Is it all just melancholic pedagogy? Accelerationism and the future of critical management education

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Abstract

This essay is a personal reflection on the double-bind that we as critical management studies academics feel we face in our pedagogic practice. We want to bring about more ethical and responsible management through teaching our students critiques of the excesses of capitalism, but we are all too aware of capitalism's extraordinary resilience as a mode of social, political and economic organization. We know how its tendencies readily co-opt even the most ardent criticism into its own ever-mutating paradigm. We thus feel torn between wanting our students to think and act critically, and the fear that critique is simply a part of the process itself. Rather than calling for raising awareness, relationality and the creation of difference, we present an accelerationist provocation. We invite critical management studies educators to struggle with us through upsetting considerations – that perhaps the most effective tactics for resistance might be to encourage and exacerbate capitalism's excesses. We conclude with a note on melancholy pedagogy and the powers of hopelessness.

Keywords

Accelerationism, critical management studies, Deleuze and Guattari

Sometimes doubts are all we seem to have

If one wanted to encourage critical, revolutionary, sociopolitical change, what would one teach in a Business School? We think about this question every day as we write our lectures, prepare for our seminars, speak to our students and work with our colleagues. Every day, the news seems to remind us that today the 1990s optimisms of capitalism have irredeemably succumbed into realities of

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global war, planetary ecological collapse, institutionalized violence and discrimination, and an ongoing intensification of socio-economic inequality. As it is our craft to think and teach organizing, we feel compelled to make a difference; we want to have a positive impact on the future, but we are also not sure about what we can *actually do*. The totalizing edifice of capitalism that intensifies these problems seems unyielding. Over time, our uncertainty has transformed into frustration, and from frustration into a clawing melancholy from which it seems impossible to escape.

Over the years, we have found solace in the work of colleagues from the tradition of critical management studies (CMS) who have encouraged us to continuously work to redress contemporary capitalism's social and political inequalities by trying to 'bring values into the classroom for analysis and discussion' (Grey, 2004: 180). By giving voice to the problematic features of contemporary management theory and practice, CMS scholars have tried to 'articulate dissent' (Grey, 2002: 509) in their classrooms or serve as 'harbingers of change' (Cunliffe et al., 2002: 491). They have sought to address 'the unavoidable realities of managerial work as a social, political and economic practice' (Watson, 2001: 395) through pedagogic approaches that can 'challenge management practice rather than seek to sustain it' (Grey and Mitev, 1995: 74).

But is this kind of critical orientation effective at bringing about change? Or is it more likely a *redemptive* approach (Galindo Hervás, 2016) that makes us *feel relevant* as contributors to some larger body of anti-capitalist resistance? We often wonder whether we make a difference by teaching students about alternative theories and practices of management (Parker et al., 2014, 2007; Schreven et al., 2008). Do we really commit acts of resistance by publishing critical papers (Lund and Tienari, 2019) or other forms of activist scholarship (Contu, 2018)? Our doubts are made acute by reading Deleuze and Guattari's (2000, 2005) critique of capitalism which focuses on its functioning on the level of unconscious desire.

Deleuze and Guattari (2000) define capitalism as 'the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows' (p. 139). For them, what makes capitalism unique is not the sale of labour by the proletariat to a capital owning class in exchange for a wage, or the belief in free market solutions, or private ownership of the means of production (Harvey, 2007). Rather, what makes capitalism unique is its tendency to channel liberatory desire. It is thus best understood as an unconsciously engaging libidinal tendency that works by creating, co-opting and capturing new possibilities, potentialities and modes of existence. In its manic movement, it relentlessly stimulates new forms of thought and action in order to reinvent itself, adopting new morphologies for the extraction of surplus value and the multiplication of money. In this way, 'capitalism confronts its own limits and simultaneously displaces them, setting them down again farther along' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 463). Its limits are simply all 'kinds of libidinal-unconscious flows that make up the delirium of this society' (Deleuze quoted in Guattari, 2009: 36). Any critique of its functioning or resistance to it only produces momentary conceptual limits, which it then readily decodes and swiftly commodifies further. *How can we resist a machine of delirium that is always reinventing itself by capturing and co-opting forms of resistance?*

To address such an impossible question, we feel that we must think the unthought – unsavoury as it might be – if only to alert ourselves to the depths of our current predicament. Instead of affirming hope for change, we wish to share a *negativity* and see the ramifications of what may be continuing to *simulate* resistance as an academic palliative. Following Deleuze's (2006), sombre notion of how a 'philosophy that saddens no one, that annoys no one, is not a philosophy' (p. 106), we want to consider whether the hopelessness that we feel has a dormant transformative potentiality (see also Žižek, 2018) or whether it is just a sombre melancholy undertaking. In this article, we look at and share our reflections on a particular kind of waylessness that we feel as educators at present, no more and no less.

In the hope of discovering more radical alternatives, recent interest in management and organizational scholarship in accelerationist thought (e.g. Ennis, 2021; Haynes, 2021; Hietanen et al., 2020; Mohammed, 2021) has urged us to reflect on the efficacy of what we are trying to achieve in our roles as educators in the business school with our pedagogic practice. Accelerationism has been defined by Mackay and Avanessian (2014) as

> the insistence that the only radical political response to capitalism is not to protest, disrupt, or critique, nor to await its demise at the hands of its own contradictions, but to accelerate its uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies. (p. 4)

Accelerationist imaginaries draw heavily on a tradition that includes Marx, Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari to reflect a deep disillusionment with the ineffectiveness of the continuously failing practices of resistance against the capitalist mode of production (e.g. Fisher, 2009; Land, 2012; Mackay and Avanessian, 2014). Such work recognizes capitalism as *crisis itself* that feeds off criticism, and consequently that the most attractive and increasingly *only* way to fight capitalism might paradoxically be to 'accelerate the process' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 240), its dynamics of contradiction, and exacerbate its ruinous tendencies. The radical gambit is that this would intensify global capitalism's inherent paradoxes to a point where they push over its limit of being able to mutate by internalizing its tensions, and then we might enter whatever social formation emerges thereafter.

In light of such arguments, instead of teaching resistances that are the fuel of the machinic tendency itself, the temptation would be to adopt a *revolt*-ing pedagogy of teaching capitalist ideals, to be intensely more mainstream than the mainstream. It would entail the desperate cunning of a madman (Brassier, 2010), a tremendously irresponsible effort to teach unadulterated capitalisms as a way of experimenting with change, or subversively, it might mean continuing to teach critical approaches, as both these efforts can be *equally* co-opted to expediate capitalism's destructive expansion.

In what follows, we first briefly map how CMS literature speaks to questions of resistance and the emancipatory potential of what we teach. In the second section, we sketch some of the core accelerationist ideas which problematize resistance and change through conventional pedagogical practices. We problem-pose around two accelerationist deterritorializing vectors that radicalize the position of educators in the business school. Finally, we outline what we see as a melancholic pedagogy, which, recognizing its own ineffectiveness, has to come to terms with the realities of a future that is being slowly cancelled by the unchecked advance of techno-capitalist-driven social and ecological collapse. While traditionally academic work is often ideologically bound to offer optimistic contributions, we align ourselves with a development of 'dark Deleuzian' scholarship that explores the possibilities within negativity rather than joyous encounters with hope (Culp, 2016). We seek to recognize particular impasses for what they are, that neither CMS resistance *nor* accelerationist radicalizations may have the capacity to produce egress from capitalism with a difference that would make a difference. We conclude with an opening towards novel potentials residing in hopelessness itself.

CMS and education: valiant resistance irresistibly assimilated?

Ideas of emancipation and resistance have always been a part of CMS (see Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011). They form the backbone of a critical lexicon that has become integrated into contemporary debates around the future of political economy, work relations and subjectivity in what are recognized as the inherent excesses and injustices of the global capitalist hegemony. Those who would

see the discipline move towards more critically performative (Cabantous et al., 2016; Spicer et al., 2009, 2016) forms of praxis that involves the development of an 'affirmative stance, an ethic of care, a pragmatic orientation, engagement with potentialities, and striving for a normative orientation' (Spicer et al., 2009: 554), and those interested in pursuing various forms of intellectual activism (Contu, 2018, 2020), routinely draw on such language. Calls for critical management scholars to embody various logics of resistance and 'practice what they preach' by disseminating such thought in textbooks (Fulop, 2002) and to encourage a kind of self-aware and reflexive thinking that might awaken a critical consciousness (Cunliffe, 2004) are long-standing. In fact, many have gone further and reflexively noted that CMS academics continue to benefit from the context of the contemporary business school. Thus, there have been calls for pedagogy of not merely resisting but *refusing*; refusing managerial hegemony and the auto-legitimation of the inherent 'wisdom of the market' (King and Learmonth, 2014; Perriton and Reynolds, 2018). This work has posed important challenges to the often ideologically normative position of the contemporary business school, and by proxy to the broader institution of the university which is at times dedicated to smothering critical work, especially if such work is seen as being critical of management (Dunne et al., 2008; Harney, 2007; McCann et al., 2020).

However, we are still troubled by the question of what exactly CMS is resisting. From the earliest days of CMS, the answers to the question of resistance to and emancipation from what have been plural, ranging from challenging dominant positivistic and objectivistic epistemologies, to a rejection of the masculine norms of management theory and practice via feminist critique (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a; Smircich and Calás, 1995). More recently, many have begun to recognize the role of the business school in advancing ideas and ideologies that are inherently racist and colonialist (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2021; Dar et al., 2021), exacerbating social inequality (Fotaki and Prasad, 2015), and actively worsening the global ecological crisis we face in the anthropocene (Campbell et al., 2019; Wright and Nyberg, 2016) by continuing to legitimate death in service of profit maximization (Banerjee, 2008). Yet, perhaps the most common answer has been that we need to resist the exploitative tendencies of work shaped by the currents and vicissitudes of capitalism (see Adler et al., 2007; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b). As Zanoni (2021) suggests, CMS resistance seeks to engage 'the contradictions at the heart of capitalism' (p. 580) and thus to 'denaturalize it as a mode of organizing the economy and society, and envision more just flows and novel subjectivities' (p. 580).

But how much has CMS been able to accomplish in the name of lasting change? The business school of today is hardly recognized as an engine of positive social change. Instead, they are critiqued as anachronistic propagators of 'bullshit' models and theories that actually hamper the work of organizing (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Spicer, 2018), or even as 'a cancerous machine spewing out sick and irrelevant detritus' (Jones and O'Doherty, 2005: 1) that only works to discipline students in order to prepare them for unfulfilled lives of debt, burnout and enthusiastic corporate bootlicking. It remains deeply unclear how they could be the harbingers of anything other than more of the same and so should perhaps be shut down (see Parker, 2018).

In this context, we wonder: *what could we actually teach in a business school to make a difference?* We have been encouraged by colleagues who have engaged in creative experimentations of theory, research and classroom practice, to stimulate changes and becomings, not only in their students but also in their wider communities, seeing that they can have an impact by cultivating the conditions for others to imagine new social possibilities. This has been particularly true of Deleuze and Guattari–inspired scholarship related to CMS which has tended to focus on affective encounters, advocating a joyously affirmative politics of connection, multiplicity and above all difference (e.g. Ergene et al., 2020; Linstead and Thanem, 2007). This work has suggested rhizomatic teamworking (Bissola et al., 2017), embracing walking as a pedagogical practice (Beyes and Steyaert,

2020), and creating space for play and the performing arts (Steyaert et al., 2016). Other examples encourage engaging in affective pedagogy (Hickey-Moody, 2013) or nomadic education (Semetsky, 2008) to engender embodied resistance to the patriarchal and heteronormative Western academy (Semetsky and Masny, 2013), in order to reaffirm a 'hope that life can be different, no matter how forlorn things seem, and that such difference can be joyous' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2017: 109).

While we wish to believe in the inspirational hope of such reassuring aspirations, we cannot help but reflect on their inherent paradoxicality in the face of the insatiable capitalist desire for accumulation as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. We worry that we continue to underestimate capitalism's ability to co-opt and colonize desire, to reterritorialize and recode each creative act and render it via its own axioms. Often these approaches seem to place their faith in the emancipatory potential of immanent praxis, lines of flight, nomadic exploration and affectively joyous affirmations of the new. The call, thus, is to remove hierarchy, *smoothe* dominant strata, open up pure possibility of difference. It is thus strange that Deleuze and Guattari (2005) themselves also issue a curious warning: 'Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us' (p. 500). We draw a parallel to this utterance in Brassier (2010), who noted that if immanent tactics and affirmations become our sole emancipatory goals, someone more strategically cunning and cynical will happily accommodate such tactics and employ them to their ends. In this case, we worry that we might be inadvertently impelling capitalism forward into new hardier morphologies that can continue to oppress and subjugate, continuing our current state of affairs indefinitely; a capitalism that survives forever, growing off of the critiques that we levy at it (Mohammed, 2021) precisely *because* we teach criticism and joyous resistance in our pedagogic spaces. Our suspicions that relationality as a mode of resistance only achieves reactionary advances have led us to reflect on what other theoretical possibilities are available to us.

An accelerationist alternative to respond to capitalism by its intensification

Accelerationist lines of thought are often described as having their roots in Marx's critiques of capitalism. Throughout the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1971) discusses capitalism as 'permanently revolutionary' (p. 94), as continuously pushing past any natural or social limit that it comes up against, and that while this tendency has caused it to emerge as the dominant form of socio-economic organization, it is also what 'impels it towards its own dissolution' (p. 120). Marx thus held that capitalism produces contradictions that he believed would lead to its own destruction. These have been elaborated by contemporary economic theorists who highlight the inherent tensions between alienated labour and the capital accumulating processes that work only by exploiting the former or the way in which extractive capitalism must constantly commodify and destroy a finite 'nature' in order to profit (Harvey, 2014). The inherent contradictions between capital markets that champion private wealth generation and democratic politics have been broadly recognized as well (Streeck, 2011). Yet the revolutionary action that Marx foresaw these contradictions producing has seldom materialized. Capitalism, it seems, is always in the process of producing both its own destruction and then immediately internalizing it only to keep growing in an ever-intensifying fashion.

Deleuze and Guattari (2000) build upon this in *Anti-Oedipus*, writing openly about their uncertainty regarding the potential for traditional modes of resistance:

> Which is the revolutionary path? [. . .] Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market [. . .]? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from

the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process', [. . .] the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet. (pp. 239–240)

Concurring with Marx, they suggest that previous social formations, like feudalism, existed by virtue of their ability to cut off flows (of people, of resources, of desires, etc.), creating social codes and restrictions to which members of that social order must conform. What makes capitalism distinct is that it radically liberates flows, incessantly deterritorializing them anew. They suggest that what defines capitalism is that it is

> Continually cutting off the circulation of flows, breaking them and deferring the break, but these same flows are continually overflowing, and intersecting one another according to schizzes that turn against capitalism and slash into it. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 376)

Capitalism is thus a machine for the unlimited expansion of social limits. It is revolutionary and liberatory by nature, thus expanding *through* constant critiques and curtailment. It does not just open up new possibilities and produce new desires in order to continue to extract surplus value, it requires them in order to function, and thus it constantly produces new flows that eat into itself only to use them as a creative impetus in order to expand further.

The question is thus not simply about capitalism's apparent manifestations and representations, but how it has been able to become a sprawling global desiring-machine that constructs our entire horizon of desiring potentials and how it irreducibly now constitutes our subjectivities. We thus find ourselves in an all-encompassing affect of ever-intensifying and increasingly technologized capitalism, which does not follow logics, clear symbols and representations, and is constantly forming technologically pervasive desiring intensity (Genosko, 2009). 'It is not the net but its shadow' (Genosko, 2011: 117), where thus 'all of the social enters production' (p. 121). What such an affective description of capitalism seems to most strikingly challenge is the idea that we are 'outside' our relations and able to observe and reflect upon them. Instead, we are embedded in its frame of possibilities that constitute our unconscious desires (Gardiner, 2014; Smith, 2011). There is no outside, our desires for resistance and alternatives are a part of capitalism.

How might we be able to think critically about what tactics or strategies would be able to confront, address or contest a capitalism conceptualized in this way? Do we have openings for creative differences and alluring micro-emancipations? Are there potentials for new affective relations and becomings? Are these resistance or are they *required* by capitalism, which should instead be understood as an all-encompassing morass or

> as megadeath-drive as Terminator: that which can't be bargained with, can't be reasoned with, doesn't show pity or remorse or fear and absolutely will not stop, ever. (Fisher, 2014a: 343–344)

Do we not constantly see the truth of this? How many radical social movements have been swallowed up and sold back to us? LGBTQ+ Pride is now a corporate advertising spectacle. Once a radical rejection of the global meat industry, veganism is now a consumer lifestyle choice. Capitalism used to operate by discarding its excesses outside of the sphere of production as externalities (e.g. pollution, mental illness, drug addiction), but now commodification is increasingly turning even such adversities to marketable opportunities (e.g. carbon trading or medicalization). As such, the accelerationist gambit asks: if capitalism will capture any resistance and turn it to the service of profitability, might ways to accelerate the process of its immanent contradictions – until there are too many contradictions for it to internalize – be effective resistance?

While there are multiple others, we turn to reflect on two prominent forms of accelerationist thought to find possible alternatives to our common modes of resistance. While multifaceted and dissimilar in their own ways, they both share an acceptance of capitalism as a powerful libidinal engine, as 'purposiveness without purpose' (Fisher, 2020: 124) or an inhuman potentiality that impels action towards growth (Land, 2012). It is in the face of this recognition that we feel forced to recontextualize our questions of resistance.

Accelerationisms without

What might be termed 'radical accelerationism' coalesces in the firebrand and experimental work of Nick Land and his contemporaries at the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru) at Warwick University in the 1990s. Through dissident essays with connections to the legacies of Marx, Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari, the Ccru produced a number of texts involved in a critique of contemporary capitalism that weaved together Lovecraftian occultism, cybernetics, theory-fiction and poststructural theory. In the Landian form of accelerationism, the goal was to eradicate what he perceived to be a misplaced celebration of the joyous and affirmative humanism in Deleuze and Guattari, and thus lunge into darker excesses of a 'rage of thought' (Land, 1992: xxi) that can only envision grim futuristic worlds of dystopian nihilism where the human will have been replaced by artificial intelligence (AI) orchestrating a new form of planetary techno-capitalism from which there is no escape. Impelled by a cultural imaginary rich with images of *Bladerunner, Akira, Terminator* and *The Thing*, Land's work builds on the inhuman potentials of desire as a totalizing tendency of unstoppable capitalist emergence.

For Land, when desire is taken seriously as capital's inhuman impulse, it is the *drag of human subjectivity* that becomes its problem to be overcome. In its incessant will to intensify production, capitalism is the runaway motor of desire, functioning as a technologized death-drive through intense feedback loops, producing production itself until every living thing is rendered again as inorganic matter in the process. There is nothing about human culture, egoism or other 'humanist hubris' (Negarestani, 2011: 185) that is of importance in this inhuman process of desire towards nothingness. In Land's view, it thus becomes foolish to have any sentimental longings for the fictional relevance of the subjectivity of the human condition apart from its interim and at best temporary potential to assist as a vector in speeding up the process. This will finally lead to a boundless *zero*, in 'which there is no agent other than unconscious matter, a production machine and desire' (Galindo Hervás, 2016: 312). As per Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism deterritorializes everything stable, but subordinates that desire by momentary reterritorializations according to its own axiomatic of relentless accumulation. For Land, what also becomes increasingly deterritorialized is the idea of subjectivity itself, that 'cosmic joke' slowing down the process which will be superseded by other (in)organisms and technologies soon anyway.

The proliferating fervent valorisation and social penetration of technological automation is integral to this tendency, and this is why Land (2012) refers to AI as an 'alien' technology

> what appears to humanity as the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy's resources. (p. 338)

AI is thus something like an inhuman force of intensification, a new 'sorcerer's apprentice' of capitalism that is itself now fully dispersed; 'a system of sorcery without sorcerers' (Skonieczny, 2018: 986) having lost all control of its creations and itself. In this sense, as Land notes, the futures of capitalism and AI become entangled and identical, a global cybernetic system of automatic marketized exchange that exists in perpetual meltdown and so transcends the human in order to achieve

greater productivity (Land, 2012). This is happening *already* and that there is *nothing* we can do about it (Fisher, 2014b).

Land thus insists that the contemporary confluence of global capitalist technologies has *already* taken an evolutionary turn of its own, developing towards its own endless accumulation (Ennis, 2021). With the obliteration of the inertia-inducing human protagonist, radical accelerationism forces us to imagine the inhuman desiring tendencies of capitalism (also Murphet, 2016). This allows us to consider it not as a social mode of economic exchange, or an epiphenomenon to an otherwise harmonious and benign humanity, but rather a far more primordial organi-*zing* that emerged as an incessant channelling of humanity's desires in a global and hyperproliferating fashion.

. . . and with the human

What has become known as 'left accelerationism' follows its Landian predecessor in that it seeks to reject a 'folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism' (Williams and Srnicek, 2013: n/a); tactics which have long been mainstays of the political left. What sets left accelerationism apart from Land's work is its refusal to abandon the human as an agent within the political process. Instead of a preoccupation with the inhuman autonomization of capitalism, what a left accelerationism champions is an intensification of the well-known tensions and paradoxes in capitalism to bring the system to its limits (Gardiner, 2017). It is about *reclaiming* capitalized technological tendencies and putting them to work to improve the human condition. Indeed, it is recognized that the aforementioned efficiencies of capitalism relied on its capacity to externalize the negative effects of its productive activities or as recognized by Carstens (2018) as the

> venomous assemblages of semiological, chemical and neuro-affective capitalism; the toxic networks of e-waste, plastics, dead land, dead water, and economic precarity that shadow, like a black smog, the mediated spectacle of business as usual. (p. 352)

For left accelerationism, the answer is a striking call for *more* experimentation in commodification, more technological progress and automation, so as to bring what has been able to be largely jettisoned from the system's value-function to the fore. Seen in this way, hyper-capitalist stalwarts like Walmart and Starbucks, in their generic homogeneity, are reflections of a 'thwarted desire for communism' (Fisher, 2012: 17). What needs to be rediscovered are novel collective forms of societal organizing when technologies of automation and production can be brought out of the value-function of capitalist inequality and endless accumulation (Brassier, 2014; Morgan, 2019). The implication is that we need to 'dismiss the Orwellian fears around cybernetics and argue that "cunning automata" can be liberated from the directionless and irrational constraints of capital' (Gardiner, 2020: 1), which effectively 'squanders human potential' (p. 5) through its insistence on producing effectively useless but certainly desirable offerings. From this perspective, 'a viable post-capitalism must therefore beat neoliberalism at its own game' (Gardiner, 2017: 35). Technologies and their development should be repurposed as it were, on the already existing capitalist infrastructures (Gardiner, 2020). In *Inventing the Future*, Srnicek and Williams (2015) outline potential strategies for achieving such goals, including advancing an agenda of engineering consent through pluralising the teaching of economics, catalysing utopian imaginaries and storytelling, and encouraging technological innovation towards full automation.

For us, these two varieties of accelerationism share fairly little in common, but they do both draw on an alternative reading of Deleuze and Guattari that eschews traditional tactics of resistance, seeing these as backwardly romantic gestures or classically rationalist but effectively useless

aspirations of raising awareness. From these perspectives, criticism and humanism are ineffective approaches, because capitalism consists of a systemic emergence that channels desire and is not human in the first place. *The question again is what is it we should be teaching, if we follow these ways of thinking about capitalism?*

Intensifying teaching through accelerationist alternatives?

What can we actually do? As CMS scholars and educators, we yearn for pedagogic expressions for promoting meaningful and systematic change via what and how we teach in our classrooms. If we accept capitalism's all-encompassing tendency is the key problem for us to address if we want to make meaningful social change, then what, via an accelerationist lens, could we do about it? While we can only approach them as unsettling potentials, we offer two possible deterritorializing vectors: teaching hypercapitalism or accelerating technology.

Deterritorializing vector 1 – teaching hypercapitalism

What would happen if we took the ideas of radical accelerationists seriously? Land (2017) insists that 'the only way forward is through, which means further in' (p. n/a). What if rather than trying to moderate capitalism through critical relationality, we instead embrace and encourage a cunning form of hypercapitalism? This could entail championing free markets and deregulation to the point that would amplify capitalism's excessive tendencies, exacerbating the business school's hidden curriculum of neoliberal capitalism (Parker, 2018) in the hope that the system will break down and bring about difference no matter what kind. What if, instead of traditional resistance, which is readily co-opted by capitalism, we 'leaned in' and started teaching a proliferation of unabashed capitalism that would maximize shareholder value at any cost? What if instead of championing sustainability, feminism, equality, diversity, inclusivity, ethical or purposeful business, and a general ethic of humanism, we moved from reaction to radical offensive?

This approach would feast on the contemporary cultivation of an ethics of 'care of the self' that would be 'able to resist – or at least cope better with – the individualization and marketization inherent in biopolitics' (Śliwa et al., 2015: 4). Instead, a radical accelerationist vector might glorify the workaholism seen in the neoliberal entrepreneurialism of #hustle or #thegrind, exacerbating existing epidemics of stress, burnout and work-death, and put such wonders to the forefront of our curricula and our messaging on employability. What if, instead of trying to raise awareness of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and embed them into our teaching or advance agendas of sustainability and climate justice (see Wright and Nyberg, 2016), we simply taught students to maximize profit regardless of the environmental, social and political impacts? We might also teach about the benefits of *fully* falling into the caress of social control and AI 'nudging'. That is to say, what if we took Land (1993) at his word and tried to act to as though capitalism *is* free of the drag of human subjectivity, that all that mattered *is* intensifying the process? What might this change?

While the above might entail an 'interesting' experiment in curriculum design, we simply are not convinced by its ability to bring about *change*. Indeed, if we follow the work of Śliwa et al. (2015) and others, how long before capital comes to accept and celebrate our unsavoury approach, ready to increase workloads and efficiencies because it knows that new resilient and employable workers produced by the business school will be able to withstand the pressure of a persistent 90-hour workweek? How long before business schools, desperate to continue to attract students, start marketing themselves as producers of hardier and more resistant workers, who can suffer

longer hours for lower wages because they are equipped with the skills to be a relational, ethical and reflexive leader (see Cunliffe, 2009)?

Indeed, how long before our institutions become celebrated for *not* catering to a 'woke' capitalism (Rhodes, 2022) that performs a pretence of sustainability, attracting an international student body of reactionaries via this unique selling point? Conversely, how long until our approach is vilified for not keeping on the 'human face' (Fisher, 2014b) necessary for capitalist tendencies to operate through society? New business opportunities emerge – an inhuman accelerationist business school and the 'nice and happy' business school that really cares about socially progressive causes can both find market niches. It seems that even a radical and revolting counter-resistance will inevitably be co-opted and made to serve the ends of profitability.

What we are perhaps most afraid of is that the answer to the question of 'what can we teach now to deal the most damage to capitalism?' is perhaps an indifferent 'nothing'. The idea that radical accelerationism can be simply about hastening the collapse of capitalism is farcical. It assumes that a subject who is outside the process can intervene in the process in order to alter it. Yet, as Land's (2012) work reminds us, the process will always have taken place. *We* are a part of it. It also assumes a weakness in capitalism *while* constituting a death-drive machismo and magical thinking of its own right (Noys, 2014). *A production of pipe dreams*. Taking Land seriously means understanding that the planetary technocapital singularity is coming, and there is no possibility of escape.

Deterritorializing vector 2: accelerate technology

What if we were to focus on one specific contradiction within capitalism, for example, the relationship between labour and technology? For left accelerationism, the way to fight capitalism is to accelerate the pace of technological innovation, particularly in terms of automation replacing human labour in the production process. In doing this, we would intensify the contradiction of capitalism that makes productive work such a central desiring tendency (see Fleming, 2015), and thus arrive at a post-capitalistic future free from the drudgery of work. This is the vision which Srnicek and Williams (2015) propose in their demand of 'full automation', the reduction of the working week, the provision of a universal basic income and the diminishment of our entrenched work ethic.

In response, we ask simply: 'Does any business school need to be encouraged to accelerate the pace of innovation?' This is already happening with no critical action on our part. Business schools already celebrate the technologies that organizations are using to optimize supply chains or surveil their employees. From the other side, organizations are already experimenting with the 4-day workweek and different national governments are trialling Universal Basic Income as ways to bolster productivity. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, would our students, many of whom might have trouble distinguishing us from an AI chat bot that replies to emails with quotes from the syllabus, actually notice if we tried to do anything to champion technological innovation? Let us say that we follow Proserpio and Gioia (2007) and 'blend technology with the traditional classroom practices' (p. 79) in order to cater to the virtual sensibilities of students who are now Internet-natives, or O'Doherty (2020) in using films like *Leviathan* to encourage students to explore their 'becoming Go-Pro', in the hope that smoothing their acculturation into a technosocial apparatus will lead them to be more willing to invest in AI or support automation. Maybe we could expand to use simulation software or AI chat bots to facilitate different forms of relationality and practice that could encourage more innovation. In doing so, we will be acutely aware that this line of flight is already reterritorialized. It is already taking place as contemporary business schools are doubling down investment into business analytics, machine learning and simulation platforms,[1] feeding back into the reinforcement of systems of capitalism.

For us, any form of techno-utopianism, no matter how sophisticated, typically overlooks how technologies in capitalism are and will likely continue to be strictly available *only for those* with purchasing power or the control to construct consumer subjectivities. Even in the case of a global emergency like Covid-19, it is generally not seen as controversial that medical corporations hold entire countries hostage and that the crisis will likely continue in 'developing' countries to the foreseeable future as an outcome of necrocapitalist policies (Banerjee, 2008). It remains unclear to us how capitalism would suddenly 'roll over' and release its technologies to the commons. How will any automation be repurposed for some notion of the collective good, apart from via the same archaic political processes the entirety of accelerationist thought has deemed completely dysfunctional in its irreducible allegiance to global capitalism (cf. Srnicek and Williams, 2015)? In addition, it would seem that in many ways, contemporary capitalism is already doubling down on a narrative that is preparing the public for more unemployment and inequality instead of any technologically liberated future (Morgan, 2019). Thus, the promise of a left accelerationist future is already under constant threat. The phenomenal growth of AI and machine learning suggests that this process will not suffer abatement and teaching our students the revolutionary politics of accelerating technologies that can overtake the capitalist institutions that 'own' technologies is likely to do nothing other than continue the process. As such, we are likely teaching what capitalism has expected us to be teaching all along, any innovations simply helping us to feel subversive as we do so.

Concluding thoughts on the melancholic quality of teaching CMS

We thus return inexorably to the question with which we began. *If one wanted to encourage critical, revolutionary, sociopolitical change, what would one teach in a business school?* As we have tried to suggest, we worry that the interventions of our critical management teaching continue to fail to take into account how readily critique is recaptured by capitalism. As Parker (2020) comments, even if they try to engage in activism, and teach modes of resistance, or champion alternatives, 'business schools end up teaching business as usual' (p. 13). *But what else can we do?*

Having considered different accelerationist vectors, we can also conclude that they seem to not live up to their dark potentials of producing change. We might ask whether they are anything more than an macho impulse of a thrilling death-drive attesting to 'the poverty of a theoretical imagination' (Noys, 2013: 52) that global capitalism is more than happy to support? The problem seems to again lie in underestimating the mutability of capitalism, and thus it seems more likely that any accelerationism 'could well lead to a "higher" and even more vicious stage of capitalism, rather than anything resembling a genuinely post-capitalist society' (Gardiner, 2017: 49). Rather than any change for the better, accelerationist thought, even the left variety, seems to only suggest an absence of politics and an intensification of the same. Its attraction may be little more than a self-satisfied gesture of the 'critique of critique' that we may be tempted by as a vector of achieving *anything* other than more of the same.

But what other possibilities are available to us that capitalism would not subsume and intensify? *We must have something liberatory to affirm, how can we contribute*? After 50 years of cautious experimentation with trying to find small advantages, 'find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 161), what has been accomplished? It seems that if anything, contemporary techno-capitalism has only become more entrenched by swallowing up resistance to it. *Is this really all we can say?* We have been asking these questions in earnest because we have no good answers to any of them. Instead, we wish to provoke colleagues to tell us about theirs. We thus fail at the publishing industry's requirement for an affirmative contribution (Culp, 2016) and

risk being dismissed as yet another quirky critical paper (Bell and Bridgman, 2018). *But who needs another manifesto?* Any positive stratagem that we lay out will, in the act of doing so, be co-opted so perhaps the most prudent thing is to say nothing at all. We do not have answers, only many doubts, fears and anxieties about the contemporary business school and the practices in which our day-to-day lives as educators are implicated. Maybe we want colleagues to tell us comforting stories about how their intellectual activism, championing of resistances and alternatives, or how new pedagogical experiments are bringing about change, because *we* do not seem to be. Maybe we want to simply share our fears and seek solidarity, for misery, as they say, loves company.

We feel as though we have become enmired in a *melancholic pedagogy*. In the Freudian sense, the melancholic is the one who cannot bear to fully recognize the lost object and is thus left in an affective limbo where something is irredeemably amiss but cannot be directly confronted. This classic image of melancholia also comes appropriately stocked with self-reproach and self-contempt, resonating well with our attachment to a field as a lost object, 'for its betrayals in life and in dying' (Yassa, 2002: 88). Yet our predicament is not grief, even if we finally have come to acknowledge that *there is no alternative*. We even envy the triumphalism of capitalism that has today 'ceased doubting itself' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 153), for we only have recourse to a dreary suspicion that the pleasure in writing and teaching resistance is capitalism's own exceptionally effective survival mechanism. Indeed, while the cruellest, 'this machine is fantastic' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 374). The dream of the alternative and its relentless perpetuation is capitalism's alone. There is no escape from capitalism because it *is* already a vector of escape. Capital, increasingly as AI, as human assembled machine to escape human inertia itself (see Land, 2012) cannibalizes any possibility of relationality, alternatives and critique, and emerges looking for seconds. In this regard, we can only wonder whether it is our desire *to do something* that should be the object of critique. If we can identify that every new critical offshoot, every new strategy for resistance, every form of alternative organization will be recaptured by capitalism in order to further its own ends, perhaps it is the desire to *do something* which leads us to create these new alternatives that we need to resist. As Land (2017) reminds us, 'the process is not to be critiqued. The process is the critique, feeding back into itself, as it escalates' (p. n/a). *What if there is nothing that we can do to make a difference? What if our critique is capitalism itself?*

This is a question that we as CMS educators are not really able to consider. It would mean the re-evaluation of resistances we have held dear throughout our careers. It would mean admitting that our quiet rebellions are informed by *our own* will to revolution rather than their efficacy. *Melancholia for us is an incurable loss of faith*. There are no convincing grand narratives of radical transformative change left for us. Yet, we continue on regardless because *what else are we going to do?* We encourage students to pursue more ethical and responsible forms of organizing, unsure of whether we are inspiring or depressing them, as we send them and their desire for ethical and responsible organizing to be commodified further. We are stuck as 'transcendental miserabilists' (Land, 2012), wishing that we could glimpse some hope for change through an unexpected rupture in history (Fisher, 2009), while finding such possibility increasingly unlikely. We were desperate enough to even look to accelerationism for a way out, but there too we only find fantasy and deadlock. Radical accelerationism offers only the thrill of the annihilation of the human, but perversely at least *knows how we get there*. Conversely, left accelerationism promises human emancipation from capitalist logics, but *does not know how to actualize them* apart from extant political structures that are already deemed to be part of the problem in the first place. Equally, we are dogged by the fear that our melancholia is *also* capitalism's affect (Fisher, 2009), a way of stifling and cutting off resistance.

We are thus still stuck on Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) original questions, 'Which is the revolutionary path? Is there one?' Today there is only aporia. We started off with Deleuze's notion of

how the use of philosophy is to *sadden* and the dangers of a cult of excessive optimism have been well chronicled (Scruton, 2010). Is there potential positivity in saying out loud that we inhabit entrenched negativity? Recent work highlighting the potentialities of cultivating a novel negativity rather than optimisms (Culp, 2016) encourages us to explore the possibilities here. For Deleuze and Guattari (2000), true courage lies 'in agreeing to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges' (p. 341). Echoing Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, Žižek (2018) provokes us to consider that 'true courage is not to imagine an alternative, but to accept the consequences of the fact that there is no clearly discernible alternative' (p. 9), that the threat today is 'not passivity but pseudo-activity' (Žižek, 2006: 334). Finding a recourse in hopelessness does not necessitate apathy, but instead it is only there that we can, in true negativity, instead of instantly co-opted rejuvenating critique, uncover the seeds of something else. Are we courageous enough to discover our hopelessness and be freed from hope to think anew?

Funding

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Note

1. At Aalto University, depression is being gamified in exiting ways. See https://www.aalto.fi/en/news/researchers-developing-computer-game-to-treat-depression

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