

## ***On Peripheral Philosophy:***

### ***A Para-Academic Polemic***

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**Summary:** In an age of increasing university privatization, neo-conservative think tanks shaking hands with 'liberal' institutions, and questions of fake news, disinformation, and the concomitant 'problems' of Internet philosophizing being foregrounded, we would do well to take a step back and look at the larger picture. Philosophy, the State, and the market share a comfortable queen bed where each feed upon the other. On the handle of the door – in lieu of 'do not disturb' – a sign which reads 'Enlightenment thought occurring' hangs. Indeed, liberated from the shackles of religious fideism and political fiefdom, us post-Enlightenment academics are constantly reminded that we no longer must fear suffering the fate of Bruno, being burnt at the stake. While such overt repression no longer exists (at least in the West), we have traded such overtness for a 'liberatory' tool: the Academy itself. Despite no more stake burnings or religious zealotry, we have erected new walls with new rules, all under the influence of the co-incidence between thought and the State. While we need not fear the iron maiden, we ought to fear the dean of the university. The aim of this editorialized polemic is to argue that, contra institutional norms which focus on traditional 'scholarship', philosophers – so as to maintain any semblance of relevance – ought to look to philosophy's Other for guidance in our quest(s): the pseudonymous blogger, the anonymous commenter, the amateur. Only with a multiplication of voices from disparate backgrounds can philosophy properly engage in 'ruthless criticism of all that exists'.

*'[I]f there is to be a philosophy at all,  
[it must be] withdrawn from all State influence.'*  
– Arthur Schopenhauer<sup>1</sup>

*'[E]verything interesting happens on the periphery,  
outside the standard modes of "developed" existence.'*  
– Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU)<sup>2</sup>

*'I don't say "interdisciplinary" anymore because  
once a word becomes a talking point for the  
administration, it has all vitality sucked out of it.'*  
– Professor *II*<sup>3</sup>

The trifold relationship between philosophy, the State, and commoditization is a problematic knot that has roots as far back as, at least, Ancient Greece, with Socrates' relentless mocking of the Sophists who sold truth to the highest bidder and the State's attempt to exterminate undesirable thought with a glass of hemlock-laced tea. Despite being 'enlightened', or at the very least despite living 'in an age of enlightenment' that pushes us towards greater 'freedom' from the dogmatism of religion and the State – a trajectory we shall trace shortly – our intellectual liberation has only remained nominally post-dogmatic with the overt repression of the Church and State replaced by an invisible system of exclusion born from more insidious hegemonic attitudes.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, our intellectual revolution has tracked with Lacan's

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays (Volume 1)*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 137–97 (p. 180).

<sup>2</sup> CCRU, 'Communiqué Two: Message to Maxence Grunier (2001)', in *Writings: 1997–2003* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2017), pp. (:)(:)-(:(: [9–12] (p. (:)(: [9]).

<sup>3</sup> Said in a classroom setting.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 13–22 (p. 21 [8:40–41]).

(in)famous comment to the 1968 student protestors in France: ‘What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master [and] [y]ou will have one!’<sup>5</sup> The master of our intellectual liberation, in a perverse irony, is the institution we post-Enlightenment academics built to free ourselves from the tyranny of religion and the State: the Academy as such. In what follows, I will wax poetic about the history of anti-academic philosophy and then argue two things: first, traditional philosophy caters to a rigid, academic milieu that is intrinsically exclusionary and thus will remain deficient in its accounts of subjectivity; second, the crisis of the relevance of philosophy not only within the Academy itself, but also in everyday life, can only be solved by appealing to a new mode of thinking – one which Edward Said isolated as that of the ‘amateur’ as para-academic – and the creation of Outsides to academia. Indeed, the aim of this paper is to track para-academic thought through Deleuze and Guattari, the CCRU, and others, while ultimately aiming to affirm and take seriously the radical Other of philosophy as *such*: the pseudonymous blogger, the anonymous poster, the peripheral philosopher. Indeed, if we take seriously the presupposition of liberal academia – that is to say, that texts are ambiguous and thus require disambiguation *while retaining multiple potential meanings* – can we really consider novel ideas anything but conglomerations of unique interpretations? If that’s so, why ought we to afford the ‘proper’ academic any more credence than the pseudonymous blogger? To do so not only seems to be a recapitulation of the fetish of established knowledge, but it is a powerful, institutional way to privilege certain subjectivities above others based on contingent educational factors. These questions – or, more specifically, their implications – are the tracks upon which this paper travels.

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 12.

## I. The Spectre of State Philosophy

In his essay ‘On Philosophy at the Universities’, Arthur Schopenhauer launches a scathing attack on what he sees as the Religio-State amalgamation of ‘professional philosophy’. For him, the growth of professional philosophy – that is to say, philosophy at the institutional level as opposed to the street philosophy of Socrates – is inexorably bound up with the propagation and legitimization of the State. As he notes, interwoven with religious and metaphysical dogmas of the time, the State ‘promulgate[s] its ideology] from all the pulpits by thousands of its appointed priests or religious teachers’ and demands conformity. The effective dissemination of ideology thus requires that contradiction be denounced: ‘*improbant secus docentes* – [“We reject and condemn the man who teaches something different.”]’<sup>6</sup>

But can we really expect anything else? Indeed, the State is a structure that makes instrumental use of systems around it, molding and using people for its ends and co-opting various institutions – religious when spiritual sway is needed, capitalist when market forces dominate, etc. Following from this, we would then be wise to recognize that

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<sup>6</sup> Schopenhauer, ‘On Philosophy at the Universities’, p. 139. A larger problem about the formation of the subject (of academia) rears its head. Indeed, questions surrounding the masks one wears as one navigates different social milieus – and the subjectivities and power relations at play therein – are significant issues. That being said, their direct relevance is tangential and best taken up elsewhere. While the issue of the author *will* be foreground later in this paper, properly treating the *creation* and *subjectivation* of the academic is a task that is both untenable here and better suited to a longer, more focused analysis. Thus, I simply point readers to appropriate sources. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 1–36; Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. by Carol Diethe, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 25–27 (1: §13), pp. 83–85 (3: §10–11). For my own account of multiplicitous subjectivities, see Peter Heft, ‘Xenofeminism: A Framework to Hack the Human’, *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, 12.1 (2021), 121–39 (pp. 126–28).

professional philosophers employed by the State are bound by an imperative: they mustn't 'examine a new system that appears to see whether it is true', rather they must 'see whether it can be brought into harmony' with the current ideals of the State.<sup>7</sup> Implicitly drawing upon Kant's 'What Is Enlightenment?', wherein Enlightenment is nothing but freedom from minoritarianism – that 'inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another' – which, nevertheless, rests upon rigid duties, Schopenhauer goes a step further.<sup>8</sup> The pursuit of truth – '*truth*, which has at all times been a dangerous companion and everywhere an unwelcome guest' – will always be *mediated and distorted* by the State: 'Realists and Nominalists, or Aristotelians and Ramists', the State has 'taken sides' and in doing so has 'trumpeted sophists'.<sup>9</sup>

Further, as Kant, the great State philosopher (second only to dear Hegel), notes, while all that is required for Enlightenment is '*freedom*', a very odd set of restrictions apply. Indeed, for Kant, freedom, as it relates to Enlightenment, involves the 'freedom to make *public use* of one's reason'. Such an invocation of the public requires that we examine what Kant means. Public use, for Kant, is the use of one's faculties '*as a scholar* before the entire public of the *world of readers*': the independent thinker invested in the marketplace of ideas. The private, in contradistinction, is the use of one's faculties 'in a certain *civil post or office* with which [one] is entrusted'.<sup>10</sup> In sum, all that is required for Enlightenment is free thought in intra-personal affairs.

As the Academy becomes increasingly privatized, with funding for institutions coming from countless and unknown sources, vested

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<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', p. 149.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', pp. 17–18 [8:36–37].

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy at the Universities', pp. 153, 168.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', p. 18 [8:37].

interests become par for the course. Indeed, not only is academized thought bound up with the State, but financial interests come to dominate the educational sphere. Further drawing upon Kant, our mighty proponent of freedom, it is vital to note that ‘for many affairs conducted in the interest of a commonwealth a certain mechanism is necessary, by means of which some members of the commonwealth must behave merely passively’. Not only must members remain passive whilst working in a professional capacity – indeed for Kant, the existence of a civil servant who questions orders from their superior ‘would be ruinous’ – it is wholly ‘impermissible to argue; instead, one must obey’.<sup>11</sup> While free to dissent amongst one’s cohort – one’s friends, family, and, theoretically, the ‘citizens of the world’ – the professional – that is to say, the individual ‘on duty’, educating and lecturing, practicing and preaching – must not question the dogmas of the Religio-State apparatus as they were ‘employed by it on that condition’.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as privatization spreads and funding is bound up with *what* is taught, the interests of the financier become more closely aligned with the goals of the Academy, thereby necessitating the active discouragement of dissent. This can be seen most clearly in the cults of personality surrounding specific intellectuals who, when ‘invited’ (read as: hired) to speak for ungodly sums of money, play to public opinion and court

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<sup>11</sup> Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?’, p. 18 [8:37].

<sup>12</sup> Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?’, pp. 18–19 [8:37–8:38]. One can see a corporatizing trend within public educational institutions in North America mirroring Kant’s odd inversion of public-private. Indeed, in the context of Canada, ‘our presidents are “CEOs,” professors are “human resources” and students are “clients”’ and as (*in*)vested knowledge is privileged, ‘academics are doing more and more research for and with “partners,” often from the business community’ instead of ‘setting their own research agendas in response to a variety of social needs and interests.’ Claire Polster, ‘Privatizing Canada’s Public Universities’, <<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/privatizing-canadas-public-universities-claire-polster>> [accessed 5 August 2023].

agreement from impressionable graduate students. While a level of critique is certainly permissible – ‘Herr Dr. X, what do you mean when you say Y? Is that not incongruent with the claim in your *New York Times* bestseller *How to Think!*, where you said Z?’ – one must not stray too far from established norms, lest one be branded as a heretic. Indeed, what department attempting to secure funding from the *wellspring* of humanities monies can afford to have a rabble-rouser in their midst, a student who questions the orthodoxy of Herr Dr. X flown in from afar and fed sushi and lobster at the town’s finest restaurant?

Such a hegemon(oton)y ought not to seem utterly foreign to us, however, as Deleuze and Guattari make a similar point in their examination of ‘State/royal’ science in relation to ‘nomad/minor’ science.<sup>13</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, ‘State science’ – or ‘royal science’ – is science with the end of subordination. Royal science sees all that is different from itself – the dominant form of knowledge (production) – as a threat upon which, in order to secure a stable base of knowledge, it ‘imposes its form of sovereignty’ and makes the dynamic, uniform; the numerous, bound; ‘space, occupiable’.<sup>14</sup> The relation of royal science to nomad science is not merely one of the sovereign exertion of power in quantifiable ways but rather ‘a qualitative change’ in how the world is seen. Indeed, under the epistemological framework of royal science, staticity is favored over dynamism as the former, when instantiated by the sovereign, promotes the control and management of bodies in space in contradistinction to the intrinsic nomadism of the latter, which promotes fluidity and vectorization.<sup>15</sup> What’s more, royal science seeks

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<sup>13</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Volume 2)*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp. 361–74.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 362–63.

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 364, 366. See also Michel Foucault, ‘Part Three: Discipline’, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 134–228.

to instrumentalize nature and make the world uniform by searching for laws and ‘extracting constants’ so as to eliminate unknowns. On the other hand, nomad science – what we might practically think of as science extricated from the State, performed by independent researchers and free citizens – always existing on the periphery and attempting to avoid capture and appropriation, seeks instead to problematize the hegemonic worldview populated by the royal scientists by not only undermining them but fundamentally fuzzing the world, bringing forth a plurality of different voices, and ‘placing the variables [which royal science seeks to contain] in a state of continuous variation’.<sup>16</sup>

We can thus draw a comparison between the professional philosophy Schopenhauer so despised and the two different epistemic models put forth by Deleuze and Guattari. Reading Schopenhauer’s professional philosophy retroactively through the DeleuzoGuattarian lens of royal science, where there must be a *specific* taught truth that is static and conforms to the ideology of the State, we can see that dissident, nomadic science must be squashed. Thus, ‘[w]hat is at stake in both cases is not argument, however rancorous, but the relation of mutual revulsion between the academy and a small defiant fragment of its outside’.<sup>17</sup> This cat-and-mouse relationship between the State (with its academic fangs) and the Outside can be understood as a despotic game where the plug is pulled whenever the tides shift. The justification for such malevolent moves can be traced back to Socrates’ mocking of established systems of knowledge and the exposition of the hypocrisy of those in power.<sup>18</sup> These moves, moves to squash the nomads, moves birthed in Athens, have since become endemic to the Western

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 369, 362.

<sup>17</sup> Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> See Plato, ‘The Apology of Socrates’, in *The Trials of Socrates*, trans. by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), pp. 26–61.

philosophical tradition. Thoroughly infected by the State and its desire for control, when

exploratory philosophy ceased to generate the outcomes favourable to established (theistic) power, [...] we were suddenly told: 'this game is over, let's call it a draw'. The authoritarian tradition of European reason tried to pull the plug on the great [heretical philosophical] voyages [of Spinoza, Nietzsche, et al.] *at exactly the point they first became interesting*, which is to say: atheistic, inhuman, experimental, and dangerous.<sup>19</sup>

Radical thought, thought that is dangerous to the status quo can thus only be allowed into the Academy under one of two conditions: either its radicality must be thoroughly defanged, or it must fall in line with – and indeed, support – popular ideology.<sup>20</sup> If Marxism, that 'dangerous idea which killed hundreds of millions', is accepted and indeed *taught* at universities, it is only because armchair theorizing has overtaken political action, rendering the 'red menace' nothing more than a pop-philosophical-book-production machine.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Nick Land, 'Shamanic Nietzsche', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2017), pp. 203–28 (p. 204).

<sup>20</sup> At this point – both in this paper and in history – it ought to be noted that the radicality discussed above is not to be interpreted as an affirmation of sloppy scholarship or charlatanism of the worst kind. Ron DeSantis and other fascist pigs are not paragons of radical thought as they 'rage against the machine' of 'woke critical race theory' and 'transgenderism'; they are the perfect example of parochial reterritorialization coming 'down on us heavier than ever' and ought to be resisted at every turn. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 161.

<sup>21</sup> Admittedly, I am here succumbing to the cynicism Edward Said (to whom we'll turn later) chastises as 'coarse and finally meaningless'. Edward Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', in *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 65–83 (p. 69). Nevertheless, in the 30 years following his Reith Lectures, I fear the state of academia as politicized and privatized has only gotten worse.

## II. Para-Academia and The Periphery

George Yancy, commenting on the stereotypical State philosophy of today, notes that there is a disparity between the thought that goes on within the gates of the Academy and that of bodies not included. For the former, thought is abstracted with the goal of exposing ‘a weak argument, a fallacy, or someone’s “inferior” reasoning power’, and of ‘taking down’ enemies while presuming to ‘speak for *all* of “us”’, whereas for the latter, thought is rooted in personal experience and, in turn, is more open.<sup>22</sup> While this does not mean that personal experience and intensely phenomenological philosophy *cannot* occur behind the doors of the Academy – indeed, such thought *can* and *does* take place in our venerable institutions of higher education – such philosophizing is always subject to rigid restrictions around language used, authors cited, academic mores followed, etc. Students proclaiming radicality will nonetheless be required to fall back on citational norms and Western, colonial educational structures. More significantly, in order to shore up its own cracks – that is to say, retain its hegemonic credibility – the Academy must engage in a spurious game of recognition.

Writing in the context of gender affirmation within conservative status quos, gender nihilist Aidan Rowe notes that positive recognition is fundamentally dangerous. As Rowe contends, recognition is always conditional and operative within frameworks of power. It does not only imply prior categories of acceptable identification, but recognition as a force of institutional power ‘retains the possibility that [such] recognition will be withdrawn if you become something else’.<sup>23</sup> Thus,

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<sup>22</sup> George Yancy, ‘Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body’, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 19.4 (2005), 215–41 (p. 215). It should be noted that para-academic discourse is not *inherently* non-exclusionary but is seemingly more open and, when exclusionary, it is less repressive and/or violent.

<sup>23</sup> Aidan Rowe, ‘Gender Nihilism’, in *What is Gender Nihilism? A Reader* (version 1.2), ed. by wign (Contagion Press, 2016), pp. 341–47 (p. 345).

recognition by existent power structures 'is also simultaneously the power of misrecognition and non-recognition'. Indeed, recognition is, implicitly, a *re-cognizing* of existent modes of understanding. It is a recolonization of the subject by systems of control 'interested not in the elimination of difference but in its assimilation'.<sup>24</sup>

The problematic becomes worse. In his account of so-called 'openness' within liberal systems, Reza Negarestani isolates a tactic of 'affordance' that remains in play. When radical alterity is allowed to engage in the Academy (nominally) on its own terms, the politics of affirmation come into play. As Negarestani notes, '[a]ffirmation does not attain openness to the world'.<sup>25</sup> Instead, modern liberal affirmation operates according to the logic of '[e]conomical openness' – that is, 'the ultimate tactic of affordance' – wherein the Other is not accepted as such but rather *budgeted for* within the current system.<sup>26</sup> Negarestani continues: 'Economical openness is not about how much one can be open to the outside, but about how much one can afford the outside.'<sup>27</sup> Like a pressure release valve operating so as to allow small, controlled amounts of flight from repression, economical openness and its 'tactic of affordance' is not a means for meaningful inclusion within a system but instead a means of maintaining control over aberrant and/or deviant behavior, *pre-scribing* how the Other is to be engaged with. Ultimately, liberal openness – the openness of the modern Academy operating within a politics of recognition – 'can be recapitulated as "I have the capacity to bear your investment" or "I afford you"'; a fundamentally

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<sup>24</sup> Rowe, 'Gender Nihilism', pp. 345, 344.

<sup>25</sup> Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), p. 197. I thank Rowan Elizabeth Cabrales for forcing me to read Negarestani.

<sup>26</sup> Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 197.

conservative position that will, when threatened, tear ‘out the tongue of alterity’.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the rigorized and highly structured mode of State philosophizing, at best, only excludes those not privileged enough to exist within the Academy while allowing a modicum of resistance so as to rehabilitate itself; or, at worst, denies altogether the experiences of the Other. While there are certainly ways to *try* to remain radical – that is to say, dangerous to the Politico-Academic status quo – within the Academy by carving out a niche for oneself, we must remember that for every comfortable, ‘radical’ academic out there, there are ten other thinkers existing on the edges of society who don’t have a voice within the Academy.

Perhaps that is for the best. If we take Schopenhauer seriously – and indeed, it seems as if we must, given the current moribund state of ‘radical’ academia – then we ought to be wary of inclusion for the sake of inclusion. The Academy, like The Blob, assimilates and normalizes all that comes too close by acting as a homogenizing force to turn ‘the philosophical lecture-room into a school of the shallowest philistinism’ where radical ideas are salted before they germinate.<sup>29</sup> Back in 2001, the CCRU (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit) began mapping precisely the movement of the nomad scientist toward the periphery:

Many members of the Ccru had fled cultural studies, disgusted by its authoritarian prejudices, its love of ideology, and its pompous desire to ‘represent the other’ or speak on behalf of the oppressed. To us, it never seemed that the real articulacy of the leftist academic elites was in any way superior to the modes of popular cultural expression which were either ignored or treated as raw material to

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<sup>28</sup> Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 198. Nick Land, ‘Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest: A Polemical Introduction to the Configuration of Philosophy and Modernity’, in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2017), pp. 55–80 (p. 64).

<sup>29</sup> Schopenhauer, ‘On Philosophy at the Universities’, p. 153.

be probed for a ‘true’ (i.e. ideological) meaning by white middle-class intellectuals. [...]

CCRU engages with peripheral cultures not because they are ‘downtrodden’ or oppressed, but because they include the most intense tendencies to social flatness, swarming, populating the future, and contagious positive innovation, hatching the decisive stimuli for the systematic mutation of global cybernetic culture.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, with the blossoming of personal weblogs and the intensification of social disparities, those disgruntled with academia and engaged in ‘peripheral cultural processes’ began setting up shop on the tatters of the digital map, where new social enclaves built around pseudonymity and cyber-culture were, like bubbles, constantly arising.<sup>31</sup> Is it at all surprising that the response to the rigor (mortis) of academia and the explosion of locked-off academic journals was a rise in theory blogs? The Internet was, and is, alive with conversations that cannot be found in the stuffy pages of *X, Y, Z Quarterly*.<sup>32</sup> As pamphleteering was to the State, blogs and Twitter are to the Academy.

Apart from being nodes of non-traditional, and thus non-monotonous, philosophy, blogs and niche areas of study provide a counter to the structural exclusionary features of the Academy. Indeed, to be ‘taken seriously’ within the Academy, ‘authority’ must be achieved by, typically, undergoing what Mark Fisher (a.k.a k-punk) called ‘the

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<sup>30</sup> CCRU, ‘Communiqué Two’, p. (:):( ) [9].

<sup>31</sup> CCRU, ‘Communiqué Two’, p. (:):( ) [9].

<sup>32</sup> I do, of course, fully recognize the performative contradiction that arises from publishing this article in an academic journal. While further justification will be implicit as we move forward, for now I merely quote Deleuze and Guattari: ‘You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn’, you must ‘[I]odge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them’. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 160–161. All the above being said, it also ought to be noted that blogs are not *intrinsically* liberatory. For a critical approach, see Adam Kotsko, ‘A Dangerous Supplement: Speculative Realism, Academic Blogging, and the Future of Philosophy’, *Speculations*, 4 (2013), 35–37.

traumatic experience of doing a PhD'. For him, such work – and the same can be said of academia more generally – 'bullies one into the idea that you can't say anything about any subject until you've read every possible authority on it'.<sup>33</sup> While there is certainly a level of expertise gained from studying a given thinker or topic for an extended period of time, the notion of 'authority' is itself a uniquely modern problematic that arguably has no parallel in (Western) history. Indeed, for much of the history of Western thought, knowledge production was done collectively and collaboratively through dialectical inquiry, philosophical and theological commentaries, and pseudonymous scholastics. If one *could* pin down an author, the role of the author-function was drastically different than we understand it to be in contemporary academia.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, looking to Foucault, we can attempt to make sense of the shift that has occurred. As the exercise of power variously shifted from unconditional sovereign power through disciplinary power to biopolitical power, the figure that was birthed and refined was that of the subject.<sup>35</sup> Concomitant with shifts in power that were increasingly

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<sup>33</sup> Mark Fisher and Rowan Wilson, 'They Can Be Different in the Future Too: Mark Fisher Interviewed', <<https://www.versobooks.com/en-ca/blogs/news/3051-they-can-be-different-in-the-future-too-mark-fisher-interviewed>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>34</sup> Taking Greek and Roman historians as further examples – e.g., Diogenes Laërtius or St. Jerome – we can see that the utilization of the name serves to index a collator of information. Or, as Foucault notes, "'Hippocrates said," "Pliny recounts," were not really formulas of an argument based on authority; they were the markers inserted in discourses that were supposed to be received as statements of demonstrated truth.' Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984 (Volume Two)*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Josué V. Harari and Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 205–22 (p. 212).

<sup>35</sup> For accounts of the shifts in power mentioned here, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 (The Will to Knowledge)*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 133–59 and Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

focused on targeting individuals as opposed to scaring groups, stable, isolatable, and static subjects had to be formulated. It is for this reason that Foucault begins his famous text, 'What Is an Author?', with the following statement: 'The coming into being of the notion of "author" constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas.'<sup>36</sup> Whereas *authority* was previously more diffuse and writing was pointed to an exteriority, at some point – and Foucault is, unfortunately, rather vague here – an internalization occurred where 'author' was subsumed by the text and the two became inexorably intertwined.<sup>37</sup> We then ought not to think that the institutionalization and formalization of an author as an identifiable subject – especially within the early-modern era of universities – is a neutral accident of history. Rather, the creation of the author *as such* served as the backbone for the Enlightened, Kantian subject subordinated to the State and for the professional academic re-producing privileged knowledge. 'Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors [...] to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.'<sup>38</sup> Criticism, real criticism, had its wings clipped before it could get off the ground.

What, then, has to be done? Ought we to burn our caps and gowns, shunning all academic mores? Perhaps. But we must also recognize that

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 205.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', p. 206. See also Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 25–27 (1: §13); Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142–148. For a different account of authorship and the history of the 'author' as a figure (as well as an account of the life of 'the author') – an account which perhaps, following my own claims, brings forth more questions than answers – see Lawrence Lipking, 'The Birth of the Author', in *Writing the Lives of Writers*, ed. by Warick Gould and Thomas F. Staley (London: MacMillan Press, 1998), pp. 36–53.

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', pp. 211–12.

the Academy *does* exist, and we can't just wish it away; instead, we must engage with it in some form.

Thus, in conjunction with the above, we can use contemporary critiques of international relations studies coupled with a 'post-modern' Saidian launching pad to provide tangible alternatives to the rigid State philosophy. Indeed, for Shampa Biswas writing on the relevance of Said, the Academy has become yet another battlefield upon which the tanks of neo-conservatism roll.<sup>39</sup> While Biswas will maintain that there is a technical distinction between 'scholars working for the state' and a scholar's 'intellectual orientation', such a dichotomy, *if* it ever existed, has long since evaporated in any practical sense. Indeed, just as '[i]t is not uncommon for IR [international relations] scholars to feel the need to formulate their scholarly conclusions in terms of its relevance for global politics, where "relevance" is measured entirely in terms of policy wisdom,' philosophy within the Academy falls prey to the very same problems, as dominant discourses are reproduced, cults of personality are maintained, and professional philosophers '[r]ender [...] unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's'.<sup>40</sup>

For Biswas, such an 'encroachment' of politics into, ideally, independent institutions – although their claim to independence is itself dubious, as the Academy is an *institution* (coming from *instituere*, 'to set up / to put in place': in other words, to make static and hegemonic) – is fundamentally dangerous insofar as it brings with it 'nationalist and statist agendas'.<sup>41</sup> What is required? Asking a prior question, Said begins his investigation:

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<sup>39</sup> Shampa Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals: Reading Edward Said as an International Relations Theorist', *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 36.1 (2007), 117–33.

<sup>40</sup> Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals', p. 122; Matthew 22:21.

<sup>41</sup> Biswas, 'Empire and Global Public Intellectuals', p. 120. Said himself provides a very interesting account, summarizing Régis Debray, of French intellectual life

And yet the question remains as to whether there is or can be anything like an independent, autonomously functioning intellectual, one who is not beholden to, and therefore constrained by, his or her affiliations with universities that pay salaries, political parties that demand loyalty to a party line, think tanks that while they offer freedom to do research perhaps more subtly compromise judgement and restrain the critical voice.<sup>42</sup>

After running through a rapid-fire crash course on intellectualism in the United States post-World War II (especially during the hippie and beatnik movements) – an account I'll leave the reader to peruse at their leisure – Said goes on to comment on the distinction between an 'academic' and an 'intellectual', the latter of whom is 'a stubborn force engaging as a committed and recognizable voice' who aims toward 'a combination of enlightenment and emancipation or freedom'.<sup>43</sup> In eerie synchronicity with Schopenhauer almost 150 years prior, what Said critiques – contra my own claims – 'is not the academy, nor the suburbs, nor the appalling commercialism of journalism and publishing houses'. Rather, like the pessimist before him, Said critiques 'professionalism': 'thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, [...] not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable.'<sup>44</sup> Said continues to outline the pressures that force one into professionalism, but the ultimate question for us is *what is the alternative?* As per Biswas' formulation, the alternative is thus: in contradistinction to abject professionalism, one ought to adopt 'a spirit of "amateurism"' to act as

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from 1880 to the seminal year, 1968. See Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 66–67.

<sup>42</sup> Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 67–68.

<sup>43</sup> Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', p. 73.

<sup>44</sup> Said, 'Professionals and Amateurs', pp. 73–74. Professionalism: what we, in this edition of *Pli*, are perhaps not succumbing to (unless, of course, it's marketable to be anti-academic within academia).

a bulwark against the onslaught of professional philosophy.<sup>45</sup> Or, as Said himself will put it, our task must not be to ignore the influences of the State, capital, pushes for professionalism, etc., rather we must articulate ‘a different set of values and prerogatives’ – amateurism as ‘care and affection’, love of learning – *philo-sophia*.<sup>46</sup>

There is, however, another reading of amateurism one can draw out: a reading Said alludes to but is nascent in his writings, a more *guerilla* form of intellectualizing. Even when working within the Academy, we can become amateurs embroiled amongst the professionals – lambs pretending to be wolves, in an odd inversion – and are, as such, “‘a species of nomads, despising all settled modes of life” who come from a wilderness tract beyond knowledge [... and are] invasion routes of the unknown’.<sup>47</sup> We can, as per Said,

enter and transform the merely professional routine [...] into something much more lively and radical; instead of doing what one is supposed to do one can ask why one does it, who benefits from it, [and] how can it reconnect with a personal project and original thoughts.<sup>48</sup>

How might we envision such a figure? What would they look like? It is certainly easy to abstractly talk about such a free intellectual, but discerning how they might operate around the zone of the Academy is different altogether. I suggest two figures with whom we might think, two in a commensalistic relationship: the para-academic and the peripheral philosopher.

The first figure, that of the para-academic, is an obtuse figure formulated in many different ways. If Google’s Ngram Viewer is to be believed, the word ‘para-academic’ has seen a 140% increase in the frequency of its usage from its supposed coining in 2011 to 2019. Insofar

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<sup>45</sup> Biswas, ‘Empire and Global Public Intellectuals’, p. 124.

<sup>46</sup> Said, ‘Professionals and Amateurs’, p. 82.

<sup>47</sup> Land, ‘Shamanic Nietzsche’, p. 208.

<sup>48</sup> Said, ‘Professionals and Amateurs’, p. 83.

as the usage of the word has spiked, it's not surprising that one finds a myriad of different uses of the word. Recent banal and/or bureaucratic uses see the figure of the para-academic as another side of the Academy as such: a subsection of academics that are formed by privatization and, in turn, help run the university like a business with different departments – 'student skills advisers, educational developers', etc.<sup>49</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, we see accounts that situate para-academics as 'individuals who work across and against the corporate agenda' of university privatization.<sup>50</sup> Others figure the para-academic as 'motivated [by] the ruined university's apparent betrayal of [the above described] desire for autonomy' and thus 'echoes earlier countercultures such as the free and anti-universities of the late 1960s.'<sup>51</sup> And there are, of course, still other accounts ranging from an #alt-academy project, to an incredibly interesting reading of the university through Fred Moten's concept of 'the undercommons', to a new, open-access publishing model, to a *handbook* for the para-academic – which, interestingly enough, contains an essay entitled 'A Lesson from Warwick' (itself sadly devoid of any mention of the CCRU).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce Macfarlane, 'The Morphing of Academic Practice: Unbundling and the Rise of the Para-academic', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65.1 (2011), 59–73 (p. 59). See also Neil Mulholland, 'Para-Academic', in *Re-Imagining the Art School: Pedagogy and Artistic Learning* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 61–71.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Wolfe, 'We Are All Para-Academics Now', in *The Para-Academic Handbook: A Toolkit for Making-Learning-Creating-Acting*, ed. by Alex Wardrop and Deborah Withers (Bristol: HammerOn Press, 2014), pp. 1–5 (p. 1).

<sup>51</sup> Mulholland, 'Para-Academic', p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> See '#alt-academy: a media commons project', <<https://mediacommons.org/alt-ac/>> [accessed 6 August 2023]; Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, 'The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses', *Social Text*, 79 (22.2) (2004), 101–15; Eileen Joy, 'PARTY! Or is It a Panel Discussion on Para-Academic Publishing, or BOTH?', <<https://punctumbooks.com/blog/party-or-is-it-a-panel-discussion-on-para-academic-publishing-or-both/>> [accessed 6 August 2023]; Paul Boshears, 'Open Access Publishing as a Para-Academic Proposition: Besides OA as Labour Relation', *tripleC*, 11.2 (2013), 614–19; Wardrop and

Indeed, in Gary Hall's 2016 book, *The Uberfication of the University*, an entire chapter is devoted to examining the academic who is living precariously amidst the rising tide of educational privatization and who seeks supplemental income and/or satisfaction by publishing with non-academic presses – for example, Zer0 Books. Nonetheless, for Hall, such attempts are potentially co-opted. With regard to Zer0 Books, he notes that the publishing house has an 'air of edginess and nonconformism about it' but nonetheless is not open-access and thus doesn't actually challenge 'academics and the way they live, work, and think (in terms of copyright, IP fixity, the finished object, etc.).'<sup>53</sup> That being said, I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention three very promising alternative academic structures: The New Centre for Research & Practice, The School of Materialist Research, and Foreign Objekt. While each may have their own flaws, they are nonetheless very promising and unique examples of philosophy outside the traditional academy.<sup>54</sup>

Contra traditional academic norms, I don't want to engage with any of the existent literature because, while interesting, it is ultimately of little help to us (save for Moten and Harney). I suggest we burn our dictionaries and come at the figure of the para-academic from a different angle. Following Said, we can conceive of the para-academic as one who, while ultimately in the employ of the Academy, is first-and-foremost an intellectual. She plays the games of academia and attends committee meetings, but this is all a disguise. She is actually one who traffics with the academic Outside and, while not assimilating it to

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Withers (eds.), *The Para-Academic Handbook*; The Provisional University, 'A Lesson From Warwick', in *The Para-Academic Handbook*, pp. 81–85.

<sup>53</sup> Gary Hall, *The Uberfication of the University* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 42 n. 5.

<sup>54</sup> I give thanks to my anonymous reviewer for making me aware of my oversight (and *ignorance*) of these 'institutions'.

traditional philosophy, smuggles peripheral thought – the odd tweet by whomever; a post on a now-defunct GeoCities weblog; etc. – under the door of traditional academia, presenting it in a new light in her class, publications, etc. Indeed, this is exactly the figure that Elizabeth Lewis Pardoe of the University of Venus describes; a figure that takes up the cry of the guerrilla intellectual.

For Pardoe, the para-academic ought to be understood, at least initially, etymologically. Starting from the prefix, she borrows from the French and draws upon *para-* as ‘a combining form meaning “guard against”’, further adding that the para-academic can be found ‘camouflage[d], parachuting down into the back corners of campus quads, and skulking the perimeter, as [they] prepare to take the academy by storm’.<sup>55</sup> For her, the ‘dual status’ of being within the Academy while not being *part* of the Academy gives the para-academic the freedom to operate as they like, and support the invasion from the periphery while holding back the assimilation of radical thought.<sup>56</sup> The para-academic can ‘think, theorize, and produce with rather than “about” (or – even worse – “for”)’ those not present in the walls of the Academy, all while operating unseen but all seeing.<sup>57</sup> She is one who has accepted her fate of being bound up with the Academy while retaining a modicum of freedom – that is to say, she operates within its walls and requires its affirmation but is *not* part of it. This formulation is fundamentally Saidian insofar as one aims not to please, but to synthesize; not to kowtow, but

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Lewis Pardoe, ‘Para-Academics’, <<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/university-venus/para-academics>> [accessed 31 March 2019]. She links to Dictionary.com as the source of her definition.

<sup>56</sup> See Pardoe, ‘Para-Academics’.

<sup>57</sup> CCRU, ‘Communiqué Two’, p. (:)(:) [9]. Indeed, such creatures may be found, amongst other places, within Western University’s Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism or McMaster’s Cultural Studies and Critical Theory program. While such institutions *do not* escape the trappings outlined above, if one digs deep enough, asks the right questions, conducts the proper *séances*, etc., one will find para-academics.

to work parallel. To be truly trans-disciplinary is to be an amateur, cross-pollinating one's thought with whatever is devourable.

Alongside her, however, is the figure of the peripheral philosopher. Shunned by the Academy – or with no interest in it whatsoever – the peripheral philosopher cares not for securing grant money or placating an audience; her goal is Schopenhauer's 'unwelcome guest': truth. As a *bricoleur*, she hijacks ideas and repurposes them for different ends, taking what she needs and discarding the rest, separating the wheat from the chaff. Writing on Twitter or blogging pseudonymously, posting on image boards or obscure forums, she is able to do what traditional academics – at least today – cannot: she can play with dangerous ideas. We might take two examples and draw them out further. Following Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' publication of '#Accelerate: Manifesto for Accelerationist Politics' in 2013, the pseudonymous, trans-continental collective of materialist feminists, Laboria Cuboniks, penned 'Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation' in 2015. The bodies which made up Laboria Cuboniks came from various disciplines and intellectual milieus, from different backgrounds and locatable along various vectors of precarity. Professor and poet, artist and activist, disciplinary distinctions mattered not, thus allowing the collective to take up several provocative stances that were heterodox among the humanities today, namely the insistence that rationality is neither masculine nor feminine but rather – as a concept itself – a 'suspension of gender', as well as not merely a rejection of orthodox Marxist views that alienation is bad – a monstrous plight of the worker – but a call for 'not less, but more alienation!'<sup>58</sup> Despite the pseudonymous and online publication of 'Xenofeminism', the ideas found within the text have been taken up by 'serious' scholars, both critically and supportively,

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<sup>58</sup> Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation* (London: Verso, 2018), pp. 21, 15.

while the text itself has found its way onto various syllabi of respected academics at venerated institutions.

Even more obscure, and on the further fringes of the remains of the Internet, another pseudonymous figure – a computer-coder (and part-time Twitter theorist) n1x – wrote an even more radical ‘manifesto’, taking the ideas within ‘#Accelerate’ and ‘Xenofeminism’ still further, producing ‘Gender Acceleration: A Black Paper’ (2018). Drawing from widely disparate sources ranging from the history of computer science to cyber feminism to Jewish mysticism, a variety of theses come to the fore. While we do not need to examine them in detail – that has been done elsewhere – we might simply note some of the more outlandish claims that have gained the essay traction not merely amongst academics but, in an interesting turn, as a foil for the most banal forms of conservatism.<sup>59</sup> Within the text, n1x draws a parallel between Unix as an operating system, the number 0, and a vulva; an incredibly interesting argument that links passing the Turing Test to passing as a trans person (an AI passing the former and a trans person passing in society are both figured as radically Other with passing being necessary for survival); and the position that the progression of techno-capital will render the concept of gender obsolete.<sup>60</sup>

Regardless of the position one takes with respect to the aforementioned texts, they could not have been authored – much less published – in traditional academic environments (even if Verso

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<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of Accelerationism and Xenofeminism, see Heft, ‘Xenofeminism’, pp. 128–136. For a short exegesis on the Gender Acceleration Black Paper, see Peter Heft, ‘On Gender Acceleration and Its Critics’, <<https://guerrillaontologies.com/2018/11/on-gender-acceleration-and-its-critics/>> [accessed 7 October 2023]; for its usage as a foil for bland conservatism, see Mary Harrington, ‘The Fight Against Erasing Women’, <<https://americanmind.org/features/the-fight-against-erasing-women/>> [accessed 7 October 2023].

<sup>60</sup> n1x, ‘Gender Acceleration: A Black Paper’, <<https://vastabrupt.com/2018/10/31/gender-acceleration/>> [accessed 7 October 2023].

eventually printed a copy of ‘Xenofeminism’ – three years too late, I might add). Indeed, the occulted and obscured generation of these texts occurred entirely on the periphery where the ideas were originally thrashed out. Only later, after being run through the shredder labeled ‘Twitter’, did the ideas found therein percolate into mainstream academic thought, being smuggled into term papers by intrepid graduate students and courses by eccentric professors.

At the end of the day, it is the thought and work of peripheral philosophers, among many other things, that keeps philosophy not merely relevant but *interesting*. These thinkers are, fundamentally, the Other for whom we ought not speak for – such a task is a fool’s errand anyway – but argue alongside and feature in our work. Ideas birthed *outside* the Academy are the true existential threat to the status quo of a rigid, calcified academia. As philosophers, professional or not, we need thinkers on the periphery (although they certainly don’t need us). All of us as philosophers – or, perhaps more significantly, free agents worried about the fate of our world (or, as Said would put it, as ‘thinking and concerned member[s] of a society’ interacting with other ‘citizens as well as other societies’) – must don the fatigues of the para-academic and engage with the periphery. *Not* to assimilate it, but to affirm it.<sup>61</sup>

To return to the question set forth out at outset – ‘if the conceit of liberal academia is true (namely that texts are always in need of disambiguation), then why privilege one group’s ideas over another’s?’ – and, in turn, to provide an answer, we ought to say that there *is no intrinsic reason* to prefer institutional, accepted, and signed and sealed interpretations over those of faceless commentators. If anything, we ought to be *more skeptical* of the former than the latter. Ultimately, by affirming the status of the peripheral philosophical Other as a legitimate thinker in their own right – something they hardly need but we, in order

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<sup>61</sup> Said, ‘Professionals and Amateurs’, pp. 82–83.

to stay relevant, desperately do – by taking seriously the contributions made by those pseudonymous bloggers and anonymous posters in cluttered comments sections, working with, and defending those, who are Outside, and, in the final estimation, marshalling such thought *against* conservative and traditional institutional norms, a new form of academia has the possibility to arise.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> An editorialized and highly embryonic form of this argument appeared on *The Mantle*. See Peter Heft, 'On Peripheral Philosophy' <<https://web.archive.org/web/20221204061934/https://themantle.com/philosophy/peripheral-philosophy>> [accessed 5 March 2019]. This paper was more fully developed for and at Binghamton University's 2019 graduate student conference.