



Treasonous Minds: Capital & Universities, the Ideology of the Intellectual and the Desire for Mutiny

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The tenor and the speed of capital are such that often all one wants to do is stand still in silence. The continual re/deterritorialisation of neo-liberalism, now neo-conservatism, as part of an endless process of accumulation and counter-revolution leaves us on the back foot. As the Left – that is the *left-wing of capitalism* – undergoes meltdown after meltdown there appears to be little room from which to mount and sustain critique. The fear of the trajectory of global capitalism – the fear of the future – can lead to a defense of what there is today. All this is seen on the campuses of universities in Australia; a new round of restructuring is planned, restructuring based on the erosion of the last vestiges of social democracy and the intensification of neo-liberal aspects.¹ The most vocal voices of opposition such as the National Tertiary Education Union positions their arguments on a firmly liberal terrain. The defense is based on an ideology of liberal meritocracy and various inherited notions of the university being a place of excellence, unsullied by the direct machinations of government or money, yet contributing to the general health of civil society and thus both. These arguments are palatable in the official spaces that manufacture public opinion. They will be debated in editorials and on the floor of parliament, a polite campaign of public rallies is in the works – in this sense they reaffirm the illusions of parliamentary democracy; they will have little to no effect on the actual administration of these applications. But under this is a sense of frustration, as the alienation experienced by all who ‘work’ in universities (a place where ‘work’ takes on new and strange meanings) is reaching new levels. Many university staff members, like much of the global multitude, face a work environment where personal autonomy is shrinking and the conditions are increasingly precarious (some staff remain protected by privileges that are both feudal and postmodern); that is to say they are experiencing the ‘new enclosures’ – a work environment that, clothed in an ideology of autonomy, flexibility and choice, is characterized by the intensification of work-discipline through increased insecurity, monetarization and speed up.² And

1 For updates of both government legislation and the official union response see <http://www.nteu.org.au/home>

2 Midnight Notes Collective (1992) ‘The New Enclosures,’ *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 317-333.

staff are experiencing this in a context where the traditional methods of insubordination, the Left in general and social democracy specifically, have shown themselves to be not only exhausted and deteriorating, but part of the world we must leave – chains on thought and action.

In short, the only way out for those who work at universities is the only way out for the entire multitude. To work out ways of constructing alliances of defiance and affinity with each other, so revolt can be realized, the world ‘that is’ swept away and new forms of liberated existence (anarchy) created in this revolt. Yet for those university staff that are knowledge workers – academics – this will involve a profound rethink. The danger is that since it is partly through the university that the social machine thinks academics who do not transgress their position through revolt (and thus actually do not revolt), can work to recuperate radical praxis back onto acceptable social terrain. The rethink that is necessary is one that rejects the classical view of the role of the intellectual, engages with how thought is put to work, and dreams of the possibilities of conspiracy, mutiny and treason.

The Intellectual

Most commonly the academic is seen as some kind of continuation of the ‘Intellectual’. This perspective is an ideological mystification inherited from the heyday of the Left – the periods of both the classic workers’ movement of the 19th century and the struggles of the mass worker in the lead up to the Second World War. It is a mystification that invokes a special role for the intellectual – one that simultaneously elevates the intellectual yet demands their degradation in front of the ‘genuine agents’ of revolution: the proletariat proper, or their official representatives. This is seen clearly in both Lenin’s and Malatesta’s work; signifying that despite their serious political differences both Marxist-Leninism and classical anarchism often shared a similar political cosmology.³

For Lenin the intelligentsia plays a special and specific role in the process of revolutionary struggle. The working class for Lenin cannot through its own activity generate a radical critical theory – it can “develop only trade union consciousness”.⁴ The actual process of class struggle would only develop a politics that was firmly within the boundaries of capitalist society. The antagonism of the factory floor would generate a politics that only sought the amelioration of direct injustices through a process of trade unionism and campaigns for government reforms. Whilst this might often take insurrectionary and violent forms, for Lenin it could never lead to a praxis that would

3 It might seem strange that this paper starts by referencing Lenin and Malatesta – as if we have never moved past the classical revolutionary theorists. For those unfamiliar with the terrain of radical thought in Australia it could be useful to note that despite the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist project organizationally as a paradigm of revolution it remains hegemonic. Equally Anarchism – as ideology – often plays the role of loyal opposition to Marxist-Leninism rather than contribute to the generation of new practices and approaches. The hope here is that by attempting to negate this paradigm approaches will become possible and obvious.

4 Lenin, V. I. (1973) *What is to be Done*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 37.

transcend capitalist society. Rather a socialist ideology would have to be developed outside of the life of the proletariat – that is in the realm of the intelligentsia. To quote: “[t]he theory of Socialism, however grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals”.⁵ This development of theory we are told takes place “independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement” – its origins instead being in the progressive development of Enlightenment thought.⁶ Knowledge of capitalism then is seen as separate from the experience of capitalism. Indeed, it is those that do not experience the daily agonies and tussles of the struggle over the wage that are seen as those who can know its truth, whilst those that experience it cannot. Lenin does think that individual workers can take part in this process. Yet to do so they do not take part *as workers* but rather as ‘socialist theoreticians’ – and they can do this by their immersion in the “knowledge of their age”, that is the practices of culture, politics and science that are separate from the image of working class experience.⁷ What is so stark here are the deeply authoritarian reiterations of the division of mind and body – the split between the sensuous and the intellectual. A split that does not arise naturally; as Federici has shown part of the process of the origin of capitalism was the creation and hierarchization of the mind / body split – a process that was brought into being through violence and terror.⁸ Within this discourse the sensuous is denied an ability to understand, in fact sensual experience is actually misleading; it produces untruths. It is only the transcendent and transcending intellect that can produce insight.

Yet Lenin’s thinking also carries a paradoxical but typical inversion of virtue when it comes to the mind/body split that he projects into the split between intellectual and worker. The very distance from the productive processes of capitalism that is meant to allow for the intellectuals ability for insight – their inhabitation in a world of knowledge – also makes them untrustworthy. There is a small comment near the end of *State & Revolution* that is particularly telling. When describing how in communism those who brake from “national accounting and control” will be met by “swift and severe punishment”, he states: “for the armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals, and they will scarcely allow anyone to trifle with them.”⁹ The rationalization of violence and repression here, that it is practical – thus ‘rational’ – is startling and a telling insight into what the Bolshevik revolution became; the subjection of the human to supreme rationalization and industrialization, subjection to the practical. The focus here is that the tasks that Lenin sees as being necessary to the revolutionary process are alien to the intellectual, whose sentiment is something distanced from Lenin’s depiction of the proletarian condition. For Lenin, the task of revolution is that of the violent destruction of the old state and the construction of a new proletarian apparatus: “specific tasks in relation to violence, authority, power, the

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 48 (footnote)

8 Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and The Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.

9 Lenin, V.I. (1973) *State & Revolution: How To Change the Social Order*. Melbourne: International Book Shop, 78.

state”.¹⁰ These tasks require a kind of resolve, a steeling, that is of the body, of labor. The intellectual, then, in this schema is objectively *un*-revolutionary. For Lenin, the way out is the fusing of mind and body back together through the medium of the party and then the worker’s state. It is the revolutionary party here that will unite the violent power of proletarian uprising with socialist consciousness. It is the party that “*brings closer and merges into a single whole* the elemental destructive force of the crowd and the conscious destructive force of the organization of revolutionaries”.¹¹ The implication also is that the intellectual is a revolutionary only by their existence in the party – and that party is a revolutionary party by the presence of the correct program, and thus the right ‘thoughts’.

Whilst different in many ways Malatesta subscribes to a generally similar paradigm. In common with anarchist thinking he is different from Lenin in his rejection of uncritical scientism and an opposition to authoritarianism. There is different *tone* that runs through his work – less of a predilection to mechanical certainties. Yet the same view towards the division between intellectuals and workers remains. Interestingly, like Lenin, Malatesta worries that without the injection of revolutionary ideas from outside, the struggle of the proletariat will not go beyond capitalism but will only seek reforms within it. He writes: “it would be a great and fatal illusion to believe, as many do, that the workers’ movement can and must on its own, by its very nature lead to such a revolution.” Thus, “the impelling need for strictly anarchist organizations which struggle both inside and outside the trade unions for the achievement of anarchism and which seek to sterilize all the germs of degeneration and reaction.”¹² Differing from Lenin it is less clear if these ideas embodied in the organization have an ontology that arises outside of the proletarian experience.

Specifically on the issue of intellectuals Malatesta writes of the importance of “forces and values which cannot be acquired without an intellectual background”. The lack of these ideas means that an actual uprising could end up being “an explosion of anger without significance and without a future.”¹³ But the revolutionary movement must be wary for the “intellectuals are, by reason of their education, their family background, their class prejudices, tied to the Establishment, and tend to want the subjection of the mass of people to their will”. This is juxtaposed to the ‘mass of workers’ whose class position means that they are “the principle force behind the revolution and the guarantee that it will not resolve itself into a simple change of masters.”¹⁴

Malatesta also voices a worry that not only is the class position of intellectuals un-revolutionary but that it is counter-revolutionary. He suggests the failure of the Russian Revolution to produce liberation could lie with the dominance of intellectuals in the

10 *Ibid.*, 49

11 Lenin, V.I. (1973), *op cit.*, 214

12 Malatesta, E. (1993) *Malatesta: Life & Idea*. London: Freedom Press, 133.

13 *Ibid.*, 138

14 *Ibid.*

leadership who simply used the mass as an ‘instrument’ to replace the old masters with themselves.¹⁵

The only way out for the intellectual then is to “fuse with the working class”. But this process of fusing is a process of supplication, one in which the intellectual must pay the ‘debt’ they owe the working masses. This is a crucial part of this paradigm. It is apparent that solidarity – the formation of alliances of antagonism – is a central part of revolutionary struggle. However in this formulation, solidarity is only possible by a dual movement of negating the position of the academic and affirming of the position of the worker. It is an essentially authoritarian formulation that has much to do with the workerist ideology of the Left – the validation of the condition of proletarianisation as the condition of virtue that will persist even after the overthrow of capital. Faced with the brutalities of capitalism, the idea of the “[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers” sounds deeply libertarian.¹⁶ Yet here the human is still framed within the terms of capital/work/commodity – producing and consuming. Thus this workerism in fact only posits the change of the management of capitalist society *not* its suppression/transgression. It is understandable where this ideology emerges from. It arises with a specific class composition – that of the *professional worker*. As Negri puts it, in this period the composition of struggle was one that “involved primarily transforming the specific power of valorization of the worker’s own labor and productive cooperation into a weapon to be used in a project of *reappropriation*, a project in which the singular figure of the worker’s own productive power would be exalted”.¹⁷ What ever the heroism and tragedy of this period it has past. Yet the figure of the intellectual haunts us – it is a chain around the neck of the living.

The position of the academic is still seen on the one hand as being a moment of privileged insight, yet on the other illegitimate and lacking real power (or even a sense of the Real). It is a strange neurosis of power frustrated that manifests into an exceptional elitism mixed with guilt and paranoia. As the 20th century progressed and the insurgent power of the industrial proletariat and the socialist project seemed increasingly reconciled and integrated into the functions of industrial civilization, some chose to cling to the figure of the intellectual – or at least to a conception of the purity of thought. Examples of this can be found amongst the Frankfurt School; whilst so much of their collective efforts work to show how the rationalization of capitalism has spread throughout and subordinate the social body, they still hold on to the possibility of thinking being exterior from the relationships of power. But at the same time they express the powerlessness of this thought that lacks a body. Horkheimer writes: “philosophy would be mankind’s memory and conscience, and thereby help to keep the course of humanity from resembling the meaningless round of the asylum inmates’ recreation hour”. Yet he also admits that philosophy, as it is cannot “bring it about that either the barbarizing tendency or the humanistic outlook should prevail”.¹⁸ Marcuse

15 *Ibid.*, 139

16 *Ibid.*, 184

17 Hardt, M. and T. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 40.9

18 Horkheimer, M. (2004) *Eclipse of Reason*. London: Continuum, 126.

tries to reconcile this by returning to the paradigm that was common to Lenin and Malatesta – but with one exception. Instead of the proletariat here it is the “outcasts and outsiders”. Marcuse hopes for the meeting of “the most advanced consciousness of humanity, and its most exploited force”.¹⁹ Marcuse’s language betrays again the rift of mind/body – spirit /matter: the intellectual is *consciousness* whilst the exploited are *force*.

The unhappy figure of the intellectual is a sickness and must be left behind. The mind / body dichotomy was always an illusion despite its importance to capitalism and the effort exerted in attempts to make it appear concrete. The most manual of labor has always been a cerebral experience and thought has always been embodied and fleshy. Its appearance of separation has more to do with specific discourses and ideologies.

For a revolutionary project it is useless. The revolt against capital as *civilization* will involve the lucid and the ludic – and put into play ideas of humanity that cannot be constrained by any Enlightenment cosmology. But more than this, the idea that ‘thought’, the work of the intellectual, is somehow separate from the machinery of capital is false. Arguably it has always been false – but now more than ever the mind is being put to work and the specific intellectual replaced by mass intellectuality. Here pathways for the revolt of academics can be sensed.

Thinking about/as Work

A useful and fertile tool for this investigation is Marx’s idea of *real subsumption*. Simply put, Marx makes a distinction between formal and real subsumption. Marx argues that in its early period(s) capitalism does “not at first affect the actual mode of production” but rather imposes its control over what it has inherited.²⁰ It is only later with the “production of relative surplus-value the entire real form of production is altered and a *specifically capitalist form of production* comes into being”.²¹ Real subsumption involves at least two interrelated phenomenon. What goes on in the process of production increasingly involves the social, and the social increasingly becomes a moment in the general process of production. The clear distinctions between work and what is outside work begins to crumble under a general logic of capitalism – *even if they maintain an illusionary appearance of separation*. Read writes that in “real

19 Marcuse, H. (1968) *One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society*. London: Sphere Books, 200-201.

20 Marx, K. (1990) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*. London: Penguin Classics, 1010.

21 *Ibid.*, 1024. This raises a host of questions: When did this happen? And where? Marx writes as if this moment of real subsumption is emerging or has emerged as he writes. Yet capitalism has changed massively since then- and the development of capitalism is un-even. With confidence we can look at the modern metropolis and say that life is subsumed by the relations of capital – the commodity, wage-labour, (cyber)-industrialization etc – but what about in the peripheries, that is if they even still exist? Is there something beyond real subsumption – a total subsumption for instance? All these are questions that beg answers. Yet here we can still use the idea of real subsumption as a broad abstraction to help us understand the role of the academic in capitalism.

subsumption...every act of production incorporates knowledge, instruments, discoveries, and social relations that are not present in the limited space or time of the factory. The factory becomes a social factory”.²² Camatte describes this process as capital coming to constitute the “material community”.²³ On one hand the majority of human existence now takes place as commodified and alienated human activity, on the other the general social conditions become increasingly crucial to the process of work/commodification. It becomes almost impossible to find human interactions that are not stamped or formed by capitalist modes of production/exchange/consumption. If some spaces can be found that are not directly under capitalist logics they seem to be *generally* motivated by them. In this sense we can talk about the proletarianisation of humanity. This arises partly through increasing amounts of human activity being organized via alienating wage-labor, but also the tasks of social reproduction that sit outside that wage (house-work, study etc) are ‘work’ (activity commanded by capital that serves its regime of accumulation) in the period of real subsumption. Note – in a sense this is a process of homogenization, but it has not produced the homogenized proletariat beloved by classical Marxism.

Marx asserts that in the process of real subsumption there is the development of the “productive forces of *socialized labor*” coupled with “the use of *science* (the *general* product of social development) in the *immediate process of production*.”²⁴ Both these processes involve the emergence and development of the collective intellectual powers of the population and their application in the now society wide matrix of production. In the *Grundrisse* Marx writes that:

the development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it.²⁵

Both socialized labor and the productive apparatus (which now encompasses society) are increasingly characterized by the application of this ‘general intellect’. The old figure of the intellectual has no place in this. The realm of thought does not live outside capitalism but rather becomes a crucial component to it. The role of the academic has to be seen then in this light of the production and application of knowledge as a crucial ingredient in the general re/creation of the social relations of capital. Not only that, the figure of the intellectual as a member of a minority that holds some unique access to knowledge is replaced by the development of *mass intellectuality*.

It has been amongst the work of the ‘post-autonomia’ and their immanent critique of Marx’s idea of the general intellect that some useful attempts to apply it to

22 Read, J. (2003) *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 122.

23 Camatte, J. (1995) *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 39.

24 Marx, *op cit*.

25 Marx, K. (1993) *Grundrisse : Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* London: Penguin Classics, 706.

contemporary conditions have been generated.²⁶ Lazzarato argues that immaterial labor has risen in contemporary capitalism both from the increased application of communicative skills in the work process; and through activity not typically conceived of as ‘work’ creating the “‘cultural content’ of the commodity”.²⁷ The vast expansion of cybernation/info-tech, the mobilizing of nuanced identities in the production of commodity fetishism, the application of micro-management etc. all require mass intellectuality. This manifests in over-lapping ways; the need to display certain emotions in the work place, investing cultural understandings in what is being produced, relating to others in particular ways and so on. Also, for this to function a certain type of individual must be created that can function in this work place. To quote Lazzarato:

If production today is directly the production of a social relationship, the ‘raw materials’ of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the ‘ideological’ environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces. The production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the reproduction of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive, because the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator – and to construct it as ‘active’.²⁸

It is then in people – in the collective life of the population that works in the context of post-Fordism that the general intellect is located. This is a break from Marx. Whilst Marx located the general intellect in “fixed capital, with the ‘objective scientific capacity’ inherent in the system of machines”, Virno does not.²⁹ Rather, Virno sees the general intellect present itself as “living labor”.³⁰ The general intellect then involves all the cognitive –linguistic functions of the population put to work. He contests that even in the classic manufacturing industries, those bastions of work associated with the Fordist mass worker, this is the case. Lazzarato has previously argued that in large-scale industry production has already become geared to what goes on outside the factory – “sales and relationship with the consumer” – a process that requires the application of mass intellectuality in the entire circuit of conception and promotion.³¹ Virno complements this by arguing that within the process of production it is the communicative skills of the workers with each other that become crucial.³² The modern workplace involves the putting into motion of the entire ‘team’ (to use a key stone of the modern management lexicon). Hence the centrality of human relations to capitalism and more disturbing the defining of human relations by capital

(There are a number of criticisms to raise against all of this. Whilst some times ‘post-autonomia’ theorists of the general intellect make their observations site specific, there is a counter-veiling often-louder tendency to overemphasize the importance of the

26 For those unfamiliar with the various trajectories that came out of the Italian operismo and autonomia I recommend Dyer-Witheford (1999) *Cyber-Marx: cycles and circuits of struggle in high-technology capitalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

27 Lazzarato, M. (1996) ‘Immaterial Labour,’ in M. Hardt and P. Virno (eds.) Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 132.

28 *Ibid.*, 142.

29 Virno, P. (2004) *A Grammar of the Multitude*. New York: Semiotext(e), 106.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Lazzarato, M. *op cit.*, 140-141.

32 Virno, P. *op cit.*

general intellect. Virno is careful enough to locate his analysis in the work done in the “post-Fordist metropolis”.³³ Negri on the other hand makes the figure of mass intellectuality – called in turn the social worker and the cyborg – the hegemonic figure of struggle. An excellent critique of this can be found in George Caffentzis’ ‘The End of Work or The Renaissance of Slavery’. Caffentzis’ critique is that this entire line of thinking conforms to the old Marxist paradigm of emphasizing the activity of the most ‘productive’ workers, often resulting in blindness to the rebellions and self-activity of the vast majority of the world proletarianised population.³⁴ Indeed, these formulations do not fit with the actual patterns of revolt in which those who appear to be engaged the least in immaterial labor – indigenous peasants in Chiapas or the Miners of Bolivia – are also those that seem to be having the most success in destabilising the order of capital.)

This investigation leads us to an interesting vantage point to understand, sublimate, critique and/or negate the academic. It is quite simple now to see the university as a node (and probably not the most important) in the general chain of the application of immaterial labor, the creation of mass intellectuality and the development of the general intellect. Some academics’ work (especially those whose labor sees direct results in industrial development – bio-tech, informatics etc) appears to be more obviously related to the constant advancement of the productive apparatuses. Teaching might be less obvious though its role is still apparent. A process of training students is one of creating the boundaries for thought to function in the social machine. The emphasis is on developing students’ abilities to ingest past knowledge and relate it in a group form – all under the disciplinary function of the grade. Even if study appears to have no direct relationship to later wage-labor, it still works to create mass intellectuality; it produces the linguistic-cognitive abilities of the student in a way that is *generally* copasetic with the functions of capital. The process of study is one element in the creation of the subjectivities necessary for this post-Fordist metropolis to function.

The labor of teaching shares similarities with contemporary service work in that it is what Hardt and Negri call ‘affective labor’. To quote: “[a]ffective labor, then is the labor that produces or manipulates affects such as feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. One can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistances, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile)”.³⁵ The difficulty with approaching affective labor is the contradictory nature of generating pleasurable experiences that are part of the world of alienation. Teaching has a sense of reward and joy to it – yet this joy works in affect to reinforce the process of reification that places human experience into fetishised forms. It would be a mistake however to see the more positive moments of teachings as being *unreal*: as a manifestation of some kind of false needs that trample over deeper needs that arise from our species-being. Such dichotomies are no longer supportable. Rather, it is a question

33 Virno, P. (2003) *Labour & Language* [<http://www.generation-online.org/t/labourlanguage.htm>], visited 12 June 2005.

34 Caffentzis, G. (2003) ‘The End of Work or The Renaissance of Slavery’, in W. Bonefeld (eds.) *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics* Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 129-130.

35 Hardt, M and A. Negri (2004) *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Press, 108.

of what invests desire into the social machinery that negates a more liberating possibility and how we can invest desire in negations against that machinery.

There is one element of academic work that deserves specific attention – *research*. In broad terms the process of academic research is a process in which elements of the world are made intelligible to the society of capital. It is the process of the fetishisation of phenomena – their transformation into things, into a form that can be linked into and reaffirm the general intellect. Irigaray makes a savage and nuanced critique of this (ultimately gendered) process. Research is still, almost without exception, conceived within the parameters of scientific discourse. The activity of science is the activity of “[i]mposing a *model* on the universe so as to take possession of it, an abstract, invisible, intangible model that is *thrown over* the universe like an encasing garment”.³⁶ Thus the gaze of the university constructs and imposes. It is a part of the broader matrix that codifies flows of desire. This codification normalizes what is studied to the patterns of social conformity of capital. They become invested into its symbolic economy. The object of study is now spoken about with the voice of authority and ‘taught’ to broader society. Again this might seem more obvious in those disciplines with an apparently direct techno-rationalist application: sciences that involve the subjecting of natural forces to economic imperatives. It is also the case for the more intangible subjects. What goes under the name of the Humanities or Arts are often the disciplines that still cling the hardest to notion of intellectual exceptionalism – that still wish to define themselves as outside the tawdry world of the state and the dollar. Some wish to define themselves as inherently subversive. They often bring to light histories and stories that have been almost erased by the trajectories of colonialism. This bringing to light still carries on the work of transformation/assimilation. They become another commodity in the general market place of ideas. All the standard conditions of the commodity apply – their process of reification, most often into an ideology, imbues the product of research with potentialities that were previously human. So too the academic in the process of research reifies their labor into a fetishised form and cements their own misery.

The university then is a moment of both the application and the re/production of the general intellect – in ways that make these two tasks difficult to distinguish from each other with any confidence.

What does this mean for the revolt of the academic? The posing of the application of the general intellect is for the ‘post-autonomia’ writers generally an optimistic and a positivist one. Capitalism has had to move towards this particular régime of accumulation because of struggle – and libertarian social relations exist already in this communicative multitude. Important to this is the idea that the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism was driven by the struggle of the proletariat against the former. The worker then is the inheritor of previous victories of struggles. The work that takes place under post-Fordism then is the product of these struggles – it is liberation, which capital is merely a parasite on. To quote Negri: “[t]he socialized worker is a kind of actualization of communism, its developed condition”.³⁷ If this is the case, then the task is quite easy. All that is needed is to overthrow the axiomatics that capital imposes and

36 Irigaray, L. (2004) *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. London: Continuum, 103.

37 Negri, T. (1989) *The Politics of Subversion*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 81.

let communism speak its own name. What is needed is the “reappropriation of administration” through “the soviets of mass intellectuality”.³⁸ If this is the case the struggle of academics is essentially one of struggling for autonomy – the delinking of their work from the pressures of the state and market and the creation of new truly democratic bodies of social organization. Indeed, this is how Bifo typifies recent social struggles – a struggle to “reclaim the autonomy of their brain from profit”.³⁹ This would only be possible as part of a society wide revolt and would involve much turmoil and confrontation with the baggage of history, yet...

Problem 1

What if a more separate, more autonomous workforce has not accompanied the rise of mass intellectuality? What if the application of the general intellect, rather than creating a more antagonistic social subject, has done the reverse? What if the continual development of technology actually produces increased domestication? In the schema above the development of productive forces (both that of ‘actual’ machinery – fixed capital – and the ‘social’ machinery of the general intellect) is seen as progress. Indeed, the continual constitution of life with a techno-scientific framework – as cyborgs – is seen as liberatory. Hardt & Negri assert that the process of exodus – of rebelling against /leaving from empire – is a “machinic exodus”. That part of the process of liberation is the actual “hybridization of humans and machines”.⁴⁰ Here it hits a wall. Whilst the development of information technologies involved moments of rebellious activity – from the hacker to computer piracy – it seems impossible that this world of cyber-tech can exist *without* capitalism. How can the actual physical structures of the cyborg exist without the manufacturing of its parts in sweatshops, without the soldier-miner of the Congo, without vast toxic pollution? Indeed, does not the development and application of mass intellectuality exist in a world of increasing fracture, incorporation, biopolitical domination and social atomization?

Working against the technological determinism of orthodox Marxism Camatte writes, “[c]apitalism imposes its despotism on human beings by means of objects and things that are invested with new modes of being appropriate to capital’s new requirements”.⁴¹ The continual subsumption of existence by capital is facilitated in part by the continual application of techno-scientific rationality throughout the social body. Mass intellectuality is in a constant state of surveillance, construction and guidance – much of this facilitated by the hardware of information technology. This continual application of techno-scientific rationality also results in an escalating specialization and division of labor – a fracturing of the human population. Camatte continues that in this condition, this despotism of capital, “[i]t is things that are the real subjects. They impose their own

38 Negri, T. (2003) ‘Constituent Republic’, in W. Bonefeld (eds.) *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics*. Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 252.

39 Bifo. *The Warrior, The Merchant & the Sage* [<http://www.generation-online.org/t/twarriormerchantsage.htm>], visited 12 June 2005.

40 Hardt, M. and T. Negri, *op cit*.

41 Camatte, J. *op cit*.

rhythm of life and ensure that people are confined to the level of their own single existences.”⁴² Post-Fordism is the further erasing of wild and unplanned behavior from the bodies of humans and the world through the continual application of the will of capital congealed into the bio/cyber/industrial-technological apparatus.

In this sense the ‘post-autonomia’ authors still hold too much of a debt to the past, believing that the world of work can be taken over freed from capital and made liberating. But to really be rid of alienation must not we completely destroy the proletarian condition? The general intellect and mass intellectuality – as moments of proletarianisation – are not to be liberated from the control of capital, but destroyed as part of the world of capital.

Problem 2

It is common for academics (especially in art/humanities) with ‘radical’ politics, to make rebellion their study: to write on critical theory, uprisings, social movements etc. It is what I’m doing right now. What does this mean if it is through research that the universe is, in part, transformed into an item that fits into the productive machinery of capital? If academic work is alienating then is the study of rebellion the process of its recuperation? One of the privileges of being an academic is the ability to often choose what one studies. But is this really a privilege? It is only allowed because the process of research nullifies the radical potential of what is studied. In fact contemporary capital thrives on its ability to ingest previously radical moments and reintegrate them into the commodification and social management. Žižek asserts that the modern freedom of thought “does not undermine actual social servitude, it positively sustains it”.⁴³ The contemporary academic can study *anything* as long as they study, as long as the production of ‘ideas’ continues. Conferences and journals can be on any topic as long as they work to reproduce the world of conferences and journals. You may work on anything as long as you work. All this means is that academic labor is consistent with labor generally – it reproduces the conditions of alienation. The university however functions under certain ideological mystifications that obscure this and generate a certain kind of semi-autonomous servitude that is necessary for academic work to take place. This is even more horrific when you consider that academics often bring movements and rebellions they have been involved and deeply invested in, into this process of recuperation. All the little rebellions that make life actually livable are encouraged to enter the spotlight of legitimate research. Through building a career as an academic we built monuments of our accumulated alienation. When do you stop being a punk and start theorizing about punk? When do you stop being a feminist but become a theorizer of feminism? Is not the pleasure of reading searing critique nullified by the process of marking it? Is not the joy of creative labor drained by its entrapment in forms that slot into the larger productive matrix? The result of this process is the draining of radical content from both the object of study and our very lives.

42 *Ibid.*

43 Žižek, S. (2002) *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* London: Verso, 3.

It might be possible to reverse the polarity. Rather than struggle entering the terrain of the university as an object of study, the process of academic work could be subverted by our own immersion in struggles. The more we rebel the more we can ally with the rebellion of others. These alliances, spiraling conspiracies, open up the terrain of our lives, allowing us to de-invest from the dominant order and build radical subjectivities of our own. This itself would be the beginnings of the formation of another world, a collective dreaming, a group fantasy that could help us unplug our investments in the social machine and offer fragmentary glimpses of other ways of being. These conspiracies of fantasy and support are what Deleuze and Guattari call “agents of the real productivity of desire”.⁴⁴ This is *not* the movement of the intellectual going to the people bringing knowledge and receiving authenticity. It is collective exodus and the mingling of desire and autonomy based on both what we share and what we hold uniquely.

There are of course moral panics that do occur over certain academics and certain works: the media attack on a conference at Sydney University where Negri was going to speak for instance.⁴⁵ But what is crucial here is what is being attacked is the academic going beyond the boundaries of study. It was Negri’s relationship to *revolutionary praxis* that was the issue – not philosophical anti-capitalism. The study of an idea becomes a problem for capital when it stops being the study of an idea. This perhaps is our point of rupture.

Conspiracy & Treason

Academic labor can be subverted. On any given day it probably is. The same tactics of *auto-valorisation* are carried out as much as they are anywhere. People slack off, fudge deadlines, email friends endlessly, steal office supplies. Students and staff form other dynamics, they hang out together, fall in love, have sex, get drunk etc. Within the pressure to produce, we can often weasel out little parts of our day in which we can dedicate to labor that actually brings us joy. In a period of low level of overt struggle this is all hidden; it exists as a special little secret world that we try to escape into as much as possible. Our precarity often makes us the ones who hide this. People talk of how hard they work because of the presence of discipline. And this discipline can function largely because of our atomization; both the atomization amongst academics and also the general atomization of the multitude (that continues despite / because of capital’s reliance on general social co-operation in post-Fordism). As already alluded to, processes of proletarianisation have only homogenized the population in the *broadest* sense. Our daily lives are still those of being alone in a crowd. Federici identifies that the process of proletarianisation has historically been the production of difference

44 Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (2004) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum, 33.

45 Windschuttle, K. (2005) ‘Tutorials in Terrorism’, in *The Australian*, 16-03-2005, 15.

within the proletariat.⁴⁶ This is part of the condition of precarity – there is always someone worse and better off than you.

This same precariousness forces humiliating compromises; I intellectually critique marking, but I still mark – I need the tutoring money. In honesty this article will contribute to my CV; because when lying in bed in the middle of the night, worrying about my future, with the only realistic solution, revolution, seeming so far away, I would like to get an academic job. The only other work I can get without cutting my hair, and taking out my piercings (a humiliation that as of yet I refuse to accept) is in call centers – and I'll be fucked if I am ever going back there.

What are the possibilities? In the short term it seems that conspiracy is the most obvious form of dissent. This could consist of loose networks that weave out across and beyond the university forming links of trust and mutual aid involving us not through our roles allotted by capital but against them. These could work to firstly provide social solidarity to weather the storms of wage-labor and provide material comfort that make the prospect of outright rebellion less daunting. They would work to generalize our experiences, help develop revolutionary self-theory and over come in practical way the divisions of labor and specialization that cripple us. Indeed, most of us already form such conspiracies with family and friends as a defense mechanism. But we can push them to more aggressive footings and also open up to other similar networks.

Doing this would allow the *possibility* of acts of treason. These acts would be any that defy the application of our labor towards to re/creation of capital. In the daily work of an academic – teaching, marking, administration, research etc – there could be numerous opportunities for sabotage. What simple acts could just fuck things up a little and create/reclaim moments of joy? What would be the more public confrontational ones? Refusal to mark, perhaps, or strikes on research? If social struggle intensified what possibilities would open up? Objectively the power of academics to disrupt the functioning of capital has never been more potent. If mass intellectuality is crucial to the functioning of capital, then we are in a prime position to sabotage its development.

The figure of the revolt of knowledge workers has not yet truly made its presence known. Cyber-punk seems to have been overtly optimistic. I prefer to think in terms of pirates. The pirate is a representation of the triumph of previously contained and repressed desire. Think of the sailor: uniformed, codified and slotted into a hierarchy. The sailor press-ganged for matters of state, becomes a cog in a greater national, mercantile and military project. Any sense of individual subjectivity is broken by harsh discipline. Yet it is the sailor who transforms into the pirate – an explosion of colour, rage, desire and violence through a collective process of reappropriation. The loyal subjected who participates in the internal functioning of power becomes the outsider, becomes barbaric. Whilst the pirate world is one of rich symbols in its own egalitarian cosmology their lives no longer fit into a reified cause that demands their supplication. The mercantile naval apparatus, build by their alienated labor is turned on – not to be taken over wholesale – but broken up, destroyed and consumed to increase their enjoyment and liberty. Of course every strike, since it weakens a key imperial

46 Federici, S. *op cit.*

apparatus, opens up the possibilities for freedom for all those facing the machinery. And in doing so the pirate takes part in the creation of a new world of the commons and of anarchy.⁴⁷ Is it possible to dream of black flags on our horizon?

By Way of Conclusion

Ultimately, humanity will only be in any sense free when the totality of global capitalism is destroyed through conscious revolution. This involves the destruction of the university as part of the destruction of all concretized moments of the division of labor. We can really only dream about what this would look like, drawing on the tumultuous history of revolt and our own experience of struggle for sustenance. Yet the potential to turn the world upside down is not some gift in the future, but an immanent and imminent possibility. This possibility, at least in Australian society, has not been picked up. Rather contemporary conditions are typified by a numbing social peace. Molecular forms of disobedience seem to be the only ones really open to us. Though this could change – just one really serious moment of struggle could suddenly make everything appear combustible.

It seems facile to suggest some kind of platform for a way forward. Struggles on campus, are at this point, still locked in Leftism. There are some brief and beautiful exceptions. Recently posters entitled the *Destructivist Position on Militarism and Higher Education* appeared around the Australian National University. They contained beautiful and lucid calls for students and soldiers to join together and with the aid of “powerful weaponry...partake in the enjoyable exercise of absolutely smashing all the current ivory towers and ivy covered halls, all the sandstone monuments to elitism, business and boredom”.⁴⁸ Its surreal ‘madness’ expressed so well the very manifestation of desire and the schizing out of normality that is needed in the here and now. As such it simply does not compute with the standard and repressive consciousness of the academic, the paranoid and self righteous fantasies that lead so many of us into a defense of our own alienation. Like so many of the subjects of capital in the post-Fordist metropolis we find ourselves constantly reinvesting into the machinery, apparatus, practices and technologies that enrage us. The process out is unclear, but the removal of ideologies based on the reified position of the intellectual and academic might help clear the decks for a practice that can take into account, basing itself on desire, creativity and revolt.

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47 Linbaugh, P. and M. Rediker (2000) *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press.

48 Temporary Bureau of Destructivist Activity *Destructivist Position on Militarism and Higher Education* Leaflet