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Thematic Section:
Mediatization, Mobility and New Methods
of Knowledge production

Edited by
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Thematic Section: Mediatization, Mobility and New Methods of Knowledge production

Introduction: Mobility, Mediatization and New Methods of Knowledge Production
Martin Fredriksson & Alejandro Miranda 222

The University as a ‘Giant Newsroom’: The Uses of Academic Knowledge Revisited
An Essay by David Rowe..... 228

Academic Publishing and its Digital Binds: Beyond the Paywall towards Ethical Executions of Code
by Teresa Swist & Liam Magee 240

Bellamy’s Rage and Beers Conscience: Towards a Pirate Methodology
by James Arvanitakis, Martin Fredriksson & Sonja Schillings 260

Publishing and Mediatization – A podcast from a Workshop in Norrköping June 2017
[With a written introduction by James Meese]
A podcast by Andreas Lind, featuring Gary Hall and James Arvanitakis 277

The Citizen Professional, Mediatization, and the creation of a Public Domain
by Karin Christof..... 279

The Road Map to Brave New World: Cartography and Capitalism from Gulf Oil to Google
by Timothy Eric Ström..... 307

A conversation on methodology

On Not Being There
A Methodological reflection by Johanna Dahlin 335

On Being Here
A response by Mattis Karlsson..... 342

Video Keynote

Queer Times and Chemical Weapons, Suspended in the Gotland Deep
A Video keynote by Astrida Niemanis. <https://vimeo.com/220422987>



Introduction: Mobility, Mediatization and New Methods of Knowledge Production

By Martin Fredriksson & Alejandro Miranda

This special issue of *Culture Unbound* focuses on three themes central to contemporary dynamics of culture: mobility, mediatization and methods of knowledge production. Much cultural research has investigated how mobility and mediatization intervene in different social spheres and processes. This issue, however, seeks to shift the perspective by exploring the ways in which knowledge production and dissemination become related to mobility and mediatization. Growing possibilities of international exchange, open access publishing and digital technologies have created new methods of gathering and analysing data, as well as of presenting research. Yet, the intensifying mobilities and rapid changes in publishing platforms affect the research process itself and the relations of power and dependencies in the world of research.

The background of this issue is a network project entitled ‘Everyday life of research in the mediatization era’, funded by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences. A series of workshops in three countries were central in advancing the discussion on these three themes. The first one, ‘Mobility: the Travelling Researcher’ took place in Sydney in November 2015, followed by ‘(Ex) Changing Methods’ in Amsterdam in November 2016 and finally ‘Publishing and Mediatization’ in Norrköping in June 2017.

These workshops were in themselves acts and embodiments of mobility, bringing together scholars from several collaborating environments at different sites to reflect on the conditions of our own work. Looking at mobility, therefore, appeared as a proper place to begin. Academics from Sweden, Australia and Germany gathered to discuss how today’s cultural researchers are becoming more mobile as research funders are increasingly investing in internationalisation. Individual researchers are given opportunities—or must meet expectations—to work outside their home countries, and contribute to an ever-growing number of projects con-

ducted in partnership with researchers in different parts of the world. While many aspects of mobility are well researched, we as academics rarely subject our own mobility to the same kind of attention. The first workshop was an opportunity to reflect on how mobility affects the research process and the production of knowledge, as well as how the aspirations and/or expectations to be constantly on the road affect us as scholars and individuals.

The changing conditions of mobility as well as new forms of media practices that permeate culture and society also affect the context for conducting research. The second workshop in this project examined how established research strategies such as ethnographic participant observation, text interpretation, visual studies, audio-visual essays and archival research can be applied in new ways in an age of increased mediatization. Digitization makes a growing body of information and sources available online and offers possibilities to communicate with colleagues across the globe: to an increasing extent the researcher does not need to leave his or her desk to access archival material or interact with colleagues. In that regard, it appears as somewhat of a paradox that the possibilities and demands for mobility within academia increases while digitization and mediatization make it possible for us to conduct the better part of our work *without* travelling. The second workshop thus addressed a number of methodological questions regarding how to conduct research under these changing condition.

The overarching theme of mediatization was explored in the concluding symposium on Publishing and Mediatization. This event explored how changing modes of mediatization affect the conditions for conducting and disseminating academic research. The conditions for scientific publishing have changed dramatically with the rise of an open access 'movement'. The increase in open access platforms has allowed researchers greater access to online publishing as they no longer have to contend with the terms and stipulations set by formal publishing channels.

The format and nature of the scientific text are also undergoing transformation. Animated images and audio files can be embedded in text, newspaper articles linked to podcasts and the set data published for secondary analysis. Our third event approached questions regarding how the changed forms of publishing affect the research process itself, and how the changed publishing landscape affects power and dependencies within academia as well as between academia and other sectors.

Over this three-year period, ideas were exchanged and lines of thoughts crossed. Some of the articles presented in this issue rely on work presented at those meetings, while others grew out of the wider research environments that hosted them. Nevertheless, they all connect to the themes of mobility, methodology and mediatization. As such, most of the contributions are not as much documenta-

tions of the project as they are reflections on the questions it set out to address. This issue of *Culture Unbound* is thus not necessarily a conclusion of a project, but rather constitutes a call for a continuous, collective exploration of contemporary conditions for knowledge creation.

The contributions

In order to acknowledge the expanding field of academic knowledge creation and dissemination we have chosen to open up this special issue to different types of media formats. Apart from four peer reviewed articles the issue also includes two essays, one podcast and a recorded video lecture. By providing different examples of how academic knowledge can be presented we want to approach the issue of mediatization in a self-reflexive way, rather than merely writing about it.

David Rowe's essay *The University as a 'Giant Newsroom': The Uses of Academic Knowledge Revisited* provides a point of departure for this issue. Here Rowe reflects on the relationship between mediatization and academic knowledge production—both as a theoretician and a practitioner. As a media scholar, Rowe has studied journalism and news media for decades; but as a public intellectual he has also contributed to the public debate. In this essay he reflects on how the desire and expectations to mediatize research and make it accessible to a general public affects the research process as well as the choice of topics to study. Furthermore, Rowe also highlights how expectations to leave the ivory tower of academia and engage with the tabloidized news media—with its increased emphasis on fast, accessible and spectacular content—may also put academics in the line of fire when they take on politically sensitive issues.

Teresa Swist and Liam Magee examine how socio-technical circuits, conceptualised as 'digital binds', exert influence on the political economy of academic publishing. Their critique of the expansion of these digital binds across the fields of academic publishing is developed in relation to the increasing dependence of university researchers upon substitutive metrics. In analysing different constraints and affordances of publishing and circulating academic texts in the digital age, the article proposes three 'ethical executions of code' to promote more equitable practices. *Dissuading* as a way of bringing unfair publishing practices into the public debate and negotiating fairer practices. *Detouring* as a way of developing alternative publishing pathways. *Disrupting* as the ways in which blockchain technology can transform the ways in which the contemporary publishing industry functions.

James Arvanitakis, Martin Fredriksson and Sonja Schilling's article takes the prototypical pirate as a starting point to discuss how scholars can navigate in an academic environment that is both enabling and restricting. For academics with safe positions and plenty of resources mobility can be a privilege, but for

those who work under precarious conditions on short term contracts, constantly moving between places and employers, the precariousness creates a need for self-promotion where networking and publishing become tools to build a competitive entrepreneurial self. At the same time, commercial publishing often locks up articles behind paywalls that limit their circulation in ways that are detrimental both to the interests of the academic and those of the public. While digital pirate libraries can circumvent the paywalls, scholars can navigate the system in different, more or less opportunistic or oppositional ways, just like golden day pirates and privateers both profited from and opposed the colonial trade empires.

Some of the issues raised in the articles by Swist & Magee and Arvanitakis et al. are further explored in the podcast called *Publishing+Mediatization*, recorded by Andreas Lind at the last of the three workshops in June 2017. It centres on a lecture where Gary Hall, head of the Centre for Disruptive Media Studies at Coventry University, talks about how the shift from print media to digital media—the transition from a Gutenberg Galaxy to a Zuckerberg Galaxy—changes the conditions for academic knowledge production. In consecutive interviews Gary Hall and James Arvanitakis, Dean of research at Western Sydney University, continue to discuss how the attention economy that has emerged with the expansion of digital social media affects the role of the academic, and how digital technologies enable free circulation of knowledge which sometimes clashes with copyright policies and the commodification of knowledge.

Through the analysis of cases in the Netherlands and Austria, Christoff discusses how self-organised citizens turn neglected public facilities into socio-cultural spaces. In describing how these *citizen professionals* negotiate and use these locales, Christoff discusses how the meanings and practices conducted within and around them are digitally transmitted, consumed and diffused into the public arena. From this perspective, mediatization denotes the impact that different media practices have on the articulation of alternative forms of housing, volunteering and working in relation to a *lived space* (Lefebvre 1991).

Just like Christoff, Timothy Ström also discusses the mediatization of space and its relation to social change, but from a different perspective. In his article, 'The Road Map to Brave New World', Ström asks what maps can tell us, not only of space but also of society. By comparing a roadmap from 1915, produced by Gulf Oil, with a Google map from 2015, Ström explores the relationship between capitalism and cartography. Ström draws parallels between google maps as a form of augmented reality and the transition from Fordism to cybernetic capitalism that emerges as software increasingly overlays and intertwines in all aspects of production and social life.

Space and place are central also in Johanna Dahlin's essay *On Not being there*, which focuses on the importance of spatial presence in the history of anthropo-

logical methodology. Relating to her own work where she moves between digital and on-site ethnographies, Dahlin reflects on all the information that lies hidden in the background noise in on-site observations that might not be possible to formulate as knowledge but still informs ones understanding of the objects of study. While Dahlin laments her incapability to hear the background noise in social media her colleague Mattis Karlsson responds, in a comment to the essay, that virtual reality is reality first and virtual second, and that background noise exists in all realities. The most important lesson to be drawn from this dialogic essay is that new technologies give us the capacity to approach the world in different ways; there is no need to limit ourselves to one single approach, but we also have to grapple with the fact that different approaches carry different methodological challenges.

Finally, we close this issue with a Video Keynote presentation by Astrida Niemanis, 'Queer Times and Chemical Weapons, Suspended in the Gotland Deep'. Ocean beds across the world are littered with barrels of mustard gas and other chemical weapons, waiting to burst. Some of these chemical time bombs may never go off, but they nevertheless embody a constantly present potential of slow violence. Niemanis' contribution is not only a thoughtful and poetic reflection on an intriguing issue, but also a fascinating example of how restricted mobility fosters innovative ways to mediate knowledge since it was originally produced for the symposium on Mediatization in Norrköping in June 2017, but presented via skype from Sydney as Neimanis could not attend the event.

Shifting methods and conditions

In his opening essay, David Rowe defines the issue of mediatization and how it differs from mediation in relation to academia:

Published academic knowledge is always mediated, usually within the established genres of journals and scholarly books. But mediatization is a more thoroughgoing effect produced by engagement with the dominant, routine processes of the institution of the popular media. Rather than taking academic knowledge and processing it, mediatization describes the impact on the formation and articulation of that knowledge at the point of production. Mediatization may mean that academic research and scholarship that is deemed to be media friendly and popularly digestible is institutionally favoured over intellectual activity seen to be obscure, irrelevant or, in deference to an adjective that has taken on an increasingly negative connotation, 'elite' (Rowe 2017).

Crucial to our understanding of mediatization of research is that mediatization constitutes a structural precondition for conducting research. It is a logic that applies to and affects a research project from the moment of its conception. Furthermore, this is also relevant for the case of mobility as funders are increasingly calling for international collaborations, sometimes even between specific countries, as a requirement for funding larger projects.

These conditions often have positive outcomes: collaboration across borders and communication with large audiences appear to enrich and enhance the discussion on significant social issues, which is a fundamental part of conducting research. But mobility and mediatization are not merely added features that leave the research process intact. In order to fully engage with these mediatization and mobility issues we need to acknowledge the multiple ways in which they shape how we do research. These changing preconditions for academic knowledge production have methodological implications in at least two ways: first of all they might enable, or call for, new methods of knowledge production. Secondly, they affect how we can work and act within academia. Overall, the contributions in this special issue show how these two facets become intertwined. While this special issue does not offer a road map to understanding the role and meaning of mediatization and mobility in contemporary academia, it is our hope and belief that it gives the readers tools, fresh insights and perspectives to further stimulate the discussion on these shifting conditions.

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The University as a ‘Giant Newsroom’. The Uses of Academic Knowledge Revisited

By David Rowe

Abstract

Almost a decade ago I published an article (with Dr Kylie Brass) based on Australian Research Council-funded research¹ about criticisms in the media and public sphere of ‘ivory tower’ academe, and how, under pressures of ‘relevance’, ‘accountability’, and ‘brand identity’, academic knowledge was being progressively and institutionally encouraged to engage with everyday media discourse. In this and other articles on universities and public communication policies, we explored the ways in which the products of university-based academic labour were being increasingly placed in the service of wider public discourse, with some perils both for that knowledge and those who generate it. In the ensuing years, these pressures have intensified in tandem with the marketization of higher education and the often-remarked hegemony of neoliberal managerialism. The decline of the mainstream press (certainly in paper form) and the rise of user-generated, social and mobile media have produced a more intimate and volatile relationship between universities and the media/public sphere. In addressing the subject of publishing and mediatization, it is timely to re-assess the uses and trajectories of academic knowledge, the technologies that convey it, and the implications for its producers.

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The Academic and the Tabloid

My research in this area stemmed from a study of the changing nature of journalism and the media, especially newspapers, at the turn of the last century. It involved an interrogation of the tabloidization thesis, which broadly proposed that all news media were being transformed by a process which can be described in various ways as spectacularization, trivialization, and oversimplification. In more technical terms, it might be measured by changes in subject matter, register, textual size, visuality, headline size and content, and so on (Goot & Griffen-Foley, 2011; Rowe 2011). This research prompted a line of investigation concerning the relationship between university-based academic knowledge and labour and that of the media and journalists. At that time, academics were being increasingly called upon to venture outside their 'ivory towers' and to contribute to and enrich wider public debate. How their textual product (especially in my broad field, the social sciences and humanities) could be adjusted to the demands of, and play within the media, was uncertain. These questions were especially pressing given the aforementioned turn towards the tabloid, as well as the unaccustomed hostility and incivility of some journalists towards academics, especially those of a right-wing disposition who regarded academics as publicly-funded left-wing agitators (See, for example, Cater 2014). This 'mobile' environment involves a relatively stable, specialist, peer-reviewed zone of academic knowledge coming into contact with a rapidly shifting, uncertain domain of general discourse that may involve the discursive equivalent of 'hand-to-hand' combat. It also produces tension over universities encouraging public communication by academics while seeking to prevent and control any reputational damage or uncomfortable controversy occasioned by such interventions in the public sphere.

This shift also involves understanding a potential move in the direction of mediatization, which is sometimes conflated with the more routine concept of mediation (Couldry 2008). Published academic knowledge is always mediated, usually within the established genres of journals and scholarly books. The same process, after 'translation' and customization, occurs when it is situated in the wider media, either through academic authorship or journalistic interpretation. But mediatization is a more thoroughgoing effect produced by engagement with the dominant, routine processes of the institution of the popular media. Rather than taking academic knowledge and processing it, mediatization describes the impact on the formation and articulation of that knowledge at the point of production. Mediatization may mean that academic research and scholarship that is deemed to be media friendly and popularly digestible is institutionally favoured (a case of the university acceding to a combination of media and government pressures regarding its intellectual priorities) over intellectual activity seen to be obscure, irrelevant or, in deference to an adjective that has taken on an

increasingly negative connotation, 'elite' (Flint 2003). Such a framework is usually based on a conception of utility. Thus, mediatization is the process by which such knowledge is fashioned or influenced by media imperatives, anticipating topics, approaches, explanations, arguments, interpretations, predictions, recommendations, and so on. This process is frequently caught up with the so-called 'impact agenda', whereby the presence in the media of academic discourse and data can be interpreted as a measure of intellectual efficacy.

Academic knowledge can be projected into the media sphere through orchestrated public communication of research findings, or 'extracted' from it by the media for a range of purposes. The latter can be regarded as a positive indication of universities enriching the quality of public debate through provision, circulation and exchange of theoretical, conceptual and empirical knowledge, but more negatively it can involve a sometimes-virulent attack on the value of certain types of knowledge and on those who produce it. In Australia, for example, there is a well-practised routine among the tabloid media of ridiculing research grant announcements, especially those in the humanities and social sciences, which are regarded as a waste of public money and/or politically biased (Lamberts & Grant, 2016). One apparent tactic of the Australian Research Council in response is to cease publishing the titles of successful grants independently of their 100-word descriptions (See, for example, ARC 2016). This tactic is clearly designed to make it more difficult for hostile journalists to trawl through research project grant lists and to pluck out research titles that they wish to attack, without at least some prospect of contextualization.

The 'Ig Nobel Prizes' (Improbable Research 2017) are a playful take on this phenomenon:

The Ig Nobel Prizes honor achievements that first make people laugh, and then make them think. The prizes are intended to celebrate the unusual, honor the imaginative—and spur people's interest in science, medicine, and technology. Every year, in a gala ceremony in Harvard's Sanders Theatre, 1200 splendidly eccentric spectators watch the winners step forward to accept their Prizes. These are physically handed out by genuinely bemused genuine Nobel laureates.

The focus here on science, medicine, and technology has generally, though, meant greater indulgence by the media than would generally be extended to the humanities and social sciences. For example, the conservative UK broadsheet, *The Telegraph*, appears quite tolerant of scientific eccentricity in its coverage of so-called "silly science":

The government has unveiled plans to allocate research funding according to how much “impact” the research has.

The plans have come under fire from academics, who say that curiosity-driven, speculative research has led to some of the most important breakthroughs in scientific history, including penicillin, relativity theory and the theory of evolution.

More than that, though, it might bring an end to the quirky, sometimes daft, sometimes weirdly inspired research that brings harmless entertainment and occasional enlightenment to armchair boffins and science nerds everywhere (Chivers 2009).

This kind of discovery-based scientific research is treated rather differently to theoretical or applied social science research, some of which ventures directly into the sphere of politics. For example, the tabloid *Sydney Telegraph* and its Melbourne counterpart, the *Herald Sun*, engage in ritualistic condemnations of “pointless”, “loony”, and “absurd and obscure” research (Bita 2016; Bolt 2004; Loussikian 2017). In response to such hostility, universities and their academic knowledge workers seek to use the media as a vehicle for demonstrating the relevance and value of their work (Johnstone & Moffat, 2017). However, as is clear from the above the examples, this may not be a congenial intellectual environment. Even if it is handled more sympathetically, it is possible that academic research and scholarship may be oversimplified, the implications of findings prematurely fixed or inadequately contextualized. While it might be suggested that such outcomes are less likely in so-called ‘quality’ newspapers and media outlets, the financial and organizational pressures visited upon them have both introduced a degree of ‘tabloidization’ (Rowe 2010) and a reduction in resources, especially of journalistic personnel, that have impaired the media’s capacity to conduct sophisticated, critically reflective treatments of academic knowledge. One way of dealing with this problem, and which does not rely as heavily on media releases and regular journalistic contacts, is to use the now-available digital technologies to create customized public communication.

This was not a readily available option when the original ‘Uses of Academic Knowledge’ research was conducted at the turn of the 21st century. At that time, for example, analogue technologies and paper formats were more prominent; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networking media platforms were yet to materialize; blogging was less ubiquitous; Wikipedia was still in its infancy; YouTube was yet to be acquired by Google, and mobile media, especially smart phones, were relatively underdeveloped. Importantly, the barriers to

entry of establishing professional-looking news and opinion websites, especially those not attached to major newspaper mastheads and broadcast corporations, were considerable. By the end of the first decade, new, relatively 'open' ways of communicating academic research to large, dispersed and heterogeneous publics—in other words, a potentially mass mediated process—had become available. At the same time, Creative Commons licensing had emerged to ameliorate disputation over copyright. Of particular interest to this article is *The Conversation*, a not-for-profit media entity founded in 2010 and launched in 2011 to operate as a “communications intermediary” (Landrum 2017) between intra- and extra-mural knowledge environments.

Academic Conversations

The Conversation was conceived in Australia around 2008 in a dialogue between a University Vice-Chancellor (Professor Glyn Davis of The University of Melbourne) and a former newspaper editor (Andrew Jaspan, who had edited newspapers including *The Melbourne Age*, and the UK's *The Observer* and *The Scotsman*). In sharing a concern about the quality of information and debate in the media, Jaspan devised the notion of merging the university and academe:

“Why don't I just turn this university into a giant newsroom? Why don't I just get all these incredibly smart people within their various faculties to become journalists and write for the public?” (quoted in McAmish, 2013).

The publishing model relies on a ready supply of donated academic labour (no non-staff authors are paid) and funding support from member universities, partner governments and corporate sponsors, with no advertising revenue within a Trust ownership structure. Using a customized digital platform written in an open-source code, contributors, who must be affiliated to an accredited university or research institute, work with editors in real-time collaboration, and must agree to 'sign off' on the final published text. There is mandatory disclosure of any funding and private interest in the subject of the article. Once published, the article can be re-published without charge on the condition of appropriate attribution, and the author is able individually to track, via a dashboard, the numbers of readers, major re-publishers, and the main countries and regions in which each article's readers are located, as well as comments, re-tweets and Facebook/Instagram shares. Intra and inter-institutional analytics are also provided. Apart from Australia, *The Conversation* (2017a), the motto of which is “Academic rigour, journalistic flair”, now has Africa, Canada, France, Indonesia,

United Kingdom and United States editions, as well as a Global one, which are freely accessible to all readers. As of May 2017, it had 5.2 million on-site users and a reach of 35 million, including republication (*The Conversation*, 2017b). The Australian Twitter News Index (ATNIX), which tracks the sharing of articles from Australian news and opinion sites on Twitter every month, regularly registers *The Conversation* as Australia's most-shared opinion site, and it ranks highly among all news websites (see, for example, Bruns 2017).

Turning a “university into a giant newsroom” may be regarded, if it occurs, as a clear case of the mediatization of academic publishing. Of course, this is a rather misleading description—news generation may be part of what a university does, but, in contrast to media organizations, that is not its main task. Indeed, apart from the key activity of teaching—itself a form of knowledge dissemination and, given the increasing size of student cohorts, of public communication—university newsroom activity is dependent on deep, long-form research and scholarship that is rarely evident among newspapers, broadcasters or website hosts. Less ambitiously, *The Conversation* model is characterized by a non-commercial relationship that aspires to integrate university and media activities. This development may lead to something of a breakdown in previously clear divisions of labour, especially when articulated with the aforementioned impact and engagement agenda that has spread out from the UK, where it first took root (Stern 2016). For example, it may lead some academics, as in the case below of a testimonial in *The Conversation's e-newsletter* (Valadkhani 2017), to combine elements of personal and organizational promotion, and media fund raising:

Hello. I'm Abbas Valadkhani, and I'm an economics professor at Swinburne University. Last year I wrote a piece for *The Conversation* on my research on the profits big banks make when they delay passing on interest rate cuts to customers.

Parliamentarians directly made reference to my work at a Senate Committee inquiry when questioning the CEOs of the big four banks, just hours after my article was published.

It's impact like this that makes it worthwhile for researchers to publish with *The Conversation*. Today's newsletter includes some of the other stories that have had a real impact. If you think that matters, please support *The Conversation* with a tax-deductible donation.

And if you're one of the 2,000 people who have donated already, thank you so much. By donating to *The Conversation* you've helped my research have a real world impact (Valadkhani 2017).

Although it is quite usual to endorse a text—for example, a ‘blurb’ for a book or journal - the enlistment of academics to help raise funds for a media organization in connection with promoting research impact suggests here that publishing and mediatization may take many forms. There is much to commend this developing relationship along the lines of the not-for-profit *Conversation* model—not least the provision of a public good for activity that is mostly publicly funded, and the geo-social spreading of readerships—but there are some sceptical questions that need to be raised in three areas of practice: mediatization, public labour exploitation and appropriation, and duty of care.

Conclusion: A Meeting of Mobile Minds and Media

In the Uses of Academic Knowledge research, consideration was given to what happens to that knowledge in the hands of the media. This reconsideration has addressed what might occur when the university is turned “into a giant newsroom”, and media protocols and routines become everyday aspects of academic knowledge production and information. Impact is at the heart of these questions. It may involve a variation on the more traditional conception of ‘opinion leadership’ through, for example, exercising influence through a hierarchy of credibility (Becker 1967) and knowledge legitimacy. Alternatively, impact may be measured according to a more conventional media market dynamic—readership size and, in a recursive loop, media interest and response. In both cases, the influence on knowledge production may deter certain kinds of academic practice, such as that which does not have obvious utility (i.e., ‘pointless’, ‘absurd and obscure’, and so on), is arcane, or condemned as systematically biased (Thomas 2014; Webster 2013).

Second, there is a matter of labour. Pressure on academics to be engaged in public communication involves a movement from discretionary activity to expectation. This activity, as noted above, entails the supply of media content (‘news and views’), sometimes for a fee, but more often without charge not only to a not-for-profit outlet, but also via Creative Commons to commercial content aggregators and media organizations that otherwise pay for such content via an employed or freelance workforce. The issue of workload and work expectation is front of mind for academics required to juggle higher student:staff ratios, performance management and task inflation. Ironically, it is increasingly an issue for journalists in de-populating newsrooms being required to process greater and more diverse content. Thus, the implications for academic labour of the (still limited) mediatization of universities are not neutral or negligible. This development requires the acquisition of skills and the allocation of time under conditions of hyperactivity and relative scarcity. Given the university’s many

constituencies and responsibilities, mediatization requires some reconsideration of public funding priorities and institutional autonomy.

Third, and this not an argument for insulation academics from the external world, it carries with it risks of public excoriation and ridicule. This reaction goes further than a conventional tabloid media antagonism towards the academy. In a digital world of intense contest over ‘eyeballs’ and the monetization of media content (Hutchins & Rowe 2012), there is heightened objection among commercial media organizations (most notably the Murdoch-family owned 21st Century Fox and News Corp—see Murdoch 2009) towards rival content providers that are funded by public funding or trusts. In Australia, for example, in the context of debates about reforms to media ownership and reach, a campaign has been waged by commercial media organizations over perceived competition from non-monetized knowledge, news and entertainment content (Meade 2017). Thus, academics publishing in public and not-for-profit outlets unwittingly become entangled in political conflicts over media share and so-called ‘competitive neutrality’ (Samios 2017)

Therefore, if academic knowledge work is to be mediatized, it is necessary not only to recognize this extension of the expected skills portfolio, but also for universities to afford some protection to their workers in the public sphere, and especially one in which social media communication is now central (see, for example, the case of former journalism academic Julie Posetti—Elliott, 2010). A particularly unedifying case involving a colleague was a vituperative attack on a colleague, Louise Crabtree (2017), who had written an article in *The Conversation* entitled ‘Can property survive the great climate transition?’. In response, James Delingpole (2017), in the right-wing website *Breitbart* and via multiple syndications, republished her official short biography and wrote:

This might sound like obscure, pseudo-academic, sub-Marxist gobbledegook. As indeed it is.

It would be nice to console ourselves that this dangerous thesis was written by a left-wing research student of no account.

Unfortunately, as Eric Worrall points out at Watts Up With That? there are people who take this woman’s lunatic redistributionary jottings seriously.

Her bio may raise the question—are we actually paying for this? (Delingpole 2017)

Although some academics (including Louise) might wear such online abuse as a 'badge of honour', it has the potential to cause considerable distress and harassment. This is a particularly acute problem for women, who frequently are subjected to misogynistic and even violent trolling for advancing opinions in the public sphere (Campbell 2016; Jane 2017; Rowe & Barcham 2014).

This point returns the focus to university public communication policies (as referenced above—see also Rowe and Brass, 2011), which have had difficulties with reconciling a desire for academics to be engaged in public communication and a concern to contain, via employee disciplinary rules, the incidence of damage to organizational standing, including bringing 'the university into disrepute'. This movement from publishing (in the broadest sense and incorporating public commentary) to mediatization needs to be recognized in the context of normative demands of relevance, extra-mural discourse, impact and engagement. Since the Uses of Academic Knowledge research was conducted and published, there has been considerable change in universities, turmoil in institutional media and an efflorescence of networked social media. Academic knowledge can and does travel a long way, with highly variable results. There is a strongly democratic intellectual bias in favour of this knowledge circulation and exchange, but the transmutation of the university into a "giant newsroom" is one form of mediatization that demands greater reflection on its consequences for the organizations that foster knowledge production, for those who actually generate it, and for the structures, meanings and uses of that knowledge as it flows across the globalizing digital landscape.

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Notes

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²A small indicative quantitative content and qualitative textual analysis of four newspapers was conducted: two Australian newspapers, the (then) broadsheet *Sydney Morning Herald* and the tabloid *Daily Telegraph*, published by, respectively, Fairfax Ltd and the Rupert Murdoch-controlled News Limited; the UK broadsheet (then 'Berliner' size, and changed to tabloid format in 2018) the *Guardian*; and the USA broadsheet *New York Times*. The purpose of this exploratory study was to establish some of the explicit ways in which academic knowledge is used in the media (in this case, print, although much of the published material appeared online, often with some additional editing). The *Media, Culture & Society* article was not intended to discuss these data in depth, but merely to suggest the ways in which academic knowledge is openly used in the sampled newspapers, and briefly to observe variations that might suggest differences in the forms and uses of academic knowledge in different types and contexts of publication, as well as in the professional relationships between journalists and academics.

The sampling framework for this indicative content analysis involved 12 issues each of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, and the *New York Times* on a 'rolling weekly' basis in 2001. The total is approximated given sampling decisions concerning what constituted an article (for example, separate digest textual elements were excluded). The study was conducted in 2001, before significant format changes to some of the newspapers (for example, the re-design and re-sizing to Berliner format of the *Guardian*, and frequent adjustments to the *Sydney Morning Herald*), but at an historical point when universities—certainly in Australia and Britain—began to be more overtly and systematically managing their media relations and media dissemination of knowledge (Rowe, 2005).

The content analysis identified the number of articles in which there was overt reference to, or input from, academics: 50 in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2.9 per cent of all articles totalling approximately 1700), 22 in the *Daily Telegraph* (1.46 per cent, 1500), 60 in the *Guardian* (3.3 per cent, 1800), and 84 in the *New York Times* (4.2 per cent, 2000).

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Academic Publishing and its Digital Binds: Beyond the Paywall towards Ethical Executions of Code

By Teresa Swist and Liam Magee

Abstract

In this article we explore various constraints and potentials of academic publishing in the digital age. Advancement of digital platforms and their expansive reach amplify the underlying tensions of institutional and scholarly change. A key affordance of these platforms is that of speed: rapidly distributing the outputs of a precaritized profession and responding to pressures to publish as well as the profit motive of publishers. On the one hand, these systems make possible alternative modes of contributory content and peer-production for supporting the commons. On the other, they turn all too readily into privatising devices for contracting labour and profit in the corporate sector and, within the academy, for accentuating subtle power effects. Drawing upon platform studies and integrating insights from political philosophy and property law, our article seeks to problematise neat binaries of possession and dispossession associated with the sector. We examine in particular how co-existing and emergent socio-technical circuits—what we term digital binds—modulate the political economy of academic publishing on a number of scales. These entangled binds constrain but also indicate mechanisms for opening up new possibilities. We introduce three *ethical executions of code* towards this end: *dissuading*, *detouring*, and *disrupting*. Together, these mechanisms show how mutually beneficial boundaries can be drawn for designing otherwise: by blocking dominant systems and bargaining for fairer practices; exploring sanctioned and unsanctioned systems which offer more diverse publishing pathways; and, disrupting systemic processes and profits towards more inclusive and equitable conditions.

Keywords: digital binds, academic publishing semicommons, ethical executions of code, designing otherwise.

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Introduction: Digital Binds

This article explores some of the conditions, pressures and designs of academic publishing in the digital age. We trace the ways in which publishing technologies, labour and governance have become mediated through the proliferation of technical and organisational devices: for-profit multinational corporations, government-funded institutional repositories, non-profit foundations, legal and illegal academic sharing sites, peer-to-peer production, social media, self-publishing channels, and blockchain-based alternatives to double-blind review and citation tracking.

In response to the dizzying rate of change, our introductory section poses the question: *What are the conditions of academic publishing in a digital age?* This is crucial to any consideration of the multiple roles of publishing in contemporary academia that evolve with, and through, digital technologies: “as a means of disseminating validated knowledge, as a form of symbolic capital for academic career progression, and as a profitable business enterprise” (Fyfe et al. 2017: 2). The centrality of publishing to knowledge production further intersects with an expanding field of global economic and political forces: university ranking systems, an increasingly casualised academic workforce, publishing metrics, financialisation, and the consolidation of editorial and dissemination through a handful of Western-led publishing houses and their satellite operations. Socio-technical circuits articulate these roles and forces through what we term digital binds: the digitised mechanisms connecting and shaping our communicative practices in multiple ways.

Academic knowledge production has a lengthy history that varies along disciplinary, geographic and institutional lines, with global inequalities often maintained by publishing mechanisms (Collyer 2016). This social and technological mediation forms a common thread of continuity and contingency:

Knowledge has never circulated freely, unencumbered by institutions, technologies, traditions, and norms. The “free exchange of ideas” requires media—things, concepts, technologies, practices, institutions—that intervene and get in between. Be it the patronage systems of early modern universities, the bureaucratic systems of the German research university, or the mixed systems of contemporary universities, systems of communication and transmission are never free from mediation (Wellmon & Piper 2017).

Throughout this overarching tradition figure critical moments of transition. Key turning points in history have triggered these changes across academic publishing, as Fyfe et al. (2017) identify in the following transitions: the early

twentieth century marked the rising professionalism and prestige of academia, with the value of editorial peer review becoming more pronounced in post-war decades; during the early Cold War expansion of research, sector growth and funding transformed the focus toward generating income; in the 1960s and 1970s peer-review processes were adopted by commercial publishers; while in the 1980s, the mutually-beneficial alliance between libraries and publishers dissipated with the university funding crisis, changing this relationship markedly. In the years since, the significance of prestige has expanded as accountability demands from government and within institutions have increased. This genealogical snapshot acknowledges the centrality of mediation, while equally reminding us that macrological shifts in the political economies and technological environments also register profound reorientations in the ways knowledge is produced and disseminated. Our argument picks up upon these in the current context that is witnessing a profound expansion of digital binds within academic fields and publishing, and at the same time, a rising precariousness of the university research career. This have formed new interdependent ties, within that career, upon substitutive metrics, income and recognition.

A brief overview of transformations and trends in the sector assists in pinpointing key tensions. Edwards et al. (2013) have described the evolving intellectual frameworks and research challenges of contemporary knowledge infrastructures —education, libraries, the publishing industry, intellectual property, global flows, and knowledge politics—and further claim “that we are living through a period of fundamental transformations that profoundly challenge our understanding of the basic process by which knowledge is created, debated, and spread” (Edwards et al. 2013: 3). In tune with this, Striphas (2010) articulated five specific trends impacting scholarly communication: i) *alienation* emerges from the imperatives of urgency and collective interests, as well as an imbalance in terms of the benefits received in return for signing over key rights; ii) *proliferation* is based upon audience segmentation and outlet expansion; iii) *consolidation* stems from the reduction of academic journal publishers and disconnect from scholarly, or learned, societies; iv) pricing of academic journals has steeply increased; and v) *digitization* offers new affordances for exchange, management and monetization.

These multi-scalar trends influence how contemporary academic publishing unfolds in often contradictory and conflicting ways. Vastly different countries and types of economies, such as those of Germany, China and Ecuador, are facing markedly similar issues in relation to the grip of proprietary publishing platforms. In Germany, a consortium of universities operating under the banner of “Project Deal”, is pushing back against Elsevier publishing constraints. In China, publishing outputs are increasingly beholden to foreign commercial publishers, journals and paywalls, producing “a devastating impact on the visibility and impact of Chinese

scholarship within China” (Ren & Montgomery 2016: 397). In Ecuador, with many universities transitioning from a teaching-only to a research-and-teaching paradigm, they become increasingly preoccupied with imperatives to improve their “publication visibility” (Feyen et al. 2016).

Socio-technical circuits play a key role in articulating these trends and transformations. Such circuits manifest in many forms, but are exemplified in the mechanisms of *digital platforms*: systems and networks that collect and circulate academic papers, host data sets, measure citations and impact, and utilise semantic connections to connect academics with each other and with publications relevant to their fields. What Bratton (2016) terms “The Stack” illustrates how such digital platforms have become global infrastructures with affordances for both control and freedom, and his evocative metaphor finds ready application in the context of academic publishing. Bratton introduces the layers of The Stack (Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, and User) and how they overlay an “accidental megastructure” to produce “*the machine as the state*.” Its agglomeration of computing machines into platform systems not only reflects, manages, and enforces forms of sovereignty; it also generates them in the first place” (Bratton 2016: 8).

This megastructure replicates itself in smaller, nested structures at the level of academic publishing sector—a market which draws heavily upon academic labour and vested interests, and in the process exchanges, mandates and governs digital information in markedly different ways. Content hidden behind the pay-walls of proprietary publishers is rigorously tracked by download and citation, producing consolidated data that has economic value to governments, universities, departments, researchers and administrators enmeshed in a calculative logic of impact and influence. Tight bundles of for-profit journals are sold at exorbitant prices to academic libraries, while looser bundles of open-access and alternative journals eke out a living through volunteerism, university support or author fees—yet both depend upon the presence of networks, databases, protocols and social media that comprise the platform. Regardless, the academic publishing market is being significantly transformed via global innovations across infrastructure, firms, strategies, and actors (Ponte et al. 2017). While Bratton’s 2016 target is the wider set of social operations that have become subject to the digital platform megastructure of “The Stack”, we suggest platforms have become integral to the post-millennial knowledge landscape, with comparable if derivative controls and freedoms in relation to academic publishing. Rather than defeatism or unbridled enthusiasm, this acknowledgement needs instead to identify the ways in which we can draw the boundaries of academic publishing towards more ethical designs.

The argument of our article is developed over four sections to explore how the digital binds of academic publishing shape public and private interests, and

ways in which ethical design can produce more mutually beneficial possibilities. First, in this introductory section we highlighted the history, trends and binds informing contemporary academic publishing. Secondly, we examine the complex ways in which private and public interests are enmeshed in this sector. Thirdly, we propose a conceptual framework based on the following mechanisms: boycotting proprietary platforms and bargaining for fairer practices; building alternative platforms to bridge impasses and publish elsewhere; and bringing transformative systems for academic publishing processes and profits into being. Finally, we suggest why these acts of dissuading, detouring and disrupting are urgently needed in the sector.

Background: The Academic Publishing Semicommons

In this second section, we seek to unpack the following question: *What are the pressures associated with private and common uses in the sector?* Our article seeks to problematise binaries of knowledge possession and dispossession by examining the relationship of the “semicommons” (Smith 2000) to academic publishing. Our interest in this term is based on the recognition that a political economy strongly underpins how academic publishing is formed, as is evident from a variety of international and country perspectives (Merrett 2006; Biesta 2012; Lincoln 2012). The sector now spans a global political economy, emerging from the “private appropriation of public resources and the unrestricted commodification of information” (Pirie 2009: 57). Features of the semicommons are outlined below, alongside the ways in which these tensions, benefits and power relations apply to the academic publishing sector.

The term “semicommons” was originally coined by property theorist Henry E. Smith: “In what I am calling a semicommons, both common and private uses are important and impact significantly on each other” (Smith 2000: 132). This concept has since been applied to studies of information property, telecommunications and the internet (Heverly 2003; Smith, 2005; Grimmelmann, 2010). A defining feature of the semicommons is: “the explicit recognition of a dynamic relationship between the common and private uses of semicommons property, such that their coexistence maximizes wealth to an extent not possible under either a purely common or a purely private scheme” (Heverly 2003: 1132). Applied to practices of academic publishing, we suggest its formal outputs—journal articles, books, book chapters and conference proceedings—occupy comparable wealth-maximising positions for some actors, within a field similarly composed of both private and common uses.

We further propose the characterisation of an *academic publishing semicommons* to highlight the digital binds of exclusion and inclusion which could

be otherwise. Threats to the hypothetically mutual benefits of the semicommons requires attention to the multiple layers of its operation. Negative “strategic behavior” is associated with “capturing as many of the benefits of the dynamic relationship as possible, while avoiding as many of the costs as possible” (Heverly 2003: 1172), arising “out of the method by which information owners grant access to their information” (Heverly 2003: 1176). Understanding the methods and repercussions of such strategies in the academic publishing sector can help us to modulate one-sided benefits, as well as generate more inclusive and equitable designs.

Rather than an idealised state of equilibrium, the concept of semicommons is better understood in conjunction with political philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s term “state of exception” (2005). Agamben outlines this state as a zone of indeterminacy in which the regular law has been suspended. Such ambiguity strips away the sense of safety often associated with legal status and rights, leading to unprecedented tensions and exclusions. The dynamics of academic publishing semicommons can then be seen as an exceptional territory impinged upon by forces, strategies and threats. The term “state of exception” has been applied to urban studies (Stavrides 2013; Murray 2017) to highlight the zones which operate outside of the law. This suspension of law creates undecidability through creating new routines and habits “which are justified by administrative reasoning alone” (Stavrides 2013: 40); in addition, once erected under conditions of apparent urgency, such imposed zones often stay and become normalised – such as post-Olympic Athens or post-9/11 New York. Ominously, exclusionary spaces in the city, such as gated estates, shopping malls, resorts, and parks “represent increasingly prevalent building typologies for the urban future” (Murray 2017: 20).

We argue the rise of informatic exclusionary spaces, in the form of proprietary publishing platforms, align with Murray’s (2017) analysis of contemporary spatial fragmentation, and similarly participate in “the new social logic of postpublic space is one of indifference and indistinction, that is, not necessarily one of deliberate exclusion, but a kind of selective inclusion that welcomes some but discourages others” (Murray 2017: 20). As a comparable case, and in contrast to the overuse associated with Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons” metaphor, Heller and Eisenberg (1998) examined the transaction costs, diverse interests and cognitive biases within biomedical research to propose the “tragedy of the anticommons”. This tragedy registers the situation of underuse where “multiple owners each have a right to exclude others for a scarce resource and no one has an effective privilege of use” (Heller & Eisenberg 1998: 698). In such cases, apparent crises of intellectual property theft are produced to justify draconian rights management systems and other exceptional states. Other semicommoning

examples in digital academic publishing include the proprietary formats used to manage digital rights of access to academic books, such as Apple's iBook (IBA) and Amazon's Kindle file formats. While opening access to scholarly content, they simultaneously limit content sharing and reuse—even copying and pasting fair-use quotes from Kindle readers is notoriously difficult. Scholarly portals, such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate, appear novel communing initiatives, but produce further commodities—data on academics and their publications— that has proprietary commercial value. The oligopoly of large academic publishers constitute the largest disseminators of open access content, but under conditions that continue to support a business model that both concentrates knowledge and contributes very little to it: owning and monetising content written by academics and subsidised by grant agencies and taxpayers (Larivière, Haustein & Mongeon 2015). Oscillating between and manipulating oppositions of public/common and private/anticommon intellectual property, semicommoning functions strategically for dominant publishers and institutions to privatise the financialisation of that property.

In this section we described the conditions which generate the *academic publishing semicommons*: the entanglement of private and common uses, and the strategic use of exceptions to de-mutualise the benefits of this arrangement. Digital binds intermingle across institutions, sectors, and borders to produce these co-existing private and common interests. Bratton's (2016) notion of "The Stack" again helps to illustrate how this unfolds abstractly:

Platform sovereignty may be planned or unplanned, universal or specific, generative or reactive, technologically determined or politically guaranteed. *Platform sovereignty is automatic under some circumstances and highly contingent under others, and it may function differently in relation to different components of the platform system.* The conditionality of these is a function of how platforms relate to other political, technical, and economic institutions that also manage something (or someone) that is also organized by that platform (Bratton 2016: 51).

This has far-reaching implications for how we choose to design the future of labour, technology and governance across academic publishing. What role do—or could—university researchers, professional staff, alternative journals and platforms, plus emerging technologies play in reconfiguring the ethics and politics of digital binds? Our inquiry therefore seeks to build on studies which suggest that academic publishing requires "not less mediation but mediation of a different kind [...] We need new ways of measuring, nurturing, valuing, and, ultimately, conceiving of it" (Wellmon & Piper 2017). In the following section, we highlight

how the boundaries of academic publishing could potentially be drawn with more ethical designs in mind.

Conceptual Framework: Ethical Executions of Code

Previously illustrated, the digital binds of the academic publishing semicommons constitute a dilemma for those working within the scholarly community. Extending upon this, and elaborating upon on a twinned interest in technology and ethics, the conceptual framework proposed in this section asks: *How can more ethical designs for academic publishing be drawn?* We begin by introducing the idea of *ethical executions of code*: the mechanisms of dissuading, detouring and disrupting which interrupt academic publishing platforms and practices towards more ethical designs. While the primacy of ethics is key to such designs, they are also heavily imbued with political intent: “a space that is bought into being by citizen subjects who act in ways that submit to but also at the same time go beyond and transgress the conventions of the Internet” (Ruppert 2015). In the context of the academic publishing semicommons, such designs aim to modulate unfair states of exception imposed by dominant actors through “boundary placement”, a method for “abating suboptimal behavior by those with access to a resource” (Smith 2000: 162).

Design is a key feature of what we term ethical executions of code, developing ways of drawing more equitable academic publishing boundaries. The role of design is vital, as it “becomes clear that it is not only the activity of designing which is inherently ethical, but that instances of design themselves possess an inherent ethicality. Artefacts of design bring new potentialities into being as they come into existence, and actively embody and reproduce potentialities by continuing to exist” (Buwert 2017: S4466). Design includes here more than the specific plan of a technological solution, and the blueprints of a single social organization or policy. It also can intend towards features of the general architecture for an entire sector or industry, such as academic publishing as a whole. Towards this end, we aim here to offer a heuristic and vocabulary for how academics, programmers, designers, scholarly societies, and education leaders can embed more ethical designs in the sector. Three affordances of this framework are outlined below, suggesting “digital acts” (Ruppert 2015) for generating more inclusive and equitable digital binds.

Mechanism 1: Dissuading

The first mechanism— *dissuading*—seeks to unsettle the growing powers associated with an “oligopoly of academic publishers” (Petrini & Alleva, 2015; Larivière et al. 2015). It illustrates how the direction of proprietary publishers can be partially blocked and paused, so as to publicly question and debate how incentives

and mandates could be made more just. We first trace the emergence of the most dominant publishers and the ways in which they have come to commandeer the market at global and individual scales. We follow this by showing their geo-political reverberations: the ways these oligopolies are negatively impacting academic publishing across Western, Asian and Latin American regions. Then, we briefly describe the process of dissuading by way of Project Deal, the German consortium established to negotiate a fairer open-access agreement with Elsevier and other publishers. The boycott shows how academic and institutional practices can expose the interdependencies of the academic publishing semicommons: positioning us better to explore the potentiality of more ethical designs, even amid unjust structures.

How did this oligopoly come about? Tracing the emerging academic publishing industry in mid-century Britain, Buranyi (2017) follows the journey of businessman Robert Maxwell as he espied an inefficiency in the scientific publishing process. The tycoon quickly realised the easy profits that could be made from monetising and marketing science; an early example from 1955 was signing up researchers to exclusive contracts at the Geneva Conference on Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy. By the 1960s his business model for Pergamon involved creating grand titles and inventing a multiplicity of journals that placed him well-ahead of other publishers. Amid much controversy about his private and public dealings, he sold Pergamon to Elsevier in 1991. “If Maxwell’s genius was in expansion, Elsevier’s was in consolidation,” Buranyi remarks, highlighting the acquisition, price hikes and electronic access bundles of the 1990s. Digital affordances for scaling, through market consolidation, and bundling, through package subscriptions (Petrini & Alleva 2015) continue to escalate, and realised efficiencies have not been passed on to university customers. A study showed how five for-profit publishers were responsible for more than half of all science publishing around the world (Larivière et al. 2015).

As the global reach of academic publishers and university rankings expands, the publish-or-perish culture, initially a feature mainly of European and North American universities, leaks into the publishing circulations of other countries. In a study of young Chinese scholars, the pressure to publish in internationally indexed journals promises promotion and incentives. Yet it has also negatively impacts their personal and social lives, and in the long term dilutes the quality of research and the prospect of novel discoveries (Tian et al. 2016). Ren & Montgomery (2015) outline how a “lack of transparency in the government-controlled research and higher education system in China” (405) could begin to be addressed with the broader scrutiny, supervision and public benefits of more thoughtful open-access publishing. The authors examine two open-access publishing approaches—“government-initiated national-level

repositories and publisher-initiated OA journals” (Ren & Montgomery 2015: 395)—which could enhance reach, transparency and efficiency of academic publishing. Given the current state of the market, the first of these—push-back by the state against market mechanisms—appears much more likely to succeed.

The reverberations of academic publishing imperatives in Latin America countries such as Ecuador indicate emerging tensions in other geographic regions. Bernasconi (2016) charts the evolution of the Latin America model of higher education, currently grappling with tensions between co-governed developments of social transformation and the economically-driven standards of the knowledge landscape. In Ecuador, the multibillion dollar investment in higher education over the last decade has allocated money across scholarships, technical education, excellence, admission and accreditation, innovation and contingency plans (telesurtv 2017). The ways in which this will steer academic publishing in the country will no doubt continue to be closely examined. As Feyen et al. (2016) acknowledge, publication visibility in Ecuador contends with multifaceted issues, including: low research capacity and infrastructure; low impact and prestige of local journals; scholars studying abroad often publish in international peer-reviewed journals; and local scholars contributing to internationally-funded projects are sometimes excluded as co-authors.

Established in Germany in 2016 to establish a fairer licensing agreement with Elsevier, Springer Nature, and Wiley, the number of institutions joining Project Deal is rapidly increasing, with an increasing number of academic institutions supporting demands for fair pricing, open access to academics, and permanent access to associated scientific bodies (Kwon 2017). As of early December 2017, negotiations are still underway with the extension of contracts due to expire at the end of the month (Schiermeier 2017). An analysis of the Cost of Knowledge petition (Heyman et al. 2016) describes the dilemma of individuals signing up to a boycott, and the personal and professional pressures which can counteract such commitments. The Project Deal consortium shows how many individuals and institutions—when working together—can begin to push back against corporations reaping the profits from academic labour. With countries such as Peru and Taiwan joining the boycott against Elsevier, this double-strategy of denial and desire shows how semicommons disequilibria can begin to be recalibrated. Dissuading – through blocking routes of for-profit publishing companies—involves what we have termed an ethical execution of code by way of a two-phase mechanism: obstructing impingements from states of exception, and demanding fairer practices.

Mechanism 2: Detouring

The second mechanism—*detouring*—can be performed by alternative platforms that help to traverse the academic publishing semicommons in novel ways. We discuss three types of platforms that seek to circumvent proprietary academic publishers by connecting producers and consumers directly: open access journals; unsanctioned repositories; and agency mandates for public dissemination. Tracing the rhetoric of ‘openness’ across varying software and network cultures, Tkacz (2012) indicates “there is a need to look more closely at the specific projects that operate under its name—at their details, emergent relations, consistencies, modes of organising and stabilising, points of difference, and forms of exclusion and inclusion” (Tkacz 2012: 404). This can be done through thinking more carefully about how open access journals have emerged from intermingling moral and market concerns; recalibrating labour and legal norms to support academics as individuals and collectives; and better understanding the sanctioned and unsanctioned intermediaries which can forge alternate paths to seemingly ingrained states of exception.

Open access pre-dates the rise of the World Wide Web, but has exploded in popularity with the global spread of the Internet. For example, in the United States two federally funded initiatives were developed in 1966, the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) and MEDLINE (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online); these preceded ARPANET, a network set up in 1969 by the Advanced Research Projects Agency for “sharing research without barriers” (Suber 2006). Project Gutenberg was created in 1971, based upon a ‘Plain Vanilla’ American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) allowing easy online accessibility; this emerged from the idea that: “the greatest value created by computers would not be computing, but would be the storage, retrieval, and searching of what was stored in our libraries” (Hart 1992). In 1991, arXiv was established, “a highly-automated electronic archive and distribution server for research articles” (arXiv.org 2017) built on a low-bandwidth TeX file format enabling high quality online text publishing. The diversity of motivations and values associated with the proliferation of open access, as Moore (2017) suggests, requires greater scrutiny. The success of open access journals has more recently been questioned, due in part to the rise of grey literature, vanity publishing and the predatory practices of pay-to-publish companies eager to exploit the demands of early career academics to publish. Originally developed to replicate established commercial models of peer-review and dissemination, some open access journals have more recently instigated more radical methods of review. In a two-part critique of existing models of academic knowledge exchange, Whitworth and Friedman (2009a, 2009b) propose utilising socio-technical advances—wikis, online repositories, rating systems, filters, social bookmarks and version control

—to encourage more inclusive, granular and participatory methods for producing and distributing research. As one example, *The Journal of Peer Production* (JoPP) has since sought to implement some of these suggestions into its review process: originals, reviews and quantitative signals are published alongside final manuscripts.

Beyond the desire to loosen the shackles of the gates of knowledge production (Whitworth & Friedman 2009a), such experimentation serves wider ends. According to several members of JoPP’s editorial board, making critique available publicly shifts research work closer to ideals exhibited by open source software, where “massive numbers of reviewers can address, in the case of FOSS for example, defects or ‘bugs’” (O’Neil & Zacchiroli 2017). This in turn produces work—whether software, research or other forms of creative labour—that is “socially and technically valuable”, and leads to a “further expansion of the commons” (O’Neil & Zacchiroli 2017). Through reputation-building, contributions to the commons can help to construct “new forms of solidarity” and communalism, coexisting with but independent from the capitalistic logic seemingly irrepressibly insurgent in today’s academia (O’Neil & Zacchiroli 2017).

Notwithstanding counter-examples, and as discussed in the previous section, the majority of reputable scientific knowledge still disseminates via journals owned by the “oligopoly” comprising five major academic publishers: Reed-Elsevier, Wiley-Blackwell, Springer, Taylor & Francis and Sage Publications (Larivière, Haustein & Mongeon 2015). These generate their revenues by selling access to universities and other research institutions and, despite adopting less restrictive policies such as time-delayed “green” open access, have little commercial incentive to release their content freely. Efforts to circumvent paywalled research content have frequently floundered upon legal injunctions and threats of prosecution, most famously in the case of Aaron Swartz’s systematic downloading of JSTOR’s archived content.

Systematic detouring does now appear to be underway. Since 2011, the Sci-Hub website¹ has developed as the world’s largest repository of pirated scholarly material. As of mid-2017, it hosts more than 64.5 million articles, and is maintained through volunteer labour and financial contributions (Sci-Hub 2017). A recent study of its scope suggest Sci-Hub contains as much as 85.2 per cent of articles published in closed access journals (Himmelstein et al. 2017)—more than five in six previously paywalled articles now being freely available. Sci-Hub’s success, as “nearly all scholarly literature is available gratis to anyone with an Internet connection”, provocatively points to “the subscription publishing model becoming unsustainable” (Himmelstein et al. 2017).

Significantly, the hosting arrangements of Sci-Hub to date—based in St. Petersburg, as well as replicated through encrypted torrent channels—have

made the site resilient towards take-down requests and threatened legal action. Indeed, Elsevier's civil suit and preliminary injunction against Sci-Hub produced greater publicity and traffic for the site (Himmelstein et al. 2017). Whether Sci-Hub ultimately spells the end of pay-walled content, its six-year successful operation registers a significant and sustained alternative conduit of access. Not coincidentally, that success is partly premised upon the widespread use of crypto-platforms (Tor, Bitcoin) that shield the site's operators, contributors, users and funders from sanctions. We discuss the potential expanded use of such platforms further below.

The third catalyst involves the widening role of non-academic institutions in the funding and dissemination of university research. As Butler (2017) notes, organisations such as the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust now promote or mandate open access publishing of funded scientific work. While this locks out authors from access to established and highly reputable journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, the high prestige of these funding organisations acts as a significant counterweight in the general ledger of academic reputational value. Both organisations have also founded substantial open access publishing platforms of their own, with a specific drive towards promoting research in developing nations (Butler 2017). Coupled with the continued rise of *altmetrics* (Priem et al. 2010)—alternative measures of academic quality and impact—such developments mean research funded by humanitarian agencies and published through open access platforms appears a viable complementary or alternative channel for academic career development and knowledge production.

These three instruments—open access, unsanctioned repositories, and funding agency mandates—contribute to what we term a process of detouring: the manoeuvring of academic knowledge through alternative channels. Such ethical executions of code, we propose, offer ways of modulating seemingly rigid states of exception within the academic publishing semicommons. However, none in and of themselves yet make good on the promise of a global knowledge commons that acknowledges institutional funding and authorial contributions while permitting free or token access to its results. Open access, for instance, still leaves unmet the challenges of costing both research and its dissemination through peer review, editors and technology hosting infrastructure. That challenge remains a largely unrealised goal that requires further speculative activity, one approach to which we turn in the section below.

Mechanism 3: Disrupting

Disrupting connotes the possibility of creating digital platforms which have the potential to invert the academic publishing sector, and here we explore the disruptive possibilities of blockchain technology. Underpinning Bitcoin, a digital

cryptocurrency released in 2009, blockchains offer immutable, decentralised digital ledgers based upon “collective consensus and verification” rather than a central authority; this enables trust to “shift away from third parties and legacy institutions towards code and a community-based, open-source, peer-to-peer system of transparency and accountability” (Al-Saqaf & Seidler 2017: 2). We propose that blockchain technology can potentially transform the current socio-technical stasis of moral and market crises associated with academic publishing. This could be achieved, as traced below, by producing alternative conduits of incentives, value and exchange. Moreover, we suggest blockchain technology may offer even more ways to invert the apparent grip of states of exception through “geo-designs” (Bratton 2015) transforming knowledge sovereignty on a global scale.

The gradual maturation and adoption of blockchain technology could embed operations of a trusted ledger and repository for global knowledge sharing. Describing the evolution of blockchain from currency to smart contracts and applications, Swan (2015) highlights how this technology holds potential for an alternative technical and organizing paradigm:

We should think about the blockchain as another class of thing like the Internet—a comprehensive information technology with tiered technical levels and multiple classes of applications for any form of asset registry, inventory, and exchange, including every area of governance, economics, and money; hard assets (physical property, homes, cars); and intangible assets (votes, ideas, reputation, intention, health data, information, etc.). But the blockchain concept is even more; it is a new organizing paradigm for the discovery, valuation, and transfer of all quanta (discrete units) of anything, and potentially for the coordination of all human activity at a much larger scale than has been possible before (Swan 2015: vii, italicised in text).

The affordances of blockchain are increasingly identified as ways to open up more mutually beneficial possibilities for academic publishing. For example, a blockchain-based system (such as r-coin, a ResearchCoin or ReviewCoin) where researchers obtain bitcoin currency for each review undertaken has multiple benefits: offering incentives to researchers, raising barriers to predatory publishers, and providing an “alternative publication metric” (Spearpoint 2017: 1). In view of this, blockchain has the potential to support concerns for efficiency alongside care for justice:

Publishers provide content curation, discovery, “findability,” relevancy, advocacy, validation, and status ascribing, all of which might be useful attributes for content consumers. One way to improve a centralized model with blockchain technology is by applying an economy as a mechanism for making the incentives and reward structures of the system fairer (Swan 2015: 63).

Applying blockchain to academic publishing—and the affordances of a Bitcoin address—could underpin a universal standard for publishing, cataloguing, and purchasing, thereby opening up multiple opportunities. Existing examples include: JournalCoin—a token system to underpin a “publishing microeconomy”; metacoins by Big5 publishers to run as Counterparty assets; Researchcoin to buy papers behind paywalls; and Experimental Resultscoin to incentivise experimental replication, negative results, and raw data (Swan 2015: 63-64).

This disrupting mechanism shows how the boundaries of academic publishing can be redrawn to better recognise and reward shared labour. Its tentative formulation requires acknowledging and working through both the massive technological complexity of re-equipping universities, publishers, authors, reviewers, editors and readers with usable crypto-infrastructures, and the considerable scepticism levelled at the financial speculation and political entailments seemingly embedded with the architecture of Bitcoin itself (Golumbia 2015). Without further experimentation though, institutional inertia is liable to default to existing and known arrangements with those who supply universities the products they have already bourn the risk and cost of financing—perpetuating a perverse market and an inequitable geopolitics. The “promises and pitfalls of blockchain technology” stem from how “technology creates a set of potentials that are informed by its core architecture and principles” (Saqaf & Seidler 2017: 5). This mechanism holds potential for sector transformation, but will require collaborative attention and energies towards co-designing such possibilities.

Individuals and communities from across higher education and beyond can utilise the mechanisms suggested above to unsettle some of the ingrained tensions and limits associated with the sector. The dynamics of semicommoning offers us a way to problematise perceptions of rigid property principles and linear resource use: through recognising how threats of “strategic behavior” can be potentially ameliorated via “boundary placement” (Smith 2000: 133). The value of the proposed heuristic—ethical executions of code—stems from showing how more inclusive platforms and equitable practices can reconfigure the academic publishing semicommons.

Conclusion: Designing Otherwise

Our article examined the ways in which the conditions, pressures and designs of academic publishing in the digital age can be modulated for *designing otherwise*: that is, the ethical design of digital binds as political acts in the making. In accord with this intent, the primacy of ethics central to the philosophy of Levinas offers a way of “undesigning the design” of information and communication technologies, by way of “reinvention and new judgments through and beyond existing frames of ethics and politics (Brigham & Introna 2007: 7). The ethical and political imperative of designing otherwise becomes a double force which can be applied to digital platforms and practices: the “digital acts” (Ruppert 2015) of picking away at unjust binds, along with the pursuit of more just entanglements.

The formation and entanglement of digital binds, and how they could be designed otherwise, has been the guiding motif of our argument. First, we explored how the drivers in this sector are always mediated via socio-technical binds (history, trends and infrastructures); secondly, we identified how features and strategies of the “semicommons” (Smith 2000, 2005) resonate within the academic publishing context; thirdly, our concept of ethical executions of code showed how the sector’s mechanisms could be geared towards more ethical designs. The mechanism of dissuading was illustrated by way of Project Deal, the German consortium established to negotiate a fairer open-access agreement with Elsevier and other publishers. This is one example of how academics and institutions can begin to negotiate fairer practices, through blocking the hold of proprietary platforms and raising publishing inequalities to public debate. The mechanism of detouring was highlighted by way of platforms, such as commons-based journals (The Journal of Peer Production) and illegal file-sharing repositories (Sci-Hub), which inscribe alternate publishing pathways. The mechanism of disrupting focused upon the ways in which blockchain technology can potentially invert the way in which the academic publishing sector operates.

We conclude by asking: *Why are such mechanisms necessary?* The infrastructural reach of platforms to curtail and create freedoms across global, regional, city, institutional, and individual domains is markedly apparent. Both common and private interests form the academic publishing semicommons. Ethical design, or designing otherwise, needs to be a primary consideration of these entanglements and what becomes produced. We have illustrated how, in the context of academic publishing, this semicommons is activated by various digital binds which need to be redrawn, maintained, and sustained with care. As Bratton suggests:

The care of any archive is one present moment's self-accounting toward an unknowable future—an ethics—and a database is just a particularly active kind of archive, one for which information that is drawn from the world more easily becomes an instrument for working reflexively back on it. It's unclear though if the shift from scarce, sacred texts to overabundant, instantaneously archivable information still requires the same promise of ethical completion to motivate and justify our participation and promise toward the future. We could act as if it does, until we find out (Bratton, 2015: 353).

Acts of longer term care are needed beyond the short-circuiting of knowledge and skills, as Stiegler has also suggested with the idea of “contributory publishing”, pointing toward a reorientation of research economies “in the service of new scholarly and scientific societies, and of the academy as a whole” (Stiegler, 2015: 213). A range of specialists and expertise—from the university sector and beyond—need to problematise the status quo by re-directing their energies to create a semicommons which strikes a more balanced approach between public and private interests. All disciplinary fields—from biomedical and biodiversity, to social sciences, humanities and arts—must co-create the proliferation of ethical digital binds. Ultimately, this can buffer and offset the dominance of privatising and corporatising forces which exclude or detract from benefits for academics, their peers, and the public. Our conceptual framework delves into a range of existing and emerging mechanisms—dissuading, detouring, and disrupting—to articulate more inclusive and equitable designs for the future of academic publishing.

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Notes

¹We echo Himmelstein et al.'s warning: "Readers should note that, in many jurisdictions, use of Sci-Hub may constitute copyright infringement. Users of Sci-Hub do so at their own risk. This study is not an endorsement of using Sci-Hub, and its authors and publishers accept no responsibility on behalf of readers. There is a possibility that Sci-Hub users—especially those not using privacy-enhancing services such as Tor— could have their usage history unmasked and face consequences, both legal or reputational in nature" (2017).

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Bellamy's Rage and Beer's Conscience: Pirate Methodologies and the Contemporary University

By James Arvanitakis, Martin Fredriksson & Sonja Schillings

Abstract

Over the last decade piracy has emerged as a growing field of research covering a wide range of different phenomena, from fashion counterfeits and media piracy, through to 17th century buccaneers and present-day pirates off the coast of Somalia. In many cases piracy can be a metaphor or an analytical perspective to understand conflicts and social change. This article relates this fascination with piracy as a practice and a metaphor to academia and asks what a pirate methodology of knowledge production could be: how, in other words, researchers and educators can be understood as 'pirates' to the corporate university. Drawing on the history of maritime piracy as well as on a discussion on contemporary pirate libraries that disrupt proprietary publishing, the article explores the possibility of a pirate methodology as a way of acting as a researcher and relating to existing norms of knowledge production. The methodology of piratical scholarship involves exploiting the grey zones and loopholes of contemporary academia. It is a tactical intervention that exploits short term opportunities that arise in the machinery of academia to the strategic end of turning a limiting structure into an enabling field of opportunities. We hope that such a concept of pirate methodologies may help us reflect on how sustainable and constructive approaches to knowledge production emerge in the context of a critique of the corporate university.

Keywords: Piracy, knowledge production, university politics, knowledge politics, publishing.

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Introduction: A Pirate Methodology

Over the last decade, piracy has emerged as a growing field of research covering a range of different phenomena: from 17th century buccaneers through to present day pirates off the coast of Somalia, to fashion counterfeits and illegal downloads of the world's most popular movies and television shows. This scholarly interest has partly been a response to the public attention on media piracy in the early part of this century when file-sharing networks such as Napster and The Pirate Bay caused outrage within the media industry, but has now grown into an emerging research field transgressing a narrower media focus (see e.g. de Sutter 2011, Fredriksson & Arvanitakis 2014; Arvanitakis & Fredriksson 2017, Puzar 2010).

Piracy is not a new term but has been used as a metaphor for unauthorized book publishing since the 17th century and was conventionalized as such in the 19th century (Johns 2009, Eilenberg 1989). It was thus a handy and readymade trope in the copyright wars of the 1990s and early 2000s when the copyright industries drew heavily on the pirate metaphor to brand the hometapers, file-sharers and counterfeiters as thieves and outlaws. The strategy backfired as the word 'pirate' was embraced and coopted by the file-sharers, giving rise to a pirate 'movement' that drew heavily on the mythology and iconography of golden age piracy and characterizations of pirates in pop culture. Previous popular representations of the pirate in literature, stemming from the nineteenth Century, identified pirates as the exploiter of political, legal, and bureaucratic loopholes (Schillings 2017, 139-140). Today, this pop cultural usage has extended to a more general idea of pirates as subversive, anarchist and egalitarian actors who challenge the prevailing hierarchies of colonial empires and otherwise oppressive bureaucratic structures.

Academia has responded in various ways to this abundance of conflicting pirate representations. Some researchers condemn all acts of piracy while others see subversive potential in certain forms of piracy. In some cases, such as in our own work, piracy has emerged as a metaphor, or even as a method, to help us understand complex societal changes by acknowledging the fact that most acts and actors occupy grey zones—between legal and illegal; public and private; open and closed; good and bad (Fredriksson & Arvanitakis 2014; Arvanitakis & Fredriksson 2017; Schillings 2017).

In this article, we apply that perspective to ourselves and ask whether the approach of *piracy as a method* can help us understand our own position in academia. Recent scholarship, particularly in the humanities, has repeatedly stressed that the researchers' perspective inevitably informs their methodology and research emphases. Therefore, it is of particular importance that we disentangle some of the complexities inherent in academic perspectives. This is not the least important to our own work since we have been studying piracy and thus inevitably interacted with the conversations on piracy that abound today as the issue has been increasingly mediatized since the 1990s.

In our minds, *Piracy as a method*, could help us formulate a more nuanced understanding of the loophole-exploiting individualist scholar (rogue, but stoutly capitalist) who bounces from institution to institution, always on the hunt for third-party funding and short-termed employment. Another potential consequence of this method is the proliferation of more specific conversations on our own access to, and production of, available knowledge which ultimately occasions us to reflect on visions of a free academic exchange. The focus on piracy, thus enables the interrogation of the complex phenomena which are implicitly framed by stark distinctions between right and wrong, oppressive and oppressed, perpetrator and victim. The reference to piracy allows us to see many sides of a conflict in a way that does not deem them equivalent in terms of power, resources, or objective; rather, it allows a multifaceted approach that takes into view the many contradictory layers of conflict, oppression, aggression, and opportunity.

The pirate perspective thus embraces the simultaneity of the object of study: the fact that an act can be many things at the same time, and that how you chose to define it can lead to seemingly irreconcilable conflicts. We see this in the polarized debates over media piracy, where the copyright industry and the file sharing ideologists cannot understand each other simply because they define the contested objects differently. The former assumes that copyright protected works are property that is being stolen by the pirates, and for the latter, file sharing is an act of communication that is being disrupted and censored by the purveyors of property rights. In both cases, the consequences seem intolerable.

We even see this simultaneity in Somali piracy which is perceived as both a violation of international law and an enforcement of local customary rights. It is indeed much more difficult to romanticize contemporary maritime piracy – where armed forces are fighting actual maritime robbers off the coast of Somalia and in the South China Sea—as it involves violence and is often accused of having ties to terrorism. However, at closer consideration Somali piracy may also have emanated out of moral and legal grey zones. The acts condemned as piracy are not only heterogeneous in the sense that they involve a range of different strategies and objectives. According to local customary laws—the Xeer law prevalent in many Somali communities—they can also be considered legitimate means of compensation for damages and losses that those communities suffer from overfishing and the pollution caused by European and Asian fishing fleets and the global shipping industry as a whole (Gilmer 2017).

As this article will demonstrate, we also see this ambiguity illustrated in our own roles as academics. In the following article we will discuss how the pirate and the professional academic simultaneously depend on, and at the same time potentially oppose, a given structural distribution of resources—be it material wealth as in the case of colonial logistics, or knowledge as in academia—and how

this dependence and opposition challenges our way of understanding ourselves and the academy. We will begin with discussing everyday life in an academia that increasingly relies on precarious working conditions and a mobile workforce. Then we will address the (social) mediatization of academia and the blurred, but still strict, distinction between proprietary publishing, Open Access and piracy. Finally, we will return to the history of maritime piracy to ask if a pirate methodology could help us understand, and maybe also change, our own role within academia.

The Pirate and the Academic—Mobility and Precarity

Geographic mobility is a suitable point of departure for the discussion of how and where the image of the pirate and the situation of the contemporary academic researcher intersect. Alexandra Ganser has described how the authorities of a colonial Europe resented piracy because it represented an unsanctioned and uncontrollable form of mobility, not only spatially but also socially, since the pirates rejected the social order of the navy and established their own social hierarchy (Ganser 2017). Piracy thus actualizes the question of what constitutes authorized and unauthorized, as well as privileged and unprivileged, forms of mobility.

Connecting to piracy's inherent claim to illegitimate mobility might, at first glance, be seen to create an enabling space within an otherwise often rigid academic structure. In other words, piracy emerges as a way to circumvent the interests of states, markets, and other 'interested' power players. In an academic context, this can be seen as analogous to the desire to do research that is based on the researcher's choice to explore questions with potentially uncomfortable answers for academic institutions. This view on intellectual mobility as a struggle to move beyond established routes of thought and to challenge hegemonic perspectives is sometimes associated with activist scholarship, including research on copyright that is 'pro-piracy'.

The relationship between intellectual and spatial mobility can, however, be ambiguous as the latter does not necessarily promote the former. The capacity to use and enjoy spatial mobility is entirely dependent on whether one's working conditions veer towards the privileged or the precarious. For those of us who enjoy a fairly secure employment and a certain amount of freedom, mobility is mostly an opportunity. For those of us who lack those privileges and safety nets, mobility can be an externally enforced requirement. Since this precarious stage is something that most newly graduated PhDs are likely to experience on their way towards a more secure and privileged position—which may not ever come—we will focus our discussion on the precarious rather than on the privileged academic.

Neither does spatial mobility necessarily contribute to greater intellectual mobility as precarious mobility and the dependencies it involves, limits the individual's capacity to express oppositional opinions.

Academic mobility is most often not part of a utopian lifestyle; it is part of a precarious job description (c.f. Hall 2016). The majority of contemporary researchers are not, in fact, perpetually mobile for reasons of research integrity. They are made mobile by un-tenured positions, transitional grants, and the increasing reluctance of universities to make long-standing commitments to researchers. Heated, principled, sophisticated and consequential conversations about the nature of research within universities do not even have a chance to arise when universities refuse to commit to researchers in the first place, and thus implicitly refuse to consider researchers' visions of scholarship as consequential to the institutional profile. Often, the emphasis on research mobility as a condition of contemporary research prevents the systematic inclusion of research perspectives into even the short-term institutional memory of a university or even faculty.

As the (often junior) researchers who are forced to be mobile by the general structural demands of the university know, mobility does not automatically result in a sophistication of perspective. Serious debates on academic vision which might indeed result in normative disagreement with universities and an individual commitment to mobility often do not even arise in the first place *because* of contemporary conditions of researcher mobility.

If this is the starting premise, especially for young academic researchers, the proper parallel offered by the much-allegorized Golden Age of Piracy (1690-1730) is not the idea of class struggle as it is portrayed, for example, in the work of Marcus Rediker (2001, 2004). The academic world today is not well-described in the language of a divide between monolithic institutions and their representatives who are collectively devoted to a rigid continuity of thought and perspective on the one hand, and the rebellion of methodologically innovative, surprising and subversive individualist perspectives on the other. The situation of the precarious academic is better described by the problem of sailors as precarious workers who operate in a system geared toward their exploitation whichever choice they make. Researchers are needed as a workforce that produces knowledge, but everything is done to minimize the ability of individual contributions to directly impact the institutions from which such contributions emerge.

The Mediatized Academic and the Politics of Publishing

The structural origins of this situation may be traced to the legacy of the Cold War, when the university emerged as a model institution for transnationally bound knowledge 'gathering' in the name of national interests. The Manhattan

Project in particular can be described as a foundational project in this respect, as the parameters of scholarly success in this context relied on vivid knowledge exchange in conversations between international scholars on the one hand, and a rigid policing and structuring of the resulting scholarly work on the other. This model of international exchange in the name of national interest extends to the humanities insofar as interpretation itself became a central political concern in the context of the Cold War, and thus subtly reinforced the notion that knowledge is power and connected to privilege (Horn 2013). This paradox of sharing the thought process, but not the conclusions, of scholarly work is relevant to contemporary questions associated with piracy, not least because the question of copyright emerges as a central political concern that helps detach international academic collaboration from the far more restricted exchange of scholarly works (Dennis 2016: 56).

It is therefore not surprising that digital regimes of academic knowledge production and circulation are theoretically accessible to all but in fact rely on the funds and cooperative structures of an individual university library system. These are precisely the contexts of academic research that are consistently the target of 'pirated' knowledge production and circulation and these interventions are subject to normative debate precisely because they call attention to a split between open knowledge production and restricted access to the results. Here, the products of academic labour are appropriated by commercial publishing houses and sold back to the university libraries at hefty subscription fees. These tend to operate at exceptionally good profit margins, and as Sean Johnson Andrews and Jaafar Aksikas have shown in an article in *Cultural Studies*, they are often run by large transnational companies that might in some cases own academic publishing companies (such as Taylor & Francis which published *Cultural Studies*) alongside other businesses, including military subcontractors (Aksikas & Johnson 2014). This commercial publishing industry, spearheaded by large corporations like Elsevier and Taylor & Francis, also emerged with the expansion and internationalisation of academia partly driven by the mobilisation of research during the Cold War. It was further consolidated from the 1960s and onwards as large publishing houses merged and continuously acquired scholarly journals that had sometimes existed for decades on a non-profit basis (Fife et al 2017).

The 'public databases' of organisations such as Research Gate and Academia.edu are also privately owned, thus further exacerbating the understanding of scholarly works as a form of currency—an understanding of academic exchange (sic!) that corporate actors have not themselves invented but adopted from the Cold War state. When a layer of social media is added to this, we get a socio-technological environment that prioritizes the entrepreneurial self as an 'ideal' type of researcher. As Gary Hall argues in the podcast on *Mediatization+Publication*

published in this issue: “We’ve shifted into an era where we can’t just publish anymore, we’re supposed to be micro entrepreneurs of ourselves” (Lind 2017).

The shift from a Gutenberg galaxy to a Zuckerberg galaxy creates expectations to complement publishing with social media networking. This applies to all levels of academia, but it does not apply indiscriminately: as Swist and Magee point out in their contribution to this issue of *Culture Unbound* (Swist & Magee 2017) the precarity among certain parts of the academic workforce makes them particularly dependent on the kind of metrics and recognition that such inter-academic social media platforms offer. These platforms become even more important with academics’ increased and (often) enforced mobility which not only increases the importance of a well curated digital portfolio, but also makes it hard to use university websites for that purpose when academics move between different universities every second year. This creates a growing need for services that “offer a self-representation that is independent of current employment” (Hammarfelt et al 2016). At the same time, these platforms also function as what Hammarfelt et al. (2016), drawing on Jose van Dijk, describe as “inscriptions of normative professional behavior”. While the platforms instruct the users how to act self-entrepreneurs in a neoliberal academic market, they also measure how well they live up to this by providing metrics and statistics that create a gamification of academic life (Hammarfelt et al 2016).

At the same time, these websites are not only social media platforms but also alternative text depositories that integrate publishing with social networking functions. Some databases, such as Academia.edu, ResearchGate or Social Science Research Network (SSRN) offer a form of parallel publishing, or pre-print, services where academics can make texts, originally published in closed format in proprietary journals, available for non-paying customers. As such, these databases can be described as a kind of hybrid publishing space in a sphere of academic publishing that Swist and Magee (2017) describe as a semi-commons: a form of resource management where private and common ownership interact to create a more efficient use of the resources. In this context the academic networking platforms become a hybrid not only between social media and publishing, but also between proprietary and Open Access publishing which distributes the articles more widely than a strictly proprietary publishing system.

The necessity to create parallel distribution channels where academics can share articles they have published in proprietary journals with a wider audience, shows how proprietary publishing is actually detrimental to the interests of the academics whose careers depend on being read and cited as widely as possible. Here, the publishers and academics work according to different value systems: In order to turn the text into a commodity with an economic value, the publisher limits its circulation, which in turn limits the value it has for the academic as a

source of citations and public acknowledgement. Databases like Academia.edu and SSRN are grey zones that allow these two systems to co-exist: they provide academics with a tool to spread their work, without challenging the proprietary publishing model—although some of the texts they distribute might not be compliant with copyright law.

The fact is that these text depositories could be said to provide the publishing system with a flexibility that enables its continuous existence, thus making proprietary publishing compatible with the growing demand on Open Access publishing from large funding institutions. Therefore, it is significant that the academic publishing conglomerate Elsevier, in May 2016, bought the previously independent pre-print text depository SSRN (Van Noorden 2016; Masnick 2016). It is likely that we will see similar acquisitions in the near future as most academic publishing houses are likely to want their own alternative text depository. Although SSRN has been accused of imposing a stricter copyright regime after it was bought by Elsevier, they nevertheless emphasize that the new ownership conditions will not significantly affect their Open Access policy (Masnick 2016). This certainly makes sense since an enclosure of SSRN would counteract Elsevier's attempt to move into the Open Access segment: a more likely scenario would be if SSRN discretely promotes the spread of articles from Elsevier journals over those published by other companies.

Although their agendas might diverge, the interests of publisher and academic can coexist. It is more worrisome when this negotiation leaves the public altogether, i.e. the potential readers who do not have access to university library resources, cannot navigate confidently in inter-academic social networks. The fact that academics need to rely on alternative publishing platforms when they publish with proprietary journals indicates that commercial scientific publishing does not really contribute to the spread of knowledge and science but, in practice, limits it. This even constitutes a part of its business model, based as it is on paywalls that lock the texts away from the vast majority of readers. Like all other copyright based business models, academic publishing thrives on constructing an artificial scarcity of knowledge.

Works from this academic enclosure are consistently leaked and made accessible through piratical shadow libraries where large groups of users contribute by digitizing and uploading books, mostly in violation of copyright law. In some cases, particularly among the first generation of pirate libraries, the initial collection was made by university employees who had access to libraries as well as to computers. Over time, some of the larger shadow libraries have developed as different smaller text archives have merged into huge digital collections (Bodó, 2015).

While the digitization of conventional libraries is hampered by the publishers' restrictive policies on e-book licensing—which has sometimes created open conflicts between libraries and publishing organizations (Fredriksson 2015)—the shadow libraries are not subject to such legal, economic or administrative impediments. As Balasz Bodó puts it, “pirate libraries are the product of readers (and sometimes authors), academics and laypeople, all sharing a deep passion for the book, operating in a zone where there is little to no obstacle to the “ideal” library” (Bodó 2015: 75). Or as a pirate activist explained when he motivated his decision to scan and post thousands of books on The Pirate Bay:

I was thinking to myself. These books.... The whole purpose of the university back in the days was to send your kids off to it because that's where they had the libraries, the education, the expertise. That is no longer the case [...] everybody should have access to the education and the knowledge of all those books [...] it's a humanitarian effort to get that out there (quoted in Fredriksson 2015).

As Bodó (2015) points out, pirate libraries are underpinned by the idea that books in a digital age no longer need to be a scarce resource. Although the social network platforms and the pirate sites both make texts publicly and freely available, they do so according to different logics. On the social network platforms, the texts are circulated freely, but they remain tightly connected to the authorial persona since the very reason for disseminating the text is to promote the authors' status as an entrepreneurial subject in a neoliberal academia. Conversely, on the pirate sites, the texts stand on their own. Although the texts are certainly attributed to certain authors, the authorial persona is not the hub around which they are categorised and presented. Here, the reason to circulate the texts is not to promote their authors but to serve the readers.

These pirate libraries are often guided by an ideology calling for the public access to academic knowledge (Bodó 2015). In his “Guerilla Open Access Manifesto” the digital rights activist Aaron Swartz argues that it is not only the right but also the responsibility of all academics to ensure Open Access to their work. The proclamation thus includes a moral argument that all who have access to the knowledge produced within academia should help spread this knowledge. As Swartz writes,

those with access to these resources—students, librarians, scientists—you have been given a privilege. You get to feed at this banquet of knowledge while the rest of the world is locked out. But you need not—indeed, morally, you cannot—keep this privilege for yourselves. You have a duty to share it with the world. [...] There is no justice in following unjust laws (Swartz 2008).

However, as evidenced by the fate of Aaron Swartz who committed suicide in 2013, opposing these industries can in some cases have fatal consequences (Naughton 2015).¹ The fact that the European Union as well as many national research councils now require that the research they fund will be made available through Open Access forums lends post mortem restitution to Aaron Swartz, as it shows how the Open Access ethos is finding its way into public policies.

The Paths of Bellamy and Beer: Methods of Resistance or Persistence

In order to embed these well-known critiques in a conversation on piracy one may recall, for example, the famous ‘Free Prince Speech’ attributed to pirate captain Samuel Bellamy who attempts to recruit a Captain Beer, the captain of a ship just captured:

I can't pass by in Silence, Captain Bellamy's Speech to Captain Beer. "D—n my Bl—d," says he, "I am sorry they won't let you have your Sloop again, for I scorn to do any one a Mischief, when it is not for my Advantage; damn the Sloop, we must sink her, and she might be of Use to you. Tho', damn ye, you are a sneaking Puppy, and so are all those who will submit to be governed by Laws which rich men have made for their own Security, for the cowardly Whelps have not the Courage otherwise to defend what they get by their Knavery; but damn ye altogether: Damn them for a Pack of crafty Rascals, and you, who serve them, for a Parcel of hen-hearted Numskuls. They vilify us, the Scoundrels do, when there is only this Difference, they rob the Poor under the Cover of Law, forsooth, and we plunder the Rich under the Protection of our own Courage; had you not better make One of us, than sneak after the A—s of those Villains for Employment?" Captain Beer told him, that his Conscience would not allow him to break thro' the Laws of God and Man. "You are a devilish Conscience [conscientious] Rascal, d—n ye," reply'd Bellamy, "I am a free Prince, and I have as much Authority to make War on the whole World, as he who has a hundred Sail of Ships at Sea, and an Army of 100,000 Men in the Field; and this my Conscience tells me; but there is no arguing with such sniveling Puppies, who allow Superiors to kick them about Deck at Pleasure; and pin their Faith upon a Pimp of a Parson; a Squab, who neither practices nor believes what he puts upon the chuckle-headed Fools he preaches to" (Johnson 1999, 587; emphasis in original removed; quotation marks added).

When the attempt at recruitment is refused with reference to Beer's conscience, the Bellamy of this (heavily fictionalized) anecdote vehemently attacks not the normative foundations of Beer's position of conscience, but the naiveté of a position that the so-called 'honest trade' is in any way about honesty rather than about stabilizing and expanding prevailing structures of privilege. The trading companies, Bellamy suggests, are just as piratical as his own ship company is, and the only remaining question for any sailor or captain is: who is going to give me the more attractive deal for the work that I do, since I'm going to do it anyway, and since neither side is going to commit to me in the long run?

Beer, in contrast, asks and answers a different question. He doesn't care much about the conditions of his own precarious, but comparatively stable and secure, position in the 'honest trade.' He asks a different, yet no less relevant, question: where is the limit to this kind of critique? To this he answers:

It is here, where I am asked to leave the institutional framework of the honest trade and become only and exclusively its critic, its enemy, its nemesis—at the price of perpetuating exactly those aspects of the system, and only them, which I try so hard to counterbalance from within when I refer to my conscience in the first place. My conscience will be the only thing that will be permanently sacrificed by such a cross-over into piracy—but not my structural reliance on the fact that a trade system exists. Once I help run it, once I help attack it: What, indeed, is the difference between those two evils?

This story highlights two key points. First, defiance of a distributive order does not necessarily go hand in hand with the formulation of alternative visions (of trade or, in our own case, of knowledge production); secondly, that there is a much better chance of substantive systemic change from within, but only when equipped with insights from without. The confrontation of Bellamy and Beer does not give us exemplary characters who pursue this path to substantive systemic change. Instead, the exchange of two far more limited perspectives illustrates why precisely such a conversation may spark substantive reform.

Even though critical insights may influence individual decisions in profound ways (as in the case of Bellamy's decision to become a pirate, and Beer's decision not to become one) the story shows that both of these individual decisions are not foundational but reactive. The precarious social and institutional position of the academic is addressed in Bellamy's position, and emerges very clearly as a question of distributive justice within a system that views knowledge instrumentally—an instrument used to generate profit and to consolidate structural privilege and power. The academic does want a piece of the cake; he or she wants money,

resources and job security. This material dimension of research cannot be neglected, and Bellamy's brazen and extensive thematization of material wants and needs prevents us from glossing over this aspect of doing research.

At the same time, Beer's refusal to become a pirate draws attention to the normative side of research which goes beyond Bellamy's purely materialistic descriptions. Especially in the case of knowledge production, it is surely a hallmark of any scholar's self-understanding that the ends of their own research are not exhaustively described in terms of flexible tactical savviness. That scholarly research serves a higher, more general purpose is, indeed, what the scholarly consciousness tends to dictate. Nevertheless, Beer's relative speechlessness in the face of Bellamy's mockery indicates that such a perspective is ill-served by not considering the fact that high ideals are pursued in a system of trade/knowledge production that is designed to be unequal and to marginalize especially those mobile participants on whom it most depends. As Beer's example shows, normative visions which address this question can be preserved even in a systematically exploitative system, but they remain empty platitudes if they do not engage with the material conditions that empower certain sailors/scholars but not others (usually those who see these conditions most clearly).

It is ultimately this insight—in the very telling of the story—that is of interest to this article. Bellamy's analysis of the situation is compelling, but the question is raised whether the conclusions he draws are actually a normative rather than a tactical response: and we would argue 'no'. Beer's analysis of the situation is limited and far more superficial than Bellamy's, but his general insistence on norms and ideals seems better equipped for long-term change and reform.

It must be emphasized once more that the characters themselves, Beer and Bellamy, do not, in fact, communicate with each other. When their positions on piracy and trade are constructed as alternatives that exclude each other, when these questions are raised merely as ammunition in a confrontation, neither is capable of describing the situation or potential solutions satisfactorily. Yet the reader *is* capable of bringing them together because he or she is confronted with these positions as two sides of the same coin. As professional readers, contemporary academics may be particularly equipped to draw conclusions that systematize the provocation of this scene.

The story ultimately encapsulates the two dimensions in which piracy can be useful for the researcher. First, the tension between the pirate and the honest sailor emerges as an uncomfortably apt analogy for the description of contemporary research conditions; but on this basis, it also emerges as a reminder that, in order to exchange knowledge and to bring the results of scholarly thought together, the political benefits and limits of such perspectives have to be considered as part of that knowledge. Bellamy cannot think extensively about the possibilities opened

up by his critique because his critique serves to legitimate the conditions of his entire situation as an outlaw—his energy is needed to maintain his situation in the first place. Beer, on the other hand, cannot think too hard about the facts of his own position (i.e. that the system 'is exploitative of sailors like himself) because, simply put, Bellamy is right about it; but Beer, by not thinking about the problematic aspects of his honesty, is freed to think about the possibilities that emerge from his own situation in order to make it better.

Mobile career trajectories that are always partly outside and partly inside the institution of the university cannot afford either strategic blind spot: to lose sight either of the ideals that a system of privilege claims to answer to, or to the ways in which this particular systemic answer is exploitative or even abusive. This is also reflected in the study of piracy—or its systematized use as an allegory—that can help address and structure questions in which a difference in perspective (rather than, say, straightforward access to information) is the key obstacle to communicating effectively about global phenomena, dynamics and questions. Issues of copyright are a classic example here; but the expanded use of piracy as an allegory allows a broader use of the concept that does not require the signal use of terms such as 'copyright *piracy*.' There is much piracy that is not called piracy; as with any effective methodological toolbox, the kinship to piratical dilemmas and the accordant paradoxical provocations can be revealed by systematizing this toolbox.

The systematic study of pirate provocations, in this sense, emerges primarily as a meta-interdisciplinary enterprise. This is an interdisciplinarity that does not primarily bring together different text forms, historical trajectories and critical methodologies. Rather, it constitutes a critical *perspective on perspectives* most centrally interested in the study of seemingly incompatible and mutually hostile perspectives. The core question of piracy, according to Schillings (2011), is: *Why do we not understand each other even though we speak of the same phenomenon? What occasions this inability that is often also an unwillingness to engage? Why are we so unwilling—when and why do we resort to our conscience when we actually discuss aspects of knowledge? How and why are we so invested in perspectives? Can we, and should we, resist the conditions of our uneasy indebtedness to groups and institutions? Do we have the resources, the time, the standing for it—where can we renegotiate, and to which end should we renegotiate?*

Setting Sails for a Pirate Academia: A Conclusion

The contemporary university institution envisions the bringing together of multiple knowledges, and seeks to foster an intellectual exchange that is in fact an open system of sharing. As long as the university remains at least nominally

devoted to such a vision (a vision that a scholarly Beer may refer to), the vision can be accessed to inspire reform and betterment from within. Ultimately, this possibility can be considered the underlying moral of the story of Bellamy and Beer, published as it was in Great Britain in the early eighteenth century when both maritime piracy and the quasi-sovereignty of trading companies in colonized territories were under severe political attack.

In times of geopolitical transformation, global uncertainty, and the ‘postfactual’ return of interpretation as a central tool of political tactics, the interdisciplinary generation of knowledge in particular can only benefit from including an awareness of the interested, biased, and deeply political foundations on which the university itself rests. Especially with regard to junior researchers who perpetually slip into and out of university systems, the precariousness of global life must impact an awareness of the precariousness of globalist institutional knowledge production.

Bellamy’s rage and Beer’s conscience, powerful structural criticism and an awareness of the intellectual possibilities of structural integration, deserve in-depth consideration. The pirate methodology we suggest would consist in the refusal to favor the arguments of either side, and in making them communicable as complementary rather than (only) conflicting perspectives on shared phenomena. These ‘perspectives’, brought together by the pirate methodology, are neither well-described as ‘academic positions on a specific problem’ nor as ‘normative positions on the world’. They are both, and more. The pirate is such an enduring figure because his or her ‘origin’ as a pirate is always a result of a fundamental decision regarding the question: What am I going to do with my life and my labor? The story of the pirate is so dramatic because he or she has decided to go, essentially, all critic. In contrast, the honest sailor Beer is uncritically constructive, a bureaucrat utterly fascinated by questions of degree.

Essentially, the vision of the pirate methodology is to enable a more genuine form of the much-belabored term ‘constructive criticism’. This requires an acknowledgement of, and closer engagement with, the simultaneity of social existence that is central to piratical debates, from Bellamy and Beer, through the Copyright Wars, to the enforcement of Xeer law off the coast of Somalia. As we have discussed in this article, that simultaneity does not only apply to our objects of research, but also to our roles as academics, which can rarely be pinpointed in one fixed position. This is not to say that we need to respond to the entrepreneurial self with an even greater abundance of masks, as Winfried Fluck points out, there is a certain bitter irony in responding to neoliberal demands with an effort to manage an even greater number of flexible, situation-appropriate faces (Fluck 2011). The point is rather to keep it all in the open, at the same time, and to allow the contradiction to stand.

However, our possibilities to act are also affected by the institutions we create and inhabit, and we should end this article by looking not to the individual but to the university. The place for this kind of constructive criticism – grounded in heterogeneity of perspectives and positions – remains the globalist, interdisciplinary university; a university that dares to unleash the Bellamy in their researchers, and to draw institutional consequences by remaining indebted to, and invested in, the equally uncomfortable lines in the sand drawn by Beer. It is also a university that, like pirate methodology, can take multiple positions simultaneously.

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Notes

¹ In January 2011 Aaron Schwarz was arrested for downloading numerous articles from JSTOR from a computer he had hidden in a closet at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was accused under federal law for crimes that could potentially give up to 35 years in jail. The prosecution was not primarily not instigated by JSTOR but by FBI who allegedly wanted to make an example of him. After two years of court processes he took his own life in January 2013.

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Publishing and Mediatization – an Exploratory Workshop

Summary by James Meese

On the 21st of June 2017, Martin Fredriksson and Bodil Axelsson at Linköping University brought together a multinational group of academics to talk about the future of academic communication. The day opened with a keynote from Gary Hall (Coventry University) who articulated a vision of radical publishing that could operate in a post-literate world before a series of senior academics offered their own views on this issue, which in a way collectively stood as a diverse series of responses to Gary's original provocation.

David Rowe (Western Sydney University) considered the ethical questions around publication that were raised by Gary, linking these conversations to the broader funding environment and the increased focus on research impact that has spread from the United Kingdom. He noted that *The Conversation* (a website that publishes research in a consumer-friendly format) may be indirectly affecting broader labor issues in the media industry. While publishing these articles may provide some greater awareness around our research, we were essentially providing labor for free, which previously may have been provided by paid journalists. Collectively, the issues raised by David and Gary surfaced a set of ethical questions regarding what sort of publications academics engage in and broader structural factors influencing our practices.

Eva Hemmungs Wirtén (Tema Q, LiU) introduced her recently funded 2016 ERC Advanced Investigator Grant for the project "Patents as Scientific Information, 1895-2020" (PASSIM). The project approaches patents as documents and examines the mixed economy surrounding the processes of scientific discovery. Eva provided a brief explanation of the patenting process, which sees patented inventions and processes required to be subject to public disclosure in order to gain protection. In doing so, she offered an analogous narrative about academic knowledge that highlighted tensions between the knowledge that is

protected and the knowledge that is circulated and the extent to which broader publics can access and actually use academic knowledge in an era of costly journal subscriptions.

James Arvanitakis (Western Sydney University) continued this discussion by considering the question of academic and public exclusion through the lens of piracy. He explored the increasing cost of textbooks for students, the potential of viewing piracy as a generative force that supported education as well as the extent to which our own publication practices are exclusionary and lock out the public through particular forms of discourse or discussion. He ended with a provocation: What would (or does) an academic form of piracy look like?

Finally, Jesper Olsson discussed the development of Media Labs at Linköping University and considered how academics could use new formats and experiences to communicate academic knowledge. This raised a potential tension between funding bodies and narratives of impacts and metrics and more creative outlets but had the potential to open academic horizons and suggest a range of forms, vessels and experiences through which academic knowledge could be retained and shared. As Gary Hall mentioned throughout, “there was no easy way of doing this”, but the workshop stood as an impetus to start thinking through these difficult questions.

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The Citizen Professional, Mediatization, and the Creation of a Public Domain

By Karin Christof

Abstract

Situated within the transition experienced by our welfare states, citizens have become ever more involved in the re-use of derelict public housing stock throughout Europe. These citizens are tentatively to be called ‘citizen professionals’ in the urban realm, a term that serves as a sensitizing concept to explore the social worlds of their contributions to the public domain. Employing various types of media to communicate their progress and success, these urban actors seek to gain the trust of the neighborhood and governmental institutions to sustain their projects within a broader community. Just as the media influence and structure cultural domains and society as a whole, the social-cultural activities carried out by citizen professionals in the public domain are mediatized not only by the actors themselves, but also by municipal organizations, policy workers, and governmental institutions.

Grounding mediatization as a socio-spatial concept within empirical practice, the article examines the practices of citizen professionals and describes how they endeavor to attain public acknowledgment by representing their projects as showcases within a public domain. The article builds on pilot interviews conducted in Rotterdam (NAC, Reading Room West) and Vienna (Paradocks) to expound on the projects as lived spaces between mediatized and physical environments. Positioning citizen professionals within contemporary developments in the urban field, the article then investigates the underlying values of the spatial interventions, as well as how governmental bodies relate to their practices. Seen through the lens of mediatization, the article provides insights into how citizen professionals employ their social imaginaries and mobilize their activities around their agenda regarding the creation of a public domain.

Keywords: Public domain, mediatization, welfare states, citizen professional, re-use public housing stock, social imaginaries, sensitizing concept, lived space.

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Introduction

Situated within the transition experienced by our welfare states, citizens have become ever more involved in the re-use of derelict public housing stock throughout Europe. Current economic conditions have given rise to austerity politics and prompted governments to continue to dismantle public provisions. Against this background, active and self-organized citizens gain an opportunity to negotiate for the use of neglected public facilities. Running self-initiated projects, these self-mobilized citizens, whom I tentatively call *citizen professionals* in the urban realm, employ various types of media to communicate their progress and success, and to legitimize their actions within the public domain they have created. In this way, they seek to gain the trust of the neighborhood and governmental institutions to sustain their projects within a broader community. But just as the media influence and structure cultural domains and society as a whole (Livingstone & Lunt 2014), the social-cultural activities carried out by citizen professionals in the public domain are mediatized not only by the actors themselves, but also by municipal organizations, policy workers, and governmental institutions. Therefore, citizen professionals must be able to position themselves in a media-constructed and politicized public sphere.

This article examines the practices of citizen professionals and describes how they endeavor to attain public acknowledgment by representing their projects as showcases within a public domain. I consider physical and media environments as lived spaces (Lefebvre 1991), and follow a non-media-centric approach (Hjarvard 2014) that grounds mediatization within empirical practice (Couldry 2008; Ekström et al. 2016). Through looking into its potential to contribute to the strengthening of an active public arena, it seeks to test out the relative strengths and weaknesses of two competing concepts for grasping the wider consequences of media for the social world: the concept of mediatization and the concept of mediation. In order to shed light on the diversity of the urban actors' practices, this article uses findings from pilot interviews conducted in April 2016 at two projects in Rotterdam (NAC, *Reading Room West*) and one project in Vienna (Paradocks). The study first explains why I chose to use a sensitizing concept. It then goes into the use of mediatization as a socio-spatial concept within the politicization of a public space and domain. Finally, I expound the underlying values of the spatial interventions of citizen professionals, in order to examine how governmental bodies relate to the practices of citizen professionals. I also answer the question of how citizen professionals relate to mediatization and how they use it to mobilize activities around their agenda regarding the creation of a public domain.

Methodological Approaches

At the core of this empirical analysis are the initiators of the projects, the citizen professionals who take an initiative to experiment with urban and social regeneration projects and combine fields of knowledge and practices outside of their own working fields. In order to show the diversity of these citizen initiatives within urban space production, and question how these urban actors see their contributions to the public domain, I have coined the concept of the *citizen professional*. I use this concept to explore the different ideas of citizenship and professionalism at play in these cases, and to elucidate the degree of commercialization and openness of the public domains they have helped to create. The practices of citizen professionals may differ considerably between different settings, and for this reason I use the concept as a *sensitizing* one (Blumer 1954). Such a tentative description can be tested, improved and refined to arrive at a definitive account, and the description helps us to approach the fieldwork with an open mind to investigate what these practices entail in the urban realm.

The cases considered here are seen against the background of austerity measures taken within the context of welfare state retrenchment, the re-use of derelict or empty housing stock, and the creation of self-initiated cultural spaces. In addition to these fixed parameters, two variable criteria are considered: the extent of openness and accessibility of the public domain, and the degree of commercialization and professionalism of the projects. As this criterion sampling (Bryman 2012: 419) builds on the researcher's professional network as a curator in the architecture and art field, it is important to be aware of having expectations when observing in the field. It is also important to be aware of the risk of interpreting sensations, as academic research can nourish expectations on both sides—not only among those who do the fieldwork but also among those who read the reports (Lee & Brosziewski 2007). Therefore, a combination of qualitative tools such as semi-structured interviews, cameo descriptions of actors and sites, and document analysis helps to arrive at a *thick description* (Geertz 1973; Luhrmann 2015), and provides contextual insight into the practices of the urban actors. Cameo narratives aid in the characterization and delivery of contextual knowledge about places and people. When developing the pilot interview questions, I drew primarily from recent publications in the field (Pakhuis de Zwijger 2013; Killing Architects 2014; Specht & Van der Zwaard 2015; Paradocks 2016a; Steinkellner 2017). In *De uitvinding van Leeszaal Rotterdam West: Collectieve tactieken en culturele uitwisselingen (The Invention of the Reading Room Rotterdam West: Collective Tactics and Cultural Exchanges)* (Specht & Van der Zwaard 2015), for example, the authors describe the process and the thoughts behind setting up the Reading Room West, with topics that range from self-organization to volunteer work. They also describe the media used to increase public recognition.

The pilot interviews revealed that citizen professionals carry out ordinary and habitual tasks that they had been trained to perform in their original professions, such as organizing, planning, thinking strategically, programming, fundraising, and building. They carry out also everyday activities, such as welcoming guests, making coffee, cleaning up, and solving social problems in a group. Through their actions, citizen professionals make a location familiar, concrete, and meaningful. Such a location then becomes endowed with value (Tuan 1977). At the same time, users of such a space find it difficult to reflect or speak about their habitual practices or about experiences that arise from a practical consciousness of how to get around. In practice, it is not easy to enable people to reflect on their place-making when the place is ‘accomplished through repetitive, habitual practices’ that are taken for granted (Moore 2012a: 95). Such a discursive consciousness or thought-in-action is also referred to as ‘practical knowing’ or ‘embodied dispositions’ (Moore 2000; Thrift 2007). One way to gather insight into such a physical know-how is to travel with people and observe how they go around and what they do—what Urry calls ‘travelling with people, as a form of sustained engagement’ (Thrift 2007: 40). It is also useful to observe their routine activities. These everyday experiences and observations can deliver a relevant account of the relation that people have with the world, and how it affects their actions in everyday life.

As the three cases described in this article have been set up and staged quite differently from the way in which communal projects are set up and staged, they beg reconsideration and discussion of the roles of citizens and professionals within a mediatized public domain. Having described the methodological approach used in the research and the implications of a sensitizing concept in the field, let us now move on to discuss the socio-spatial concept of mediatization and its implications for the creation of a public domain.

The Citizen Professional, Mediatization, and the Public Domain

Citizen professionals fit into various social corporate images of a participation society (Binnenlands Bestuur 2013; Twist et al. 2014) (also known as a ‘self-active civil society’ (Beck 2000; Glasz 2015)). Thus, they meet neo-liberal agendas that have been created by governmental institutions, which are positioned within a lively project economy. Ranging from artists, designers, ecologists, and organization managers to researchers, citizen professionals possess the skills of ‘self-mobilized’ citizens (Dalton 1996). They have generally attended higher education and acquired in this way the political skills necessary to formulate their own perspectives on current social and political matters independently of the positions of public parties. While the concept of the citizen professional is

still to be introduced in the field of urban design and planning, the term exists in other academic fields, with differing meanings: within the domain of community health and public services, the citizen professional is considered as a counterforce to the professional (Kuhlmann 2006; Newman et al. 2011), while in development studies citizen professionals are people who strive to make the world a better place (George 2014; Dunworth 2015). These connotations of the driven idealist or the counter-professional do not apply to the citizen professional within urban space production, and the term requires further analysis before it can be used in this field.

Citizen professionals in the urban realm take a tactical cooperative approach by claiming the citizens' right of access to public space or goods. This contrasts with the radical counterculture of the 1960s (such as squatters' groups in the Netherlands), the social and ecological movements of the 1970s and 80s, and the Occupy movement of the 2000s. They may be situated somewhere between the concepts of the self-empowered laypersons (Jacobs 1961; Alexander, Ishikawa & Silverstein 1977) and the spatial agents who—as designers—also integrate social and economic values within a community (Awan, Schneider & Till 2011; Tonkiss 2013). Such self-initiated practices often take place in the cracks of urban development, where urban regeneration has not occurred yet, or is in the process of occurring. Especially in times of crisis, the city represents an interim or makeshift space that gives urban activists space to intervene (Tonkiss 2013). An agency, where it 'acts collaboratively with and on behalf of others' and 'engages in the transformation of space by negotiating existing conditions with the intent of reforming them' (Tombesi 2012: 809), can be considered capable of acting otherwise (Giddens 1984) and opening up possibilities for change.

The word 'activism,' though, has several contradictory meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. When used to denote service to the state with an element of opposition to it, activism can be radical and revolutionary. The word can, however, also signify moderate civic action (Yang 2016), in which dissent is expressed through consumerism-based behavior, such as the choice to live a different lifestyle, avoid big brands, or live in a communal setting. In this sense, citizen professionals can be considered moderate activists, pursuing their individual moral responsibilities that have replaced 'social and socialized political action' (Talbot 2015). Although their cooperation with municipalities and corporations can be seen as a professionalization of civic engagement in order to effect non-violent change, some scholars consider it a form of capitalism in which activism has become corporatized (Dauvergne & LeBaron 2014). In this case, the practices of the activists are banded together with those of existing institutions for a better future. So, how can these initiatives maintain their integrity, independence, and freedom to criticize within such unequal partnerships? Further, to what extent

do citizen professionals follow the same organizational logic that they criticize? I will raise some critical points concerning the corporatization of activism later in the article.

Let us now look into the concept of ‘mediatization’, which has been the subject of many interpretations and discussions. Whereas the concept of mediation refers to ‘any acts of intervening, conveying, or reconciling between different actors, collectives, or institutions’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999: 249), mediatization denotes processes in which the media have taken hold of all spheres of social life (Mazzoleni 2008) and constitutes a space for media-related social transformations (Ekström et al. 2016). As mentioned earlier, I follow a non-media-centric approach to mediatization, in which I situate media and their uses relative to other practices (Hjarvard 2014; Krajina, Moores & Morley 2014). In this approach, media are a consequential accompaniment to everyday activities and social life. A non-media-centric approach to mediatization involves the study of different logical structures from different institutions, and in this way leads to the construction of patterns of social interactions (Ekström et al. 2016: 1101). The interactions range from governmental logic to media logic in the public domain. At the same time, a growing body of literature on mediatization recognizes its importance as a sensitizing concept that opens a framework to analysis, and that develops a theoretical understanding of how media and different social institutions influence each other and human relationships (Hjarvard 2013). Thus, mediatization as a sensitizing concept can be a useful tool to elicit social patterns within specific contexts and to investigate the relationships between the practices of citizen professionals and governmental institutions in the public domain.

Mediated experiences have a huge outreach and can reveal what is possible within the public domain. This means that they can establish standards of how to conceptualize public space. The mediated experiences to which people have access become more important than the public that is physically present, which can help to effect change in the way people perceive the feasibility of their built environments:

Simply by communicating that such an exchange took place, the work influences people’s notions of what is possible and acceptable in public space, far beyond what was communicated at the moment the work is made (Merker 2010: 54).

It is not sufficient for citizen professionals to operate in a purely physical space any more: it is essential to have also a digital existence—to reach a public that might never physically attend, but is present through the mediated and mediatized events. As such, mediatization serves as a socio-spatial concept that expands the

physical materiality of a place in which primary and mediated experiences become increasingly interchangeable (Jansson 2013). The development of ever more advanced media technologies such as urban sensor networks, location services, and social networking sites, has converted public space into a hybrid arena that has transcended its physical form to become increasingly digitally dispersed, inhabited, lived, evaluated, and communicated by an ever more physically dispersed group of people. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) conclude that the media have become a necessity in our public domain: media are not subordinated to the political sphere, but form a base on which to communicate.

As urban life becomes more and more mediatized, the creation of a public domain represents a hybrid space experienced as a 'new sense of space' (Mazzoleni 2008). This is constituted by not only walls but, above all, also by mass-mediated images. The term 'public domain' refers here to those places 'where an exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs' (Hajer & Reijndorp 2001). This public domain is either available to everybody or is aimed at a parochial domain, such as a group of designers or artists who are already present in an area or a group of people who are specifically interested in cultural events (Lofland 1973; Waal 2012). Above all, 'public domain' describes also those geographically dispersed people who follow the activities from elsewhere, as mediatized activities. The Reading Room describes a public domain as a space in which life can be commented on, comparable to the Greek *stoa*, the covered colonnade with a view onto the *agora*, the square of a town. From the *stoa*, different people can be 'challenged to think, act, or perform' (Specht & Van der Zwaard 2015: 128). We can use Lefebvre's concept of *lived* space (1991) to describe such a space in which we perform activities in 'the everyday course of life' (Watkins 2005) as *representational spaces* as follows: "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (Lefebvre 1991: 39). In this sense, space is a process of production rather than a product, representing a site of ongoing interactions and social relationships. Media usage operates as a place-constituting activity that facilitates social practices (Moores 2012b), and creates new ways of spatial experiences and places, be they digital or corporeal spaces, where these exchanges occur.

By mediatizing such a public domain, this new sense of space represents a double reality: it is physically present and digitally transmitted to others worldwide, and media have now been turned into a 'necessity' for the functioning of the political domain and public arena. Against the background of such a mediatized public space, the public domain benefits from a sophisticated self-mobilized citizenry that is interested in maintaining and contributing to the making of a public domain. But what, then, does the creation of a public domain entail?

Practices of Citizen Professionals in Built Environments

Citizen professionals mediate their activities digitally using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google+ to trigger the curiosity of passers-by, visitors, and future participants. Their cultural actions range from setting up and organizing a reading space to setting up living and working spaces for artists. These socio-cultural places represent just a small selection of what is going on in the public domain, and exemplify situations from which the governments of welfare states have withdrawn, following the financial crisis of 2008. Such situations involve, for example, social tasks and the construction of an urban community (Ward 2003; Fainstein & Fainstein 2012; Hurenkamp, Tonkens & Duyvendak 2012). I will here first discuss the *Reading Room West*, which addresses the socio-cultural needs of diverse communities to come together by setting up a jointly organized physical space in the neighborhood.

Repeatedly used in political debates as the best example in Rotterdam in 2013 (Gemeentebestuur Rotterdam 2015), the Reading Room West has proven its versatility through the use of a mediatised space. Starting as a bottom-up project to protest against the closure of 18 of 24 public libraries in Rotterdam, the initiative activated diverse community groups in the area and organized a communal space for the neighborhood. The action was intended to counter the municipal policy measures and to provide a platform where everybody was welcome (Rooij 2013; Specht & Van der Zwaard 2015; Weenen 2015). Initiated by researchers Maurice Specht and Joke van der Zwaard in 2012, the Reading Room West started off with an initial five-day festival, and then became an initiative that was open five days a week. It provided a cultural program organized by any number of the 100 volunteers involved in the project. The initiators originally squatted in the building, and subsequently negotiated a lease with the housing corporation. This allowed them to create a public domain in which different groups could meet without any obligation to perform or act (Killing Architects 2014). When we enter the Reading Room West in the Centrum district, we find a bright and informal space, containing a few reading tables, chairs, and benches, with a buzz of people coming and going. The space is intended not only to fill a temporary gap in the neighborhood but also to contribute to a sustainable and dynamic community (Stichting E3D 2014).

The second project is situated in the south of Rotterdam, in the neighborhood of Charlois. *New Ateliers Charlois* (NAC) was set up by socially engaged artists Jaap Verheul and Kamiel Verschuren in 2004, to offer affordable live-work spaces for artists, while also investing in the local neighborhood. As a reaction to the impending demolition of a block of 45 derelict houses in which the two artists were living, they joined forces and negotiated a ten-year lease with the housing association. Within three years, NAC was managing 115 houses with 170



Figure 1. Reading Room West, Rotterdam.

residents, and had turned into the third biggest non-commercial housing provider in the neighborhood. They had done this on a voluntary basis as an ‘art project with an intuitive approach’, as they call it. At the same time, NAC reacted to the Neighborhood Act (*Wet bijzondere maatregelen grootstedelijke problematiek or RotterdamWet*) (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelatie 2005; Woonnet Rijnmond 2017), which requires people who want to reside in certain neighborhoods of Rotterdam to have an income above a certain limit (120% of the minimum income). This act had been passed with the intention of safeguarding social diversification in neighborhoods and preventing areas from becoming ‘concentration neighborhoods’—a term used to describe areas in which a high proportion of residents are from ethnic minorities, and where living standards are low (Uitermark & Duyvendak 2008). Thus, NAC opened its premises to a group of artists and students who did not earn enough money to register at the municipality. In addition to providing affordable living space, the two artists also wanted to invest in the local neighborhood, and use a part of the members’ monthly contribution (EUR 20 of the monthly contribution of EUR 110) for art in the public space. They also set up a cultural stimulus fund, the Mya Cultural Fund.¹ Through organizing art and cultural events in the public domain, initiators of NAC aim to add extra social and artistic value to the area.

Paradocks (2014) was set up in Vienna by three cultural entrepreneurs whose expertise ranges from urban and cultural research to sociology and design. Inspired by citizen-initiated developments they had witnessed in the Netherlands, they appropriated a vacant seven-story office building in the inner



Figure 2. Wolphaertstraat, NAC Rotterdam @ NAC-member 2004-2017.

district of Vienna to serve as a temporary site of knowledge production, and as a general public domain for people from different social backgrounds and design fields. Considering unused property to be a ‘useless [wasted] resource’ (Philipp 2016), they announced an open call for applications to fill the building with tenants. As ‘enablers’ (as they call themselves), the three entrepreneurs take an approach based on active media use and participation in cultural and art events (Das Packhaus 2016; Pakhuis de Zwijger 2016b). As such, they aim to develop a growing network as a temporary agency that can provide a public domain for the neighborhood. They discuss their ‘case’ at international conferences and events, and collaboratively search for ways to best develop their practice, and to discuss problems they encounter—learning from practice and the potential to create. The spaces in their project can only be used temporarily, but this restriction reinforces the feeling of ‘now-or-never’ (*Jetzt-oder-nie-Gefühl*), which is part of the ‘vibrant atmosphere of the building’ (Philipp 2016). Offering space to 250 users over the past two years, the collective provides such places as a mobility room, bicycle repair shop, photo studio, and ‘healthy lunch room.’ Furthermore, the team of Paradocks has co-developed a continuous presentation platform for the applied arts, in order to strengthen and enable publication possibilities for upcoming artists.

Citizen professionals in two of the cases (NAC, Reading Room West) hold a non-commercial view of the world, applying egalitarian structures within

their initiatives by which either nobody is paid or everybody is paid the same. Paradocks takes a more commercial approach: the enablers want to develop a self-sustaining business model with temporary use, to improve neighborhoods through socio-cultural activities and spaces. What is common to all of the projects is a quest to contribute to the neighborhood, to create and invigorate a public domain, and to give a socio-cultural use to derelict buildings in the urban realm. The initiatives are a response to neighborhoods that have been stripped of their public functions by governmental institutions. Feeling indignation at poorly made or executed government decisions, reactions such as ‘that is not possible’, ‘that should not happen at all’, and ‘we cannot allow that’ prompted their actions and led them to call for the creation of a public space and domain. As stated earlier, such an attitude can be attributed to a growing group of educated citizens who are more alert to issues of public affairs—as a result of the social and educational provisions of Western welfare states (Inglehart 1997). In such a situation, a



Figure 3. DAS PACKHAUS, Vienna @ Veronika Kováčsová.

political sophistication allows citizens to understand political processes and the mass media, and in this way, enables them to take a position and co-shape their environments.

Before examining how mediatization is used to *mobilize* activities around the creation of a public domain, I will discuss the values and moral responsibilities that citizen professionals hold, through their spatial interventions and contributions to the public domain.

Motives for and Values in the Creation of a Public Domain

Research at the Spatial Planning Department of Wageningen University into the possibilities of involving consultancy firms to better mediate the ambitions and objectives of citizen initiatives showed that initiators of citizen initiatives are characterized by a strong drive to identify themselves with their environment, and that they believe that they can do things better and differently. They also have a strong passion and personal concern for the place and site they want to safeguard, enhance, and develop (Dijk 2014). Indeed, initiators work outside their own fields, and thus consider their projects to be pioneering, where they can discover, learn, and create. They want to show others that it is possible to do things better and differently, by drawing from different sets of experiences and experimenting. For example:

Jaap: You are thinking as kind of an artist, you know. I am always looking for where there is the space, how it can be done differently, how you can connect things, how you can still work with people...

Karin: To create something new?

Jaap: Yes, and to do it better. Because it can, because it is allowed, and that gives a sort of drift to simply do it [...] and also to show that it can be done differently (Interview B).

The approach that things can be done differently and better can be referred to as *research in action*, as philosopher and urban planner Schoen described in his theory on the reflective practitioner that builds on, among other things, professionals' abilities to 'think on their feet' (1983), when they find themselves surprised or puzzled by unknown situations. By reflecting on such uncertain conditions, the practitioner then draws on her prior experience and 'carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation' (Schoen 1983: 68). Or, as the two artists in NAC explain, it is by living in a project that one is prompted to act on certain conditions. They see their involvement as part of a work of art, where they are living in an ongoing experiment. According to Verschuren, their projects are a way of sharing life, based not on the exchange of money but of activities. If everybody lived like that, he claims, the world would be very different (Interview C).

However, not everybody is able to live under such conditions. That is why artist Verheul left the project when its members no longer contributed actively to the creation and maintenance of the public domain of NAC—which was the initial objective of the social-cultural project. Verheul describes how he became disappointed with the project, which for him had worked only when the original

idea of a socio-cultural place was upheld, and the place was not a simple provider for living spaces and services. As he explains,

Because I think it's [now] just too much about living [cheaply], and much less about delivering [cultural and social] 'commotion' than it could be (Interview A).

Verschuren believes in his vision of contributing to a change of life by showing how it can be done differently, and still lives in the neighborhood. He is actively supporting a new group of artists who are forming a foundation that will continue negotiations with the housing corporation with the aim of developing social and cultural investments in the neighborhood. He recently also implemented a ferry boat service to help provide better public transport in this part of the town.² As such, Verschuren and the team involved in NAC are keeping the spirit of the project alive and trying to achieve sustainable development.

Deerenberg and Kováčsová from Paradocks, in contrast, emphasize that not only pioneering work in the field of urban regeneration, but also the development of a sustainable business model were driving forces behind the project. It was, furthermore, a challenge to experiment and play constructively with a vacant area in the city. After graduating, they have been trying to contribute to a new professional field that deals with the problem of unused space in a city, while also working together with others to create a public domain for the neighborhood. As such, Paradocks is an example of the search for a financially sustainable model (Sturmberger 2015). In a workshop on value creation for self-initiated projects (Pakhuis de Zwijger 2016a), the initiative takers of Paradocks questioned the added value that the project brought to the neighborhood, and tried to develop long-term strategies to put themselves onto the market.

A recurring topic in the debate on the value creation that citizen professionals achieve is the quest for professional acceptance—or the discussion about working as a professional or volunteer. The work that they do in these projects is not generally considered to be professional by others in the field, although the tasks they carry out can be seen as a prolongation and extension of their former professional work. According to Specht, the activities do not cover the professional capacities of what a volunteer does. The activities carried out in the communal projects require a range of skills, such as management skills or organizational skills, that not everyone possesses. Specht found that institutional professionals did not take him seriously, saying: 'Oh, you are a member of this group with the volunteers.' Professionals associate a volunteer with a person who does work that anybody can do, but Specht points out that all the volunteers carry out highly specialized tasks that were previously remunerated tasks performed by municipal employees. The latter now play a smaller role in social and urban projects.

We've always done a lot of voluntary work, it is not new, but we have narrowed down volunteering in our heads to tasks that nobody wants to do, besides a professional, where you really do not need any skills. (Interview D).

Instead, they do 'deliver' services that tend to be previously remunerated tasks of municipalities as they increase social cohesion and livability, enhance safety in a neighborhood, and provide cultural experiences. Therefore, public debate has repeatedly addressed the opportunities for both citizens and the state to initiate and support self-initiated projects (Opbroek 2015; Pakhuis de Zwijger 2016b; Stimuleringsfonds 2017). As Specht and Van der Zwaard (2015: 48) put it, municipalities and governments should continue to invest in 'social physical infrastructure'. As governments want them to carry out former tasks of the municipalities (such as to increase social cohesion and the livability in a neighborhood, and to address and provide cultural education and experience), a part of the municipal budget could be dedicated to sustaining these independently operating initiatives. In order to not run the risk of corporatization of their agency, Van der Zwaard and Specht work as volunteers, since they believe that this is the only way they can keep relationships clear and remain independent of any 'forced collaboration' with other institutions.

The findings of the pilot interviews highlight general developments in society: they find that, as intergenerational studies have previously shown, the values of a largely educated population are geared more towards individual freedom, self-expression, and participation, than towards the accumulation of material values (Bennett 1998). This can be seen as a form of *zeitgeist* of the 2000s. At the same time, interest in politics and civic engagement on a community level increased (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). This is visible in two of the cases I have studied (NAC, Reading Room West), where the initiative takers consider that life is 'not merely based on the value of money' but on the exchange of socio-cultural activities. It is, however, important to be able to cover expenses at the various stages of the projects. Asked why they carry out their projects, Specht replies:

...because my daughter grows up in this city, and I want her to grow up in a city as good and fun as possible. Thus, if I can do something for this, then I will be doing that (Interview D).

This change of values and moral responsibilities is not only a driving force for the citizen professionals engaged in the projects; it also prompts us to ask: how do governmental bodies relate to the practices of citizen professionals, and how do citizen professionals use mediatization to *mobilize* activities around their agenda regarding the creation of a public domain?

Mediatization and the Creation of a Public Domain

Media is crucial for communication in a social-cultural project, to ensure that the projects gain acceptance from the neighborhood. The use of the media is required also to obtain the support from cooperation partners that is necessary to sustain self-organized projects. Digital representations of projects explain and describe the motivation, goals, people involved, and history of projects, and can act as locations that people can consult before visiting the physical location. Media is—in addition to publicity spread by word of mouth—responsible for spreading the word and obtaining public recognition, and thus the right to a lived space and existence.

To mediate their projects in the neighborhood and in institutions such as housing corporations and public administration, citizen professionals and governmental institutions apply user-generated content (UGC) for their social media platforms and for their websites and blogs.

You increase your reputation while doing the projects, as you organize meetings around themes that are interesting content wise. As such it works naturally as marketing, in practice, as I am driven by enthusiasm. (...) It increases your branding though I have never started for it (Interview D).

Through reviews and newsfeeds from other users, reports from the projects are, firstly, sources of information about the events of daily life at the specific socio-cultural place in a neighborhood. As the use of UGC for the coverage of urban life has increased, it has created 'social worlds'—a concept from symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934)—that are bound together by a network of communication and by joint activities or concerns. Social worlds are thus not limited by geography, but by their means of communication (Krotz 2014). In this way, they create new spatial places and practices in the world, and extend the lived space beyond a physical one. As such, they add to our social imaginaries, "that is, the way our contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain" (Taylor 2004: 6).

Mediatization serves to achieve public recognition and to represent projects as showcases within a public domain. Two of the three cases I have studied (Reading Room West and Paradocks) have mediated their motives and process through a publication (Specht & Van der Zwaard 2015; Paradocks 2016b). NAC, however, could not find the necessary funds. The project's initiators still hope to translate their practical work into a cultural reflection on the ambitions and motives that drove their project:

But it is also, as you do so much volunteer work, there is simply no time left to look at yourself calmly of what you are actually doing. What does it entail? It's not just that you have to show the success story but that you once again look quietly: what does it all mean? And where the heck is it going to? It has become such a large work of things and we have had everywhere collaboration (Interview B).

This example shows that public recognition needs to be 'earned' from public institutions and the public that attend. Issues such as public relations, project management, and development all require time for reflection and planning, and this implies that the projects must operate on the same terms as their larger corporate counterparts. This aspect concerns the concept of the corporatization of activism mentioned above. One definition of 'corporatization' involves both parties profiting from each other's involvement and their actions in the public domain. A municipality may, for example, show that it supports these initiatives, which help to provide cultural experiences in run-down neighborhoods. A 'positive' branding then affects the viability of such a space, which helps to increase social cohesion and livability, or enhances safety in the neighborhood. In this way, the municipality, the citizen professionals and the wider public all profit from the corporatization process.

We are, however, dealing with temporary self-initiated projects for the urban realm, and the question thus arises about the role that governmental bodies play in the representation of these spaces. Specht and Van der Zwaard have proposed that municipalities and governments should show that they have a responsibility to support such initiatives and keep investing in social physical infrastructure. Housing corporation Woonstad took up this proposal and presented its vision



Figure 4. Reading Room West used to showcase the fact that the housing corporation Woonstad supports residents' and citizens' initiatives (Molenaar & Feenstra 2015: 30).

for future developments within their business strategy in a document entitled *Ondernemingsstrategie 2015-2018* (Molenaar & Feenstra 2015). This document uses terms such as ‘social return on investment’, and presents its intentions to sustain problematic neighborhoods. Although the corporation uses images of the Reading Room West, it does not mention the project by name in the entire document. It states only that it wants to improve networks of residents and help make partnerships with other parties, in order to give boost the resilience of a neighborhood (Figure 4). How it plans to do that, however, is not described in detail. This document seems to be strategic window-dressing that showcases the corporation’s interest in lively multicultural neighborhoods in which cultural activities take place following citizen initiatives. So, how do governmental institutions relate to and mediate these projects?

The two cases in Rotterdam are described on the municipality website, which contains a digital *Wijkprofiel* (district profile) (Gemeente Rotterdam & OBI 2016a). This district profile provides facts and statistics for all Rotterdam boroughs, such as an index of safety (including criminal offenses and nuisances), details of social conditions (how contact is among neighbors, how many children leave school with acceptable qualifications, and what living conditions are like), and the physical space (how residents experience the built environment, the conditions of public spaces, and the percentage of residences that are vacant). The Reading Room West is explicitly mentioned as a prime example of a ‘special initiative by active residents’ (Gemeente Rotterdam & OBI 2016b). The NAC initiative is not mentioned by name, but described as ‘inspiring residents hosting more than 150 artistic and creative entrepreneurs in the neighborhood’. This lack of media presence of the NAC name emphasizes how the case of NAC has not been sufficiently well perceived by official institutions in the city.

Specht disputes this mediatization of a ‘best of’ example of citizen initiatives in Rotterdam by the municipality (Keijzer 2013; Raeflex 2014; Gemeentebestuur Rotterdam 2015), and describes how it mobilizes around its agenda regarding the creation of a public domain, giving the project an advantage over other projects. He criticizes how the municipality prefers to co-opt initiatives to sustaining them. As to declaring that an initiative such as the Reading Room West is ‘special’, he argues that the municipality’s strategy demonstrates simply that the municipality does not ‘believe’ that the municipality’s policies are aimed at involving citizens. Such initiatives, on the contrary—Specht elaborates—‘should be’ embraced and considered as part of daily practice, and that within a so-called participation society there ‘should be’ many more projects with a similar approach to the one he is taking. Specht concludes that if such projects are to be examples of the participation society,

then we will set up our society so that it [the project] is not a ‘special’ choice. I do not want to be ‘special’ at all, I am particularly fond of what is ‘normal’. Look if it would be normal to do something like the Reading Room, I would not talk to you now. (...) My aim for the Reading Room is that it contributes to a normal functioning as I do. Actually, I would like that what I do is the norm (Interview D).

Specht and Van der Zwaard (2015) further state that, as initiators often feel responsible for the entire project, it is important to consider which tasks can be taken over by others. This will prevent the project remaining dependent on the ones who initiated the process. These persons are often described as *best persons*, who make the difference in a neighborhood—people who have a sense of entrepreneurship and involvement. They have professional capacities in different domains, operating as, for example, scientists, social workers, community workers, organizers, cultural producers, and fundraisers. The most important skill they can have, however, is the ability to mobilize others.

The initiators of the NAC project feel that Dutch public institutions do not hear or recognize them. The project received a ten-year loan of EUR 150,000 from the housing corporation De Nieuwe Unie, to renovate the houses for which they had been given a lease. They were then confronted with a take-over by Woonstad Rotterdam in 2007 (Lensen *et al.* 2010). As the agreements with the former housing association were binding, Woonstad Rotterdam proudly announced



Figure 5. Deerenberg criticized in the press for her position as ‘real estate agent’ (Blatakes 2016) @ Liane Tschentscher / Marija Jociute.

its continuation of existing agreements to support the artists who live and work there, and its plan to make it an ‘art zone Oud-Charlois’ (Gelder *et al.* 2012). The

term ‘support the artists’ is, however, misleading, as the NAC foundation agreed to take out a loan to develop the houses in self-management, in collaboration with the former housing corporation. This may be the reason, as artist Verheul has suggested, that the project was not nominated for best neighborhood practices in Rotterdam in 2013. The jury considered that NAC was a project run by the housing corporation, which was paid for the project. NAC was not, according to the jury, self-initiated or self-organized.

In Vienna, the public perception and mediatizations about Paradocks proved more controversial with regard to the temporary use of derelict buildings. As the project became a successful showcase for some policymakers, Deerenberg was criticized in the local media for her style of managing the group of users and deciding who was allowed in and who was not. Critics considered that Deerenberg played the role of a real-estate agent who was more focused on hip design and youngster companies than on a diverse socio-cultural temporary use of the space. She excluded, to a certain extent, financially weak organizations and individuals from Packhaus, which, as a socially inspired project, had received a municipal starting research grant of EUR 12,000 (Blatakes 2016) (Figure 5).

However, the Paradocks team took steps to position itself within a mediatized landscape. Cooperating with like-minded people in other parts of the world, the initiators of Paradocks established an internationally oriented creative shared space initiative, which invested in social platforms, and shared ideas, friends, and people (Paradocks 2016b). The project cooperated also with institutions in art and architecture, urban planning, and economics (Biennale Architecture Austrian Pavillon 2016; New Europe—Cities in Transition 2016; MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art 2017). One partner of Paradocks, Conwert (which owns 26,711 properties in Europe) refers to the project as the biggest project it has undertaken within its policy of corporate social responsibility (Conwert Immobilien Invest SE 2017). Deerenberg stated at the workshop meeting on community finance in Amsterdam (Pakhuis de Zwijger 2016a) that she felt it was quite difficult for the project to survive. The project at that time required a collaborative model with the housing corporation to tackle the issue of vacant housing plots. This would make it necessary for the project to hop from one place to the next. This need, in turn, prompted the initiators to reconsider how they ‘should’ position and profile themselves in the field. Deerenberg asked:

Does their community move along with them? Or do they still have to create a community [when they move to a new location], as it is now more about users of available working space? (Interview E).

All three cases have received international public recognition: Paradocks through its frequent participation in art and architecture events and by being part of the City Makers network (Urban Agenda for the EU 2016); NAC and the Reading Room West as examples of *Wild Sites* in Rotterdam, amongst others. Artist Thomas Rustemeyer (2014) made drawings of the organizations and activities of the projects during his residency in Rotterdam (Kraft 2016) and exhibited them in an international art context (Figures 6 and 7). NAC concludes proudly that it received more invitations from cultural institutions outside the Netherlands than in its own country, where it has not achieved what it had hoped for:

I had hoped that the project had gotten copycats in other places and there were maybe other community agencies, as well as financial partners that had stepped into. We have tried, but failed, or so, although we have spoken with a number of parties (Interview C).

The description above concerns how citizen professionals use mediatization to mobilize activities around their agenda regarding the creation of public space. I will now summarize the main findings of this article concerning how their practices relate to mediatization and how their activities are mobilized around the creation of a public domain.

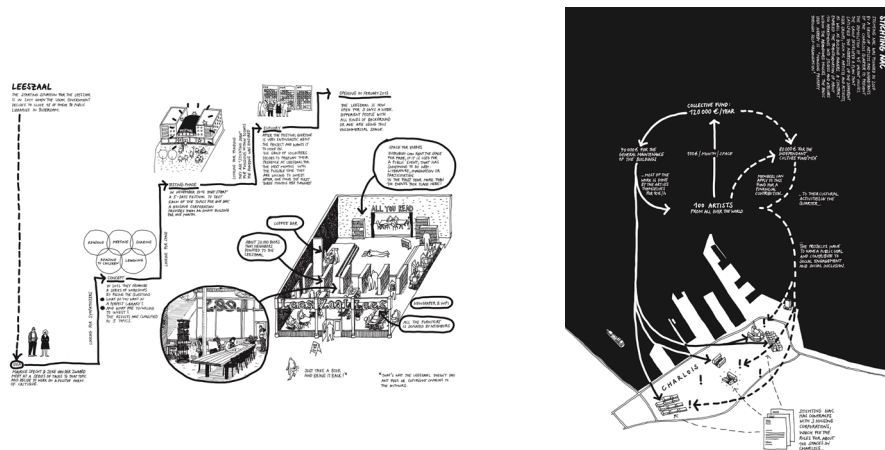


Figure 6 & 7. Reading Room West and NAC Rotterdam from *Wild Sites Rotterdam* (Rustemeyer 2014) @ Thomas Rustemeyer.

Conclusions

The three cases described here arose as a result of planned or implemented actions of governmental institutions resulting from austerity measures. These actions were, for example, closing down libraries, tearing down houses, and leaving an office building empty for years. In these processual, bottom-up developments, citizen professionals tend to cooperate with municipal institutions to negotiate user contracts that often concern temporarily available public facilities that are abandoned or derelict. The agreements reached can lead to deeper cooperation, which in turn leads to corporatization activism in which opposing parties work together towards a common objective. The role of the initially critical party may in such circumstances be weakened, as it promotes and mediatizes its activities to achieve a common aim with the policy makers or municipality. The latter, on the other hand, are eager to showcase these projects (and other examples) as proof that financial cutbacks can be countered by active, engaged citizens who care about their city. The question then arises about what is the true objective of the various corporation partners in the public domain.

The term 'citizen professional' as a sensitizing concept has helped in the approach to the different actors without any pre-conceived notion that they fit into a special image of a citizen, be it the activist, self-reflexive, ecologically conscious, socially engaged, good, or responsible citizen. The term *citizen professional* was not used during the pilot interviews, in order to avoid the risk of influencing or steering the conversations, which were being conducted to investigate the social imaginaries within the projects how the initiators envisage their collective social lives. The designations that the actors use to describe what they do varied from 'social organizers' and 'cultural producers', to 'enablers' and 'urban professionals'. As expected, holders of different professional skills positioned themselves differently in the field. Conceived as spatial agents or modest civic activists, citizen professionals address another way of living. They often describe their projects as experiments that allow them to invent, decide on a destination, and figure out how to perform while carrying out the projects. Like Schoen's reflective practitioners, they appreciate the value of spontaneity within their practices, because it allows unexpected things to happen and spontaneous programs to arise with people arriving in their lived spaces.

As reported earlier, the work performed by citizen professionals is carried out differently from the way in which community projects are normally implemented: operating in the space between governmental institutions, neighborhood groups and residents, the actors are often not considered to be professionals in the field. This failure to recognize professional competencies is a recurring point of irritation for the urban actors, as cooperation partners from housing associations and municipal agencies often fail to take them seriously when negotiating about

the uses of derelict public buildings and the creation of a public domain. Therefore, they wish to be acknowledged by others in the field as offering more than mere volunteers' contributions. In this work, using the term 'citizen professional' as a sensitizing concept helped to lay bare the social imaginaries of these actors in their diverse articulations of living arrangements, moral dispositions, and social commitments. I have looked at how these self-initiated projects tackle questions of public maintenance and the creation of a public domain for the community.

As we have seen in the cases described here, media are essential and indispensable tools to mobilize activities, attain public recognition and achieve acceptance in the public domain. A public domain as a politicized space requires proper mediatization, to ensure that the intentions that the citizen professionals pursue are neither lost in the mediation process along the way, nor corporatized by governmental institutions, to be used to deliver socio-cultural services to problematic neighborhoods—that is to perform tasks that were formerly undertaken by the municipalities. Mediatization thus serves as a means to achieve public recognition: citizen professionals endeavor to obtain public acknowledgement through their different media uses and by representing their projects as showcases within a public domain. Citizen professionals, therefore, and governmental institutions look for a legitimatization of their contributions and actions to the urban realm. As their projects are mediated not only through their usergenerated content but also in publications from official bodies, it is essential for citizen professionals to play the game and to remain actively involved with the media, to mediate their social imaginaries. In order to get their messages across, they must adapt to the way the media operate and use their social media platforms, personal websites, and blogs to inform the wider world that their lived spaces are made meaningful through their practices.

Policy makers and municipalities, however, are not ready to give such initiatives a sustainable place within their daily practice. They are prepared, when showcasing these projects as best examples of neighborhood initiatives, to state that such initiatives should take place more often to ensure the social viability of a neighborhood and enhance its safety. However, the media attention of these actors turns out to be window-dressing rather than any attempt to support actively the stated policy of stimulating citizen participation. Further data collection will show whether the initiatives driven by the social imaginaries of these actors can be attributed to a modest civic activism with intervention in the world, or a corporatized version of top-down community making.

As we have seen in two of the cases (NAC and the Reading Room West), working as a volunteer is a way to position oneself as a critical agency in urban regeneration projects: taking such a position can help to avoid conflicting interests with governmental institutions. However, such a practice cannot be

considered to be a guiding principle when intervening in the creation and use of a public domain. Such an approach is possible only for those committed and self-mobilized citizens who have sufficient financial means to continue without receiving payment. This said, the actors may very well be operating precariously, as they have a lifestyle that does not accommodate the consumerism-based mode of living. More important for them is that their position of financial independence from governmental institutions allows them to criticize freely, and there is no risk of them falling prey to a corporatization of activism. On the other hand, the case of Paradocks demonstrates that choosing to establish oneself as an independent professional organization that combines socio-cultural ambitions with a goal of arriving at a proper business model for the agency can facilitate making a living within an upcoming urban field of temporary use.

The lived spaces of the citizen professionals within the projects are part of a process of production in which different groups of people experience and live through their lived and mediated images and spaces and as such appropriate the spaces. Through their social practices they help to facilitate sites of social relationships, and the exchanges that are necessary for socially livable neighborhoods. The practices of citizen professionals raise the question of which community groups in a neighborhood they will address and involve, and for whom the public domain will be available. Within the cases described here, the answers are parochial groups of designers and researchers at Paradocks, artists and students at NAC, and an open public domain at the Reading Room West. Only the latter has not excluded specific groups of citizens, and established a public domain in which everybody is welcome. However, as moral responsibilities have dislocated social and socialized political action, the making of our public domain requires more research on the mediatization of citizen professionals' practices, to reveal what the social imaginaries they possess imply and what they can mean for the future making of our urban environment.

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Notes

¹ The Mya Cultural Fund was created within the foundation NAC to stimulate the artistic activities of its members in the area. The abbreviation stands for “mind your area, move your ass”. A yearly contribution of EUR 20 from all members is saved, and an official call is subsequently made from which the best proposal is selected <http://stichting-nac.nl/cms/activities/pfitem.php?iid=29&lng=EN>.

² The ferry boat service is run on a self-initiated and personal basis. Started in 2017, the boat service links the borough of Charlois with Katendrecht. The latter neighborhood is close to the center of Rotterdam and has undergone extensive gentrification in the last few years: <http://veerpontzuid.nl/>.

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The Road Map to Brave New World: Cartography and Capitalism from Gulf Oil to Google

By Timothy Erik Ström

Abstract

This paper explores the shifting practices in and between cartography and capitalism. It compares two road maps of the same territory created one-hundred years apart; a Gulf Oil map from 1915 and a Google Map from 2015. These representations of space serve as entry points into examining some of the larger transformations that have occurred within capitalism over the century. I am interested in how the classic world order of Fordism has been reconstituted by cybernetic capitalism. I argue that the world order has been intensified and reorganised on a more abstract level, with profound subjective and material consequences.

Keywords: Abstraction, cartography, capitalism, Fordism, Google, technology.

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Introduction

There are many roads to Brave New World; but perhaps the straightest and the broadest of them is the road we are traveling today, the road that leads through gigantic numbers and accelerating increases (Huxley 2004).

These words were written in 1958 by Aldous Huxley as he was reflecting on his classic science fiction novel, *Brave New World*, published a generation earlier in 1932. Writing in the USA during the post-World War II boom, Huxley was living at the historic high point of classical Fordist capitalism, a social formation that he had long criticised. I am using this quote as an anecdotal introduction to this article by imagining that it is not just ‘roads’ that we follow to Brave New Worlds, but that there are also ‘maps’ that have been abstracted from these roads, maps that lead us onwards to various dystopic futures. This article has a dual focus: it is interested in exploring the changing nature of capitalism and the changing nature of cartography. This dual focus is held together by a consideration of the role of abstraction as a social process (discussed below).

The article begins by critically analysing two road maps of the same territory made a century apart; one produced by Gulf Oil in 1915 and the other produced by Google in 2015. The early map can be seen as part of a cartographic transformation that pioneered the conventions of the road map, thus making it a direct genealogical ancestor of Google Maps. These representations of space serve as entry points into examining some of the larger subjective and material changes and continuities that have occurred within capitalism over the century. Thus, I am interested in how the order of Fordism emerged from industrial capitalism, spread unevenly around the world, before being reconstituted by the abstracting processes of cybernetic capitalism, which also spread unevenly around the world. Before getting to these two maps though, I must first flesh out more precisely what I mean by ‘abstraction’ (Ström 2017).

As this special edition of *Culture Unbound* is focusing on mediatization, I would like to contribute to discussions on this subject by emphasising the importance of *abstraction in service of capitalism*. In this article, abstraction is understood as a material social processes, a lived relation with the world that is shaped by patterns of social practice and the production of subjectivity (Hinkson 2016; Sharp 1985).¹ Abstraction is one of the “defining features of the human condition”, with its roots going back long before the rise of any media (McGilchrist 2012:21). Indeed, its origins preceded the written record, for writing itself as an abstraction of speech, an isomorphic translation into symbols embedded on an external media. Prior to this, speech itself is an abstraction of thought, albeit an embodied abstraction of practical consciousness, one that was fundamentally social, recipro-

cal and embedded in relationships and history (Williams 1977:166). In this sense, abstraction is constitutive of social relations, practices and being: it is not just an activity that occurs in the heads of isolated individuals.

Furthermore, the forces of abstraction have unevenly increased across history's unfolding, with a sharp increase beginning with the rise of capitalist modernity in the 'long' 16th Century (c.1450–1640) (Braudel 1992; James 2006; Wallerstein 1974). As Marx noted, increasing abstraction is one of the major tendencies of capitalism as a world-historic system: an all-encompassing trend of this mode of practice and its impact on human activity (1976). With this in mind, I critically analyse the organizing power granted by abstraction and how it has been bound up with capitalism's "quest of power by means of abstractions", to use Lewis Mumford evocative phrase (1963: 24).

Putting abstraction in such terms resonates with attempts to stretch mediatization out into a long-term general historical transformation. Friedrich Krotz, for instance, has formulated it as a kind of meta-process behind modernity (2009). From the perspective advanced here, processes of mediatization are underpinned by intensifications in the social processes of abstraction. I return to these points in the latter part of this article where I rework the concept of 'augmentation' as both an analytical tool and as an argument by building on these conceptions. More immediately, I turn to cartography and the production of space.

The Map to the Road

Looking down from above is perhaps the central metaphor for abstraction, hence maps are potent symbols of this process, as well as technological manifestations of it. They literally draw away from the embodied landscape to represent it on a more abstract level, a process that imbues the map with an organizing power. In this article, I analyse two maps as ways into the shifting dynamics of cartography and capitalism. In so doing, these maps are cultural artefacts that both represent and dialectically produce the world. Put bluntly, maps, as images, do not merely reflect the world, but actively contribute towards constructing reality (Durante 2013: 48; Mitchell 2005: 105).

Before looking specifically at road maps, I shall briefly evoke the larger cartographic genealogy that preceded them. This begins with a brief consideration the *Miller Atlas* (1519), one of the first European maps of the Americas produced soon after the conquest began in 1492. This map is from a tradition called 'portolan charts' which began in the Mediterranean in 13th Century after compasses were first imported to Europe from China. Portolan charts were made as practical navigational aids and their representations consisted of labelled coastlines and waters covered with compass roses to help navigators sailing along the seaboard.

This representational technique had the effect of leaving the interiors of the continents empty. In the context of the ‘New World’, this emptiness could be filled by the wild speculation and exotic fantasies of the mapmakers, as can be seen in detail reproduced in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Map of Brazil, Miller Atlas, 1519, Wikipedia Commons. This Map was made by the cartographers Lopo Homem, Pedro Reinel and Jorge Reinel, and illustrated by miniaturist António de Holanda.

With the intensification of imperialism, mapmakers began to shift their emphasis from the coastlines of the Americas, to mapping the rivers, for they served as the primary avenues by which continents were penetrated by colonial forces. Then, in the industrial expansion of the 19th Century, the focus of maps moved away from rivers and towards railway lines, which came to dominate cartographic representations (Black 1997). This latter change occurred in the context of the American doctrine of ‘Manifest Destiny’—a complex and contested mix of divine mission and capitalist opportunism, imperial ambition and outright plunder—which saw the westward expansion of the United States and its conquest of indigenous lands. These railway maps dominated until the early 20th Century, when they were replaced by the road map associated with the rise of the automobile.

Late 19th Century railway maps differed significantly from the early 20th Century road maps, principally because, under the control of the locomotive operator, a train follows its tracks along a specific and predetermined route. This meant that a passenger would need a spatial itinerary of stations and a timetable to navigate. By contrast, a car does not run on rails and is independently piloted so, unlike a

train, one cannot assume any given starting place, destination or route. Navigating on roads thus requires the more open-ended cartographic form of the 'network map'.

Network maps are not new. The earliest known network map is called *This is the Way to Rome*, and was created by Erhard Etzlaub as a symbol of Germanic pilgrimages to Rome for the Christian Jubilee in the year 1500 (Akerman 2007: 159). However, early network maps only showed a vague relationship between topography and roads and were not intended as an aid for mobility. This began to change with rise of national mapping projects, such as the ones conducted in France by the Cassini family, a powerful 17-18th Century cartographic dynasty. The maps they produced were the first maps to depict a road network in a systematic way (Brotton 2012: 294-336). Initially motivated by the state's preoccupation with war, internal security and troop transportation, this network map had the unintended effect of increasing regional trade. The Cassini maps exemplified the rising concern for "rationalizing and simplifying internal transportation as a way of diminishing regional control over commerce and increasing the state's role in regulating national trade" (Mukerji 1983: 123-4).

These network maps were used by the state, the military and large commercial forces for planning operations and projecting power; and they were not used by ordinary people as navigational aids. While network maps existed prior to the 20th Century, it was only after the rise of Fordism in the United States, and its subsequent uneven expansion around the world, that road maps became a dominant cartographic form. In the first decades of the 20th Century, the conventions of the networked road map were created, and its main features have remained largely unchanged in the present day (Akerman 2006: 178-89). As private car ownership expanded, road maps became increasingly entangled with everyday practice, shaping the way that people understood and moved through space. These artefacts became implicated in the multidimensional changes that shifted the dominant mode of the production of space (Lefebvre 1991).

A Tale of Two Maps

1915: Gulf Oil Map

Figure 2 is a reproduction of a network road map issued by Gulf Oil in 1915. The map represents two US states, Pennsylvania and New Jersey and was a particularly early example of a networked road map, a cartographic form that would go on to become increasingly widespread as the production and usage of cars expanded along with the Fordist reconstitution of capitalism. The map's producer, Gulf Oil was founded in 1901 by members of the Mellon banking family to exploit an oil

discovery in Texas. The company grew quickly and became a major player in the expanding petrochemical arm of the nascent world order that would become known as 'Fordism'. Gulf Oil has many firsts to their name: in 1910 they became the first company to start drilling for oil underwater; in 1913 they opened the first 'drive-in' petrol station, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and they were one of the first US oil companies to move into the Middle East, setting up Kuwait Oil Company as a joint venture with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (BP). During the Second World War, Gulf Oil received a major boost in their attempt to meet the American military's immense demand for oil. In the 1950s Gulf Oil was considered one of the 'Seven Sisters' oligarchy, which collectively controlled around 85 percent of the world's petroleum reserves for decades. After a century of monopoly capital's mergers and acquisitions, Gulf still pumps oil as part of Chevron.²

Gulf Oil was also rather influential in the early making of road maps. According to Harold Cramer, the company dominated the production of road maps until around 1925 when other oil corporations began to follow suit (Cramer 2003). Their earliest road maps were made in collaboration with W.B. Akins, a Pittsburgh-based advertiser, before becoming more professionalised in 1915 when they began collaborating with the Automobile Blue Book Company. Blue Book had been making road maps since 1901 and were endorsed by the American Automobile Association in 1906, becoming "the standard publication of its type" by 1910 (Akerman 2006: 169-70). Figure 2 was issued as an insert as part of the *Automobile Blue Book* for 1915.

On the other side of the map is its cover, an image reproduced in Figure 5. This depicts a confident white male sitting behind the wheel of a powerful red sports car, while his attractive female accessories admire his mastery of the machine. Using the myth of American-style freedom, this image employs socially conservative symbols of youth and gender roles, health and wealth, mobility and modernity which, taken together, form a scene that served to reinforce the underpinning social order of patriarchal capitalism. It was, broadly speaking, this order that Gulf Oil benefited from and sought to reinforce. The corporation put their sizable resources into the creation of road maps as it was in their direct commercial interest to encourage people to consume as much petroleum as possible, hence the maps were designed to facilitate this oil power mobility.

2015: Google Map

Figure 3 depicts a screenshot reproduced from Google Maps on the 2nd of December 2015.³ Founded in Silicon Valley, California in 1998, Google expanded rapidly to become a powerful global institution in the early 21st Century. As of July 2017, Alphabet Inc., Google's holding company, had a market capitalization of

\$669 billion USD. To put this number into some perspective, it is approximately the same as the World Bank's estimates of the GDP of nation-states like Saudi Arabia and Switzerland, both in the top twenty wealthiest countries in the world. At this time Alphabet had the second highest market capitalization of any corporation in the world; behind Apple and before Microsoft and Amazon. That the top four slots are occupied by American tech-giants is significant, and relates to what I call 'cybernetic capitalism', an increasingly dominant social formation that I shall describe more below.

Google Maps is used by up to two billion people every month.⁴ The vastness of this number is also worth reflecting on. One-hundred years ago, there was less than two billion people on Earth, and only a tiny proportion of them, mostly the powerful—governments, military, navigators, planners—would have used maps. Not many other people had any need for such abstractions. Today, Google Maps actively shapes the way an enormous number of people unevenly scattered around the planet imagine the world and their place in it. This has significant social consequences for the production of space. As a way-finding device, Google Maps acutely affects everyday social practice, with up to one quarter of humanity regularly engaging the representation to facilitate their physical movement through embodied space. As many of the statistics used to describe Google suggest, the corporation belong firmly to the path of Huxley's "gigantic numbers and accelerating increases".

Google Maps is both a representation of space and a reproduction of code. Inquiry into it, then, must follow from the "spatial turn in media studies and the media turn in geographical studies" (Thielman 2010: 5). Insights from this juncture are important, as the production of space (Lefebvre 1991) and the social production of software (Fuller 2008), are increasingly intertwined (Kitchin & Dodge 2011). Moreover, it is particularly important to this article, because Google Maps is not just a paper map made on a screen; it is the product of technologies, techniques and social practices that are significantly more abstract in their constitution. Google Maps is an apparatus that emerges from the convergence of cartography, graphical interfaces, search algorithms, web optimization, GPS, surveillance etc.—all bought together within the abstracted material of computing-machines. This is key, for as Manovich notes, it is this ability of computing-machines to combine previously separate media techniques that marks a fundamental transformation in the history of human media and communication (Manovich 2013: 45-6). Google Maps is an exemplar of the emergent phenomena of "deep mediatization", to use the concept proposed by Couldry and Hepp (2016). Hence, it is a product of the underlying processes of abstraction that have intensified greatly since the rise of cybernetic capitalism.

Two Maps Compared

The Gulf map is strikingly similar to Google Map's representation of the same area at this scale, despite the 100 years separating them (Figures 2 & 3). Both maps are dominated by a network of boldly coloured lines representing roads, which connect cities and towns represented as circles. Both networks unfold over a largely plain white background. Neither map depicts railway lines, and rivers are heavily deprioritized. Both maps represent water as a uniform blue; and state borders are represented with broken lines; and both are oriented north and use a similar projection. Thus, at the level of the reproduced images, Google Maps has much in common with its cartographic ancestor.

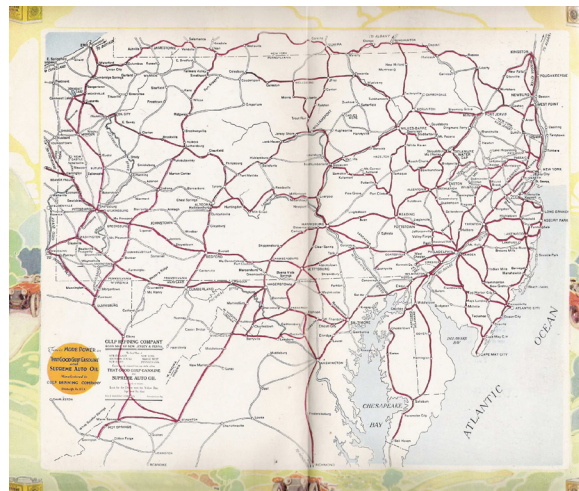


Figure 2. Map of Pennsylvania, 1915, Gulf Oil.

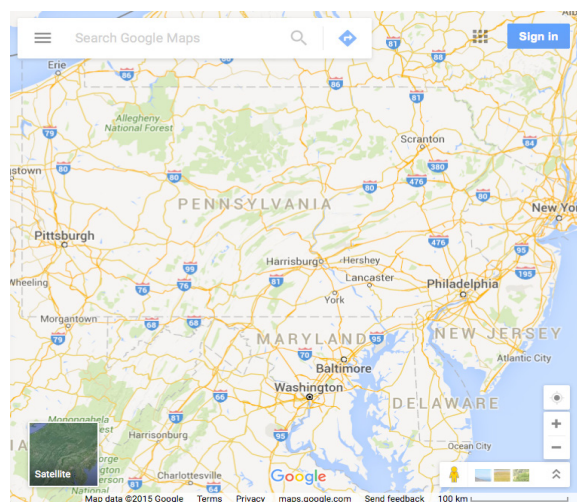


Figure 3. Map of Pennsylvania, 2015, Google Maps.

Many of the differences between the maps can be accounted for by the century that separates their publishing. Take, for instance, the flecks of pasty green that Google use to represent parks and forests. These parks are absent from the earlier map because, like the highway system, the majority of them did not exist 100 years ago. For instance, the Allegheny National Forest, which Google labels in Figure 3, wasn't declared until 1923. Also, most of the major roads that Google represent on its network map simply didn't exist in 1915. The USA's highway network, known officially by the rather clunky name *Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways*, was produced under Eisenhower's regime (1953-1961). The five-star general turned president saw an interstate highway system as being key to provide transport routes for the flow of military supplies and troop deployment across the continent in a Cold War context (Petroski 2006: 396-9). Much like with France's national road system in the 18th Century, the US system was motivated by war, and came to have spin-off benefits by facilitating trade, commercial integration and mobility. Google represents these highways by using their official symbol, which is a curious mix of modern and national imaginaries



Figure 4. Interstate 95, Manual on Uniform Instruction Devices.

over a medieval background. Shaped as a knight's shield, the interstate symbol is a kind of abstract coat of arms, rendered in American red-white-and-blue, which centres on a standardized numeral (Figure 4).

Significantly, Gulf Oil represents far more towns than Google does, a discrepancy that stems from the radically different materiality of the two maps. Google Maps can zoom in and reveal exponentially more details than a paper map, hence it is not forced, like Gulf, to include as many places on this scale. Nevertheless, it is still worth to note Google's deprioritization of rural areas in its hierarchy of representation (O'Beirne 2016). Be that as it may, the question of materiality marks the largest difference between the two maps. Google Maps is composed of an abstracted materiality; it is recombined from codes, algorithms and data-banks, all

existing in complex layers within and between networked computing-machines (Ström 2017). The Gulf map, in contrast, is cartographic in the sense of the word's etymological root, *carto*, as in paper, meaning that it is made from pulped trees and inks. The material abstraction of Google Maps constitutes a *qualitative break* between the two images. It is not the same as a paper map translated onto a screen, although there are plainly many parallels between the two cartographic representations. Rather, it possesses a fundamentally different materiality that is an order of magnitude more abstract.

Google Maps exists within a subjective material ensemble of social practices, meanings and technological apparatuses. It is constituted by vast, globe-spanning conglomerations composed of multiple layers of systems and standards, machines and management, labour and legalities, commodities and communications, ideologies and interoperability, products and protocols (Fuchs 2014; Rossiter 2017). Plainly this list goes well beyond the hardware/software divide and spills out into the bundle of practices, relations and meaning-making systems that make up the cybernetic capitalist social formation. Taken as a whole, these subjective material practices constitute the historical conditions that enable the dominant form of contemporary social life. The Gulf map also existed within a similarly large subjective material ensemble, although it was decidedly less abstract owing to its predating the rise of cybernetic computing-machines.

The complexity of the multiple systems of networked computing-machines makes the older 'mechanical reproduction' that Walter Benjamin wrote about, seem comparatively simple (Benjamin 2009: 228-59). One of Benjamin's central points was that the process of reproduction changes the meaning of an image, and this is an enduring point that is worth taking seriously in the more abstracted age of 'cybernetic reproduction.' To create Figure 3, I used my browser to frame Google Maps in such a way as to mimic the Gulf map by covering Pennsylvania and New Jersey at a similar scale. To do this, I negotiated the pre-programmed constraints of the interactive software—zooming in and out, resizing windows, etc.—until I was satisfied with the framing, whereupon I used another piece of software to take a screenshot. The reproduced artefact was coded as a PNG image file, and was thereby severed from Google's servers, cutting it off from the constantly shifting, updating and expanding apparatus. This was undertaken on the 2nd of October 2015 and representations of the same area look different today. The artefact was saved as a file in a digital archive before being pasted into word processing software and surrounded by text, inviting a critical reading of it, thus altering the site of interpretation.

Curiously, I have never seen an original paper version of the Gulf map; only a digitized version of it downloaded from the web. Specifically, I found it at the rather abstract location: <http://www.mapsofpa.com/art5pics/1915bbm.jpg>, where my

browser rendered the JPG image file on the monitor of my computing-machine. Visual traces of the original were drawn into a computing-machine via a digital camera or scanner, and encoded in abstracted material before being put online. The century old map did not escape the power of cybernetic reconstitution, with the artefact being reproduced at a greater level of abstraction in the circuits of cybernetic capitalism.

While the question of materiality marks the biggest difference between the two maps, one of the largest qualitative similarities between them is that both are the proprietorial products of powerful corporations and are branded with their company's trademarked logos. Private business had long been entangled with European cartography. Since the beginning of capitalist modernity, some states have sought to expand their control internally and to project control outwards, with both processes requiring a level of organization that was, according to David Turnbull, "only possible when the state, science and cartography become integrated" (Turnbull 1996: 19). This integration is notably incomplete without 'capital', which Turnbull neglected to mention. As Mezzadra and Neilson have noted: "The appropriation of space that lines at the core of modern mapping replicates the appropriation of the commons that establishes private property as well as the colonial conquest with its global geography of genocide and extraction" (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 35). Across capitalist modernity, the private sphere has increasingly been involved with the making of maps. For example, the Cassini map of France



Figure 5. "There is more power in that Good Gulf Gasoline", 1915, Gulf Refining Company. This is the cover of the 1915 Gulf Oil map. Thank you to Harold Cramer for the permission to use this picture.

was produced at the junction of capital and state; a sort of proto-public-private-partnership. The influence of private power over cartography went to a new level under Fordism when corporations began producing maps for public use. At this point maps became active tools to encourage consumerism and were hence bound up with the processes of capital accumulation.

As road maps were increasingly circulated in the early twentieth Century, many other industries orbiting the automobile industry—from oil companies to motels, tyre companies to insurance agencies—all embraced road maps as marketing tools. Akerman notes: “wherever possible backsides and margins of maps were filled with advertisements for specific products. Corporate symbols and slogans, particularly the logographic designs that appeared on gas station signs, facades and pumps were ubiquitous” (Akerman 2006: 189-92). As the back of the 1915 map states: “There’s More Power in that Good Gulf Gasoline” (Figure 5). Significantly, neither Figure 2 nor Figure 3 depicts any third-party advertisements. For the Gulf map, this is because the practice of putting ads on maps had not yet come about, and on Google it is because the scale of zoom is too far out for its plethora of advertisements to be shown.

While neither map displays any third-party ads, this does not detract from the fact that both maps serve as *advertisements in and of themselves*. The 1915 map is encouraging people to use it to drive more, thus consuming more of that ‘Good Gulf Gasoline’. This means more dependence on oil, more opportunities for capital accumulation for the company, thus more social power and a tightening of the hegemonic grip of fossil fuels more broadly. The 2015 map is encouraging people to use it more, because all interactions with it leave subjective data-traces that Google can harvest with their surveillance-engines (Ström 2018; Zuboff 2016). These can then be appropriated, commodified and auctioned off to advertisers in a way that increases Google’s revenue stream and contributes to the hegemony of the cybernetic capitalist world order. Both maps are made with the vision of increasing the profit and power of Big Oil and Big Tech respectively. They both attempt to be useful by manufacturing consumer desire and fusing it to a monopolistic brand. In these respects, the Gulf map is a genealogical ancestor of Google Maps. Having touched on some of the similarities and differences between these two maps, I shall now consider how capitalism has transformed between 1915 and 2015, with a focus on how Fordism has been reconstituted.

The Reconstitution of Fordism

The mass production of automobiles was one of the most important industries of the twentieth Century. It was within this industry that the managerial and organisational techniques associated with the modern corporation first arose.

Under the reign of newly professionalised managers, car companies like Ford and General Motors brought together research, design, engineering, production, distribution and advertising (Frieden 2006: 159-64). This meant that on one hand the assembly line and ‘scientific management’ sought to deskill certain workers and render them more replaceable, less powerful and cheaper (Braverman 1998). On the other hand, there was an increasing amount of intellectually trained workers being employed to conduct skilled labour which, in part, reconstituted what it meant to be a worker (Sharp 1968). The practices of car companies were indicative of a larger process within which intellectual activity was increasingly absorbed into the circuits of capital accumulation.

The big car companies were integrated with the petrochemical industries, military-industrial organisations, financiers and others into the ‘carbon-combustion complex’. I draw this concept from Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway’s hard science fiction *The Collapse of Western Civilization*. The authors define the ‘carbon-combustion complex’ as the “interlinked fossil fuel extraction, refinement, and combustion industries, finances and government ‘regulatory’ agencies that



Figure 6. Power house mechanic working on steam pump, 1920, Lewis Hine, Wikimedia Commons. Image of classic Fordism’s tool-wielding industrial masculinity, encircled by a ‘womb’ of steam and steel.

enabled and defended the destabilisation of the world’s climate in the name of employment, growth and prosperity” (Conway & Oreskes 2014: 54-5). The car companies, as part of this larger complex, were behemoths of mass production and vertical integration, and their rise to hegemonic power contributed to the destabilisation of the Earth’s climate and other multidimensional changes.

Writing in a fascist prison in the early 1930s, Antonio Gramsci analysed the changes that came with what he called ‘Fordism’ (Gramsci 1971: 279-318). Gramsci noted how the social form of Fordism colonised not only the physical labour of the worker, but also aspects of their mental and emotional experiences (Figure 6). The Fordist pact between labour and capital, with its hard work, high wages and lure of consumerism, would significantly alter the subjective and material make-up of twentieth century capitalism. This “process of psycho-physical transformation”, to use Gramsci phrase, can be summarised as:

changes in economic, intellectual, moral, and even sexual habits— changes in people’s ritual perception of social time and space; changes in what things mean; and changes in the way that meaning is produced and consumed; changes whose high-speed global teleelectronic circulation blurs the difference between production and consumption, the actual and the virtual, the real and the imaginary, the pleasurable and the dangerous (Pfohl 2005: 556).

For much of the 20th Century, Fordism was in ascendency. This multidimensional transformation spread intensively and extensively around the world following the uneven path of capitalist development. Since Gulf Oil’s early road map, the number of people driving cars has increased massively. In 1915, the United States had a population of around 100 million people (7 percent of the world), and a ratio of cars to people of around 25:1000, the highest of any country at the time. The ratio of cars increased dramatically during the ‘roaring twenties’, and then again during the post war boom. This immense increase in cars was one factor which enabled the huge process of suburbanization that occurred after the Second World War, with cities sprawling out according to the unsustainable geometry of

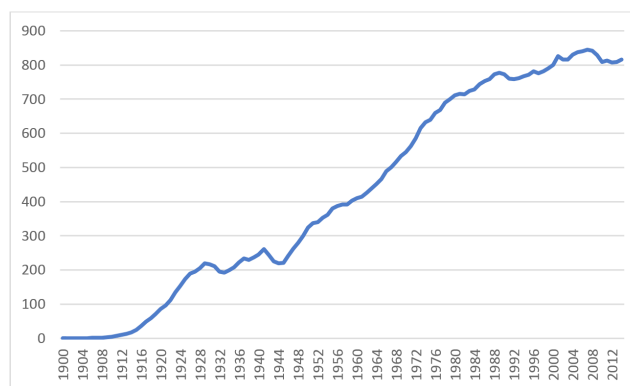


Figure 7. Vehicles per Thousand People in the United States, 1900-2014, Center for Transport Analysis, http://www.cta.ornl.gov/data/tebd35/Spreadsheets/Table3_06.

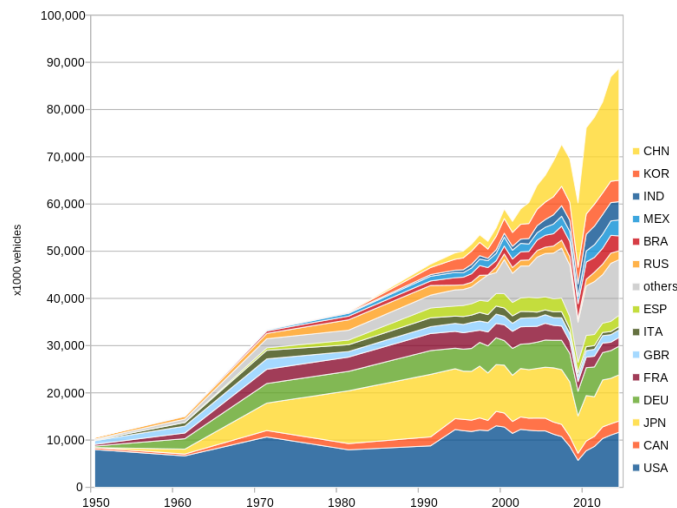


Figure 8. Motor Vehicle Production Volume WikiMedia Commons. Made with data from the Bureau of Transport Statistics.

the automobile. Over the last 100 years, the ratio of cars has continued to climb, and has seemingly only slowed as a result of major global crises (Figure 7 & 8) (Davis 2011: 3-9). Globally, it is estimated that there are over one billion cars in active use, to say nothing of the vast number in rusting ruin. Because there are now so many cars, the need for road maps to facilitate people's oil-powered mobility has never been greater.

In 1950, around 10 million cars were produced globally, 75 percent of which were produced in the United States. Yet, just thirty years later, the US share had fallen to 20 percent of global production (Figure 9). A large part of this change was due to the massive productivity gains in Japan, which produced less than half a million cars in 1960, and 11 million cars just twenty years later. Over the same twenty-year period, US production rose with only about 100,000 cars. Figure 9 is illustrative of the major reconstitution of global Fordism has played out since 1950.

A decade after Huxley's 1958 reflection that I opened this article with, massive protests appeared as the first major cracks in the dominant order of Fordist capitalism, and these cracks continued to spread over the following decade or so (Harvey 2005). A microcosm of these processes can be seen in the crisis and reconstitution of Gulf Oil. Firstly, the company reached its peak oil production in 1970, a problem that was unresolvable in the context of infinite accumulation within finite nature. Then, three years later, the OPEC oil crisis broke the 'Seven Sisters' oligopoly of global production. This crisis was in part the result of an increasingly independent Third World attempting to assert itself on the global stage (Prashad

2014). As a part of this push from below, Gulf Oil had their highly productive oil facilities nationalised by the Kuwaiti government in 1975, which sent the company into a downward spiral. Gulf Oil's production and reserves dwindled, falling 40% between 1978 and 1982. After fighting off a hostile take-over attempt, Gulf opened itself up to offers from other companies and investors. In 1984 the board voted to sell the company to Standard Oil of California, which subsequently re-branded itself as Chevron.

Curiously, aspects of Gulf Oil survived the merger. This is interesting as it shows how capitalism was reconstituted during the crisis in classical Fordism. The remnant that survived the acquisition went from being part of a vertically integrated petrochemical company to a network of business interests. It left the oil pumping to Chevron and transitioned to a more abstract 'new economy' style of accumulation. The refashioned Gulf Oil employs very few people and had a focus on using its brand to franchise, advertise, sponsor sports events, partner and out-source, with a specific focus on intellectual property, branding, scientific expertise and logistics. So, the crisis in capitalism in the 1970s saw Gulf Oil come undone, have its productive capabilities merged into an increasingly monopolistic market, and the remnants go on to become a new 'flexible' business (Gulf Oil 2017; TSHA 2010). In this way, Gulf Oil's transformation is an example of the broader crisis in Fordism, and its reconstitution on a more abstract level.

The crisis in Fordist capitalism provoked a number of reactionary processes that went along with its reconstitution. I cannot explore them in detail here, but will offer a summary list to point to their breadth: unleashed finance, speculation and an explosion of predatory debt relations; aggressive confrontations with unions and stagnating wages; mass privatizations, outsourcing, and off-shoring; increasing precarious employment, regimes of austerity for the poor, and much deregulation (which is to say deregulating from the public good in favour of re-regulating for corporate interests). In short, the Fordist pact of hard work, high wages and mass consumption was broken and was replaced by a new pact: hard precarious work, stagnant wages and debt-fuelled consumption. Much as with the initial coming of Fordism, the crisis in this mode of practice saw a wide ranging "process of psycho-physical transformation", with multidimensional changes in social formations, practices and meanings. Margaret Thatcher hinted at the breadth of this when she stated the purpose of her reactionary project: "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul" (Thatcher 1981). In short, the crisis in Fordism marked a major transformation in social subjectivity and materiality.

Cybernetics in Service of Accumulation

The story of the crisis in Fordism and its reconstitution is important, and one aspect of it that I would like to emphasize here is the role that cybernetics in the service of capitalist accumulation played in this transformation. This relates to my conception of ‘cybernetic capitalism’, an analytical category that focuses on the layer of abstract social practice that is spread unevenly across the capitalist world-system, a layer that bleeds through and transforms patterns of social relations and practices (Ström 2018). Cybernetics has its roots in the techno-scientific developments that began during the Second World War. The term was coined by Norbert Wiener and he brought it to its highest level of condensation in his bestselling book entitled *Cybernetics: Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Wiener 1948). The four terms from Wiener’s formulation—control, communication, animal/humanity (he used both) and technology—can be made into a thematic lens through which one can critically approach contemporary capitalism. This approach emphasises the roles that technology and communication play in the reconstitution of material and subjective social practices at higher levels of abstraction.

After being formulated in the military-industrial research complex, the rise and spread of cybernetics, in Simon Cooper’s words, has seen an increasing “fusion of intellectual technique with the market so that a vast amount of intellectual energy goes into creating lifestyles based on consumption” (in Hinkson 2016: 47). As noted above, the appropriation of intellectual energy was immanent in classic Fordism, with the integration of engineers and other intellectually trained workers into business, yet it was only after capitalism’s cybernetic reconstitution that this more abstract appropriation became increasingly dominant. Ongoing cybernetic developments were centred on networked computing-machines, and the inseparable bundles of techniques and social practices that enable them. In short, the bundles of technology, technique and practice were put into the service of capital accumulation, thus helping to resolve the crisis in classical Fordism and keep the circuits of accumulation spinning. As networked computing-machines were increasingly woven into social practice, they had a profoundly abstracting influence. These devices enabled technologically extended forms of interaction, which when generalized across sectors of society, reconstituted social forms and practices in more abstract ways, creating “a change that cuts so deeply that it can only be spoken of as a transformation of the mode of being” (Sharp 1993: 231).

The cybernetic reconstitution of Fordist capitalism enabled and underpinned many other well-known processes that contributed to the transformations that began in the 1970s. Take for instance the world historic process of financialization which began in full in 1971 with the US unilaterally dropping the gold standard (Arrighi 2010). By drawing away from the tradition of gold, this more abstract

regime had many crucial cybernetic moments in its constitution, thus differentiating it from older forms of 'dematerialized' currency systems (Graeber 2012). The emergent order was qualitatively different, in part, because of the cybernetic systems of networked computing-machines which allowed it to unfold more intensively and extensively, and on a level of greater abstraction. Following this line of argument, it is also significant that 1971 was the year that NASDAQ, the world's first electronic stock market, came online. These abstract and automated processes of financialization quickly became more profitable than more traditional forms of production. As of July 2017, the NASDAQ Stock Market had an average annualized growth rate of 9.24 percent since it began its trading in February 1971. In comparison, global GDP has grown at an average rate of around 3.8 percent for the last fifty years. Notably, NASDAQ's growth rate has intensified significantly since the Global Financial Crisis, increasing to 17.13 percent per year since June 2009 (Williamson 2017). In the early 21st Century, Ford Motor Company made higher corporate profits from financing consumer automobile loans than it did through selling cars (Leggett 2005). This last anecdote is a symbol of how thoroughly the Fordist order has been reconstituted, with its patterns of accumulation becoming much more abstract.

Another aspect of the cybernetic reconstitution of Fordism can be seen in the world of logistics. The role of shipping containers in facilitating and intensifying global trade is well known. Coming out of the US war machine's organizational developments from the Second World War, via more wars in Korea and Vietnam, the core of the 'container revolution' was solidified between 1968 and 1972 in a series of International Maritime Organization standardization practices which saw more consistent loading, movement and transportation of goods. These standardized boxes are part of an ensemble of cybernetic technologies, techniques and practices that enable this highly rationalized system of global trade, a system that spreads out much further into global supply chains and wide-reaching transformations of social practice (Tsing 2009). All containers are issued unique numbers and are tracked via computerized systems which are implemented to make the processes as automated as possible. The logistical business software that facilitates these processes are as significant as the containers themselves, hence making this cybernetic moment crucial in the critical study of political economy (Rossiter 2017). As Levinson notes, "Computers, and the vessel planners who use them, determine the order in which the containers are to be discharged, to speed the process without destabilizing the ship. The actions of the container cranes and the equipment in the yard all are programmed in advance" (Levinson 2006: 6). Cybernetics thus underpin the logistical transformations that have enabled capitalism's more abstract reconstitution.

Cybernetics in service of capital accumulation have enabled intensifying processes of financialization and logistics—among many others that I cannot outline here—which have served to reconstitute Fordist capitalism on a more abstract level. Computing-machines have contributed to the increasingly abstracted reorganization of nature in service of capital accumulation (Moore 2015). The disarticulation of productive processes, the extension of global supply chains and logistical rationalizations, telecommunication and automated systems, the exploitation of living labour—formal and informal, waged and reproductive—all have been recombined within a cybernetic system to intensify the productive capabilities.

This can be seen in the car industry, where production has continued to intensify (Figure 9). There were more automobiles produced in 2016 than any previous year—94,976,569 cars to be precise (OICA 2017). From the perspective of sheer output, Fordism has never been productive. Yet, there are profound contradictions at the core of this social formation. One material contradiction can be understood through using the ecological economic concept of ‘energy-return-on-investment’ (EROI). This represents the ratio of the energy from delivered from a resource compared to the amount of energy used to obtain it. EROI have dropped significantly over the last one-hundred years. In the US in 1919, oil delivered a massive 1,000-to-1 EROI ratio. It has dropped significantly down to 30-to-1 in 1995 for conventional oil and for ‘unconventional oil’ in the 2010’s, it had dropped

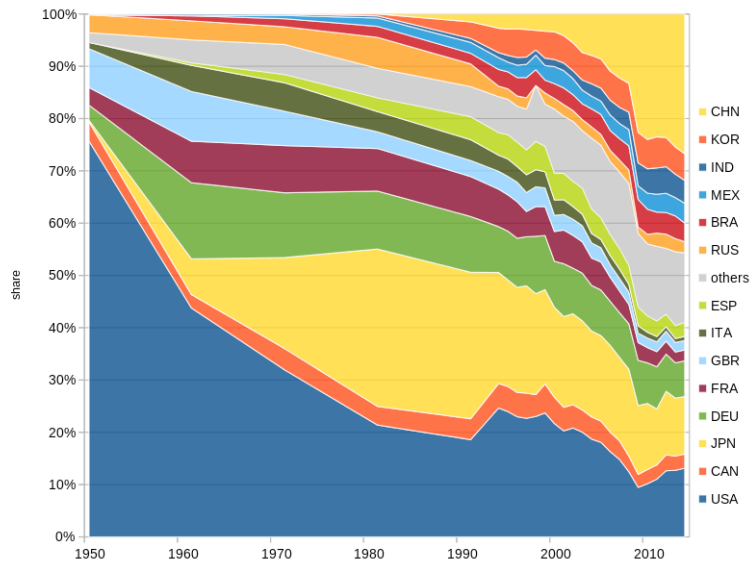


Figure 9. Motor Vehicle Production from 1950, Share Wikimedia Commons. Made with data from the Bureau of Transport Statistics.



Figure 10. Condamine River burning after coal seam gas mining began in the area. Queensland Australia. Photo by Max Phillips, 2016.

to 5-to-1 for shale oil and 3-to-1 for tar sands (Murphy & Hall 2010). Fordism has never been more inefficient. And yet, Fordism has never been more productive. These two contradictory facts sit next to one another with massive eco-social consequences (Figure 10). This is a case where “gigantic numbers and accelerating increases” lead not to a ‘Brave New World’, but rather to an increasingly desperate encounter with the limits of growth. Figure 10 depicts a surreal photograph of an Australian river on fire after coal seam gas mining commenced in the area. A burning river is a material contradiction worthy of a dystopian imagination.

The Augmentation

The multidimensional transformations in Fordism that started in the 1970s have long been subject to critical analysis. Many writers, such as David Harvey, began speaking of ‘post-Fordism’ in the late 1980s to help explain the profound changes in capitalism (Harvey 1989). While adding the prefix ‘post’ made sense at the time, a generation later we may be in need of greater analytical clarity via new conceptions. The concept of ‘augmentation’ can be helpful to put focus on the increasing abstraction and layering effect under conditions of cybernetic capitalism. The word ‘augment’—which simply means increase, extend or intensify—came to have a new meaning in the context of cybernetics. The term ‘augmented reality’ was coined by the Boeing scientist Thomas Caudell in 1990.

He invented the term when he imagined equipping workers at Boeing's aircraft factories with cybernetic head-mounted displays that could superimpose plans and instructions over their visual fields to increase efficiency and deskilling the workers at a level, hence increasing the centralization and concentration of control (Caudell 1990). In this way, the concept of 'augmentation' is embroiled with the cyber-capitalist response to the crisis in Fordism and the reconfiguration of power, labour, materiality and subjectivity that ensued.

Unlike 'virtual reality'—which replaces a lived reality with a simulated one—*augmented reality overlays an abstracted, technological layer onto lived reality*. This abstracted layer reconfigures that over which it is projected. In this way, augmentation is a very apt metaphor for the processes of cybernetic reconstitution and increasing abstraction that I am describing in this paper. Indeed, in some cases at least, it is more than a metaphor. Google Maps is an augmentation reality apparatus, a cybernetic machine that projects abstraction onto social practice, a phenomenon that has profound consequences on the production of space and subjectivity. To be clear, unlike uncritical celebrants (Chen 2016), my use of the term 'augment' does not imply an 'enhancement'; reality is not necessarily improved by its technological enframing. Rather, while certain aspects of reality may be heightened, other aspects are necessarily impoverished, and the entire experience is reconstituted on a more abstract level.

It is important to note that once overlaid, the more concrete layers do not disappear, abstraction does not simply lead to a one-dimensional technological enframing. Rather, more abstract layers reconstitute more concrete layers of social being, a process that can cause tensions, ambivalences, ambiguities, conflicts, contingencies, and complexities (Cooper 2002). These tensions can even lead to fully blown ontological contradictions (James 2006). In this way, augmentation can be a way to describe processes of mediatization that draw attention to its layering effect and the resultant tensions.

The image of levels and layers is significant. Manovich describes "software as a layer that permeates all areas of contemporary society" (Manovich 2013: 15). Elsewhere, he notes that 'augmentation' involves "overlaying dynamic data over the physical space" (Manovich 2006). Speaking of locative media's interactive production of 'augmented realities', André Lemos notes that we are seeing "several examples of integrated, mixed processes that merge electronic and physical territories, creating new forms and new senses of place" (Lemos 2008: 96), which leads to the creation of "new forms of territorialisation through informational control" (Lemos 2008: 104). In these accounts, the authors describe how augmentation changes the phenomenological experience. Building on these accounts, and others like them, it can be helpful to add an axis of abstraction to the conceptualization. This can help show how phenomenological experience is reconstituted; how more ab-

stracted layers of social relations, practices and subjectivity emerge and interact with more concrete levels. This analytical move allows for a multidimensional exploration of social phenomena and the current qualitative transformations that are unevenly underway.

With this in mind, I now return to the two maps analysed earlier, as the Gulf and Google Maps can be understood as paralleling the distinctions between Fordist and cybernetic capitalism. The production of the Gulf map requires many technologies and intellectual techniques to be brought into existence. The roots of this go back to what Benedict Anderson called 'print-capitalism', which emerged from the interplay of capitalism, technology and empire. Anderson argued that between "1500 and 1800 an accumulation of technological innovations in the fields of shipbuilding, navigation, horology and cartography, mediated through print-capitalism", combined to alter consciousness, hence producing a new more abstract way of organizing the world (Anderson 2006: 188). After 1800, the processes Anderson noted were strengthened with the rise of industrial capitalism. Printing went from being hand-operated Gutenberg-style to being steam powered and far more abstract and productive. This technique, first successfully implemented by Friedrich Koenig over the first decades of the 19th Century, intensified this development. From a media history perspective, these transformations are understood as belonging to the "mechanization" of media, the first of three "waves of mediatization" proposed by Couldry and Hepp (2016: 34-44).

Following Anderson's analysis, it is possible to see how similar patterns have occurred at other historic moments, such as the Fordist reconstitution of 19th Century industrial capitalism. Fordism emerged from the interplay of capitalism, technology and empire, with developments in the extraction and processing of petrochemicals (including plastics and fertilizers), the industrialization of advertising and public relations, telephone enabled centralization, production lines and the invention of modern management techniques (to name but a few). These developments were mediated through the "electrification" of media, the second wave of mediatization (Couldry & Hepp 2016: 44-48). Being composed of older industrial-print techniques, the Gulf Oil map presents a conception of space which is inseparable from the rise of Fordist capitalism.

As Fordism overlaid and reconstituted some of the patterns from print and industrial capitalism, so did the rise of cybernetic capitalism in overlaying and reconstituting Fordism after it hit multiple crisis points in the 1970s. This new order emerged from the interplay of capitalism, technology and empire, with developments in cybernetic techno-sciences, increasingly mobile telecommunications industries, new modes of precarious labour management, and the Global Positioning System (to name but a few). These developments were mediated through the "digitization" of media, the third wave in Couldry and Hepp's schema (Couldry

& Hepp 2016: 48-56). The intense abstractions enabled by networked computing-machines enabled this transformation, opening the way for a state of “deep mediatization”. From this process, cybernetic capitalism has augmented Fordism, reconstituting it on a more abstract level. Much as print-capitalism produced new conceptions of space that were more abstracted than that which preceded it, another qualitative leap into the drawn-away occurred with the rise of cybernetic cartography like Google Maps (Kitchin & Dodge 2011). Apparatuses like this are the products of computing-machines that produces space, practice and subjectivity on more abstract levels.

Maps and Abstraction

In this final section I briefly consider how maps—and the increasing abstraction inherent in them—reconstitutes social practice and produce a way of being in, and relating to, the world that is more abstract. There are a multitude of ways in which to navigate space, with the majority not involving the mediation of a map. The most concrete methods begin with the drawing of signs from the natural world, such as from the sun, stars, or terrestrial formations like hills and rivers. Navigating using natural formations is a practice that is partly shared by many other migrating animals, from humpback whales to swallows. People can also navigate through space by drawing signs from human experience, such as from memory, whether individual or collective. This could involve asking someone for directions, or through having someone act as a guide. Such navigation is contingent on speech, which is itself an abstraction, however it is also embodied and involves a face-to-face encounter with another human. For most people for most of history, these more concrete forms of navigation were how people moved through space. It is thus more abstract to produce a map than to draw signs from the environment, but far less abstract than using a representational technology.

Mobility becomes more abstract when people begin producing technologies like maps. To produce a paper map, such as the Cassini map of France, requires all sorts of abstract practices to bring them into being; various techniques and technologies such as standardized measurement systems, triangulation and magnetic compasses. Using a paper map to navigate requires constant attention translate between the abstracted space of the map and the embodied space of one’s surroundings. With a paper map, one must plot their own route, and constantly go back and forth between the representation and the territory in order for the map to facilitate mobility. While such practices are far more abstract than looking at the landscape or asking another person for directions, a paper map is far less abstract than a cybernetic apparatus like Google Maps.

Using Google Maps to navigate involves a layer of augmented reality that is connected to a network of globe-spanning computing-machines. The functioning of this system is highly abstract, with layers upon layers of machinery and coded material—semiconductors, interoperability standards, precarious labour, surveillance systems, etc.—all of which are immanent to the very functioning of the map. Such apparatuses serve to augment navigation, which is to say that they project a layer of cybernetic abstraction onto social practice. Through its search and surveillance engines, Google Maps can find a destination and automatically generate a route there. It can even ‘speak’ the directions via a synthesised voice, and one need only follow the directions rather than actively translate: “In 50m turn right”. This augmented process is much more passive than using a paper map and can be understood as the outsourcing of spatial awareness to the cyber-capitalist firm. This abstraction has become part of everyday practice of billions of people unevenly spread around the world. In this way, Google Maps changes social practices of mobility and meaning, technologically mediating it, thus resulting in space being produced in more abstract ways. This is part of the cybernetic reconstitution of everyday practice—the deep mediatization of the world—a phenomenon that is embroiled with the changing nature of capitalism as a world-historic system.

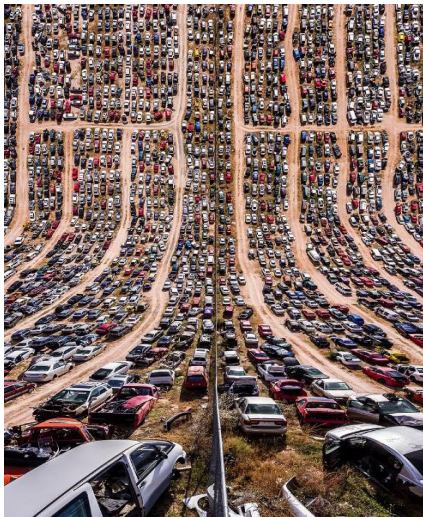


Figure 11 & 12. Aydin Buyuktas, ‘Junkyard’ and ‘Empty Car Park’, Flatlands II Taken by with the aid of drones, these photographs can be seen as visual manifestations of the accelerating curves that Huxley suggests paves the way to Brave New World. Figure 11 on the left shows the exponential waste, and on the Figure 12 on the right shows the increasing abstraction of cybernetic capitalism’s reconstitution of Fordism.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have very briefly looked at a century of transformations within Fordist capitalism by using two road maps as entry points into the narrative. The 1915 Gulf Oil map is a symbol of the world order dominated by capitalism during its Fordist reconstitution. In the same way, the 2015 Google Map is a symbol of an augmented world order dominated by capitalism during its cybernetic reconstitution. As previously noted, there are many parallels between the two maps as well as profound differences. Likewise, there are many parallels between the Fordism that Gramsci wrote about and the augmented Fordism of today, yet there are also qualitative differences. In both cases, the latter has been thoroughly remade by the cybernetic revolution and the technologies, intellectual techniques and social practices connected to it. These new modes have made capitalism simultaneously more abstract and more productive, albeit in a contradictory manner (Figure 11 & 12).

In both cases, the maps are not simply passive images, rather they have both been bound-up with everyday practice and have therefore actively contributed to transforming conceptions of space, affecting the way we move through space, relate to one another and create meaning. Like Fordism exerted a process of “psycho-physical transformation”, in Gramsci’s terms, the newer phenomena of cybernetic capitalism are reorganizing the world in ways that are increasingly abstract. Over the past century, we have been following the road map to a Brave New World. It is not the specific dystopia that Huxley imagined, yet the trajectory of “gigantic numbers and accelerating increases” carries on, with the map reconstituting the territory, abstracting and augmenting it in a relentless cybernetic reorganization.

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Notes

1 This argument was formulated by a number of writers around the Australian academic journal *Arena*. A good summary of this concept can be found in Raewyn Connell’s chapter in a book celebrating fifty years of *Arena*, and the book more broadly summarises the arguments of this line of investigation (Hinkson 2016).

2 The facts from this paragraph were drawn from Gulf Oil’s official website

[<http://www.gulfoilltd.com/timeline/company/>] and the Texas State Historical Association's article on the company [<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/dog02>]

3 The digital degrees (co-ordinates) of this map are 40.0668125, -76.8982741, and it was taken at the 7th level of zoom, see [<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.0668125,-76.8982741,7z>]

4 This is a difficult thing to estimate, as Google very rarely give any indication as to how many people use their systems. In 2012 the company announced: "More than a billion people use Google Maps each month to find their way around town and around the world" (McClendon 2012). Since then, the number of people accessing the internet has increase significantly.

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On Not Being There

By Johanna Dahlin

This paper is an expression of the social anthropologist's frustration with not being there, and an attempt to deal with my own chronic disciplinary identity crisis and my "it's complicated" relationship with participant observation.¹

I have worked for a long time now in an interdisciplinary setting, and although I sometimes characterize myself as an interdisciplinary bastard, I have retained a rather strong identification as an anthropologist. This identification is perhaps paradoxical as one of my main reasons for applying to an interdisciplinary PhD program was to get away from social anthropology. As a master's student, I became increasingly frustrated with anthropology and its insistence on ethnographic fieldwork as the one (and only) way to do research. I remember my annoyance with my supervisor's question, 'but how is this anthropology' as she was reading my proposals, until I finally included a passage on participant observation, which appealed her. I remember reading master's thesis upon master's thesis where it seemed to me that participant observation was actually quite ill-suited for investigating the issues at hand. And then, finally, I remember my relief when one of our professors tried to instil in us, that there are 'other ways of knowing about the world' than participant observation.

I came to my PhD studies with a thematic I wanted to study: the memory and commemoration of the Second World War in Russia. It was a topic I far from exhausted in my master's thesis, and a doctoral dissertation later I could easily devote a few more years to it. I also had a vague idea on how to go about studying it. Participant observation was to be a part of it, but I did not envisage it as the main part. Through serendipity, I happened upon the search for fallen soldiers, and ended up doing far more anthropological fieldwork than I would ever have imagined. It was quite literally field work, where I took part in work on the former battlefields to locate the remains of soldiers, fallen but often officially listed as missing in action. It was heavy, dirty, cold (or sometimes too hot) and very participatory, even hands-on. It was in many ways life-changing; allowing me close

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proximity to both the cruelty of war and the friendship of the volunteer search unit. And perhaps, it also made me end up as the sort of dogmatic anthropologist the master's student version of myself despised, because although I still agree that there are other ways of knowing the world, I have become one of those proponents of ethnographic fieldwork.

Being in the mud, in the field and getting your hands dirty became, for me, *the* image of the researcher. This was how research is done. Although I did work with other materials in my dissertation, they were always secondary. It was through fieldwork everything was somehow filtered.



The quintessential anthropologist: Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands 1918. Photo likely by Billy Hancock.

When I reluctantly had to leave the dirt and mud and move on to other projects, I continued to use fieldwork mixed with other methods. But the proportion is the opposite, and I am frustrated that I can't be 'there' enough. As things were getting really interesting, I had to go home. Instead, I have to try to access other sources. And I, quite frankly, don't know how to deal with it. Most of all, I'm frustrated with trying to research social media. So frustrated, in fact, that I have adopted the 'ostrich approach': I stick my head in the sand, hoping it will just go away, which is hardly a long term solution to my problem or a methodological approach that funding bodies generally approve of.

But let us return to Russia. I recently stumbled across a conference paper that I wrote early on as a PhD student. I wrote it as I was approaching the end of my first period of fieldwork, relieved that no one asked me, 'but how is this anthropology?'. Instead I asked this question to myself, anxious for disciplinary belonging or merely to be employable after attaining that PhD. There aren't too many places for interdisciplinary bastards, after all. (And here I am, almost 10 years on, still no proper employment, still the same disciplinary identity crisis.)

My doctoral research was actually not my first attempt at fieldwork, but it was part of an initial attempt to make sense of the whole endeavour. And in that attempt, an oft-quoted poem by Fyodor Tyutchev from 1866 came to my mind. It begins ‘Umon Rossiyu ne ponyat’, and in John Dewey’s English translation it reads like this:

*Who would grasp Russia with the mind?
For her no yardstick was created:
Her soul is of a special kind,
By faith alone appreciated.*

The Russian ‘um’ is perhaps better translated as ‘reason’, and the message is that you cannot understand Russia, you have to believe in her. It has become something of a popular maxim in Russia, but for someone embarking on a career where understanding Russia was her very *raison d’être* it was of course provocative. But as I was trying to come to terms with fieldwork in St Petersburg, I was also gaining a new sympathy for Tyutchev, or at least for ‘mind’ or ‘reason’ not being enough to understand Russia. Because what I was doing, as I tried to gather material for my dissertation, was feeling. Experiencing things down to my skin. And as I later developed my relationship with the search unit that I had met for the first time just days before I wrote that paper, this emotional aspect grew even stronger.

I’ve tried to come to terms with this in a book chapter, that I’ve called ‘A labour of love’ as this is what the search work is for many of the participants. But perhaps it is also a description of what I am doing. Is ‘labour of love’ an apt term for research? The chapter deals with the emotional aspects of heritage, but can I engage with ‘affective meaning making’ in what I study, without engaging with my own ‘affective meaning making’?

I’m beginning that text in the woods and bogs of the Sinyavino heights east of St Petersburg. From 1941 to 1944 fierce battles raged here and helmets, splinters and barbed wire are still visible. What is not as visible is that the ground is also filled with the remains of the soldiers that fought here. I wanted to begin the text there, in the mud, and I seized upon a day in September a few years ago. It was during one of the unit’s larger expeditions, but it was not enough people present and we were often working alone. During my third day in the same spot, in the same pit, I was getting bored. Digging was slow. The remains were in a very poor condition and I had to be careful. Patience with this type of work was one quality I could bring into the search unit, but the conditions were also frustrating as it was hard to do much social research, when isolated in a muddy pit where the only human presence was in the form of decomposed bones. On the third day I finally had some company. One of the search unit’s members had just returned



Dragon's teeth near the Sinyavino heights. Photo by the author.

from working in the city and decided to help me. As one of the most experienced members in the unit, he was also a “key informant” who, over the years of my involvement in the unit, has been teaching me the intricacies of search work, and how to understand the terrain and infer the course of war. He started digging where I had not yet been digging, and almost immediately he encountered a pair of glasses. I inspected them, both fascinated and slightly annoyed that he had showed up to find the most interesting things. “It must be a *politruk* [political commissar]” my companion decided, explaining that glasses are a rare find.

We also found a decomposed pencil and an eraser, and the remains of what appeared to have been a purse containing 25 kopecks. Compared to the two soldiers I previously dug up out of the pit, a crumpled mug seems to have been their sole collective property, this was quite a find in all its modesty. The lenses in the glasses were intact, but the frames loose and broken.

This muddy pit was not too far from where I, two years previously, had my first encounter with this search for fallen soldiers. I was deeply affected when I found my first soldier. I had never handled human remains before, and the emotional impact it had on me was in many ways crucial in shaping my doctoral research. After two years, I was already a bit blasé.

Getting to know Russia and the Search Movement was both an intellectual and emotional process. Being there creates attachment and just being in this landscape is cherished by *poiskoviki*, as the search unit's members are called. However, place is also central to learning and teaching about the war, and about the search. The



The politruk's glasses. Photo by the author.

world of my doctoral fieldwork, St Petersburg, the woods and bogs, and not least the people, has come to mean much to me, but I cannot spend a lot of time there anymore. I work on other things, have other commitments. And not being there, not seeing my friend's children grow up, is painful.

This brings me back to Tyutchev. Perhaps you cannot grasp Russia with the mind? Is understanding a question of reason, or is it also about feeling? Emotions and attachment are important for making sense of things. Is separation of sense and sensibility possible? The dedicated fieldworker in me says no.

But there is more to my uneasiness with having other sources of knowing the world than being there as a basis of my research. Another part of the problem, I think, is noise. When you're not here, there is not enough noise—and too much noise at the same time.

I guess there is much in most research projects that will not make it into the final publications. But I imagine there is more discarded bits and pieces in a project based on ethnographic fieldwork. When the research instrument is your own body, which is on 24-7, where there are constantly sounds and smells and sights to make sense of. Noise in this sense, is about overcrowded trolley buses, money sent from hand to hand in a marshrutka, the crowds outside inexplicably closed metro doors. It is the unknown man who explains that you cannot stand and dither so long at the crossing because then you will never get across the street, or the old woman at the cemetery who is praising the bird song and peace, or, for that matter, the clatter of high heels against the paving stones. Things that seem



Fieldwork noise in the form of dust. Photo David Torell.

irrelevant, but that I think are important. This is noise in the sense of the roar of a river. Even if you're interested in the wetter properties of water; take away the roar, and you take away a good deal of what that river is.

There is not much of this on social media. There might be a good deal of posting going on, and of course this is indicative of something, and can be an excellent source to find out about that something, but I miss the noise. The media is such a severe filter in itself, content curated with varying degrees of care. Where are all the things going on around the thing I'm supposed to study? The things that give it context and meaning. Even for the most frequent posters, there is but a tiny fraction of their life that goes online. There might well be good answers to this in any of the many handbooks on studying social media that I keep checking out from the library and return unread, but my hunch is that the problem probably has to do with me not viewing the internet as a site, in keeping with anthropological terminology. And perhaps it needs to be a site to do it justice. Instead, I have seen it as a way of getting a glimpse of the real site. A way to reach what's behind the screen. It might not be surprising that it fails to live up to this promise.

There is too little, and at the same time too much. The internet is its own ever-expanding universe. Social media has its fair share of noise, more like a disturbing static than a romantic roar. Irrelevant posts, trolls, hopeless comment threads. The online selves of some of my interlocutors in the field are a conspiracy-filled nuisance. If they were complex and interesting people when I met them, I don't want to understand their actions or motives anymore, just tell

them to get a grip. While there was a good deal of annoying things about them on the ground as well, the whole thing was exciting and intriguing. Their online presentations, however, made me lose interest. Analyzing social media posts might be a way to get some data, get that article written, but it does not spark my curiosity. I'm not particularly interested in what I might find.

The beauty of being able to access things from your office is also a curse. To get material into your own every-day life, instead of you getting immersed in that context, is very convenient—but for a terrible multitasker like myself, far from ideal. Research drowns in the mighty roar of the flood of everyday life. It is too easy to log off: for lunch, for tea, for colleagues knocking on your door, for pre-school pickups... In the field, on expeditions, there were no breaks. The frequent *perekur* (the smoking-break enjoyed by smokers and non-smokers alike) was prime research time. Even in the city, when the water, so to speak, was out of sight, the roar was still heard. The countless hours I spent alone in my room, curled up on the wide window sill watching Prospekt stachek below; the noise of the six lane road was part of this whole understanding Russia thing.

It is the noise, the kind that I miss, that helps me make sense of my data. It gives me leads and frames of interpretation. It may give a feeling that there is something in this, and noise then turns to music. And if there is no noise, I'm at a loss. Perhaps I'm a hopeless romantic, but give me back my mud, dirt and dust.

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Notes

¹ This conversation originates from the workshop Changing Methods: Conducting research in the age of mediatization held at University of Amsterdam in November 2016.



On Being Here

by Mattis Karlsson

Dear Johanna,

This paper is a response to the social anthropologist's frustration of not being there. It is, to make further use of your own words, an attempt to deal with my own chronic disciplinary identity crisis. It is a response written in recognition of your situation and in recognition of the symptoms that you so eloquently describe.¹

I love your expression “interdisciplinary bastard”, partly because I can relate, and partly because of what happens when the metaphor of disciplines and parenthood is extended. I was once also in search of parents. As a fresh undergraduate student my first contact with academia was at the program for Social and Cultural Analysis at Linköping University. This is a program managed by scholars who in many cases had left their respective disciplines to answer calls for interdisciplinary science. The program was also a response to a similar call: approach the world with an open but critical mind without the guiding hand of a specific discipline. In a sense we were all orphans. We grasped for clearer contexts, conformity in method and a canon to rally around. I found all of this in the disciplinary arms of sociology. However, I rebelled on my newfound family at every given opportunity. To me, sociology is merely a point of departure. I keep coming back, but only because I imagine it as a necessity in order to leave. I think this is an imagination based on a false distinction. The insides and outsides of disciplines are arbitrary divides. There are no perfect lines drawn on maps to indicate where sociology ends, and anthropology begins. The “field” is little different from the disciplines of science in that regard. I do not practice fieldwork in any traditional sense. Regardless of whether I am in search of material, or if I am analysing or writing, you are most likely to find me by my computer. In spite of this, I would argue that I am there. It is not from laziness or reluctance to travel that I have decided to conduct my research in this manner. It is from interest and a want for effectiveness.

In my coming doctoral dissertation I study the recently discovered prehistoric human species, the Denisova hominin, or simply, the Denisovan. I am interested in the fascinating process of how this species' making via scientific practice and the mediation of science—a process that involves places like the damp caves of the Altai Mountains in Russian Siberia, high technology laboratories at the Max Planck Institute for evolutionarily anthropology, editorial rooms of newspapers and tabloids and many other places where I have yet to set my foot. I have spent countless hours observing the muddy caves of the Altai Mountains although I access this field from my cosy office. While you are “out there” in the mud I am exploring the deep Siberian caves from my perfectly ergonomic fold back chair. I am sipping coffee while accessing the world via my screen.

The difference is extreme, but only because we let the extremes make the difference. It is not authenticity that separates my “there” from yours. A virtual reality is reality first, virtual second. Sometimes it is mediated, sometimes it needs translation, but it is never less than. Nor is it noise that makes the difference, my field offers plenty of that, although it does not always make sounds. I spent days exploring the comments on a Russian YouTube-channel recently and I could speak at great length about the amazing insights I had there. And a few days ago I realized (with a mixture of horror and fasciation) that the advertisement in my browser was based on my regular visits to a neo-Nazi website that I was gathering information from. I realize that the Altai cave that I am so interested in has qualities that I may need to see with my own eyes in order to comprehend them, but I would argue that it has qualities that I am seeing with my own eyes because I am where I am. The online/offline divide is too often a compulsive divide. It too is an arbitrary distinction, and the best research is probably made without it, or we will forever study half of what we are interested in.

This is when you say: “The beauty of being able to access things from your office is also a curse.” Sure, there is a beauty in accessing things from the office, but it is no more every-day life than your mud “out there”, and it makes me no less immersed in context. I do not find my material conveniently situated at the top of my Facebook-feed. It takes time, searches, discussions with colleagues, translation, and navigation to find my material. I imagine it is the same for you, you will not simply walk out your door Monday morning and start your observations. You will not draw conclusions about Russian soldiers based on observations from your local city square. There are crucial differences in our methods, absolutely. However, the contrast between every-day life and getting immersed in context is not one of those differences. On the contrary, it is one of the things we share. We share the travel from our every-day life to the field. The means of travel are radically different, but the point of departure and the point of arrival could be the

same. We simply have different routes to Russia.

At the end of the day I think your best arguments for being there has very little to do with method and more to do with romance. But that is also why I am sometimes jealous of your relationship with participatory observation; you have clearly been through a lot together and you seem to look at your field in a way that wholly differs from the way I look at mine. It is a sort of romance indeed, and maybe that is why it has so much to do with method after all? What we love, we do well.

What about me? Maybe I'll do things your way next time. I might try out mud, dirt and dust AFK. The beauty of being in a poly-disciplinary relationship is that you get to pick and choose. There is no such thing as an uncomplicated relationship anyway.

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Notes

¹ This conversation originates from the workshop Changing Methods: Conducting research in the age of mediatization held at University of Amsterdam in November 2016.