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**Grundlagenforschung für eine linke Praxis  
in den Geisteswissenschaften**

**Die wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift  
und ihr Wert**



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**The Value of the Humanities in the Context of the  
Political Economy of Publishing  
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**Speculation from Below  
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From the perspective of a PhD student in the humanities, or “early career researcher” as it is phrased in the jargon of the academy and its audit culture, the demand to publish is increasingly hanging over our thesis work as a constant threat. The thrust here is that only publishing in peer-reviewed journals with high impact factors will ultimately help us to secure an academic job in an already hardly-existing job market. The earlier we get acquainted with the journals and their respective “identities” or brands and guidelines, the better. This imperative is based on an implicit hierarchy of value in which journals with high impact factors reside at the very top ahead of any other form of publication starting with the monograph to specialist journals, up until journalism and online-writing at the very bottom.<sup>1</sup>

The “journal-criterion” is however only representative of one specific measure among many others that are collectively embedded in what De Angelis and Harvie have described pointedly as “the war over *measure*”<sup>2</sup> that is now taking place in *all* of the fields of immaterial and cognitive labour, of which the (neoliberal) university is a part. It is therefore not the threat of the publishing imperative in and of itself including all the related feelings of anxiety, shame and performance pressure that is my foremost interest here<sup>3</sup>, but the way in which the specific hierarchy of value that helps to define the quality of academic research can be understood as created by nothing other than capital’s increasing need for the valorisation of immaterial labour processes. It is from this vantage point that Gayatri Spivak formulates as her pressing concern,

*the bleak landscape of the contemporary Euro-U.S. academy, turning out “the scholar”, the Gelehr[t]er, the felicitous subject of the Enlightenment, as an epistemologically challenged market analyst.*<sup>4</sup>

In the following inquiry I will initially focus on the specific manifestations of Spivak’s rather general remark about the Euro-U.S. academy in relation to the publishing industry and practices in the humanities. This first part will then allow me to ask in a following step, what we should make of Spivak’s binary opposition between Enlightenment scholar and market analyst, which is everything but uncommon in recent critical accounts of higher education reforms, in terms of how *and* in what name to resist the current development.

1 This hierarchy is mainly experiential deduced from recent hiring practices in UK social sciences departments. In other geographical and subject areas, the importance of the monograph is certainly still greater than that of high-impact journal articles. See for recent developments in the US humanities publishing market e.g. Waters, Lindsay: *Enemies of promise: publishing, perishing, and the eclipse of scholarship*, Chicago 2004, p. 36.

2 De Angelis, Massimo and Harvie, David: ‘Cognitive Capitalism’ and the Rat-Race: How Capital Measures Immaterial Labour in British Universities, in: *Historical Materialism* 17 (2009), pp. 3-30, here p. 3.

3 See for an extensive analysis of the academic conditions of production from a feminist point of view: Gill, Rosalind: *Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of Neo-liberal Academia*, in: *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Ross Flood, London 2009.

4 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty: *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Cambridge, MA 2012, p. 27.

## A materialist critique of academic publishing

Higher education in the UK between 2010 and 2012 experienced a series of far-reaching reforms including massive public funding cuts for the arts and humanities, an increase in tuition fees of up to £9000 per year for undergraduate students and the opening up of the higher education market to private providers. These changes gave rise to a new wave of critique that focussed on the increasing monetisation of academic value leading to a “commodification of knowledge”<sup>5</sup> on the one hand and a transformation of academic values on the other.<sup>6</sup> Apart from these radical incisions in the HE system at large, it is in the daily relations of academic production that a more general transformation from an emphasis on scholarly activity (producing ideas, knowledge and inspiration) in the “post-war university” towards measurable outputs in the neoliberal university<sup>7</sup>, becomes concrete. This shift is also no longer to be understood as unique to the UK, where Burrows dates its starting point back to the mid 90s, but as Pirie and others note, manifests itself as much in other European countries such as Germany as well as in North America, which is why Pirie sees the need to examine this shift in the context of global capitalism.<sup>8</sup> The introduction of ever stricter time allocation exercises and measurements for different tasks on the level of the individual academic, university-wide performance assessments such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), now called Research Excellent Framework (REF), as a scheme that makes departments and universities compete on a national level, the National Student Survey as a measurement for good teaching according to student (or consumer) satisfaction and finally national and international league tables, translate directly into universities becoming businesses in global markets<sup>9</sup> in which value is allocated by ever more refined “metric assemblages”<sup>10</sup>. The forms of “quantification, standardisation and surveillance”, of which I have only described a few<sup>11</sup>, need to be understood on the one hand as part of capitalism’s ongoing struggle for increasing surplus extraction from labour and on the other hand as specific to our post-industrial, or cognitive capitalism era in which capital needs to find new and more effective forms of measure. As Hardt and Negri have identified in their description of this historical period that started in the 70s, it is because of the increasing subsumption of life as a whole under capital, which goes hand in hand with an immaterialisation and growing intangibility of that which is produced and exchanged that capital finds itself in danger of losing a certain amount of created value by not being able to measure, and thus objectify it.<sup>12</sup>

With regards to academic publishing, this manifests itself on two related levels:

5 Pirie, Iain: The Political Economy of Academic Publishing, in: *Historical Materialism* 17 (2009), pp. 31-60, here p. 31.

6 Burrows, Roger: Living with the H-Index? Metrics, Markets and Affect in the Contemporary Academy, Unpublished manuscript, 2011, [https://www.academia.edu/807673/Roger\\_Burrows\\_2011\\_Living\\_with\\_the\\_H-Index\\_Metrics\\_Markets\\_and\\_Affect\\_in\\_the\\_Contemporary\\_Academy](https://www.academia.edu/807673/Roger_Burrows_2011_Living_with_the_H-Index_Metrics_Markets_and_Affect_in_the_Contemporary_Academy) [10.4.2014], p. 11.

7 See De Angelis and Harvie: ‘Cognitive Capitalism’ and the Rat-Race, p. 10.

8 Pirie: The Political Economy of Academic Publishing, pp. 35-36. Here, Pirie also points to the fact that while his study focuses on the UK publishing industry, it is obviously highly integrated into an international, “English-language-publishing complex”.

9 See De Angelis and Harvie: ‘Cognitive Capitalism’ and the Rat-Race, p. 8.

10 Burrows: Living with the H-Index?, p. 2.

11 See a more comprehensive list in De Angelis; Harvie: ‘Cognitive Capitalism’ and the Rat-Race, pp. 12-14.

12 See Hardt, Michael; Negri, Antonio: *Multitude*, New York 2004, p. 146. For a direct criticism of their political investment in the “excess” that labour might be able to create in this context, see De Angelis and Harvie: ‘Cognitive Capitalism’ and the Rat-Race, p. 4: That “it is more difficult to pinpoint where labour power is produced” does not mean we should easily assume that it does not exist for capital as value”.

The first is the level of impact measurement that is primarily allocated with relation to the individual academic and her publications while feeding into the broader schemes of comparison and evaluation mentioned earlier. By means of quantitative bibliometrics that have gained importance—especially because of the possibility of their calculation via sophisticated algorithms—the production of academic papers is made comparable. It is particularly by means of the personal “h-index”, introduced in 2005, that academic quality and worth are determined. H-index is short for Hirsch-index, based on its inventor Jorge Hirsch, who defined it as follows: “A scientist has index  $h$  if  $h$  of his/her  $N_p$  papers have at least  $h$  citations each, and the other  $(N_p - h)$  papers have no more than  $h$  citations each.”<sup>13</sup> It is thus a measure that combines the number of papers published on one axis and the citations on the other axis. The H-index therefore clearly opts for quantity in both regards, even though it argues that while the number of papers is a quantitative factor, the number of citations is in fact an indicator of quality.<sup>14</sup> But as Burrows rightly argues, it is not the accuracy of the measure that we should concern ourselves with, but the way in which it has become reified and now governs a whole academic life-world colonised by metrics that incorporate the h-index in order to make decisions about promotion, employment or funding down to the affective experience and motivation of the individual academic for writing and publishing.

The other measure that has recently gained importance in redefining academic value is the impact factor of journals, defined as the “ratio of citations and recent citable items published”<sup>15</sup>. As a “shadow metric” it increasingly leads to the reorientation of academics in deciding where to publish or “place” their articles.<sup>16</sup>

Gill, De Angelis and Harvie have all shown that, in the context of austerity and massive cuts to university funding, both measures combined help to establish as well as to drive down the “socially-necessary labour time”<sup>17</sup> that is required to produce an output, i.e. an academic paper, of a certain quality. They have also emphasised in how far this process immediately affects the experience of time and emotional pressure of academics, especially at the beginning of their career, enforcing already existing material and immaterial inequalities, such as the availability and acquisition of the financial means that leave enough time beyond the work on the thesis, or a support network of more established scholars.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, it directly ties in with the second level of an intensified valorisation in the field of academic publishing, now with regard to the publishing industry as a whole. By looking at the consolidation of a market of academic publishing in which the struggle is specifically one

13 Hirsch cited in Egghe, Leo: *The Hirsch-Index and Related Impact Measures*, in: *Annual Review in Information Science and Technology*, 44.1 (2009), pp. 65-115, here p. 66.

14 Even though Hirsch applied the h-index primarily to examples in the natural sciences, it gained increasing importance within the field of the social sciences and humanities as part of the general drive towards metricisation and accountability that Burrows describes. However, it remains problematic with regard to accuracy and validity that the representation of the social sciences and humanities citations remains limited in the most important databases from which the h-index is currently generated such as Thomson Reuter’s Web of Science as the most important (which replaced the former Science Citation Index and covers around 9500 journals), but also Elsevier’s Scopus and Google Scholar; see for a recent assessment of the attempts Scopus made to improve this imbalance: *Towards a Comprehensive Citation Index for the Arts & Humanities*, *Research Trends*, <http://www.researchtrends.com/issue-32-march-2013/towards-a-comprehensive-citation-index-for-the-arts-humanities/> [4.11.2013]. Further, there are large differences between the h-index that all three databases generate for an individual scholar and other discipline-specific as well as general problems of distortion, which are yet to be resolved; see Harzing, Anne-Wil: *Reflections on the H-index*, [http://www.harzing.com/pop\\_hindex.htm](http://www.harzing.com/pop_hindex.htm), [4.11.2013] and LSE Public Policy Group: *Maximizing the Impacts of Your Research: A Handbook for Social Scientists*, April 2011, pp. 24, [http://www.lse.ac.uk/government/research/resgroups/LSEPublicPolicy/Docs/LSE\\_Impact\\_Handbook\\_April\\_2011.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/government/research/resgroups/LSEPublicPolicy/Docs/LSE_Impact_Handbook_April_2011.pdf) [4.11.2013].

15 Burrows: *Living with the H-Index?*, p. 6.

16 An exemplary ranking overview for the Sage journals can be found here: <http://www.sagepub.com>.





over private appropriation of what was originally understood to be a public good (knowledge), we can see how the “war over measure” and its resulting drive in academics towards publishing in “high-impact” journals leads to an intensification and enlargement of the area of economic valorisation.<sup>19</sup> This also allows the inverse conclusion that, in such an attempt to extend valorisation into formerly untouched territories, the publishing metrics help to equalise academic value and economic value following the motto that only that which sells is worth being written at all.<sup>20</sup> Iain Pirie helps us make the link between the new forms of measure within the academy and the way they tie in with the developments in the publishing industry where digitisation has come hand-in-hand with a strong push towards commercialisation that aims at making journal articles throughout all subject areas, including the less lucrative humanities and social sciences, into profitable private commodities.<sup>21</sup> Pirie shows how this is commonly achieved through the commodification of the labour of academics that are usually employed by public institutions, whilst the main consumers of the products the commercial publishers sell, are the libraries of those same public institutions. The most prominently debated link, observed by Burrows, is that only *after* a journal has been included in one of the commercial databases, which are at the forefront of this extremely monopolised market, an impact factor can at all be calculated.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, even though the humanities and social sciences publishing market is still less monopolised by a few big players than the natural sciences equivalent, the major publishers employ techniques such as the ‘bundling’ of journals that slowly drive the smaller players out of the market, as libraries, who are the major customer in this market, are left with no choice but to buy the overpriced bundles.<sup>23</sup> When considering the need to reform the publishing market, which with its enormous profit margins and lack of competition is, even “according to the criteria of neoclassical economics”<sup>24</sup>, so obviously failing<sup>25</sup>, it is important to understand its development not merely as the result of a particular political strategy or a failure to properly regulate that could be resolved through a transferral of copyrights from private to public, but as part of capital’s need to alleviate its intrinsic crisis tendency<sup>26</sup> through valorisation of new social spaces such as education or the public sphere. This transformation of academic publishing into a market for accumulation can then be understood as impacting different levels: the publishing industry and its players, government policies that seem to have little interest to counter this development, and most importantly, the experience of academic life. Here, metrics and perceived “value” forcefully change the social enactment of what counts as academic value in the first place, creating new levels of pressure and competition not only on an experiential level, but also in relation to the

com/isiranking/default.sp [4.11.2013]. The most comprehensive overview is available in the yearly-issued Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports, which is however access-restricted.

17 The concept of “socially necessary labour-time” lies at the core of Marx’s value theory of labour, defined in *Capital* Vol.1 as follows: “Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the condition of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society.” Marx, Karl: *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol 1 London 1976, p. 129. Whereas there have been recent attempts to newly emphasise the crucial place of this concept in an understanding of Marx’s theory (see e.g. Tomba, Massimiliano: *Marx’s Temporalities* Leiden: 2013), there is also an implicit danger of confusing “socially necessary labour-time” with the embodied substance of concrete labour, which De Angelis and Harvie seem to be in risk of doing, when they use the concept in order to short-circuit new forms of governing concrete forms of labour within cognitive capitalism and what that means for the theory of value (see Heinrich, Michael: *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, Münster 2001, pp. 199). An alternative way of understanding the “war over measure” might be via Jacques Rancière’s concept of “police”. Then the role of measurement within the overall becoming-commodity of knowledge would be to control and steer a process of normalisation of academic knowledge production for economic valorisation, without conflating those two moments into one, this is however a debate, which needs to be continued beyond the confines of this paper.

18 Gill: *Breaking the Silence*.

19 A recent study by the European Commission



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kinds of epistemologies that are applied in theoretical research.

Finally, on the level of the reception of academic research, which has always been of enormous importance to the humanities and social sciences that are most often defended as the disciplines guaranteeing a democratic, educated public, the commercialisation of the publishing industry also means an increasing inequality of access. It is ironic that in the age of digitisation of information, the general public is more excluded from accessing journal articles than in the past, because of the limited usage rights that the major publishers induce on libraries when purchasing e-resources.<sup>27</sup> That leads to an enforcement of inequalities of access and of already existing hierarchies, in which less privileged individuals or just the average citizen who is not related to an education institution, undergraduates, who highly depend on their institutional access, lower-ranked universities and the developing world are systematically deprived.<sup>28</sup> Once again, Pirie does not allow for any short-circuited conclusions here, demanding us to understand these inequalities or dysfunctions as part of the core functioning of capitalism as a system:

*[A]nyone familiar with Marx's analysis of how the development of the forces of production render existing relations of production increasingly dysfunctional over time may simply view this anomaly as one of many that are apparent in late capitalism. The perversity of this outcome is indicative of a wider sense in which the capitalist mode of production fails to fulfil real human social needs.<sup>29</sup>*

How to resist? - or Humboldt won't help us!

Staking out a political potential for the humanities from within the midst of its commodification

In view of the gruesome outlook on what might become of the humanities and social sciences through the publishing mechanisms of the neoliberal

supports this argument with the following findings: "The core STM (science, technology and medicine) publishing market is estimated between USD 7 billion and USD 11 billion [...]. In the last 30 years, the prices of scientific journals have been steadily increasing. Between 1975 and 1995, they increased 200%- 300% beyond inflation. This was accompanied by a fall in subscriptions both by individual researchers and by libraries whose budgets got squeezed. Indeed, journal prices far outpaced the evolution of library budgets, which did increase at a somewhat slower pace than total academic research budgets." (DG Research, European Commission: Study on the Economic and Technical Evolution of the Scientific Publication Markets in Europe, January 2006, 5, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/pdf/scientific-publication-study\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/pdf/scientific-publication-study_en.pdf). See for more details pp. 21) Regarding the UK, Pirie states that in 2006, the academic journal-industry added £1 billion per annum to the UK economy. Pirie: *The Political Economy of Academic Publishing*, p. 33.

20 See Couldry, Nick: *Fighting for the University's Life*, in: *The Assault on Universities a Manifesto for Resistance*, ed. Michael Bailey, London; New York 2011, p. 42.

21 See Pirie: *The Political Economy of Academic Publishing*, p. 35-36. Following Pirie that is especially true for the "English-language publishing complex", but he also observes that even in countries where his-

The marketisation of the university is an undeniable fact. It concerns questions of measure and value to a great extent. I want to use these questions as an entry point to develop a critique of the so-called marketisation of higher education, which, as I argue along the lines of Bromberg's article, cannot stop with the complaint that the universities have recently started to work like enterprises.

university, the question of resistance becomes pressing. And I think it is precisely only against the background of the former materialist analysis of the changing economic structures and their multi-level impacts that we find ourselves in a position of formulating how and with what kind of claims or demands resistance would become effective.

It is, first of all, by challenging capitalism and the kind of valorisation it imposes on the humanities as a means of solving its own crisis that resistance can be effective. In relation to publishing practices, this is most commonly done via forms of non-commercial self-publishing or *radical publishing*.<sup>30</sup> Non-commercial, radical publishing is then an important pillar of a struggle for de-commodification and open access, and posits in a way a certain dualism when it turns *against* the “audit culture” and its imposition of economic value and *towards* “the people” as its direct audience. It therewith brings its original responsibility towards the public or society as a whole back into perspective and allows for a different definition of impact via the criterion of who can be reached by and engaged in the ideas distributed: “[it] re-open[s] scholarship as a public good.”<sup>31</sup> While non-commercial publishing in this way helps to strip down the immense valorisation processes that the major publishers managed to impose and to re-establish the development of ideas, arguments and perspectives as the relevant legitimising categories<sup>32</sup>, it nevertheless bears a number of problems. There are still editorial, copy-editing — refereeing tasks to be fulfilled on top of the actual writing that cost time and money and thus cause financial vulnerability and instability — at least in the current highly competitive academic environment, young researchers heavily rely on the signalling powers of elite journals. That is to say that there is a certain sense in which these alternative media might be able to co-exist with the major journals without posing any direct threat to them and rather establish themselves as an altogether different genre. All these dangers very strongly support the argument that non-commercial

torically public intellectualism and a bourgeois model of disinterested and autonomous “Bildung” are valued more strongly, such as Germany, “commercialisation is equally (or even more) prevalent”.

22 See Burrows: Living with the H-Index? Metrics, Markets and Affect in the Contemporary Academy, p. 6.

23 See Pirie: The Political Economy of Academic Publishing, p. 36–37.

24 Pirie: The Political Economy of Academic Publishing, p. 57.

25 See also Rath, Richard Cullen: How to Read Hypertext: Media Literacy and Open Access in Higher Education, in: Making the University Matter, ed. Barbie Zelizer, London; New York 2011, p. 189.

26 Pirie acts on the assumption, that a crisis of overaccumulation is taking place since the early 70s. See Pirie: The Political Economy of Academic Publishing, p.50.

27 Ibid., p. 43.

28 See e.g. Swartz, Aaron: Guerilla Open Access Manifesto, <http://ia600808.us.archive.org/17/items/GuerillaOpenAccessManifesto/Goamjuly2008.pdf> [4.11.2013].

1 De Angelis, Massimo; Harvie, David: ‘Cognitive Capitalism’ and the Rat-Race: How Capital Measures Immaterial Labour in British Universities, in: Historical Materialism 17 (2009), p. 3-30.

### (Non-)Measure and Exploitation

In line with De Angelis and Harvie, Bromberg describes the “war over measure” taking place at the British universities (and elsewhere).<sup>1</sup> She correctly conceptualises the multiple means of measure as an “ongoing struggle for increasing surplus extraction from labour”. The means of measure are used to control and discipline the academic work force, as

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publishing needs to be accompanied by assuming and communicating a more radical position that explicitly criticises and rejects the forms and channels of mainstream publishing *and* its reification within the whole university life-world and importantly, in a collective manner. Only positioned *within* the context of the struggle that capitalism leads for enlarged valorisation of a wide range of cognitive and immaterial labour processes, and *if* it can find large-scale support and solidarity from all levels of academics, university administrators and the public<sup>33</sup>, radical publishing can be successful in the long run and become a real alternative, even for the most vulnerable members of the academic system. The public boycott of Elsevier, which was spearheaded by Harvard University and had the support of over 11,000 researchers worldwide entered the public debate in summer 2012. An initiative such as this, alongside other recent government-led projects with the aim to ensure open-access to tax-funded research findings, strongly suggest that a real possibility for initiating a radical shift away from the current paradigm does exist.<sup>34</sup>

Opposing the law of value imposed by capital on publishing in the humanities is however only the first step. The second step would be to develop a different set of values that is able to guide a transformation of society beyond its existence as a (late-)capitalist society, and I argue here that this double responsibility is inherent to the humanities as a discipline and opens up a very specific possibility with regard to combining resistance to the form of publishing with its content. As I will show in the concluding paragraph, this claim – if made seriously *from within* the midst of the ongoing struggle for the commodification of academic knowledge – challenges many of the commonly heard defences of the humanities that are ultimately doomed to remain empty and meaningless from the point of view of our current situation.

Here, I specifically mean the invocation of the humanities' value as supposed to consist in helping to "build"<sup>35</sup> and maintain our democracies and

29 Pirie: *The Political Economy of Academic Publishing*, p. 43.

30 The other alternative is the development of "author-pays journals", see Pirie: *The Political Economy of Academic Publishing*, p. 47. But as Pirie has shown this has no real critical value especially for humanities research, which is often conducted without external financial support. For an account of the impetus of Radical Publishing and a rough market overview, see also Sandhu, Sukhdev: *Radical Alternatives to Conventional Publishing*, in: *The Guardian*, February 17, 2012, sec. Books, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/feb/17/radical-alternatives-conventional-publishing> [4.11.2013].

31 Rath: *How to Read Hypertext*, p. 190.

32 The other question is here the importance and value of peer-review, which often persists as a legitimising instance in non-commercial publishing projects, but is itself haunted by a history of disciplinary consolidation that institutionalises gestures of closure and blind spots. Nevertheless, the potential for the peer review process to become an institution based on an idea of solidarity and geared towards an enriching practice of critique seems to be an actual possibility. See also *ibid.*, p. 189.

33 See Pirie: *The Political Economy of Academic*

2 See Hardt, Michael; Negri, Antonio: *Multitude*, New York 2004, p. 146.

well as to make academic workers work more, harder and more in line with the management's research plans. Hence they drive down the socially necessary labour time and allow for enforced surplus production. In that sense, tools of measurement are weapons in the struggle to increase the efficiency and profitability of academic work. But there is a second way in which Bromberg reads the multiple means of measure. With Hardt and Negri<sup>2</sup> she argues that in cognitive

its citizens<sup>36</sup> and contribute to the creation of truly public value<sup>37</sup> or, in a slightly stronger version, the defence of the humanities' existence as necessary in the name of "academic freedom" that similar to aesthetic freedom, becomes an end in itself, the ultimate condition.<sup>38</sup> All these defence arguments are articulated as some kind of ahistorical, Platonic ideas that could be easily activated to defend our universities in their contemporary crisis. My problem is not with the implied alliance between the humanities and a struggle for true democracy or the embrace of value-creation for the public, but with the underlying limitation of these arguments, when they are formulated as a merely political, ethical or even aesthetic question<sup>39</sup> with no material or critical-historical anchoring. Such a socio-historical grounding is however indispensable, if we want to understand the university *as well as* its defence as embedded within a historically specific social constitution of freedom, democracy and other values.

It is precisely from this stance that I want to take issue with Spivak's dual opposition between the contemporary academic as market analyst and the Enlightenment scholar, which we could understand as having originated in the historical and conceptual space between thinkers such as Kant, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher and Humboldt around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> A genealogical close-reading of the specific context as suggested by Dominic Boyer will serve as a critique of the widespread, somewhat nostalgic and often conservative habit of turning to Humboldt and his idealist ethics of "independent scholarship" combined with his model of the research university, when attempting to defend the humanities against the neoliberal attacks with which even Spivak's argument seems to be complicit.<sup>41</sup> By forging a wide connection between the origins of the European university in Bologna (1088) and Paris (c. 1160) and its contemporary neoliberal governance, Boyer shows very clearly that the university as an institution has always been a place of social reproduction for either the aristocracy

Publishing, p. 55, who opts for a research-council, i.e. state-funded solution, although pointing to its own problems and dangers.

34 See Lavoie, Joanie and Bérubé, Dominique: Crisis in Academic Publishing, June 19, 2012, <http://phys.org/news/2012-06-crisis-academic-publishing.html> [4.11.2013] and Rossbauer, Maria: Wissenschaftler Boykottieren Verlage: Papier Ist Macht, in: Die Tageszeitung, 18.8.2012, sec. Wissenschaft, <http://www.taz.de/199876/> [4.11.2013].

35 With reference to Bildung.

36 As recently evoked by Judith Butler in her Honorary Doctorate address at McGill University (DLitt - McGill 2013 Honorary Doctorate Address, 2013, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFIGS56iOAg&feature=youtuube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFIGS56iOAg&feature=youtuube_gdata_player).) [10.04.2014].

37 Brewer, John D.: The Public Value of the Social Sciences: An Interpretive Essay, New York 2013, p. 2.

38 Evans, Mary: Killing Thinking the Death of the Universities, London; New York 2004.

39 I do not want to deny that it also needs all of these dimensions. See also Pollock, Griselda: Saying No! Profligacy Versus Austerity, or Metaphor Against Model in Justifying the Arts and Humanities in the

capitalism "capital needs to find new and more effective forms of measure" because "capital finds itself in danger of losing a certain amount of created value by not being able to measure, and thus objectify it". As a consequence, the bibliometric h-Index seems to be a measure of value necessary for capital to exploit the immaterial labour of academics: "the publishing metrics help to equalise academic value and economic value". It is here that I disagree. Firstly, I think that the h-Index

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or, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, for the middle classes – i.e. for the politically and economically dominant strata. A place at which citizens or the workforce were disciplined<sup>42</sup>, where „nation“ and „culture“ were supposed to materialise into powerful ideas, and from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a place for state, and later, private investment.<sup>43</sup>

Humboldt's „artisanal“ concept of a „Forschungsuniversität“ [research university], which treats teaching and research as one interlinked complex, and places the humanities at the very centre of the university, are in *this* historical narrative<sup>44</sup> an integral part of a politics that was initiated with the bourgeois French Revolution, but 'sadly', from the point of view of its contemporaries, could only be realised in the sphere of ideas, rather than in any practical-political reality within the German Prussian State.<sup>45</sup> This gave the revolutionising of ideas its immense importance, as it was the only hope to somehow catch up with the French advancements. The task was thus to erect an autonomous, individual subject, who cuts himself off from feudal and patriarchal bonds, and instead becomes the universal citizen, advocating liberty and equality within and in the name of his nation – independent of any religious or social differences.<sup>46</sup> The form, which Humboldt chose for the realisation of this task had been introduced to him through his older contemporary, Friedrich August Wolf, who had already developed and employed a „forschende Praxis“ [researching practice] as the guiding principle of the Enlightenment university within his seminar since 1787.<sup>47</sup> The primary goal of these seminars for Wolf was the stimulation of self-directed autonomy – the transmission of skills and abilities – as opposed to the transfer of pure knowledge. It was supposed to serve a higher utility rather than fulfil everyday needs, namely classical scholarship that would produce capable, self-reflective subjects. At the same time his seminars were extremely elitist, as only the best students would be allowed to participate, and functioned on the basis of exclusivity, strong competitiveness and monetary rewards.

Contemporary University, in: *Journal of European Popular Culture*, 3.1 (2012), p. 104, for a similar critique of „humanities as education for democracy“. My problem with Pollock's argument is however that her conclusion seems to be caught up within the same limits she sets out to criticise.

40 See Stolzenberg, Jürgen and Ulrichs, Lars Thade: *Bildung Als Kunst: Fichte, Schiller, Humboldt, Nietzsche*, Berlin 2010.

41 See Pollock: *Saying No!*, p. 97 for a similar argument, from which she however draws different conclusions turning towards justice, creativity and history for sources of hope.

42 See *ibid.*, p. 101. Also Faulkner, Neil: *What Is a University Education For?*, in: *The Assault on Universities a Manifesto for Resistance*, ed. Michael Bailey, London; New York 2011, p. 28-29. In direct relation to the form of disciplining that the peer review process imposes on academic knowledge production, see Biagioli, Mario: *From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review*, in: *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures*, 12.1 (May 2002), p. 11-45.

43 Boyer, Dominic: *The Institutional Transformation of Universities in the Era of Digital Information*, in: *Making the University Matter*, ed. Barbie Zelizer, London; New York 2011), p. 178-179.

is no measure for value in the Marxian sense and secondly I disagree with Hardt and Negri's point that capital always needs to measure value in order to exploit labour (immaterial or not).

I would argue that sometimes quite the contrary is true. This is precisely the point of materialist feminism since the 1970s. Concerning housework, which was and still is mostly done by women, materialist feminism argued that it is precisely the non-acknowledgement of care

Before concluding, I would like to highlight some problems inherent in this Humboldtian ideal that gain relevance through its contemporary invocation as a transhistorical idea of the modern university. Having been constructed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century as a “universal weapon”<sup>48</sup> against university reforms of all kinds, it is now, claimed via the signifier “academic freedom”, supposed to once again serve as a way out of the most recent neoliberal attacks on the university. Thus, we don’t only need to reject the historically specific political problems of nationalism and elitism that I highlighted above as part of Humboldt’s agenda in order to renew the idea of the university. More importantly, I want to finish by indicating that the mobilisation of a transhistorical Humboldtian ideal cannot be in any way a successful strategy of resistance or renewal of the university beyond the boundaries of our bourgeois, capitalist society.

First of all, the idea of the researching subject as established in Wolf’s seminar can be understood as fully compatible with the logic of self-disciplining, which Michel Foucault and his contemporary interpreter, Ulrich Bröckling have identified at the core of the forms of governance within neoliberal capitalism.<sup>49</sup> The individual researcher as an “enterprising self” is taught to make himself into the slave of his own performance imperative as well as of his economic, today increasingly precarious, existence and becomes the single responsible agent for his success as well as for his failure. Secondly, the university as a social institution, with the seminar at its core, was in Humboldt’s time understood to directly serve a national agenda, which had as its goal as much a political as an economic revolution. If today, within the neoliberal university, we observe the destruction of the image of the independent scholar, we can speculatively conclude that this purpose of the university has plainly come to an end. The political and industrial revolutions have been long realised and global capitalism no longer depends on privileged institutions such as the university to separate its subjects into individuals, strata and nations in

44 And I am not claiming any direct causality here.

45 See e.g. Kouvelakis, Stathis: *Philosophy and Revolution: from Kant to Marx*, London 2003, p. 327.

46 See for the development of this argument Marx, Karl: *On the Jewish Question*, in: *Early Writings*, London 1975, p. 211.

47 Spoerhase, Carlos and Dehrmann, Mark-Georg: *Die Idee der Universität - Friedrich August Wolf und die Praxis des Seminars*, in: *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*, 5.1 (2011), p. 106, p. 115.

48 Paletschek, Sylvia: *Die Erfindung der Humboldtischen Universität*, in: *Historische Anthropologie*, 10.2 (January 2002), p. 204.

49 See Bröckling, Ulrich: *Das unternehmerische Selbst: Soziologie einer Subjektivierungsform*, Frankfurt am Main 2007.

3 See e.g. Della Costa, Mariosa; James, Selma: *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol 1975.

4 Federici, Silvia: *Wages Against Housework*, Bristol 1975, p. 197.

work as labour that allows for its free appropriation by capital.<sup>3</sup> On that ground, the “wages for housework” campaign<sup>4</sup> argued in a certain sense for the (monetary) acknowledgement (and thus valorisation) of housework as work for capital. In that sense, means of measure could possibly have been the base for a demand for payment of those forms of work, even if the strategy of the campaign finally aimed beyond the demand for wage: the impossibility of paying all reproductive work showed

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the same way as it did at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, because, as we have seen in the first part of the paper, it found other, more efficient mechanisms for that.

On these grounds, the abstract defence of the Humboldtian educational ideal including its ideology of an autonomous, self-directed researching subject, finally loses its pertinence as an argument against the neoliberalisation of the university – precisely because it is ultimately unable to question the relation between the individual and the world, or the value of social existence *tout court*. Humboldt himself operated on the assumption to already know what freedom and equality meant and therefore erected an idea of the university, which never questioned the social conditions for which the autonomous subject was supposed to be educated, but rather fitted precisely into its bourgeois form. It is because of the inability to question this idealist premise that we should reject a transhistorical invocation of Humboldt. Our chance through such a rejection based on understanding the problems of a) instituting freedom and equality qua the state and the law while ignoring the role of the private sphere altogether, as well as of b) the hidden mechanisms of exclusion behind the supposed universality of the category of the citizen, is that we can think the university as one specific place where these limits can be uncovered and contested.

To conclude: our defence of the value of the humanities that doesn't fall back into arguments that have historically supported its current crisis, needs to defend its ability to radically question the relation between man and world, which only becomes possible by going beyond the appeal to abstract ideas. It would require an understanding of students, researchers and the university not as "being *in* the world", but as "being *with* the world"<sup>50</sup>, i.e. as entities that form and transform the world with its social, political and economic contradictions and value imperatives, ideally *and* materially, as much as they are transformed by them. This

50 Freire, Paulo: *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Harmondsworth 1996, p. 56.

51 Readings, Bill: *Die Posthistorische Universität*, in: *Was Ist Universität?: Texte Und Positionen Zu Einer Idee*, ed. Unbedingte Universitäten, Berlin; Zürich 2010, p. 105.

52 See Freire: *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, pp. 25.

53 Derrida, Jacques: *Die Unbedingte Universität*, in: *Was ist Universität? Texte und Positionen zu einer Idee*, ed. Unbedingte Universitäten, Berlin; Zürich 2010, p. 189.

54 See *ibid.*, p. 190.

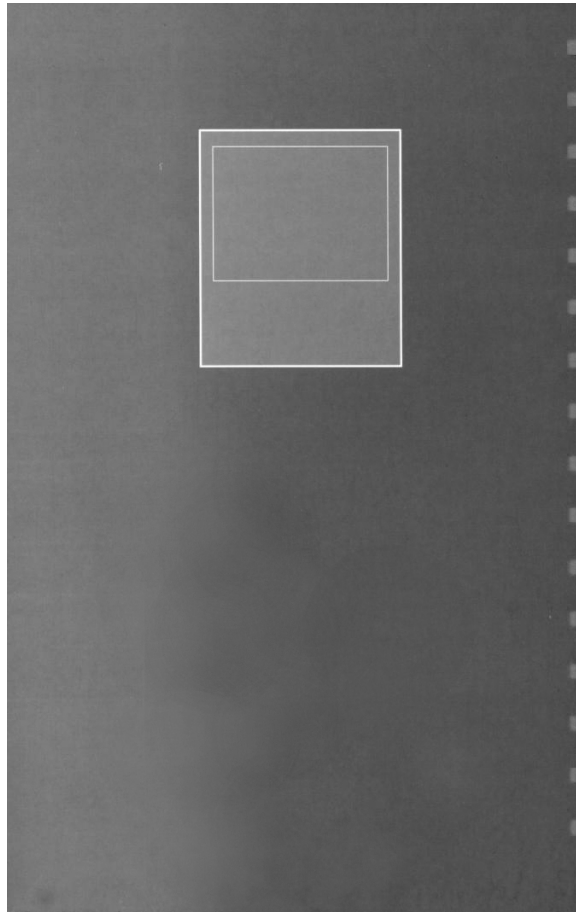
55 Spivak: *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, p. 26-27: "It was Gramsci's genius to understand that the point was to deconstruct Marx by inserting the lever in Thesis 3 and epistemologizing the project: instrumentalizing the new intellectual to produce a "revolutionary" subject as proletario-subaltern intellectual, so far invariably lost in the vanguardism of the immediate aftermath of revolutions. A disinterested episteme can allow and withstand the interruption of the ethical. Study humanism, said Gramsci [...]."

56 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

precisely capitalism's reliance on unpaid labour. But the point I want to stress here, is that it is sometimes precisely the immeasurability of certain forms of work, which allows capital to appropriate them for free. If we then claim that the monetisation of a certain area, be it care work or academic publishing, subordinates this hitherto untouched area suddenly to capital, there is the danger of forgetting how labour in those fields has been very exploitative and useful for capital even before its







way, the university becomes a place in which society cannot only imagine itself differently<sup>51</sup>, but where it can re-enact itself within its existing social relations.<sup>52</sup> The humanities in its practice of developing and disseminating ideas have a specific responsibility towards this understanding – because they are per definition concerned with “man” and her life<sup>53</sup> and because, as opposed to the natural sciences, they do actually exist in spaces that are at least partially or momentarily still closed off from neo-liberal streamlining. Core to this responsibility is the inquiry into the powers that dominate and oppress human life in its contemporary form<sup>54</sup> and the development of the humanities as an “epistemological force”<sup>55</sup> that can provide training not only for a radical historical-materialist critique of the current conditions of existence of humanity and of the humanities as a discipline, but also “for the habit of the ethical”<sup>56</sup> that rejects the current in the name of a different form of existence. Training that would take place in the name of a materialist-idealist double bind<sup>57</sup>. This would be a humanities that while not ridding itself of its necessary “moment of naivety”<sup>58</sup> as Adorno argues, cherishes an idea of sovereignty or freedom that is no longer the Humboldtian absolute autonomy, but a Derridean limited sovereignty<sup>59</sup> that does not allow itself to be “governed quite so much”<sup>60</sup> – something we cannot call *Bildung*, but critique. Against Derrida and Spivak, however, it needs to be clarified, which brings me back to the first part of the article, that „saying“ something in public alone is not enough<sup>61</sup>, because the possibility of speaking itself and the demands we formulate need their political-practical, and therefore collective, self-organised realisation. It is at this point that we finally start to be able to go beyond an idea of freedom as autonomy and instead envision a counter-rationality<sup>62</sup> of the humanities on the basis of a materially grounded social freedom.<sup>63</sup>

Grounded in a materialist critique of contemporary publishing practices and processes of valorisation, I have shown that we need to

57 Here I deliberately remain in Spivak’s terminology of the double-bind, whilst however subjecting it to a much more explicitly Marxist content – materialist-idealist as a different way of referring to dialectical materialism – than Spivak does. But to her partial defence, it should be said that Spivak is primarily concerned with reading, whereas my concern – publishing – is per definition of a different, more directly social nature.

58 Adorno, Theodor W.: Notiz über Geisteswissenschaft und Bildung, in: Was ist Universität? Texte und Positionen zu einer Idee, ed. Unbedingte Universitäten, Berlin; Zürich 2010, p. 182.

59 See Derrida: Die Unbedingte Universität, p. 193-194.

60 Foucault, Michel: What Is Critique?, in: The Politics of Truth, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth, Cambridge, MA 1997, p. 29.

61 See also Düttmann, Alexander Garcia: Euphemism, the University and Disobedience, in: Radical Philosophy 169 (2011), p. 43-47 for a similar kind of argument.

62 Couldry: Fighting for the University’s Life, p. 42.

63 Social freedom here is defined in opposition to

5 Leopoldina Fortunati shows in her study how housework, sexwork etc. are inscribed into the wage relation. See Fortunati, Leopoldina: The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital, New York 1995.

inclusion in circles of *direct* valorisation.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the immeasurability and intangibility of certain forms of labour (especially immaterial and affective labour) often works in capital’s favour. For post-Fordism it can even be argued that capital flew out of measure to a certain extent in the sense that in some areas stable contracts based on working time were displaced by flexible, short-term, project based work. Thereby capital reacted to struggles and victories of working-class movements.

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go beyond the common stance, which identifies economic valorisation as the problem but searches for the solutions elsewhere: *either* in practices of resistance and alternative publishing formats *or* in envisioning a non-capitalist concept of (human) value, both of which whilst not unimportant are problematically one-sided. While Harvard University President Drew Gilpin summarises the humanities' existence as ultimately aporetic with a responsibility to "add value and question value" at the same time<sup>64</sup>, I argue that the reforms<sup>65</sup> we struggle for need a horizon in which questioning value is, on the one hand, understood as inherently interlinked with the imperative of adding value and, on the other, aimed at breaking through this aporetic existence in the name of interrupting and displacing ideological and economic value creation. Academic publishing is one place where this struggle over value takes place.

a naïve idea of individual freedom as well as to an Arendtian idea of political freedom, which from a Marxian perspective, can only fail, because it ignores socio-economic exclusion and domination as an important condition of freedom.

64 Zelizer, Barbie: *Making the University Matter*, London; New York 2011, p. 2.

65 I agree with Pirie that it would be wrong to reject any reformist stance in the face of the complexity of the struggle.

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Measure thus seems to be a tool strategically (not) employed by capital and not a necessity for valorisation.

What does this mean in relation to academic publishing?

Firstly it is necessary to state that academic publishing can be exploitative and useful for the production of value even if there is no direct profit for the publisher (the same goes for the university as such: even a 100% state financed, non-profit university has an important role in the (re-)

production of capitalist social relations and serves capitalist value production). Secondly, and that is the inestimable lesson of (materialist) feminism, we shouldn't limit our critique of exploitation to wage labour and monetarisation, but instead be attentive to exploitation in fields where labour is unwaged and often naturalised in a way that it does not appear to be labour (but love, vocation, natural duty etc.). Here, this incentive should turn our attention to aspiring and unwaged academics, to which publishing in prestigious journals is necessary in order to get jobs. From that perspective, the publishing business as it exists, appears as a machine to extract huge amounts of free labour in exchange for a weak promise of future.

#### Publishing as Speculative Investment from Below

Looking at this business from the perspective of the graduate student or aspiring academic then allows to understand publishing as an economy fuelled by speculation from below. While it can be argued that faculty staff gets paid for publishing by their regular wage, publishing in the case of aspiring academics is almost always completely unpaid. In general very few authors of academic papers or books in the humanities get paid for the work of writing (and almost no one according to the time spent for the actual process of writing). In some cases authors even pay a fee for the publication of their work in important journals and mostly also for the printing of their first book. The remuneration authors hope for is the recognition of their work and subsequent career prospects. While the h-Index is a weapon in the struggle for efficiency, ideological streamlining and works in favour of big publishing corporations, it is not some sort of objective measure of value in the Marxian sense, nor is it its monetary expression. It bears little relation to the working time embodied in the articles and while of course it is some sort of academic currency, it is a weird one: its convertibility works only for one side, hence it is not a general equivalent.

In that respect impact factors can be understood as an academic currency as well, but a very unequal and unsecured one. After all, it is not as if a certain number of peer-reviewed articles with a certain h-Index could be exchanged for a job in the academia. Quite the contrary: it is never sure how many articles, books, conference papers etc. will be sufficient to get a job and some form of social security. Publishing, just as undertaking a degree, is then very much a speculative investment from below. The student or young researcher invests a lot of money (for

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6 Additionally, the important work of peer-reviewing is in most cases also done for free.

7 Eichhorst, Werner; Hinte, Holger; Rinne; Ulf: Youth Unemployment in Europe: What to Do About It?, IZA Policy Paper No. 65, <http://ftp.iza.org/pp65.pdf> [11.12.2013].

fees amongst other things), time and labour power in the hope of being paid back with a secure job at some point. But the risks of this speculative economy are allocated very unequally. It is the student who has to invest in the hope of being repaid at some point. Academic publishers simply exploit those aspirations by providing the infrastructure and selling the products they get for free.<sup>6</sup> Quite successfully by the way: in 2010 academic publishing giant Elsevier reported profits of 36 percent on revenues of 3.2 billion US-Dollar.

## The Crisis of Free Labour

The speculative economy works quite similar concerning degrees. If you invest more money (e.g. for Oxbridge instead of a regular university) and more time (taking out a loan instead of working part-time to finance your studies) and labour power (by working harder), you are more likely to get a secure and well-paid job. But this is of course no fair race to the top where the boldest player gets the best job. It reproduces and deepens inequality, because who can afford university fees to begin with? Who can afford to study full-time without working alongside? Who can afford unpaid internships? Who can publish their PhD thesis for a few thousand Euros? Thus the economy of the CV (including a list of publications, languages spoken, internships etc.) is a speculative economy fuelled by a false promise: if you work hard, at some point you can get a secure and well-paid job. Furthermore, for the current generation this is very much a broken promise. Because there are less jobs and tenure appears more and more like a myth from the old days than something that can be hoped for realistically. 40% of the youth in crisis-ridden Spain is unemployed. The average unemployment rate for young academics increased from 12 % in 2008 to nearly 18 % in 2012 in the EU.<sup>7</sup> Because of the increasing reserve army of academic labour, competition becomes fiercer, which makes it even easier for capital and the state to exploit free labour. Today, every student needs to provide huge amounts of unpaid and very precarious labour before being able to hope for a secure job.

In this respect academia is not very different from the cultural industry – or other industries, for that matter: you are asked to provide years of free labour before they even consider starting to pay you. Sometimes, this would be funny, if it was not so sad: One cannot deny the irony of a graduate student paying 400 pounds to a publisher for her/his work to appear in a specialist journal and the fact that the publisher then sells this work to the university (its library) to which the student on the

8 Althusser, Louis: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses, in: ib.: Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays, New York 1971, p. 121-176.

9 Marx, Karl: Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 694.

other hand is paying 5000 pounds a year for her/his PhD (including use of the library in other words the right to read her own article) and which will probably turn down her/his application for a post after s/he finishes the degree.

### Beyond Marketisation

To summarise: while it is tempting to compare a university to a capitalist enterprise, it is sometimes misleading to equalize them. Even if the marketisation of the universities increases the cultural affinity to enterprises, especially concerning the logics of management, universities have a special position in capitalist economies and different functions. The most important one is the (re-)production of skilled labour and knowledge. Even if in cognitive capitalism the university gains importance as a site of production in addition to its traditional function as ideological state apparatus<sup>8</sup> – and the war over measure is certainly an indicator for this increasing importance –, in a certain sense it has always been the edu-factory directed at exploitation and “accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain”<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore a critique of the neoliberal university, and Bromberg touches on that problematic in her second part, cannot be limited to a critique of the direct valorisation of academic labour, which is indeed increasingly taking place across the campuses. Among other things, such a critique tends to ignore the role of the state and the ‘old university’ for capitalism. Here, a nostalgia named Humboldt will not help us as Bromberg pointedly argues. If we limit our critique to the “marketisation” there is, amongst other problems, a danger of once again focusing on production and wage labour while losing sight of forms of precarious and highly exploited free labour, which is not *directly* valorised but nevertheless central to the functioning of yesterday’s and today’s economic circuits.

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