organisation of labour that predominates in non-platform courier work involves human dispatchers operating from a central depot and co-ordinating a fleet of couriers through radio communications (Bossen, 2012). But when working for Deliveroo workers have no radios and see no supervisors. On any given night in one city algorithmic management makes possible immensely complex logistical processes that organise thousands of couriers going from hundreds of restaurants to tens of thousands of customers.

Conventionally within the field of logistical software, warehouse management systems (WMS) and transport management systems (TMS) perform two distinct sets of key functions (Nettsträter et al., 2015). The Deliveroo labour management system, however, breaks down the distinctions between WMS and TMS systems. Its key functionality contains elements of both. From warehouse management comes order processing, release, retrieval and picking. From transport management comes order management, scheduling, transport planning/optimisation, tracking and tracing. As such, the best way to understand the Deliveroo labour management system from the perspective of the worker is that it's capable of conceptualising the spatial 'zone' in which it operates as two overlaid layers: as a warehouse and as a transport network. This co-management of warehousing and transport is no longer human-led, but algorithmic.

Seen from this angle, it is quite clear that algorithmic management is a specific form of automation. An algorithmic dispatcher replaces a human one, as inter-capitalist competitive pressure forces capitalist managers forwards in the search for relative surplus-value. Human labour is still required to supervise the function of constant capital in the form of an algorithmic manager, but this supervision functions on a higher level than a radio dispatcher. The innovation of the food delivery platform emerges out of an attempt to develop a new avenue for the exploitation of labour-power. In this new form, the variable capital of dispatchers has been augmented by the constant capital of algorithms, leading to a rising organic composition of capital and a corresponding tendency towards a decreasing rate of profit (Marx, 1981:317). As such, the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production endure despite apparent transformations in the concrete form of value production. The expansion of algorithmic management can be conceived in a general way: inter-capitalist competition forces the development of forms of constant capital in all areas, not just in lean platforms. In the UK, research in supermarkets (Barr, 2018) and warehouses (Delfanti, 2018; Moore and Akhtar, 2016) already demonstrates the growth of diverse forms of algorithmic management far beyond food delivery platforms. As a result, algorithmic management is best understood as an automated

mode of management that is expanding across the sphere of production and recomposing its terrain.

The second key feature of the algorithmic management of labour at Deliveroo is its 'black box' (Pasquale, 2015) characteristic. In short, this means that Deliveroo courier workers have very limited control of the labour process and take instructions from the app without contextual information. They are powerless to understand or contest the decisions of the 'black box', and the relationship between automated management and workers is a vertical. The logic of management and the specifics of the labour process are hidden from those who carry it out. The only direction workers receive is a depersonalised sequence of repetitive commands. The informational dissymmetry and hierarchy of a 'black boxed' labour process is not just produced by a lack of workers control over the black box, but also by the black box's extensive control over workers. Whilst workers struggle to understand the principles and systems used to manage them, the black box uses a constant stream of location, speed and time data to maintain control of the labour process. This information is fed upstream and used to refine the management of labour-power via machine learning practices which make decisions on the (re)design and (re)organisation of the labour process, often without any human input. This is a significant expansion of the dynamic that Pasquinelli claims Alquati first understood in the context of manufacturing at the Italian firm Olivetti with his concept of 'valorising information' (Pasquinelli, 2015). When Taylor first laid out the goal of scientific management, he aimed to give managers the information required to minutely control the labour process and combat the refusal of work enacted by workers on a granular level through 'soldering' (Taylor, 2014). Algorithmic management takes this dynamic even further, undermining the worker/manager knowledge hierarchy that Taylor identified, so that it is no longer workers whose knowledge needs to be discovered by managers in order to exert control over labour-power (*ibid.*), but vice versa.

Invisible organisation and political composition

Whilst reflecting on worker resistance at a FIAT manufacturing plant in Turin, Romano Alquati developed the concept of 'invisible organisation' to

understand the forms of self-organisation which enabled the massive, generalised wildcat strikes that had bypassed institutional structures to shut down the plant (Alquati, 2013). Evan Calder Williams, in his reading of Alquati, notes the three critical steps taken by Alquati via this concept which distinguish his approach from the rest of the workerist tradition. These are, first, an examination of the rational and historical nature of the wildcat strike; second, a recognition of the way in which invisible organisation is generated both by and within capital as part of its attempt to circumnavigate its own contradictions; and third, a treatment of theory as an ‘accomplice’ to this invisible organisation (Calder Williams, 2013). All three of these steps are useful for an inquiry into Deliveroo. Specifically, understanding how workers formed effective collectives by using common online and offline communication channels despite their spatial and subjective disintegration allows us to place the emergence of visible worker resistance in its proper context. Rather than accepting ‘spontaneity’ as a sufficient explanation, we have to understand the technical basis for the resulting political composition.

The self-organisation of Deliveroo workers proceeded on the basis of opportunities built into the labour process. At the time, the most pronounced of these opportunities was the ‘zone centre’. Whenever a Deliveroo worker is waiting for an order, the app instructs them to ‘go to zone centre’. In Brighton there were two of these meeting points, one for mopeds on Spring Gardens and one for cyclists on Jubilee Street, both in the central North Laine area of the city.

At the zone centres, large numbers of workers gathered when waiting for work. This dynamic is not unique to Deliveroo riders: London dockers used to wait ‘on the stones’ to see if they would get work, and this offered organising opportunities for worker resistance such as the 1889 London dock strike (McCarthy, 1988). Similarly, Deliveroo riders waited ‘on the phones’. This often created the conditions for impromptu mass meetings of workers discussing organisation and action around grievances relating to low pay and bad conditions. These meetings were influenced by the use of piece rates by Deliveroo. The natural first question from one rider to another was: ‘how many orders have you had?’ This produced, in effect, a constant collective comparison and discussion of wages. Zone centres also acted as a hub for

distribution of copies of the *Rebel Roo* workers' bulletin. When the app crashed as it did numerous times in early 2017 – most of the workers in the city would head for the zone centres, creating the conditions for even larger meetings.

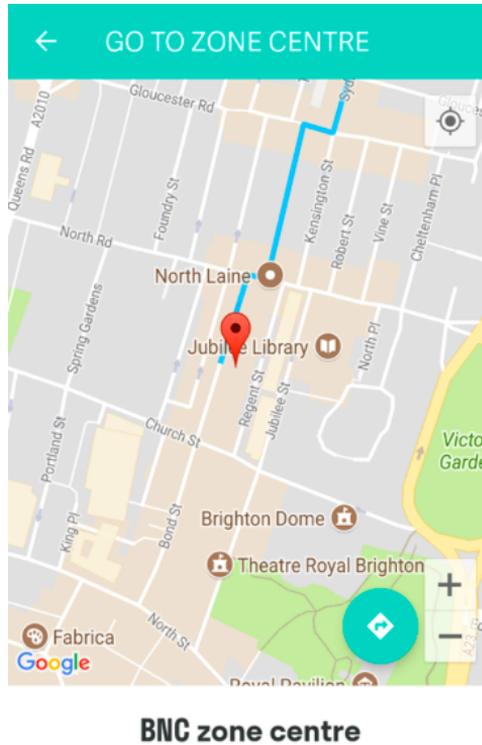


Figure 1. The ‘Go to Zone Centre’ screen giving directions to zone centre for a cyclist

The existence of in-person communication channels also allowed for the expansion of digitally-mediated communication, as workers were added to encrypted instant messaging group chats through the contacts they made at the zone centre. At least two 50+ worker WhatsApp groups existed by January, one for the cyclists and one for the mopeds, alongside at least one large Facebook group. Combined, these groups functioned as backchannels which contained an estimated 50% of the workforce.⁴ These networked workers were

4 This estimate is premised on a combination of ethnographic data and an assumption of relative equivalence in worker self-communication between

predominantly those who did more hours per week, and therefore were responsible for the fulfilment of a disproportionate number of orders. This allowed for an extension of discussions beyond the zone centre amongst the most important segments of the workforce and the development of a many-to-many communication capacity. The role of these groups was analogous to the 'mass self-communication networks' identified amongst Walmart workers by Alex Wood (2015). As well as communication functions, these groups also developed solidarity functions. Riders with problems such as punctured tyres could ask for help from other riders in order to allow them to continue working rather than going home early and missing out on orders. This online networking later proved invaluable for mobilisation.

These networks were often built between a highly heterogenous workforce. There was no hegemonic specific 'culture' to which workers could refer. Deliveroo's workforce was a varied mass of deskilled labour, not a community of subcultural workers with 'courier' identities. Instead, more common points of connection were music and religion. Trade unionists involved in the original London dispute said that the invisibly organised groups which had started the strike there had known each other from one of two places: either East London mosque, or Gabber raves.⁵ But in both cases, these cultural commonalities were only the initial starting point for connections within the workforce and could not bridge to connect between all the points of the invisible structure of organisation.

The material specifics of the labour process created the conditions for the political leap from subjectively-disintegrated labour-power organised *by* capital into a recomposed class organised *against* capital. The transition from technical to political composition was underway, facilitated by the invisible

remote micro-work freelancers and lean platform workers (see Warin, 2017; Wood et al., 2018).

5 Gabber is a genre of dance music, originating in the working-class areas around the container ports of Rotterdam in the Netherlands in the 1990s. It has been described as 'the hardest, fastest, most terrifying most apocalyptic dance music in the civilised world' (Marshall, 1993, p. 85 as cited in Verhagen et al., 2000, p. 147).

organisation that workers had developed both in-person and via digitally-mediated communication.

This turn to worker resistance was acute due to the unmediated dynamics of the power relations between classes within Deliveroo. The use of 'independent contractor' legal status by Deliveroo led to a series of consequences for the resulting political class composition. Firstly, labour law designed to protect workers by granting legally enforceable rights like a minimum wage, holiday pay, and sick pay no longer applied. But, on the other hand, trade union law that functioned to restrict the action of workers to a set of legal processes determined by an increasingly authoritarian state (Bogg, 2016) also no longer applied. This opened avenues for the recomposition of the class around unrestricted antagonism.

For the workers, this meant that direct action was the only avenue available to redress grievances. Local or informal solutions in one workplace could not be negotiated on the job between workers and management with action short of a strike: after all, the algorithm wasn't designed to negotiate. Algorithmic management foreclosed the possibility for management to use procedural means to indirectly maintain authority during a period of negotiation and compromise (Friedman, 1978: 96). This situation produced a tendency towards polarisation and the widespread use of strategies that relied upon immediate class power at the point of production, led by workers with no obligation to follow restrictive legally enforced procedure, and no option to achieve better conditions apart from through direct action. The circumnavigation of the classical institutions of the workers' movement such as the large TUC trade unions was the result of this dynamic. The assertion of a specific kind of working class autonomy was not a consciously political decision; it was a product of a specific class composition.

The highest tactical expression of this strategy of unmediated direct action was an innovation on the flying picket. Deliveroo's use of a logistical system that maps warehouse and transport on top of one another eliminated the classic site of worker leverage in logistics: bottlenecks. Whereas usually the transition between different stages of a logistical system requires a narrowing process (the transition from warehouse to road freight, for example) this

simultaneous system operates with near-total decentralisation (see fig.2). Visible or disruptive pickets could take place on key arterial roads, but if they remained static their leverage would be limited.

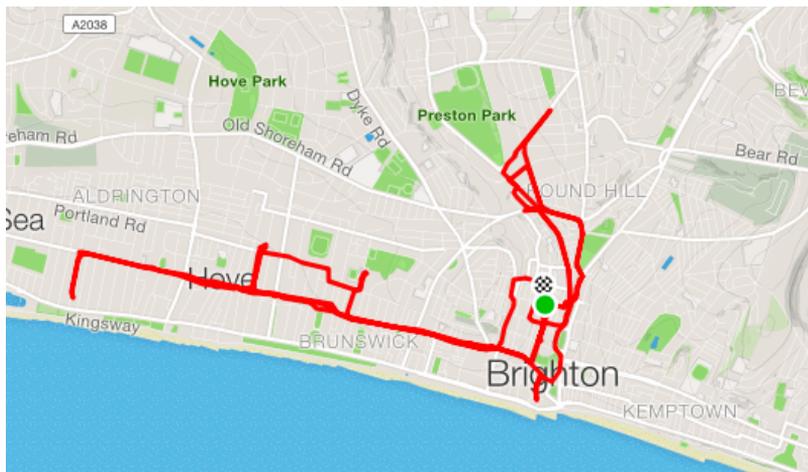


Figure 2. Route taken over 2 hour Deliveroo shift in September 2016

A decentralised process demands decentralised tactics, and so the classical static picket had to become a flying picket by virtue of the organisation of labour. As a result, workers designed a tactic whereby they met at the heart of their invisible organisation- their zone centres – then moved along key roads. The leverage of this tactic derived from a disruption of the circulation of commodities in the city on a general level, but also the specific contact with other workers who were not aware of or not supportive of the strike. This allowed other workers to talk to them and perform the classical picket function. As they circulated around the city, pickets also engaged with restaurant workers to try and get them to sign a petition in the name of their workplace calling on Deliveroo to meet the IWGB demands.

This autonomy, however, did not preclude alliances. Deliveroo workers found that because of the public nature of their workplace, social movements participated in the dispute quite organically. Other social groups could support flying pickets as demonstrators, in a way that mirrored the tactic of the ‘critical mass’ (Boal and Carlsson, 2009). This duality brought out the public and political nature of the dispute.

The movement was always based on the workplace leverage of the strike. However, this basis was complimented by additional social movement techniques that fell into the category of ‘leverage tactics’: a specific subset of tactics focusing on reputational damage, politicisation of the dispute and ‘associational leverage’ (Olin-Wright, 2000). Leverage tactics employed by the IWGB were worrying enough to elements of the state to form part of an investigation by the Cameron conservative government in 2014 (Carr, 2014). Altogether, the form of strike action developed by Deliveroo workers had significant impact. The 4th of February strike was reported, by workers, to have cut order volumes by up to 50% for the whole evening at large restaurants like *Wagamama*, *Yo Sushi!* and *Las Iguanas*. Even when workers did not call all-out strikes, they employed very similar tactics for their demonstrations:

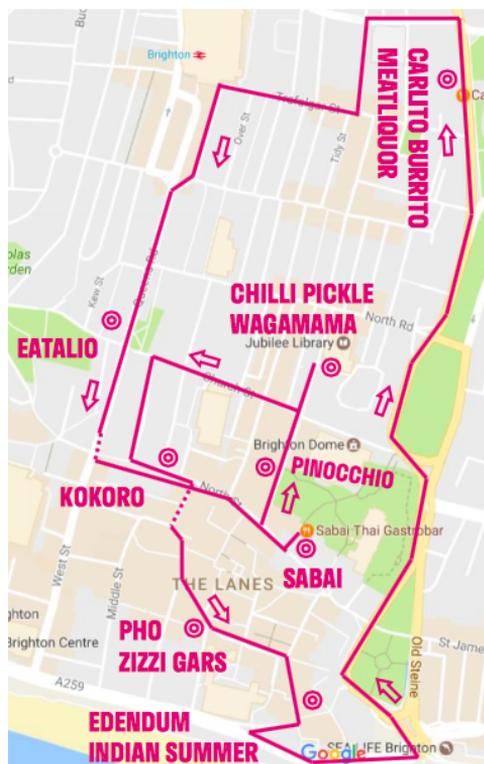


Figure 3. Stewards map of ‘Ride With Us’ Demonstration, 1st April 2017

This unmediated struggle was fierce, but cracks began to show in the organisation of Deliveroo workers. The collective subject created by the

labour process was unstable. It combined a heterogenous workforce and relied on the zone centre in order to develop meaningful coherence. Striation along the lines of migration status, language, race, level of education, forms of other income, age and so on were pronounced.

In many ways the division between cyclists and mopeds amplified this striation. These two groups of workers occupied parallel organisational structures: they had different zone centres, different WhatsApp groups and were made up of different class fractions. When the invisible organisation was strong, the two categories of worker could respond to each other's actions: mopeds could take the initiative for action from cyclists, cyclists could join a strike called by mopeds and so on. But a decentralised labour process could only go so far in producing a collective. As soon as the recruitment freeze began to give riders more work, no one was stopping at the zone centre any more. The invisible organisation of workers and corresponding visible struggle began to degrade from this point onwards, and the gulf between mopeds and cyclists grew. Workers were never in control of the circumstances that had produced the conditions for self-organisation – they never got their hands on the levers of the black box – and therefore were powerless to prevent those conditions changing. This lack of control manifested itself as the clear limit of the struggle, which prevented the further development of worker resistance.

Conclusion

This article makes two contributions: first, it provides a first-hand account of the labour process at Deliveroo. Second, it develops an initial analysis of worker self-organisation and resistance within platform capitalism, and the new cycle of struggle that is resulting from it.

The first-hand account given above clarifies some of the key aspects of the technical class composition at Deliveroo. The labour process at food platforms essentially consists of final-stage logistics work. This work is controlled via the black boxed algorithmic management and has built into it a number of antagonisms (primarily associated with wages and piece rates) and opportunities for worker self-organisation (primarily realised via zone

centres). An analysis of this process from the point of view of the worker can disprove mistaken theories about the outsourcing of capital under platform capitalism, and provide evidence that the defining trend in the sector is the regressive redefinition of the means of subsistence.

The skeleton of invisible organisation that arises from this technical composition is defined by digitally-mediated mass self-communication networks and zone centre meetings. When a process of mobilisation towards collective worker resistance occurs in this context, it is characterised by the use of unmediated and autonomous class struggle strategies based on a combination of workplace and associational leverage, thereby producing the specific political composition of the sector. The struggle of Deliveroo workers in Brighton in 2017 was primarily limited by a collective failure to gain any control the labour process and the instability of the coalition of class fractions which underlaid the creation of a collective subject. This combined weakness resulted in the IWGB campaign and associated worker self-organisation winning some but not all of the initial demands decided upon at the February strike meeting.

New developments in class composition, notably the concept of ‘social composition’ (Woodcock et al., 2018), challenge researchers to expand our analysis beyond the workplace and deal systematically with questions of consumption and reproduction and overcome the limitations of this article. Further work on platform capitalism might focus on the intersection of food platform worker resistance with wider trends: the transformations of UK higher education since 2010 and the resulting creation of large-scale student workforces (Collins, 2013; Myers, 2017), the commodification of reproductive labour since the 1970s (Endnotes, 2013), the creation of racialised surplus populations in large urban areas (Moody, 2017), and the role of autonomous migration in reshaping the working class (Mezzadra 2010), amongst others. This research could contribute substantially to developing a literature on the emergent sector which prioritises the perspective of workers. This reprioritisation is essential if research is to reflect the reality that under the capitalist mode of production working class disempowerment can structurally never be final. As workerist Mario Tronti put it:

The equilibrium of power seems solid: the relation of forces is disadvantageous. And yet, where the domination of capital is at its most powerful, the threat of the workers runs deepest. (Tronti, 2013:87; *translated by the author*).

To take a historical example: before the potentials for renewed class power within Fordism were understood it was assumed that this new technical composition would reduce workplace leverage. Only with the discovery of the sit-down strike did workers realise their recomposed capacity to disrupt production (Silver, 2003: 6). There is a chance that we are in a similar moment with platform capitalism: in the pause between the introduction of a new technical composition which deconstructs old forms of resistance and the completion of a period of working class experimentation that gives birth to new ones. There is no guarantee that a form worthy of comparison with the sit-down strike will be found during such experimentation, but it seems at least possible.

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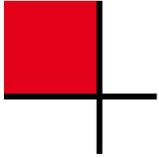
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Thinking like Apple's recycling robots: Toward the activation of responsibility in a postenvironmentalist world

Stefan Laser and Alison Stowell

abstract

This article turns to valuation studies to enrich the critical capacities of postenvironmentalism with a more situated approach. Debates in postenvironmentalism suggest moving away from a romanticized notion of nature and instead shining the spotlight on the responsibility humans have toward the built environment, including technologies. We use *Liam* and *Daisy*, two recycling robots of Apple Inc., as intermediaries to discuss the multiplicities of value-production in the recycling economies of electronic waste. The company introduced these robots as innovations to revolutionize the recycling industries; yet, drawing on our ethnographic research in the UK, Germany, India and Ghana we emphasize that Apple's approach is limited. The notion of dis/assembling value enables us to activate the production of responsibility as a value in empirical contexts, with a focus on (1) decisions on material breakdown that are hidden in the black box of Apple's algorithms, (2) the vulnerability and fragility of electronic waste work, and (3) the rising impact of shredding technologies in the global recycling economies of e-waste.

Introduction

Postenvironmentalism is an emerging field that offers thought-provoking insights into considering the built environment as part of nature (Certonma,

2016; Vogel, 2015). Central to postenvironmentalist theories is the notion of responsibility toward nature, especially in light of the sociotechnical construction that is now ever-present. However, to understand the role of the built environment in nature, we must consider how social values are attached to and coproducing nature. Whilst postenvironmentalism makes welcome advances in the areas of valuation analysis, with research into technologies as coproducers of nature (*ibid.*), the end of nature as an external biosphere to us (McKibben, 1989), and recognizing built environments (Vogel, 2015), in the current writings, valuation ideas are often in an abstract form. Drawing upon valuation studies, we make use of the notion of dis/assembly as a means to connect the theoretical in an empirical context (Greeson et al., 2020). Through these connections, we aim to *activate responsibility*, as outlined in postenvironmentalist debates. To do this, we explore some of Apple Inc.'s (henceforth, Apple) latest innovations – Liam and Daisy, two recycling robots introduced as part of Apple's 'Renew' and the 'Rethinking Materials' programmes, respectively, and the company's attempt to take responsibility for societal and environmental degradation. These programmes can also be seen as attempts to enact a circular economy¹ (Greeson et al., 2015) in a bid to address challenges associated with discarding electronic waste (or e-waste), which is a complex, fast-growing global stream (Baldé et al., 2015).

In September 2016, Apple introduced Liam, and Daisy followed in 2018 (Apple, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). These robots specialize in breaking down, separating parts and recovering materials from iPhones. They present themselves as lovable robots that can take care of consumers' stuff, and get things done – Liam can disassemble 1.2 million iPhones a year and Daisy drives the numbers up to almost 2 million devices, Apple claims (Apple, 2016a, 2016b, 2019a; Moorhead, 2018). The company advocates that Liam and Daisy (as a line of robots) can reintroduce resources into their supply

1 A circular economy is one that is premised on designing waste out, keeping products, materials and resources in use and regenerative, thereby minimising impact to the natural environment (European Commission 2015; EMF and McKinsey 2015)

chain (and, more generally, into the global economy), thereby reducing the impact to the natural environment. The company thus promises to establish an environmentally and socially compatible way of processing electronic waste. Consumers only have to hand in their old device, so that Apple can take care of it. Liam and Daisy are supposed to make things easier, and at the same time, they are presented in a sympathetic fashion. These robots, however, take a particular perspective on mobile phones they are said to recycle; they value the materials in a specific form. Part of this enactment of the value of responsibility is also a public discussion which adopts Liam and Daisy's perspective to a certain degree, thereby highlighting the importance of recognizing the built environment.

In this article, we address the following research questions: how does the focus on dis/assembling values contribute to postenvironmentalism?, and how do the robots Liam and Daisy enact the value of responsibility? We draw on concepts in postenvironmentalism (Certoma, 2016; Vogel, 2015) and suggest extending the discussions through the pragmatic perspective of valuation studies (Dewey, 1939; Dussauge, et al., 2015; Greeson et al., 2020; Lamont, 2012). We aim to show that there are competing value systems being enacted around the notion of responsible recycling. Liam and Daisy's thinking is good at hiding alternative forms of organizing. Apple's robots deactivate certain modes of responsibility; Liam and Daisy dis/assemble values by utilizing high-tech recycling procedures that render alternative setups and actors redundant. Studying Liam and Daisy helps us understand how a particular form of responsibility is organized. Based on our research of the global recycling economy of electronic waste, in the UK, Germany, India and Ghana, we can show how specific this valuation really is. Our article, then, is a critical assessment of how waste is being appreciated or prevented from being valued in a multitude of ways. We argue that reconceptualizing postenvironmentalism enables us to activate the production of responsibility as a value in empirical contexts. We thus discuss limits to a technocratic approach to e-waste and aim to move beyond a demystification that is prominent in contemporary e-waste reflections. This helps us discuss the complexities and ambiguities of the recycling reality.

We begin by engaging with a postenvironmentalist theoretical framework more thoroughly and sharpen its conceptual lenses with the help of valuation studies. Afterwards, we introduce our collaboration and methodologies to study Apple's robots and our empirical contexts. Moving forward, we map the introduction of Liam and Daisy as a means of organizing the themes that emerged from our research, before concluding with a discussion on the activation of responsibility.

Approaching postenvironmentalism via valuation

Mainstream debates in environmentalism 'share...sustainable development's interest in reconciling economic growth and environmental protection' (Dryzek, 2003: 299). Theorists emphasize the need to transform institutions central to modernity – for example, science and technology, production, consumption, politics, governance and the market. This should be done considering multiple scales (local, national and global levels) (see Beck, 1992; Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000; Mol et al., 2010; Schlosberg and Rinfret, 2008).

Situated within environmentalist debates, ecological and reflexive modernists value the environment in different ways. On the one hand, ecological modernists attempt to find ways to create a win-win between ecological reform and good economic performance (Mol et al., 2010). Underpinning these ideas is the assumption that the economy can be organized to take into account planetary and societal concerns, thus producing responsibility as a particular value. Ecological modernization was a response to apocalyptic visions of societies running out of vital resources, as described in the report, *Limits to growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), posed by more radical theorists (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000; Mol et al., 2010; Warner 2010). Reflexive modernists, on the other hand, are also concerned with the reform of modern institutions, but they take into account power relations and conflict dynamics (Certoma, 2016). Scholars such as Beck (1999, 1992, 2010) emphasize uncertainties in transforming institutions that are central to modernity. He argues, '[r]isks are essentially man-made, incalculable, uninsurable threats and catastrophes which are anticipated but which often

remain invisible and therefore depend on how they become defined and contested in “knowledge” (Beck, 2010: 261). Both ecological and reflexive modernists open dialogues regarding nature, society and our responsibility. Conversely, they have contributed to widening an ontological gap between nature and society, as argued by postenvironmentalists (Certoma, 2016; Vogel 2015).

Postenvironmentalism is a relatively new term that builds upon the basic tenets of environmentalism but places the emphasis onto the complexity of sociotechnical entanglements (Certoma, 2016; see also Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). Authors here pay ‘attention to technologies as coproducers of our world’ (Certoma, 2016: 74) recognizing nature as more than an ‘external’ biosphere. Here Certoma (2016) draws upon Latour (1993), who argues that modernist thinkers only refer to nature when they purify and thus mystify the actions we are involved in – excluding non-human actors and producing unintended consequences. In a similar vein, McKibben (1989) argues there is no sense for environmentalism to focus on nature because, through industrialized human activity, the world is a different place. He announced the ‘end of nature’; and this is in fact what the now prominent term ‘Anthropocene’ emphasizes: there is no nature anymore to connect with, no external body truly external to us (Steffen et al., 2011, 2015).

Taking inspiration from McKibben’s critical claims, philosopher, Steven Vogel (2015) takes postenvironmental ideas a stage further, by examining how environmentalists could value nature after the end of nature. In his book, *Thinking like a mall: Environmental philosophy after the end of nature*, he recounts a personal story, linked to a renowned mall in his American hometown. Once welcomed, beloved and visited by many, it was soon considered obsolete and politicians campaigned for it to be demolished. It was, and a park was erected – hence a win for environmentalism and an appreciation of nature as such? Vogel is sceptical of this reading. He asks, ‘why we find the loss of a wolf, or of a mountain, a matter for regret and yet feel nothing similar about the loss of a piece of the built environment’ (Vogel, 2015: 137).

Inspired by environmentalist Aldo Leopold's 1949 seminal text, *Thinking like a mountain*, Vogel (2015: 137-138) wants to examine 'what it might mean to think like a mountain, or whether thinking like one might help us better understand our environment, at least as well as thinking like a mountain would'. For Leopold, it originally meant recognizing the complexity and self-regulating forces of natural ecosystems. In his famous text, Leopold recapitulated how he and his colleagues shot a wolf in the middle of the Grand Canyon, a wolf that seemed to be a danger for a neighbouring pod of deer. The more wolves, the more danger to the valuable deer – securing the latter was considered a 'win-win situation' for humans and nature alike. However, this shooting was a turning point in Leopold's (1949: 137) life as he explained in this key passage:

We reached the old wolf in time to watch the fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known to only her and to the mountain.

The natural equilibrium was disturbed because of the missing wolf. The shooting did not stop the deer eating the grass at the heel of the mountain, and this grass would never grow again, because of some environmental management schemes. However, Vogel, (2015:30) contends that,

...environmental theory will remain stuck – on the one hand in a series of antinomies stemming from the conceptual ambiguities about what nature is, and on the other in the impotence of a romantic nostalgia for a lost and possibly imaginary world beyond the world of human action in which we actually live.

For Vogel, what we need to do instead is answer the following questions:

What sort of environment ought we to live in? What kind of world would be the best for us – and not just us, but also the many creatures, animate and not, with whom we share it...? And what practices ought we to engage in, as a community, to help bring that sort of world into being? (*ibid.*: 237).

Vogel moves us into a closer engagement with environmental thinking that exposes us to new ways of making responsibility. There is no easy way to engage with environmental matters; new knowledge and new forms of organizing are required (Lousley, 2014). Postenvironmentalism, however,

can benefit from a more practical assessment of what responsibility actually implies – and could be transformed into.

We turn to valuation studies to enrich the critical capacities of postenvironmentalism with a more situated approach. Based on seminal contributions of this interdisciplinary field of studies (Dewey, 1939; Dussauge, et al., 2015; Lamont, 2012), we understand responsibility as a quality that has to be brought forward – as a value that has to be given. Whilst it is important to recognize different values, it is equally important to understand the process by which they are produced. We suggest analyzing this production by drawing on the notion of dis/assembling value, an approach developed to attract attention to the 'centre' as well as the 'peripheries' of the action of valuation (Greeson et al., 2020). It is a very pragmatic approach that is keen on emphasizing the particular materialities of certain valuation processes. Thinking in terms of assemblages (DeLanda, 2006) helps us attune to the different pieces of the built environment (Vogel, 2015), and how to take the messy arrangements and the constantly changing dynamics seriously. Attuning to the dis/assembly shapes our perspectives on the study of value-production in the following ways:

Creating value is a process of joining together: classifying, grouping, combining, making, re-forming. Yet it is also a process where persons, things, parts of bodies, or landscapes are disentangled, abandoned, dismissed, or corrupted (Greeson et al., 2020: 5).

Crucial to this approach is also to recognize the multiplicity of values being produced, with value orders perhaps competing against each other (or co-existing).

Below, we draw on the notion of dis/assembling value to understand the consequences of Apple's introduction of the recycling robots, especially with regard to competing ways of recycling and enacting responsibility. However, before doing that we will briefly introduce our methodology and the way in which we bring our joint ethnographic research on the global e-waste economy together with the discussion of the robots and their consequences.

Methodology

The paper presented here is the result of a two-year-long collaboration of our shared interests in e-waste recycling industries. In this section, we clarify our methodologies to study Apple's robots and their consequences, and these methodologies are closely linked to the history of our collaboration and reflections. It is important to appreciate this history and make our reflections transparent because they directly influenced our procedure and are also key to the development of our theoretical argument on postenvironmentalism (see below for details on our phased approach). Having both undertaken ethnographic research at multiple sites, we were able to bring our insights together. The robots, Liam and Daisy, function as intermediators – they enabled our cooperation and helped us explore new arguments and syntheses. On a more general note, we are thus drawing on, learning from and pushing what is the core idea of the transdisciplinary field of waste or discard studies (see e.g. Alexander and Reno, 2012; Liboiron, 2018; Moore, 2012; Reno, 2015) that waste is understood as the result of wasting practices that have a certain history and that are driven by systematic or infrastructural dynamics. Therefore, to attune to and make wasting practices transparent requires a continuous critical exploration of field sites as well as the consequences of different kinds of approaches. Waste is in constant change, and scientific investigations have to account for that.

As we have argued in the previous section, adopting a valuation perspective provides the means to study values in the making. Following actors involved in recycling procedures and thus taking part in the valuation practices, as we will describe below, enable us to focus on 'the numerous and multifaceted frictions that come into view due to simultaneous efforts to enact different values' (Dussage et al., 2015: 271). Various scholars are sceptical of current recycling schemes and their approach of responsibility (e.g. Gregson et al., 2015; Hird et al., 2014; Lepawsky, 2018; MacBride, 2011). Valenzuela and Böhm (2017: 41), who share these concerns, see Apple's recycling schemes as a prime example of an 'a-political fantasy of the manageable-waste-commodity fetish'. The company, in other words, wants to free consumers from any guilt, inviting them to keep on buying and discarding. This is a

powerful critique. However, we want to slow things down, to explore how concrete sociotechnical issues surrounding e-waste may be re-evaluated so that responsibility can be shouldered collectively. What follows is our exploration into the insecurities of value that can produce certain ways of organizing environmental thinking (which reinforces postenvironmentalism). For this, we designed a strategy, to bring our different insights and sites together.

We call our collaborative approach multi-perspective ethnography. This is different from what is known as 'multi-sited research' (Marcus, 1995) – even though this notion may describe part of our individual research. The data for this paper was taken from the authors' previous research projects and reanalysed. However, we are also keen on emphasizing that our research is not just put next to each other. Our article, to paraphrase anthropologist Strathern (1991), is about more than one but less than many perspectives. Liam and Daisy at times insinuate that e-waste is unaccounted for. Yet, as Gabrys reminds us in her research on digital rubbish:

We not only need places of demattering; we already have them. They just tend not to register as places of regard (Gabrys, 2011: 98).

Apple's robots are thus used as links; below we show how and why certain places are highlighted or forgotten when Daisy and Liam are put centre stage. Before, however, we briefly introduce our research sites.

Stefan, first of all, did ethnographic research on e-waste in India and Germany. He analysed an Indian law that tries to reorganize e-waste value chains. Interviews (formal and informal discussions) were conducted, and the classification system surrounding waste (with its documents and regulations) was analysed and brought together with the experiences and skills of the so-called informal sector. Formalization efforts were highlighted, while the new high-tech recycling actors turned out to be the new essential actors. In Germany, he then worked at a global market leader of recycling, where the preparation (the shredding, sorting, evaluating; in short: the accounting) as well as refining and smelting of e-waste is conducted. Stefan went to this facility to understand what kinds of daily 'boundaries and edges' high-tech recycling is really facing (Lepawsky and

Mather, 2011). This helped in understanding the complex global values chains, and the accounting procedures a self-proclaimed efficient recycler needs to invest in – as a means to attune to the dynamics of the financial (metal) markets.

Alison, in turn, explored how UK e-waste management legislation was enacted into working practices at an asset recovery organization whose core business was mobile telephones. During May 2012 to June 2013 she, and a fellow researcher, followed the trajectory of a mobile telephone through one of the largest asset recovery companies in the UK (inspired by Czarniawska, 2004). The research included interviews, participant observation, photographs, access to documentation, archival materials relating to the company's operations and work practices, and publicly available texts (for instance, promotional material and their websites). In particular, they went to this site to explore how waste and value were extracted, assembled and circulated in everyday practices (Stowell and Brigham, 2018). More recently, since February 2018, she has begun to engage with the informal e-waste and waste sector in Accra, Ghana (among it the infamous Agbogbloshie e-waste site) – building contacts with the waste organizers, sites and fellow researchers. This research is in the early stages of development and the data is from personal visits to two waste sites and informal conversations and observations.

There were two stages to our analysis. The first focused on the emergence of the robots and the second on a re-interrogation of our empirical research data. It should be noted, and in keeping with the epistemological, experimentalist positioning of this paper, these stages did not happen in a linear fashion; they were emergent, entangled and messy (Law, 2004). Stage one began with a review of different data sources from Apple's official websites in the UK, Germany and India (in line with the key empirical sites), to extract the inscribed values produced. This was followed by a review and the consequences of the responses given by journalists and the online technical community. The data gathered from Apple and its respondents included company reports, a white paper, videos, newspapers, blogs and press releases. A comparison was undertaken in regard to the different countries and inscribed values to identify key themes. In stage two we

explored how the enactment of these robots connects to and/or challenges the understandings of responsibility in our field sites. Against this backdrop, we can now move to the introduction of the recycling robots.

Thinking like Liam and Daisy. Or, how are the robots enacting the value of responsibility?

When you select the environment menu on Apple's website you are invited to 'GiveBack' your old phone. This indicates a take-back mechanism (and it is organized differently in different regions; as a new term Apple now uses the notion of 'Trade In', even though the system has not changed dramatically). The website suggests 'have it recycled responsibly for free', and if you follow the 'see how it works' link provided, they emphasize that your phone 'will be recycled in an environmentally responsible way' (Apple 2019a, 2019b).

Apple can make these statements because of the introduction of their recycling robots – Liam and Daisy – that are presented online. So, what does this mean for the enactment of the value of responsibility? How are they dis/assembling this value? To address these research questions, we chronologically map the introduction of Liam and Daisy as a means of organizing three key themes that emerged from our research – algorithming of knowledge, vulnerability and fragility of e-waste work, hegemony of shredding.

Algorithming of knowledge

Liam featured prominently in Apple's keynote event in March, 2016. This event was by invite only to their USA Headquarters and livestreamed through their website for the rest of the world to view. That said, we should be mindful that the world is not built on equal terms and there were substantial disparities in how this message was communicated and picked up in different regions – in India for instance, Liam's presence was ignored as Apple does not offer a convenient 'GiveBack' scheme in most countries from the Global south (Apple, 2019b).

A video clip introduces Liam as follows: ‘True innovation means considering what happens to a product, at every stage of its life-cycle’, then suddenly a fancy robot arm ascends, holding an iPhone; there is a motivational and rather hip soundtrack in the background, and a voice announces: ‘Meet Liam’ (Apple, 2016a: 00.05-00.10 min). One then witnesses this robot deconstructing the iPhone. Have a look at how this robot presents himself:



Figure 1: ‘Liam – an Innovation Story’ (with subtitles). Source: YouTube (Apple, 2016a).

The male video narrator, in between jazz musical interludes (indicated below by ‘...’), further advises:

...when it is time, Liam deconstructs your iPhone..., parts are detected and removed, and separated. So the materials inside those parts..., can be repurposed..., to rescue cobalt and lithium from the battery..., separate the gold and copper in the camera..., extract silver and platinum from the main logic board..., so that the materials in your iPhone... can live on..., because in a world with limited resources..., some things can’t be replaced (Apple 2016a: 00.10 – 1.03 min).

These official PR announcements are supplemented by research published in a white paper (Rujanavech et al., 2016), and insights from the British/American digital media website Mashable, who Apple gave insider knowledge in advance of Liam’s launch. Below are examples of how these

sources emphasize the proclaimed importance of the work that Liam and his brothers are doing:

There are currently two Liam systems – one in the United States (California) and another in the Netherlands. The Liam lines operate at an 11 second take time – every 11 seconds an iPhone is disassembled into 8 discrete components, with each line capable of disassembling 1.2 million iPhone 6 units per year. To meet this capacity, the Liam system is comprised of 29 robots in 21 cells with dual robots used in certain cells with particularly high cycle times (*ibid.*: 4).

According to Murphy (2016: para. 9), 'Liam is programmed to carefully disassemble the many pieces of returned iPhones, such as SIM card trays, screws, batteries and cameras, by removing components bit by bit so they'll all be easier to recycle'. Liam results in deskilling handicraft workers by transferring their knowledge into automated scripts: discreet and clearly defined steps – something we refer to as the algorithming of knowledge. This can be seen from a look at our extensive empirical studies. Our on-site research revealed workers developing clever strategies to work with obsolete devices such as mobile phones. Empirically, three approaches may be differentiated, while their notion of breaking down things (and putting them back together) differs substantially, also indicating how the value of responsibility is dis/assembled.

The first approach (a) is reusing or repairing one's phone, whether with the help of an expert, by checking on- or offline manuals or by experimenting with abandoned gadgets. It is also critical to note that people became used to well-established workarounds to prevent obsolescence. Below is a field note (in its original form) by Alison that gives an insight into the tools, skills, and experience of this art (while presenting the story of two male repairers), in the UK:

The workbenches were scattered with an array of miniature tools, electronic testing devices, laptops with phone manuals open, anti-static mats, storage containers with draws comprising of screws, screens, keyboards, casings and memory chips... John eagerly remarked that '98% of the stuff is reused'... Depending on the fixer's skill level and depending on the time spent on the repair – 'the worker makes a judgement call'. But the official rule of thumb was the value of the phone dictated the time spent and whether it was beyond

economic repair.... Greg enthusiastically started explaining the repair process – the phone is switched on to see if it is operating before the factory settings are restored, all traces of the previous owners were removed. Replacing screens, keyboards or upgrade software were the next steps before the phones looked as good as new with the final step being electrical safety checks...entering back into the warehouse John proudly told us his phone was ‘actually reconditioned from their stocks, with the screen replaced, upgraded with reused stuff’.

In this quote we begin to see a second approach (b), the breakdown and selling or reusing of mobile phone parts. Components are rearranged in the marketplace; the particular marketplace one is involved in really makes a difference – the material entanglements differ in different places. Bricolage techniques help make technologies. In northern India, for example, urban city dwellers are accustomed to *jugaad*,² indicating a playful and open perspective on technologies that takes the need for workarounds for granted (Rai, 2019; Sundaram, 2009). There are plenty of repair shops that are similar to the UK Company cited above but they are attuned to the needs of citizens of megacities. The image below (figure 2), taken by Stefan, gives a sense of the dynamics and possibilities of Dehli’s infamous Nehru Place. If you roam around this place, sellers on the street tempt consumers by selling future imaginaries for your phone – tweaking, repairing, disassembling or replacing one’s device (Laser, 2016). Despite being a place for marketing pitches, however, you also meet plenty of people who can simply help with various issues.

2 The hindi term *jugār* is translated by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as a ‘flexible approach to problem-solving that uses limited resources in an innovative way’ (OED, 2019: np).



Figure 2: Nehru Place, Delhi (copyright Stefan Laser).

A third way (c) is known to be, as introduced above, the recycling of the materials included in a device. Waste plays an integral role in the global economy and is a permanent feature as demand for critical raw materials grows and concerns are raised regarding finite resources (European Commission, 2015). Engineers have trained themselves to know which materials they are confronted with and which ones may be captured in a safe manner (Minter, 2013). During the visit to the German recycling and smelting facilities Stefan, for example, learned about the complex arrangements that make a sound assessment of materials delivered possible in the first place. Imagine a seller were to drop 40 tonnes of e-waste materials at your premises – a truck loaded with a complicated selection of printers, toasters, personal computers, servers, etc. And you have to pay this seller the appropriate amount of money, manoeuvring the slippery slope of gains and losses. Workers at the recycling site need to react to the changing material compositions of the deliveries, adjusting machines, looking for crucial objects, and sensing changes. Not every delivery can be checked separately, because different contracts emphasize different assessments, which makes this endeavour so interesting and in need of trained personnel.

The accounting becomes closely linked to the experience of particular workers (Laser, 2020).

Unlike Liam, the e-waste workers are not following a simplified algorithm, as they can view e-waste not for what it is but for what it can become (Gregson et al., 2010). Liam hides the decision on material breakdown in the black box of Apple's algorithms – which is why we refer to this practice as the algorithming of knowledge.

Postenvironmentalism recognizes that our world consists of many creatures (inanimate and animate) (Vogel, 2015). Using Liam as an intermediary, we have dis/assembled values to activate the multiplicity of competing notions of responsibility (Greeson et al., 2020: 157). For instance, glossing over the future visions e-waste workers have for what the discarded technologies could become (Gregson et al., 2010), or the potential of Liam to close the loop of Apple's supply chain cutting off supplies for other workers.

Vulnerability and fragility of e-waste work

Daisy made her debut ahead of the 2018 Earth Day, at Apple Park in Cupertino, California (Apple, 2018; Tibken, 2018). Apple proclaimed this robot as 'the most efficient way to reclaim more of the valuable materials stored in iPhone' (Apple, 2018: para. 5). Her introduction was a more subdued affair (see figure 3); it was announced as one of many Apple initiatives, supporting their 'GiveBack' programme. Her broadcast informed the audience that she 'can take apart up to 200 iPhone devices per hour, removing and sorting components, so that Apple can recover materials that traditional recyclers cannot – and at a higher quality' (*ibid.*).



Figure 3: 'Apple introduces Daisy, a new robot that disassembles iPhone to recover valuable materials'. Source: Apple (2018).

Protected by glass, she operates alongside her co-workers (humans among them indeed!) engaged with the dismantling and the 'GiveBack' process. In contrast to Liam's presentation there is no narration; the music is softer, and subtitles inform how she enables

...customers return their devices to Apple... Apple will donate to Conservation International through April 30... These efforts lead to positive change, detailed in Apple's Environment Report for 2018... Showing ways Apple is reducing its impact on climate change conserving precious resources and driving energy efficiency (Apple, 2018: 00.15 – 00.45 min.).

Daisy is now on the stage superseding Liam. Not only can Daisy handle nine different iPhone models (Liam only managed to deal with the iPhone 6 model). She is also 'made from some of Liam's parts' (Apple, 2018), with the plan for her sisters to appear in Europe soon (Tibken, 2018). Like Liam, we are reminded that Daisy is there to protect as she dismantles/recycles iPhones in a 'safe' and 'clean' way (Rujanavech et al., 2016), but at the same time she and her sisters are set to displace and abandon Liam and his brothers, who are deemed to be inefficient and awaiting *deactivation*. Apple also appears to reflect on this shift by way of subtle hints – informed fans and presumed early adopters may have identified that. The introduction of

the robots has been intensively discussed in digital media. Regarding Daisy, YouTube commentators make the association with the film '2001: A Space Odyssey', since Daisy is the song sung by HAL, the computer, as he is being scrapped (JBey4you, 2018). There is some irony to be had here. Other commenters mention how they are puzzled seeing phones being discarded that are newer than theirs. Consumers show their critical capacities.

Daisy is skilled, dexterous and protects us from harm, it seems. In the video, the robot is gleaming white, a bit of silver, contains a few black spots yet shines like a star. Apple's robots offer the polemic picture of those working in the e-waste industries, disentangling themselves from global e-waste value chains. The absent other of this situation is the so-called informal sector.³ Here, one needs to look at the iconic pictures, popularised for example by the Basel Action Network and Silicon Valley Toxic Coalition (Puckett et al., 2002), of workers in Agbogbloshie, Accra, in Ghana (Fernandez-Font Perez, 2013) or Delhi, India, where humans are toiling away in insalubrious environments (Laser, 2016). Such images depict grimy, dirty, open-air toxic conditions that show primitive separation practices used to extract (economic) value. This is a one-sided framing, characterized by a specific American-European view and partly mediated by racist stereotypes, thus shaping the discussion in a particular way (Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2008; Sahpores et al., 2009). Indeed, and in contrast to that, in the so-called formal sectors, the images typically represent an assembly line of men, wearing health and safety clothing separating and preparing devices ready for feeding large recycling machines. Apple appears to pay homage to the high-tech recycling machines that these formal industries celebrate.

3 We write of 'so-called' because the in/formal categorization is disputed and partly rejected by various authors; we preserve the notion to reflect the performativity of the terms (see also Laser and Schlitz, 2019; for alternative conceptual inputs such as 'reclaimers', 'irregulars' or 'informal' see e.g. Hafner and Zirkl, 2019; Samson, 2015; Schulz, 2019;).



Figure 4: Complex scrap yard order at an informal site (copyright Alison Stowell).

Both images, our research emphasizes, are not doing justice to the complex recycling realities and their limits (see also Fernandez-Font Perez, 2013; Lepawsky, 2018; Schulz, 2015). In the pictures shown below (figure 4 and 5) we have confronted the two worlds with a rather different set of pictures. The informal sector (figure 4) is not as unorganized as it seems. One needs to appreciate the complex ordering of the scrap yard not always visible at first glance; it is indeed similar to the formal operations, which simply use more and (crucially) more expensive tools to do the job of sorting (figure 5). Most importantly, only a small fraction of informal labour surrounding e-waste is dangerous. Daisy tries to enforce Rujanavech et al.'s (2016) 'safe' and 'clean' practices that culminate in making the e-waste sector invisible from the landscape (Apple, 2019a).



Figure 5: Ordering practices and tools at a formal recycler's site (copyright Stefan Laser).

While the informal sector is often misrepresented, the limits of formal recycling operations are not well accessed either. It takes a lot of organizational and financial power to successfully recycle e-waste, while success is narrowly defined. During Stefan's ethnographic study of a German recycling company, he observed a peculiar differentiation of labour that provides an interesting perspective. Inside one of the facilities, the workforce was almost exclusively elderly men or handicapped people (this term is deliberately used as quite often their hands had been damaged in some way). They were doing rather comfortable and lightweight jobs (classification and documentation of testing samples – bureaucracy, if you will). As Stefan learned, most of them used to work in different facilities/departments of this company. Management had transferred them because they could not withstand the physically demanding repetitive work. The required skill and stamina to be deemed efficient, it could be

argued, is being replaced by technology. Daisy is relocating and reconfiguring workers too, even other robots like Liam.

All the e-waste workers (including the robots) and these competing recycling operations have in common that they require physical stamina, strength, dexterity and skills to identify value (Stowell and Warren, 2018). Reconsidering public discourses around recycling and their effects on recycling programmes, Pickren (2014: 33) argues that 'given the complexity of global commodity networks like those used for electronics, these governing narratives rely on abstractions that oversimplify and rework the fetish of what e-waste is, where it goes, and how it should be managed'. For us, Daisy shines a spotlight on the vulnerabilities, fragility and inequalities of waste work. All in all, it is important to acknowledge that multiple actors claim to do a good job while handling the e-waste, both in the global north and south, and not just in Cupertino.

Hegemony of shredding

This last sub-section discusses Liam and Daisy by focusing on one essential element they both share. The robots highlight a hegemony of shredding, the rising impact of shredding technologies in the global recycling economies of e-waste, which helps us revisit our research sites once again. Below are two quotes from the introduction of Liam and Daisy respectively, stressing what is at stake.

Traditional e-waste recycling can only recover a handful of the materials actually used in today's electronics. This is due to the challenges faced in pre-processing where highly complex electronics have to be shredded and are separated into only a few different material streams that aggregate many individual materials. Liam lets Apple address this problem by producing eight different material streams that can be sent for targeted material recovery. As a result, end-processors can recover a more diverse set of materials at higher yields than ever possible before (Rujanavech et al., 2016: 6-7).

Our newest disassembly robot, Daisy, is the most innovative and efficient way to reclaim more of the valuable materials stored in iPhone...For example, Daisy makes it possible to recover rare earths, tungsten and Apple-specific aluminium alloys. Then we can use these materials to make new products or return them to the market, reducing the need to mine more resources from

the earth...Daisy not only yields more, but also teaches us more about what's possible (Apple, 2018: para. 3-4).

Apple is connecting with the recycling industries, aiming to advance the options already used, taking them one step further toward more efficiency. For the establishment of efficiency, as Stefan learned during his studies at the German recycler, the precision of shredding machines is important (Laser, 2020) in order to differentiate between different streams of valuable scrap that can be sold off or processed with a clear destination. The mixture of materials delivered at the recyclers' site is a challenge, yet this is where the robots are said to help out to capture key metals (aluminium, gold, silver, rare earths, tungsten, copper, palladium, tin, cobalt, tantalum) and plastics (Rujanavech et al., 2016).

Liam and Daisy are said to receive the iPhones when options of repair are believed impractical (*ibid.*). Yet, there are critical voices that question this claim. Recycling industry exports highlight that consumers should be wary of giving Apple their old telephones, for they would hinder alternative, more sustainable uses of the devices. 'Don't give it to him [the recycling robot]', they suggest (Urry, 2016: n.p.). More research is required on this topic, because we lack data on what kind of recycling value chain Apple is in fact establishing. The company, for example, has also been under considerable pressure from the Right to Repair movement that urges Apple to make their devices more accessible to professional and layperson repair – and recent news reports suggest they indeed appear to have succeeded in making their demands heard (Koebler, 2019).

Our research suggests that Apple's technocratic scheme to deal with broken/used phones is just one of the many strategies at present to deal with waste, pushing repair and refurbishment actors out and thus stabilizing a hegemony of shredding. As indicated, this is not only this particular company's endeavour. The recycling robots rather help illuminate a global trend. Electronic waste has been hitting the news as a major global issue since the early 2000s, coming into prominence also by way of dramatic NGO storylines on illegal global exports of waste (Puckett et al., 2002). Since then (and in fact beginning with the negotiation of the original Basel convention

from 1989) we can see a political shift toward the establishment of an infrastructure of high-tech recycling. Technocratic means of grappling with the e-waste issue have become an end of their own, while reappearing news reports on the dramatic scenes of so-called amateurish recycling practices in the global south emphasize the need to stick to high-tech means-ends.

Waste prevention as well as repair mechanisms are declared laudable goals in the policy frameworks we came across during our studies (WEEE in Europe, the e-waste Rules in India). However, the most important financial support mechanisms drawing on these schemes share a focus on supporting new shredder technologies rather than, say, repair strategies and initiatives (this is partly the reason why Lepawsky (2018) suggests that we need to rethink the e-waste issue). We need to be careful with our critique here though, for the new infrastructure of high-tech-recycling is complex and anything but unidirectional in its influence. In practice, we see contradictions and the coexistence of infrastructures. Actors are able to creatively link with different parts of diverging sociotechnical arrangements. At the UK asset recovery site, Alison, for example, found that the organization oscillated across different systems to extract value and thereby produced different understandings of responsibility – placing the impetus on data security and eradication services refurbishment, and component sales, before shredding and smelting (Stowell and Brigham, 2018). In India, Stefan found that the new e-waste law wants to reorganize by way of devaluing practices like repair, while the new high-tech infrastructure in fact does not simply replace the previous recycling and repair efforts (but it might make their work more difficult and expensive). Despite such complexities, however, Liam and Daisy help us see that particular high-tech approaches toward e-waste are becoming more dominant when it comes to handling of discarded materials – something we refer to as the hegemony of shredding.

Reactivating responsibility

So, how does dis/assembly contribute to the understanding of postenvironmentalism? Returning to the postenvironmentalist, Vogel, we

remind ourselves of the importance of exploring the concrete sociotechnical issues surrounding the production of responsibility and how this can be activated. He vividly points out that focusing on individual human beings and what they should do regarding certain ecological issues could even be harmful. For Vogel (2015), the infamous tragedy of the commons results from the inability to coordinate one's action with others (consequences then appear in the form of stiff natural facts) (Hardin, 1968; Ostrom, 1999). The moral obligation of each individual, in turn, is to make responsible decisions. In doing so, he does not focus on individual consumer decisions. But he explores political collectives and their ability to mobilize, in order to generate knowledge that can help organize society in different ways. In addition, we need a pragmatic approach that enables us to be attentive to the valuation processes at hand and their materialities. We argue that dis/assembling value helps to put a spotlight onto the action of valuation. Using Liam and Daisy as intermediaries, by focusing on how they enact the value of responsibility, we have shown the multiplicities of value-production, and how value orders compete against each other. We thus highlight the limits of adopting a technocratic approach to e-waste and how this contributes to a reassessment of politicisations.

Limits to a technocratic approach to e-waste

How do the robots, Liam and Daisy, enact the value of responsibility? They gloss over the future visions the e-waste workers have for what the discarded technologies could become (Gregson et al., 2010). Whilst automated disassembly might be advantageous, since the take apart process provides homogenous component streams (Rujanavech et al., 2016), one could argue that the robots are representative of Apple's control, relying upon algorithms that 'black box' decisions about what recycling practices are considered 'optimal'. Thus, we argue, attention should be paid to what decisions are behind these material breakdown process. From the point of view of our research, Liam and Daisy close the loop of Apple's supply chain and contribute to the decision as to who then can own an iPhone.

In addition, it is indicative to look at which actors and locations are absent in newly introduced (and cherished) technologies. In this case, Liam and

Daisy emerged as particularly white and powerful robots, and the absent other that got silenced was the informal sector and its actors in the global south as well as the global north.

Moving beyond demystification

Finally, however, it may also be helpful to slow down one's criticism when being confronted with such inequalities. Exploring the production of responsibility through dis/assembly shows a particular way of developing critical arguments. Environmentalism traditionally suggests the protection of something, but the something usually embraced (called nature) does not exist anymore (or has never existed in the first place) (Latour, 2005). Drawing upon Vogel's (2015) postenvironmentalism, we are reminded of the importance of taking Apple's robots seriously and to move beyond demystification in order to deepen our understanding of the responsibility of waste. What we investigate here is the protection of the built environment, which includes electronic devices and the infrastructure surrounding these. As Apple documented, the Liams were also a recycling experiment so their existence is just as insecure, precarious and unstable. How long will it be before Daisy is disassembled to create the new army of robots? Like Liam, Daisy becomes the absent other, silenced, and her creativity and innovation lost. Reinforcing the importance of protecting the built environment carefully to ensure inclusivity remains, and those less visible are not forgotten. However, it is an ongoing challenge that is faced when attempting to create a circular economy solution.

To summarize, we argue that through the introduction of Apple's recycling robots the company is claiming to be responsible, but what they in fact do is to remove important parts of the recycling realities from our sight. What is required is an exploration of multiple responsible ways of dealing with electronic gadgets and their waste. We argue that reconceptualizing postenvironmentalism, through the lens of dis/assembling values, enables us to activate the production of responsibility as a value in empirical contexts. Through adopting this conceptual framework, we can engage with the built environment in a more democratic way. There was not enough space in this article to discuss the plethora of actors and skills to be found at

our research sites; but there was sufficient space to hint at a selection of key themes to think of, which can also nudge future research.

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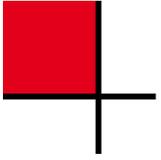
acknowledgements

We would like to thank the organizers and participants of the Opening the Bin workshop in 2017 at Lund University in Sweden, and the Department of Organisation, Work and Technology writing group at Lancaster University, UK, for their early input into our ideas. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Editor of this article for their constructive and helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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Power and management according to Agamben: Some implications of Agamben's thoughts to management scholarship

Enrico Beltramini

abstract

This review discusses some of the most prominent contributions of Giorgio Agamben to philosophy and political theories that are relevant to management scholars. By addressing Agamben's theological genealogy of economy and government included in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, I introduce management scholars to innovative significations and understandings of power and management, including the notion that power is a form of management. I also offer some reflections on the ramifications for management scholarship of Agamben's engagement with management as a *praxis*.

Introduction

It is the scholarly instinct in general, and the American predilection in particular, to equalize management with exercise of power. This intuitive understanding of management, Italian philosopher and political theorist Giorgio Agamben argues, reflects a distinct relationship between political theory and management. However, Agamben claims that economy, not politics, is the key to this connection between power and management. With the term 'economy' Agamben explores a variety of meanings, including the Greek *oikonomia*, that is, household management. This shift from politics to

economy offers two advantages. First, it allows Agamben to reveal that the link of politics with management in contemporary times is established hegemonically, from which the prescriptive character of management scholarship can be deducted. Second, a focus on economy allows Agamben to reframe management as operability, or the simple act of using something. While the reader may think that this shift has little or no relevance to contemporary management, the claim can be made that modern management lies on fragile theoretical roots. In fact, if management takes the form of action, management is not dependent on a superior order of affairs; it does not receive legitimacy and authority from an external body. To put it in more general terms, from Agamben's work it is deducible that not one, but two different understandings of management are possible. On one hand is the paradigm of authority, which links politics and management, expresses a transcendental tendency, and conceives management as a form of knowledge, and eventually as a science. On the other hand, the paradigm of economy and management replaces this transcendence with the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent ordering – domestic and not political in a strict sense. By claiming that management derives from economy, Agamben suggests that management belongs to a non-epistemic paradigm, something that is not a knowledge or a science. As a matter of fact, management is action, and action does not need further justification. In this context, Agamben frames management as:

... an activity that is not bound to a system of rules, and does not constitute a science in the proper sense. This activity rather implies decisions and orders that cope with problems that are each time specific. (Agamben, 2011b: 17-18)

In an effort to correct Michel Foucault's analysis on Western politics, Agamben has been occupied with an extensive project of power reconceptualization. In political theory there is the long-established notion of a negative relationship between sovereignty and government, or, political authority and political activity. Foucault addresses this relationship: he suggests that in modern times, the dominant political element, sovereignty – the juridical-political form of power – has been replaced by government – the economic-administrative form of power. Reflected in this process for Foucault is a profound transformation of the nature of power itself: power takes the

form of government and regulates the population; this is what Foucault occasionally called a 'biopolitics' (Foucault, 2003: 243). The biopolitical is the political concern with biological life. Foucault's contribution has already been assimilated in management scholarship.

Enter Agamben. His argument is that government has not replaced sovereignty as the dominant form of power, but rather that sovereignty belongs to a certain ontological domain, that government belongs to another, and that the two domains mutually influence each other. The notion of Government (different than the notion of 'government') stands for the articulation between the two. It can be said that, for Agamben, 'government' stands for the executive power, while 'Government' is the articulation or coordination of sovereignty and government. Moreover, Agamben argues that the negative relationship between sovereignty and government is the result of a juridical-political paradigm, while the articulation between these two 'antinomical but functionally related' poles (i.e., sovereignty and government) is the effect of an economic paradigm (Agamben, 2011b: 1). Thus, Agamben's first concern is that the relationship between sovereignty and government is that of mutual coordination, and that it is not hierarchical. This activity of mutual coordination is the Government. His second concern is that sovereignty and government belong to an economic-administrative paradigm. As a consequence of belonging to an economic-administrative paradigm, Agamben notes, management is a praxis, an activity.

The aim of this article is to deal with these radical theses of claiming that (1) power belongs to an economic-administrative paradigm, not to a juridical-political paradigm; (2) Government is the bipolar machine of power, i.e., norm and order, legitimacy and execution, sovereignty and government, *auctoritas* and *potestas*; and (3) government is an activity, not a science.

This article is divided into three parts: first, I briefly introduce Agamben and his work; second, I address Agamben's work on power; third, I explore the implications of Agamben's work for management scholars. In the first part, as indispensable background, I introduce briefly Agamben's overall project and the related notions of state of exception and bare life. I then turn to

Agamben's general assumptions about secularization, his interpretation of Foucault's work on power, and Agamben's study of two theological paradigms, one political and the other economic-driven. My central interest does not concern the accuracies or inaccuracies of Agamben's readings of Foucault's corpus of political texts. Instead, the intention is to tease out the main features of Agamben's theoretical and philosophical conceptions of power and management. Then, Government comes to the fore and occupies my focus. Finally, as follow and take further Agamben's argument, I invite readers to recognize the ramifications of Agamben's ideas for management scholarship.

Agamben is a thinker whose texts are characterized by a scrupulous attention to other authors' terminology; unfortunately, he does not pay the same attention to his own. With that said, in coherence with Agamben's works, 'government' is used in three distinct senses in this article: (1) government (or governance) as executive power; (2) government as the bipolar system of power composed of sovereign power and executive power (and in order to avoid confusion, the capital letter – i.e., 'Government' or 'Governance' – is used to indicate the second sense; (3) government as government of people and things (used as a synonym of governmentality). The terms administration, government, management, and economy are used synonymously.¹ Finally, the meaning of terms such as 'political theology,' 'economic theology,' 'biopolitical,' 'economy,' and 'management' are defined in the text.

1 An introductory note on some terms used in this article. 'Sovereign power' is power as right within a territory; 'biopower' stands for power as competence over a population. 'Sovereignty' is the *supreme authority within a territory*; 'governmentality' is a term that Foucault originally formulated to combine the terms 'government' and 'rationality.' Governmentality in this sense refers to the process of governing as well as the mentality, the 'governmental *ratio*' or 'governmental reason' or 'rationality of governing.' To put it differently, the concern of governmentality is how to govern, or the intellectual and practical activity of governing. 'Law' stands for 'norm', 'rule', or 'prescription'.

Agamben's thought

Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben (born 1942) dedicated the first part of his academic career to focusing on questions of aesthetics and the readings of major figures in the history of philosophy. Since the 1990s, however, much of Agamben's work can be read as a re-conception of the notion of political power. Here I refer mostly to his so-called *Homo Sacer* project, a series of nine volumes published across 20 years (1995-2014), which are intended to be read together as a single work. In this capacity, Agamben's work has had a deep impact on contemporary scholarship in a number of disciplines in the Anglo-American intellectual world. Following the trajectory of Agamben's work since the mid-1990s makes evident that he proceeds by an ongoing interpretation of the thought of two main European thinkers, Walter Bendix Schönflies Benjamin (1892-1940) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Benjamin was a German Jewish philosopher associated mostly with the Frankfurt School. Agamben served from 1979 to 1994 as editor of the Italian edition of Benjamin's collected works. Foucault was a French philosopher, often cited as a poststructuralist and postmodernist. Agamben's (1998: 9) work on political theory is explicitly engaged with Foucault's thesis on the condition of biopolitics, claiming that he aims to 'correct or at least complete' it.

Agamben is best known for his work investigating the concepts of 'state of exception' and 'bare life'. These two concepts might be relevant to management scholars and remain worth reading. Certainly, one of Agamben's main theses is that sovereign power, through the inclusive exclusion of natural life, is always already biopolitical. More precisely, Agamben argues that sovereign power establishes itself through the production of a political order based on the exclusion of human life. It achieves this, according to legal scholar Amy O'Donoghue (2015), through the enactment of the exception in which the law is suspended, withdrawn from the human being who is stripped of legal status and transformed in relation to sovereign power into a bare life without rights (*zoē*). O'Donoghue explains that the bare life in the sovereign exception is captured in a specific relation to sovereign power, what Agamben terms a 'relation of exception' or 'relation of ban'. Those who inhabit the state of exception cannot be said to be freed from the juridical order and from

sovereign rule; bare life is not ‘simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it’ (Agamben, 1998: 28). Through its own suspension, the ‘law encompasses living beings’ (Agamben, 2005a: 3) who are simultaneously bound and abandoned to it. As such, the bare life captured in the sovereign ban is included in the juridical order ‘through its exclusion’; it finds itself tied to the order, and the sovereign power by which it is constituted, in the relation of exception (Agamben, 1998: 18).

Agamben’s attempt to move beyond Foucault’s work on biopolitics, as the regulation of populations, has led to an important debate in fields as diverse as political theology (Siisiäinen, 2014), philosophy of politics (Toscano, 2011; Kishik, 2012), legal studies (Frost, 2012; O’Donoghue, 2015), political theory (Luisetti, 2011; Whyte, 2014), geography (Minca 2006; 2007), and Foucault studies (Genel, 2006; Snoek, 2010). While the contribution of Agamben’s project to Foucault’s political ideas remains yet to be explored in a comprehensive and systematic way (see for example Mills, 2008; de la Durantaye, 2009; Murray, 2010; Kishik, 2012; Whyte, 2014; Attell, 2014), Agamben’s work has been addressed in management scholarship with regards to politics of the gesture (ten Bos, 2005), state of exception (Cunha et al., 2012), organization (Banerjee, 2008; O’Doherty et al., 2013), and workplace (Ek et al., 2007).

Readers should be aware of Agamben’s extraordinary and intimidating range of interests and readings, including poetics and politics, logic and linguistics, philology and philosophy, and theology and biblical studies. It is impossible to summarize Agamben’s thought on political philosophy and theory in the space of one article. I limit this review to the most influential dimension of Agamben’s work in recent years, specially the first five chapters of his *The kingdom and the glory: For a theological genealogy of economy and glory* (or simply *The kingdom and the glory*). While some of Agamben’s texts were long ago translated into English, some are only newly translated, and some are not yet translated from the Italian. For the sake of terminological and stylistic coherence, I have for the most part provided my own English translations of Agamben’s Italian texts.

The kingdom and the glory

Agamben's *The kingdom and the glory* is, alongside *Homo Sacer*, his most important book and it is quite surprising that *The kingdom and the glory* has not earned the interest of more management scholars. Notable exceptions in the field of social sciences include the writings of Dean (2012, 2013, 2017) and Minca (2008, 2009).

Agamben's methodology

I start with a preliminary clarification of the significance and implications of the term 'secularization' in order to make Agamben's methodology explicit. Secularization for Agamben is not a retreat from religion, rather a byproduct of religion. In *The kingdom and the glory*, Agamben points out that he is closer to Carl Schmitt than to Max Weber (2011b: 76-77). Schmitt argues that religion continues to be present and to act in an eminent way in the modern world, while Weber suggests the option of a progressive disenchantment of the world. This reinterpretation of secularization changes the relationship between theology and politics. It does not necessarily imply a substantial identity between theology and politics, nor a perfect identity of signification between theological concepts and political concepts; it concerns, rather, a particular strategic relation, which marks political concepts, referring them to their theological origin. Most apparent concepts of the political philosophical tradition are, in this way, *signature* in the sense of Foucault, that is something which defers and dislocates concepts from one sphere to another (in this case, from sacred to profane or vice-versa) without redefining them semantically (Agamben, 2011a: 4) (see also Toscano, 2011; Zawisza, 2015).² I must make evident Agamben's strategy: when he states that the Trinity 'has functioned as the hidden ontological paradigm of modern governance', he is not doing theology (Agamben, 2011b). When he mentions an ancient doctrine, a theological debate on the Trinitarian mystery or the role of angels, he is not

2 On the concept of signature, Agamben wrote a methodological treatise (Agamben, 2009). Agamben has recently defined signature as something that in a sign or a concept marks and exceeds such a sign or concept referring it back to a determinate field of interpretation, without for that reason leaving the semiotic to constitute a new meaning or new concept.

proposing a return to theology, but using theology as a prism to better understand the modern concepts of power. Agamben is suggesting that the old theological concept of the Trinity can be seen as a generating source of the modern notion of government.

Power

In his attempt to redefine power, Foucault introduces the notion of ‘economy of power’ (Foucault, 1977: 25). According to Foucault (1979: 92), power is not a substance or thing, rather

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.

For Foucault, power is not related to some form of class, gender, racial, or economic structure, nor is it a resource or a stock; it is, rather, the production of a set of relations of forces. From the perspective of a systemic conception of power, power is framed as the final result of an organization of different actors, technologies, materiality, and forms of knowledge. For Foucault, a pre-modern organization (or regime) of power is based on sovereignty. In the modern age, sovereign forms of power are replaced by a governmental form of power, the expression of a biopolitics of the population. I will revisit this replacement theory later.

This governmental form of power is the economy of power. Foucault never attempted a definition of ‘economy of power’. However, the expression stands for power as administration, or eventually for power as management. If power is a system of forces, economy of power is the administrative, i.e., the regulating, measuring, calculating *modus operandi* of this system. This notion of an economy of power has become, since Foucault’s initial contribution, increasingly influential. Although inaugurated with Foucault in recent times, this concept of ‘economy of power’ has a long history beginning with the notion of *oikonomia*, which is the Greek term understood in Aristotle and Xenophon as the administration of the *oikos*, the house. In Ancient Greece, in fact, economy suggested an ordering, or a form of management. Foucault used the term *dispositif*, often translated into English as ‘apparatus’; it is derived

from the Latin *disposito*, which is one translation of *oikonomia*. I will return to this.

For Foucault, a ‘profound transformation’ of the ‘mechanisms of power’ in the West is the eclipse of the political by the economical that occurred in the transition from the classical age to modernity (Foucault, 1979: 136). According to Foucault, the transition marks the transformation of the forms of power relations, from sovereign power to biopower. In the pre-modern world, sovereign power was characterized by a king’s right over the life and death of his subjects. Yet, there was no serious attempt by kings to regulate the people who lived in their domains. Sovereign power was ‘essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself’ (Foucault, 1979: 136). Whereas sovereign power was the power of the king to appropriate property, labor, or the lives of his subjects (a juridical-political form of power), biopower in modern times is characterized by the governance of specific populations as objects (an economic-administrative form of power). In the modern period, governments take an active interest in the lives of the people (i.e., biopolitics) and people have turned from constitutive political body into population: a demographical biological entity (Agamben, 2005b). Biopower aims to regulate, manage, and administer the life of the people who live in a nation state. It is a regulatory mechanism of power that allows the state to administrate and monitor the nation through institutions such as health care, education, tax collection, and military drafting. Thus, Foucault argues that pre-modern power was characterized by sovereignty rationality, while modern power is characterized by a governmental rationality. For Foucault, power has changed its character from a juridical-political system to a regulating administration. Foucault defines governmentality as allowing for a complex form of ‘power which has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (Foucault, 2009: 107-8).

According to Agamben, Foucault is correct in assuming a distinction between a juridical-political understanding of the state, ultimately concerned with questions of legitimacy, on one hand, and on the other concerned with the economic-administrative significance of government finalized to a regulatory approach to citizens’ life. However, Agamben suggests that Foucault misses

the point in postulating an essential continuity between the original juridical-political orientation of the state, based on sovereignty, and the economic-administrative orientation of government, or biopolitics. Agamben in fact refuses the idea that power has abandoned politics and law for embracing economy and administration: in his opinion, Western politics has been since its inception biopolitics, i.e., concerned with the government of the living. The source of this difference of opinions between Foucault and Agamben resides, at least according to Agamben, in two different genealogies of power. For Foucault, the origins of power are located in a theological-political paradigm, for Agamben, in a theological-economic paradigm.

Genealogy

In *The kingdom and the glory* (2011b: 13) Agamben claims that there are ‘two broadly speaking political paradigms’, both

... derive from Christian theology... in a broad, antinomous but functionally connected way: political theology, which founds in the one God the transcendence of sovereign power, and economic theology, which substitutes for this the idea of an *oikonomia*, conceived as an immanent order – domestic and not political in the strict sense – as much of the divine life as of the human one. From the first derives political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty; from the second, modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life.

It is a dense quote. Agamben enquires the genealogy of the two paradigms that power has assumed throughout the history of the West. He argues that both paradigms find their origins in Christian theology. Political theology derives from the notion of the sovereign power of a single God. Agamben already discussed the first paradigm specifically in *Homo Sacer* and *State of exception*, where he further developed the work of Carl Schmitt. Economic theology, instead, results from the idea of a domestic, not political administration of both divine and human life (respectively, Trinity and creation). Political philosophy and the modern theory of sovereignty derive from the first paradigm; modern biopolitics up to the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life derive from the second paradigm. In *The kingdom and the glory*, he investigates the second paradigm.

Agamben traces the patterns of conceptual descent in current theories of government to economic theology, aligned with the now fashionable line of reasoning introduced by Mark Lilla in his *The stillborn god* (2007). Agamben argues that investigations into the nature of executive power in the West have operated within a framework that, taking its departure from Carl Schmitt's analysis of sovereignty, have remained essentially within the horizon of political theology (which founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God), with biopolitics understood as a phenomenon of political theology. Agamben, however, sustains that it is not political theology but rather economic theology (the idea of an immanent ordering) that is the interpretive paradigm of reference in which to investigate the source the triumph of economy and government over all forms of contemporary life. In this sense, *The kingdom and the glory* is an investigation of the ways and the reasons for which executive power came to assume, in the West, the form of an *oikonomia*, that of a government of humans (Agamben, 2011b).

Not only does Agamben establish a connection between government and the notion of the *oikonomia* (economy); he frames the nature of this connection. The English word 'government' has Greek and Latin ancestries: initially, it takes the form of *oikonomia* (economy); then it was conceived as a form of arrangement and disposition, being translated later in Latin as *dispositio* (apparatus). From the initial definition of *oikonomia* as 'economy', or 'administration of the house', Agamben traces the ramifications of the significance and understanding of this term. He seeks to understand the current conception of government in light of an important but rarely acknowledged transformation in the idea of government brought about by Christianity. Through a careful exposition of early Christian theology, Agamben demonstrates that economy, not politics, is the intellectual offspring of government. But the activity the ancients termed 'economy,' assumes today, he argues, the form of what is called 'administration,' or 'management'.

Thus, 'economy', 'administration', and 'management' are all terms that can be used synonymously: government is a form of management. For Aristotle, economy is a non-epistemic paradigm, something that is not a science or an episteme, but rather a praxis which implies decisions and measures that can

be understood only in relation to a given situation and a given problem. What emerges is a sense that economy is distinguished from politics in not being law-governed. Rather, it is a series of ad hoc measures suited to each particular situation, and so economy can never be the object of a science properly-so-called. Xenophon, an ancient Greek philosopher, used the analogy of a ship on a voyage, where there is a captain and yet everyone is immediately responsible for everything, shifting their strategies according to ever-changing conditions. Agamben maintains that this notion of ad hoc, non-rule-governed management is the semantic core of the term. In addition to ‘administration of the household’, he notes, the concept has to do with an ordered functioning and has often been associated with a managerial or operational focus. To put it briefly: the key to understanding the contemporary mechanisms of power, including forms of economic power, lies, according to Agamben, in a properly theoretical research into the concept of human praxis. In Agamben, praxis is an activity, but not really a productive activity; it is rather a willed practical activity, a practical activity in which human will finds expression (Agamben, 1999).

Agamben sees in modern and present-day models of political activity the unmistakable footprint of the fourth and fifth-century ‘economic’ doctrine of the Trinity (‘divine life’). The starting point of Agamben’s investigation is, in fact, the history of the early Church and the elaboration of the Trinitarian doctrine as a form of domestic administration, or economy, or *oikonomia*. In the early centuries of Christianity, in order to reconcile monotheism with God’s threefold nature, theologians introduced *oikonomia*, economy, in terms of an administration of divine life. God, as far as his substance or being is concerned, is one. But as for his *oikonomia*, his economy – that is to say the way He manages the divine house – He is three. Thus, the ‘divine life’, the Trinity, is a ‘divine economy’, the administration of the divine house. These early church theologians distinguished two discourses: the ontological discourse, concerning God’s being, and the economical discourse which refers to God’s action and to how He manages His house. This articulation of *theologia* and *oikonomia*, the being of God and the activity of God, ‘introduces personality and action into the being of God’ (Agamben, 2011b:

18). Agamben argues that the economy of divine life (the Trinitarian model) is a crucial point in the genealogy of governmentality.

In *The kingdom and the glory*, Agamben explains that it is not the monotheistic political theology that culminates in the theory of sovereignty, but rather the notion of divine *oikonomia* that ultimately underwrites modern biopolitics. Moreover, Agamben shares with other scholars, including Erik Peterson (1890-1960), a recent line of reasoning that traces the patterns of conceptual descent in current theories of democracy in the patristic 'economic' paradigms in theology. He argues that a theological-economic paradigm operates better than a theological-political paradigm for understanding the relation between the sovereign power and biopower.

Government

At this point, Agamben moves from the administration of the divine life, the Trinity, to the administration of human life, the divine government of the world, or providence. 'Providence – according to Agamben – just means the divine government' (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.). Providence means that God is constantly at work governing the world. If He stops for a single instance, the world (His creation) would collapse. But how does divine government, how does providence, operate? Providence is conceived as a double machine. Theologians distinguish between a general providence and a special providence. The former establishes the universal laws, the universal and transcendent laws, and the first causes. Theologians call this *ordinatio*, Latin for ordering order. The latter is entrusted to the angels or to the mechanisms of immanent and secondary causes. Theologians call this execution, *executio*. So, the machine of the divine government is order and execution (Agamben, 2011b: 142). However, order and execution are not linked together in the context of a theological-political paradigm, but of a theological-economic paradigm. What does it mean? It means that, in a theological-economic paradigm, execution is not subordinated to order, special providence is not secondary to general providence. In fact, general providence and special providence, ontology and economy, order and execution, are autonomous to each other yet operating in mutual coordination. To understand this model, one has to go back to the Trinity.

Back to the Trinity. Christian theologians articulated a distinction between God's being and God's action. The distinction between the being of God and the activity of God, God's being and God's action, implies the question of the relationship between the two: is God's action based on God's being? The Father, the first person of the Trinity, is without beginning or foundation. The Father is *anarchos*, without beginning. Christ, the Son, who is the logos, the word and the action of God, Agamben argues, is supposed to be grounded in the Father. But He is not. The doctrine of the Church, in fact, ultimately states that the Son, the Christ, is *anarchos*, without beginning or foundation, exactly like the Father. Christ, the Son, the Logos, the Word and the action of God, is not grounded in the Father, rather is anarchical like the Father. He is without *arché*, without foundation without beginning, exactly like the Father. So, Christ is completely independent. This is the paradox of divine anarchy: God's action is completely independent from God's being. Agamben notes three implications of this theological move. An effect of this is the anarchic, groundless character of action.

This thesis of the anarchy of the Christ ... implies that language and action – as the divine language and the divine action – had no foundation in being, are in this sense anarchical. This means that the classical Greek ontology with its idea of a substantial link between being and logos, being and language, but also between being and praxis, action, is ruined forever. Any attempt, since that moment to found language on being is doomed to fail. (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.)

God's being is the Father, the first person of the Trinity. God's action is the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Together, they identify the double structure of the government of the world. This bipolar machine, Agamben argues, is a constant in Christian thought. The same bipolar machine is postulated with regard to the divine administration of the world. This is the conjunction of this doctrine of the divine economy with the divine government of the world. Since the beginning of the theory of power, there is a double structure. The divine economy is a dual structure; the Government is a dual structure. This dual structure implies the necessity of some form of government that governs the entire system.

It is precisely because being and action are both anarchical in this sense, precisely for that reason, something such as a government – the word government comes from the Greek *kybernetes*, which mean the Pilot of a ship,

to guide the ship. So precisely because being and action are both anarchical, a government becomes possible and even necessary. It is the groundless and anarchical paradigm of human action that makes it possible to govern this action. (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.)

Precisely because being and action are both anarchical, government becomes necessary.

It is well known that the division between the power that authorizes the action (*auctoritas*) and the power of acting (*potestas*) is supplemented in the theological genealogy of politics. In the tradition of political philosophy this double structure is expressed in the old formula: The king reigns, but he doesn't govern. Agamben (2011c) notes that this is an old dictum, which had already been founded by the 16th century. In modern democracy this division between kingdom and government is the division in legislative or sovereign power, which acts always through universal laws and principles, and executive power, which carries out in detail the general principle. Agamben agrees that this division exists but refuses to identify any juridical-political relationship between the two. In fact, he notes, the relationship between God's being and God's action is that of reciprocal coordination in autonomy. Similarly, the relationship between executive power and sovereign power is economical, driven by an administrative, not a political or juridical concern.

In theology, the administration of the world is precisely what results from the coordination and articulation of God's being and God's action, general providence and special providence. The same can be said in the theory of power: Government is the result of the mutual coordination and articulation of sovereign power and executive power. Nobody exercises Government; Government is the spontaneous result of the mutual adjustment between one form of power and another. In Agamben's (2011c: n.p.) words,

No matter how theologians conceive the relationship between the two poles, in any case, the bipolar structure must be present. If they are completely divided, no government is possible. There would be on the one hand side an almighty sovereign who is effectively impotent, and on the other, the chaotic mess of the particular acts of interventions of governance. A government is possible only if the two aspects are coordinated in a bipolar machine. So I will define government when you will have the coordination of these two elements. General law and an execution, general providence and particular providence.

Modern theory considers sovereignty as the central political category and reduces Government to government, executive power. As a result, Agamben notes, political philosophy fails to understand the real nature of Government and focuses instead on universal problems. But the bipolar machine of Government is not the result of the evolution of a political paradigm. Government is the result of the necessary functional relation between the two forms of power, sovereignty and government. Thus, Government is, according to Agamben, the convergence of these two forms of power that are hitherto distinct: *auctoritas* and *potestas*, *ordinatio* and *execution*, sovereignty and execution. The articulation between these two antinomical but functionally related orders, that is, the ontological and the economical, is Government (2011b: 1). To put it differently, Government is the structural articulation of power according to two different levels, aspects, or polarities, because ‘power – every power ... – must hold these two poles together, that is, it must be, at the same time, kingdom and government, transcendent norm and immanent order’ (Agamben, 2011b: 82).

As Agamben states when discussing Thomas Aquinas, “‘the economic’ sense of order ... does not concern the substance, but the relation” (Agamben, 2011b: 136). Government is precisely concerned with the relation between sovereignty and government; Government is the coordination and articulation of general laws and particular situation. Agamben (2011b: 276) notes that

... the real problem – the secret core of politics – is neither sovereignty nor law, it is government ... It is the governmental machine that functions through the complicated system of relations that binds these two poles together.

This means that Government is not targeting the general or the particular, the end or the means, but their functional correlation. Government is neither only substance nor action, but the composition of the gap between the two. This means that the dominance of administration over legitimacy in modernity is not the result of replacement of law with bureaucracy, but rather a different aggregation within the bipolar machine. In the course of history, sometimes the first pole becomes dominant over the second, and monarchs or legislators (in the context of nation-state) assume a commanding position over governments; sometimes the second pole becomes dominant over the first.

Today one could say that the act of government, or execution, has the primacy over the parliamentary and legislative power. The crisis of legislative power is evident everywhere. Regardless, Agamben notes, both legislative power and executive power are here to stay. In fact, one pole can prevail on the other, like now it is the case for government and executive power, but nevertheless both poles must be there, otherwise no Government is possible (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.).

Implications

For contemporary readers working at the intersection of management and political theory, Agamben's contributions summarized in this review may look irrelevant: Agamben, in fact, offers material to the intellectual history of politics and to scholarly conceptions of the operations of political power. Yet, he also instantiates economy and management as absolutely central to the political discourse. He states that economic concepts are at the origin of modern political theory. As said, it is a monumental shift from Foucault's view of political discourse. For Foucault, within the very same juridical-political paradigm that sustains the relationship between sovereignty and government, sovereignty is replaced by government as the dominant form of power. With modernity, power moves from legitimacy to administration, from politics to management. Agamben changes it all. First, he states that Foucault's main idea, i.e., government has replaced sovereignty as the dominant form of power, is embodied into, in Agamben's words, a theological-political paradigm. This paradigm, which is invisible to scholars because taken for granted, it is the paradigm of the administration of the city, i.e., *polis*. This paradigm becomes visible only after comparison with an alternative paradigm: the economic-administrative paradigm. This economic-administrative paradigm, framed in *The kingdom and the glory*, has a managerial nature: it is the paradigm of the administration of the house. What is 'political', including the notion of political power, is actually economical. This last statement drives the reader, in Agamben's words, to 'the vicarious character of the governmental power' (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.). In which sense? In the sense that the governmental power is ungrounded, it does not receive legitimacy from sovereignty. Once again, Agamben finds the roots of this idea within the theology of the Trinity. In the Trinitarian economy,

both Father and Son are anarchical; neither has a foundation. This intra-Trinitarian relation between the Father and the Son can be considered as the theological source of the intrinsically vicarious character of governmental power.

Trinitarian economy is the expression of an anarchical power which moves to and through the divine persons according to an essentially vicarious paradigm. There is no way to assign to one person the original foundation of power. Power has a Trinitarian form; it circulates vicariously in this form. (Agamben, 2011c: n.p.)

This is why, according to Agamben, the supreme sovereign power in the history of Western politics presents itself as vicarious. And governmental power is essentially vicarious, too. The groundlessness of power is the reason why the fundamental problem of Western public law is to ground: government in sovereignty, order in law, economical practice in juridical patterns, and legality in legitimacy (Agamben, 2011c). This is also why in Western public law the source of power is impossible to describe and moves always in circles between sovereignty and execution. Agamben notes that ‘the ontology of the acts of government is a vicarious ontology, in the sense that, within the economical paradigm, every power has a vicarious character’ (Agamben, 2011b: 141). Power has a vicarious structure, Agamben points out, and moves in circles. This is the first implication: power has no foundation.

The second implication refers to the relationship between the two poles of sovereignty and government. The relationship between sovereignty and government is not political, or juridical; it is economic, or administrative. The relationship between different orders and forms of power is not related to obedience (political) or norm (juridical). Thus, a second implication of *The kingdom and the glory* is that power is not related to a juridical-political paradigm, and therefore it does not derive from authority and is not transferred through norms. Power is related to an administrative activity. In fact, the relationship between the two poles is driven by voluntary action.

Agamben’s main concern in the first five chapters of *The kingdom and the glory* is power and how power works in an economic-administrative paradigm. For Agamben, power implies not a juridical-political system, but an economy,

an administration, a management. This makes management all the more relevant to the political development of the West.

Government

For Agamben, power is a form of management, and management operates in the context of an economic-administrative paradigm. With Agamben's theses in mind, management scholars are invited to conduct fresh investigations into that notion of management. In the final part of this section, I will suggest some possible investigations, probably the most obvious ones, leaving others to further, more detailed analysis.

A first line of investigation concerns the origins of management and how management entered Western consciousness. Agamben's work suggests a credible and definitive answer to the origins of management. In a hypothetical intellectual history of management, it can be said that management was originally *oikonomia*, domestic administration. How did management enter into the great conversation of the West? It entered through economic theology, and therefore became part of a theological-economic paradigm. In the context of this paradigm, management was considered an element of an historical project of salvation. Here, I like to emphasise all three elements of this definition. *Historical*: management happens on time, in the flux of time. It is a *project*, a work in progress, an activity. More on this later. Finally, management is framed within an historical project of salvation, i.e., for the good of the entire community. In sum, management was conceived within a theological-economic paradigm as a social activity operating in a certain space at a certain time for the good. Management was not the *lunga manus*, the operative branch of an authority. The anarchical character of government, that is, of management, freed management from any obligation toward general principles or mandatory norms coming from the reign of ontology or metaphysics. Management might be part of a plan, but only if autonomously and voluntarily accepted. Management was not subject to a power, it was itself a power and eventually worked in coordination with other powers outside a relationship of subordination. Management was immediately operative, without need of an external authority. In the beginnings, management did not belong to a political paradigm, therefore it was not a means for an end.

Mission of management was not bringing order, separating the useful from the useless, respecting authority and exercising power, but acting properly in any situation so that members of the community remain safe or retain protection. To put it differently, management was an end in itself. Management stood for operating a constant, permanent activity of caring for the entire community in the flux of ever-changing historical circumstances. Management did not belong to the reign of *ordo* (order, organize, conquer, command, obey, implement, dispose, etc.) but of *salus* (taking care, saving, protecting, etc.).

A second line of investigation focuses on the ontological blue-print of modern management. Of course, Agamben does not address this topic. However, management scholars can probably deduct from *The kingdom and the glory* that modern management bears the imprint of political theology. Accordingly, modern management may be located within a juridical-political paradigm, in which the relationship between sovereignty and government, authority and execution, is regulated by norm and power. Management scholars may investigate this link between theological politics and modern management either to confirm it or reject it. I cannot stop thinking, however, that this link was established already twenty years ago with regards to social science. In his ground-breaking book *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason*, the Anglican theologian John Milbank (2006) claimed that social science emerged from effectively non-Trinitarian theism, a model of deity that does not maintain the integrity of the triune God. In other words, social science emerged from a form of political theology based on the notion of the sovereign power of a single God. Moreover, Milbank argued that the secular reason informing and shaping social science is not neutral, but rich with distorted images of religion. In his view, non-theological disciplines like sociology and other social sciences maintain religious assumptions that may not be aligned with orthodox Christianity. Or, as Milbank (2006) famously said, what scholars encounter in social science is only theology in disguise. His conclusion seems to validate the hypothesis of political theology as the legitimate place of origin the modern management. In the remaining part of this section, I will assume as confirmed the existence of this relationship between political theology and management.

A third line of investigation regards how management moved from being incorporated into an economic paradigm to become part of a political paradigm. In this case, like in the previous one, Agamben cannot be of help and the entire topic is open to scholarly discussion. However, it is clear that Agamben's *The kingdom and the glory* (or at least the first chapters of the book considered here), allows management scholars to describe a trajectory in what can be understood as a semantic shift in academic vocabularies. At the beginning, management belongs to an economic-administrative paradigm, then it assumes the tracts of a juridical-political paradigm. Historically, a shift can be implied at this point, a shift that occurred in the semantic domain of management. Originally conceived as domestic administration, management assumed the significance of management of the *polis*, an organization. When and why this shift occurred is, of course, open to discussion. Management scholars are left with the important task of tracing the development of academic vocabularies through the dynamically shifting cultural, political, and linguistic landscapes of the twentieth century.

A fourth line of investigation addresses the future of management. Scholars should be in full speculative mode to dare to answer this question. I propose three options. First, the future of management will be similar to the present: management is and will remain in the domain of a juridical-political paradigm. Scholars will continue their work without further consideration of Agamben's work. Second, an economic-administrative paradigm will emerge as an alternative to the dominant juridical-political paradigm. In this hypothesis, scholars will be regrouped according to the paradigm of reference. Third, management will be replaced by technology as an absolutized form of juridical-political paradigm. In this context, technology is nothing else than a radical expression of the current juridical-political paradigm.

A fifth and final line of investigation is concerned Agamben's notion of management as *praxis*. Agamben's thesis of the anarchy of Christ is the rejection of the classical Greek idea of a substantial link between being and logos, being and language, being and praxis, action. To put it differently, action does not need extrinsic justification, government is not based on authority, and management does not stand on law. The point can be expanded: politics is an epistemic paradigm, something that is a science, an

episteme. Economy is a non-epistemic paradigm, something that is not a science or an episteme. The relationship between different orders of power is not a science and does not require a form of epistemic knowledge. With Agamben's distinction in mind, readers can see the dominance in management scholarship of a paradigm focused on power and norm over the economical and the administrative, the transcendence of general laws over practice, which bases itself on the notion of an *oikonomia*, an economy conceived as an immanent order. The emphasis on the juridical, or juridical-political, understood as prescriptive, over the managerial, which treats all of society, including economic organizations, like a household, has given rise to the domination of a scientific form of management. Beginning with modern theory of management – this is the argument – scholarship began to consider prescription as the central managerial category, reducing practice to implementation. To put it differently, a prescriptive tendency that culminates in the theory of management as science has marginalized the alternative option of management as *oikonomia*.

Here the work of Henry Mintzberg on the nature of managerial works comes to mind. It is not enough, however, to signal Mintzberg's claim on the pragmatic nature of management. Without tracing the genealogy of management ideas back to the origins, even marshalling obscure concepts from Roman law, scholars cannot truly establish the semantic core of what Mintzberg says, i.e., that management is a kind of practical know-how rather than a form of rigorous knowledge. This is why Agamben's work is important. By investigating Agamben's study about 'economy' and the related notion of *oikonomia*, which Mintzberg totally ignores, scholars can make a better sense of what Mintzberg is saying.

More importantly, management scholars can see in the necessary functional relation between political theology and *oikonomia* a model to comprehend the gulf separating the principle and the implementation, the theory and the practice, in modern management. Agamben establishes the semantic core of 'economy' in the realm of home administration, in which the master does not force himself on his relatives, but instead works through his/her family members' own free choices, which he/she indirectly manipulates to achieve his/her own ends. This is identical to the way the modern economic

organizations supposedly work, where all of people's free choices add up to a positive outcome due to the intervention of the invisible hand (which is actually a secularized version of the hand of God, as Agamben argues in the appendix to *The kingdom and the glory*). With Agamben's writings in the background, management scholars can see how they still operate in a classical ontological paradigm exemplified in Aristotle, where the relationship between God and the world is unproblematic. Agamben believes that the classical ontology expresses itself as a continuum from being to praxis. However, he sets the economic paradigm in contrast to the classical ontological paradigm exemplified in Aristotle; in effect, he believes that the economic paradigm grows out of the breakdown of classical ontology. In fact, in Agamben's view, economy belongs to a paradigm different from politics, and action is not grounded on principle. The perceived fracture between theology and *oikonomia*, in other words, between being and acting, is Agamben's explanation for free and anarchic praxis. If management scholars follow Agamben to his final, radical conclusion, management is anarchic (i.e., autonomous from theory) practice.

Conclusion

This article is primarily a review of some of Agamben's most prominent contributions to philosophy and political theories that seem relevant to management scholars. By addressing Agamben's theological genealogy of economy and government, management scholars engage primarily with the overarching 'problem of management' – that is, the *what* of management: what is management, what is the relation with power and norm and finally, what is the relation of management with itself, the process by which management gradually becomes *managerialized*. I dealt briefly with these topics. In summary, one of the key features of Agamben's thought on management is the way he leaves management unthought. Rather than leave management unthought, modern scholarship has thought management most rigorously as a transcendent body of knowledge. I argue that Agamben's account of management opens a way of deactivating the transcendent tendency of contemporary management and return it to an immanent order of things.

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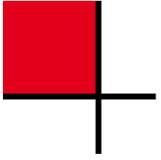
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The struggle for good leadership in social movement organizations: Collective reflection and rules as basis for autonomy

Ruth Simsa and Marion Totter

abstract

This paper analyzes how leadership is practiced in social movement organizations (SMO). Drawing arguments from Critical Leadership Studies, and based on qualitative empirical research conducted within the organizations of the Spanish protest movement 15M, this paper analyzes the perceptions of leadership, fields of tension and practices for dealing with these tensions. By empirically investigating a rather unexplored area of research, the paper makes three contributions. First, it offers in-depth investigations of leadership-practices in SMO, showing that activists are highly aware of the importance of leadership. Second, it contributes to leadership theory by confronting views of critical leadership studies with the empirical results. Activists share quite precise views on what good leadership means for them, which we propose to characterize as autonomous, reflexive and rule-based. Third, with the emphasis on collective reflection and rules, it highlights two aspects of leadership in SMO that have been widely ignored in discourses, but turn out as important means of dealing with challenges of autonomous leadership.

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to analyze characteristics, challenges and leadership practices in social movement organizations (SMO). To explore this, we also discuss tensions that arise by implementing aspired forms of leadership, and

how activists deal with these tensions. Broadly, in our study leadership is defined as a process and practice that provides guidance to groups or organizations (Crevani, 2018: 88).

New social movements are often described as leaderless. Also, SMO, which distance themselves from established and hierarchical organizations, emphasize self-organization and are highly skeptical of traditional notions of leadership. Thus, it is often claimed that leadership has a negative connotation in emancipatory movements (Western, 2014) and that their organizations do not fully use the potential of leadership for effective organizing. We argue that this is not the case in the organizations this study investigated. Activists try to avoid permanent leadership positions but see the necessity for leadership work, thus focusing more on processes than on persons. They share quite precise views on what good leadership means for them and they invest much effort in implementing it.

Civil society protests, movement activism and voluntary self-organization have increased worldwide (Kaldor and Selchow, 2013: 923). Consequently, studies on social movements have gained importance (for an overview see Della Porta and Diani, 2015). Yet, we must distinguish between social movements and the organizations of these movements. Although SMO are increasingly being recognized by scholars (Gerbaudo, 2012; Morris and Staggenborg, 2002; Sutherland et al., 2014), so far the topic has not been given much attention (Walker, 2012). Thus, in contrast to the rich debate on leadership in general organization studies, leadership in SMO is still an under-explored topic. Further, most writing on leadership in SMOs 'has mirrored "mainstream" leadership theories, which perceive leadership as the product of individuals with certain traits, styles and/or behaviors' (Sutherland et al., 2014: 760), and there is yet little empirical data on how SMO actually deal with leadership. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap by exploring how leadership is practiced in SMO.

The theoretical basis is critical leadership studies, which interpret leadership not only as the acts of individual persons but as a process of the whole system involved, thereby clearly distinguishing between leadership and leaders (Day, 2001; Wood, 2005). Critical leadership studies theorize what movement actors

often wish to put into practice, namely, a focus not on leaders but on relations and processes. An interesting approach within critical leadership studies is Western's (2014) heuristic concept of Autonomist Leadership in emancipatory social movements. This concept was a useful orientation framework for our research that, in contrast, focuses not on movements as such, but on their organizations.

The analysis is based on qualitative empirical research conducted from 2014 to 2017 in organizations of the Spanish protest movement 15M, which emerged in 2011 as an answer to the political and economic crisis (Della Porta and Diani, 2015; Romanos, 2017; Taibo, 2011;). Many organizations have been founded in the course of this movement, ranging from the nation-wide platform against evictions, to smaller groups like youth without future, the protest grandparents, women's or lawyer initiatives, and social centers. 15M can be characterized as an emancipatory movement in the tradition of libertarianism (Flesher Fominaya, 2015). Our findings indicate that leadership practices in the investigated SMO are autonomous,¹ reflexive and rule-based.

The paper contributes to an understanding of leadership in three ways. First, it complements the empirical picture by in-depth investigations of leadership-practices in SMO. Second, it contributes to leadership theory by confronting views of critical leadership studies with the empirical results, thus going beyond normative or theoretical ascriptions. Third, with the emphasis on collective reflection and rules, it highlights two aspects of leadership in SMO that have been widely neglected to date and may stimulate further research to better understand leadership in SMO.

The paper is organized as follows: We begin with a literature overview on leadership in SMO, and present the theoretical background, the definition of leadership used in this paper and the goals of the study. After a description of the methodology, we present and discuss the findings.

1 autonomous: 'having the freedom to act independently' (Oxford Dictionary); 'independent and having the power to make your own decisions'; 'an autonomous organization...is independent and has the freedom to govern itself' (Cambridge Dictionary).

Leadership in social movement organizations

Although leadership in social movements is gaining scholarly attention, it is still an under-explored topic (Barker et al., 2001; Melucci, 1996). The Sage Handbook of Leadership (Bryman, 2011), for example, does not mention leadership in social movements at all. Nevertheless, Gerbaudo (2012) argues against a 'spontaneous' or 'leaderless' image of current protests and states that complex forms of leadership have emerged. Morris and Staggenborg (2002) argue for considering actions of leaders and structural contexts to uncover diverse levels of leadership, and DeCesare (2013) proposes an interpretative approach to leadership in social movements. There is wide consensus that new social movements tend to alternative, nonhierarchical forms of organizing, which emphasize direct and participatory democracy and autonomy (Benski et al., 2013; Polletta, 2002). Many authors argue that new social movements reflect key principles of anarchist thinking (Bratich, 2007; Gibson, 2013; Graeber, 2011), such as the rejection of imposed authority, hierarchy and domination (Wigger, 2014). They are thus characterized as autonomous: 'Autonomous movements can be understood as movements organized in horizontal networks, underlain by principles of self-organization, direct/participatory democracy, autonomy, diversity and direct action' (Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 145). Well-documented examples are the alter-globalization movements (Della Porta et al., 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2012), the *Spanish Indignados* (Hughes, 2011; Romanos, 2017) and *Occupy* (Castañeda, 2012; Graeber, 2012; Sitrin, 2012).

A reason for emphasizing alternative forms of organizing is the prefigurative character of these movements. Prefigurative organizing (Siltanen et al., 2014; Yates, 2015) regards internal organizing practices as crucial for achieving social change by actualizing ideals in the here and now. Activists attempt to create social change by applying internal practices 'according to the principles they want to see govern the whole society' (Leach, 2013a: 182). Based on this ideology, aiming at egalitarian, participatory structures in society needs non-hierarchical structures. Thus, practices, social relations, decision-making, and culture themselves are the goal (Boggs, 1977). While prefigurative strategies have a longer history in movements like civil rights, women, peace and environmental movements, currently also broader movements with a

focus on social justice started to apply them (Leach, 2013a). Prefigurative movements share the idea to prefigure not only social goals but also the desired concepts of organization in daily practices (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Reedy, 2014; Yates, 2015), including voluntary association, self-organization, direct democracy, and autonomous forms of leadership (Graeber, 2004).

Yet how does this work when it comes to SMO and what do we know about leadership in these organizations? Despite some similarities of social movements and SMO, a clear distinction must be drawn. Consequently, Diani (2014) argues that SMO often reflect the movement's mechanisms, without matching all their stereotypical traits. Contrary to movements, which are more fluid networks of activists and activities, organizations usually are designed to last longer, to focus on more specific goals, and they therefore need more structure – and other forms of leadership.

Studies on SMO have addressed the problem of how to establish organizational clarity without giving power to individuals by making a sharper distinction between leadership and leaders, thus following older anarchist ideas that 'Anarchy is not without leadership, it is without followership' (Ehrlich, 1979: 108). Related empirical papers focus on internal structures and decision-making (Della Porta et al., 2009; Graeber, 2012; Leach, 2009; Polletta, 2005), or on meeting structures (Haug, 2011, 2013; Thorburn, 2012). Few studies deal with tensions and conflicts (Laamanen and Den Hond, 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2012). Some authors point out the risks of leaderlessness like hidden internal dynamics, informal power, and inefficiencies (Freeman, 1970; Polletta, 2002; Vecchio et al., 2010). Epstein (2001: 8) states that an '(a)nti-leadership ideology cannot eliminate leaders' but bears the risk of informal authorities.

Nevertheless, there are very few empirical studies on leadership practices in SMO. Choi-Fitzpatrick analyses tensions between efficiency and inclusivity. Mechanisms to solve them are staging, which means manipulating organizational procedures, and scripting, which refers to using language to reinforce these procedures (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015: 123). This is instructive, yet, the research focuses on leaders' views. Sutherland et al. (2014) analyze, how leadership is understood and performed in anarchist SMO, calling these

practices anti-leaders(hip). They describe processes of the management of meaning and focus on organizational practices of non-hierarchical and shared leadership such as distributed and rotating formal roles, distributing tacit knowledge or enhancing accountability through symmetrical power relations. Although they describe these processes as challenging and conflictual, they stress their functionality and argue ‘that just because an organization is leaderless, it does not necessarily mean that it is also leadershipless’ (Sutherland et al., 2014: 759). As their analysis is based on four case studies they conclude that ‘future studies could develop a much more nuanced analysis of the realities of leadership in SMOs’ (*ibid.*: 775).

To conclude, although SMO are a phenomenon of high significance (Simsa and Totter, 2017), empirical insights on leadership practices in SMO are scarce and this paper shall contribute to fill this gap.

Critical leadership studies

Critical leadership studies are a particularly apt theoretical basis for studying leadership practices in SMO. They have a radically different understanding of leadership than the mainstream management literature. In classic models, the assumption persists that leadership is the result of designated leaders and their acting. Therefore, an organization is perceived as shaped by its leader’s decisions, style and personality. Leadership is ascribed to a person with certain qualities, a formal position within a hierarchy and the exercise of authority. Different approaches of dominant models focus on the leadership style (Bass and Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Lewin et al., 1939; Wunderer, 2009), on the innate characteristics of the leader (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Bolden and Gosling, 2006), on the relationship between leaders and followers (Stippler and Dörffer, 2011), or on a combination of the organizational context and specific styles of leadership (Fiedler et al., 1975; Hersey et al., 1988). The common feature of these approaches is the emphasis on a clear top-down hierarchy, a distinction between leaders and followers (Collinson, 2011) and the neglect of the contribution of followers to leadership (Western, 2013).

With critical leadership studies, there has been a shift in the focus of leadership research; ‘to understanding the emergent, informal, and dynamic “leadership” brought about by the members of the collective itself’ (Contractor et al., 2012: 994). Critical leadership studies have theoretically decentered the leader (Wood, 2005). They interpret leadership as a process, which is a relational, socially-constructed phenomenon realized through the interaction of diverse actors (Bolden, 2011; Gronn, 2002). Critical leadership studies distinguish clearly between leaders and leadership. The effects of leadership are not only seen as resulting from individual persons, but from the dynamics within the respective system; this ‘complementary perspective approaches leadership as a social process that engages everyone in the community’ (Day, 2001: 583). In line with this perspective, Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009) argue that dynamic interactions between individuals lead to emergent outcomes, and that conceptions of leadership thus should be reframed.

As critical leadership studies interpret leadership as a socially constructed and culturally specific phenomenon, different forms and practices come into view. Alternative forms of leadership are described with different terms, such as ‘shared’ (Pearce and Conger, 2002), ‘collective’ (Contractor et al., 2012), ‘collaborative’ (Chrislip, 2002), or ‘distributed’ leadership (Binci et al., 2016; Bolden, 2011; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2012; Spillane et al., 2004). They all understand leadership ‘as a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both’ (Pearce and Conger, 2002: 1), with fluid processes of taking leadership roles according to contextual conditions (Pearce and Sims Jr, 2002), and outcomes understood as co-constructed by leaders and followers, thus ‘recognizing leadership as inherently a collaborative act’ (Ruben and Gigliotti, 2016: 469). This interactive perspective characterizes leadership as a complex process, which is open to for innovative organizing practices (Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009; Lichtenstein et al., 2006).

Autonomist Leadership, which comprises ‘non-hierarchical, informal and distributed forms of leadership’ (Western, 2014: 673), is also a noteworthy framework within the critical leadership studies to analyse organizational

dynamics in new social movements. The prefix 'autonomist' shall resolve 'the paradox of leadership being enacted in leaderless movements' by breaking 'the emotionally binding ties that link leadership with hierarchy, elitism, authoritarianism and coercion' (*ibid.*: 676). Autonomist Leadership encompasses the five principles of autonomy, spontaneity, mutualism, networks and affect that drive and guide the leadership in emancipatory social movements.

Consequently, Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014) conceptualize leadership actors as the plurality of individuals who may be involved in acts of leadership, including formal or informal leaders, followers, or other stakeholders; they distinguish between leadership positions and leadership acting. Bendell et al. (2017) depict leadership as relationally co-constructed; as a behavior instead of a position or the inherent quality of an individual.

While the concepts of critical leadership studies are convincing, they still have two pitfalls. First, it is criticized that even alternative approaches often emphasize exceptionalism, 'an individual locus of action and a generalised other that is the object of leadership' (Bendell et al., 2017: 419). Second, there is a temptation to just change words from leaders to facilitators, spokespersons or simply members, which covers up more than it clarifies, as simply excluding individual leaders per definition prevents one from seeing differences in the leadership roles assumed that might exist in practice. Thus, 'by refusing to acknowledge any kind of leadership, organizations may be at risk of re-creating the same hierarchical relations they seek to abolish as informal hierarchies rooted in power are likely to emerge' (Sutherland et al., 2014: 763). To avoid these traps, we will intensively draw on our empirical material, guided by the following definitions:

Following Crevani (2018), we suggest a focus on the phenomenon rather than on individuals, and conceptualize leadership as an ongoing social process, in which leadership work contributes to the production of direction in organizing. Leadership work is enacted in interactions and refers to the co-creation of relationships (Crevani, 2018; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012). Drawing on Sutherland et al. (2014), we assume that it consists of individual acts of agency, which manage meaning, define reality and provide a basis for

organizational action. Leadership work is done by specific actors but not necessarily by people holding leadership positions.

Methodology

Our empirical research is explorative. It is based on qualitative research and followed a circular approach (Froschauer and Lueger, 2009) by leveraging diverse sources of data. Altogether, 92 qualitative interviews were conducted from 2014 to 2017 with activists and experts in Madrid, Sevilla and Valencia. Participatory observation in 16 cases allowed us to acquire additional knowledge. Out of the entire sample, 31 interviews with 20 female and 11 male activists were selected that were particularly appropriate for the research topic. These interviews were transcribed in Spanish. The resulting text body contains around 450 pages.² The sample includes activists of diverse SMO that identify themselves with 15M, including well-known organizations that operate nationally like Youth without Future or the Platform for Mortgage Victims and others that operate locally such as small neighborhood associations. Challenges due to the language context of the study (Kruse, 2015; Kruse et al., 2012) were met by group discussion. Further, memoing served to record thoughts and mutually control ideas.

Data analysis was organized in three steps. First, the textual data was coded according to main themes that were based on a previous topic analysis and relevant literature; specifically, equality/hierarchy, conflict/challenges, networks, organizational structures and routines, leadership/coordination, learning process/reflection, decision-making, communication and communication channels. Based on an inductive approach and in-depth analysis, we evaluated data regarding our research questions on characteristics, challenges and leadership practices. Second, according to the principles of summarizing content analysis (Mayring, 2000); the coded text material was analyzed further regarding the five principles of Autonomist Leadership. Yet, as not all categories were distinctive for the organizations investigated and substantial content was not covered adequately, we

2 The quotations are translated literally into English and presented in italics; 'I' stands for interview number.

therefore, thirdly, conducted in-depth analyzes of the dimensions that emerged beyond the existing framework, namely reflection and rules.

Findings: Leadership practices in social movement organizations

To explore how leadership is practiced in SMO, we will first describe the characteristics and challenges of leadership in SMOs. We will present how activists use the word leadership, what they mean with ‘good leadership’, and the problems that arise when implementing these concepts. Second, we discuss practices to deal with these challenges. Specifically, two practices emerged from our exploratory empirical work as particularly important, namely collective reflection and the application of rules.

The characteristics and challenges of leadership in SMOs

Western argues that movements like *Occupy*, the *Arab Spring* and the *Indignados* had difficulties moving beyond the phase of protest, because of ‘the disavowal of all leadership (including autonomous forms) that occurs within these movements’ (Western, 2014: 675). In line with this, our interviewees describe the movement as guided by the common goal of being non-hierarchical, horizontal, self-organized, participative and driven by the aspiration to build a radically new form of democracy. Thus, regarding the movement, our data show a clear rejection of leadership and leaders.

I’m a libertarian, I believe in the organization of society from below, based on self-organization, direct democracy, the rejection of leadership. I think that was one of 15M’s most important aspects... separations and hierarchies ended and a new season of horizontality, assembly and self-organization began. (I76)

And [15M is] also new in the forms it has taken: this occupation of the streets and this participatory, horizontal democracy without leadership. (I77)

Yet, when talking about organizations, the disapproval of hierarchy leads to the rejection of leaders, but not of leadership: ‘We have a philosophy of leadership, not leaders, rather the people involved that take decisions themselves’ (I52).

The term most-frequently and unambiguously used by interviewees to describe their perceptions of good leadership in SMO was *autogestión* (self-guidance). It refers to the following aspects: Leadership is important, but it shall not imply any form of hierarchy, formal authority or fixed roles; it shall enable more or less equal participation of all members and shall be transparent, empowering, and open to everyone. To quote just one example of this: 'My utopian ideal is that people should know how to govern themselves, that people should be able to govern themselves' (I52).

Activists of SMO thus try to ensure leadership without fixed – formal or informal – positions and stress the collective roots of successes. Leadership is associated with being very involved, empowering, responsible, and self-critical. It shall enable individual and collective learning by opening processes and fostering 'autonomy, power and choice' (I80), and by embracing failure and experimental forms of organizing. Leadership shall not be a 'top-down' process, but 'mediated from the bottom' (I77). A background for the surprisingly homogeneous views on good leadership are shared concepts of autonomous self-organization, a non-competing culture, and dispersed authority.

Power asymmetries should be avoided, and equality and interchangeability are important goals – everybody should be able to take on leadership roles. The overriding goal is described as to be able to act as a collective and the focus is clearly on leadership work and not on positions: 'We have a philosophy of leadership, and they are not bosses, but people who engage, who have to take actions, and in the end, who empower the others' (I52).

Activists often stress that instead of leaders they strive for speakers who as act as representatives and serve as communicative bridges between different collectives or different members of an organization. The ideal of collective, consensual decision-making prevails, yet for some situations also majority-decisions are accepted.

It was something absolutely collective. There was no structure that would have allowed for leaders. Everything was realized by spokespeople. There was no president, no coordinator, or anything like this. (I58)

The demand for a new mentality, this new collaborative paradigm, this was crucial. (I74)

Despite the often-mentioned rejection of individual leaders, *leadership work* (Crevani, 2018) by individuals is accepted and appreciated, as long as it is aligned with the ideals of autonomy. Individuals facilitating a decision-taking process, suggesting further strategies, coordinating the activities of a group, mediating conflicts, acting as representatives etc. are welcome, as long as this is not perceived as hierarchical, top-down acting.

What is rejected, in fact, by all interviewees are *leadership positions* whose holder's influence on decisions is only based on the position. Nevertheless, leadership positions held by individuals are accepted, as long as they fulfill the following conditions: The position must serve the collective, and it must be based on permanent legitimization by the other members. Usually, this implies the temporary holding of leadership-positions by individuals (for instance, the facilitator of a meeting). Only exceptionally, more stable positions arise (for instance, the long-time spokesperson of the nation-wide organization against evictions). This ideal of autonomous leadership implies certain difficulties in practice. While activists emphasize many aspects of success, they also are aware of the challenges. Issues that arise when groups seek to renounce the role of a single leader while at the same time acknowledging the importance of leadership, are informal hierarchies and inefficiencies.

Not surprisingly, the emergence of informal hierarchies and implicit leadership positions is mentioned as a problem. Besides differences in communicative skills and charisma, also different individual time-resources contribute to informal hierarchies.

It also changes our way of activism, the attitudes of the male who makes a leadership speech in the assemblies, which was what we were used to before (...) there are always people who speak more than others. (I40)

Sometimes somebody is more capable to do things and sometimes less. Of course, we have horizontal organizations, but it varies. And who leads ideas in the end is who can do it in this situation. (I68)

A further reason for the emergence of implicit leadership positions are unintended bonding effects: In spite of the ideal of openness, participation is often regulated by subtle mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, resulting in homogeneous groups of what activists sometimes self-critically call 'autochthonous members'. The term refers to those who have been engaged longer in the organization, and sometimes also to the somehow typical activists (better educated, more radically oriented, with long (family-) trajectories of protest). 'There are difficulties...to let go of the reins of those who have been doing it for a long time...the insiders should empower outsiders more and help them to feel at home more quickly' (I52).

Further, unequal gender relations are an obstacle to equality. Many interviewees talk about male dominance in assemblies and a gender gap of leadership-positions: 'Even within an assembly, albeit a space of communality, those who speak out the most, who speak loudly, are men' (I55).

Informal hierarchies sometimes result from very subtle forms of manipulation, like influencing group decisions, agenda-setting, and following individual preferences.

It is necessary to be very aware of the way in which the assemblies are manipulated, of how people behave ... It is very subtle to see how a person is influencing, is taking an assembly to what they want, so, in reality, it is not a decision from everyone, right? (I55)

Another constant challenge is to balance efficiency on the one hand and broad participation and egalitarian decision-making processes on the other hand, as the following quote illustrates:

Two political structures always have been controversial: the effectiveness of selecting a leading group and...the slowness but more participation and democracy when everything is based on assemblies' (I29).

Participation and egalitarian structures are very time consuming. Specifically, when it comes to new topics and strategic decisions, activists find it difficult to reach decisions:

If you want to realize an activity where everybody agrees to something, the liquid organization, with assemblies, social networks and diverse groups works

fine... The problem arises when you want to change strategies or when you have reached a goal. With this organization, it is very difficult to develop new goals, who should decide about that? (I74)

Most organizations are inclusive and open. Combined with non-hierarchical structures, this is a challenge as people can just show up and participate, sometimes without sufficient knowledge:

This is a topic of open assemblies ... somebody can show up, saying 'I want to speak', he takes the microphone and talks for 15 minutes. Then he never shows up again ... and he is given the same possibilities, the same voice and the same importance like people who have worked on this topic for four months. I don't think that this is good ... Very ineffective and not respectful. (I94)

Problems are also named regarding the necessity of high personal engagement. Activists talk much about exhaustion, tiredness and a lack of resources. Implementing new forms of leadership is demanding, both physically and mentally.

Practices to deal with the challenges – collective reflection and rules

Regarding the question of how actors strive to overcome the described tensions, our data showed two recurrent practices, namely collective reflection and rules. Both are frequently referred to by activists as the organizations' methodology, and as a means to deal with the difficulties of implementing ideal concepts of leadership.

Reflection is the review, interpretation, and understanding of experiences to guide present and future behavior (Boud et al., 2013). It is characterized as crucial for transformative learning (Mezirow, 2006). Activists stress the necessity of collective reflection to understand organizational dynamics, and to learn to ensure efficient organization without hierarchies. In this context, they often state: 'We move slowly, because we have a long way to go'. Activists are highly reflexive about the power of organizational structures, and specifically about leadership structures. Many interviewees emphasize the need to invest time in internal organizing, collective learning, and the development of tools and practices. Often, this is framed as using collective intelligence to empower the organization and as collective learning.

One of the things we realized, is the power of collective intelligence. The moment you put so many people together to think, things came out all the time, very powerful things. Then, we realized that we really have a capacity. (I59). It sometimes is still a bit chaotic. Still, I think that we have been learning a lot in these years. (I67)

Reflection goes along with experimentation. Activists engage in theorizing and experimenting with alternative forms of organizing, like participatory democracy, decentralization and horizontal decision-making. They emphasize the need for the creation of secure spaces in assemblies, where rules, organizing skills and proceedings are tested, evaluated and revises.

It worked by assembly, in a democratic manner... we wanted the politicization of everyday life, we understood that democracy had to be a fundamental thing. That's very difficult. Democracy is very laborious. It is very necessary, but very laborious. (I61)

In the SMO investigated, the collective reflection of leadership is a core underlying principle of what is believed to be good leadership. People who engage in leadership practices have to be open to permanent vigilance, comments, discussion, and learning. Reflecting on internal processes is part of daily activities. In many SMO, for example, the moderator role rotates, and at the end of each meeting, the group gives feedback and discusses which interventions had been helpful and what could be improved. Cases of absence of reflection, such as unwillingness to take part or un-reflected dominance, are heavily criticized.

The second important means of overcoming tensions are rules. They are often mentioned regarding their purpose of impeding formal or informal hierarchical structures and consequently fixed leadership positions. Besides very general rules, for example, that nobody should be able to impose their will on everyone else, a number of concrete rules are mentioned that guarantee participatory decision-making, mutual respect, and a productive way of dealing with conflicts. One group, for example, worked out explicit and detailed guidelines to guarantee 'good' communication. Many rules are dedicated to gender equality, such as a zipper system for speakers at meetings or for the nomination of delegates, or the techniques to secure equal speaking time. Often, these rules are accompanied by specific techniques:

We are learning to implement mechanisms that allow everybody to speak, with limited time. There are certain techniques ... Everybody who comes to an assembly gets a pink and a yellow card. The pink one means three minutes talking in the first part of the debate, the yellow, one or two minutes in the concluding part... Or, for example, we do closed rounds. Like, only seven persons may speak, then we close the round. Then we open a new round and five persons may speak (...). This works. It seems magic. (I85)

Methodologies of transparency ... were necessary because they allowed for trust ...also between people who did not know each other personally. (I59)

Other activists describe implicit rules – mainly regarding communication – that have been established without any explicit guidelines.

What we like most is that we do not have a document that explains our discursive strategies; it is not necessary because we – for some reason or the other – have internalized a specific language ... we are not monolithic, but from outside, a certain cohesion appears. That results from daily work. (I40)

The high importance of rules is remarkable, as movements and their organizations are usually characterized as specifically spontaneous. The organizations investigated share the goal of spontaneity only in the context of the goal to avoid fixed leadership positions. Nevertheless, our analysis shows that rules are a highly contentious issue; very controversial discussions are held on the extent to which existing rules are sufficient.

Concluding discussion

Summing up the findings, the leadership ideals in the investigated SMO may be characterized as autonomous, reflexive and rule-based. Autonomy is used in the connotation of anarchist and libertarian socialist economics with the meaning of self-gestation or self-management, ‘to self-create, self-control, and self-provision’ (Vieta, 2014: 783). Leadership must thus serve the collective, being enacted widely without fixed positions and without a focus on individual leaders. Leadership work, such as individual contributions to achieving common goals and providing direction, is appreciated, when it is aligned with the ideals of autonomy: It must foster equality, being empowering and open to collective deliberation. Contrary to findings of other studies (Tait, 2005), we found that this perception of leadership is part of the

SMOs' identity, and thus motivating. Rejecting fixed leadership positions while appreciating leadership as practice creates challenges such as the emergence of informal hierarchies and tensions between efficiency with equality and broad participation, which are also found by other authors (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Epstein, 1991; Haug, 2013). The principal means to overcome these tensions in practice are collective reflection and rules. Reflexivity refers to regular and purposeful cycles of review and interpretation, and to experiments as a basis for collective learning. The respective practices encompass developments of skills such as social awareness, team orientation, and conflict management. Explicit and implicit rules have high degree of practical importance as a means to cope with the inherent difficulties of self-organization.

Regarding the aspect of autonomy, our findings are in line with existing literature. Autonomy is at the center of anarchist concepts (Reedy, 2014) and it is often described as a crucial goal of alternative forms of organization and leadership (Parker et al., 2014). Empirical studies of leadership in social movements also highlight autonomy as a guiding principle (Benski et al., 2013; Graeber, 2012; Western, 2014). Thus, by focusing on organizations of social movements, regarding autonomy, this paper complements the empirical picture, following Collinson's (2011) suggestion to better investigate the different contexts of leadership dynamics.

Collective reflection and its underlying principle of experimentation have been mentioned theoretically in concepts of prefigurative organizing (Maeckelbergh, 2011). Studies on alternative forms of leadership also argue that leadership should be open to contestation, change and reinterpretation (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014), while others stress collective processes of meaning making and the necessity of critical, reflexive feedback loops (Sutherland et al., 2014) and also of understanding processes collectively (Freeman, 1970). Yet, reflexive competences are usually described as the primary skills needed by individual leaders (Day, 2001). On an organizational level, reflection and respective leadership practices of SMO, have thus far not been a topic of intensive empirical research. Therefore, in this regard, this paper discusses a fairly new dimension.

Regarding rules, the discussion is more ambivalent. Literature on social movements often stresses the aspects of freedom, fluidity and spontaneity (Fyke and Sayegh, 2001; Western, 2014), and few authors describe the importance of clear, common, yet contested rules in activist groups or assemblies (Blee, 2012; Haug, 2013). While Žižek (2011: para. 47), addressing *Occupy* activists, encourages recapturing words such as discipline and work, to regain the ideological field and to ‘take all this from the right-wingers’, Leach refers to the limitations of rules and regulations:

Ultimately rules and regulations – no matter how egalitarian – cannot prefigure the new society. It is the cultures and communities we build around these counterhegemonic values that will help us sustain our structures of tyrannylessness (Leach, 2013a: 190).

Nevertheless, Western (2014) argues that it is an emancipatory task to acknowledge that tendencies of abusing power, like authoritarianism, are part of the reality of social relations in general. Also, our findings indicate that the development of these egalitarian cultures implies risks. Rules might help to mitigate and limit these risks.

Our results imply that the leaderless image of protests needs a more nuanced description with regard to movements’ organizational forms (Gerbaudo, 2012). While critical leadership studies might underestimate the emancipatory potential of leadership (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012), the activists do not. They have clear perceptions on how leadership work should be implemented, and are ready to invest in developing new forms and methodologies – as imperfect as their implementation sometimes might be. Nevertheless, the paper contributes to critical leadership studies (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Collinson, 2011) by showing how leadership practices in the investigated SMO aim at ensuring adequate processes instead of leadership positions, and they rely on the enactment of leadership work instead of on individual leaders. Critical leadership studies have decentered the leader theoretically (Sutherland et al., 2014), activists in the investigated organizations strive to do this in everyday practice.

Further, the paper contributes to concepts of prefigurative organizing (Leach, 2013b; Yates, 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2011) by offering further empirical

insights on how activists try to align their theories and societal goals with daily practices of organizing, which they refer to as *methodology*.

With the themes of collective reflection and the importance of rules, the paper highlights two practices that are widely ignored in discourses on SMO and that go beyond the symbolic processes mentioned by other authors (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015). A clear focus on these two dimensions in further research might not only help advance our understanding of leadership in SMO, but also serve to develop practical tools and innovative methodologies for emancipatory forms of leadership in general.

The paper has certain limitations. Although research shows that 15M has inspired other movements, such as Occupy (Castañeda, 2012), by focusing on just one case, it cannot suggest a universal framework for leadership at SMO. It can only build a basis for further empirical research. Above all, the practices of collective reflection and rules, which make it possible to avoid the abuse of power without excessive structures and bureaucracy, is in our view a promising field for further empirical research. The findings might also inspire further empirical research on practices of alternative forms of organizing (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011; Parker et al., 2014, Reedy, 2014) and on ethical dimensions of leadership that often are obscured by dominant concepts (Alakavuklar and Alamgir, 2018; Brown and Treviño, 2006). More open definitions, which emphasize processes and relations, prove useful for 'interpretation when engaging in the study of leadership work empirically' (Crevani, 2018: 87). They enable a view on changes already taking place and on leadership practices for radical forms of democracy and participation.

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acknowledgement

We thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors of *ephemera* for their valuable comments and suggestions.

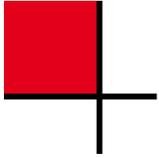
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Revisiting precarity, with care: Productive and reproductive labour in the era of flexible capitalism

Mariya Ivancheva and Kathryn Keating

abstract

This article seeks to reconsider the concept of precarity by bringing in the discussion of care. An increased academic interest in the subject of precarity and precarious working conditions in advanced, post-industrial economies is often premised on the false binary of precarity-stability. While stable working and living conditions have historically been a privilege of a minority of autonomous individuals, engaged in productive work, free from direct dependence or dependents, women and marginalised groups are often made more precarious, as their highly exploitable labour assets are not given any, or certainly not an equal value. And while stability at work can destabilize precarious lives of people with care responsibilities and marginalized groups, who need flexibility in order to navigate their lives, subjecting the affective domain to the principles of the market does not offer an effective solution to the inequalities between productive and reproductive labour. The article works on three different levels – the critique of ethnocentrism and androcentrism of the concept of precarity, the introduction of precarious living conditions into the discussion of precarious labour, and the insistence on the necessity to insert solidarity, care and love back into our workplaces as a way to resist capitalist competitiveness and alienation. We also warn against the risk of such care labour being exploited by a next cycle of capitalist appropriation. Reviewing a range of empirical studies, we explore the ways in which care destabilizes the neat boundaries between precarity and stability. We argue that repositioning care as a central activity in all human production and reproduction, both outside paid labour and inside it, allows us to see more clearly potential venues of exploitation and liberation within the predicament of precarity.

Introduction

The concept of precarity – a term describing the flexible and uncertain working and living conditions in the contemporary world – is often presented in opposition to the idea of stability. On the one pole stands the idea of a permanent job or career: a secure and stable life-long chain of economic pursuits and social relations that promise steady upward mobility across generations (Sennett, 1998: 9). On the other pole remains the hyper-flexible contractual labour and displaced life advanced by new forms of managerial capitalism.

While precarious life and labour are a global and historical norm (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), in recent years scholars have increasingly focused on precarious employment and living conditions in wealthy Euro-Atlantic states. A growing ‘precariat’ has been defined as people living in increased insecurity in relation to labour and production, distribution of resources and services, and relations to the state and voice in the decision-making process (Standing, 2014). Exploitative, violent and arbitrary working and living conditions – more commonly associated with women, marginalized groups, and people in the developing world (Mitropoulos, 2011) – has started to affect two groups protected by the post-war pact between labour and capital: the professional middle class and organised workers in the Global North.

Paradoxically, it is only in this new context, that precarity is seriously taken into consideration and its discussion is projected from the contexts where it is a new exception, to those where it has been a norm. This produces an ironic twist. Having blocked the supposedly straight roadway of life and career prospects, considered as granted to workers in the former context, precarity has become the subject of anxiety and disdain. The stable career track is presented as the ideal to which we should all aspire. Thus, while precarity stands for allegedly new forms of labour and living, its opposite often is represented by a stalemate political imaginary of the return of a ‘golden age’ of consumer capitalism.

Drawing on empirical studies from across different disciplinary fields and geographical areas, this paper seeks to re-examine theoretically the concept

of precarity to better resist its manifestation within our life and workplaces. We argue that in order to overcome the false binary of flexibility-stability that constitutes the concept of precarity, and to address the inequalities created and exacerbated by it, we need to bring the concept of care into the discussion of precarious labour and life in more than one way.

First, it is important to address the reality that both emotional caring and care sector work have been some of the most flexibilised, stigmatised, invisible, and exploited forms of work in human history (Federici, 2004; 2014). It is mostly done by women, migrants, minorities, and people from the Global South who are most often subject to different forms of symbolic, structural and physical violence as their labour is undervalued or unrecognised.

Secondly, we need to acknowledge the limitation of the current discourses of forms of production, distribution, and relation to the state (Standing, 2014) and of the forms of mobilization (Shukaitis, 2013) they engender. These still focus predominantly on the productive rights and human freedoms of a highly individualized, rational, able-bodied, self-sufficient (male) citizen involved in remunerated productive labour. This focus neglects the importance of care that remains a central, yet often invisibilised condition in the sustaining of human life and community in and outside of work.

Yet, bringing care into the discussion of precarity, we also argue that we should not collapse the distinction between productive and reproductive work. This should happen neither by claiming remuneration of emotional and care work, nor by blurring the line of distinction by resorting to arguments of affective and 'immaterial' modes of labour. Blurring this boundary, we claim, is no solution to the alienation and stratification at precarious workplaces.

Drawing on Johanna Oksala's critique (2016) of Michael Hardt and Tony Negri's (2004) use of the concept of affective labour, we see it necessary to address the relation of care in precarious working and living conditions not by simply claiming remuneration and benefits for domestic and care workers. The International Wages for Housework Campaign (Federici, 1974)

was radical not just in connecting pay with the recognition of social rights and the centrality of reproductive labour to production. It also showed how much capitalism depends on extraction of marginalised and unpaid reproductive work.

Yet, moving from acknowledging this central contradiction of capitalism, while insisting on the material value of precarious forms of care work, we still claim that it is not just difficult (Lynch, 2007) but also potentially dangerous to attribute an exchange value to love, care, and solidarity cherished for their non-commodifiable and inalienable use value. It could mean attributing monetary value and extending the capitalist logic of competition and alienation into all domains of our life (Oksala, 2016). It could also mean endowing the traditional nuclear family with even more monetarized logic, and steering nuclear families in even steadier forms of competition for absorption of different forms of capital for their own home and generation, while extracting care needed at other spaces we inhabit.

Instead, we call for a profound rethinking and eventual reorganisation of the productive domain around the concept of care. We argue that in order to move beyond the false dichotomy of flexibility-stability, which offers no solution to the current juncture of capitalist development, it is crucial to see the emancipating potential in a profound reorganisation of working relations. The abstract demand for liberal individualizing autonomy, which has been instrumentalised through new managerial systems and used by capitalism to steer workers into always more alienating work, needs to be suspended as a condition of oppression in itself.

With Kathleen Millar (2014) we argue for a relational autonomy that sees human beings as profoundly dependent on desires for sociality, intimacy, and relations of care in both their lives and work. However, unlike Millar, we do not plead for a 'politics of detachment' of precarious workers distancing themselves from their jobs in order to navigate their caring lives. Against the ongoing managerial attempts to pit life against work, exploiting our out-of-work abilities (Fleming, 2013) while individualising and privatising (self-) care, we solicit an understanding of a life-work continuum, in which work should not be based on competition but on love, care, and solidarity.

Only when radically opposed to the individualized, divisive, and invisibilised exploitation within patriarchal structures, can this new concept of work be used to build new collective subjectivities that recuperate the destroyed social fabric in the era of flexible capitalism. And while our life abilities and extra-work qualities (Fleming, 2013) as well as caring practices themselves (Ivancheva and Krastev, 2019) can be exploited to extract surplus from alienated workers and marginalised communities, it is important to nurture radical practices of care that overturn power dynamics, cut across hierarchies of casualization, and expand the horizons of resistance in increasingly toxic workplaces.

The article follows in three parts, starting with a brief review of how the concept of precarity has developed as a subject of academic concern and a rallying point for collective action. In the first part we reflect on the political and economic dimensions of precarity, and their often ethnocentric and androcentric biases, within which care relations are most often silenced. In the second part we look at the ethical and social dimensions of precarity, which, as a politically-induced condition, can be damaging to individuals and groups. Bridging the politico-economic to the social aspects of precarity, we show how already marginalised or under-resourced social groups are disproportionately affected, physically, mentally and socially, by the negative consequences of precarity. In the third part we bring together the discussion of care and precarity; we look at how love, care, and solidarity work (Lynch et al., 2009) are invisibilised and subsequently undervalued in comparison to work that is considered directly economically productive. Drawing on empirical research, we look at how flexibilised and precarious labour is gendered, racialised and classed, and used to navigate the intersection of paid labour and complex care responsibilities.

This article, produced in preparation to enhance on our own empirical research operationalising precarity within a project on new intersectional equalities in the academic workforce (Ivancheva et al., 2019), is based not on our own data, but on the review of an already existing wealth of empirical research on the subject. Such review helps us revisit the concept of precarity with fresh eyes and conclude that in order to challenge inequalities produced and exacerbated by precarious labour, there is a need to include

love, care, and solidarity as central into any conceptualisation of and resistance against precarity. Rather than a narrowly defined focus on care only in romantic love and within the nuclear family, we envisage collective practices of care in our workplaces. In order to destabilize the current individualizing system of competition and life dominated by employment (paid work), it is not enough to create welfare institutions that pit working lives to lives-outside-work, or act as prosthetics to aid our expansive working lives. We aim to initiate a discussion on how to re-organise, instead, our very understanding of productive life-at-work and create ways to embed love, care and solidarity within working places as means of resistance against casualisation and exploitation. Only so, we can challenge from within the increasing care-lessness (Lynch, 2010) that working lives, and lives in general are exposed to.

Precarious labour: Ethical and political dimensions

Precarity has become a concept central to scholarly attempts to grasp the complex changes in working and living conditions in advanced capitalist societies. Used initially to designate the proletarianisation of white-collar workers (Weber, [1948] 2002), by the end of the 20th century it re-emerged in the struggles of student, unemployed, and flexible workers' movements in Western Europe, who experienced the crumbling of the post-war welfare state and the Fordist labour regime (Bourdieu, 1997; Berardi, 2009). The 'new deal' between state and capital, achieved by organised labour earlier in the 20th century had left out part-time and temporary contract workers, women, migrant workers, and workers in the developing world, for whom precarity has been a norm rather than an exception (Nielson and Rossiter, 2008). Unemployment, flexibilisation and uncertainty now also became the predicament of a generation, whose parents had enjoyed guaranteed remunerated employment with benefits and securities. Activists and scholars related to this generation used 'precarity' as a frame of collective action against the neoliberal restructuring in public sector, privatization and market deregulation that marked the new crisis of capital (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008).

Precarity as a claim

Yet, the critique against precarity came together with such against a historical form of capitalist organisation through the state that was ripe in the post-war era. And whereas the so-called artistic critique of the post-war capitalism defied bread-and-butter social critique by uncritically embracing the drive for authenticity, freedom, and flexibility (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: x-xii), both stemmed from real concerns. The state bureaucracy was a tool of capitalist, imperialist, and patriarchal forms of social organisation. Secure employment carried out by men or increasingly by middle class women, was operating thanks to the invisible and unrecognized forms of reproductive and emotional labour (Fraser, 2013). The latter were not seen as equally important or remunerable to 'productive', paid employment (Federici, 2013).

Critique against the oppressive state order was absorbed by capitalism in its next reincarnation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), and produced a new monster: neoliberal governance and new managerial labour organisation. By flexibilising labour and seemingly reducing state regulation, it created new ever more invasive and exploitable forms of work. Still, by holding the tension between working and existential conditions the term precarity addressed as a collective action frame both the need of secure and stable future, and the push for authenticity and freedom against the routinized bureaucratic discipline.

Precarity as class distinction

Recent debates on labour precarity have inevitably referred to Guy Standing's work on 'the Precariat' (Standing, 2011; 2014), which suggests the emergence of 'The Precariat' as a new class within the contemporary class ladder. For Standing, the members of the Precariat experience precarity in three dimensions: in the relations of production, economic redistribution, and political participation and representation in relation to the state (*ibid.*). Standing sees potential for development of a Precariat class-consciousness based on shared anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation (Standing, 2011: 19, 21), but recognizes the peril of multiple vulnerabilities dividing instead of uniting workers (*ibid.*: 25).

However, in Standing's writings care and reproductive labour do not receive significant attention except when linked to hospital workers or charity volunteers in crumbling welfare states (Standing, 2014). His analysis does not take into account the marginalized groups who have been historically excluded from production, distribution, and equal participation. Positing anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation as the main condition of precarious workers, Standing remains fixed on those working in productive labour within advanced capitalist societies. And while Standing himself has called for a redefinition of work as productive only (*ibid*: 107-108), his texts never explore the connection between precarious work and reproductive work done predominantly by low-paid women and migrants. His focus on the commonalities of precarious work across contexts and classes has been criticised for disguising rather than disclosing existing inequalities including between precarious and industrial workers in developed countries, pitted against each other as rival 'reserve armies', and pushing precarious labourers to resort to 'first-order loyalties of ethnicity, caste, race, and creed' for affinity and struggle (Breman, 2013:135-137).

Precarity as a global action frame

Over the last decade scholars have discussed the serious limitations to precarious workers' organising. Traditional unions have had an ambivalent role in this process, as the un(der)employed have traditionally been perceived as a weak link in workers solidarity as difficult to recruit and potential strike-breakers (Brugnot and Le Naour, 2011). In the Global North, research on precarious workers' mobilising has shown that the huge variation of conditions and hierarchies in the precarious workforce challenge collective action frames (Mattoni, 2015). And even if frustrations with precarious work are shared across borders, the possibility to think of international strategies is undermined by country-to-country legislative differences: for instance differences between production-based and contract-based flexibility results in the reliance on different coalitions and action repertoires across seemingly similar cases (Vogiatzoglou, 2015).

Against this background, Stephen Shukaitis articulates the need of struggles against precarity to focus on a more transversal, work-and-life relating

experiences that can bring groups together to develop new forms of individual and collective autonomy, and ‘new modes of being and community that are not determined by labour’ (Shukaitis, 2013: 658). To do that, it is crucial to challenge the ethno- and androcentrism that underpin most scholarly work on the subject of precarity.

Precarity as ethnocentric

Critics have pointed out that the works on precarity mostly focus on the exceptionalism of the American case (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 389) or other Euro-Atlantic countries (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Bret Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008) state that rather than an exception, precarious labour is a global and historical norm. For them, European and North American movements’ and scholars’ use of precarity as a mobilizing and analytical frame has no resonance with the rest of the world where life and work stability and security are not experienced by the majority.

For Ching Kwan Lee and Yelizavetta Kofman precarity takes different shapes in the Global South where deregulation, privatization, and market liberalization have led to assault not only on labour rights but also on life and livelihood of workers (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 390-392). Many post-colonial countries have produced novel forms of exploitation (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012). Some developmentalist states have done away with labour protection, causing mass internal migration and casualization or the opening special economic zones (SEZs), feeding off unregulated labour and ‘partial border citizenship’ (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 394-397).

Precarity as androcentric

The focus of labour studies and studies of precarity on the individual male and white worker, engaged in productive work has also been criticised. Shifting from a unionized factory worker to an artist or creative worker, this figure is idealised, respectively, as vanguard of the proletariat or of the ‘Precariat’ (Fantone, 2007: 9). Their polar opposite has traditionally been the ‘suburban housewife’ (Oksala, 2016: 281).

Yet, as Silvia Federici (2004) has shown as a response to E.P. Thompson's examination of industrial workers, 'women's work' has been pushed out of the productive sphere and marginalized. This happened during the European Enlightenment process of the enclosure of the commons – used by women to support household consumption – and the push of peasants towards cities: the spaces of waged and timed labour. In this process, women became the indispensable – yet undervalued – double tool of capital: not regarded and remunerated as workers, their reproductive work was used to yield and bring up healthy workers. To force women into this situation, they were made legally dependent on the patronage of male breadwinners, denied control over their bodies, and witch-hunted for performing labour liberating them and their offspring from inextricable poverty (*ibid.*).

The impact of early capitalist formation on the economic subjugation and coercion of women continues today. Housework remains informal, unwaged and largely unrecognized, even if increasingly commercialized (Federici, 2013). Women who entered the labour force since the interwar era have relied on flexible labour or the work of other often migrant women to 'have it all' – a job and a family (Fraser, 2013; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; O'Hagan, 2015). Today women still form a large percentage of the labour force in part-time positions, and are times less likely than men to work full-time, progress in their careers, and be independent from bread-winning partners (OECD, 2015: 115, 176). New forms of debt have also emerged that produce ever further extraction from vulnerable female and feminised bodies (Gagy, 2019; Cavallero and Gago, 2019).

Decentering precarity

Thus, with few exceptions the discussion of precarity has remained focused on productive rather than reproductive, and on material rather than on immaterial labour (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Important recent debates on the infringement of new technologies into human work still largely focus on precarious male workers in the Global North (Cant, 2019; Moore, 2017). Unsurprisingly then, precarity – a historical characteristic of women's invisibilised, immaterial, and affective work – only became an issue of concern once it came to characterize 'productive' work in global capitalism

(Oksala, 2016). Even then, the critics of precarious labour mostly focused on the creative and information industries, and the movements against precarious labour – on organising youthful, able-bodied, highly educated people with a relative lack of caring responsibilities (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

While traditional Marxist feminists have long spoken of reproductive labour, the term was often used to include unwaged work to provide food, shelter, and care, inside, but not outside the traditional family structure (Gill and Pratt, 2008). More recent feminist analysis has included precarity-focused critique of other structures such as heterosexual marriage, maternity, care-work, and individualized self-exploitation (Fantone, 2007; Zechner, 2013; Coin 2017). While much of this critique addresses precarity in the lives and communities of the theorists – including through the focus on emotions and practices of care in social movements and artistic collectives (Zechner, 2013) – it opens debates on precarity to groups formerly absent from it: those living and working under extreme forms of feminized and racialized precarious conditions in global commodity chains.

Johanna Oksala has more recently argued that a narrow focus on abolishing the division between productive and reproductive labour, or remuneration of reproductive work – eclipses a whole ethical aspect of both labour and care (Oksala, 2016: 296-297). ‘In an economic system, in which resources are primarily distributed to individuals according to their ability to compete in the economic game – as opposed to their need or their right...women’s reproductive labour can only ever be a handicap’ (Oksala, 2016: 299).

The abolition of the distinction between productive and reproductive labour, then, sounds like a new threat to lift all determinations rather than suspend a condition of oppression (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). New struggles against precarity need to treat both already existing structural conditions of oppression that persist at workplaces, and the attempts of individualizing, profit-led working conditions to define all aspects of our lives. Instead of trying to abolish this distinction between reproductive and productive labour by bringing rationalities from the productive sphere into the personal and communal domain, the struggle against the negative aspects of precarity should bring systematically care work and affective labour into the

workplace. This also requires the discussion of not directly labour-related aspects of precarity: those related to life and livelihood that are exposed to acute forms of inequality and care-lessness (Lynch, 2010) under advanced capitalism.

Precarious life: Ethical and social dimension

A focus on workers as independent, hypermobile actors solely occupied with income and welfare benefits, denies the fact that personal lives are complex, and that mobility decisions are made with affective realities in mind. Work and life outside the workplace are not neatly delineated. Isabell Lorey notes, 'it is not only work that is precarious and dispersed [for precarious workers] but life itself' (2015: 9). For Judith Butler, 'precarity' is 'a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (Butler, 2009: ii). Franco Berardi insists that in order to understand the political economy of contemporary capitalism, we need to grasp the psychopathology of relations based on economic competition for maximum profit (Berardi, 2009). Mike Davies calls for a political analysis of precarity examining the physical or physic damage of precarious work: its impact on social integration, social transformation or their failure (Davies, 2013).

Precarity creates increasing demands on mobility and flexibility. While flexible arrangements can contribute to workers' mobility power (Alberti, 2014), they can also be manipulated by employers to implement exploitative organisational models of insecure labour and incessant work. Hence, there is not a 'true flexibility' but an 'inflexible flexibility': a rigid and a prescriptive vocation that displays greed and reverberates on the life of the individual (Morini, 2007: 48-9). Empirical research on different groups affected by such processes has shown their deep, divergent impacts.

Political precarity and vulnerability

Groups and populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and who experience routine aggression or lack of adequate protection by states, suffer

precarity expressed as ‘maximised vulnerability’ and minimised equality (Butler, 2009: ii). Judith Butler speaks of ‘precarious life’, as not ‘recognisable, readable, or grievable’ (*ibid.*: xiii). As well as equal access to resources, equal participation requires conditions of being recognized and listened to as a political subject: of being considered worthy of living, worthy of welfare, and of care as an integral human being (*ibid.*: iv).

Thus, for persons and groups who are exposed to physical or symbolic violence and frequently unrecognised or misrecognised, precarity is a permanent state of induced competition: a zero sum game over scarce symbolic and material resources which determine who counts as a subject and who does not (Butler, 2009: iv). Under these conditions, access to rights and equality is possible only through assimilation to structures of violence (*ibid.*). Insurgence often becomes an only means of subaltern populations to fight back against the hard power of the state and the soft power of civil society, which impose oppressive legal frameworks and power structures (Chatterjee, 2004).

Economic precarity and exploitation

Beyond exposures to symbolic and physical violence, the market creates subtle, yet brutal mechanisms of cutthroat competition, exploitation, and exclusion by limiting the time to dedicate to love, tenderness, and affection (Berardi, 2009). The separation between life and work through the introduction of regular hours into a work routine and the division between employers’ time and ‘own’ time (Thompson, 1967: 60-61) is now a privilege.

Under constant demands to perform a growing number of fragmented mental tasks, the body-mind of the contemporary worker is completely taken up; he or she is not treated as an integral individual but as package of abstract, depersonalised time, purchased and sold out by company owners via management (Berardi, 2009: 42; Moore, 2017). These conditions result in a dissatisfaction and stress as workers are constantly required to adjust to new standards and skill-sets (Standing, 2011: 124). More recently, a growing tendency to also treat out-of-work skills and social capacities of workers as

yet another exploitable asset has blurred the life-work continuum at the advantage of work (Fleming, 2013).

There is also a further sense of ‘wasted labour’ and ‘bullshit jobs’ (Graeber, 2018), combined with fear of having to remain stuck in their cycle because of scarcity. Starting a temporary contract, workers are worrying about and already searching for future work (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Reducing the value of life to the value of one’s paid work produces an existential angst. Workers’ mental and physical activities are in accelerated labour that leads to collapse, depression, and to low motivation, self-esteem, and sexual desire (Berardi, 2009: 37-38). This process negatively impacts workers’ health and wellbeing: it leads to fatigue, exhaustion, frustration, and the inability to plan ahead. Anxiety, insecurity and individualised shame often lead to burnout, substance abuse, physical, mental and emotional disorders (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

Precarity and gender

In relation to gender, the flexibility and mobility which have increasingly come to characterise precarious labour under capitalism are characteristics that have historically been associated with work designated as ‘female’ (Morini, 2007). While the number of women in paid employment has risen dramatically, women in the workforce have an increased likelihood of holding low quality jobs, along with immigrants, recent school leavers and workers considered to be ‘low-skilled’ (OECD, 2015). Women, who still try to accommodate paid work and unpaid domestic responsibilities, dominate fast-growing service sectors of the new economy (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009), and comprise the majority of part-time and flexible workers globally (OECD, 2015).

All these inequalities considerably impact workloads and the ‘double-burden’ of paid labour and unpaid care or domestic work, as well as on income and career progression. Women also perform the larger share of affective labour and ‘emotion work’. Commonly depicted as unskilled, effortless and outside the labour process, emotional work remains unrecognised or dismissed as embodied, natural, immaterial (Bolton, 2009).

It is obscured within the institution of the family 'by privatising, feminising and naturalising much of the work involved in its reproduction' (Weeks, 2011: 143). The moral imperative to care remains highly gendered in both paid and unpaid environments (O'Brien, 2007). This gendered division of labour has real consequences for political and economic participation for women.

Precarity and mobility

An increased expectation of mobility is another aspect of life, particularly for fixed-term, part-time, 'underemployed' and 'casual' workers. Liz Oliver writes about the relational impact of temporary labour even for those in relatively privileged 'white-collar' occupations as contract workers in scientific research. Geographic mobility extends the individual capacity to tolerate instability and requires decision-making that can be harmful for personal relationships or requires bringing partners, children, and extended family members across time and space (Oliver, 2012: 3860). Beyond change at work, and constant re-negotiation of career decisions, the end of each contract also means renegotiating friendships, family, and collegial relationships (*ibid.*). By changing countries, workers often curtail their previous social and professional networks. Many suffer loneliness and depression while others take on the responsibility of moving their whole families along or commuting across regional or national borders to make ends meet (Ivancheva, 2015).

Women are particularly exposed to vulnerability with less access to permanent positions, and caring responsibilities both in and out of the paid labour force (Ivancheva, 2015: 42). While wealthier and middle class women find partial solutions in hiring care workers (O'Hagan, 2015), a global, and rural-urban, 'care deficit' emerges (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). Daughters or mothers of care workers remain out of education or of work to take care of children or elders, while their respective mothers or daughters become caregivers to other people's loved ones (Parreñas, 2005; Deneva, 2012).

Precarity and 'hostile environments'

As a temporal and spatial process that meshes with the requirements of the labour market at certain stages, migratory processes add a further dimension of precariousness via visa regimes that produce labour market immobility and insecurity. Migrants – and especially low paid migrants from the Global South – navigate within a new institutional environment. On top of their labour precarity, they have to deal with an employment and a racialised migration system. Precarity translates into an 'institutionalised uncertainty' that produces workers over whom employers have increased control (Anderson, 2010: 300).

Precarity is in many ways exemplified in undocumented migrant workers, who are overrepresented in low-paid, poorly regulated sectors (Anderson, 2010; MRCI, 2015). For undocumented workers, where employment or residency could end suddenly and therefore time must be used 'productively', here is a keen sense of 'living off borrowed time' (Nobil Ahmad, 2008). Persons in these situations are often extremely confined within work and home spaces. The complexities and idiosyncratic character of the immigration and work permit systems across nation states, the use of agencies to hire workers, the ease with which in low-paid and poorly regulated sectors can become undocumented, all exacerbate precarity and related inequalities (Meszmann and Fedyuk, 2019).

Precarity and automation

Labour automation adds yet another aspect of precarity in relation to care. The threat of job loss of over 800 million jobs over the next two decades (Vincent, 2017) will also happen in parallel with the aging of a vast proportion of population in the developed world in need of care. What is more, as Tiziana Terranova has pointed out, even if automation frees time and energy, this surplus is incessantly 'reabsorbed in the cycle of production of exchange value leading to increasing accumulation of wealth by the few' (Terranova, 2014: np). And while care work has been discussed as unreplaceable by digital technologies, differentiated services for those able to pay and those unable to afford care would mean ever growing shortage of access to care labour for the latter, exposing them to new forms of alienation

and affective precarity. Despite the rise of ‘the cyborg’, most work is still premised upon gendered, classed, and racialised labour that is downplayed as ‘unproductive’ or ‘immaterial’ (Caffentzis, 1999).

The intersectional inequalities of precarity

These examples show some of the ways in which precarity intersects with factors to destabilise life or increase vulnerabilities. However, in certain cases, hyper-flexible, though precarious working arrangements can help rather than hinder precarious lives. Kathleen Millar’s work shows how precarity helps in the conceptualising labour as ‘inseparable from issues of subjectivity, affect, sociality and desire’ (Millar, 2014: 35). Her ethnography of informal workers at a garbage dump in Rio de Janeiro, exemplifies how precarious labour can enable greater flexibility and self-determination in paid work. Through this, paid labour can be better interwoven with relationships and care responsibilities. While in some contexts unstable work ‘destabilises daily living’ and has a negative impact on income as well as public identity and social belonging, for the *catadores* working in the garbage dump amidst poverty and threat of violence, ‘unstable daily living destabilises work’ (*ibid.*: 35). For many workers, and particularly those with limited resources, a more stable affective and relational life trumps a more stable but highly restrictive and inflexible low-waged work. This process facilitates individuals and families to ‘relational autonomy’, to be able to ‘sustain relationships, fulfil social obligations, pursue life project in an uncertain everyday’ (*ibid.*: 35). Though low-status, dirty and difficult, employment at the garbage dump provides a method of navigating employment and earning income in the midst of other forms of social and economic precarity that go beyond the disruptions to routine and contingency associated with full-time, low-wage jobs.

Thus, in spite of the vulnerabilities created and exacerbated by precarious working conditions, within the current system, highly flexible labour can be more compatible with care responsibilities for workers seeking to negotiate life within globally unequal geographic locations and oppressive social realities. In precarious living situations, flexibility holds the potential to facilitate greater self-determination and autonomy (Millar, 2014: 40), and

that might not be possible within fixed working hours requiring full-time availability. A refocus on care and affective relationships in precarity gives a nuanced view of complex social realities. A binary conception of precarity-stability and fixed work-life boundaries masks lived experiences, as well as the social and historical contexts in which subjects operate.

The vision of fixed life-work boundaries has also underpinned the classical Marxist notion of the working class as bearer of universal characteristics, transcending territory, culture, or lineage, in its strive towards a universal liberation from exploitation (Berardi, 2009: 62). Here, the notion of the working class avoids the discussion of workers as territorially and contextually bounded in their experience of belonging and caring relations. Precarity has not only been a constant feature of labour for the global majority; it has become a normalised feature of the life and work of those employed in certain poorly regulated sectors: care and domestic work, sex work, retail, catering and hospitality, agriculture and construction. Even in sectors dominated by men, work is gendered through distribution of domestic work, often done by women workers. They navigate a series of temporal, geographical and financial arrangements in the unequal terrain between unpaid care and paid labour. Not taking into account precarious living arrangements and care relations in the discussion of work creates further obstacles to conceptualising a transformative alternative in which oppressive hierarchies are not simply replicated, but challenged.

Precarity and care: Rebuilding the social fabric

Lynch et al. (2009) theorise the nature of affective care as constituting circles of care relations: primary care relations of love labour, secondary care relations or general care work, and tertiary care relations of solidarity work. Care is not an isolated sphere of activity. It is intertwined with economic, political and cultural relations (Baker et al., 2004). Inequalities in these areas of life exacerbate affective deprivations and the ability to perform love, care and solidarity (Lynch and Walsh, 2009: 41). In the context of precarious employment, greater energy and time is required to compensate for a lack of stability. A constant need to adapt feeds into an erosion of social relations

(Anderson, 2010: 303), as well as of capacities to care to develop relationships of love and solidarity in and outside the workplace. Caution is needed against paternalistic and parochial 'dark' sides of care (Tronto, 1993), ascribing caregivers more authority over those receiving care, and more value to mother-child links rather than larger social interdependence. Yet, with Joan Tronto we employ a political concept of care that transcends individual rights and insists on responsibility of humans to each other.

Access and time to care

When it comes to love labour and affective work, paid and unpaid care work is subordinated to labour seen as more economically profitable or valuable, while affective and love labour are subordinated to labour that is considered 'productive'. This is particularly so for persons in low-paid and precarious employment. In addition to the negotiation of environment and irregular working times, unstable employment or frequent changes of employer presents significant challenges to creating and nurturing social and affective relationships. Social and economic inequalities, exacerbated by precarious and unstable conditions, weaken the human capacity to perform affective work – the active doing of tasks and rituals that communicate affection, love, and care. In this process, those with less time and resources such as low-wage workers, those with multiple jobs, or persons with multiple caring responsibilities and little support, are disadvantaged. They experience constant deficit of time, as well as of the material, physical and emotional resources necessary for love and care (Hochschild, 2003). Thus, people in precarious living and working situations face additional barriers to creating and nurturing loving relationships, both in and out of work, than those who do not face these restrictions. Comparatively, persons with greater time, energy and resources are in a position of privilege and better equipped to manage the working day to include time for affective labour (Lynch et al., 2009; Claassen, 2011).

The cost of care

To make up for the growing lack of time for affective labour in the lives of the ever fewer workers privileged with stable employment, the caregiver has appeared on the scene of complex micro- and macro-politics. Paid and

unpaid domestic labour and primary caregiving within families is still overwhelmingly performed by women (OECD, 2014). For those that can afford it, it is delegated to women with less access to the labour market, who are often poorer workers from minority or migrant background (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Anderson, 2010). The increased demand for outsourced care work and the commodification of such labour has resulted by what has been called a 'care deficit' as many workers migrate to perform care, domestic and affective work elsewhere (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). This 'extraction of care' (Parreñas, 2003: 53) from peripheral to core countries, and from poorer rural areas to affluent urban centres (Deneva, 2012), means that wealthier countries and families benefit from such arrangements at the expense of the families of caregivers whose labour is often undervalued and underpaid (Gutierrez- Rodríguez, 2014; Parreñas, 2005).

Competition vs. care

A third way in which new flexibilised forms of work are related to the question of care concerns the new imperatives of social organisation that erode cooperation and solidarity (O'Flynn and Panayiotopolous, 2015). Social relations or potential bonds of collective care are ever more damaged though a culture of competition and individualism. In this environment precarity thrives as a self-sustaining ideological energy, hinging on our preoccupation with 'our individuality, our unique destiny, our special distinctive abilities' (Horning, 2012: np). That workers are increasingly required to simultaneously and constantly compete even when co-operating with peers and co-workers presents an emotional burden. It produces an environment hostile to dissent: while those who speak up are penalised, the others remain divided, and in constant fear (Courtois and O'Keeffe, 2015). This 'universal competition' results in further separation from networks of protection for workers (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 427) and calls for care and self-care rebuild solidarity and the social fabric in social movements they form (Zechner, 2013).

The status of love, care and emotional labour

While care is increasingly outsourced, automated, and commercialised (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003, Oksala, 2016), it is still considered 'unproductive' and attributed lower status vis-a-vis other forms of labour. Following Oksala's (2016) argument on affective labour we argue that, while the remuneration and recognition of professional care labour is important, by itself it remains unable to tackle the enclosures of love, care, and solidarity work that produce precarity. The affective dimension of everyday life is further invisibilised by a more general approach to precarity that focuses on work alone. Even if certain forms of are attributed price and turned into a commodity, there will always be forms of love, care, and solidarity that will defy the market logic. Pushed even further into the private domain, they will be left to those less privileged groups – often migrant, low-income and minority women – whose marginality keeps them out of traditional sphere of exchange. One way to address this inequality is to examine the care needs of those providing care, and of all workers generally. Engagement with employers and building support networks within the workplace could allow a symbolic and material recognition of workers that in addition to financial remuneration. Only by incorporating care into an analysis of precarity, and resituating the centrality of love, care, and solidarity to individual and societal wellbeing, can the inequalities and injustices of precarious labour and life begin to be truly addressed.

Productive vs reproductive labour

Accounting for the double bind of precarity, it is important to take into account two disparate realities that are still an intrinsic part of this concept. Precarious work, rather than causing vulnerability, can provide a flexible foundation to precarious or unstable living, particularly when it serves to accommodate affective responsibilities. In such cases rebuilding the social fabric cannot start with a firm division between life and work identities, and champion 'life' as normatively positive, and 'work' as negative. Working lives and life outside of paid work are equally part of one's integral life. They can be equally sources of positive and negative identification depending on the conditions under which they are experienced. In examining precarisation

as political constituting, we should take into account that it is a contested field that should not be conceived of as necessarily negative: subjects are not only productive for the purpose of capitalist accumulation, but for communication, knowledge, creativity and affect (Lorey, 2015). Precarisation becomes a base on which workers can articulate desires and struggles for alternative forms of living, and to recompose work, life and relationships. The rejection of this division and the repositioning of love, care, and solidarity as an integral part of work can be seen as a way to reinvent a relational autonomy of workers that can replace individual autonomy as technique of new managerialism (Millar, 2014).

Importantly, erasing the distinction between productive and reproductive, material and affective labour under the conditions of capitalism, is not an easy solution to our current predicament (Oksala, 2016). A 'simple' solution, such as offering more maternity leave and welfare benefits to women and caregivers will not solve the gender or global inequalities. On its own, allotting a price to care work, and affective labour, while relying on women's unpaid role in reproductive work, will not offer a long-term solution either (*ibid.*: 299). While affect and care are increasingly commodified, they remain rare sites of resistance against the logic and moral of the market. A focus on paid labour neglects the reality that work and life outside paid work cannot be clearly delineated. Some forms of affective labour by their nature are inalienable or cannot be commoditised (Lynch, 2007). There is an urgent need to ground care and self-care in the workplace, not as a technology of further extraction, but as a sign of clear resistance against the individualising and alienating labour. The reorganisation of productive forces toward the building and maintenance of nurturing, affective relationships and bonds of solidarity and community is even more important in a context in which workers, focused on individual, everyday struggles, are seen as temporary and replaceable. In order to challenge the negative effects of precarity a recognition and redistribution of the capacity for love, care, and solidarity must be prioritised.

Discussion

In this article we worked on three interconnected levels. In the first part we critiqued some androcentric and ethnocentric tendencies in the debate of labour precarity. We then moved on to discuss the highly gendered and racialised aspects of care work, both affective labour and the professional (if not always professionalised) care work that is often done by those experiencing precarious working and living conditions. In this we emphasised that in relations of social reproduction, the ability to build communities and access relations of love, care, and solidarity, are crucial to subsistence and survival. In the last section we showed how the intersection of precarity and care illuminates how the monetisation of reproductive and care work, claimed by campaigns such as Wages for Housework, bears significant limitations. While it sheds light on the extraction of surplus from reproductive and care labour, it also brings an instrumental, calculative logic into domains of human life and livelihood that remain the last resource of resistance against capitalism. We claim that, reversely, care and affective labour should be brought into the core of productive work and used as a means of resistance and resilience against alienation.

Considering a grounded understanding of precarity, which also reflects the affective aspect of our lives, means to also examine our understanding of what kind of subject and practices we envisage in struggles that would challenge precarity. Flexible employment has created both an impossibility for a shared labour identity, and a parallel craving for a 'we' (Sennett, 1998: 148). The latter is represented in a new emphasis on a defensive character of the nuclear family and the local and national 'community' which have become defensive spaces from which assaults are made against the imagined 'other'— the subject envisaged behind one's own working misfortunes. Clutching to networks of aid, however, is no longer such an easy solution, as flexible capitalism 'radiates indifference, reengineering institutions in which people are treated as indifferent' (Sennett, 1998: 146).

Moving beyond the double bind of precarity and addressing related inequalities can only happen when positive communal identities and practices reorganise the current relations of production. This would involve

placing the value not on individualised competition, but on collective solidarity, care, and love (Baker et al., 2004). There is a need to recognise symbolically, but also compensate and honour in very material terms those whose lives have always been vulnerable and marginalised, and whose labour and sacrifice has always been taken for granted.

It is also very important to rethink the subjects that have thus far been envisaged as revolutionary subjects. Paradoxically, both the Marxian proletarian and the autonomous, rational actor championed by neo-liberalism feature indifference to the affective domain, ignoring the relational life of humans as interdependent, loving, caring and solidaristic beings (Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015: 18; Lynch, 1989). Focusing on subjects as independent, economic actors determined by their economic status, reinforces a ‘competitive individualism’ which underpins precarity, and is ‘no longer seen as an amoral necessity but rather as a desirable and necessary attribute for a constantly reinventing entrepreneur’ (Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015: 18).

While it is beyond the scope of the article to give exact prescriptions of how this could work, we can speak of some basic lessons from our own experiences of bringing solidarity, care and love into a toxic workplace, where—similarly to multiple experiences in the neoliberal university – we were both profoundly precarious in different, intersectional, and often conflicting ways.

Our differences – of professional rank and of salary within a vertically structured hierarchy; of financially unstable rootedness vs. financially stable displacement within our local life and work context; of being a white migrant or a national from a migrant background; of being feminists within a macho working culture that required self-promotion and cut-throat competitiveness – slotted us mercilessly into different, potentially antagonistic categories. These categories had divided many in our positions and us from other colleagues in previous jobs. They could have easily created serious cleavages either by producing hierarchy and disparity resulting in passionate envy, and destructive competition and adversity between us; or by instantiating cold disinterestedness in which life and work could only be

lobotomised from each other with a sterile dexterity so they never intersected.

It took everything from intentional and systematic everyday gestures of care, through to bigger efforts and sacrifices on behalf of both of us to be in solidarity with each other, against the vulnerability of our individual and shared positions and while resisting assimilation and co-optation into the oppressive structures in order to access individually better conditions. This was needed to start rebuilding an alienating working environment into something that between us felt like a safe space. From there we could be introspective with our own reactions of moments of conflict, and generous with each other. From there we could also reach out to others, producing slowly and despite all odds a caring community that spread our mutual care to other colleagues without expecting full reciprocity but with the expectation of respect for our efforts and the space we had built. Transgressing the life-work boundary and bringing a similar sensitivity to our workplace that we had in our friendships outside of it, was our strongest weapon against the divisive force of precarity.

Thus, in order to challenge the universalistic underpinning in understanding of the working classes, and, for that matter, of any collective agent of social change, we suggest a more organic, grounded understanding of workers' experiences is needed. It could entail organising through a shared analysis not of our strengths, but of our vulnerabilities and care needs. It could look like Jane McAlevey's (2012) power structure analysis on the reverse – a less formal vulnerability structure analysis, aimed at building mutual understanding and trust at precarious workplaces. It could entail opening safe spaces among precarious workers for sharing-based analysis of individual vulnerabilities, strengths, caring commitments, and dis/comfort zones. Unlike a campaign where external forces are analysed, the point could be to open up about, share, and come to terms with our own strengths and weaknesses. Doing this could not be easy, but it could lead to trust building and ac/knowledge/ment of our own and others' limits that underpin any realistic strategy against an oppressive power structure.

Revisiting the debate of precarity with the concept of care, the article crucially insists on the distinction between productive and reproductive work in a landscape where care labour is pushed outside economic exchange, or exploited at the expense of productive activity (Federici, 2013). Through recognising, revaluing, and reintroducing care in the workplace, we suggest that a more holistic approach, rather than an artificial work-life divide, would nurture workers' wellbeing and positive relationships. The recognition and remuneration of care labour is important, but making care workers better paid and more secure is not enough to bring transformation of the current system driven by a market logic. Instead, we claim that love, care, and solidarity should be integrated into the productive sphere, engaging all workers in producing practices of collective care at work, that can corrode the institutions and culture of carelessness in capitalist firms and neo-managerial public institutions. A sincere effort to go beyond precarity and the multiple inequalities it creates and sustains must include recognition of the necessity of non-alienating social production and reproduction.

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acknowledgement

This article was written as part of the Irish Research Council sponsored project 'Equality of opportunity in practice: studies in working, learning and caring' (Advanced RPG2013-2).

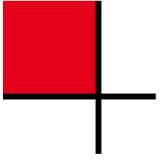
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Discourses of degrowth: New value systems for global environmental governance

Lucy Ford and Gabriela Kuetting

abstract

The Global Environmental Politics literature tends to focus on institutional and governance frameworks as the solution to global environmental problems rather than on the systemic constraints that limit the potential effectiveness of governance efforts. Part of the problem with institutional frameworks to reform global environmental governance is insufficient attention paid to deeper structural challenges. We seek to contribute to these debates drawing on critical political ecology understood as a broad, interdisciplinary set of discourses and practices that goes to the roots of structural challenges. In particular, we focus on a broad area of research around degrowth. Usually, critical approaches are considered idealist. However, we argue that value changes are a vital component in the transition to a post-growth, post-capitalist world, which is inevitable given the biophysical and social limits to growth. While degrowth is not by any means on the verge of becoming a new dominant value system, it nevertheless presents both a coherent frame of reference as well as contains concrete examples of alternative ways of organizing society and the economy. Thus it offers important new value sets to the treasure chest of approaches wanting to bring about ecological and social change and thus a potentially important contribution to global environmental politics.

Introduction

The way the politics of global environmental degradation is studied faces an epistemological challenge with its focus on global governance as the

appropriate site for change. Governance research has been driven by the assumption that if research generates convincing evidence, shows linkages and suggests effective solutions, then that will result in normative changes as we expect actors to change their behavior in the face of the appropriate evidence (see e.g. Biermann et al., 2012). It has become clear in the past 20 years that these assumptions are flawed. Part of the reasons why this has not happened is that actors operate within systemic constraints that cannot easily be overcome even in the face of incontrovertible evidence. Thus one of the biggest challenges for researchers of global environmental politics is how to crack those systemic constraints. We define systemic constraints as the capitalist/free market economy with its engrained power relations, political institutions that are driven by interest group politics and political compromise and social norms that put wealth and the associated growth economy before well-being for people and planet. While there is of course a long history of theory and social movements seeking to transform capitalist modernity, we are looking for signs of value shifts in both institutions and wider society, and believe degrowth is worth investigating in this regard, and bringing into the discussions on global environmental politics.

The bulk of the academic literature emanating from the field of global environmental politics focuses on institutional and governance frameworks as the solution to global environmental problems rather than on the systemic constraints that limit the potential effectiveness of governance efforts (for example Young, King and Schroeder, 2008). Part of the problem with institutional frameworks to reform global environmental governance is insufficient attention paid to deeper structural challenges. While not wanting to reject reformist strategies altogether, we seek to intervene in these debates drawing on degrowth understood as a broad, interdisciplinary set of discourses and practices focused on disparate power relations that looks into the root causes and obstacles to current ecological and social unsustainability and seek a radical reorganization of society and economy. In this instance we focus on the discourse and practices that fall broadly into the area of degrowth as used in critical ecological economics and political ecology discourses. While degrowth is firmly based in the critical political economy sphere, in our opinion it offers the best insights into challenging

systemic constraints and a basis from which to approach a discussion of normative change. Degrowth is a concept that is concrete enough to be conceptualized as a policy tool and it goes to the heart of the dichotomy between environment and economy. This approach reflects our wider understanding of social change as not relying on a rigid dichotomy between reform and revolution, but rather seeing the possibility and necessity of transformation occurring in multiple avenues that may include normative changes that impact on dominant institutions as well as wider society (for example Ford and Kuetting 2017).

This paper discusses the challenges of the global environmental crisis and engages with the predominant discourse that solutions to global crises lie in successful global governance. It argues that the structural constraints hindering an effective global environmental politics are situated in the economic sphere and a commitment to a growth economy. Drawing on political ecology and degrowth discourses, suggestions for an alternative world view of global political ecology are presented.

The challenges of global environmental governance

In order to assess how well existing efforts to curb the environmental crisis are able to rise to the challenge, it is necessary to define what the challenges are. While some environmental problems seem to have been resolved or become less urgent (ozone depletion, acid rain), at face value, the challenges have become bigger, not smaller (climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, air pollution). Environmental problems are complex as well as global in that they are caused by complex global social, political, economic and cultural structures and have serious effects worldwide. Global governance institutions tend to have only limited effect in developing successful strategies because overall political compromises in negotiations between economic demands and environmental needs generally mean that proposed solutions tend not to be ecologically effective though they may function well politically (Kuetting, 2000). Where institutions are successful, they often are so because of a fortuitous constellation of events or conditions. This shows the importance of wider economic factors and thus

necessitates a political economic analysis rather than a narrow focus on institutions.

For example, the case of ozone depletion, which is often lauded as a success story, had the strategic advantage of a very small number of producers of the offending substance involved and a scientific alternative becoming available, thus facilitating a solution. Climate change, on the other hand, is too controversial, too complex and affects too many economic sectors to lend itself to a political compromise, never mind one that actually has an effect. This suggests that institutional design can only go so far as it is constrained by political, economic, scientific and environmental factors. While global governance institutions, whether private or public or a mixture of both, have been successful at forming institutions in many cases (and unsuccessful in others), this success has rarely been accompanied by measurable environmental improvement (Kuetting, 2000; Paterson, 2001). Thus it is incumbent upon scholars of global environmental politics to look beyond narrow institutional avenues of change to the wider political economy (Newell, 2008), and within this context we look to degrowth for seeds of potential change.

With the rise in importance of the international or global dimension of environmental politics, as reflected in the attention received by global environmental problems and institutions in the 1980s and early 1990s, international cooperation was considered to be the best way forward for ameliorating or resolving the issues at stake. One of the seminal texts of the early writings contextualizing global/international environmental politics poses the question in the following way:

Can a fragmented and often highly conflictual political system made up of over 170 sovereign states and numerous other actors achieve the high (and historically unprecedented) levels of co-operation and policy co-ordination needed to manage environmental problems on a global scale? (Hurrell and Kingsbury, 1992: 1).

Most of the early writings took the need for international cooperation and the state system as the starting point for cooperative policies as a given. Approaches to international environmental politics presupposed a system of

international anarchy and the need to provide a regulatory system for transboundary and global problems. The resulting grounding of the evolving new global environmental politics literature in neoliberal institutionalist thought and specifically regime theory was a logical conclusion. As a result, most environment-related international research was then centered around the notion of governance (or regimes, as early governance efforts were called then), mostly in its traditional neoliberal institutionalist form.

The global governance view of the international system is one that puts emphasis on structural diversity, but mostly continues to see national governments as the main actors and guardians of the system. This governance focus also affected global environmental policy coordination and with it came the recognition of more complex webs of interdependence and a richer diversity of actors involved in policy making (Lipschutz, 1996; Paterson et al., 2003).

Global governance is a concept used in a variety of theoretical approaches and with a variety of normative starting points. For example, the United Nations in its *UN Commission for Global Governance* report (UNCGG, 1995), *Our global neighbourhood*, claims we are entering a new era of democratization, economic transformation, multilateralism and collective responsibility. This inclusion of new groups of actors from the business and civil society spectrum found in the transnational sphere is also what the neoliberal institutionalist literature highlights as the main contribution of global governance to the understanding of international cooperation (Young, 1997; Pattberg, 2006; Young et al., 2008).

Despite the growing involvement in governance of a wide range of actors, the key decision making institutions remain inter-governmental in nature. After all, although the analysis of the international system through the lens of global governance has changed, juridically the claim to sovereignty of states has not been undermined and the political framework of the liberal global political economy has also not fundamentally changed despite the appearance that states may have lost power (Lipschutz, 2004; Kütting and Cerny, 2015).

Another dynamic that has been identified is the increased privatization of environmental governance with the growing influence of private actors which are seen as replacing the traditional role of the state (Levy and Newell, 2005; Newell and Paterson, 2010). Some writers suggest that an increasing number of private actors initiate governance institutions which then become recognized by states and become part of regulatory structures (such as ISO 14000 standards, stewardship councils) (Pattberg, 2006; Alcock, 2008; Betsill and Corell, 2008). For a liberal world view, the notion of a pluralist, inclusive global standard seems an ideal basis for harmonized global solutions. However, critics argue that it does not take account of unequal power relations between the various actors in the global political economy (Lipschutz, 2004; Kütting, 2010).

Critical scholars found that a critique of capital accumulation provides a meaningful and powerful tool through which to analyze the nature-society relations underlying the friction between environment and economy (Saurin, 1996; Kütting, 2000, 2010; Paterson, 2001; Chew, 2008). Especially the neo-Gramscian framework has proved to be useful for analyzing state-firm relations in fields such as forestry, biodiversity or climate change (Levy and Newell, 2005; Humphreys, 2018) as well as the role of civil society and an analysis of governance reproducing capitalist hegemony (Ford, 2018). As Vogler (2005: 235) puts it, 'market-based globalization is the driver of degradation and states (acting as the agents of capital) are regarded as part of the problem rather than, as in mainstream work, the solution'. The logical conclusion from this analysis is that the environmental problems regimes or global governance institutions aim to address cannot be resolved through collective action endeavors alone since these do not touch upon the underlying operation of the hegemonic economic system.

Such a fundamental critique of the liberal institutionalist emphasis on state or pluralist cooperation as the solution to environmental degradation problems can be found across many environmental sub-fields. Other ecocentric scholarship also argues that the roots of the environmental problem cannot be tackled with the development of international or global norms in a liberal market economy – such as the environmental or ecological justice literature (Hampson and Reppy, 1996; Schlosberg and

Caruthers 2010; Schlosberg, 2014), feminist critiques (Bretherton, 1998, Salleh, 2009) and political ecologists (Guha and Martínez -Alier, 1997; Peet, Robbins and Watts, 2011). Writers such as Laferriere and Stoett have imported ideas from green thought (Laferriere and Stoett, 1999; Vogler, 2018). Conca (2005), in his study on water, highlights the concept of territoriality. Jacques (2006) introduces the concept of ocean space. Others stress the importance of consumption as an economic and social activity (Ekins, Meyer and Schmidt-Bleek, 2010; Fuchs and Lorek, 2002; Dauvergne, 2008). In light of these diverse interpretations, one could argue that with the adoption of the concept of global environmental governance, literature and perspectives became more pluralized and academic debates on the concept of governance very contentious.

While most of global environmental governance is still concerned with what political science does more generally – establishing institutional frameworks to solve problems identified by political actors – writings on transnational actors from different perspectives have broadened the vision of what kinds of actors can and ought to engage in this policy process (e.g. Ford, 2018). This has certainly made political processes more diverse but it raises the question whether this makes ‘the environment’ more vulnerable to compromises and if it leads to more representative frameworks that are politically more successful but not necessarily or rarely effective ecologically.

The diversification of the global governance literature in recent years to define governance as inclusive of non-traditional actors and to include a normative desire for more representative and equitable institutions has been one way to address the above critique (Trudeau et al., 2013; Young et al., 2013; Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014; Pattberg and Widerberg, 2015). While more diverse, equitable, just, inclusive, and representative governance institutions are of course extremely desirable from a legitimacy point of view, it would be even more desirable for these new institutions to achieve more effective policies for environmental improvement as a result of increased diversity. However, that connection is tenuous at best. While more equitable institutions facilitate burden sharing both in terms of environmental and financial burdens, shared burdens do not unfortunately

equal a better environmental record. Institutions are compromises arrived at through negotiated trade-offs between actors and constrained by the power constellations underlying these trade-offs. While having more actors in the political process has solved some problems, it has not addressed the key problem – which is in the structure of the global economic system that systematically treats nature as an unlimited resource and commodity without intrinsic value or voice. Within this, it does not problematize the notion of economic growth, which is fundamentally taken for granted and embedded in a wide range of institutions, including global governance institutions (Purdey, 2010).

Critical global political ecology

Critical political ecology approaches recognize that the institutions of global governance are hampered by the structures of the contemporary global political economy within which they sit (e.g. Peet, Robbins and Watts, 2011). These approaches pay attention to the structural constraints and the relationship between nature and the political economy. Ecological economics writers such as Daly (1996) and Martínez-Alier (2002) have provided incisive critiques of the current economic/capitalist system with detailed analyzes of the root causes which have become classics of the environmental literature. Fundamentally, the incommensurability of values between a social system based on accumulation of wealth and economic efficiency with the aim of unlimited growth is incompatible with a complex and limited ecosystem. Martínez-Alier (2002) argues that the economic system is organized as if it were not located within these specific ecological constraints. However, this critique does not provide answers to questions as to what form of political organization is necessary to combine equity and sustainable environment-society relations except that it would not be based on unlimited growth or take uncritical assumptions of economic growth as its base. A growing literature on critical political economy goes beyond ecological-economic perspectives to reflect upon the political economy of ecological degradation (Kovel, 2007; Bellamy Foster, 2009). This is where a connection between governance and critical political economy is necessary.

Much of the literature is, quite rightly, focused on analyzing the problems. Indeed, a prerequisite for finding good solutions is that we truly understand the problem so of course analyzing the problems is crucial. Much less literature has focused on what the solutions might be. Part of the problem is that there are diverse discourses of what the root problems are and there is no universal agreement. These discourses have different normative origins (Dryzek, 1997; Clapp and Dauvergne, 2005). So while there is large-scale scientific consensus on the nature of the environmental crises we face, the political, economic, cultural and social dimensions underlying the environmental crises mean a lack of consensus when it comes to the solutions.

One example of a proposal for solutions was an article in *Science* by a group of global environmental politics scholars (Biermann et al., 2012). They aim to make 'realistic' suggestions, in other words suggestions that can be taken up by policy-makers and implemented and thus have some tangible results. In that respect, Biermann et al. (2012) aim to make much more applied and hands-on suggestions than conceptual work does, which offers analysis but cannot suggest avenues for transformation except suggesting that rational actors will change behavior in the face of convincing arguments. However, Biermann et al. raise two other questions, the first being what we can assume to be 'realistic'. While the proposed changes in the article are certainly feasible policy wise, many if not all the suggestions (closing regulatory gaps, according more importance to certain institutions, placing a stronger emphasis on planetary concerns in economic governance) require substantially altered power relations and value change to put the public and environmental good before private gain and it remains unrealistic that such a system can be generated for the same reasons as outlined in the critiques of the global governance literature discussed above. They are good policy suggestions but the article remains silent on how they can be effectively translated into 'realistic' actions, to quote the authors. The system-shaping agents (in the sense of decision-making and structural power) are unwilling or unable to pursue such policies. Thus this does not bring us any closer to the aim of ecological sustainability. In fact, the solutions are unrealistic

despite being technically feasible precisely because they come up against the systemic constraints outlined above.

Consequently, the key question is how to achieve environmental change when existing power relations make effective changes unlikely. This is a question that has either been ignored in the literature or answered as a policy rather than structural question (see Kütting and Cerny, 2015). It has not been identified as a research challenge although research output of the past 20 years suggests that it is a very strong element of the environmental problematique.

Thus, we argue that there is a need to accept that infinite and exponential economic growth is impossible on a finite planet. The logical follow-on is to take seriously the proposals for degrowth and redistribution. In the following section, we outline the main tenets of degrowth and highlight examples of where degrowth presents possible alternative value systems both within and outside institutions that can contribute to a broader critical understanding of global environmental politics.

Degrowth

The literature on global environmental governance and liberal institutionalism discussed above does not focus on the nature of economic organization. We argue that effective, ecological change has to go hand in hand with a decoupling from the growth economy and a move toward different forms of economic (and thereby social) organization. However, such a change will not emanate from existing power networks alone. As seen for example in the UNEP report on decoupling natural resource use from economic growth, the growth economy itself is not challenged in this decoupling discourse. The report states:

Decoupling at its simplest is reducing the amount of resources such as water or fossil fuels used to produce economic growth and delinking economic development from environmental deterioration (UNEP 2011: xi).

While attention to resource use is a vital step in the move towards a green economy, degrowth goes beyond this to question the very notion of growth,

which by necessity challenges the very logic of current accumulation strategies, necessitating a questioning of the current structuring of society and political economy.

We believe that the examples of degrowth that are in evidence today are indicators that degrowth is a possible viable strategy. Before we discuss possibilities for change, we will explore the concept of degrowth as the most promising avenue for facing the challenges of environmental degradation.

Within critical perspectives on global political ecology, the discourse of degrowth has come to prominence. The degrowth movement is both a civil society movement and an academic field that considers the downsizing of production and consumption in order to achieve a more ecologically balanced society (Victor and Rosenbluth, 2007; Latouche, 2009; Kerschner, 2010; Heinberg, 2011; Demaria, 2013; D'Alisa et al., 2015; Buch-Hansen, 2018). While by no means a homogenous research area and movement, the thrust of degrowth is critical of the inherent growth logic of the modern economic system. It arises out of the ecological economics tradition taking the starting point that the structural assumptions of an economy driven by growth rates and GDP per capita measurements is in direct contradiction to an ecosystem foundering under the demands of the growth economy. Thus, a system that operates within the ecological limits of the planet is needed, which would logically necessitate a move away from the ideological underpinnings of mainstream economic thought that growth is infinite (Booth, 2004; Barry, 2012; Cato, 2013; Daly, 2014) and thus ultimately necessitate the transformation of the capitalist mode of production, consumption and reproduction (Demaria et al., 2013; D'Alisa et al., 2015). This is of course where power and systemic constraints come in, as outlined earlier in this paper.

Kallis et al. (2012) outline the following indicators as guiding principles for a degrowth society: cap and share, zero interest rates, non-debt money and regional currencies, new forms of property and work-sharing. Substantively, their approach aims to take the profit motive out of most of the economy and thus to reduce the growth potential (and increase more equitable social relations). In fact, Victor and Rosenbluth (2007: 492) argue that in modern

industrial societies economic growth ‘detracts more from well-being than it adds’. In the same vein, the 2015 winner of *Riksbank Prize* in Economic Sciences, Angus Deaton, highlights that more wealth does not result in more happiness or wellbeing beyond a certain (quite low) point – you certainly do not have to be part of the top 1% or even top 30% to feel more happiness. Victor and Rosenbluth state that environmental and resource constraints make continued economic growth an unrealistic option, that economic growth is not really necessary for developed countries to sustain their welfare and that economic growth’s side effects ultimately outweigh its supposed benefits. This argument is mirrored forcefully by researchers critical of growth in general (Jackson, 2009). Poverty and uneven distribution are a manifestation of this argument (Zieschank and Dieffenbacher, 2012). However, while smaller economies would be a consequence of degrowth transformation, indeed a differentiation is made between various areas of economic activity. While clearly some industries need to shrink, such as extraction and consumption of fossil fuels or the financial sector, sectors such as education, health and social care, as well as renewable energy might see an expansion (D’Alisa et al., 2015). Likewise, across the globe degrowth ought not to be applied evenly. Economic expansion to meet vital human needs and alleviate poverty in the global South are still acknowledged as necessary, all the while bloated Northern economies clearly need to shrink, while also paying attention to inequality, injustices and poverty in the North (Demaria et al., 2013), similar to the earlier proposals around contraction and convergence in the field of fossil fuel consumption (Meyer, 2000).

The basic premise of a degrowth society is a commitment to transformation towards a system that does not prioritize economic growth as its defining feature and also produces more equitable social relations. This would require a radical rethinking and reorganization of political and economic practices running counter to the main tenets of the free market capitalist economy. There are many nuances to the degrowth literature that we will not go into detail here as the main objective of our article is to discuss how the general notion of degrowth has provided evidence of practical alternatives that begin to challenge dominant value sets.

A commitment to degrowth would run counter to all political networks, alliances, systems, governance structures that are currently in existence and that are based on a growth logic (Purdey, 2010). Hence the political support it would receive is non-existent if suggested as a policy direction. However, we see recent examples that point in the direction of ideas around degrowth influencing policy discourse. For example, the ‘German Energiewende’ (energy transformation) shows that power networks (though not necessarily structural constraints) can be cracked under the right circumstances and that policy tools based on reducing material throughput (which ultimately is the main guiding scientific principle of a degrowth society) are beginning to be policy tools at local, national and indeed global levels. Such cracking of systemic constraints can be explained with transnational neopluralism which argues that change is possible when the right political interests align and are able to change power relations (Kütting and Cerny, 2015). However, the emphasis is on the ‘right circumstances’, which is not something that can be controlled with agency.

Buch-Hansen (2018) provides an important analysis of what the criteria for a paradigm shift towards degrowth might be, deploying critical political economic analysis. He argues that there are four requirements for such a shift to take place: the necessity of a crisis, the presence of an alternative political project that could become hegemonic, a comprehensive coalition of social forces sympathetic to this new political project, including amongst elites and elite institutions and finally consent, even if only passive, amongst society. That a crisis, or even convergence of crises, exists is widely understood. He also makes a good case for seeing degrowth as offering the potential of an alternative political project albeit marginal at present. However, what is lacking at present is supportive social forces and wider consent.

We agree with this analysis and, as mentioned above, this ties in with a long history of the study of social change. However, we want to argue that a convergence of wider societal forces – for example green movements and anti-austerity movements – are beginning to make inroads into value shifts within wider society (see also D’Alisa et al., 2015) and we are also seeing some minor shifts in global institutions, which are worth noting.

Interestingly, the language related to critical political ecology and degrowth has found its way into the discourse of multilateral institutions. For example, the OECD has a program dedicated to measuring material flows and research productivity which engages with the importance of measuring material throughput. Material flow analysis (MFA) is accepted as an increasingly policy relevant and rapidly developing field of research, constituting a tool that can provide a more integrated and holistic measure of resource and material flows in the economy, from which economy-wide material flow indicators can be derived, including on resource productivity and resource use efficiency. The OECD acknowledges that these could parallel labour productivity indicators (OECD, 2008; see also OECD 2011).

The World Bank, too, sees the limitations of a growth paradigm and argues for material throughputs to take a central place in economic reasoning. Like Victor and Rosenbluth (2007), the World Bank noted that economic growth and wellbeing are not intrinsically connected:

[P]reliminary estimates show that many of the most resource-dependent countries, including all the major oil exporters, have low or negative genuine domestic savings. That means that losses of their national wealth caused by depletion of natural capital and damage done by CO₂ emissions outweigh the benefits from net domestic saving and education expenditure. Thus it is quite possible that in these countries the aggregate national wealth was actually decreasing, to the detriment of the people's quality of life and these countries' future development prospects. And such unsustainable development might be happening in spite of positive economic growth indicators, which are usually at the center of all governments' attention. (World Bank, 2004: 115)

Thus, the recognition of degrowth, or at least a critical engagement with the concept of growth, is not a debate that takes place solely on the academic left, but has also squarely arrived in policy-making centers. However, it needs to be explored what the consequences of this boundary-crossing dialogue are given that this discourse takes place without reference to the underlying power structures that are ultimately responsible for degrading nature-society relations in the first place. So for example in the case of the World Bank, while it is laudable to see an acknowledgment of underlying material throughputs and related impacts on well-being, they are arguably

still couched in terms of sustainable development, which does not radically challenge the underlying logic of capitalism (Brand, 2012) and thus is not in line with more radical degrowth arguments. However, they are a sign of changing discourse within dominant institutions, even if they are not signifiers of radical social change. There is still a gap between optimistic but ineffective global environmental governance literature on the one hand and critical, deeply analytical but perhaps ‘unrealistic’ political ecology and degrowth literature on the other. This is for several reasons – firstly, a basic incommensurability of values between the status quo politico-economic system and those discourses that seek to take seriously the biophysical and social limitations that make the status-quo untenable. Secondly, there is a lack of consensus between the main political and economic actors in decision-making roles and knowledge holders researching environmental degradation and/or climate change. Finally, there are major difficulties in effecting large-scale change given the power constraints arising out of points one and two above, that are linked to entrenched dominant economic and political enclosures.

As noted earlier in a different context, the incommensurability of values between a social system based on accumulation of wealth, economic efficiency and unlimited growth is incompatible with a complex ecosystem. Martínez-Alier (2002), in particular, argues that the economic system is organized as if it was not located within these specific ecological constraints. It is not in ‘the system’s interest’ to acknowledge its shortcomings as the system is exactly predestined to operate as a power and interest-maximizing unit. While research generated at all levels has shown quite conclusively that the closed system economy operates as if indefinite growth were feasible and desirable, all ecological research shows that a finite planet and ecosystem cannot logically be based on infinite growth. Even if renewable energy as the main energy source became a reality, global society would still bump up against finite material bases. Thus the values of the politico-economic system are fundamentally incompatible with the kind of supply system that would be sustainable. However, given the self-propelling nature of the power constellations of the economic system, a fundamental change of

existing practices would not be in the interest of decision-making elites because it would undermine the basis of their power.

Environmental problems, as argued above, therefore cannot be resolved through governance-type collective actions alone since these do not touch upon the underlying operation of prevailing political-economic processes – and, indeed, they tend to reinforce those processes. They further institutionally embed not merely capitalism as a mode of production but also a range of other underlying structures of unequal power and control in both domestic and global politics – structures which directly or indirectly depend upon environmental degradation for maintaining their power and control as well as their profitability, such as fossil fuel producers.

Road to change

There are certain trends in global environmental politics that show that these constraints can be overcome in small ways which may hold lessons for larger scale structural change. Our aim is to shift the academic debate in this direction.

Lessons or blueprints for ecological change can be found at the margins of society rather than in the mainstream governance forms. For example, Litfin (2014), Fischer (2017) and Henfrey and Ford (2018) all argue that the ecovillage movement is an excellent example of a form of organization that is a lived form of a degrowth and ecologically conscious society. Often dismissed as of no importance, the ecovillage movement is nevertheless a sizeable movement, especially in the developing world.

Likewise, the concept of ‘buen vivir’ in Latin America and the increasing empowerment of indigenous communities is another example of alternative, degrowth-driven societies becoming legitimized and empowered actors in the global community and aiming to stake their claims (Acosta, 2017). Again, these are movements that are often regarded as marginal because of their challenging the status quo of a global economy, however, the fact that these communities are increasingly getting recognized and legitimized as actors shows a potential for a paradigm shift (Suiseeya, 2014).

In the global North (as well as South), movements for healthier, more sustainable and ethical agriculture and the rising movements against the use of plastic are examples of society questioning the growth model of food production. While still a small proportion of the overall food economy, the existence of ‘no plastics supermarkets’, for example, are a sign that challenges to the growth economy are everywhere and are likely to rise. These are sites of resistance to the growth economy and while they are fairly small at the moment, they are nevertheless hopeful sites for changes that have the potential to challenge the hegemony of economic growth. In all, we take note of challenges to the growth discourse within international institutions such as the OECD and the World Bank, as well as amongst wider social forces across the globe. These are still marginal, and diverse and legitimate questions can be asked about scaling up beyond dispersed and diverse movements. Nevertheless we see these as signs that values are shifting in wider society and that these shifts are making themselves felt even within the corridors of inter-governmental institutions, even if underlying political-economic structures will most likely be much slower to shift.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that conventional approaches to ‘solving’ the global environmental crisis have sought to build global institutions for sustainable development and environment that have remained coopted into orthodox hegemonic economic and political thinking. A critical political ecology approach seeks to look at the deeper structures and obstacles to why global environmental governance is not containing or solving the ecological challenges that we face. Our approach has been to focus on attempts that seek to transform current structures and practices. In doing so, we have identified a focus on degrowth within critical political ecology as the most vital approach toward overcoming the ecological crisis. Yet, global governance and critical political ecology/degrowth are two discourses that hardly overlap or interact. Our article is a first step and first stab at identifying possible overlaps/crossroads, identifying promising

developments and highlighting the challenges and constraints associated with this process.

While an emphasis on global governance acknowledges the constraints arising out of bringing the interests of predominant actors to a negotiated compromise and focuses on consensus-building, the urgency of the environmental crisis is very much not in sync with the solutions proposed by this focus. It does not address the primacy of the economic system and its emphasis on growth and without doing so, is unlikely to offer the kind of solutions that are ecologically necessary. This is why an emphasis on degrowth is so vitally important. As discussed in this paper, the basic premise of a degrowth system is that it does not prioritize economic growth as the defining feature of the system and also produces more equitable social relations. While a degrowth society is unlikely to ever arise out of global governance policies, there are many examples of practiced degrowth strategies at the community level that have been successful and can serve as inspiration for any attempt to move toward degrowth. This paper is an attempt to show these connections and call for more academic focus on the potential role of degrowth strategies as a transformative political force.

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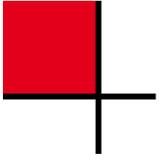
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At the heart of new work practices: A paradoxical approach to silence in a coworking space

Stephanie Faure, Jeremy Aroles and François-Xavier de Vaujany

abstract

The increasingly popular expression ‘collaborative economy’ seems to imply explicit, visible and ultimately ‘noisy’ work practices; collaborating requires expressing things, which is a ‘noisy’ phenomenon in itself. Paradoxically, most contemporary work environments (e.g. open-space oriented or mobile in the context of public spaces) appear to be largely silent and filled with invisible work bubbles. This raises some fundamental questions around the unfolding, emergence and temporality of collaborative practices. In other words, where and when do these expected collaborative practices occur? This research note suggests that new work practices wrap collaboration in silence itself and in alternations of silence. It purports that silence is far from being the mere opposite of noise and offers a critical perspective on silence and noise at work as part of a new managerial practice. We use the case of a French coworking space to illustrate our argument.

Silence and collaboration: Setting the paradox

Paradoxes are ubiquitous in organizational settings, as suggested by the dense body of research on paradoxes within the management and organization studies literature (see Bloodgood and Chae, 2010; Clegg et al., 2002; Schad et al., 2016; Smith and Smith, 2011). Organizational paradoxes

are encountered at various levels and may take many different forms, such as the tensions between the processes of stability and change (Aroles and Mclean, 2016; Farjoun, 2010), cooperation and competition (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014), exploration and exploitation (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009; Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008), profits and purpose (Jay, 2013), or autonomy and control (Taskin and Devos, 2005), just to name but a few. Engaging with paradoxes allows us to navigate through the labyrinthine demands, directionalities and logics guiding organizations and working practices on a daily basis. This research note is concerned with one particular paradox, that of the prevailing place of silence in collaborative workspaces.

More precisely, there is a fascinating paradox around the growing use of silent tools in open silent working environment and the adjacent rise of the so-called collaborative economy. Isn't collaboration supposed to be a noisy undertaking framed by loud conversations and negotiations involving a wide range of actors? Isn't the continuous set of innovations and creative processes behind them also expected to produce noisy and visual collaborations? What are the implications of envisioning collaborative activities as silent? How does silence underlie the performativity of collaborations? These are just some of the questions raised by this paradox. The problem becomes even more complex when we realize that silence is not quite the opposite of noise for that silence is itself a form of noise. Put differently, silence does not correspond to the absence of noise or a situation 'by default' where nothing exists but is a lived event and experience enabling meaningful events and collaborations (see De Vaujany and Aroles, 2019). In that sense, collaboration is not simply silent but made silent and enabled through silence via particular assemblages and work configurations (e.g. body postures, use of headphones, management of phone calls outside workspaces, etc.).

Contextualising new work practices

The time-space of work, alongside our conception of work, have changed drastically over the past 50 years in the light of the emergence of a wide range of information and communication technologies, the popularization

of miscellaneous management mantras and the evolution of the ways in which we conceptualize the relationship between ‘organizations’ and employees (see for instance Aroles et al., 2019; Bosch-Sijtsema et al., 2010; Brocklehurst, 2001). Collaborative entrepreneurship, telework, digital work, digital nomadism, freelancing, individual or collective hybridization of employment and entrepreneurship (alternate entrepreneurs, open innovation, etc.) perfectly epitomize these trends (Laniray et al., 2017). Within that context, various scholars have highlighted the seemingly greater preponderance of flexibility and autonomy in daily work activities (Feldstead et al., 2005; Sewell and Taskin, 2015), the central role played by third spaces in the unfolding of new ways of working (Brown and O’Hara, 2003; Hislop and Axtell, 2009; Kingma, 2016) and the emergence of collaborative spaces (e.g. coworking spaces, makerspaces, hackerspaces, fab labs, incubators, innovation labs, etc.) and activities (Gandini, 2015) in line with the ‘materialization’ of the collaborative economy.

New work environments are depicted as quiet and governed by a logic of silence; working together and close to each other in open spaces implies collective rules of silence and a subsequent process of self-discipline (i.e. one must refrain from making noises in order to respect the silent atmosphere that governs these spaces). The decline of office compartmentalization, the development of silent tools and the digital nature of most tertiary-sector activities and productions have materialized a completely different relation to noises and silence at the workplace. Within the context of collaborative spaces, individuals work in quiet environments, rely on a range of silent tools and produce outcomes that remain immaterial, invisible and silent. In this infrastructure, workers are supposed to remain silent in open spaces, thus materializing the image of being ‘alone together’ (Spinuzzi, 2012). Interestingly, workers seem to remain connected through a shared experience of silence.

Within that context, silence plays a key role in the unfolding of new work practices. Despite the ubiquity of silence in these new work configurations,¹ there is a puzzling dearth of research around the role played by silence in the organization studies literature (Bigo, 2018; Blackman and Sadler-Smith, 2009; Kirrane et al., 2017; Morrison and Milliken, 2003), with a majority of papers on this topic concerned with the coercive dimension of silence (see Brown and Coupland, 2005; Costas and Grey, 2014; Donaghey et al., 2011). There is clearly more to silence than this literature would seem to suggest and in this research note, we see silence as a meaningful and multifaceted phenomenon (rather than a ‘default setting’) pregnant with possibilities (Bigo, 2018). While empirically revolving around a coworking space, this paper sets out to contribute to research on the place of silence in the changing world of work. The following section provides an illustration of the role of silence in a coworking space located in the center of France.

Silence in and around Coworkingtoday²

Exploring Coworkingtoday

Coworkingtoday (CwT) is a coworking space located in the center of France. It presents a different logic to that of ‘traditional’ workspaces, in particular corporate open spaces. Both places can be described as open spaces that are not partitioned, equipped with tables and chairs, and in which workers can ‘settle collaboratively’. Two notable differences need to be considered; the first one relates to the users of these spaces and the second to their respective territories. In the context of an open corporate space, offices are assigned and the procedures and practices of the company are known and shared by each employee. Everything is framed around the culture of the company. This space thus appears as a closed and ‘regimented’ place. On the contrary, a coworking space brings together individuals who do not belong to the same structure (company or institution). As such, they are not linked

1 This is never a complete silence: smartphones, laptops, movements in the place and short conversations always take place inside. In addition, noises from the street are also often present.

2 This is a fictional name.

by the same corporate culture and are not (directly or indirectly) subject to the same hierarchical structure. People sharing the same space are therefore 'default' work colleagues. As a result, the rules of that space, apart from the respect of each other, are not driven by the same collective of workers sharing different activities that are part of an operational chain or even a company.

The account that follows comes from an on-going ethnographic study of CwT that the first author of this note started two years ago. CwT is a non-compartmentalized space where a wealth of activities unfolds and that hosts a vast range of communities. Makers, coworkers, readers and others mingle in the restricted space of CwT. Upon entering the place, people would typically take some time to look at all the possibilities offered by the space before deciding to head to a particular area that would seem to be appropriate for the activity at stake. Much care then would ensue to avoid disturbing others and to maintain the silence that would pervade in that space. This could involve lifting up one's chair when moving it, opening one's bag cautiously, ensuring that one's mobile is on silent mode, refraining oneself from eating, etc. In the coworking space, the 'rules of life' are imposed by the place itself where the 'working together' must be as comfortable as possible for all the professionals who have chosen this place to exercise their activity.

The first author of this note instinctively followed these invisible rituals. Particular practices and codes also surrounded the ways in which coworkers interacted with people entering the space of CwT. On many occasions, people would simply enter quietly, grab a seat and start working on their laptop. Even in a silent environment, the posture of the body was very significant; it sent certain signals regarding one's disposition to others (e.g. does one appear to be willing to engage in a conversation or not?). On other occasions, some coworkers (already present in CwT) would send signals (such as body movements) to acknowledge the arrival of someone into the space and to suggest that they may be willing to engage in a 'chit-chat'. Most of the users of the place knew each other, and it was not uncommon for them to greet each other once they were done with their respective activities.

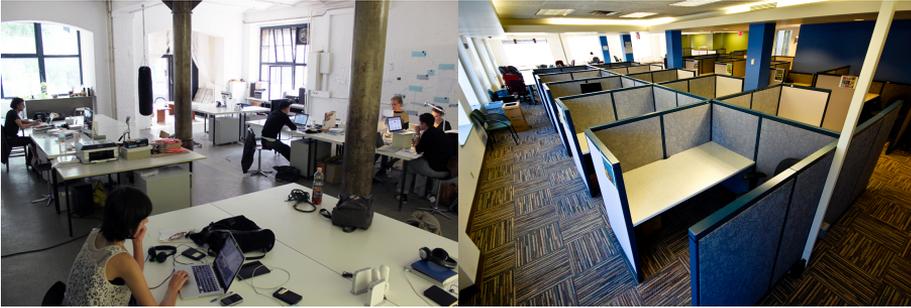


Figure 1. Coworking space in Berlin (license: CC BY-SA 3.0); Cubicle space, Portland, Oregon (license: CC BY-SA 2.0)

When a conversation started, it was nothing more than a mere whisper in order to avoid disrupting the activity of other coworkers. The preponderance and special status of silence in collaborative spaces led us to interrogate the actual motivations behind the imperative to remain silent. In other words, is silence some sort of self-imposed practice (denoting a will to work together) or the result of external pressures, such as the presence of community managers (who would act as ‘silence guarantors’)? What is the value of ‘rules’ or ‘internal charts’? On various occasions, we noticed that this rule of silence was maintained even in the absence of community managers (hence silence was not coerced). More than ever, silence appears as a paradox here. What a strange way to welcome newcomers, in silence... At first sight, this can be assimilated to haughty attitudes, distance and even symbolic violence against those trying to join in the space.

Some of the professional activities of the coworkers actually take place outside the walls of CwT – this could be the case when calling a client or discussing a new collaboration over the phone for instance. As such, the noisy times of collaboration could take place outside, and the coworking space could then be a place for concentration, focus and to disconnect. Thus, we note that there are no barriers that force some activities to be carried out on the premises of CwT. In addition, CwT regularly organizes events and convivial moments in its street or neighborhood. One such occasion is captured in figure 2 with coworkers eating outside the space, on the sidewalk in order to enjoy the first gleams of sun. The noise of the place was thus produced far from its core activities.



Figure 2. Assembly line of a Citroën 10hp (public domain); Interior Photography of The Hub by London Architectural and Interiors photographer, Matt Clayton (license: CC BY-SA 4.0)

Our ethnography of CwT makes visible another paradox. ‘By no means does silence define sound deficiency: it defines the state in which the ear is most alert’³ (Quignard, 1996: 148). This quote by the French writer Pascal Quignard proved particularly meaningful during the course of our study in the space of CwT. Paul, one of the two community managers, would always speak in a low voice, regardless of whether he would have one or many interlocutors. He knows that the slightest noise can disturb the balance of what happens in the coworking space. As argued by Serres (1980), noise can be perceived as parasitic in a communication system, then transforming meanings in an environment. A noisy environment can be a hindrance to some with regards to the development of their reflection and creativity. Faithful to Paul who introduced them to the coworking space, newcomers would pursue their exploration of the space of CwT with the same commitment to silence, with a greater attentiveness to these innumerable little sonorities that underlie the ways in which this coworking space would operate. By extension, silence is also encountered between two people who collaborate on a same project and who happen to be working alongside (each behind their own screens). Silence is the space where their collaborative activities unfold: in some cases, this took the form of a complex web of glances and gestures.

3 Authors’ own translation from French.

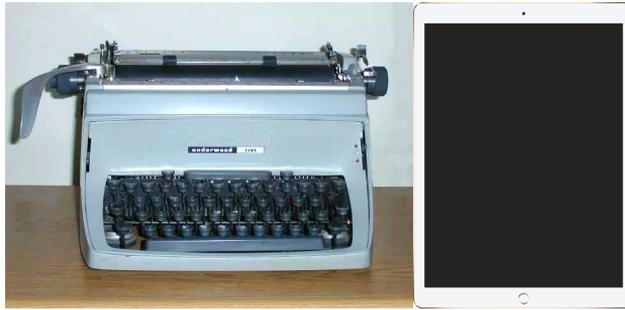


Figure 3. Typewriter Under Underwood Touch-Master 5, early 1960s (public domain); iPad (license: CC BY-SA 4.0)

The semitone silence that prevails in CwT was well perceived and widely accepted by coworkers and other users. It is even helpful when it comes to focus on a particular project, as can be noisy café where the subtle interfering noises are no longer heard and disturbing. This ‘white noise’ seemed to be produced by the many computers in the space. Absolute and prolonged silence does not exist. The form of silence encountered at CwT was simply a silence not disturbed by sonorous, meaningful words or speech. Interestingly, this form of silence was not always appreciated; for instance, in another coworking space in the center of France, the community manager told us that most coworkers cannot stand silence and continuously ask for some musical background in order to create a comfortable and soothing work environment. More precisely, the community manager argued that it thwarts the ‘false silence’, namely that of murmurs, the sound of chairs being moved, or the noise caused by the keystrokes of the keyboard of a computer. Concerned about the wellbeing of the users of the space, he decided to broadcast some carefully-chosen background music so that it would not become an inhospitable element for coworkers. This musical background had become an asset of the place, a distinctive element that was sought after by workers.

In CwT, silence would be only interrupted when an event is organized within the communal area, when the community manager connects two persons, or when a coworker receives a call from a client or collaborator. Most coworkers accepted this form of nuisance because they knew that it was temporary; upon receiving a phone call, a coworker will promptly move to an area where

‘noise’ is authorized (e.g. entrance hall, etc.). Those who are more bothered by these interruptions and accustomed to quieter environments resorted to headphones, took breaks on the sidewalk of CwT or left for another place. Ultimately, a coworking space is shaped according to the rules of life adopted by its community. This may explain why there are not two spaces that are entirely similar.

The community manager of CwT has left a real space for silence, refusing to interfere or impose it, leaving CwT’s community free to tolerate it or not. This clearly varied according to the situation and the people present in the space. When CwT would become noisy, some coworkers would accept it and consider it as a vector of focus. However, this was not the case for the majority of them, as some preferred to leave the place, to return to another time of the day or the following day. This leads us to propose the following taxonomy of silence in coworking spaces:

Silence as	Qualifiers	Observed situations
Traumatic	Disturbing, embarrassing	Some workers cannot stand ‘white silence’ and need noise. That’s why they choose to wear earphones to have a musical background. This musical isolation helps them with their work (as they can isolate themselves)
Functional	Self-discipline	CwT’s community determines itself the appropriate level of sound, without the community manager intervening.
Solemn	Respect	This natural regulation attests to mutual respect. When a worker enters the coworking place, they greet other coworkers quietly.
Illuminating	Vector of communication	Silence can also be used as a tool for empathy. When the community manager discusses with a co-worker, he lets silence settle in their exchanges. This space testifies not only to his listening posture but also to this voluntary choice to let his interlocutor express himself.

Table 1. Taxonomy of four main values of silence observed at CwT

The sidewalk: An intermediate space

Workers in CwT are used to work in a ‘fluid’ manner, that is to say to organize themselves inside the coworking space, but also outside this space. This was notably the case for some coworkers who preferred to call their customers outside the space of CwT, i.e. on the sidewalk in front of the entrance to CwT. As such, the sidewalk in front of CwT can be seen as a liminal space. It is an introductory space where individuals can restructure and refocus. It might then represent the distance needed at a given moment in time to a person who will be, a few minutes later, in the position of a coworker inside CwT (see Steyaert et al., 2006). It was the same when a conversation between two coworkers was going to be lively and loud; they would leave the building and stand on the sidewalk in front of the door. This space was also associated with recreational and friendly breaks. On the other hand, any new entry into CwT naturally imposed silence and restraint.

The neighboring bistro

In the genesis of collaborative spaces, the bistro is widely recognized as an important gathering place, as one of the first spaces when it comes to sharing and conviviality. In the immediate vicinity of CwT, The Coffee is one such bistro that would sometimes welcome coworkers who wanted to exchange ideas about a project in a space noisier and less constraining than that of CwT. This was a complementary and, in many different ways, necessary moment for the activity that they exercised.



Figure 4. Scene of coworkers' life in Coworkingtoday (Source: Authors' own photograph)

Thus, to go further, the bistro (with its own services – sales of beverages and tobacco, etc.) is to be considered here as an extension of CwT at a given moment, which corresponds to a need to benefit from a space that is not shared by all the other users of CwT. It is sometimes beneficial to plunge into an atmosphere that is no longer that of work, as it allows one to develop links that would promote different activities. In this case, the bistro replaces the ‘confidential room’ that can be found in some coworking spaces. It is a complementary space and in a certain way a facilitator and support of the activity, although it offers a very noisy context. As a result, as indicated by its community manager, the bistro develops its turnover with the flow of people who come to CwT.

Concluding thoughts: Silence as a lived event

The place occupied by silence in collaborative spaces is at the same time puzzling and fascinating. It challenges our common perceptions around the predicaments of collaboration itself and draws our attention on the wealth of assemblages, directionalities and paradoxes that underlie contemporary forms of collaboration under the auspices of the collaborative economy. Our focus on silence illustrates one of the many paradoxes that lie at the heart of these new ways of working connected to the rise of the collaborative economy.

Silence is never absolute. It is always partial and constantly oscillates between different poles: it is shared yet not externally imposed (though this might depend on the situation), both individual and collective; it disciplines collaborative spaces yet enables them to flourish, etc. This research note has sought to draw our attention onto the richness and complexity of silence as an organizational event for work practices. Most of the current research on silence revolves around the coercive dimension of silence but fails to engage with the materiality and enabling power of silence. Silence is not simply the absence of noises but itself the result of complex and on-going assemblages drawing together a wide range of actors and forces enacting various temporalities and spatialities.

Interestingly, the practice of silence is a key aspect and stake of contemporary work practices. In the context of mobile work, telework (e.g. involving the unexpected events and noises of home), independent work (more and more ‘shared’ with other independent workers in coworking spaces, business centers, incubators, accelerators, etc.), digital work (expected to be a silent activity), silence is a key issue. It is a necessary collective rule, an obstacle that needs to be regularly overcome in order to collaborate, something that needs to be wrapped, intertwined and combined with the necessary noise of work practices. Traditional work places (i.e. open offices or closed offices in most large companies today) were phenomenologically bounded in time and space. Today’s world of new work practices is much more liquid and continuously re-enacts time and space (see Aroles et al., 2021). Intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013) lies at the heart of this phenomenon, and communities play a key role in the management of the joint liquefaction, fragmentation and individualization of work (Kallinikos, 2003). Beyond these sociomaterial trends, silence may always be a political lever. The General de Gaulle once stated ‘Nothing levers more authority than silence, splendor of the strong and shelter of the weak’.⁴ Finding one’s voice in the new world of work may thus also be a question of silence more than one of speaking loudly. Another paradox?

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4 Original quote: ‘Rien ne rehausse l’autorité mieux que le silence, splendeur des forts et refuge des faibles’.

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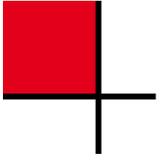
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Mediating resistance: Digital immaterial labor, neoliberal subjectivities, and the struggle for immigrant justice

Frankie Mastrangelo

abstract

Social movements' increasing use of social media to pursue movement goals and objectives presents opportunities and complications for movement work. Social media use functions as digital immaterial labor, defined as the unwaged cultural contributions that generate value in mediated realms. I see digital immaterial labor as occupying a deeply ambivalent space. This labor can be harnessed towards cultivating spaces of livability for marginalized communities. Or, that labor can reinforce cultural practices that prioritize market logics over human life. This note interrogates the role that digital immaterial labor plays in cultivating neoliberal subjectivities, understood as the performance and promotion of neoliberal values (individualism, competition, personal responsibility) enacted through individual subjects. Using the contemporary immigrant rights movement as a case study, I examine how the performance of digital immaterial labor discursively constructs neoliberal subjectivities through movement discourse. The cultivation of neoliberal subjectivities holds powerful stakes for influencing policy and cultural attitudes about movements, as the framing of movement work emerges through the discourse and narratives used to describe it.

Introduction

Digital technologies impact various facets of a social movement, influencing who can participate, what that participation will look like, where activism springs up, and when action will take place. Following authors Mark and Paul Engler (2016), I conceptualize contemporary, mediated social movements as ecologies of change. Various branches constitute these ecologies. From an e-mail action alert issued by the American Civil Liberties Union, to a swarm of activists chaining themselves to Trump Tower in support of undocumented Americans, these various strategies, individuals, and organizations represent branches of a working social movement ecology. Engagement with digital platforms weaves these various ecology threads together, and functions as immaterial labor.

Italian autonomist Maurizio Lazzarato defined immaterial labor as that which ‘produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity’ – with cultural content being the kind of activities that shape cultural and artistic standards and norms (Lazzarato, 1996: 133). Immaterial labor shapes society and culture through how such labor’s value is extracted, circulated, and applied. Digital media scholar Kylie Jarrett builds on Lazzarato’s understanding of immaterial labor by arguing that it is mapped onto larger fiscal and non-fiscal exchanges that reproduce social norms, and such norms often reinforce oppressive and regressive forces of the status quo (Jarrett, 2014).

I fuse Lazzarato and Jarrett’s conceptions of immaterial labor to define digital immaterial labor as unwaged cultural contributions that generate value in mediated realms. My conception of digital immaterial labor’s production of value is centered on the cultural and social norms, values, and ideologies cultivated by this labor’s performance. Digital immaterial labor functions to create subjectivities that reinforce norms, values, and ideologies central to neoliberalism, a prevailing social and economic order that values markets over social welfare.

In this note, I interrogate how digital immaterial labor both produces neoliberal subjectivities within movement work, and enforces neoliberal

policy. Movements use digital immaterial labor to discursively create neoliberal subjectivities, which I define as the performance and promotion of neoliberal values (individualism, competition, personal responsibility) operating at the individual level. From movement participants' narratives to the discourse circulated by movements, neoliberal subjectivities emerge through varied modes of digital immaterial labor. This labor holds the power to reinforce neoliberal policy through its influence on movement discourse.

Notes on neoliberalism and positionality

Neoliberalism refers to the contemporary shift in American culture and politics towards a 'new vision of national and world order, competition, inequality, market "discipline", public austerity, and law and order' (Duggan, 2003: X). Cultural theorist Lisa Duggan understands these traits of neoliberalism as influencing economic, political, and cultural realms. Political theorist Wendy Brown interrogates how neoliberalism operates as a cultural logic. As Brown defines neoliberalism as a contemporary form of rationality that informs how we understand ourselves, I put Duggan and Brown's definitions into conversation for the sake of understanding digital immaterial labor's impact at the individual level (Brown, 2015). According to Brown, neoliberalism's monetization of the self applies a market metrics to all contemporary spheres of human existence, and I examine how this cultivation of neoliberal subjectivity operates within mediated social movements. Neoliberal subjectivities emerge through diverse modes of neoliberal governance: the policies, practices, and logics that reinforce neoliberalism. I focus on how digital immaterial labor operates as a mode of neoliberal governance that engages narrative and discourse to produce neoliberal subjectivities.¹

1 Neoliberal subjectivity gains definition through cultural and technological mechanisms beyond narrative or discourse. The logics of algorithms and the design of contemporary social media platforms plays a vital role in creating neoliberal subjectivities. Although an interrogation of algorithms and platforms is beyond the scope of this note, these mechanisms shape digital immaterial labor's production of neoliberal subjectivities in continuously evolving ways. See Safiya Umoja Noble for more on how algorithms reinforce systemic oppression

My analysis of digital immaterial labor's relationship to creating neoliberal subjectivities engages the narratives and discourse around contemporary immigrant rights activism. My personal involvement in political organizing led me to Movimienta Cosecha, a nonviolent movement seeking to win permanent protection, dignity, and respect for the 11 million undocumented people in the United States. While I see Movimienta Cosecha as a key demonstration of how neoliberalism complicates movement work, my perspective is inevitably shaped by my privileges as a documented white woman. I want to add my voice to the dialogue about immigrant rights in ways that recognize when my positionality calls for me to listen, and when I am called to speak up. As my observations contained in this article are rooted in deep admiration and support for immigrant rights work, my exploration of Cosecha seeks to enhance and deepen conversations about neoliberalism's influence on movement work. My aim is to trace how digital immaterial labor operates in Cosecha's work to understand both how this labor produces subjectivities and discourse that reify neoliberal logic, and how activists navigate facilitating resistance amidst neoliberal constraints.

Social movement ecology and actor-network theory

Tracing digital immaterial labor in a social movement ecology requires a nimble framework for navigating complications of neoliberalism. I now turn to a brief discussion of Actor-Network theory in order to articulate what digital immaterial labor looks and behaves like in a social movement ecology. Actor-Network theory, as interpreted by philosopher Bruno Latour, understands non-human and human actants' equitable role in facilitating change (Latour, 2007). The term actant is used by Actor-Network theorists to refer to both human and non-human agents' capacity to function as part of a complex web or network of innovation, as the term actor connotes an anthropomorphic, distinctly human essence (Latour, 2007). I conceptualize social movement ecologies as composed of not only diverse branches with varying goals and logics, but also constituted by non-human and human

and diverse modes of neoliberal governance. See Alexander Galloway for more on how the architecture of networks and platforms facilitate neoliberal control.

actants that shape these branches. I argue that both non-human, digital actants and human actants are continuously engaged in defining the heterogeneous network of the social movement ecology. Sociologists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour use the term ‘heterogenous network’ to conceptualize how non-human and human actants mutually participate in the ongoing work of defining the network through their interactions with one another (Callon and Latour, 1981). The relationalities shared between digital and human actants constitute the larger heterogeneous network of the social movement ecology.

Within this larger heterogeneous network, actants constitute smaller networked assemblages of relationalities. How grassroots organizers and nonprofits engage with digital realms manifests as a digital actant network unique to a given political and technological moment. These assemblages of digital actants constitute a larger heterogeneous digital actant network, and are a key force of the social movement ecology’s expansive heterogeneous network. Digital immaterial labor weaves through the social movement ecology in ways that can reify or challenge neoliberalism, and build active popular support.

In order to ground how digital immaterial labor operates within a social movement ecology, I analyze mobilizations facilitated by immigrant rights activists’ use of digital platforms. In these mass mobilizations, digital immaterial labor functions to both harness a resistance to neoliberal processes, while also participating in the production of neoliberal subjectivities unique to the movement’s work. Further, these neoliberal subjectivities can facilitate a strengthening of neoliberal policy that marginalizes immigrant communities. Through these examples, we see how mediated social movements occupy a complicated site of engagement with neoliberalism, wherein the movement can contribute to or challenge the very political order it seeks to rally active popular support against.

To explore how digital immaterial labor facilitates mass mobilization, I first turn to how immigrant rights activists responded to the 2016 election. I then examine how neoliberal subjectivities and discourse emerges through the

cultivation of such mobilizations by examining the circulation of activists' #Sanctuary and #WithDACA hashtags.

Digital immaterial labor and immigrant rights

On November 16th, 2016, students, workers, and faculty on over 130 campuses nationwide walked out of their respective schools to not only protest the recent election of the 45th U.S. President Donald Trump, but the anti-immigrant ethos that fueled the 2016 Trump campaign (Helsel, 2016). Over the course of Trump's campaign, Trump and his supporters demonstrated an unrestrained xenophobia, with anti-immigrant vitriol present in campaign speeches, tweets, and echoing through the crowds of campaign rallies. These walkouts sprung up as part of Cosecha's #SanctuaryCampus campaign to establish college and university spaces as 'sanctuaries' for the immigrant community, namely undocumented students (Aziza, 2016). Identifying schools as sanctuaries involved pressuring higher education's institutional leadership (university presidents, provosts, and faculty governance) to declare their university as a welcoming space for immigrant students, and demonstrate this inclusivity through promises of non-cooperation with *Immigrations and Customs Enforcement* (ICE) and displays of solidarity (such as public statements). Amidst a political climate rife with anti-immigrant sentiments, the #SanctuaryCampus mobilization sought to challenge this wave of oppression with renewed vigor for organizing local constituencies. By declaring their status as #sanctuarycampuses, educational spaces could offer a symbolic sense of inclusivity and demonstrable engagement with the immigrant rights movement.

Through Cosecha's (2016) digital network of student activists and organizers, the #SanctuaryCampus hashtag aggregated key updates for those interested in taking action against Trump's anti-immigrant platform. Cosecha organizers utilized Facebook groups, e-mail listservs, and infographics to make news of the imminent walkouts spread across digital platforms. Through the dissemination of #SanctuaryCampus calls to actions, we see how various levels of participation in the social movement are

necessary to foster mass mobilization. Cosecha organizers develop the strategy for how various digital platforms (Facebook, e-mail servers, Twitter, etc.) engage and recruit supporters to the cause. From there, Cosecha communicates with local organizers that have been identified at various campuses and in diverse regions to enable the swift and expansive dissemination of a call to action.

Those dispersed organizers ensure information about the upcoming walkouts reaches people in their various locales, and those supporters in each locale will hopefully further share the call to action and show up to the action itself. This network of organizers and supporters that spans multiple geographic locations, levels of activist experience, and modes of engagement in the immigrant rights movement function as a nimble assemblage central to the social movement ecology. Digital threads of communication constitute the relationships that bind this assemblage of organizers and supporters. These threads of non-human actants carry comparable importance to the human actants that organize supporters and get bodies to actually walk out of a classroom.

In this networked assemblage, the non-human agents binding our mass mobilization are the aggregated results of the *#SanctuaryCampus* hashtag on Facebook or Twitter; they are the chain of links one must follow in a Cosecha e-mail call to action in order to donate; they are the mass texts the e-mail listserv receives after opting in to Cosecha text action alerts. These non-human actants bind the Cosecha mass mobilization, yet the mobilization requires a significant amount of labor to remain cohesive. That labor takes the form of sharing a *#SanctuaryCampus* hashtag, clicking on the chain of Cosecha links to sign a petition, or filling out the digital form to opt-in for text action alerts. The labor of engaging with the non-human actants that bind this networked assemblage determines the vitality and growth of the mass mobilization. Effective non-human actants function to positively mold the public's understanding of the mass mobilization, while generating active popular support for the cause. With active popular support for a cause, the social movement stands to push society in the direction of uplifting movement values. In the case of immigrant rights, creating active popular

support means pushing society to collectively fight for the safety and livelihood of immigrant communities.

If digital immaterial labor manifests as movement supporters clicking on links, sharing hashtags, and opting-in to alerts, such labor would appear to serve a wholly beneficial purpose in facilitating the health and success of a mass mobilization. Yet, digital immaterial labor can be used for purposes that stand to support neoliberal governance, while potentially supporting the growth of active popular support. Digital immaterial labor occupies an ambivalent space when harnessed for both reinforcing power structures it seeks to oppose, and simultaneously working to shift public understanding of the movement to support immigrant justice. In the case of #SanctuaryCampus activism, students and activists offered their digital immaterial labor to not only raise digital media users' consciousness to the immigrant rights cause, but to also motivate individuals across the country to physically walk out of their educational institutions in protest.

Recognizing the power of digital immaterial labor to facilitate mass mobilization must also be paired with an eye towards how such labor may be manipulated by neoliberal logic. What does the neoliberal manipulation of social activism's digital immaterial labor look like, and how can analyzing the contours of this manipulation serve as a key movement strategy? Understanding how neoliberalism can harness digital immaterial labor for purposes that reify its own power structures enables social movements to remain vigilant to how neoliberal logic manifests in mediated contexts.

Neoliberal subjectivities and citizenship

We see neoliberal logic present in how we code the immigrant as valuable insofar that they are contributing to the productivity of a capitalist society. This designation of value occurs within the confines of neoliberal citizenship, which queer theorist Amy Brandzel argues functions as 'a violent gatekeeping mechanism that perpetually excludes non-normative others, while making space for those that are deemed acceptable for assimilation' (Brandzel, 2016: 5). In the case of contemporary immigrant rights, citizenship perpetually excludes those immigrants deemed as lazy,

criminal, or deviant – characteristics that render one in direct conflict with neoliberal values of individual competition, upward mobility, and law and order. Neoliberal citizenship functions to cultivate neoliberal subjectivities within the immigrant rights movement. As fulfilling the criteria for neoliberal citizenship performs and promotes neoliberal values, centering neoliberal citizenship informs the creation of neoliberal subjectivities produced through the circulation of neoliberal logic. This logic operates at the level of discourse, informing how we understand particular movement rhetoric. We see neoliberal logic present in how we support the concept of a ‘sanctuary’ for immigrant communities at an abstract level, but refuse to engage with what sanctuary means in practice. At an abstract level, sanctuary takes the form of public declarations of support from college presidents and mayors, identifying their institutions and cities as champions of diversity. At this abstract level, the promotion of sanctuary as an empty signifier uplifts neoliberal values as guiding principles for action. Figureheads declaring support for sanctuary at this abstract level embodies neoliberal subjectivities of immigrant rights.

On a practical level, producing sanctuary means refusing to cooperate with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, as well as the local police who clear and blockade a street to facilitate an ICE raid of an undocumented family’s home. A rejection of ICE and police complicity stands in contrast to the neoliberal subjectivities produced through abstract conceptualizations of sanctuary. In order to further examine how neoliberal subjectivities emerged through the #SanctuaryCampus campaign, I turn to how digital immaterial labor was used to limit immigrants’ value to their capitalist productivity, and enable institutional leaders to recode the concept of sanctuary as a depoliticized tool for reinforcing the status quo.

#WithDACA: Neoliberal citizenship and the digital actants of a mass mobilization

Prior to the #SanctuaryCampus walkouts, immigrant rights activist Gaby Pacheco initiated a hashtag called #WithDACA in order to highlight the accomplishments of college students in the *Deferred Action and Childhood*

Arrivals program (DACA) (Latimer, 2016). DACA enables undocumented students who came to the U.S. prior to the age of 16 to stay in the U.S. without fear of deportation. In the wake of Trump's election, the fate of DACA grew unclear, inspiring anxiety and fear among many. The #WithDACA hashtag rapidly gained popularity, with various DACAdocumented students (also known as DREAMers) sharing personal narratives on Twitter. These narratives centered on showcasing the professionalization of DACAdocumented students, arguing that DACA made their career development possible. These Twitter users discussed their paths to becoming nurses, surgeons, and other professionals. One student named Maria Del Cielo argued for DACA's role in their upward class mobility tweeting, 'I go to school knowing that I'm working for something more in my future than just cleaning houses I'll never get to live in' (Latimer, 2016). These #WithDACA stories engage cultural ideals of an American Dream mythos, emphasizing the role that a 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' mentality can play in facilitating active popular support for the immigrant rights cause. To code DREAMers as hardworking individuals that overcame adversity and 'beat the odds' is to obfuscate the oppressive structures such individuals needed to navigate in order to achieve their successes.

Those unfamiliar with the contemporary immigrant experience in the U.S. can easily read these #WithDACA narratives as just another example of the American Dream, a myth of meritocracy, working. By focusing our attention on how some students beat the odds, we code certain immigrants as acceptable and good. Those immigrants that seemingly rise above systemic oppression are assimilated into the white Western imaginary as immigrants worthy of protections, value, and rights. Through using the narratives of professional success and upward class mobility as a litmus test for the importance of legislation like DACA, we continue to position neoliberal citizenship as a means of evaluating human life and dignity. Neoliberalism defines citizenship through the individual's capacity to contribute to capitalist modes of production and reinforce the logic of social stratification that characterizes a capitalist class system. The ideal neoliberal citizen is constituted through their demonstrable abilities to professionalize and their willingness to engage in competition for upward class mobility. As Amy

Brandzel argues, neoliberal citizenship ‘requires anti-intersectionality, that is, strategies that deny the mutuality and contingency of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation’ (Brandzel, 2016: 5). Investing in the notion that financial stability and socioeconomic opportunities are predicated on meritocracy denies how Americans’ experiences are shaped by structures of privilege and oppression, systematically offering benefits and advantages based upon race, gender, class, sexual orientation, citizenship status, and so forth.

While the #WithDACA hashtag contributed to ramping up the national conversation around immigrant-led resistance to Trump’s xenophobia, the narratives aggregated by the hashtag act to produce neoliberal subjectivities by reinforcing ideals born of systemic oppression. The #WithDACA hashtag increased dialogues that binded the digital actants of this networked mass mobilization, further cultivating the effective communication integral to facilitating active popular support. The hashtag grew viral in the weeks prior to the walkout, pointing to the public’s growing interest in and support for escalating activist mobilizations seeking to defy Trump. Yet, while the #WithDACA hashtag increased the sharing necessary to the growth of the mass mobilization’s digital actant network, the hashtag simultaneously worked to reify the bootstraps myth central to neoliberal values of individualism and competition. Thus, we see how a mass mobilization’s development of a healthy and robust digital actant network can utilize social media users’ labor for the sake of generating active popular support, while also reinforcing neoliberal governance. Digital immaterial labor can provide our digital actant network the transformative possibilities of galvanizing the public and pushing them to action. Yet, this affordance of digital immaterial labor can come at the cost of producing neoliberal subjectivities centered on obfuscating systems of oppression that produce the very conditions this social movement seeks to transform.

Declaring a #SanctuaryCity

Expanded pushes for sanctuary declarations further demonstrated the potential for digital immaterial labor to promote neoliberal governance.

Since the November 16th walkouts, cities and colleges faced pressure by activists to declare themselves sanctuary cities. Digital petitions calling for colleges and universities to declare themselves sanctuaries varied in their demands, with some petitions asking for more symbolic declarations of sanctuary, and others seeking an explicit commitment to non-cooperation with state officials. The rapidity of disseminating these petitions with various demands facilitated confusion about the exact definition of sanctuary. Lena Graber, an attorney at the *Immigrant Legal Resource Center* in San Francisco, told NPR that there is no ‘clear definition for what a sanctuary city means, with different places taking different approaches’ (Kaste, 2016). However, immigrant rights activists firmly assert that a sanctuary city is committed to the material welfare of immigrant communities. Tania Unzueta of *Organized Communities Against Deportation* (OCAD) and Mijente, two immigrant rights organizations working in tandem with *Movimiento Cosecha*, stated:

Sanctuary in Chicago today means a commitment not just to symbolically defy Trump but to actually transform our city’s policies to stop targeting us for imprisonment, risk of removal and state violence at the hands of police and aggressive immigration agents. (Lazare, 2017)

While activists remain firmly grounded in defining sanctuary as explicit non-cooperation with police and ICE agents for the sake of prioritizing immigrants’ material well-being, city officials and college administrators exploited the contested definition to reinforce the status quo. Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel declared Chicago a sanctuary city claiming that Chicago has always been a sanctuary city, and is a ‘welcoming space’ for all. However, Emanuel’s policies and practices tell a different story, with sanctuary protections extending to only some members of the immigrant community. Among those who are not protected by Chicago’s sanctuary protections are those with non-violent criminal convictions or listed on Chicago’s ‘gang database’, a document one can land on for having a ‘suspicious’ tattoo or being an activist in the Chicago area (Lazare, 2017).

Emanuel, alongside other politicians taking purely symbolic stances on sanctuary, represents the neoliberal cooptation of language in mass mobilizations. There is a strength in leaving the definition of a term open-

ended; activists can adjust their digital petitions and lists of demands to accommodate the material concerns of immigrant communities in their particular locales. What material support for migrant farmworker communities in south Florida looks like differs from protecting the rights of Muslim Americans to assemble and practice their religion in Chicago. While there is an affordance to providing conceptual wiggle room for digital calls to action and petitions, those grey areas can be exploited to uphold existing policies and ideologies. For instance, Emanuel's symbolic declaration of Chicago being a long-standing sanctuary city engaged the concept of sanctuary at an abstract level. The declaration supplanted tangible, material action taken to practically support and protect immigrant communities, highlighting neoliberalism's capacity to frame concepts and phrases in ways that support neoliberal logic. Through Emanuel's declaration, sanctuary is framed as a 'welcoming space' devoid of practical and tangible commitments to non-cooperation with state officials on behalf of all immigrants. To frame the sanctuary as simply 'a welcoming space' without policies and practices to support this assertion is to empty the concept of political significance and reify existing power structures that oppress immigrant communities. Emanuel's declaration evidences neoliberalism's capacity to manipulate movement language and concepts for the sake of both avoiding transformative change and reinforcing the status quo.

Framing sanctuary as a depoliticized tool, emptied of its exigency and practical applications, may contribute to further building active popular support. If the public opts to get on board with supporting sanctuary because it is molded into something legible by the status quo, how can this neoliberal manipulation of sanctuary be resisted? Framing sanctuary in neoliberal, depoliticized terms is not static, and those terms can be potentially broken down and changed. Through activists like Unzueta placing further pressure on officials to back up their declarations of sanctuary with tangible support, this neoliberal manipulation of movement concepts can be pushed harder in the direction of adhering to demands that materially and practically realize sanctuary for all. By winning policy changes such as decriminalizing non-violent drug offenses and remedying disproportionate policing in neighborhoods of color, activists can move politicians like Emanuel towards

actualizing promises of sanctuary, and away from the familiar contours of neoliberalism.

Conclusion

Mass mobilizations gain direction and shape through their digital actant networks. From the logic of hashtags to the manipulation of movement language, neoliberal governance holds the potential to hinder a movement's forward momentum. Yet, recognizing what neoliberalism looks and behaves like within a social movement ecology holds the potential to function as an activist strategy. Interrogating how neoliberal subjectivities and discourse emerge through movements pinpoints complications of organizing under neoliberal constraints. As the digital actant network is central to the growth of mass mobilizations, and the heterogeneous social movement ecology network as whole, understanding how neoliberalism seeks to anticipate and control movements through the cultivation of neoliberal subjectivities can enable activists to remain two steps ahead.

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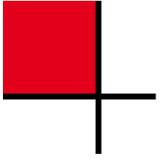
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Doing qualitative research in times of alternative facts

Anna Alexandersson

review of

Ciesielska, M. and D. Jemielniak (Eds.) (2017) *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies – volume I: Theories and new approaches*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Kindle edition, pp. 219, £82.16, ISBN: 9783319652160).

Ciesielska, M. and D. Jemielniak (Eds.) (2018) *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies – volume II: Methods and possibilities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Kindle edition, pp. 264, £87.40, ISBN: 9783319654416).

For a researcher, methodology is always a concern, but in times of alternative facts, post-truth and increased polarization, questions about how knowledge is produced has come to the forefront of my daily practice as researcher and teacher. Discussing methodology with students, in particular interpretations and truth, has in my experience changed character in the light of alternative facts and science being dismissed as a political commentary. The two volumes on qualitative approaches and methods edited by Malgorzata Ciesielska and Dariusz Jemielniak target both established researchers and PhD-students in organization studies and promise new takes on traditional methods, as well as, cutting-edge approaches, in contributions from active scholars doing qualitative research. So, what can these contributors add to the

current conditions of research, and how it affects our approaches and methods?

The first volume covers established theories on research paradigms, grounded theory, action research, ethnography and reflexivity, as well as newer conceptual frameworks such as the sociomateriality of storytelling and visual anthropology. In addition, a number of contributions discuss ethical aspects of the research processes from the perspective of emotions, accessibility and a changing research landscape. The second volume offers an overview of traditional methods such as case studies, interviews, observations, focus groups and discourse analysis. The volume is concluded by two chapters on how to design a qualitative research project and some dos and don'ts of the craft.

Most of the contributions in the two volumes, while giving comprehensive and insightful overviews of the methods, do not explicitly discuss those methods in relation to the current research landscape. However, some of them do and contextualize the methods in what they perceive as a new physical, virtual and interactive reality. A reoccurring theme in the two volumes is how modern means of communication and new digital technologies have changed our daily lives and research challenging our traditional methods and approaches. Slawomir Magala, for example, describes our daily life as characterized by an 'increasingly complex and unpredictable flow of interactions and communications' [52] accelerated by the mobile multi-media connectivity with an increasing visual competition for our attention. So, how should we deal with an increasingly complex social world and unpredictable flows of interaction and communication from a methodological point of view? Mustafa Özbilgin and Joana Vassilopoulou in their chapter on relational methods argue that we should not reduce the complexity of social relations and rather embrace the relational thinking in organization research and innovate methodologies 'that can trace, assess, examine and analyze the reality of relationality in social settings' [153]. They warn us of that this type of investigation focusing on the complexity could be marginalized in times of reductionism and the current publication regime.

This new social world transformed by new means of communication challenges in particular one of the most classic methodologies in qualitative research, ethnography, and its accompanying fieldwork technique, participant observation. In her chapter on shadowing, Barbara Czarniawska discusses the difficulties of performing the type of participant fieldwork advocated in traditional ethnography when investigating phenomena in contemporary societies. She argues that we are faced with the challenge of studying physical and virtual interaction taking place in different places at the same time and being largely invisible. She suggests shadowing as a more appropriate fieldwork technique than traditional participant observation to capture the life and work of people in contemporary societies characterized by larger mobility and modern means of communication. Malgorzata Ciesielska, Katarzyna W. Boström and Magnus Öhlander relate the traditional method of observation to this new reality being both real and virtual, and discuss how this complicates the definition of the field and requires methodological innovations such as multilocal, or translocal fieldwork. The issue of observing a phenomena dispersed in time and space requires a new approach to ethnography and has spawned a number of variations such as nethnography and virtual ethnographies observing interaction and communication in online forums, and subsequently, writing about these cybercultures using the classic toolbox from cultural anthropology, such as archival studies, treating the material from the online interaction as any other text.

Slawomir Magala argues that adding more visual anthropology and visual research methods to our research practice would increase our understanding of these flows and improve our sense-making of the images competing for our attention. Visual anthropology is according to Magala at the margin of legitimate academic research and challenges us because we are trained to work with the written word. However, the traditional methods of visual anthropology are also challenged by new technologies of visual communications such as blogs and Facebook accounts and need to be supplemented by narrative methodologies because we need to move away from the idea of photography as documentary and analyze the symbolic and political message of the images. Following the same reasoning, David Boje

and Nazanin Tourani address the materiality of storytelling in their chapter and argue that this is vital in our times when so many stories are told through digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. With a point of departure in a posthumanist ontology, they argue that we need methodologies to improve our understanding of the nonhuman element and the materiality of our social world, which they mean has been neglected in the social constructionist research era. The methodological innovations in visual research methods and Internet research creates new ethical dilemmas and reframes old discussions on ethics in the research process. This aspect of the new digital technologies is discussed by Sylwia Ciuk and Dominika Latusek in their chapter on ethics in qualitative research. The digitalization affects all parts of the research process from access negotiations, collection, presentation, dissemination, to storage in databases, creating new ethical dilemmas. They discuss in relation to visual methods and observation online the question about informed consent when observing and interacting in a virtual space that is neither private nor public. My interpretation of the message in the two volumes that I just read is that we might face a new social and material world, but we got a set of methods that we have worked with, developed and reflected upon over a very long time that can be adapted further.

When reading these contributions in the light of the discussions of polarized discourse, post-truth and alternative facts I am reminded of that the community of researchers doing qualitative research is either very well prepared for these discussions, or the least suited to engage in these discussions. We have a long tradition of working within different paradigms as outlined in the first chapter of the first volume, but also of critically reflecting on our craft and on the idea of truth. So, are we prepared to engage in a discussion of 'alternative facts' and 'post-truth' based on the theories and methods we have today? The fact that these volumes are introduced with a discussion of research paradigms, and the role of philosophy in our lives, and concluded by a discussion on how the design of a qualitative research project and the choice of methods can be so different because of our assumptions is perhaps telling of our craft showing how polarized we are. Our solution within our own research community has so far been at best to acknowledge that we

have different basic assumptions about the world and how to gain knowledge about it, which are incommensurable. However, our choice of research paradigm sometimes has become a morale choice intimately linked to our identity as researchers resulting in not so flattering culture wars between scientists from different paradigms that Beata Glinka and Przemysław Hensel remind us of in the second volume. The differences in our basic assumptions and methodologies make the research results within one paradigm invalid, 'fake news', from another paradigm's perspective.

In view of polarized discourses, I perceive the message from these two volumes as 'know thy paradigm' and use appropriate methods in a reflexive and consistent way. The aim of the editors is to encourage us to be reflective practitioners and the focus is on considering our own craft in terms of methods, which is valuable and necessary, but I would argue that books on methodology also would benefit from including a discussion on how to engage in a larger discussion about research in the society and to reflect on our craft as not only a research practice, but also a societal practice in a post-truth society. A practice involving how to handle the situation when our science is incommensurable with the basic assumptions, emotions and social norms of many people outside of our research community. In the face of changing social worlds, cultural realities, and research landscapes to be a reflective practitioner also involves understanding that more scientific facts will not necessarily convert people. This insight that social norms controls how scientific results are understood and received has been highlighted before in relation to sustainability by Klintman (2013), but should also be discussed as a vital aspect of doing qualitative research in times of alternative facts.

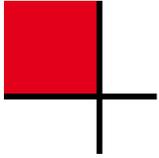
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Time to fix our teaching materials?

Andrea Bernardi

review of

Cummings, S., T. Bridgman, J. Hassard and J. Rowlinson (2017) *A new history of management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (PB, pp 380, £28, ISBN 9781316481202)

Why this book?

Why do we need a new history of management, or better, *new histories* as the authors explicitly argue in the preface? According to the authors of this book, it is due to the surprising fact that handbooks of management have been passing on inaccuracies for decades. It is a pleasure to read the book as, despite the multiple authorship and the myriad topics investigated, there is a continuity and a common style. A common feature is the historical sensitivity of the authors. This book is an important contribution to critical management studies (e.g. Alvesson et al., 2009) because it reflects on the dynamics that have shaped the nature of management and organization.

The authors historically contextualize the development of management ideas. By doing so they correct some common inaccuracies and they enrich our knowledge of management theories, providing such detailed backgrounds that are usually omitted. Did Abraham Maslow actually ever draw a pyramid of needs? Did Kurt Lewin devote substantial work to the

development of a change-management theory? Are important features of the work of Adam Smith, Max Weber, or Frederick Winslow Taylor often omitted or misrepresented? What are the forgotten origins of the Harvard Business School case method? These are just some of the important questions asked and answered by the authors in the nine chapters that make up the monograph.

Over the past twenty years, organization scholars, economists, and sociologists have increasingly looked back at history as a source of inspiration, a source of data and methodological innovation (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Bucheli and Wadhvani, 2014; Mills et al., 2016). In organization studies, this turn was triggered by Gherardi and Strati (1988) who argued that organization theories were predominantly based on ‘time-free statements’. The contemporary interest in history among organization scholars can be seen in the recent special issues published by *Organization Studies* (2017) and *Academy of Management Review* (2016). This book is not the first in its genre but represents a very good addition to this scholarly field. I struggle to find limitations. Possibly, the concluding section [331-333] could be longer and could provide a better synthesis and integration of the chapters. I am not sure that the book could be used as a core text for teaching. It does not provide a complete and systematic history of management, but it would be an excellent additional reading to complement a more traditional text. Perfection would be to have a standard textbook of management and organization written with the same historical attention.

A call to enrich management and organization’s textbooks

The message from Cummings, Bridgman, Hassard, and Rowlinson is pertinent to all aspects of our profession (research, pedagogy, and organizational practice) for it is concerned with both teaching and research and describes handbooks and textbooks as primary artefacts that shape disciplines, their boundaries, and their nature. Textbooks are the connection between our profession as teachers and our profession as researchers. They play a role in defining both aspects of our academic life and our disciplines.

They are artefacts because they represent a shared knowledge and an agreed definition of the academic field. Being artefacts, they are socially constructed, and dominant ideologies play a role (Cooke, 1999), often hidden behind the scientific ambitions of the text. They contribute to define what is in and what is out (Cooke, 2003), what is orthodoxy and what is heterodoxy, what is agreed and what is contested. The bibliographical study of books and textbooks allows the authors of this book to trace back in time inaccuracies, oversights, biases, and emphases. The history of management that dominates today is made of 100 years of such little or big misrepresentations, some of which were deliberately added to shape the nature of the discipline in support of this or that managerial orthodoxy; for instance, uncritical support of leadership and managerial prerogative, strict division of labour, unitarist perspective on industrial relations, performance management, control, standardization of professional work and organizational inequality (Bernardi and Tridico, 2020).

In Chapter 1 the book provides empirical data to show how much management studies are based on contributions that are very much concentrated in space and time. This is to say that publications from the 20s, 30s, and 40s have played a major role in setting undisputed foundations, while contributions from the US, the UK, and certain other countries are disproportionately represented. What has happened in management and organization studies has no equal in other disciplines such as architecture, medicine, or philosophy. The debate that occurred in 2018 within EGOS about the handling of LAEMOS (the Latin American conference of organization studies) is a good representation of this tension.¹ Equally, beside this geographic concentration, there is a concentration in time. The authors claim that some management scholars have been over-representing and emphasizing the contribution of the classics from the beginning of the past century:

1 LAEMOS, the Latin American chapter of the most important scholarly association of organization studies (EGOS), accused the board of EGOS of Eurocentrism and of neocolonial attitude toward the Global South business and management academia.

Existing narratives about how we should organize are built upon, and reinforce, a concept of 'good management' derived from what is assumed to be a fundamental need to increase efficiency. But this assumption is based on a presentist, monocultural, and generally limited view of management's past. [81]

The awareness of this and other problems described in the book should inform our teaching and research work henceforth. I see potential theoretical implications of the book as well as implications for pedagogy and organizational practice.

Time's up for time-free statements in management and organization theories

In his famous essay, Jeffrey Pfeffer (1993) argued in favour of some form of mainstream in organization studies as a protection and institutionalization of the discipline in relation to other social sciences. The case he made, which he himself subsequently retracted, was not followed through by organization scholars. But a mild orthodoxy in organization studies could have appeared anyway in the form of handing down for decades established knowledge about founding fathers, experiments, and theories that were not subject to careful scrutiny. Research was at times conducted that took for granted simplified accounts of the classics that were rarely investigated directly, nor disputed before being embedded in research and teaching. As a young discipline, management avoided digging into its past in search of the accurate scientific foundations of the classics. It took some time to re-read the Human Relations movement with a critical eye (Wrege, 1976). It took even more time to look back at the statistics of the Hawthorne Experiments to find out that it was probably just a *Fable of Our Times* (Gale, 2004).

It took this book to discover many more inaccuracies and fallacies. Two authors of this book (Cummings and Bridgman) are currently working on the famous Milgram experiments, claiming that unlike what happened in psychology textbooks, histories of Organization Studies ignored the experiments in later editions because the results of the experiments implied a critical view of management, leadership, and division of work. Le Texier (2018) recently published a book on a similar experiment held in Stanford in

1971 by Philip Zimbardo. In this case it is a study about the inaccuracies of the account of the experiment itself, as in the case of the Hawthorne experiments. Simplification and lack of historical contextualization also led to weak theories and interpretations of reality. The oversight on the Milgram experiments, like the inaccuracies mentioned in the book, provide clues that efforts and deficiencies converged in the construction of a discipline bent towards managerial consensus. The discipline facilitated the diffusion of a shared, simplistic explanation of human motivation that ignored how unchallenged leadership and division of labour could run the risks of conformity and ‘banality of evil’ (Arendt, 1963).

Are Business Schools fit for purpose?

The book by Cummings, Bridgman, Hassard, and Rowlinson has implications for teaching and management practices too. It turns out that some of us have been teaching an inaccurate history of management, and that management education has been altered by an ideological manipulation of the boundaries and the identity of the discipline. This means that generations of students, many of whom are now managers and policy makers, have used non-contested, yet in reality controversial, knowledge to develop their ideas about organization, organizing, and the organized (Ortenblad, 2015).

We have ethical responsibilities to our students. While our research is constrained by formal ethical procedures and the scrutiny of peer review, this is not the case with teaching. And yet when teaching we often have an even greater impact. While our papers may not in the end be read by more than a few dozen people, hundreds if we are lucky, when teaching we reach hundreds of students every week.

If we accept Martin Parker’s provocative book (2018), it might be time to shut down business schools or at least reinvent and rename them, possibly rethinking their role in academic institutions. Not everybody would agree with that, but certainly many colleagues would accept that it could be time to fix and update our teaching materials. *A New History of Management* offers some good reasons why we should do so. The most striking case is the one of

the famous pyramid of needs, supposedly drawn by Abraham Maslow. In chapter 7 we learn that the pyramid, probably the most powerful symbol in management education, never appeared in Maslow's writings. Similarly, famous and present in most MBA classes is the so-called theory of change management developed by Kurt Lewin (Cummings et al., 2016). Do you remember 'Unfreeze, move, refreeze'? Who has not used this in class? I have used it, for sure, yet this book tells me that Lewin never devoted more than 160 words to the process of managing change.

The book presents the results of detailed historical research on the thought of Adam Smith (chapter 2), F.W. Taylor (chapter 3), and Max Weber (chapter 4), describing how some parts of their work were omitted while overemphasizing others. For instance, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is rarely mentioned in business schools. Smith's treatment in management is limited to efficiency, control, and division of labour, but there was much more, for instance his belief that skilful management and liberalism could bring equality and mutual enrichment, and his opposition to slavery and repression. Similarly, Taylor's interest in the natural environment is scarcely covered. Nor the fact that he did not even choose the title of his famous book; *Scientific Management* was the choice of his solicitor, Louis D. Brandeis, and Taylor originally tried to resist it. Incidentally, the book by Cummings and colleagues is dedicated to the late Charles Wrege (1974; 1978; 2000), who devoted his career to the critical study of Frederick W. Taylor and scientific management.

The book even finds space to topple the most famous pedagogical device of any MBA programme: the Harvard case study. The authors of the book discovered in The Harvard University Archives evidence that its origin and development is not so straightforward as conventional histories of the Harvard case make it out to be. In the 1920s and 1930s there was contestation rather than consensus and a continuity of ideas and practice. This was due to the social and economic crisis that led the faculty to conceive it as a tool for independent thinking and innovation, including in labour relations. But the idea that the cases could be used to discuss with students alternatives to traditional capitalism, whose dominance was so violently questioned during the Great Depression, did not last for long.

Surprisingly, that radical past of the Harvard case has been lost and earns not a mention, not even in the 100 year-anniversary publications of Harvard Business School. Lamentably, the case-study teaching method has lost its radically creative potential, becoming a conservative rather than innovative tool for teaching and learning. Of course, we also need plain, straightforward, uncontroversial cases to train students in their future profession. Most of them will have to engage with the relatively predictable tasks of standardized professions in finance, accounting, marketing, or HR. We cannot expect everybody to be willing and capable to be educated and prepared to challenge capitalism, financialization, and managerialism at work or in their life. Nevertheless, the excess of conformity and the lack of a critical mindset is a threat to everybody, also to those happy with the status quo, corporations included.

In chapter 6 we are again reminded of the importance of the study of the historical context. Here, the precedents of the Hawthorne Experiments are described. One of them is the tragedy that occurred during the fifth annual picnic of Hawthorne Works. That day, on 25th July 1915, employees and families boarded a boat on the Chicago river that then capsized, killing more American passengers than the Titanic (841), only two years after that famous shipwreck. That disaster eventually contributed to rethinking employment relations at the Hawthorne Works. A colossal tragedy, still omitted in management textbooks, which contributed to the climate that led to commissioning the Hawthorne Studies and later to a slightly more humane management style.

You know what? He never actually drew that pyramid

This book is now a companion in my classes. At the beginning of every module I draw a pyramid on the whiteboard, and I ask students what it is. There is always more than one student proudly ready to attribute it to Abraham Maslow. At that point I congratulate them, but then I cross out the pyramid on the whiteboard and I tell them: ‘You know what? Maslow never drew any pyramid of needs in his life. If you want to know more, you can read this book. Don’t take for granted what lecturers or textbooks say about

business, management, and organizational behaviour.² I warn them that, as students, they need to be critical in class. They might not read the book but perhaps they will remember me next time a colleague of mine, next door, shows them the famous pyramid that according to Cummings, Bridgman, Hassard, and Rowlinson was not drawn by Maslow although he did develop the idea of a hierarchy of needs. From page 253 onwards we learn the history of this invention and more broadly about the development of Maslow's Five Elements of Motivation. An early representation of the pyramid was published in a book by Keith Davis (1957), based on Maslow's contributions of 1954 and 1943. But it is another book that is responsible for the misinterpretations of Maslow that would become mainstays of many management textbooks to come. This is McGregor's *The Human side of Enterprise* (McGregor, 1960). The origin of the trivialization and misinterpretation of Maslow's work is as early as that.

Hyper-simplification and populism

Another trick I do with my students is to bring in to class a classical contribution that they might have heard in a lecture or seen quoted in a history of management, be this Smith's (1776) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Marx's (1867) *Das Kapital*, Barnard's (1938) *The Functions of the Executive*, or even Hofstede's (1980) *Culture's Consequences*. I carry the actual physical book with me in class to show that their contribution is much more complex and lengthier than what the bullet points on a PowerPoint slide, a reader, or even a set textbook suggests.

Students and academics share the experience of living in an age of populism (Rodrik, 2017; Inglehart and Norris, 2016), in which the rejection of expertise and uninformed political debates is rife (Clarke and Newman, 2017; Hensmans and van Bommel, 2020). Whether on trade policy, public deficit, healthcare, international relations, or economics, any member of the public is ready to

2 In the introduction, the authors of this book warn us that their research too cannot be taken for granted. In fact they chose as a title *A new history of management*, suggesting that this should not be considered the only nor the ultimate or the exact history.

share his/her views and criticize politicians and experts, invoking the democratic right to have an opinion on every technical matter regardless of his/her level of education and experience. Of course, this is legitimate, and agonistic populism might even play a positive role in liberal societies (Hensmans and van Bommel, 2019). Nevertheless, it can also be dangerous if it leads to hazardous individual decisions (as in the case of vaccinations and face masks) or collective decisions (as in the case of Brexit). If this is the case, it could be argued that it is exactly the trivialization of science and research that contributed to weakening the role of experts and expertise; it is thanks to that trivialization that many feel entitled to talk about monetary policy or science, disregarding the recommendations of experts (Knight and Tsoukas, 2019). If trivialization is a problem, we have got a lot of that in business and management education, and we should start taking countermeasures to correct the pitch of teaching and public engagement. We cannot prevent simplification, misinterpretations, and trivialization of scholarship in society, but we cannot allow its proliferation in the university.

Conclusions

For the reasons briefly sketched above, this book is a must-read for scholars and practitioners, tutors, and students. Academics will be able to reflect critically on the nature of business education and on conformism in teaching and research. Practitioners and students will be able to challenge what they have been taught and the textbooks they were given. Both students and scholars will be able to discuss alternative approaches for managing and organizing in the twenty-first century. As academics, we have educated generations of managers who now are running firms and institutions inspired by the words and the reading we selected for them. We often complain that good management does not prevail in our organizations (universities included). But after all, does the blame for this not lie partly at our door, since some of us have been educating contemporary managers and policymakers and have let management studies take the road that brought us to bullshit jobs (Graeber, 2018) and bullshit managers (Spicer, 2017)? As this book shows, inaccuracies in management textbooks have become structural components of teaching. Probably the inaccuracies, the trivialization, and the ideological selection of perspectives and approaches

contributed to reinforcing a dominant paradigm of management practices, a global paradigm, thanks to a high degree of standardization of business and management education across institutions and nations. As a result of this standardization, management styles and practices were adopted and enforced worldwide, regardless of the sector and the type of organizations (Ortenblad, 2015).

This paradigm might even be judged not fit for purpose, given the recurrent corporate scandals and failures that at times even escalate to macroeconomic crisis. The last great recession, of 2008, had an impact on the management programmes taught in business schools and in management textbooks and practice (Lansbury, 2009; Bratton and Gold, 2015; Lancione and Clegg, 2015). But one would have expected much more, and even the most prominent initiative like PRME³ has been judged as disappointing (Millar and Price, 2018). Probably a higher impact is visible in economics where there were some actual reflections and readjustments among academics and leaders of political and financial institutions (Lavoie, 2014; Elsner et al., 2014; Tae-Hee et al., 2017; Clift, 2018). In economics, students and scholars have widely debated whether dominant economic theories and research methods were sound and whether university economics programmes were fit for purpose (Gräbner, 2017). A good indication of this is the international movement of Rethinking Economics⁴, which actively involves both prominent scholars and graduate students. Governments and Central Banks have explicitly discussed how policies and institutions have not managed to prevent the financial crisis and its diffusion across the planet, and certain innovations were introduced. The impact on newly published monographs and textbooks of economics has been substantial. The debate in business and management was less prominent, pervasive, and organized. Surely the time has come, and this book can act as a spur, for management scholars to ask ourselves how we can scrutinize our teaching materials with more attention. This might eventually contribute to training better executives who one day might try to shape healthier workplaces and more sustainable organizations.

3 <https://www.unprme.org/>

4 <http://www.rethinkeconomics.org/>

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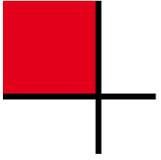
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Videogames as a sphere of resistance and play

Dilara Baysal

review of

Woodcock, J. (2019) *Marx at the arcade: Consoles, controllers, and class struggle*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books. (PB, pp. viii + 194, \$18, ISBN 978-1-60846-866-9)

Jamie Woodcock, well known for his influential ethnography *Working the phones: control and resistance in call centers* (2017), is a sociologist who focuses on work and writes mostly about digital labour and the gig economy. His latest book, *Marx at the arcade: consoles, controllers, and class struggle* is an extended version of a previous article (Woodcock, 2016). His new book contributes to literature that explores changing labour processes, worker subjectivities and the emerging resistance and organization of workers in the tech industry by providing a Marxist analysis of the gaming industry.

The book review presented here is organized into two parts and follows the structure of the book followed by a brief critical reflection at the end of each section. As the book's first part titled *Making video games* presents an

overview of the size and the dynamics of the videogaming industry as well as the labour process and the movements of resistance within it, I will begin by establishing a connection between Woodcock's analysis of the industry and his autonomist Marxist approach of worker's inquiry and class composition. The second part of the book, *Playing videogames*, explores videogames as cultural artifacts of contemporary capitalism. Here, my review focuses on Woodcock's investigation of games as a vehicle of critique and resistance.

Videogame industry, labour process, organizing

In the first part of the book Woodcock uses class composition theory to sketch the labour process as well as the social and political composition of videogame workers. He refers to *Notes from Below*, a socialist online publication for which he is one of the editors, to define class composition as:

A material relation with three parts: the first is the organization of labour-power into a working class (technical composition); the second is the organization of the working class into a class society (social composition); the third is the self-organization of the working class into a force for class struggle (political composition). [69]

According to Woodcock, class composition traditionally provides the necessary framework to understand and apply worker's inquiry, a method rooted in Marx's call for investigating the working conditions at the time and began circulating in 1880. According to this method, he proposes a set of questions to survey the workers' points of view. In his call for applying the inquiry, Marx lists a hundred questions ranging from how many people work in their workplaces to how widely the state is involved in the workplace. Woodcock and other proponents of the inquiry as a method believe that Marx wanted to complement his analysis of capital with the information gathered from workers. Woodcock argues that 'Marx wrote *Capital* to put a weapon in the workers' hand yet, it is a book about capital not about workers' [67]. Worker's inquiry is about filling this gap and getting in touch with workers 'The goal of worker's inquiry is not to only collect data but to contact with workers' [67]. However, *Marx at the arcade* does not have a component of the worker's inquiry. Instead, it provides a glimpse into the labour process, social composition and political decomposition of the

videogame industry. These themes are addressed in the chapters titled 'Technical and Social composition' by means of surveys conducted in the industry and by gathering demographic data, as well as previously conducted interviews with workers to implement his understanding of the class composition approach.

It is important to note that Woodcock's analysis of the labour process is based on the cognitive capitalism paradigm and puts an immense emphasis on the knowledge of workers as the determinant in the changing terrain of class struggle under contemporary capitalism. The thesis of cognitive capitalism conceptualizes the conflict between labour and capital in terms of where the ownership of knowledge is situated (Vercellone, 2007). Carlo Vercellone one of the pioneering thinkers who theorizes this form of capitalism, draws similarities between pre-industrial and cognitive capitalisms by arguing that in both modes of capitalism, knowledge is incorporated in living labour as opposed to industrial capitalism where the knowledge is incorporated in the fixed capital (machinery). Consequently, the workers under cognitive capitalism possess the power and autonomy that come from this knowledge. In response, capital has new management techniques and creative labour processes to capture this knowledge and turn it into profit. Within this paradigm, Woodcock talks in length about the widespread practices in the videogame industry as competing gaming companies battle for knowledge. NDAs (nondisclosure agreements) that prohibit workers to talk about any project they work on is an important example for demonstrating the growing importance of knowledge in the videogame industry. The level of secrecy and harsh legal contracts that the videogame workers have to sign have multiple consequences for organizing workers. It also has a psychological effect on workers due to the level of isolation it imposes [64]. Woodcock states that:

The use of the NDAs therefore creates serious problems for workers themselves, because in addition to making it difficult for outsiders to understand the work of the industry, it isolates workers from each other. It makes the act of complaining around the water cooler, an integral part of so many jobs, significantly harder. [65-66]

However, according to Woodcock, the strict regulations and agreements by capital to capture the knowledge of workers demonstrates its vulnerability to the workers' power and control over the production process and its potential for becoming a form of resistance by labour.

We should remember that information leaked by developers can now “reach millions of people within minutes”. The release of such sensitive information – or even the threat of doing so – represents a very powerful weapon that video game workers possess. [66]

Videogames as a profitable industry emerged from the hacker culture where players created games for their enjoyment by modifying games developed by the U.S military establishment. The hacker ethos connotes ‘leisure, hedonism, and irresponsibility against clock punching, discipline, and productivity’ [76]. Therefore, hierarchical or controlling work cultures in the industry is often met with resistance from the workers. According to Woodcock, the tension between control and autonomy is at the heart of the labour process. Woodcock argues that the unique situation in which videogame workers negotiate this tension coupled with the issues of crunch time and representation intensified the conflicts, which resulted in widespread organizing and resistance among the workers. Firstly, crunch time (overtime work closer to the completion of a project) as a common practice in the industry requires that workers work up 70 hours per week to complete a project without overtime pay or vacation compensation. Secondly, representation of women and people from different racialized populations and individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds are also another issue in the industry as the majority of the workers are young white males.

Departing from these issues, which he identifies as problematic within the industry, Woodcock's chapter on political recomposition titled *Organizing in the videogames industry* is an exciting and important contribution. He states that when he started writing the book, there was not much momentum in organizing workers in the industry. However, as he started writing the book, the workers in the Bay Area and Seattle started to organize. There are multiple organizing initiatives that Woodcock analyzes in this chapter, including the Tech Workers Coalition (TWC) and Le Syndicat des

Travailleurs et Travailleuses de Jeu Vidéo (STJV) in France. He is also involved in Game Workers Unite as an organizer. According to one TWC member, the 2016 election in the United States set in motion multiple forms of political unrest which, in turn, lead to organizing labour ‘among workers at all levels in the tech industry, from food service workers to programmers and engineers’ [91]. In the process of organizing, members of the TWC observed an immense solidarity building up in the struggle. Woodcock quotes an organizer, Jason Prado, from the TWC:

Service workers on my company’s campuses have organized and won union contracts, and workers further up the hierarchy have actively supported these efforts... service workers and professional union organizers... are happy to leverage support from high-prestige tech employees, and tech employees gain firsthand experience working on an organizing campaign. [92]

Woodcock’s previous experience conducting an inquiry into the lives of workers and writing an ethnography about call center workers published in 2016 came in handy once the movement of the videogame workers started to take place in the United Kingdom. He actively participates and continues to provide insights on the growing worker movement in the gaming industry.

Thus, in the first half of *Marx at the arcade*, Woodcock provides a comprehensive analysis of the videogame industry and the resistance forming within it. It successfully touches upon critical topics such as the continuity between the military establishment and the development of video games, as well as the racial and gender bias towards the workers in the industry, however, it hardly offers any new theoretical or empirical insight. Apart from his involvement with the Game Workers Unite, Woodcock relies heavily on simple demographic data and the well-known blog post titled ‘EA: The human story’ by ea_spouse, which details, as the title suggests, their partner’s working conditions at Electronic Arts (overtime up to 80-90 hours a week) and the toll it is taking on both of them (ea-spouse, 2014). Even though the EA spouse’s post and its impact on the movement of the game workers is crucial, the post was published in 2004 and used in multiple studies since then. Therefore, the first half of the book falls short of giving a closer and more contemporary look at what making video games look like despite what the sub-section’s title (*Making videogames*) suggests.

Woodcock's background in ethnographic work and organizing is a valuable asset for the study of the video game industry and the resistance of workers. The book does not utilize this potential to the fullest: it provides only a glimpse of it through his observations and reflections on previously published work in the field. For example, Woodcock often turns to Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter's (2009) famous book *Games of empire: global capitalism and video games* and borrows multiple points of departures from the authors. *Games of Empire*, published almost a decade ago, provides an excellent autonomist Marxist analysis by implementing theories of immaterial labour, multitude, and exodus to investigate the gaming industry and the possibilities and potential of resistance within it. Hence, if you have read *Games of empire*, some parts of Woodcock's book seem repetitive.

Videogames as cultural artifacts and spheres of resistance

In the second part of the book titled *Playing videogames*, Woodcock provides short chapters on the experience of playing different kinds of video games such as first-person shooter games, roleplaying games, political games and online games that revolve around a community of players. As a videogame player himself, he dives deeper into the experience of playing these videogames in this part of the book. His objective here is to provide a Marxist cultural critique of the current videogames and situate them in the realm of popular culture.

Certain characteristics of videogames differentiate them from other cultural commodities. For example, they are highly addictive due to the degree of power and authority a player can have while playing. Thanks to the complex game design and innovative technologies, videogames provide the player a virtual platform for participating in, for example, changing the course of history in games such as *Civilization*, or building cities and playing god in games such as *SimCity*. The level of authority given to a single player and the technological tools make the user experience profoundly immersive, thus making these games highly addictive. This also explains the exponential growth of the industry.

In addition to giving us a glimpse into the most popular videogames, Woodcock draws our attention to the potential implications of the connection between the gaming industry and the military establishment and its personnel. In this context, Woodcock refers to the concept of *militainment* developed by Roger Stahl (2010) that explains the phenomena of state violence being ‘translated into an object of pleasurable consumption’ [55]. An advertising deal between gun manufacturers and game developers to normalize using guns and to familiarize young audiences with different types of guns as future buyers is a startling example of the concept of ‘militainment’ [57].

The chapter on political videogames is also both informative and entertaining. Aligned with his general argument of popular culture as another terrain for class struggle, Woodcock presents interesting examples of political board games and videogames. One example is *Class struggle*, a board game developed by Bertell Ollman in the early 1970s as an alternative to *Monopoly*. At its core, the game speaks to the conflict between capital and labour with phrases such as “‘Socialism (The Workers Win!)” and Barbarism (The Capitalists Win!)” scrawled on the middle of the board’ [139]. More contemporary games created by Paolo Pedercini and published on the website Molleindustria include *Phone story*, which reveals the production process of smart phones, *Built better mousetraps*, a critique of management strategies, and *Every day the same dream*, a portrayal of the daily life of an office worker. Molleindustria’s mission is ‘to reappropriate video games as a popular form of mass communication’ and ‘investigate the persuasive potentials of the medium by subverting mainstream video gaming cliché’ [141]. In that sense, Woodcock’s chapter on political games successfully draws our attention to the potential of videogames as a sphere in which play and resistance can converge and grow.

The second part, *Playing videogames* starts with a short theory chapter that reiterates the significance of understanding the relations of production to grasp the cultural artifacts under capitalism. However, this short chapter that includes lengthy quotes from Marx and Engels to offer a Marxist discussion of ideology and culture does not sufficiently set the rest of the

analysis up for a well-rounded cultural critique of the video games. Woodcock writes:

The economic base of society is constituted by relations and forces of production. Stemming from these, but also going beyond, are the superstructural elements that Marx discusses. These are composed of “definite forms of social consciousness (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic and so on),” which together form “ideology”, as discussed above. Ideology should receive our focus because its function is “to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society; in the last analysis, the dominant ideas of society are the ideas of its ruling class.” The challenge here is that ideology is not a straightforward or direct command to obey — it is far more complex, subtle, obscured, and even contradictory phenomenon than that. [109]

This quote is as far as Woodcock goes to provide a theoretical framework. While he dedicates four chapters to describe the different kinds of games as summarized above, a more in-depth critique and analysis of those games does not take place. In that sense, the second part of the book accomplishes to draw a map of what kind of videogames are in the market and worthy of a cultural critique and it also points the readers and scholars in the field to study videogames in ‘their complexity’ [159].

Conclusion

In conclusion, as a videogame player, a Marxist scholar and an activist, Jamie Woodcock makes a convincing case for why we need to pay more attention to the videogames as cultural artifacts of contemporary capitalism. The lessons and insights presented by Woodcock are valuable to understand the changing nature of labour process and the potential and the obstacles for resistance. His involvement in Game Workers Unite and his observations on workers’ changed perception of how solidarity can be built provides a hopeful and dynamic look into organizing today [102]. While he reveals once again how capital can access and transform every human feeling for profit by documenting his own experience of gaming, it leaves the readers with more questions than answers.

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