Precarity as Resistance and Cultural Solidarity: A Critical Pedagogy for Exploitative Flexibilisation

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Abstract
This discursive paper uses the work of Freire and others to propose a critical pedagogy for precarity which is grounded in forms of radical (post)politics. A critical pedagogy for precarity is proposed that calls for a replacement of, or synthesis with, the UK government's employability in HE agenda. Through the conscientisation of prospective graduates towards a 'being-with-the-world' and the associated mental habits and bodily practices that focus on the principles of a Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), solidarity, reciprocity and sustainability, as a response to precarity, is possible by creating local solidarity-based associational spaces for critical education and praxis, we advocate for critical pedagogical practices alongside more opportunities for collective action that engender solidarity, reciprocity and sustainability in graduates' bodily practices and modes of thinking and being, through a critical pedagogy that facilitates cultural action for freedom, self-help and collective forms of social provisioning of biological and social needs: housing, food, energy production, social caring and welfare needs in general.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Experience of Precarity

The widespread experience of precarity points towards the need to rework the praxis of critical pedagogy as a means of liberation resulting in the subjectivities of active social action (Freire, 1973, 1990, 1993, 2000, 2014) against the social conditions imposed by the (re)precarisation of labour relations and the social realm. This requires a decoupling from the existing embedded employability strategies as a magic bullet (Arora, 2013; Speight, Lackovic, and Cooker, 2013) and to move pedagogical imaginaries towards a reframing of liberation as an active resistance to future exploitative flexibilisation facing graduates in the new economy. The term *imaginaries* suggests that our shared practices – political, social, economic – are enabled by way of a collective imagining concerning their purpose and significance. Taylor (2004) and Jessop (2012) elaborate on the power and hold of imaginaries to reduce the

cognitive complexity of making sense of the social world. Jessop (2012, p.2) provides the following definition;

> An imaginary provides one entry point into a supercomplex reality and can also be associated with different standpoints, which frame and contain debates, policy discussions, and conflicts over particular ideal and material interests. Hegemonic and dominant imaginaries are generally socially instituted and socially embedded and get reproduced through various mechanisms that help to maintain their cognitive and normative hold on the social agents involved in the field(s) that it maps. Such 'mental maps' matter most where the sum of activities in relevant field(s) is so unstructured and complex that it cannot be an object of effective calculation, management, governance, or guidance. This makes a shared imaginary essential to agents' capacities to 'go on' in that supercomplex world, but the necessary simplifications can also have counter-productive effects.

The dominant imaginary of the marketization of higher education in the UK has established an indentured condition mediated through student debt (Holden and McElroy, 2015; Bachan, 2014; Ibrahim, 2011). Additionally, both cognitive and corporeal surveillance is prevalent in the neoliberal university leading to concerns for the traditional role of universities in nurturing cohesion and managing difference in multi-cultural societies (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2016; Rights Watch (UK), 2016; Thomas, 2012). This paper aims to revisit Freire's concept of *conscientisation*, which is viewed primarily as a strategy concerned with power, literacy, the self-encounter and the acquisition of an explanatory vocabulary as a means for political awakening and *cultural action for freedom*, which represents agential possibilities. Freire is associated with teaching strategies sensitive to the effects of relations of power based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, and so forth, and on learning and consciousness formation (Morrow and Torres, 2002). The widespread experience of precarity is a shared condition that can provide new forms of belonging and action (Freire's conscientisation) within the emergent fragmentation of class structure in an enduring crisis-ridden economy.

1.2 Definitions of Precarity

Whilst the generative mechanisms of precarity are too numerous to discuss here, for the purpose of this paper, certain assumptions are made in defining precarity below. Precarity is defined here as the social, ecological, economic, cultural or political conditions that:

I. limit the stability (corresponding to prevailing measures and or metrics or policy measures) of economic security in a given context (measured as readily convertible capital and assets, such as money or other economic instruments in sufficient quantities, excluding debt) that in normal conditions create the opportunity to weather short-term crisis and shocks (Walker, Hanna, Cunningham and Ambrose, 2015);
II. progressively deteriorates social mobility - intra-generational and intergenerational (Bukodi, Goldthrope, Waller, and Kuha, 2015; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 2010; Goldthrope and Jackson, 2007). Social immobility is defined here as a generational discrepancy between parental and offspring's ontological insecurity and existential anxiety measured by the (in)ability to plan for the future (Solon, 2015; Campos-Matos and Kawachi, 2014; Chin and Culetta, 2014 and Piketty and Saez, 2014). It is assumed that security from precarity is transmitted across generations through capital assets and inheritance, and is deferred or displaced between social groups intra-

generationally (from spouse to spouse, parent to offspring, offspring to parent in any one period) through the precarisation of one particular social group in opposition to the other as a 'fix' for multi-generational immobility.

III. limit the ability to exchange skills (World Economic Forum, 2016; De Pleijt and Weisdorf, 2014)[1] in a knowledge-based economy (OECD, 1996; Brinkley, Fauth, Mahdon and Theodoropoulou, 2009; Sum and Jessop, 2013)[2] for wages or income above the required sum to sustain a livelihood (Lee and Sissons, 2016; Lee, Sissons and Jones, 2016; Goos, Manning and Salomans, 2010) corresponding to the ability to make long-term choices, e.g., marriage, family planning, housing (Oshio, 2008; Allison, 2013; Cangiano, 2016, pp.4);

IV. increase political desistance (Laurison, 2015; Armingeion and Schädel, 2015; Teivainen and Trommer, 2017; Kagarlitsky, 2017; Pettifor, 2017; Jessop, 2017;) defined as disengagement from formal or informal forms of government and governance and limits political resistance (Ettlinger, 2007; Maeir, 2013; Foran, 2014; Neilson, 2015; Vogiatzoglou, 2015;) defined as engagement in direct and indirect forms of formal and informal social action in a given social context due to ontological insecurity and existential anxiety.

1.3 Precarity as a Paradigm Shift

The political issues surrounding precarity (Lee and Kofman, 2012) have identified a range of contributing factors that focus on urban life (Mayer, 2012); the labour market (Elcioglu, 2010); industrial relations (Cunningham, Baines, Shields and Lewchuk); welfare reform (Greer, 2016); the political potential of migrant labour (Banki, 2013; Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson and Waite, 2015); migrant worker experiences (Scott, 2015, Potter and Hamilton, 2014); creative labour (Murray and Gollmitzer, 2012) and the transitions for youth (Bright, 2016).

It was during the late 1980s and early 1990s that, through its use by social movement activists and critical theory academics, the notions of precarity acquired the *new* meaning (Biglia and Bonet Marti, 2014). Precarity points toward the social and economic condition of abandonment at the core of social life by the crisis of the welfare state and by the weakening of labour rights associated broadly with neoliberal economic planning. It is the dismantling of this safety net as a reality or as a project that signals one constellation of meanings around precarity. Casas-Cortés (2014) identifies four distinct although interrelated conceptual developments that redefine precarity as follows: (i) labour after the rollback of welfare state provisions; (ii) the new paradigm of intermittent and immaterial labour; (iii) the unceasing mobility of labour; (iv) the feminisation of labour and life. The term precarity can be seen to have come to prominence at a specific historical juncture in many post-industrialist societies that is associated with changing economic landscapes, intensifying trajectories of neoliberalism and globalisation (Dicken, 2003; Gorz, 1982, 2000; Ohmae, 1990; Aglietta, 1979) and increased mobility (Urry, 2000).

[1] Some have suggested that downward mobility and some deskilling during the classical years of the Industrial Revolution (c. 1750-1850) and some in the agricultural sector (between 1550-1750) took place. The transition from artisan workshops to factory production and that mass production substantially raised the demand for unskilled workers (including women and children).

[2] See OECD (1996) Knowledge-Based Economy for a description, for a definition, Brinkley, I. (2006) Knowledge economy programme report. The Work Foundation and for a critique Sum and Jessop (2013) Competitiveness, the Knowledge-Based Economy and Higher Education. Journal of the Knowledge Economy, 4 (1). pp. 24-44.

1.4 Precarity as vulnerability and instrument of governing

Precarity indicates an ontological condition of vulnerability, exposure, or capacity to suffer shared by all living creatures: the inability of life to survive without a protective net provided by others, by social caring, and collective protection leading to fluctuating ontological security and existential anxiety (Neilson, 2015; Giorgi, 2013). Butler, in Precarious Life (2004), confronted what she calls precariousness, which should be distinguished from precarity intended in the labour market sense. For Butler, precariousness is an ontological and existential category that describes the common, but unevenly distributed, fragility of human corporeal existence. The political usage of the term precarity relates to an attempt to identify or imagine precarious, contingent or flexible, workers as a new kind of political subject, replete with their own forms of collective (dis)organisation and modes of expression. In its most ambitious formulation it would encompass not only the condition of precarious workers but a more general existential state, understood at once as a source of 'political subjection, of economic exploitation and of opportunities to be grasped' (Standing, 2011, 2014).

1.5 Precarity as insecurity

Precarity is a concept that is located within the wider discourses of resistance to the *new economy* (Maume and Wilson, 2015; Baldry, 2007). In sum, the new economy characterized by job insecurity, deindustrialization, and occupational polarization that represents a break with the past. These discourses of resistance re-present precarity as a symbolic form or expression, or symptom of the exploitative relations that are an enduring feature of social formations (Sassen, 2014). Precarity is an ontological subjectivity and a social condition, whereby ontological, economic, political and social insecurity leads to the experience of temporal poverty, informalisation of labour rights, casualisation of social life and the deprivation of a sense of belonging including class consciousness and/or occupational community.

Two broad strands of literature can be distinguished in research on precarious employment; precarious employment as insecurity regarding income sufficiency and regarding job stability (Rodgers and Rodgers 1989; Quinlan, Mayhew and Bohle, 2001; Barbier 2004; Kalleberg 2011; Olsthoorn, 2014). This literature only provides measures rather than address the ontological insecurity and future crisis potentialities of the new economy that new graduates are likely to encounter. In order to define a radical critical pedagogy for precarity, we need to reflect on the conditions wrought by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the Eurozone Crisis and Brexit. It has been argued by some that, at least in the US and UK, young people aged 16-24[3] have suffered disproportionately during the recession (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Part-time working, working-time preferences and increased migration suggest that younger age groups are more supply-constrained than other age groups by reduced levels of labour demand during the recession (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). This can be explained through the intense competition for jobs between the young and those at a much later stage in their careers, possibly approaching retirement. Job insecurity is becoming the norm for young people in the UK (The Economist, 2013; The Conversation, 2014; Simmons and Smyth, 2016).

[3] In 2015, both graduate and non-graduate employment rates returned to their pre-recession levels; however postgraduate employment rates remained below their pre-recession level. Graduates saw an annual decline in their high skilled employment rate between 2014 and 2015 of 1.3 percentage points across the working age population (16-64 year olds) and 2.2 percentage points across the young population (21-30 year olds).

In response to the contradictory and uneven distribution of social and economic impacts of globalisation, Walters and Cooper (2011) argue the case for a re-insertion of politics and power into the theory and practice of lifelong learning and work. This provides a starting point for the dialogical practice of a radical critical pedagogy for precarity. They cite the work of authors such as Mojab (2009) who proposes that "turning work and lifelong learning inside out" and standing conceptions of learning on their head through a re-interpretation of conceptions of knowledge and learning, or current practices of work-related education and training to critically analyse the social relations that underpin these conceptions and practices. The process of commodification that is transforming learning into a possession to be traded for gain in the market-place in parallel with "learning as dispossession", stripping away a person's identity and the understanding of their own exploitation (Walters and Daniels, 2009). Estrela (1999) pointed to the ambiguities and misleading ideas about the relations of power which are established among teachers, educators and trainees, the ways and effects of the reflection. Conscientisation of reflective practices which are more than a collection of techniques, a reflective practice should be based on an educational and training theory which should stimulate the teacher to take critical consciousness of the educational situations and of his/her own practice in the situation. This paper advances the issues raised by Estrela in the context of the precarity faced by graduates today. Freire's concept of conscientisation linked to the dialectic unity of theory and practice through praxis should produce an instrument of theoretical and operational value for education. New interpretations will cause the teacher to wonder about him/herself, about the world around him/her, promoting a critical and dialogist relationship towards the world, solidarity with others and to explore technical and practical reason.

2. Changing Landscapes

2.1 The Economic Landscape Facing UK Graduates

In the context of a deepening and widening retreat of state funded social protection systems, combined with an abandonment of the standard employment contract model by employers in welfare capitalist states, larger shares of risks from the crises from economic instability in a globalised economy are (re)shifting to individuals. High skilled labour are not exempt from the threat of ontological insecurity and existential anxiety on a more regular basis. Human labour is being displaced by automation, robotics and artificial intelligence combined with the major challenges of reviving growth, reforming market capitalism and managing technological change (The World Economic Forum, 2017).

Whilst graduate employment vacancies have increased over the last year and the UK HE sector perceive a buoyant labour market for graduates, graduates are reporting exploitative practices in employer culture (Higher Education Careers Services Unit, 2017; Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, 2016, pp.9). More generally in the UK, despite increasing the total employment over the last forty years, the UK employment stock and employment rate from 1971 to 2013 suggests that during recessions in the 1980s and 1990s and most recently in 2008, the labour market recovered to regain jobs that were lost and total employment has been at record levels in recent years (Office of National Statistics, 2013). This does not necessarily result in income security (Abrassart, 2015; International Labour Organisation, 2014). The early experiences of class remain an active variable in career success for graduates, and only through personal strategies and supported reflective action can this be addressed (Burke, 2015a; Burke, 2015b; Atkinson, 2013; Christie, 2017).

Since the GFC in 2008, Euro-zone crisis and Brexit (Price and Livsey, 2013; Cantillon, 2013; Centre for Economic Performance, 2016; Miller, 2016), living standards have been directly affected as a result of the vicious cycle of debt defaults, retrenchment of welfare and a trend of de-globalisation. Cumulatively, "*the outlook for living standards in 21st century Britain do not look promising"* (Corlett and Clarke, 2017, pp. 12; MacQuarie Group, 2016). Between 2004 and 2013, there has been a significant percentage change in employment. Technological change, globalisation and demographics have been the key drivers of change in the structure of employment and patterns of demand for skills in the 21st century so far. Skills possessed will provide graduates with good employment prospects and education will play a key role in helping them understand society and the economy, and their role in it, with a greater emphasis required on social values and help for graduates to gain a broader understanding of what makes happiness and well-being (Wilson, 2013, pp.107; 2012).

The UK economy underwent its longest and deepest recession since at least the Second World War and the recovery remains the slowest on record. Output is over 15 per cent below what it would have been had the long-run trend growth (1955-2008) continued from 2008 onwards. Thus, full economic recovery has a long way to go (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015). Between 1997-2013 there has been a fall in employment for UK men under 25 and UK men 25-49, UK women under 25, UK women low skilled aged 25-49 and 50-64. A rise in employment for high-skilled UK men aged 50-64, high-skilled UK women aged 25-49 and 50-64 (*ibid.)*. Whilst job polarisation is explained in general as technical progress with machines replacing people in routine tasks for which software programmes can now perform the task, in Britain, the demand for both low-skilled and high-skilled employment has also shrunk, alongside competition for work and employers demanding higher skills for lower salaries (Goos and Manning, 2003; 2007; Manning, 2013). Offshoring has led to a decline in middle-jobs as these jobs move to economies with lower wage costs, jobs are being replaced by low wage jobs requiring higher skills (Urry, 2014, pp.1-15). For instance, skilled crafts and bank clerks have declined in volume and are being replaced, in some part, by other mid-pay jobs that require similar skills requirements. There is widespread evidence for the existence of hollowing-out or job polarisation, whereby if jobs are ranked by their initial wage at a point in time in the late 1980s or early 1990s, then increases in employment share are observed at the top and bottom of this distribution, whereas those jobs that were in the middle have lost employment share over time with intermediate jobs with lower pay offsetting some of the offshoring effect (Lloyd, Mason and Mayhew, 2008; Holmes and Mayhew, 2016, 2012; McIntosh, 2013; Butcher, 2013).

The UK central government expenditure and receipts 1947-2014 also show that receipts more or less have kept up with expenditure with a marked divergence from this trend since 2008 (Jowett and Hardy, 2014, pp.8; Pope and Waters, 2016, pp.37). This means that despite record levels of employment, income and corporation tax collection are lagging behind, however Value Added Tax receipts have risen sharply since 2009-2010 impacting on the cost of living (Jowett and Hardy, 2014. pp.7; Corlett and Clarke, 2017). The growth in the number of employee jobs has been somewhat weaker and this is a contributory factor. While there were 29.7 million in June 2016 – a record number – employee jobs increased by 366,000 (or 1.2 per cent) on June 2015, and 99,000 (0.3 per cent) since April 2016. In contrast, self-employed jobs have grown three times as fast, with a 3.5 per cent increase (151,000) in the year to June

2016, to 4.53 million, although the number of self-employed jobs remained just below the peak recorded in June 2014 of 4.55 million (Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, pp.16-36).

Since 2010 real wages have fallen by around two per cent each year, the longest sustained period of falling real wages in the UK on record. The marked decline in real pay since the onset of the recession, and its stagnation on some measures, is linked to the drop in productivity, increasing non-wage costs of employment, and a rise in inequality within wages. The UK has seen a sustained growth in self-employment, accounting for 83 per cent of the net gains in employment since 2007, however this is alongside a fall in relative earnings from self-employment and substantial real terms reduction in income. There has also been an increase in 'precarious' forms of employment, including casual, very short-term arrangements or those with 'zero hours' contracts. (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2014).

The UK graduate population are hit hardest by job volatility, between 2006-2015 graduate annual employment rates are only now returning to pre-recession levels. Graduates aged 21-30 had lower high skilled employment rates than any of the other graduate age categories, which may suggest it takes time for graduates to become established in the labour market or to reach the higher levels in organisations that are captured by the high skilled employment rate measure. Graduates saw an annual decline in their high skilled employment rate between 2014 and 2015 of 1.3 percentage points across the working age population (16-64 year olds) and 2.2 percentage points across the young population (21-30 year olds). Graduates that studied 'Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics' (STEM) subjects in their degree had higher employment rates, greater high skilled employment rates, lower unemployment rates and higher median salaries than graduates that studied 'Other Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities' (OSSAH) subjects (Kreyenfeld, Gunnar and Ariane, 2012; Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016a).

2.2 The Oversupply of Graduates?

The expansion of the UK higher education sector (1970-2013) has been greater than in most of the rest of Europe, however, *occupational filtering down* means that graduates are entering jobs that were once carried out by their non-graduate mothers and fathers. A degree has become a requirement for an ever-larger proportion of jobs and skills mismatches are leading to 4.3 million workers possessing skills and qualifications beyond the requirements of their employment (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2015). The number of non-employing businesses have increased by 112,000 with the growth being around +3% (Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016b; New Policy Institute, 2015), which is a demonstration of contemporary production practices that will in future perpetuate precarious labour market experiences due to the mismatch between graduate skills and prospective employment. The era of downward mobility is now a reality, the role of education in social promotion valorised in discourses of meritocracy have been exposed as cloaks for the naked inequality of human conditions and prospects (Bauman, 2012; Giroux, 2014; Giroux, 2015).

3. A radical critical pedagogy for precarity?

3.1 Social and solidarity economy education

> 'If we fail to understand precarisation, then we understand neither the politics nor the economy of the present…In the leading neoliberal Western industrial nations it can no longer be outsourced to the socio-geographical spaces of the periphery where it only affects others…It has become an instrument of governing and, at the same time, a basis for capitalist accumulation that serves social regulation and control' (Lorey, 2015:1).

The main argument in this paper is that critical pedagogy in an era of widespread precarity requires a redefinition, politicising graduates towards formal politics is unlikely to lead to any significant improvement in happiness and well-being. Instead, it is proposed that we turn to Friere's concept of *conscientisation* towards the exchange of skills and knowledge in a social and solidarity economy (SSE). SSE aims to locally reinvent economic life on the margins of the capitalist system based on values of *solidarity, reciprocity* and *sustainability* as opposed to vulnerability to precarity through the accumulation of student debt as the foundation for housing debt in the future.

SSE is related to other familiar concepts such as Social Economy; Solidarity Economy; Plural Economy; Popular Economy; Third Sector. Defourny (1990) defines social economy as made up of associative activities based on values of solidarity, autonomy and citizenship. Those activities are carried out by commercial enterprises, mutuals and associations that operate based on the following principles: (i) democratic decision-making, (ii) social goals, and (iii) limited return on capital and socialization of benefits. The social economy positions itself as a third form of enterprise in a pluralist economy alongside the traditional private and public sectors SSE is associated with emphasising the imperatives of social and often environmental protection, but also systemic transformation. It has six forms or features: family; domestic; autonomous; community; associative; and cooperative. It has been argued that the latter three can be seen as part of a popular and solidarity economy. In European contexts, SSE is sometimes conflated with the *third sector,* defined as not part of the government, any profits are usually reinvested for social, environmental or cultural aims, and participation is largely voluntary. Any returns from enterprise are maximized for collective or mutual benefit (Amin, 2009; Neamtan, 2009; Utting, van Dijk and Matheï, 2014).

Applying SSE to graduate employability education aims to find solutions to the ontological insecurity and existential anxiety through economic uncertainty to be faced by many graduates in the UK, as a response to employability education measured by the normalisation of compliance to exploitation in the existing neoliberal economy and paradigms of "trickle up economics" and "competition fetish" (Chang, 2015; David, 2016; Naidoo, 2016). Security from precarity is possible by redefining economic life through transformative practices from the bottom up by providing *local solidarity-based associational spaces* and engaging in a science of social provisioning by redefining the *intent* and *content* of economic life, opened up through a radical critical pedagogy for precarity with SSE at its core (Whyte and Wiegratz, 2016; Dash, 2016; Polanyi, 1944).

Society cannot function without the *value* that is derived from unpaid work. The discourses of unpaid work and precarity allude to forms of exploitation, whereby graduates in internships or work-based learning placements offering their time for free act as free labour in the economy. A critical pedagogy for precarity shows possibilities of social value production and social value provisioning through collective action. Social provisioning in the context of the current discussion is aligned to Todorova's (2013: 62) definition, as the provision 'for the material means of life which results in economic activities that generate the flow of goods and services that is necessary to meet the biological and socially-created needs of individuals and to maintain various social values'. This paper does not argue for systemic change in welfare-destroying crises, although this is seen as an evitable course of political action in response to the current crises of capitalist accumulation, financialisation of social life and the flexibilisation of existence. We advocate for more opportunities for collective action that engenders *solidarity, reciprocity and sustainability* in graduates' bodily practices and modes of thinking and being through a critical pedagogy that *conscientises* self-help and social provisioning of biological and social needs - housing, food, energy production and social caring.

Events during the 2000s, especially in southern Europe and the US are evidence of "precarisation as governmental precarisation" and corresponding responses of resistance, social insecurity can be found in the most different ways and in the most diverse social positions. Living and working conditions of precarity are being normalised at the structural level, and as a result have become a "fundamental governmental instrument of governing" (Lorey, 2015, pp.63). The contemporary period can be viewed as a period in which the normalisation of precarisation occurs through subjugation and conformity, creating widespread ontological insecurity and existential anxiety through the fear of being disposable, replaceable and flexibilised. 'Flexicurity' (Chung, 2012) in conjunction with technology and the cyber-augmented-digital-reality world act as an ever established mode of human-human interaction and human-production. This process is creating uncertainty for graduate experiences in the labour market as well as in the social realm.

The site for the production of skills as a means to obtain security lie within the university. In the *university*, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education emphasises *employability, enterprise skills* and *entrepreneurial skills* through (i) careers services; (ii) as a focus for improving student's experience of learning; (iii) embedding employability in the curriculum design; (iv) enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives; (v) national initiatives, such as, the *Higher Education Achievement Report;* (vi) links with employers; (vii) skills development and professionalisation in the existing higher education workforce and (viii) digitial literacy. Meanwhile, the business community is working to ensure that education remains the best way to raise living standards; plan for the Apprenticeship-Levy; access to skills from the global talent; and a flexible labour market (The Confederation of British Industry, 2017; Quality Assurance Agency, 2014, pp. 1-4;).

Over the past decade discourses in higher education policy have leaned towards state-led attempts to tighten the relationship between higher education and the economy (Leitch, 2006). Higher education in the UK has experienced some key structural changes; gradual massification and more recently greater individual burden, risk and expenditure towards higher education in the form of indebtedness through student fees. State commitment to

financing higher education declines as it applies pressure through regulation of the 'market responsiveness' of the curricula offered in universities. This coincides with a shift towards a flexicurity in a post-industrial knowledge-driven economy. At the same time, the creation of new forms of higher education institutions and degree provision show the future threats to quality and integrity that are evident in the emerging infrastructure of higher degree apprenticeships with *independent end point assessment organisations* and *co-investment models* requiring large employers, SMEs and HEIs to collaborate through public sector procurement and regulation regimes (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2017; Skills Funding Agency, 2017). This will lead to a more heterogeneous mix of graduates leaving universities who face more flexible labour markets and workplaces, the overall contraction of management forms of employment, an increasing intensification in global competition for skilled labour and increased state driven attempts to maximise the outputs of the university system (Harvey, 2000; House of Commons, 2009; Brown and Lauder, 2009; Tomlinson, 2012, pp. 25). The current iteration of the employability agenda can be found in the *Teaching Excellence Framework*, which will assess a higher education provider's competence through measuring the destinations of graduates entering high-skilled employment (Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016c).

3.2 Responses to precarity in Freire's process of *conscientisation*

Today, graduates face the "perils of precarity" (Kalleberg, 2013) in an economy faced with a situation where growth is achieved without jobs (DeNicco, 2015; Shimer, 2012; International Labour Organisation, 2014), profit is produced without prosperity (Lazonick, 2014) and work is carried out without job quality (Kalleberg, 2012). In order to develop: (a) a critical pedagogy for precarity and (b) praxis centred around pedagogical strategies of resisting exploitative flexibilisation, we first need to investigate the post-GFC crisis landscape. There is a risk here to restrict analysis and intervention that only deals with issues such as unemployment, conditions of work including contractual arrangements and jobs, as indicators that the longer term effects of the GFC have been neutralised. Jobs are empirically and pragmatically relevant as the tangible outcomes of debt-based investment in higher education, but jobs alone do not fulfil the higher purpose of pedagogy. Instead, the shared exploitative flexibilisation experienced by the educator and the student in the UK in 2016, provides the scope for dialogical co-intentional action (Read and Leathwood, 2014).

In *Cultural Action for Freedom (2000),* Paulo Freire explains the process of conscientisation as an instrinsic element of collective and socio-cultural action for freedom. He asks us to reject the mechanistic, behaviourist understanding of consciousness as a mere replica of reality,[4] instead, proposing a critical dimension of consciousness that recognises that human beings are not dormant agents in transforming their reality from *being in the world,* signifying a lack of both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, to *being with the world,* which can be achieved only through an objective distance from reality. The construction of our reality is a social process, so requires interaction with others. This interaction may cause a sense of difference or solidarity, as all humans are both subjects and objects of conflicting cultures. Many of our mental habits and bodily practices are inherited in a 'taken for granted' fashion and need modifying in order to alleviate ontological insecurity and existential anxiety. We are arguing here that it is the conscientisation of social and solidarity economy practices

[4] Freire provides a further framework in which conscientisation can only occur by moving beyond, mechanistic objectivism, solipsistic idealism and logical behaviourism.

collectively that can provide an enduring security. In the analysis of the causation of human action, the level of the species (genetic populations) should be considered as distinct from the level of social structures (institutions, organizations, social groups, social classes) and from the level of personal identity. Correspondingly, the evolutionary time of the species should be distinguished from the historical time of social structures, and that should be distinguished from the biographical time of individual life. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]; Luckmann, 2008; Klüver, 2008; Correa, Asuncíon and Estibaliz, 2015).

In order to transform mental habits and bodily practices *local solidarity-based associational spaces*, firstly have to be created and utilised as the classroom for a radical critical pedagogy for precarity, in which *being in the world* consciousness can be transformed into *being with the world* consciousness. Objective distance from reality can only be created when approaches to social value production utilise post-disciplinarity, inter-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity practices in order to produce social provisioning of housing, food, energy and welfare in general, in exchange for time resources from graduates across disciplines towards social provisioning.

> 'Whereas the being that merely lives is not capable of reflecting upon itself and knowing itself living **in** the world, the existent subject reflects upon his [sic.] life within the very domain of existence, and questions his relationship to the world. His domain of existence is the domain of work, of history, of culture, of values – the domain in which [humans] experience the dialectic between determinism and freedom' (Freire, 2000: 40).

The *consciousness of* and *action upon* reality is the entry point into the critical dimension of consciousness. This critical dimension can be developed into a characteristic of reflective instinct, then imagination, *intentionality, temporality and transcendence*. Temporality refers to the fact that *here and there* cannot exist without a now, before and after. Once subjective reality becomes objectified giving power to words, as a means to communicate through a common language that describes the dehumanising conditions of precarisation, including linguistic, non-dyadic communication, semiotic, and interpersonal non-verbal communication. In learning a common language that articulates relations of oppression and domination, we learn to define and to distinguish between the 'human' and 'de-human' practices and encounter the *problem posing* or imagining of alternatives, once we think about reality in these terms. This is the starting point of imagining an individual biography that is a unique history, with a now, before and after, as well as a biography, which is socially universal, common and shared, this being the need to sustain ourselves in the evolutionary sense and through productive work. Such biographies include *cultures of silence* and *dialectics of change in the social structure* - superstructure as the world as we find it plus infrastructure as the means to resist and alter the world as we find it; dominators as those who "have a voice" + dominated as those who exist in a "culture of silence". In today's terms, Freire provides a helpful insight to question the nature of the relationship between 'the metropolitan' or 'urbanised' and the 'dependent' or precarious societies in critiquing the neo-liberal pedagogy of employability.

The metropolitan and the urban are outcomes of the acceleration of urbanisation, the atomisation and individualisation of life represented by a globalised economy logic of a financialised world of debt-based growth that gives a dominant definition to pedagogy and stratifies and contains populations, spaces and places in a hierarchy of core, periphery and

semi-periphery relations. These social relations constitute peculiar pedagogical subjectivities and identities that presuppose the servility to the neoliberal logic and the centrality of this as the purpose of higher education (Readings, 1997; Canaan and Shumar, 2008; Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011; McGettigan, 2013; Rapper and Olsen, 2016). The neo-liberalisation of higher education in the UK legitimises modes of *naïve transitive/semi-intransitive* consciousness that obscures the "structural perception", which is contingent to obliterate the dominated consciousness including self-blame, and to objectify the problematical situations in the daily life of the graduates' lived experience through a praxis against their perceived *natural incapacity*. The authentic dialogic conversation between the educator and the student mediates the conscientisation process as a mutual or reciprocal encounter. This is only possible through the denunciation of dehumanising and unjust structures and the re-envisioning of a new reality. In this way, higher education becomes the site in which the antagonism between cultural action for domestication – domination and oppression, cultural action for conscientisation - the scientific unveiling of reality and cultural action for freedom - the philosophy of the science of the unveiling of reality or the debunking of the mystifications of ideological knowledge, can be realised.

Conscientisation ensures that after the critical dimensions of consciousness come into being, once manifest, do not then degenerate into the old cultural myths. Freire advocates for a post-disciplinary approach to conscientisation. Specialisms narrow the area of 'knowledge' in such a way that the specialists are incapable of thinking and lose sight of the speciality as a whole. Conscientisation is the basic dimension of reflective action for educator and student. Whilst Freire's (1970) call to action for a *pedagogy of the oppressed* is contextualised against the backdrop of the mass mobilisation of 'illiterate peasants' movements in north-east Brazil, its utility may be extended as a pragmatic strategy for resistance by the oppressed in advanced economies, as the processes of precarisation begin to affect many different professions (Walsh, 2014). This paper is advocating for educational practices inside and outside the classroom that engage in a praxis of neoliberal de-socialisation. This refers to the transformation of a consciousness which has been historically and culturally conditioned through an *inversion of praxis*. Taking account of Freire's helpful binary which separates *schooling* from *education*. Following on from this, our goal is to develop a *problem-posing pedagogy* of critique and resistive action against precarisation, which is shared in many instances by the educator and student alike, albeit in different ways (English and Mayo, 2012; McKenna, 2013; Lopes and Dewan, 2015; McLaren and Jandric, 2014).

The *Fighting Against Casualisation in Education* (University and College Union, 2016) campaign group reveals that in some institutions, up to a third of staff are on teaching-only contracts (Times Higher Education, 2016). According to the best workforce data available in the Further Education sector (FE), 34% of lecturing staff and 37% of other teaching staff in FE colleges are employed on precarious contracts. The most common form of precarious work is an hourly paid teaching contract; 30 colleges employ more than 50% of their staff on precarious contracts. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency confirms that less than two-thirds of the UK's academics are on permanent contracts (Higher Education Statistical Agency, 2015). A mixture of fixed-term, hourly-paid, fractional and zero-hours contracts and working at more than one institution is common place for the 'casual academic'. In the UK, this issue of casualization of knowledge-based labour in further and higher education has also been taken up by a number of trade unions, University and College Union and Unison.

We face a situation where young people have been schooled for several generations in market values of hyper-commodified and consumer-oriented culture through the naturalisation of neoliberal governmentality, which has gradually intensified this “culture of cruelty” (Giroux, 2011, 12) since the 1970s. The departure from any past generation is that their inheritance will be marked by ever-widening wealth distribution, the dismantling of social safety nets, declining job markets, in some part due to the job destruction process and/or due to technological developments in artificial intelligence and robotics and technology in general, student debts, increased precarity where unions and pensions are under assault including the increased retirement ages and the proliferation of adjunct jobs (Fisher, 2011).

In the penumbra of the GFC, programmes of deficit reduction and austerity have been rolled out affecting many areas of society, including higher education and graduate employment (Seymour, 2014). At the same time, the acceleration of flexible employment, flexible firms, flexi-production and flexi-institutional practices alongside the retrenchment of social democratic values are evident in the workplace and welfare regimes (Farnsworth, 2015). The *downsizing, outsourcing, near shoring* and privatisation experienced in the higher education sector in the UK points to a precarity experienced by students and academic as a shared experience (UCU, 2016). In this context, the ‘edufactory’ workplace of the new economy becomes the site in which new forms of radical critical pedagogy become necessary in the face of post-partisan, post-political forms of government and governance and the emerging opportunities for cultural solidarity to be forged as a basis for collective resistance towards precarity. The shared experiences of uncertainty, instability, ontological insecurity and the inability to plan for the future is widespread across traditional national, cultural, ethnic boundaries as processes of precarisation take hold. Lorey (2015) provides an agenda for existing pedagogical practices that merely focus on more active participation in formal politics, upwardly mobile aspiration or student destinations.

The modern casualisation that is taking place as part of globalisation involves a steady restructuring of social income and labour recommodification, in which many workers are finding that an increasing share of their remuneration is coming from money wages, which are a relatively insecure part of their social income (Standing, 2008). This paper deviates from the pursuit of a universal basic security merely through the paradigm of *work*, including the universal basic income. We propose a universal basic security that is not dependent on a universal basic income in cash terms. The reason for this is that such security is nonetheless conditional on particular behaviours, instead we propose a social income that is based on a theory of radical critical pedagogy for precarity that creates co-intentional practices by the educator and student that equips the graduates with the skills, knowledge and experience to sustain their basic needs, food, shelter, warmth and social belonging utilising the human capital gained through their academic discipline but outside of the rhetoric of employability.

We advocate a departure from old and new labourist strategies of collective bargaining for wages and towards a collective bargaining for the commons - space and land that can provide the basis for experimenting with the production of a universal basic security. The rationale for a radical critical pedagogy is informed by the crisis tendencies of capitalist accumulation and the concomitant ecological insecurity associated with climate change. A new imaginary of knowledge transfer across networks and social exchange between communities facing uneven precariousness is proposed in order to produce a shared social security.

3.3 A Radical Politics of Critical Pedagogy for Precarity?

> *'*It is typical of the post-Fordist multitude to foment the collapse of political representation: not as an anarchic gesture, but as a means of calmly and realistically searching for new political forms.' (Virno, 2005)

In recent years, an emergent literature across the social sciences has conceptualised contemporary processes of depoliticisation in terms of *post-politics*, *post-democracy*, and *the post-political* (Wilson and Swyngedeouw, 2014; Allmendinger and Haughton 2011; Catney and Doyle 2011; Clarke and Cochrane 2013; Crouch 2004; Diken 2009; Garsten and Jacobsson 2007; Kythreotis 2012; Pares 2011; Vergopoulos 2001; Žižek 1999). A radical critical pedagogy for precarity uses living and working conditions as a starting point for possibilities for political agency in neoliberal conditions. Both Bourdieu and Castel had warned of the impossibility of collective resistance in the context of precarity. We argue that the battleground needs shifting towards a common ground of formal solidaristic practices, forming alliances between those atomised into rigid identities. In Italy and Spain the common ground has emerged not from the political or even university contexts, they have been realised in art institutions and social centres. The precarious cannot be unified or represented through classical forms of corporate organising due to their disparate interests. Contemporary relations of production and diverse modes of production "absorb and engender" subjectivities, extending economic exploitation and multiply identities and work places (Lorey, 2015:7-9). An example of this is that in the UK, there has been a decline in employee representative structures in the period 2004-2011 (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2014).

The alternative to a life of precarity is one of protection, political and social immunisation against everything that is recognised as endangerment. Neither the security state nor the welfare state prevent precariousness, instead they engender new historical forms of precarity, new insecurities. Protection from insecurity is conditional on the obligation to obedience and subordination. The conditions of precarity are both the cause and effect of domination and security. Lorey (2015) goes on to discuss that domination is not legitimated through social security in post-Fordist societies, instead we experience *governing through insecurity*. Precarity denotes the relations of inequality as a hierarchy that accompanies the processes of *othering.* This governmental precarisation destabilises the human through employment, the conduct of life and modes of subjectivation that can only be overcome by bodily and practices of self-empowerment that recognise the ambivalence of modes of self-government, conformist self-development/conformist self-determination. The patterns of a liberal ordering of precarity can no longer shift the danger elsewhere. It is now actualised in the individualised governmental precarisation of those whose cruel treatment is normalised under neoliberal conditions. The pursuit of hyper-efficient productivity will lead to an era of insecure employment (Chartered Management Institute, 2015; White, 2015). A radical politics of critical pedagogy for precarity starts from connectedness with others in dialogues about common interests and shared vulnerabilities within the differentness of the diverse precarious through new forms of organising and a refusal of obedience.

Casas-Cortés' (2009, p. 328) ethnographic study of social movements in Spain finds that precarity is used "both as an analytical tool and as a strategic point of departure to produce political subjectivities and re-invent different alliances and ways of struggle" (Arnold and Bongiovi, 2013). A diffusion of resistance, the decline of labourism and the periodic

emergence, diffusion and re-emergence of social movements leading to a discontinuity in social, economic and political progress, if progress is measured in the context of human flourishing. Critical pedagogy becomes the intersection for education and society and the problematic of precarity symbolises a governmentalised agency in an open networked super-infrastructure. In the UK higher education context, Dowling and Harvie (2014) proposed that an exploration of commons and communities within higher education can possibly help to posit a transcendence of capitalist education. Commons suggest alternative, non-commodified means to means to fulfil social needs - to obtain social wealth and to organise social production. Commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities, i.e., by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form (DeAngelis, 2003). This begins with the gift economy of the university (social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form); a cooperative form of convivial competition amongst the research community of the university; and an encouragement of the constitution of community in the classroom.

4. Conclusion

4.1 New directions?

My starting point for a radical politics for precarity is an employability education which centralises John Pearce's (2003:25) Third System of the social economy; self-help, reciprocity and social purpose and the concept of a solidarity economy (Laville et al, 2007) that promote alternative economic practices in opposition to development models centred on the assumption of individualism and profit maximisation, organised around co-operation to satisfy common needs and benefits for local communities. Alternative frameworks include local living economy, community economy, community economic development, people's economy. This altern-pedagogy for precarity prioritises *glocalism* (Swyngedouw, 2004), communal attachment and alternative consumption patterns. We recognise that this may require trade-offs. In the context of SSE, UK graduates can apply their disciplinary skills and adopt and enact co-operative and solidaristic practices including connecting with precarious communities, not in a paternalistic way, but to become conscious of the knowledge they can share with other precarised communities. This process may be mediated through reciprocal knowledge transfer or transactional relations; resources, technology and ideas. In the face of the loss of belonging in urbanised environments (Pinkster, 2016) and the crisis tendencies of the welfare state (Offe, 1984; Svallfors and Taylor-Goody, 1999; van Kersbergena, Visb and Hemerijck, 2014; Farnsworth, 2015, Taylor-Gooby, 2012, 2013), SSE can provide numerous advantages: economic empowerment; reciprocity and social capital; political empowerment and participatory governance; solidarity and ethicality.

The literature on the ways in which groups cope with collective responsibility for ecological problems is limited, but raises questions about how groups construct representations, engage in collective emotional processes in response to collective responsibility (Caillaud, Bonnot, Ratiu and Krauth-Gruber, 2016). The conscientisation of solidarity in response to precarity emphasises the need for a dialogue about individual biographies of past, current and future insecurity in prospective graduates' lives; food prices, housing costs, energy prices, housing volatility, job insecurity and climate change. The praxis of conscientisation of solidarity extends co-operative practices in a concrete way through a live classroom which searches for solutions to insecurity. Fundamentally, the aim of critical pedagogy is twofold: 1] to correct

the pessimistic conclusion of Neo-Marxist theories, and 2] to transform a "language of critique" into a "language of possibility" (Giroux, 1997, 108). We need to move beyond a hyper-commodified and consumer-oriented culture that relies on 'money', instead collectively develop cultures of social value production and social provisioning to create new forms of social currencies. Diverse theories and approaches in critical pedagogy can be identified which call for 1) the project of experience, 2) the project of anti-system, 3) the project of inclusion (Cho, 2010). A critical pedagogy for precarity proposes a project of experience that encourages lifelong learning in a live, real and actual laboratory that tests a curriculum in social value production and social provisioning in general, and specifically in food production, energy production, production of utility such as water purification and waste management, housing development and a pedagogy for precarity that is framed within the students' own biography of insecurity towards a social solidarity economy of hope.

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