

**EDUCATIVE POWER: THE MYTH OF DRONIC  
VIOLENCE IN A PERIOD OF CIVIL WAR**

Mike Neary



Harrier and Jaguar by Fiona Banner (Tate Britain, June 2010-January 2011). Image by Andrew Carr (<https://flic.kr/p/8MFxRZ>).



Harrier and Jaguar by Fiona Banner (Tate Britain, June 2010-January 2011). Image by Henry Bloomfield (<https://flic.kr/p/8gF4FJ>). CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

### **Drone Culture**

Drones have been targeted by the academic-intellectual-journalistic complex as a new field of human enquiry (Amerimuslima, 2013; Robinson, 2012; Murmuration, 2013; Sterling, 2012). Clearly scoped in this line of sight are drones as flying military vehicles and other expanded utilities, including surveillance devices. Fixated firmly in this field of view is the exceptional capacity of drones and their pilots to operate as assassination machines (Gregory, 2012). This capacity for murder and its collateral damage(s) has triggered demands by ethicists, moral philosophers, liberal lawyers, map makers, technologists, academics, social workers and other humanitarians to redraw the laws of war and develop drones for the benefit of humanity (Lubell, 2010; Thynne, 2009; Basulto, 2014; Sharkey, 2010; Wilcox, 2013). The threat to privacy and to life that militarized drones provide has provoked a defensive tendency in the form of new laser ground-to-air technologies, signal jammers, stealth wear and other drone survival guides (Zhao, 2014; Harvey, 2013; Marks, 2013; Murmuration, 2013; Clarke, 2014; Drone Survival

Guide, 2014), including the power of intellectual ideas to bring these violent vehicles down to earth (Noys, 2014a).

A sense of coherence to the burgeoning interest in drones has been provided by the sociological concept of drone culture, further elaborated through political philosophy and critical social theory. Rothstein (2015: xv) offers a series of systematic narratives to reveal the social life of drones, which he says is also 'a story about us'. He sets these narratives out in terms of *functions*: as transportation, surveillance and weaponry; *fictions*: as literature, art and other discursive devices; *facticity*: how drones work as engineered technologies; and the human *factor*: the impact of drones on social behaviour. He also considers drones in terms of bio-sociology where they are seen as memes, whose activities and characteristics will evolve in ways as yet unimagined, constrained by science and technology as well as socio-economic and ethical considerations.

Chamayou (2015: 17) reads drones through the history of political philosophy as an instrument of state power and the 'state of violence' it implies. At the centre of Chamayou's philosophical analysis is the relationship between the drone-state, police power and an increasingly radicalized citizenship: 'how it [the drone] tends to modify the state's relations to its subjects' (177). He considers the effects of a highly militarized-technological society in which the previous limits of state power, democracy and the laws of war, are undermined by the move from a welfare to a warfare state. For Chamayou, what is really at stake is 'the essence of the state apparatus' (218).

McKenzie Wark (2003; 2013) considers drone culture as a new form of political administration or 'vectoral power'. For Wark, vectoral power means merging commodity-space (where everything is proximate in the world market) with strategic-space (where everything is relative to the battlefield borders that enclose it), bringing them both under the control of the communication vector. He describes this new arrangement as 'third nature', through which the tensions of second nature – alienation, class struggle and the planner-state – are resolved in the form of new conflicts and collusions that emerge as yet more chaotic violent spaces. This vectoral power is manifest as the information intensive war through surveillance and remote control devices in which 'the drone is a symptom of this spatio-temporal matrix' (Coley, 2014). This new civilisation is controlled not by the Military-Industrial complex but the Military-Entertainment complex, now understood as the

‘vectoralization of the world’ (Wark, 2003). Wark (2014) looks to escape the ‘very bad future’ of vectoral power through tactical media and free creativity grounded in a new material logic of communication, based not on commodity or strategic space but on the ethics of collaboration, cooperation and the commons. These practices can be drawn from hacker and worker practices ‘based on an experimental and open ended Marxism’, not so much new ways of thinking but ‘new ways of practising knowledge’ (Wark, 2011). Wark is uncertain which route to follow: should it be the accelerationism exemplified by the work of Land (Mackay & Brassier, 2011), who argues that, if capitalism contains its own self destructive tendencies then the requirement is to accelerate capitalism; or the negation of Noys (2014b), who advocates collective resistance to the violence of capitalism. Wark chooses in the end to settle for a sort of ‘qualified accelerationism’ (Coley, 2015).

I intend to build on these readings of drones, going beyond a descriptive sociology of drone culture and a philosophical interpretation of these new politicized killing machines in an attempt to disable the violence of drones. I will do this, *pro* Wark, through a subversive Marxism grounded in new co-operative ways of practising and producing knowledge; but *contra* Wark, not through an accelerationist exploration of drone culture as part of the Military-Entertainment complex, but as a materialist exposition of capitalist violence as police state power (Neocleous, 2000, 2006); or, as a peculiar form of war. In this way I shall be attempting to deal with what Chamayou says is really at stake: the essence of state power.

Leaving Land and the accelerationists behind (Neary, 1999), this article, following Noys (2014a, 2010), offers an antidote to the police state through ‘a critique of value’ (Postone 1993; Kurz 2008). This negative critique presents state terror as a derivation of the violence of capitalist abstraction imposed by the law of value. Accordingly, this state violence can be defeated by detonating the social relation on which the law of value is based, revealing the abundance that is contained at the core of its productive logic (Kay & Mott, 1982). My critique is directed against Wark’s understanding of abstraction as the process by which things are produced as surpluses to be appropriated by the vectoralist class, until such time as abstraction can be liberated from the myth of scarcity and reclaimed by the class of productive workers/hackers (Wark, 2004). The limit of Wark’s accelerationist account is that the

productive logic of capital is left intact along with its murderous inclinations (Postone, 1993).

Capitalist state violence is viewed here through the scopic vision of higher education as the imposition of financialization and other vindictive devices in the first part of the twenty-first century, and the revolutionary violence which emerges in 2010-11 in response: a movement of academic and student resistance, of occupations, marches and riots. This is validated by Walter Benjamin's (1921) concept of 'educative power' as an adjudication between what he referred to as 'mythic' (capitalist) and 'divine' (revolutionary) violence. Eventually, educative power is turned against Noys by the 'withdrawal' (Žižek, 2009) of a group of academics, students and activists in Lincoln, UK, to establish the Social Science Centre as a 'collective practice of negativity' (Noys, 2010 18) against capitalist work, as a form of subversion in full view; or, in Wark's formulation, an 'open ended experimental Marxism' and 'a new way of practising knowledge' (Wark, 2015). This collective negativity is presented as a form of invisibilism and illustrated by reference to a weird Mievellian fiction: *The City and the City* (Miéville, 2009). The claim of this article is that the Social Science Centre is itself an act of divine violent resistance in an 'everywhere... [civil]... war' (Virilio & Lotringer 2008; Gregory 2011; Kurz 2008).

**The Power of the Powerless** (Westminster, London, 10th December 2010)

*This time they were ready. An army of occupation with battle vectors drawn diagonally and in parallel, across Parliament Square. With clear lines of sight, the trap was set around the House of Commons, waiting for the enemy to arrive.*

*The Police knew they were coming. They could follow the progress of the movement of resistance as it made its way through the West End of London. Their advance was given away by TV and police helicopters circling above in the clear blue winter sky.*

*I caught up with the march at Trafalgar Square. It looked as beautiful as it always does, but this time younger and more urban. Black and Asian working class youth with the soundtrack beat and boom and beat and boom and beat and boom. Alongside school children and college kids were university students and their teachers, and many others besides. This is a group that cannot be easily classified or contained.*

*The route down Whitehall was blocked. The march was funnelled through Admiralty Arch, around the back of the Treasury and up Bird Cage Walk. The movement of resistance knew they were walking into a trap, but still they kept walking, knowing at some point they would be taken prisoner, kettled, but still they kept walking, with no weapons to defend themselves other than their sense of righteous indignation, they still kept walking, with lessons learned from the history of progressive struggle behind them, still they kept walking. On all sides surrounded by police officers in full riot gear, and dogs and horses, while with every step the snare was tightened.*

*I retreated as I felt the police pincer closing. I lied to get through the police lines. 'Where are you going?' The police officer asked. 'Victoria', I said, 'To catch a train'. He let me through, deciding I was no threat to public safety. In the relative tranquillity of St James Park, I felt depressed and despondent. I had bottled it. Other people withdrew to avoid the snare, and stood around as bystanders, no longer participants in the movement of resistance, which kept on walking and walking.*

*Wandering about I found a gang of black youths, boys and girls, at the top of Whitehall, confronting the defensive police lines. For these marching youths the battle with 'Babylon' is an everyday event, not a one-off political protest. Most protesters eventually did what they were told to do and took another route. The youths had no fear of the police, they've been fighting against them for the last fifty years, in Notting Hill and Brixton and St Pauls and other places. They wanted to know why they couldn't walk down WHITEhall. 'Why won't you let them through, officer?', I asked. 'To prevent a breach of the peace', the officer replied, unconvinced by his own explanation. Behind his reply was a phalanx of robo-cops with full body-armor, riot helmets, and faces hidden by black balaclavas, intensifying their menacing stares.*

*I made my way back to Westminster Bridge via a roundabout route, avoiding police barricades that were set up all around. Reports were coming out that the students were taking a beating, and had been charged by police on horses. The group of protesters on the bridge were angry and defiant. They unfurled a flag, 'How Dare You', across the road.*

*The university coach was parked next to Vauxhall Bridge. I wanted to collect my thoughts before the journey home. I sat in the Duveen Galleries in the nearby Tate Britain. The gallery was hosting an exhibition, Harrier and Jaguar by Fiona Banner. The show had decommissioned jet fighters in unusual settings. The Harrier, known for*

*its ability to perform vertical take offs, was hung upside down, pointing vertically to the floor from a hook in the ceiling, like a carcass. The Jaguar lay upside down on the ground, devoid of its aeronautic capacities, with its fighting power drained away. These were no longer killing machines, but defenceless bits of metal whose powerful invincibility had been stripped bare for all to see.*

*I arrived home in time to watch the coverage of the protest on the late night news. The police, to my surprise, were having to defend themselves. Not for beating up the students, but for their slack security which allowed student protestors to surround the Royal Rolls Royce Phantom VI and its occupants the King-in-Waiting and his Duchess Consort. The protesters, in a display of 'lese-majeste', were shouting 'Off with their heads'. Maybe this what revolution looks like? Oh, what a triumph this has been!*

### **War and Police**

There is nothing exceptional about militarized drones: they are, after all, only the latest manifestation of state power (Rothe & Collins, 2014). What is understated in the literature is the way in which police power and war are connected. Neocleous presents drones as 'a technology of police power' (2014: 156), offering up the capacity to be 'a permanent police presence for the reproduction of order; air power as the everywhere police – in which the exercise of violence is an every present possibility' (162) against the constant threat of (in) security. He argues police power and war are connected: 'Populations have been bombed into order' (142) from the air, so that there are no longer any civilian spaces nor even the concept of civilian (156-157). Following on from Virilio and Lotringer (2008) and Gregory (2011), Neocleous reminds us that this has become an 'everywhere war', and the city a permanent war zone (2014: 161), based on the assumption that 'war and police are always already together' (13) as the essential aspects of a police state.

What underpins Neocleous's reading of drones is that the police state power on which drone violence is based is anything but secure. Reconceptualising police power as the science of police and 'a primary category in the mainstream of social and political theory', Neocleous reveals the precariousness and paranoia that underpins state violence (2000: x). At the core of the science of police is the fabrication of wage labour. This is much more than the police as an instrument of state repression. It is the social administration of a

class of poverty, conditioned as private property and the wage form as commodified labour making the working class work at the point where the logic of the market fails, in other words. All of this is exemplified in riots and other forms of insurgency, where the core function of the police is brought into view, maintaining capitalist order rather than preventing crime, in what amounts to a kind of 'low intensity war against the working class' (Neocleous, 2000: 82). Under the cover of imposing capitalist order the police are sanctioned to do whatever needs to be done, where the rule of law is only ever a discretionary device to legitimate a violent police state acting with apparent impunity. However, for Neocleous, this is a war the police state cannot win, as the system of security on which the police state is based is fundamentally insecure: 'private property requires and generates insecurity' as the working class of labour and poverty must be in a state of insecurity, the state is always 'generating political enemies' (59). This is why the system of private property requires state power as 'a mechanism for securing the insecure' (59), and security remains 'the highest moment of order' (42). To create the conditions for the police state to triumph would mean 'abolishing the condition of private property that gives rise to it, and thus abolishing itself as a state' (82). This is why the history of police as a security project is a history of private property's fear of its most radical 'other' (communism) (61).

While security is presented by Neocleous as a dialectical category, the structural tensions that exist between private property, the market and labour are not fully substantiated. As a result communism is presented as capitalism's radical 'Other'. However, Neocleous does not provide us with a defining principle upon which postcapitalist society might be based or any real historical trajectory out of which it might emerge, apart from 'as a counter-politics against the permanent emergency, by all means, but also against the normality of everyday class power and the bourgeois world of the rule of law' (Neocleous, 2008: 74-75). Drones as a form of police state reveal the commodified logic of capitalist social relations, but the scopic vision which Neocleous uses does not penetrate inside the commodity-form to reveal its substantive contradiction. Finding the substance of security and insecurity requires a more fundamental examination of the relationship between state violence and the law of labour to bring drones back down to earth. We can find this more fundamental analysis of the substance of capitalist power in the work of Benjamin Noys.

### The Art of Noys

Noys describes drones as ‘the signature device of the form of contemporary power, our mobile panopticon’ (2014a: 2). As a theorist, Noys eschews ‘the possibilities of resistance’ (3), offering up a more modest activity: detoxifying discourse by revealing the techno-determinism that informs so much of drone culture. Having said this, he wants to cling to the materiality of labour power as the concept by which the drone may be grounded (13).

Noys notes that writing about drones is replete with references to their God-like properties that resonate with ‘theological metaphysics’ (4): where drones have become ‘an all seeing Divinity... a general system of illumination that will allow everything to be seen and known at every moment and in every place’, so ‘the eye of God is everywhere’ (Virilio, cited in Noys, 2014a: 2). Noys finds the capacity to deconstruct the theological metaphysics of drones, by having ‘sensitivity to the material and elements of labour power’ (Noys, 2014a: 14), reminding us that Marx’s analysis of the commodity form is replete with its own ‘theological subtleties and metaphysical niceties’ (14).

Noys develops the notion of labour power in *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (2010). In this book Noys re-establishes the negativity principle through a recuperation of Marx’s labour theory of value derived from recent re-interpretations of Marx’s social theory (Postone, 1993; Kurz, 2014), doing so in ways that can be used to elaborate further the actual functioning of capitalism, and how its violent nature might be rendered powerless.

Key to this work is how Noys understands the importance of abstraction in Marx’s theory. In a world dominated by the commodity-form – the relationship between abstract and concrete value – all social life is dominated by the power of abstraction, or the expansion of value constituting the basis of the empirical and the non-empirical world. Capital is understood as the realist of real abstractions and the ontological basis for natural and social life (Noys, 2010: 10).

Noys does not provide a full account of his interpretation of the law of value, and a detailed exposition is beyond this paper. However, what distinguishes ‘the critique of value’ (Postone, 1993; Kurz, 2002) here from traditional or mainstream versions of Marxism, is

that it takes the concept of value – the substance of which is abstract labour rather than class, or private property or the market or even alienation – as its starting point. From there it seeks to deconstruct the main categories of political economy – labour, commodity and money-capital – to reveal that capitalism is not simply an economic system that has been imposed on society, as is suggested by base-superstructure functionalism. Capitalism is, in fact, the basis for all social life, including everyday life outside of the factory. Most dramatically, rather than see the working class as Capital's revolutionary subject or collective political agency, this version of Marx's work sees labour or the working class as itself being determined as a form of capital and the foundation for capitalist forms of institutional regulation, including money and the state. The counterintuitive logic of this analysis is that it is labour itself, and not just the working class, which must be abolished in order for communism to be established. Communism becomes not the redistribution of value in favour of the workers who have produced it. Rather, it is the invention of a new form of social wealth, based not on the commensurability of value, but on social individuality defined by the principle of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need' (Marx, 1875). Communism then is not capitalism's radical 'Other'; it is the appropriation of powers and knowledge that have been historically constituted in an alienated value form. None of this suggests a return to the essence of labour or the recovery or realisation of former capacities. Instead, it requires the self-abolition of labour as a process of material transformation to achieve a *postcapitalist* world (Postone, 1993: 39).

An important aspect of this reinterpretation of Marx's social theory, although it is not one that is emphasized by Noys, is that the creation of communism has now become an urgent matter. This is because capitalism, following the logic of its own anachronistic capabilities, has reached a stage where its strategies for extracting surplus value have become exhausted. It is thus being forced to adopt ever more brutal and violent methods to oppress and dominate civilian populations, through economic policies of austerity and debt, as well as militarized forms of policing (Graham, 2011), all of which form part of a project described as a global civil war (Kurz, 2014). Kurz (2002) sees this culture of violence being borne out as 'capitalist competition by other means', and as a function of 'the economic totalitarianism of globalized capital'. What were 'states of emergency' in specific localities at specific times, are now becoming elements of a world civil war (Kurz, 2014: 198-199).

The question for Noys is how to organize resistance to the violence of abstraction. Following Walter Benjamin, he suggests ‘a complete re-inscription and *détournment* of work against work as it is usually conceived’ (2010: 166) as a form of ‘collective political agency in the contemporary conjuncture’ (18) (i.e., ‘the splitting of work from within, by the disruptive working over of “abstract labour”’ (167), or ‘probing the “truth” of real abstractions as concrete appearances through their negation’ (167)). He attempts to give some empirical form to this principle of collective political agency through a non-utopian social form of resistance: the British National Health Service (NHS). He admits, this is ‘hardly a revolutionary measure, and, of course, hardly immune to the stratifications of class society, it has however, provided an essential point of resistance in the political imaginary, and, of course, as an actual experience of the relatively non-commodified’ (171). This is a vision of ‘a new contemporary communism’ (165): a communism that is ‘suspensive and preservative rather than one dreaming of a fantasmatic apocalypse’ (165) which takes place through ‘the abolition of the law of value’ in a way that implies new social forms or better institutions (172). Noys is clear this process of re-inscription and *détournment* is a violent process but, following Žižek (2009), this is not a mortal violence. Rather, it ‘is “violence” in the sense of the rupture of the usual coordinates of existence, a kind of unmooring posed precisely against the unbearable lightness of (capitalist) being’ (Noys, 2010: 96).

### **Uncritical of Academic Life**

This is a powerful analysis, but violence is a dangerous business, and its criterion for application must be clearly assessed. This is precisely what Noys does not do, falling back instead on the NHS whose progressive socialist credentials are already well assured. This might be a more urgent matter for Noys if he were to put himself in the firing line, and reflect on his own position as something more than a theorist: as an academic working in Higher Education at a time when its academic values and principles are under assault through the imposition of financialization and other vindictive devices. Doing so would enable Noys to consider the implications of this form of monetarized violence for critical thought and how this form of violence might be resisted. Ultimately, however, Noys fails to ponder on his own position: there is no critical reflection on the nature of his own role within a capitalist institution or of the nature of academic work. While he does refer to hospitals, prisons, schools

and factories (2010: 71), and is clear about ‘the need to invent new forms of non-commodified living’ (73), there is no mention of the university as an institutional form undermined by commodification, apart from one reference to student loans (11). This is peculiar at a time of withdrawal of funding and support for teaching the arts, humanities and social sciences in what amounts to a form of intellectual vandalism and declaration of war against critique and negative thinking. Such a withdrawal of support renders any attempts at critique or negativity possibly untenable, and raises the very pertinent question as to whether it is still possible to function as a *critical* social theorist in an English university. In other work Noys avoids seeing violence in the academic labour process, confining it only to the factory floor (2013). Where struggles in higher education are referred to it is in relation to privatisation and the outsourcing of support work, leading to alliances between support workers and students, without any academic involvement (Noys, 2014b: 99).

In what follows, I want to develop a more critical form of collective negative agency: as an act of violence, inside and outside a higher education institute. I intend to build on Neocleous’ fragile state power and Noys’ understanding of the power of labour, relating this directly to academic labour as a non-exceptional form of academic work. I will set this against another critical interpretation of academic labour, namely, the undercommons (Harney & Moten, 2013), which I counter with a more dynamic understanding of the nature of capitalism, and of how its institutional life might be transformed (Postone, 1993). But before I get to that point I need to consider the nature of violence more fully, through the work of Walter Benjamin and his pedagogic principle of educative power.

### **Educative Power**

Violence is a key issue for any theory of revolution. So what criteria do revolutionaries apply to the use of violence (Hirvonen, 2011)? Benjamin considers this issue in his ‘Critique of Violence’ (1921), where he is writing in a moment of extreme revolutionary passion in Germany, following the First World War, and the failed Spartacus uprising in 1919 and its aftermath, including intense labour unrest and strikes.

Benjamin argues that all states are formed on the basis of revolutionary violence - a fact they all deny – and that they seek

legitimacy for their jurisdiction in all sorts of political imaginaries (Benjamin, 1921). For Benjamin the state retains the monopoly on violence for fear that it may be overthrown and, anticipating Neocleous (2000), explains how the state uses the police as the suspension of legal justification and the rule of law so that they may intervene for 'security reasons' where no legal justification exists (1921: 287). He expounds on the nature of violence and revolution through a discussion of different forms of general strikes: political and proletarian (after Sorrel, 1999 [1906]). The political strike means a transfer of power and redistribution of resources, but does not undermine the power of the state; whereas the proletarian strike intends to destroy state power and create a society in which power would not be an oppressive determination. Benjamin argues that the political strike is violent 'since it causes an external modification of labour conditions' (1921: 291), while the proletarian strike is non-violent as it promotes a 'wholly transformed work' (1929: 292). He conceptualizes these activities as a relationship between 'mythical' and 'divine' violence, where the former is political and state-law creating ('bloody power over mere life for its own sake'), while the latter is proletarian and state-law destroying ('pure power over all life for the sake of the living') (1921: 297).

Whether violence is mythic or divine is adjudicated through his concept of educative power, a methodology through which acts of violence can be assessed. Educative power is not an absolute principle, or objective assessment, or 'a criterion of judgment' like the commandment 'thou shalt not kill' (1921: 298), but a 'guideline' for those who have to take responsibility for such activities. Educative power is critical, discriminating and decisive' (299-300), providing the conditions by which state power can be abolished and 'a new historical epoch... founded' (Hirvonen, 2011: 300). Educative power is then a type of 'radical doubt, fundamental critique', and a profoundly pedagogical principle (Zacharias, 2007).

Žižek (2009a, 2009b) provides further clarification. Here, divine violence becomes 'the sign of the injustice of the world', of the world being 'ethically' out of joint (2009a: 169), depending on the 'order of the Event' (172), and cannot be prejudged. Divine violence is 'a negative form of violence but that which aspires to a form of life beyond the life of the law: an excess of life' (168). It offers an active radical-emancipatory vision against the violence of domination, oppression and exploitation: 'the counter-violence to the excess of violence that pertains to State power' (2009b: 483). In this way educative power provides no objective criteria by which this activity

can be assessed; only, for Žižek, the Christian 'domain of love' (2009b: 488) and the Guevarian power of hate (2009b: 173).

Žižek cites Ghandi's non-violent protest to show that divine violence does not have to be mortally violent (2009a: 182; 2009b: 475). To reinforce the point he suggests the most effective form of divine violence may be to withdraw from political life: to abstain from voting, to refuse to recognise, to reject, to not engage, to do nothing, rather than take part in 'pseudo-activity... to mask the nothingness of what goes on... academics participate in meaningless debates... Sometimes doing nothing is the most violent thing to do' (2009a: 183), and could involve 'withdrawing to a solitary place to learn, learn, learn' (7).

In what follows I will present an active withdrawal by a group of academics and students in Lincoln, England, to a place outside the mythic violence of state higher education as a radical way of practising knowledge.

### **Social Science Centre: A Pedagogy of the Invisible**

In 2010-2011 a group of academics, students and administrators from University of Lincoln 'withdrew' from the University to establish the Social Science Centre (SSC), a worker-student cooperative providing free public higher education in Lincoln. This withdrawal involved maintaining their roles inside the University and establishing an alternative form of higher education with no formal link to any institute of higher education: keeping on with their *heteronymous* (socially necessary) labour in order to engage in other forms of *autonomous* (life enhancing) work, after Gorz's formulations (1982). At the heart of this project lies an attempt at the 'complete détournment of work as it usually conceived' (Noys 2010: 166). It is around this détournment of work on which the Centre's claim of divine violence is based.

The Centre was initially established as a counter-project to government higher education policy. In 2010 new government legislation massively increased student fees, up to £9,000, and defunded teaching in the Arts, Humanities and Social Science, which many regarded as an 'assault against universities' (Bailey & Freedman, 2011), and a form of 'mythic violence'. This state violence was consolidated by the response of the police state to student protests in 2010-2011, and to the riots across the UK in the

summer of 2011. These protests and riots involved many students and young people motivated by resistance to police repression, the huge increase in undergraduate fees, the withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance for Further Education Students, and the poverty of everyday life (Guardian/LSE, 2012). Members of the Centre were involved in and energised by the student protests and occupations, finding ways to contribute to the articulation of resistance in theory and practice. For example, they appeared as invited speakers at the Tent City University that formed part of the Occupation at St Paul's Cathedral in London, and also wrote publications contributing to the debate about the meaning and purpose of higher education (Stanistreet, 2012).

The current membership of the Centre is 50 full-time members, 10 associate members who are not involved in the day-to-day running of the cooperative, and 140 subscribers to the mailing list. The motivations for involvement in the Centre are many and various: some members are driven by a Gueveran 'politics of hate' for what the university has now become; while others want to protect social science teaching from the pervasive 'business ontology' of the capitalist university, and to provide debt-free higher education. Members have talked about the wish 'to create something new in freedom' (Bonnett, 2013), as well as seeking to abolish the logics of capitalist work. The preoccupation with interpreting the SSC as a form of divine violence is the author's and nobody else's. At no time is there complete certainty about what they are doing. Rather, the SCC features a pervasive feeling of radical doubt that is nourished by a highly developed sense of critical reflexivity around such questions as: 'Is the SSC a real alternative form of higher education, or a space to consider what a real alternative might look like?'; 'Do the power dynamics of the group replicate the hierarchies of higher education?'; and 'How can the SSC maintain a critical radical edge, avoiding recuperation by the mainstream imperatives of capitalist higher education?' An important part of this radical doubt is an awareness of the Centre's relationship to the radical history of worker education and its own intellectual controversies, taking care not to fetishize the co-operative model as an alternative to capitalism, but as a transitional arrangement towards full communism at some point in the future, perhaps (Winn, 2015).

The alternative character of SSC is substantiated by its offer of higher educational awards granted by its own academics and students, with no reference to any regulating authority. The Centre's 'associate members' act as reviewers of the academic work

that is produced by those involved in the taught programmes. All members of the cooperative pay subscriptions based on what they can afford, but there are no tuition fees or salaries. Students and teachers at the SSC are referred to as 'scholars' to emphasize they all have much to learn from each other. All members of the group have the opportunity to lead teaching sessions, contribute to the design of the curriculum, as well as chair planning and management meetings. One of the clear effects of this democratic way of working is to dissolve the formal university roles, disrupting relations of power and authority. But more than that, this dissolution of formal university distinctions grants members of the group a form of invisibility, with their involvement defined by the contribution they make to the work of the Centre, as a lived social individuality or a pedagogy of the invisible, while the SSC remains in full public view.

The pedagogical principle for the SSC had already been established at the University of Lincoln in the shape of Student as Producer (Neary et al, 2015). The principle of Student as Producer is grounded in Marxist critical pedagogy and had some success in moving the University of Lincoln and other universities towards a model of academics working collaboratively with students on research projects inside and outside of the curriculum. However, the radicality of Student as Producer has been constrained by the logic of capitalist institutional life, where control and contain management structures restrain any attempt to reinvent the neoliberal university as a radical political project; and so Student as Producer could only be sustained as another form of social institution outside of the academy. The politics and principles of SSC are based on the pedagogy of Student as Producer, derived from another of Walter Benjamin's principles, as elaborated in the article 'The Author as Producer' (1934), where he asked how do radical intellectuals act in a moment of crisis. Benjamin's proposal was to transform the social relations of capitalist production, so that the objects of the production process (capitalist labour) become the de-alienated subjects of a new productive cycle, based not on the expansion of surplus value but on the social needs and capacities of those involved in the work. The logic of Student as Producer is that students are regarded not only as collaborators of knowledge, but as co-workers in this new productive environment (Neary & Winn, 2009; Neary 2010).

The Social Science Centre is part of a radical tradition of subversive academic activity. One of the most compelling accounts of this activity is contained in Harney and Moten's concept of 'the

Undercommons' (Harney & Moten, 2013). The Undercommons is a general antagonism, where academics exist 'in and against' the University. The Social Science Centre is when this general antagonism is taken outside the University, as an alternative site of collective resistance. The Undercommons and the SSC are both built on the notion that academic work is a non-exceptional form of capitalist work, where academics have become 'cyborgs of knowledge production' (Moten & Harney, 1999). The Undercommons and the SSC maintain that in order to challenge this automated arrangement it is necessary to focus on the social relations of capitalist production on which state strategy for higher education is based. The Undercommons is highly critical of the professionalization of academic life: the ways in which surplus value is extracted by worker-against-worker surveillance schemes, research targets, the increase in the numbers of students to be taught, severe constraints on collegiality which is also undermined by management structures, with academics lacking ownership of the means through which their knowledge is produced. This is exacerbated with pressure to find funding from state, military and other donors whose interests may not coincide with those of academics, and who may have no interest in alternative models for social development (Harney & Moten, 1998: 165). In this situation Harney and Moten deny the possibility for real critical intellectual activity in mainstream higher education. They argue that to be a critical academic inside a capitalist university means 'recognising the university and being recognized by it as an assertion of the university's impeccable liberal credentials and the academic's bourgeois individuality (Harney & Moten, 2013: 31). In this way critical education gets to perfect higher education in its current form, as 'professional education... a counterinsurgency, coming for the discredited, for those who refuse to write of or write up the undercommons' (32). Critical educators in this context are regarded as 'harmless intellectuals, malleable, perhaps capable of some modest intervention in the so-called public sphere' (32).

Harney and Moten (2013: 30) discover the subversive intellectual in the identity of radical students and faculty:

Maroon communities of composition teachers, mentorless graduate students, adjunct Marxist historians, or queer management professors, state college ethnic studies departments, closed down film programmes, visa-expired Yemeni student newspaper editors, historically black college

sociologists and feminist engineers. And what will the university say of them? It will say they are unprofessional. How do those who exceed the profession, who exceed and by exceeding escape, how do those maroons problematize themselves, problematize the university, force the university to consider them a problem, a danger? The Undercommons ... are always at war, always in hiding.

Faced with this predicament the only rationale for radical faculty is to steal from the university (26) and to teach, or, rather, not teach:

the not visible other side of teaching, a thinking through the skin of teaching toward a collective orientation to the knowledge object as future project, and a commitment to what we want to call the prophetic organisation. (27)

This means not finishing, not passing, not graduating, but being driven by:

a radical passion and passivity that one becomes unfit for subjection... It is not so much the teaching as it is about the prophecy in the organisation of teaching... against its own deadening labour and the professionalization of the critical academic. (28)

This form of teaching, they argue, is not only unethical, but becomes a security breach (36).

A key feature of the Undercommons view of the University is an assertion about the non-exceptional nature of academic work, which can only be done in collaboration with other academics, other university workers, workers outside of the university and with students. This highly collaborative model of academic work includes students as co-workers and collaborators: 'student as producer' (Harney & Moten, 1998: 172), in fact, of knowledge as part of the teaching process. Harney and Moten argue that any strategy where academics work alongside students for radical social change based on a critique of capitalist society must recognize students as co-workers as well as the material conditions of capitalist production.

Recognising the violence inherent in state strategy they proclaim that the Undercommons is a declaration of war against war, or the state's refusal of a new society. The Undercommons is a 'non-place' (Harney & Moten, 2013: 39), or a 'prophetic organisation' (27) that works towards the abolition of a society that relies on wages, prisons and slavery, and 'the founding of a new society [which] would have the resemblance of communism' (42). This is a powerful analysis, written with a highly literary sensibility, sharing the SSC's commitment to the notion of the student as co-worker in the production of communism.

However, there are significant differences between the Undercommons and the SSC. The Undercommons is an analysis of the capitalist labour process which leaves out the dynamics of valorisation. Value is discussed by Harney and Moten, but only as a marketized medium of exchange, with no understanding being shown of the violent law of abstraction by which value expands and social life is brutalized. While Harney and Moten do use the term 'abstracting academic labour', they do so as a way of looking more closely at work inside the academy, and without consideration being given to it as the process of the abstraction of surplus value. The critique of value on which the SSC relies recognizes the social world as the totality of capitalist social relations, out of which social forms are derived, whereas the Undercommons see society as already made: as a place in which wages and slavery and prison exist (Harney & Moten, 2013: 42). The critique of value on which the SSC is based recognizes class struggle and ultimately communism as emerging from the dynamic contradiction of the commodity-form: it is thus not fixated on the identity politics of excluded faculty, whose oppositional nature or otherwise is determined by the substance of their radical Otherness, which for Harney and Moten has its defining moment in the concept of Black Studies. While the Undercommons regard stealing as a radical political act, the SSC does not advocate theft, which does nothing to challenge property relations; instead, the SSC endeavours to appropriate the power of capitalist knowledge production in a non-alienated form. The Undercommons' subversive model is also based on a positive affirmation of worker solidarity, rather than a détournement of the nature of work itself. In the end, then, the Undercommons is passionate, rather than a negative critique, and is altogether too certain, lacking any sense of critical reflexivity or radical doubt or educative power, laying itself open to its own critical analysis of the critical academic. Stripped of any scopic vision by which it can reveal the foundation of capitalist violence, the Undercommons provides

no assurance on which to launch a violent attack on police state power and its militarized drones.

### **Drone Culture and the SSC**

The insurgent power of the SSC, its anti-dronic nature and claim to divine violence, lies in its pedagogy of the invisible, or subversion in full view. The authenticity of this claim might be more amenable if expressed as a sort of weird science fiction. China Miéville, in his novel *The City and The City* (2009), has given us a narrative by which invisibility can be explored. Miéville's work is entirely appropriate for this purpose given his own commitment to the Marxist ontology within which this paper is written, and his identification of the source of capitalist violence as the real abstractions that emanate from commodity form (Miéville, 2005; Freedman, 2010). Set in the present, as imaginary post-communist society, the two cities of the title, Beszel and Ul Quoma, occupy the same geographical space, in the form of 'topolganglers' (159). As a result of their antagonistic relationship the inhabitants of each city must 'unsee' each other, or be subject to criminal sanctions: Breached. The capacity to unsee each other is enforced by hi-tech surveillance equipment, not drones but CCTV, data-mining and other invasive mechanisms. Despite the stifling sense of control, the plot provides the possibility of another secret city, Orcini, as a rebel state that exists as a site of dissensus between the two city-states. In fact, Orcini turns out to be a fiction, written up as a samizdat publication, *Between the City and The City*, by a 'bad academic', David Bowden, who gets his comeuppance at the end of book. The novel raises the question of not only of what it is to see and to not see, to be 'invisible', but also the possibility of resistance, which is presented as different ways of unseeing.

*The City and The City* provides a 'weird prism' through which to contemplate the nature of surveillance in actually existing societies (Marks, 2013: 235). Despite the omnipotence of modern surveillance systems, surveillance is based on a large amount of uncertainty. Surveillance is restricted to a particular range of intelligibility, or scopic vision, through which it has been engineered; so that which exists outside its engineered competences remains unseen (Marks, 2013: 228). These engineered competences and capacities include the intelligence to unsee emerging forms of social institutions, as new features on the landscape of the everywhere. Given the current state of capitalism's

scopic vision, a revolutionary communist society has disappeared from its radar, with domestic extremism profiled as a function of its Islamophobia and other racist and class-based caricatures. Given the nature of America's vision of communism, distorted by consumerist and productivist fantasies written by another kind of 'bad academic' (Dean, 2012), capitalist security officials would not recognize a radical communist alternative even if it was staring them in the face. Part of the technology of unseeing, being a 'bad academic', is to deny the catastrophe of our current condition, so that 'no one can admit it doesn't work' (Miéville, 2009: 307). The real nature of communism, that is 'the ruthless criticism of everything that exists' (Marx 1843), and 'the real movement that abolishes the existing state of things' (Marx 1845), remains opaque to official capitalist scholars and builders of surveillance machines, including drones, and other tortuous devices.

It is in this sense that the SSC is invisible. The SSC is based on a fundamental understanding of communism as the recuperation of capitalist work. This invisibility is compounded by the fact that the occupational identity of members are dissolved into the SSC's organisational features, as a sort of professional suicide or pedagogy of the invisible, raising the possibility of novel radical forms of revolutionary institutions, while remaining in full public view. None of this makes SSC scholars immune from the violence of surveillance machines, for whom the least infringement can result in brutal force, and who can be reprogrammed to scope out other forms of 'domestic extremism' under a different set of circumstances. Indeed, it is highly likely that those set of circumstances will turn increasingly more substantial as the crisis of capitalism continues to intensify and other forms of revolutionary invisibility emerge out of the unseen.

### **Killing Drones**

Violence is a key issue for revolution, alongside democracy, equality and social justice, but it is rarely discussed openly, not least because of the punishments that may be applied by drone machines and other forms of police state power. But in a situation where 'rights collide and force decides' at a time of global Civil War (Miéville, 2006), an understanding of violence is urgently required in ways that avoid body counts and helplessness (Postone, 2006). Neither the sociological descriptions of drone culture (Rothstein, 2015), nor the philosophical speculations regarding the essence of drone-state

power (Chamayou, 2015) provide enough intellectual capacity to disable these peculiar killing machines. Even Wark, for all of his conceptual ingenuity, is trapped, like Land and other accelerationists, in a cybernetic loop where value can only ever be realized and redistributed rather than revolutionized (Neary, 1999).

In order to challenge the police state it is necessary to identify the real nature of its power as well as its fundamental weaknesses, revealed here as the imposition of capitalist work and its possible recuperation. Providing substance and support to the strategies and tactics that seek to abolish capitalist work and re-substantiate productive activity in forms of non-alienated human life, will deprive drones and other capitalist killing machines of their murderous intent.

Violence can be discussed through Walter Benjamin's formulations adapted to the regime of higher education: as mythic and divine violence, and thus how violence might be legitimated through a process of educative power, or radical doubt. This issue of radical doubt has raised the question of the critical academic and what forms of criticality that might take in order to challenge the capitalist university as a state strategy and form of police state power. Taking on board Noys' principles of collective negative agency and the critique of value, as well as the détournement of labour on which the latter is based, it is possible to suggest an already actually existing model of divine violence: the SSC, operating as it does outside of an English university. Presented here as active withdrawals, following Žižek, these forms of divine violence constitute ways for academics and students not only to learn learn learn, but also to teach teach teach, as a concrete thought experiment.

## References

Amerimuslima (2013) 'Drone Culture', *Storify*, available at <https://storify.com/Amerimuslima/drone-culture>, accessed December 3, 2014.

Bailey, M. & Freedman, D. (2011) *The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance*. London: Pluto Press.

Basulto, D. (2014) 'The Insidious Effect of Our Drone Culture', *The Washington Post* (October 21). Available at

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/innovations/wp/2014/10/21/the-insidious-effect-of-paranoid-drone-culture/>.

Benjamin, W. (1921) 'Critique of Violence', *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Trans. E. Jephcott. Schocken Books: New York.

Bonnett, A. (2013) 'Something New in Freedom', *Times Higher Education*, (May 23).

Chamayou, G. (2012) *Manhunts: A Philosophical History*. Trans. S. Rendall. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Clarke, R. (2014) *Sting of the Drone*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.

Coley, R. (2014) 'Visuality and the Vector: Mapping and Hijacking Drone Culture', unpublished paper. Presented at *Autonomy and Automation: Robotics, AI and the Digital Cultural Future*, 8th March, Pervasive Media Studio, Digital Cultures Research Centre, University of the West of England.

Coley, R. (2015) 'Mapping the Contours of Vectoral Space: Inaugural Statement of the Committee for Aeronautical Psychogeography' in D. B. Shaw & M. Humm (eds), *Radical Space: Exploring Politics and Practice*. London: Rowman and Littlefield International.

Dean, J. (2012) *The Communist Horizon*. London: Verso.

Drone Survival Guide (2014), available at <http://www.dronesurvivalguide.org>.

Freedman, C. (2010) 'Speculative Fiction and International Law: the Marxism of China Miéville', *Socialism and Democracy* 20 (3): 25-39.

Gorz, A. (1982) *Farewell to the Working Class*. London: Pluto Press.

Graham, S. (2011) *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. London: Verso.

Gregory, D. (2011) 'The Everywhere War', *Geography Journal* 177 (3): 238-250.

Gregory, D. (2012) 'From A View To A Kill: Drones and Late Modern War', *Theory, Culture & Society* 28 (7-8): 188-215.

Harney, F. & Moten, S. (1998) 'Doing Academic Work', in R. Martin (ed.), *Chalk Lines: The Politics of Work in the Managed University*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Moten, F. & Harney, S. (1999) 'The Academic Speed Up', *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labour* (4), Available at <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace/article/view/184003>.

Harney, F. & Moten, S. (2013) *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, Autonomedia.

Harvey, A. (2013) 'Stealth Wear', available at <http://ahprojects.com/projects/stealth-wear>, accessed October 20, 2014.

Hirvonen, A. (2011) 'The Politics of Revolt: On Benjamin and Critique of Law', *Law Critique* 22 (2). Available at [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/226159745\\_The\\_Politics\\_of\\_Revolt\\_On\\_Benjamin\\_and\\_Critique\\_of\\_Law](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/226159745_The_Politics_of_Revolt_On_Benjamin_and_Critique_of_Law).

Kay, G. and Mott, J. (1982) *Political Order and the Law of Labour*. Macmillan: London.

Kurz, R. (2002) 'The Fatal Pressure of Competition', *libcom.org* (June 14). Available at <https://libcom.org/library/fatal-pressure-competition-robert-kurz>.

Kurz, R. (2014) 'World Power and World Money: The Economic Function of the US Military Machine within Global Capitalism and the Background of the New Financial Crisis', in N. Larsen et al. (eds), *Marxism and the Critique of Value*. Chicago-Alberta: MCM Publishing.

Lubell, N. (2010) *Extraterritorial Force Against Non-State Actors*. University Press Oxford: Oxford.

Mackay, R. & Brassier, R. (eds) (2011) *Nick Land: Fanged Noumena*. Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic Sequence.

Marks, P. (2013) 'Monitoring the Unvisible: Seeing and Unseeing in China Miéville's *The City and the City*', *Surveillance and Society* 11 (3).

Marx, K. (1843) 'Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge', at [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43\\_09-alt.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09-alt.htm), accessed October 4, 2014.

Marx, K. (1845) 'The German Ideology', available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>, accessed October 4, 2014.

Miéville, C. (2011) *The City and the City*. London and Oxford: Pan Books.

Miéville, C. (2005) *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law*, Leiden: Brill Publishers.

Murmuration (2013) 'A Festival of Drone Culture', available at <http://murmurationfestival.tumblr.com/>, accessed October 3, 2014.

Neary, M. (1999) 'Labour: The Poetry of the Future', in M. Neary (ed.), *Global Humanisation: Studies in the Manufacture of Labour*. London and New York: Mansell: 164-193.

Neary, M. and Winn, J. (2009) 'The Student as Producer: Reinventing the Student Experience in Higher Education', in L. Bell et al. (eds), *The Future of Higher Education: Policy, Pedagogy and the Student Experience*. London and New York: Continuum: 126-138.

Neary, M. (2010) 'Student as Producer: A Pedagogy for the Avant-Garde', *Learning Exchange* 1 (1).

Neary, M., Saunders, G., Hagyard, A. and Derricott, D. (2015) *Student as Producer: Research-Engaged Teaching, an Institutional Strategy*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Noys, B. (2010) *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Noys, B. (2013) 'The Violence of Representation and the Representation of Violence', in G. Matthews & S. Goodman (eds),

*Violence and The Limits of Representation*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 12-27.

Noys, B. (2014a) 'Drone Metaphysics', *As Above So Below – A Colloquium on Drone Culture*, University of Lincoln, May 24.

Noys, B. (2014b) *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*. Hampshire: Zer0 Books.

Neocleous, M. (2000) *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*. London and Virginia: Pluto Press.

Neocleous, M. (2008) *Critique of Security*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Neocleous, M. (2014) *War Power, Police Power*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Postone, M. (1993) *Time, Labour and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Postone, M. (2006) 'History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilisations and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism', *Public Culture*, 18 (1).

Robinson, E. (2012) 'The Emerging "Drone" Culture', *The Washington Post* (August 2). Available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-the-emerging-drone-culture/2012/08/02/gJQARYbtSX\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-the-emerging-drone-culture/2012/08/02/gJQARYbtSX_story.html).

Rothe, D. L. & Collins, V. V. (2014) 'The Normality of Political Administration and State Violence: Causality, Law and Drones', *Critical Criminology* 22 (3): 373-388.

Rothstein, A. (2015) *Drone*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Sharkey, N. (2010) 'Saying "No!" To Lethal Autonomous Targeting', *Journal of Military Ethics* 9 (4): 369-383.

Stanistreet, P. (2012) 'Anyone Can Teach, Everyone Can Learn', *Adults Learning*, National Institute for Adult and Community Education.

Sorrel, G. (1999) *Reflections on Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sterling, B. (2012) 'Drone Culture - War Arrives', *Wired* (December 2), <http://www.wired.com/2012/02/drone-culture-war-arrives>.

Thynne, K. (2009) 'Targeting the "Terrorist" Enemy. The Boundaries of an Armed Conflict against Transnational Terrorists', *Australian International Law Journal* 16: 161-171.

Virilio, P & Lotringer, S. (2008) *Pure War*. Trans. M. Polizzotti. Los Angeles: Semiotext.

Virilio, P. (1989) *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. Trans. P. Camiller. London: Verso.

Wilcox, R. (2013) 'Can Drones Be Used for Social Good', *SOS Children's Villages* (December 4). Available at <http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/news/blog/drones-for-social-good>.

Wark, M. (2003) 'Escape from the Dual Empire', *Rhizomes* 06 (Spring). Available at <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue6/wark.htm>, accessed May 1, 2015.

Wark, M. (2011) 'Digital Labour and the Anthropocene' *DIS Magazine*. Available at: <http://dismagazine.com/disillusioned/discussion-disillusioned/70983/mckenzie-wark-digital-labor-and-the-anthropocene/>, accessed May 1, 2015.

Wark, M. (2014) 'The Drone of Minerva', *Public Seminar Commons* (November 5). Available at: <http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/11/the-drone-of-minerva/#.VUN2e9pViko>.

Winn, J. (2015) 'The Cooperative University: Labour, Power and Pedagogy', *Power and Education* 7 (1).

Zacharias, R. (2007) 'Any Yet: Derrida on Benjamin's Divine Violence', *Mosaic*: 103-116.

Žižek, S. (2009a) *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. London: Profile Books.

Žižek, S (2009b) *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London and New York: Verso.