

Resisting the 'employability' doctrine through anarchist pedagogies & prefiguration

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Increasingly those working in higher education are tasked with targeting their teaching approaches and techniques to improve the 'employability' of graduates. However, this approach is promoted with little recognition that enhanced employability does not guarantee employment outcomes or the tensions inherent in pursuing this agenda. The increasing focus on employability seems to suggest that the primary role of contemporary higher education is to produce skilled (yet increasingly un/der paid and precarious) workers. Although graduate employment is undoubtedly an important outcome, we do not consider it our primary purpose or the yardstick by which the quality of education (and our teaching) should be measured. To do so would be to cede ground on what the role of higher education is and can be, potentially impacting negatively on both students and those who teach them. Drawing on anarchist pedagogies and prefigurative politics and our own experiences as educators and researchers in vocationally-oriented disciplines, we consider the possibilities for resistance within the academy to the dominant discourses of employability. We highlight the tensions inherent in the neoliberal pursuit of employability, characterising them as fissures through which possibilities for resistance and transformative praxes may take hold and indeed thrive.

Keywords: unpaid work, employability, anarchist pedagogies, graduate employment, prefigurative politics, higher education

Introduction: Creating unpaid workers for capitalism?

In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on 'employability' as a metric by which the success of a

university education and our teaching is, or should be, assessed (Jackson *et al.*, 2013). Academics have been instructed to re-write and re-structure courses to improve the 'employability' of our graduates, in everything from scientific and vocational fields to arts and humanities.

Further, those tasked with curriculum re-structuring may or may not be working in positions where this kind of labour is acknowledged or properly paid for; the increasing casualisation of higher education often precludes access to the professional development that informs and supports curriculum-level work, and sessional contracts may or may not have any allocation for this kind of work. Further, there is seemingly little acknowledgement that 'employability' does not necessarily equate to 'employment' (Brown *et al.*, 2004), or that job seeking is largely a zero-sum game. In the context of high graduate and youth un/deremployment the unspoken reality is that there are not enough jobs, and for every graduate who succeeds in finding work, many others have missed out (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Denny & Churchill, 2016). Students' self-perceived employability (Qenani *et al.*, 2014) has become the benchmark for a university system that requires most students to take on considerable

financial debt and to compromise in other life domains (Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2017; Grant-Smith *et al.*, 2017). The only way to rationalise that debt is to position it as an investment, one that pays dividends upon achieving (white collar) employment. Education for its own sake - seeking education in order to become a better thinker, to improve one's understanding of the world, of others and of oneself - becomes untenable. Taking on a non-vocationally-oriented degree, or any kind of study not explicitly tied to enhancing future employment prospects becomes characterised as a luxury or irresponsible indulgence (Kenway, Boden & Fahey, 2014).

There have been lamentations for at least the last two decades regarding the creation of the 'McUniversity', the increasing power of management and corresponding diminishing autonomy of academics (Parker & Jary, 1995, p.319; Batterbury & Byrne, 2017), alongside the near complete capitulation by university administration to neoliberal policies, reforms, and restructuring (Thompsett, 2016). Characteristics of the neoliberal university include: the widespread adoption of free-market ideology and discourse; the construction of students as consumers of education; declining public spending in teaching and research with resulting emphasis on personal gain, commodification, commercial and corporate outcomes; uncoupling higher education from ideas of the public good; increased precarity for

workers; and the compression of time and restriction of resources alongside increasing performance expectations, surveillance, and bureaucracy (Fisher, 2009; Giroux, 2016; Hil, 2016; Mountz *et al.*, 2015). So pervasive is this project that many academics now believe neoliberalism has consumed the horizons of education and of universities in Australia and abroad (Alvanousi, 2009; Brady, 2012; Heath & Burdon, 2013; Lorenz, 2012). Proposals for fee deregulation, for instance, received widespread (albeit not universal) support from management across the sector, including from Universities Australia (Batterbury & Byrne, 2017). The relative lack of overt resistance from academics against the neoliberalisation of the sector (Hil & Lyons, 2017), including to the reduction of higher education to little more than a conveyor belt transporting workers from school to industry is as disappointing as it is dangerous.

A preoccupation with employability above all other educational outcomes

presents an existential threat - not only does it make it conceptually easier to reduce or shut down non-vocational disciplines, particularly in arts and humanities departments (see Lyons & Hil, 2015), but it reifies the idea that higher education exists to produce 'oven-ready and self-basting' workers (Atkins, 1999, p.267) for capitalism. We argue that employability is not the point of education, and that positioning it as such limits, and indeed exploits, teaching and learning (and our students) and encourages us, as academics and educators, to become complicit in this exploitation.

Despite this the neoliberal university is still home to radical scholars and thinkers who work to prefigure alternative practices of education, while meeting the requirements of the qualification they teach into. However, those who practice such politics occupy uneasy spaces, and their occupation of such spaces is uneasy. This article does not seek to resolve the uneasiness inherent to our positions; rather, we explore the transformative potential within these tensions. We argue that as academics and individuals we must simultaneously work outside the systems of oppression that govern and oppress (Butler, 2005) while also resisting the neoliberal institutionalisation that disciplines us (Pullen, 2016).

This is not a comfortable or unproblematic position to occupy, and the increasing institutional adoption of a range of industry-facing, output-focussed and financially-

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centred metrics are not conducive to perpetuating radical, emancipatory, or 'free' thought (Kaltefleiter & Nocella II, 2012; Mountz *et al.*, 2015). This is particularly the case for early career academics and those in precarious positions, and/or those situated in more conservative and technocratic disciplines which have been less accustomed to critique or radical politics. While other contributors to this special issue consider the links between activism and academia from the perspective of research and outward-facing engagement, we explore the role and implications of resistance to neoliberal discourses and practices in our teaching and internal engagement.

Drawing from accidental autoethnography (Poulos, 2010), we employ a series of vignettes to recount our experiences as academics in explicitly vocational disciplines (planning and management respectively) but whose teaching praxes are informed by critical and radical pedagogies, and who are seeking to contest the dominance of the employability narrative with our colleagues, in our classrooms, and in our engagements with students. In this paper we highlight the pedagogical practices we employ which are aimed at critiquing the professions we ostensibly prepare students for. We also critique the increasing emphasis on unpaid internships (an increasingly common form of work-integrated learning or pre-graduation work experience) and their potential to undermine the emancipatory potential of education and to further implicate the academy in neoliberalism by supplying not only workers, but unpaid workers, for capitalism. Further, we consider how job obsolescence through automation and computerisation and the possibility of post-work futures call into question the uncritical deployment of 'employability' as the primary rationale for education, and the implications of this for our pedagogies.

Our experiences provide a space in which to examine resistance from within, identifying moments of radical potentiality in everyday academic existence, and the tensions associated with directing this critical gaze at our own institutions and disciplines. We reflect on our personal attempts to contest the neoliberal construction of the 'employable' graduate that now intrudes upon higher education (Noterman & Pusey, 2012), and to implement elements of radical, transformative pedagogies in vocational disciplines, in part by drawing on our own activist praxes and preferences (Kaltefleiter & Nocella II, 2012). Our goal in this paper is to use these vignettes, and analysis of them drawing from radical, anarchist and prefigurative pedagogies literatures, to

share experiences of trying to find the everyday, radical potential within fissures in the neoliberal university, and ways of supporting each other and our students in a radical re-imagining of a different way of doing and benefitting from higher education.

Applying accidental autoethnography to learn about learning

It is useful for anyone who thinks that they teach to explore their urge to do so. This urge is an intimate matter, the libidinal support for the innocent claim that good ideas ought to be passed on to others. I call the claim innocent in that it usually leaves the good of ideas (and the Idea of the Good) implicit and unexamined; since the good remains unexamined, people may obtusely invoke their mere participation in efficient schooling as evidence that teaching is possible (de Acosta, 2012, p.303).

Autoethnography is a 'learning tool' (Butz, 2010, p.138) for generating knowledge by reflecting on our situated standpoints and selves within systems and cultures. This makes it a particularly appropriate approach for exploring questions of praxis and pedagogy - in a sense, we are learning about learning. It is a way for us to consider the proposition de Acosta raises in the above quote - to examine the nature of teaching and learning itself and our motivations as educators.

To explore these questions, we take as our data stories about our own experiences as early career academics teaching in vocational/professional disciplines in order to explore, understand, and engage in critical reflexivity about the context in which we operate, and how we operate within it (Butz, 2010). Accidental autoethnography elevates relational, unplanned, mundane, everyday moments and informal conversations and considers them sites rich with meaning and insight (Fujii, 2015; Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015). This particular approach to autoethnography, sometimes known as 'accidental autoethnography', is part 'method', 'attitude', and 'process' (Poulos, 2010, p.46) and can be understood as the learning and knowing that emerges when, as researchers, we are trying to know other things (de Andrade, 2014). That is, as researchers we are situated within institutions, structures, systems, and relationships - the act of producing other knowledge also gives us the opportunity to know things about those institutions, structures, systems and relationships.

As such, in this paper we build on our sometimes uncomfortable lived and embodied experiences in the academy, generating narrative accounts by being attuned

to everyday moments and encounters. The specific events reflected in our vignettes emerged from a mix of journaling, conversations and interactions, and recollection (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015). This is not a wholly new approach to research on the neoliberal university – see, for instance Mountz *et al.*'s (2015) work centred around a series of personal accounts from the authors. Of course, such an approach to research does not produce outcome-focused findings, nor a set of generalisable statements. Rather, it provides a structure for us to explore the mundane and relational as sites for the production of experiential knowledge. Sharing these experiences has the potential to connect to the experiences of readers in their own attempts to identify fissures in the neoliberal university. The knowledge produced through this co-reflection is thus networked and relational, yet also personal, embodied, and situated.

Possibilities emerging from anarchist pedagogies and prefigurative politics

Yet another well-meaning colleague has expressed concern that I over-invest in my teaching; prepared too many tailored learning resources, responded too quickly and in too much detail to student emails, spent too much time providing feedback they expect no-one will read. How can we not? Higher education is more than a transaction. I can't perform as though teaching is merely the transmission of knowledge and skills in neat weekly blocks any more than I can accept that the purpose of higher education is to meet the needs of industry. Education is more than infotainment or teaching to assessment. It is a trust, and a commitment that they will leave me with more than they came with and that I will advocate for, and act in, their interests even before they are mine.

Building on Mark Fisher's (2009, p. 46) provocative question: 'Are students the consumers of the service or its product?' we must ask ourselves whether 'an education' is a product we sell to students, or is 'getting educated' a service we provide to students? Or, are 'graduates' our product, and are we producing future employees for the market? Must then our success (or indeed, our funding – see Harvey, 2017) be measured or apportioned by the proportion of students employed?

As our vignettes will illustrate, we experience extreme frustration at the seemingly uncritical acceptance of the employability imperative, and the fact that rather than challenging this discourse universities across Australia have, by and large, capitulated to it. But what constitutes effective action in the present context? Noterman and Pusey (2012, p.180) argue that:

The university as it currently exists, is clearly not an institution of our own making. When we work within it, as students and academics, we are grappling with it as a messy and contested space of, often contradictory, values and ethics. On the one hand the role of the university is (increasingly) about social reproduction: creating docile, debt-ridden workers for capital. On the other hand, the university is a potential space of community and commons.

Let us take seriously this claim that universities – despite their neoliberalisation – retain the potential to foster transformative spaces, for 'community and commons'. In these institutions not of our own making, where might we find these spaces for community, commons, and resistance in which we can prefigure an education underpinned by multiple and irreducible motivations, including those which cannot be commodified? We turned to radical and anarchist pedagogical theories, as these offer hope for transformation and for the discovery of possibilities (Amsler, 2013). The academy, despite its problems, its flaws, its injustices, its sometime violence, is not territory we are willing to cede. Possibilities emerge from our occupation of these spaces (DeLeon, 2012); we posit that a prefigurative approach to politics and pedagogy may assist our occupation in productive and nourishing ways.

Central to the idea of prefigurative politics is that the new possibilities, institutions, organisations and relationships may be built from, within, and of the systems we currently find ourselves in (Amsler, 2013; Thompsett, 2016). Rather than waiting for a revolutionary moment, we can grow transformative change in the cracks of the present, as imperfect and constrained as that present might be. We can grow, and experiment with, and experience different ways of relating to each other now, and in doing so create spaces for new possibilities (Curnow, 2016). The effects of neoliberalism – alienation and precarity, climate change and other environmental and ecological disasters and economic instability can be understood as opportunities to open up fissures in which we can create better modes of being (DeLeon, 2012). Automation is opening another fissure – one that destabilises not only 'employability', but the very idea of 'employment' itself (Fraser, 2016). In these spaces we can learn what works, how to better relate to and learn with and from one another. Prefiguration also helps avoid the trap of romanticism; universities have always been exclusive, hierarchical, and flawed. Liberating the university from neoliberalism must mean a fundamental transformation, not a return to the past (Haworth, 2012). As Thompsett (2016, p.62) argues, universities' 'recent history does not represent the desertion of a formerly

pure moral pedigree, but merely the capitulation to a new dominant power: capitalism'.

Theories of anarchist pedagogies are often drawn from how learning is done in social movements and other radical projects, which have a different orientation toward the purpose and content of education, and who is involved in it (Amsler, 2013; Gahman, 2016; Shantz, 2012;Thompsett, 2016). Such projects emphasise empowerment, possibilities in and for local transformations, enable exchange outside of capitalist frameworks, and engage in prefigurative politics (Shantz, 2012;Thompsett, 2016). The goal of anarchist pedagogy is not to produce workers, but rather:

learning should help people to free themselves and encourage them to change the world in which they live...Anarchist pedagogy aims toward developing and encouraging new forms of socialisation, social interaction, and the sharing of ideas in ways that might initiate and sustain nonauthoritarian practices and ways of relating. At the same time it is hoped that such pedagogical practices might contribute to revolutionary changes in people's perspectives on society, encouraging broader social changes (Shantz, 2012, p.126).

Such an understanding of the purpose of education destabilises the current, dominant narrative of employability. Employability may be a goal in higher education, but it need not be the only goal, nor should it uncritically take precedence over all others. Certainly, the world needs capable and competent workers who possess the skills required to undertake their jobs, but that's not all we need.

Casting a critical gaze on employability

I hear the snide comment whispered behind me after I question the equity implications of our new targets for participation in work-integrated learning opportunities: 'If they aren't willing to do unpaid work experience they obviously aren't hungry enough to deserve a job'. I wonder if she realises that some of the students who do take up these opportunities actually are going hungry to participate in extended periods of unpaid work. But really what is most troubling is that these students have been conditioned to be grateful for this 'real world', if unpaid, experience, believing it to be the difference between future employment and unemployment, and going hungry now is the price they are willing to pay.

The increasing dominance of the employability discourse in higher education today can be readily understood through the 'logic' of neoliberalism in which education is positioned as an investment in one's future; the return on this investment is a 'better' job. Despite the structural

challenges of youth un/der employment and employment precarity (badged as entrepreneurialism, the gig economy, or agility) many of us working in higher education have been directed to focus on the employability of our graduates and find ways to embed contact with industry and potential employers in our courses.

There is a significant body of literature extolling the virtues of participating in internships, with advocates promoting the benefits of increased workplace exposure in enhancing graduate employment prospects by developing professional networks and a wide range of interpersonal, social and professional skills (e.g. Coiacetto 2004; Jackson, 2013). Others, however, highlight potentially problematic aspects, including the potential for exploitation and further entrenchment of social and economic class divides (Allen *et al.*, 2013; Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2016; 2017a; O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2017; Regan Shade & Jacobson, 2015). Critics further suggest that the characterisation of work-integrated learning experiences as 'not working but learning' can be used to 'legitimately den[y] a whole raft of rights, protections and claims to wages and working conditions that are granted to other workers' (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2017, p.250). Similarly the pedagogical focus of such experiences has been challenged where 'instead of "learning to labour", interns are expected to be productive workers' (Chillas *et al.*, 2015, p.1).

Although unpaid work in the form of work-integrated learning is rationalised based on the purported importance of experiential learning in an authentic workplace setting, there are increasing critiques of the effectiveness of this approach, especially in relation to graduate employment outcomes (Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2017b; Rickhuss, 2015). There is little empirical evidence to support claims that participation results in securing 'good' employment or that these benefits are equally shared across disciplines (Peters *et al.*, 2014). Research that suggests that participation helps graduates to obtain employment is typically based on surveys of student (eg. Matthew *et al.*, 2012) or employer (e.g. Gault *et al.*, 2010) perceptions rather than actual employment statistics. Furthermore, such analyses generally overlook the impact of labour market issues, like the supply of graduate jobs, on employment outcomes.

Michael Newton (2017) observes it is not, despite popular belief, that young people are not willing to work - they do and often for free in unpaid internships - but rather it is the combination of the changing nature of work and the employment market and an increasing trend toward casualisation of the workforce that has created

employment barriers. Within this context, unpaid work has been critiqued as being a prop for neoliberal market economies where 'capital finds novel ways to offload its responsibilities for a workforce' (McRobbie, 2002, p. 518) particularly in terms of training and development. It has also been argued that the expansion of unpaid work may act to cheapen all labour by applying downward pressure on the wages and employment opportunities of others in the labour market (Siebert & Wilson, 2013; Standing, 2011) and create the expectation that participation in unpaid work is an obligatory rite of passage (Discenna, 2016). The increasing focus on providing more and longer work-integrated learning experiences may be a contributory factor in conditioning both employers and graduates to expect that unpaid work is the only path to paid employment. In this context we must consider anew, and perhaps defend, the purpose of a university education (McDowell, 2004), or at the very least ensure that the rights and safety of students who undertake unpaid learning through university sponsored or mandated work-integrated learning programs are safeguarded.

Teaching staff – including tenured academic staff and casual and sessional teachers – are an important line of defence on this front and it is imperative that we remember, and remind others, that participation in work-integrated learning and exposure to the world of work is not a neutral enterprise; indeed for some it can only come at a considerable personal cost and compromise (Brough *et al.*, 2015; Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Grant-Smith *et al.*, 2017). It is only through the act of recognising the emotional and embodied experiences of students' attempts to enhance their employability that we can begin to advocate ways of ensuring their wellbeing is protected, and that educational outcomes are not sacrificed to graduate employment aspirations (or worse – metrics) or to attempts to meet the needs of capitalism at any cost. It also returns to us our students' humanity as we respond to and recognise them as people rather than numbers.

(Re)Imagining successful graduate outcomes

I might be at the Tertiary Studies Expo, or at Open Day, or some other event promoting my employer and our degree offerings. My smile is warm, and so practiced I can sustain it, even hearing, for the fourth time today, the question I loathe: 'Will my child get a job out of this?' I give practiced answers: 'No guarantees of course; tends to be cyclical; affected by the economy; transferable skills; generalist degree rather than spe-

cialist; opportunities to pursue particular interests or specialisations; can travel nationally or internationally'. It tastes gritty in my mouth. I don't just make employees, do I?

Declining public funding is a key characteristic of the neoliberal university, seen across both teaching and research. As government funding in research declines we are expected to build relationships with industry, in the hopes that they will fund our work. It is easy to see how this expectation threatens free, independent and critical research, as well as the very existence of research that cannot be monetised. We would also argue that embedding industry in teaching may have a similarly limiting effect. Is there a point at which the goal of a robust and critical education comes into conflict with what employers are looking for in graduates? That is, is there a point at which the educated (or rather, educating, as education is a continual process of becoming) citizen diverges from the employable citizen? Arguably, the marketised, heavily monitored and metrics-driven system we are in,

reconstructs the idea of education as a politically barren field of activity, into which no critical life can seep and upon which nothing critically creative or transformative can possibly grow – or indeed, in the framework of the competitive knowledge economy, upon which nothing radically transformative should grow, unless it can demonstrably contribute to the consolidation of elite power (Amsler, 2013, p.1).

If that is the case, and if our view of education includes the possibility for transformative thinking and being, we may find ourselves unable to equally or simultaneously pursue education and employability for our students. Employers might value the skills attached to critical thinking, like the ability to evaluate information, and critique and defend arguments and positions. 'Self-regulation' is sometimes described as an attribute of critical thinking, and that is also likely to be a valuable skill to employers (Pithers & Soden, 2000). However, the attributes of critical thinking that relate to self-awareness, independence, self-determination and freedom (hooks, 2010), and which encourage a critical approach to power, obedience, and hierarchies may present a threat to some employers. The capacity to analyse, evaluate, and critique with confidence may make employees more likely to identify and challenge unethical practices in the workplace, and may make them harder to discipline. An effective employee understands and can deftly navigate the systems and structures in which they work. But what of an employee whose critical thinking and reflective practice has developed such that they problematise those same systems and structures? The employee

who recognises that they cannot achieve the goals of ecological sustainability or justice within these structures as they stand, and who may seek to overthrow them all or in part? Perhaps critical thinking pulls us in different directions – it is a skill that can be instrumentalised, making us effective and desirable employees, and it can give us an orientation to subversion.

This tension is particularly visible in planning education; planning students often enter their studies with a commitment to sustainability and justice – a desire to 'save the world', or at least substantially improve it. Some of their education is geared towards this goal. Some of it is geared towards learning to profit out of an unjust and ecologically destructive system. A planning education that develops their critical thinking skills may equip them with the capacity to develop and deploy the arguments and language they need to get poor developments approved, to get around planning schemes, to negotiate the waiving of contributions or commitments that might be in the best interests of the broader community and/or the environment, and the planning project generally. It may also develop their capacity to critique present systems of planning and development, identify and analyse why cities remain and in many cases, are increasingly inequitable and unsustainable, imagine new possibilities, and create alternatives. These capacities are unlikely to be valued equally by most employers.

Despite the potential for tension between certain types of critical thought and employability, potentially 'dangerous' attributes like higher order thinking skills remain prized and rewarded in education. Bloom's widely used and adapted taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) positions analysis, synthesis, critique, argument, and creation as more advanced forms of thinking, and this is reflected in our own rubrics. Students often cannot receive the highest grades unless they demonstrate their capacity for critical, analytical and generative thought, and unless they can name, analyse and debate the political, economic, and social structures that influence (and limit) their vocation and what is possible in it. This is, perhaps, a promising fissure – we have not yet yielded this ground, even in the vocational, often conservative disciplines in which we work.

It is important to direct this capacity for critique in a way that opens up possibilities for transformation and that moves beyond the ease of despair. One approach is to subject the structures that shape our classroom experiences and beyond to critical and collective scrutiny in situ. We use shared experiences of university systems to illustrate structure and agency to students (adapted from Peretz

& Messner, 2013), with the goal of developing a critical reflexivity towards university and other organisational structures, and a greater appreciation of students' own capacity for collective, transformative action.

This broad approach lends itself to adaptation to disciplinary differences. Within planning, the first author explores Nancy Hartsock's (1983, p. 224) idea of power as 'energy and competence', and Hannah Arendt's (1970, p. 44) notion of power as 'the human ability not just to act but to act in concert'. These notions of power, distinct as they are from hegemonic understandings of power as linked to dominance, violence, coercion, and scarcity, are used to explore the possibilities of collective activities. Within management, the second author discusses the uses (and abuses) of power in terms of knowledge and the capacity to influence the behaviour of others. Servant-leadership philosophy (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002) and ethical engagement are posited as a means of exercising organisational, positional and personal power in socially responsible and ethical ways. We include case studies, activities, and assessments that seek to combine critical analysis with identifying opportunities for positive change, and centre these considerations in our classroom discussions.

This is the tension. We want our students to understand the realities of how power operates, and to have a clear-eyed, robust understanding of the systems that have produced their world as well as the problems many of them are hoping to solve, in full knowledge that in employment, they themselves will be tasked with the (re) production of those systems. But we also want to give them some kind of hope, some sense of their own, and the possibilities of, collective agency. This praxis is inspired by Raymond Williams' belief that: 'to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing'. A politics of hope and possibility (Cameron, 2007) must then be the goal of prefigurative pedagogies.

Preparing students for the future work or post-work futures?

Will the person officiating the graduation ceremony mention that study – you know the one – that 40 per cent of all our jobs will be automated imminently? Will he wave that statistic at a room of graduates from largely 'professional' programs, and tell them technology is doing them out of a job that they don't even have yet? I heard it at my PhD graduation – somehow, it failed to inspire. Yep, there he goes! Try not to laugh. Try not to roll your eyes. You might be on the livestream.

In the context of increasing automation and developments in the computerisation of non-repetitive tasks, scholars and activists are discussing futures with significantly reduced working hours, and even post-work futures and full unemployment. Depending on the social, political, economic and material context in which they emerge, such futures may be utterly dystopian, utopian or a mix of both (Fraser, 2016). Of course a future where work is drastically reduced or eliminated is far from guaranteed, and the effects of automation and computerisation may be unevenly distributed (Autor, 2015; Frey & Osborne, 2017). The debate over how likely such futures are is beyond the scope of this paper, but the possibility presents an interesting question: what kind of currency or benefit does an education premised on employability offer in such futures?

There is a persistent streak of dissonance in higher education at present; on the one hand, institutions are eager to demonstrate that they are responding to the changes wrought by technology. Face-to-face learning and support services are de-valued, de-emphasised, and sometimes de-funded, and there is increasing emphasis on digital interfaces and apps supported by burgeoning artificial intelligence. On the other hand, the emerging obsolescence of many kinds of labour we currently train students for is acknowledged and discussed – even at graduation ceremonies – and yet the implication seems to be not that there is a growing tension in the relationship between education and employment and work as an idea, but that students will just need to re-train, or be more ‘agile’ in their careers and in how they apply their skills. Employability is increasingly reified by higher education institutions even as the impact of automation on the fields of many graduates becomes more broadly acknowledged. One place where this tension is tacitly acknowledged is in the discourse of ‘entrepreneurship’ as a companion to ‘employability’. In the face of fewer jobs, students are asked to become entrepreneurs – to take responsibility for making their own job, taking on all the risks, in the context of a diminishing social safety net to catch them should they fail.

This dissonance reveals a fissure. What would the role of higher education be in a post-work future? What should we be doing as educators and as learners to prepare ourselves and our students for declining employment, and what is the role of education in working to ensure such an outcome is not catastrophic? Work has long been a dominant component of how our lives are imbued with structure and meaning (Danaher, 2017); if that is much diminished, how can education

help imbue our lives with new senses of meaning and purpose? What would education in our disciplines look like if our disciplines were largely de-professionalised? These are extraordinarily difficult questions, straying as they do into ideas and imaginaries that evoke science fiction more than what many of us thought our futures would look like.

One approach to preparing students for the de-professionalisation of their chosen profession is to not create a culture in which they think of themselves as experts who will wield authority. We can instead demonstrate and encourage the rejection of mastery (Halberstam, 2011), and foster ways for students to operationalise their education without tying it to exclusivity, or a specific type of employment – or indeed to employment at all. The planning studio offers a space to do this work. For example, the first author re-designed an introductory planning studio course to centre tactical urbanism. This creates a space to critically interrogate the forces, organisations and people currently producing (neoliberal) cities through examples of people’s practical resistance to and creative subversion of them. In doing so, it repositions planning as an activity that may be undertaken by many people in many ways; that making collective decisions about how we live and work together (Healey, 2006) is something that not only can be done, but may indeed best be done, with and through multiplicities. The skills and dispositions they are developing in their studies do not require employment for legitimation; they can ‘practice’ as they choose.

Conclusion

As I head back to my office after seven hours of teaching first years, a colleague smiles compassionately and asks, ‘Corrupted them yet?’. ‘Working on it’, I reply, with a wry smile. We often joke about ‘corrupting’ the students with our radical politics, our critiques of capitalism and the necessity of overhauling a system that (re)creates fundamentally inequitable, vulnerable and unsustainable cities. It’s tongue-in-cheek, but why do we think about this as ‘corruption’? Aren’t we the ones seeking to ‘de-corrupt’? What does the notion of corruption-via-exposure-to-critique suggest about how we see our students, how we understand learning? Are we trying to inoculate them against what they’ll find in employment? (If, indeed, they find it?) Is this ‘corruption’ really that I am corrupting them against their future employers? Are my efforts to facilitate a systemic critique, a passionate commitment to a radical reimagining of a more just, more sustainable way to live entangled together on this planet as we are, a desperate act of sabotage? What are the ethics of this?

Prefigurative politics, and the possibility of prefigurative pedagogies, offer us hope. Higher education publications are filled with stories of depressed and despairing academics, alienated students, crushing and demoralising managerialism, precarity, insecurity, and cynicism. Sometimes we find advice on how to better survive in the system we're in – how to be strategic, game the metrics, tick the boxes – even amongst critical and/or progressive researchers (McDowell, 2004). Not only is this insufficient, it will be the end of us. Rather than seeking survival in an ailing system, we must redirect our energies to transformative change. Following Moten and Harney's call to be 'in but not of' the university (2004, p. 101), perhaps to work *at* the university means to work *on* the university. But such change does not have to wait for immediate and total overhaul; instead, it can mean locating the fissures in our everyday work lives, and growing something there. This might include, as Thompsett (2016, p. 65) reflects,

rethinking classroom pedagogy, or linking university-based learning with real social struggles, whether they involve university students and/or workers, or take place in the world beyond. If these appear to fall short of revolutionary imaginaries, perhaps this is because we are so attuned to looking for the revolutionary forest that we tend to miss the revolutionary trees.

The activities and actions described herein may not yet be 'revolutionary trees' but perhaps they are revolutionary saplings or seeds, or perhaps they demonstrate the possibility of verdancy. They are not nothing. They occur in the cracks, and thus both prove the existence of those cracks in the neoliberal university that would very much like us to think it is has none, and create opportunities to consider alternative ways to relate to and learn with one another.

Relatedly, prefiguration also calls on us to embody and enact our ideals and our goals wherever we are (Solnit, 2007). The academy we hope to prefigure centres kindness and care in education and educating; adopting an ethics of care – such as the explicitly feminist and explicitly collective ethics of care advocated by Mountz *et al.* (2015) – towards our comrades (our colleagues and students) in the here and now is radical and transformative in the neoliberal university. This is not the 'self-care' that reproduces us as productive workers for our employers, or that denies the work that care is (Fullick, 2015); rather, it is one that sees relationships and kindness as essential for and constitutive of resistance. Neoliberalism constructs us as atomised, individual subjects (McDowell, 2004) responsible for our own well-being in toxic systems (Fullick, 2015); it follows

that connecting ourselves to each other in supportive relationships of care, solidarity, mutual obligations, reciprocity, community and commons is fundamental to resistance within and beyond the academy (Baker, 2016; Brooks-Tatum, 2012).

Perhaps what we need to consider is that in resisting and contesting the academy through daily practices we are creating spaces of transformation, even if they are only small and ephemeral – perhaps we are prefiguring an entirely different kind of academy. Not just one where employability is not front and foremost, but where we are creating new ways of relating to and learning with each other, and where we understand the work of education, and the work education does, differently – not in terms of services to capital or to future employers, but in terms of services to society, to the planet, to ourselves and to each other.

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