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Citation:

Pusey, A and Sealey-Huggins, L (2013) Transforming the university: Beyond students and cuts. ACME, 12 (3). 443 - 458.

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Document Version:

Article (Published Version)

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# Transforming the University: Beyond Students and Cuts

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## Abstract

Much has been made of the recent upsurge in activism around higher education and universities over the past two years or so in the UK and globally. Reflecting on our involvement with a group called the Really Open University (ROU) in Leeds, in this article we seek to broaden the discussion of the ‘student movement’ to consider some of the tensions that exist between mainstream analyses of the student movement and those analyses which acknowledge the problems with trying merely to defend the university in its current form. We outline some of the emerging links between groups which seek to move beyond a narrow, reactive politics of ‘anti-cuts’ by challenging the forms and futures of education. The tensions of trying to be at once ‘in-against-and-beyond’ the institutions we are involved with are considered, and it is our conclusion that



within the ROU's 'Strike/Occupy/Transform' motif it is the notion of transformation, accompanied by the necessary resistance, which offers the most hope for the future of education.

The image of the future is changing for the current generation of young people, and the spectre of the 'graduate with no future' has been discussed in some quarters (Mason, 2011 & 2012; Gillespie & Habermehl, 2012). Gone are the aspirational promises of post-university job security and social mobility. Instead, all that can be secured is a position of permanently reproduced precarity (Standing, 2011; Southwood, 2011). Young people are not the only ones facing increasingly precarious futures: the current UK government's austerity measures appear to have everyone but the very wealthy in their sights. The unrest up and down England during August 2011 appeared to indicate a growing disquiet.<sup>2</sup> In this article, however, we focus mainly on the situation in and around higher education, as this is the sector in which we work and where we have had the most experience as researcher-participants in recent struggles.

Much has been made of the recent upsurge in activism around higher education and universities over the past two years or so. Here in the UK there have been waves of occupations across fifty or so campuses, teach-ins, strikes and other forms of industrial action, protest marches and various other displays of discontent (for a good overview see: Hancox, 2011; and Solomon and Palmieri, 2011). Many commentators have characterised these activities as being about resistance to the lifting of the cap on tuition fees, and to proposed cuts in funding<sup>3</sup>. Whilst such a characterisation is not entirely false it only captures a fragment of the diversity of motivations for some of those who have been involved.

Reflecting on our involvement with a group called the Really Open University (ROU) in Leeds, in this article we seek to broaden the discussion of the 'student movement' to consider some of the processes and mechanisms whereby the neoliberalisation of contemporary academia is being intensified. The article begins by outlining the attacks being meted out on Higher Education (HE), as well as some responses to these attacks globally, and here in the UK. We then reflect on the tensions that exist between mainstream analyses of the student movement and those analyses which acknowledge the problems with trying merely to defend the university in its current form. We move on to outline some of the movements which seek to transgress a narrow, reactive politics of 'anti-cuts' by building links internationally with others who are challenging the forms and futures of education. The tensions of trying to be at once 'in-against-and-beyond' the institutions we are

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<sup>2</sup>For commentary by anti-cuts groups on the August 2011 unrest see: <http://anticutsspace.wordpress.com/2011/08/09/a-message-to-a-country-on-fire/>

<sup>3</sup> University tuition fees of £1,000 per year were introduced in 1998 by the Labour government. In 2004 the government raised the fees to £3,000 per year, and they increased again to £3,290 in 2010/11. A government commissioned report into HE funding, the Browne Report, advocated lifting the cap on tuition fees altogether. In response to this recommendation the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government raised the maximum amount universities could charge for fees to £9,000 from September 2012.

involved with are considered before our conclusion that, within the ROU's Strike/Occupy/Transform motif it is the notion of transformation, accompanied by the necessary resistance, which offers the most hope for the future of education.

### **Context: a neoliberal assault on HE**

Universities are currently facing economic instability, debt and an uncertain future (Castree, *forthcoming*; Cook, 2011). The once popular 'universal' education model is increasingly being undermined by neoliberal reforms aimed at ensuring that market values are better wedded to the working conditions and learning practices of the university (Robinson and Tormey, 2003; Levidow, 2002). This is evident with the intensification of metric systems for measuring 'value', including research-auditing exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), coupled with teaching-auditing mechanisms such as the National Student Survey (Castree, 2002; Loftus, 2006; Gillespie et al, 2011 and De Angelis and Harvie 2009). Accompanying the apparent justification that these mechanisms of measurement will 'drive up standards' and 'improve excellence', are the claims that market competition needs to be better unleashed on the HE sector in order to coerce floundering institutions, their 'dead weight' faculty, and unpopular, or rather unprofitable subjects.<sup>4</sup> Critics suggest that mechanisms such as the REF, and its forerunner the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), not only commodify academic labour, leading to alienation (Harvie, 2000), but additionally create an environment of 'publish or perish', or what some have gone as far as describing as 'publish *and* perish' (Castree and Sparke, 2000, p224 italics in original).

The squeeze on HE is, it appears, like the crisis of capital, global. But so too is the emerging resistance (Soloman and Palmieri, 2011). People from around the world are challenging the neoliberal model of the university, which is increasingly focused on a cynical notion of 'employability' and the production of 'skilled' workers to be put to use for the reproduction of capital (Readings, 1996; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; and Molesworth et al, 2010). The 'double crisis' of the economy and the university made campuses once again sites of resistance, and it had been argued that the 'new student movement can be seen as the main organized response to the global financial crisis' (Caffentzis, 2010). In the USA, and in particular California, university campuses have been the scene of militant protests and occupations (see: Communiqués from Occupied California, 2010; also Research and Destroy, 2009; the Inoperative Committee, 2009; and Fritsch, 2010). In Italy there have been riots, occupations of prominent buildings (for example the leaning tower of Pisa) and attempts to blockade key infrastructure, such as railway stations. A recurring slogan has been, 'if they block our future, we'll block the city!' (Pittavino, 2010). Elsewhere protests in Ireland were attacked by the police when several thousand demonstrators broke away and attempted to occupy the

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<sup>4</sup> The government's new White Paper on higher education is a direct attempt to 'unpick[...] policies that stifle competition' (Cook, 2011).

department of finance.<sup>5</sup> Similar occurrences have happened in Puerto Rico (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2010), and in Chile the student movement, having been connected with broader social unrest, has reached a size that has not been rivalled by any protests in the country since the 1980s (Zibechi, 2012).

In the UK we have experienced increased resistance to education cuts and fee increases, with the occupation of the Conservative Party headquarters at Millbank in London in 2010 representing a wake-up call to those who may still have believed that students were apathetic about their education (Hansen, 2010). This action was followed by a succession of demonstrations and university occupations across the country notable for protesters' 'disobedience' in diverging from the official route and attempting to evade police 'kettles'.<sup>6</sup> On the day of the parliamentary vote on increasing university fees, dubbed 'Day X', a massive demonstration in London ended in the police 'kettling' demonstrators, and charging them with horses. Demonstrators fought back: both the Treasury building and Supreme Court were attacked, as well as Topshop's flagship store on Oxford Street. A car carrying Prince Charles and Camilla Duchess of Cornwall was also attacked – the media were, perhaps unsurprisingly, particularly fixated on this incident, and the image of Camilla's shocked face was repeated endlessly throughout the media reportage of the demonstration.<sup>7</sup>

While there seems, at the time of writing, to have been a downturn in more general student struggle, at least within the UK, we have, however, seen the eruption of the so-called 'Arab Spring', the '15-M', or 'Indignants' movement across Spain, and the emergence of the global 'occupy' movement taking over urban spaces from Wall St in New York to Oakland, California, to London, Tokyo and Tel Aviv, (Taylor *et al*, 2012; Van Gelder, 2012)<sup>8</sup>. In some instances these camps have involved 'tent universities' or other acts of protest and occupation which have strong links with the student protests, whether in terms of symbolism, actions or participants. For example, the Occupy St Pauls protest in London diversified into the occupation of disused buildings and the development of the 'bank of ideas' which grew out of the successful 'Tent City University' that had formed part of the original camp (Walker, 2012).

Paul Mason (2012) has observed, although perhaps exaggerated, that participants in the student protests of late 2010 were relatively mobile and able to move between different protests and causes. An example of this is the Knowledge Liberation Front (KLF), a pan-European network made up of education activists

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/nov2010/irel-n09.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> 'Kettling' is a term used to describe what the Police term a 'containment'. It effectively involved surrounding a group and holding them in a location, often for several hours, with or without food, water and toilet facilities. For a good analysis of this tactic in relation to the student movements see Rowan (2010).

<sup>7</sup> The car was paint bombed, had one of its windows smashed and Camilla was allegedly 'poked' with a stick, all while the crowd chanted 'off with their heads'.

<sup>8</sup> See also Environment and Planning D's Forum on the 'Occupy' movement: <http://societyandspace.com/2011/11/18/forum-on-the-occupy-movement/>

and precarious knowledge workers. The KLF held a networking meeting in Tunisia, in order to network with the 2011 uprising in that country.<sup>9</sup>

The motivation of these earlier student protests has regularly been claimed to be ‘anti-cuts’, and or anti-fee(rises)s. This analysis is supported by some of the statements made by various groups, as depicted on banners and placards, such as ‘Don’t cut our future’. Some prominent groups campaigning on campuses bear anti-cuts messages in their titles, such as the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), and here at Leeds, Leeds University Against Cuts (LUAC) and Leeds Met Against Cuts (LMAC). These groups tend to argue against the imposition of cuts to HE funding due to the threat that cuts represent to existing models of the ‘public university’. We contend though that a politics simply based on resistance to cuts is not enough, and that it is important to go much further.<sup>10</sup> As Werner Bonefeld states in a talk outlining some criticisms of a simplistic socialist and social democratic anti-cuts perspective, which he views as displaying an ‘affirmative conception of class’, ‘the hope is [instead] that the struggle against cuts, is also a struggle for something’ (Bonefeld, 2010).

Indeed in places these struggles have begun to exceed a simple ‘anti-cuts’ politics, not only forming spaces for opposition – to budget cuts, the increasing precarity of labour, and rising education costs – but also, to some extent at least, they have featured calls for new models for education, to ‘transform the campus into a base for alternative knowledge production that is accessible to those outside its walls’ (Communiqués from Occupied California, 2010). These aim to challenge assumptions about the way the world is now, and experiment with the way it could be, rather than merely trying to defend it in the present, or hark back to some idealised past.

### **The Really Open University**

Another example of this affirmative politics is the work of the ‘Really Open University’ (ROU) – a group we have been active with for over two years. The ROU formed in January 2010, around the time that strike action was announced by the local UCU branch<sup>11</sup>, partly in order to help resist education cuts on campus at the University of Leeds. Whilst engaging in resistive politics, however, such as support for traditional union strike action, it also attempts to engender a wider

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<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.edu-factory.org/wp/call-for-a-transnational-meeting-in-tunisia/>

<sup>10</sup> Bonefeld (2010) concurs stating: ‘What does ‘fight back the cuts’ entail as a positive demand? It says no to cuts, and thus demands a capitalism not of cuts but of redistribution from capital to labour; it demands a capitalism that creates jobs not for capitalist profit but for gainful and purposeful employment, its premise is a capitalism that supports conditions not of exploitation but of well-being, and it projects a capitalism that offers fair wages ostensibly for a fair day’s work, grants equality of conditions, etc. What a wonderful capitalism that would be! One is reminded of Marx’ judgment when dealing with the socialist demand for a state that renders capital profitable without ostensibly exploiting the workers: poor dogs they want to treat you as humans!’

<sup>11</sup> UCU is the University and Colleges Union, the main union for academic staff in the further and higher education sectors in the UK.

critique of the academy as a site of exclusion, and experiment with radical pedagogical alternatives, based on participatory methods.

The ROU states that it sets out to ‘change the expectations that people have of higher education, and by extension, the rest of our lives’ (ROU, 2010). The ROU is explicit that it ‘does not want to defend the university’, as an elite and exclusionary institution, but to ‘transform it’. The byline of the ROU is ‘strike, occupy, transform’, which, the group states, reflects a ‘praxis of direct action’ and represents a ‘form of acting in, against, and beyond the current system, an empowering process in which we take control of our own collective future’ (ROU, 2010).

The ROU is composed of a combination of students – both undergraduates and postgraduates – as well as non students who can perceive the importance of struggling over knowledge work and the creation of spaces outside, or perhaps on ‘the edge’ of the existing university system (Noterman and Pusey, *Forthcoming*). It thus resists being simply a ‘student group’, seeking to encourage involvement from non-students, unlike many of the anti-fees/cuts groups who are much more obviously based on campus. Among its activities the ROU has maintained a website ([www.reallyopenuniversity.org](http://www.reallyopenuniversity.org)), and releases a newsletter named the ‘Sausage Factory’<sup>12</sup>, as well as meeting to plan a variety of activities from protests and direct actions, to discussion and analyses.

The ROU has involved many participants since its inception, with involvement ebbing and flowing in conjunction with the tides of protest, people’s availability, and, not unproblematically, the cycles of the academic calendar. We would not claim to speak for the whole group as, although there is a set of shared political outlooks based around the aforementioned affirmative and prefigurative politics, different participants may well have differing perceptions of what the ROU is about and for. The two of us, however, have been involved since the group’s inception, and the ROU is the subject of Andre’s PhD research. While there is insufficient space to do the rich debates around ‘researchers-as-participants’ justice here, we wish to acknowledge that we have tried to reflect on, and, as best as we are able, to be sensitive to our positions within the group that we are researching and writing about.<sup>13</sup>

More generally, throughout its history participants within the ROU have reflected on their position being based within, but aiming to go beyond, and in many ways work against, the university. Thus an enduring, and perhaps (necessarily) self-defining existential tension has centred around confronting the

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<sup>12</sup> The publication’s title is taken from Karl Marx’s (1990) *Capital* Volume 1, ‘A schoolmaster is a productive labourer when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory, does not alter the relation’ (p644). Also see Smith (2000).

<sup>13</sup> For some debate around varying forms of militant research and scholar activism see: Graeber et al, 2007; Autonomous Geographies Collective. 2010; Fuller, 1999; Routledge, 1996.

desires to support existing workers' struggles within the university, without going too far towards defending what we see as an inherently compromised space, while at the same time trying to move against and beyond the university, more on this later.

### **Fellow Travellers**

The ROU is joined by a host of other initiatives related to challenging the current forms of higher education and the impacts of neoliberalism. While there are noticeable differences between them, with some being more like campaigns, others structured as cooperative social enterprises, and others still being modelled on anarchist 'free schools', to greater or lesser extents these initiatives share the common political desire of going beyond resistance to cuts and pointing towards possible different ways of doing things.

The University of Strategic Optimism (USO) utilise a range of experimental creative-resistive practices with which to get their points across. They have held lectures that decry the marketisation of higher education in locations as diverse as banks and supermarkets (see <http://universityforstrategicoptimism.wordpress.com/>). The day before the Trades Union Congresses (TUC) 400,000 strong 'March for the Alternative', the USO held a 'Free Free Market' outside the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Skills where they auctioned off MA's in 'Streamlining Public Culture', among other public assets, and circulated 'cultural capital'. The USO, then, aims to produce creative-resistive interventions within the everyday running of the edu-factory. Like the Situationists perhaps, they aim to puncture the 'spectacle' of everyday life through creating 'situations' that disrupt the 'common sense' narrative of neoliberalism (Debord, 1983 & Vaneigem, 1983).

Elsewhere a group calling themselves the 'Really Free School', gained notoriety in the tabloid press for squatting some high profile empty and exclusive properties, most notably a home belonging to the actor Guy Ritchie (BBC 2011). Once secured, they have transformed these empty buildings over to self-organised pedagogical projects. As they state:

Surrounded by institutions and universities, there is newly occupied space where education can be re-imagined. Amidst the rising fees and mounting pressure for 'success', we value knowledge in a different currency; one that everyone can afford to trade. In this school, skills are swapped and information shared, culture cannot be bought or sold. Here is an autonomous space to find each other, to gain momentum, to cross-pollinate ideas and actions (Really Free School, 2010).

Being a relatively short-lived group, they put on a wide range of activities. Workshops ranged from the BBC's Paul Mason discussing the Paris Commune to practical skills sessions about squatting (see <http://reallyfreeschool.org/>). In this sense, they constitute examples of 'affirmative politics', which is about trying to move beyond largely reactive and resistive political action towards instead creative



and reclaimatory processes and practices. despite refusing to directly engage with them, drew much attention from the media.

Similarly, in Dublin the Provisional University have begun a campaign to have disused property, which is under government ownership since the property bubble burst, turned over for use as a self-managed, common educational project (see <http://provisionaluniversity.tumblr.com/>). The tagline of the Provisional University states 'because we're not at the university, we are the university', expressing, a desire to go beyond a conception of a place-based ivory tower, towards a realisation of the generalisation of knowledge production and learning and a celebration of the living labour of knowledge work.

In Lincoln a group of scholars are establishing a Social Science Centre (SSC), to be run along co-operative lines, completely independent of the University of Lincoln, describing it as 'a new model for higher and co-operative education' (Social Science Centre, 2010; see also Amsler, 2011; and Winn and Neary, 2011). Professor Mike Neary, a co-founder of the SSC, states that the project 'is inspired by and connected with movements of resistance against the corporatisation of higher education in Europe and around the world' (2011). Thus the SSC can clearly be contextualised within the broader antagonism around education and knowledge production, but in attempting to create an alternative it is also goes beyond resistance alone.

Interesting things are also happening *within* the University of Lincoln where Neary is based. A project called 'Student as Producer' is being rolled out across the whole institution (see: <http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk/>). This will transform the undergraduate curriculum to be based on research-based and 'research-like' teaching, engaging students in collaborative learning with other students and academics (Neary, 2010, 2011). One of the things that Student as Producer attempts to do is re-imagine academic labour, 'part of the project is to dissolve the distinction between student and teacher; we are all student-teachers' (Neary, 2011). It does this in several ways, firstly by ending the separation of teaching and research. Teaching and research are the core activities of the university, and it is the gulf between them that has created what some have described as being an 'apartheid' between student and teacher (Brew, 2006, cited in Neary & Winn, 2009). By reintegrating these two core academic activities, student as producer attempts to reengage students with the 'project of the university'.

Mike Neary, who is responsible for the development of this program, places it within the context of critical theory, and especially the work of Walter Benjamin, whose paper, 'author as producer', is the inspiration for the its' title (Benjamin, 1934). But Neary is also self-conscious of the potential for this initiative to be recuperated by academia, and states that the level to which this will go beyond the 'mainstream teaching and learning agenda' and thus be successful in reconfiguring the university, will depend both on the ongoing struggles whereby the 'politicised nature of higher education is made explicit', and the way in which the knowledge

produced is contextualised and theorised politically and critically (Neary & Haggard, 2011, p216)

The overcoming of this separation between tutor and student, at the heart of Student as Producer, is a key theme that arose whenever the ROU engaged with the wider student body. In the early stages of the ROU, for example, an open meeting was organised where participants were encouraged to think about 'what a Really Open University would look like'. Through a series of small group activities those present were able to express both their frustrations and criticism of the existing university system, as well as their desires and ideas for an alternative one. The divide between lecturers and students was brought up numerous times as an issue that participants felt needed to be addressed, as well as a more general desire for a more 'holistic' education system. We can therefore see this aspiration to reintegrate teaching and research, student and teacher, as common to both the ROU and Student as Producer, forming a way of reimagining and recomposing academic labour, while also nodding towards a potential for radical pedagogy more generally.

There are numerous other similar projects too, and all of these initiatives are examples of attempts to broaden education struggles beyond just students or even education workers. They therefore necessarily exceed a politics simply based on being 'anti-cuts', and are working towards to creation of a different pedagogical and political vision. We tentatively argue that they therefore have a greater capacity to go beyond utopian alternatives and perhaps play a greater part at forming a force for a new direction in education. In the words of the Knowledge Liberation Front (2011): 'since the state and private interests collaborate in the corporatization process of the university, our struggles don't have the aim of defending the status quo'. Instead they say that they 'want to make our own university – a university that lives in our experiences of autonomous education, alternative research and free schools. It is a free university, run by students, precarious workers and migrants, a university without borders' (ibid). The KLF thus links the edu-crisis directly with the desire to go beyond the university in its existing, exclusionary form, exceeding the limits of both the institution and any purely reactive struggle to preserve it in *stasis*. This would necessarily mean far more than utopian autonomous experiments as a supplement to the existing education system, but instead a reappropriation of the resources of the academy, the recomposition of academic labour and the reimagining of education in its current form.

### **In-Against-and-Beyond-Student-Politics and the University?**

Within all of these projects, then, there appears the material manifestation of a desire to go from a position situated *within* the academy, which is simultaneously *against* the university in its current form and yet also, through the collective experimentation with alternative models, go *beyond* the existent, towards an affirmation of another form, or forms, of knowledge production and learning.

It was partly because of disillusionment with the limitations of establishment politics that the ROU embarked on a project called ‘the space project’ ([www.spaceproject.org.uk](http://www.spaceproject.org.uk)<sup>14</sup>). It was partly conceived of as a response to these tensions and the desire to move activities away from the university. The space project constituted a temporary, experimental autonomous educational space, established in order to hold educational workshops, meetings, and film showings, off campus.

Some of the tensions arising from attempts to occupy a position of being in-against-and-beyond the existing university are further apparent in the description for a discussion event organised by the ROU (2011):

Since its inception the Really Open University has expressed a desire to go beyond defending the University in its current elitist and exclusionary form

...

We have also, however, rejected a simple dialectic of defend/destroy, opting instead for a politics of transformation. Many of us find ourselves 'inside' the existent university, whether that be as students or staff, undergraduates or postgraduates, but also as non students or those wondering whether to return to the university.

In many ways we have wished to develop a praxis of 'in, against and beyond' the university, thus refusing both reformism or a politics of purity.

This discussion of going ‘in, against and beyond’ the academy reflects the work of John Holloway and the ‘London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group’ and their seminal book *In, Against and Beyond the State* (1980), in which they critically explore the inherent contradictions of working within sectors of the workforce that form part of the very state they are also struggling against. These contradictions are, of course, implicit within any anti-capitalist struggle. We feel this has been an informative and productive framing of the tensions and practice we have experienced with our activities within the ROU, and more broadly in our position as students and sometime educators, ‘inside’ an institution not of our own making

As the quote above illustrates, the ROU had already rejected a simplistic inside/outside defend/destroy binary, in favour of a more nuanced politics attempting to grapple with the tensions and contradictions of being ‘within and against’. This has not been a straightforward process and one of the recurring discussions within the group has been around its engagement with more traditional forms of political organisation and resistance on campus, principally the role of trade unions and what the ROU termed the ‘institutional strike’ (ROU, 2010).

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<sup>14</sup> Although the location of the original space project has now been vacated, some of the organisers are aiming to keep the project running in some form.

Although always critically supportive of traditional forms of trade union action, through being active on picket lines and showing solidarity wherever possible, the ROU questioned to what extents traditional forms of strike action could be effective within a Post-Fordist workplace? It is also questionable to what extent it was possible to ask the right questions about the future of the university within these settings, and to what degree these more traditional forms of workplace activity are engaging members of staff.<sup>15</sup> Yet it is partly as a *result* of the processes and mechanisms whereby the neoliberalisation of contemporary academia is being intensified that spaces have been opened up to challenge contemporary forms of institutionalised education. The ‘edu-crisis’ ensuing from both these marketisation processes and cuts, as well as the economic crisis more generally, has resulted in a, perhaps unpredicted, mobilisation of resistance, what Holloway terms a ‘scream of refusal’ (Holloway, 2005, p1). But the crisis has also opened up space, for projects that wish to push beyond, perhaps representing ‘cracks’ in capitalism (Holloway, 2010). Indeed, Holloway (2011) stated as much in a recent public Leverhulme lecture at the University of Leeds.

## Conclusion

There are key differences between those elements of the ‘student movement’ which are focussed primarily on fees and cuts, and those which address more fundamental questions about the form and content of education. These differences, however, form part of the messy and contingent process of taking part in political action and social movement struggles.

The affirmative projects that we have discussed can only avoid being utopian, voluntarist projects if they are part of a wider, resistive struggle, that takes the form of a strong movement fighting against government policies and market enclosure. But from within this point of refusal, the (negative) articulation of a scream of *Ya basta!* (enough!), we must begin the co-creation of alternatives that seek to go *beyond* the existent. As Sarah Amsler states:

The field of struggle within the English university is a messy space of points of view. The university is dying, being reborn and evolving; public education is under assault, taking its own life and bleeding out internally; academic life is mourned, valorized and mundanely reproduced; and critical thought is grinding to a halt and being revitalized in prefigurative political experiments (Amsler *forthcoming*).

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<sup>15</sup> We realise that this will be different in different settings. For example the conditions within Leeds Metropolitan University are different from those at the University of Leeds. We are also conscious that this form of workplace organising takes a good deal of often tedious day-to-day work that is often unglamorous but essential in defending staff members in a manner of ways. A thorough analysis of these issues, therefore, would take more research and space than we can dedicate in this paper. Instead these comments should be taken as indicative of discussion within the ROU, which consisted of undergraduate students, as well as postgraduate (mostly non active) UCU members.

We have argued that it is both the transformative imaginaries and practices of these experimental projects, along with others, which provide the most optimism for future forms of knowledge production. The destructive ongoing legacy of the neoliberal restructuring of education must be opposed, but it would be overly romantic to want to return to the pre-neoliberal academy; the academy has always been, in part, a striated institution of 'capture'. It is only through acknowledging this fundamental fact that the 'student movement' will, go beyond being just that, and have a meaningful future as a movement creating new institutions of learning and knowledge creation.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the helpful comments provided by our two anonymous reviewers; all errors, of course, remain entirely our own.

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