

PARA-ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

Paul Boshears

What I'm writing here began as a conversation in preparation for the *Aesthetics in the 21st Century* conference hosted by the University of Basel in Switzerland.¹ There we, the editors of *continent*, and the editors of the journal, *Speculations*,² convened a panel discussion entitled the "Aesthetics of Para-academic Practices."³ Our panel discussion came during the middle of the second day of convening, that potentially grey, bleak zone in a multi-day conference when no one wants to return from lunch and suddenly the crowd has become half the size it was at the commencement. But, it was good timing for that panel discussion because it did something interesting to the usual stage directions that choreograph most of the conferences we academics attend: we were discussing the gripes and the grouses that are usually only articulated in the halls, between sessions at the coffee station, or over beers at the end of the day.⁴ The backstage talk about how our daily academic practices — that grind that we live, not the polished pearls that we publish or broadcast — that was suddenly front and centre in the conference. I'm not claiming that we mobilized our collective frustrations into some tectonic shift; but we cannot deny that some "real talk" helps shape the contours of how we will behave in the future. At a minimum when we are in the presence of those with whom we've had that "real talk" we are likely to behave in a different manner, that is the promise of collegiality and more broadly of sociality.

These moments might be microscopic in the face of increasing precarity for the majority of faculty working in U.S. universities (that is, adjunct faculty)⁵ and the global cognitariat;⁶ I defer to a local leader of the Creek Nation (the indigenous people of the Atlanta area, where I have lived for many years), Tom Bluewolf, who told me, "No raindrop wants to be responsible for the flood." And so I offer this pittance, this single tear wept for all my fellow graduate students, and all those adjuncts that make a college or university education possible in the United States (where I am currently based) and across the globe. Your work transforms lives beyond your own. Mine is one of them.

We are witnessing the changing nature of academic practice. My thinking about para-academia and the macro-level forces that are helping forge the para-academic proposition is primarily informed by and concerned with how the para-academic could be practiced in the United States. Although I have also worked in universities in both Switzerland and Japan I am currently based in the U.S. and write from this perspective. This change in practice is being spurred-on by the dramatic shift in the technologies through which knowledge work is done. The para-academic proposition is both a response to and a detour away from the conditions that accompany the changes occurring in the Academy. The para-academic is not a fully-formed idea, it is a proposition and it has multiple valences. Bruce Macfarlane emphasizes the para-academic as support role, as in "para-professional."⁷ The PhD holder that acts as counselor to the cohorts, rather than as the traditional mentor, say. Or some other administrative function that frees-up the professor to either teach or conduct research. He describes the "rise of the para-academic" as a result of shifting expectations within international universities toward a more "Taylorized" model of operating so as to achieve the optimal efficiency in delivering educated people. In order to achieve these efficiencies, the role of the scholar has become what he terms "unbundled."⁸ If the university can find it's greatest return on investment through the kinds of knowledge generation that happen in research labs, then the university should be hiring those professors that are best able to acquire research dollars and manage that funding stream. Meanwhile the

historical vision of the professor as one who professes to their students and society at-large has been relegated to an army of adjunct laborers. To be fair, there is no shortage of reporting about the current academic crisis. But to whom are these notices directed? The disconnect between those working in universities and colleges and seemingly everyone else in the U.S. is perhaps best exemplified by Vice President Joe Biden's statement last year January: that the rising costs of higher education in this country is due to rising professor salaries. It was not emphasized this significant loss of funding from individual states.⁹

Currently the trend in higher education is to celebrate openness.¹⁰ For example, Open Access is bandied about as an antidote to the skyrocketing expenses of subscriptions to academic journals. But, as I have discussed elsewhere, what is meant by Open Access is not clear.¹¹ Open software initiatives like those being developed at the Public Knowledge Project (their OJS platform is the WordPress of academic publishing) continues to be adopted and developed by younger academics as they go about their work. We initiated *continent*, with aims that include developing the OJS platform to integrate the variety of media that are now available for the contemporary academic to mediate their labor (e.g. static and moving images, code-based practices, audio, etc.) Like our friends at Punctum Books, we are Open Access publishers utilizing Creative Commons licenses, the so-called "Diamond Open Access" model of publishing.¹² We do so in an effort to emphasize the fun of creating both a material object called a publication but also to emphasize that the process of publication is the process of public-making. Yes, many of us involved in these projects share precarious positions relative to the universities we draw incomes or other resources from, we may also share a certain gallows humour about the sad state of funding for our beloved Academy. But, when Harvard University, with one of the richest endowments in the world at its disposal, announces they can't afford journals,¹³ the tectonic change that comes with widespread adoption of Open Access policies isn't about a disruptive technology that finally breaks a monopoly. Open Access and MOOC's are not disruptive technologies, they're labor models.¹⁴ Under the so-called Gold Open Access model, Academics

already do a large amount of work for these publishers, and pay for that opportunity (or access to this work is paid for by the tax payers).

Today, the value of lecturers approaches zero. Their talent at communicating their knowledge is given away freely through vehicles like edX, Coursera, Udacity, or Academia.edu. Today the academic must demonstrate that their work has impact. As the CEO of Academia.edu, Richard Price, stated it, "A core problem for researchers is how to build their brand [...] To make yourself established in a field, the core way you do that is to share your work."¹⁵ This isn't liberating academics, this is neoliberalizing academia. We are the brand, the dotcom update to Marx's comment about the proletariat, doubly free, "as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that [... we are] free of all the objects needed for the realization of [our] labour-power."¹⁶ The premium paid has instead been placed on the bureaucracy necessary to achieve and maintain accreditation. Similar to the dynamic established by overseas campuses (such as Australia's Monash Indonesian campus, or the National University of Singapore and Yale), what we are seeing is the triumph of University branding. Students around the world want to attend Ivy League schools because those schools have the veneer of excellence, not because the programs themselves are the best—in fact, these Ivy League schools are frequently outperformed by public/state schools in many areas. Yes, anyone will be able to take classes from Harvard, but that won't matter unless they also purchase the accreditation. When it is impossible for any one person to distinguish signal from noise, reliable signal markers are necessary and this is, arguably what accreditation does.

The University will continue to become McDonaldized. Just like the chair on the airplane looks like the chair in the rental car looks like the chair in the faculty lounge, looks like the chair your department head holds, so will one's education become a packaged "experience." The student-consumer will expect certain events and interactions while away at their University.¹⁷ For those paying for accreditation, this education experience will be delivered on a spectrum: the flavor of timeshares for the poorer community college students, and more like Semester at Sea

— or some other expensive study abroad program — for the affluent.¹⁸

Perhaps there will even develop a Hooters-style experience, student-consumers can enjoy their education as its delivered by Abercrombie & Fitch model-like adjuncts, the university finally capitalizing on the chilli-pepper grade system used by ratemyprofessor.com. Regardless of their appearances, the academic workers at those universities will be expected to deliver the education experience efficiently, reliably, and in the most uniform manner possible.¹⁹ If you think that I am too wildly speculating, consider this somber report: the top two growing sources of escorts (primarily young women to service men) are universities.²⁰ Faced with student loan debt that has grown by orders of magnitude, the future demands that those seeking an education be, creative.

But what does para-academic afford us? Why this term that so clearly adheres to “academia,” a conservative, discipline-insistent, change-averse social institution? It was from Nicola Masciandaro that I first learned the term “para-academic.”²¹ For Eileen Joy and Masciandaro the phrase:

captures the multivalent sense of something that fulfills and/or frustrates the academic from a position of intimate exteriority [....] The para-academic embodies an unofficial excess or extension of the academic that helps, threatens, supports, mocks (par-ody), perfects and/or calls it into question simply by existing next to it.²²

To their description I would like to add the concept, *parabole*. A term within rhetoric, *parabole* operates in a manner not dissimilar from analogy: a transaction that enables two incommensurable items to become somehow representative of a truth. Like a promise, what is offered is perhaps never able to be delivered, and yet there are ample examples in our daily lives that we can turn toward and identify moments where the incommensurable promises are somehow not reduced to simply payback or tit-for-tat, but something excessive, generative. The consummate performance of communal living, what I believe the para-academic proposition aspires toward, is a generative activity in the creation of

further exchanges. These further exchanges are the creation of further public goods. Let us maintain an openness toward the para-academic as a parabolic figure, concerned with the generation of knowledge. The para-academic, regardless of the relationship to the university at any particular point, will be characterized by their practices for novelty generation as a mode of educational working.

In English we arrived at the term “education” by conflating two Latin words: *educare* and *educere*.²³ With *educare* there is a concern with training, like a vine; a process of installing an incremental amount of knowledge into the student with the ends already presupposed. At the end of the *educare* process there will be the skills-trained student, an ideal consumer, empower with the knowledge to do what is known in advance. *Educere*, on the other hand as Roger Ames and David Hall state, “suggests that one ‘extends’ one’s inner tendencies through a mode of self-cultivation that is, in fact, self-creation.”²⁴ *Educere* is a drawing-out,²⁵ an aesthetic re-understanding, it is knowledge that has appreciated through experience that enables one to generate novelty. This is the difference between the academic as a parergon (a supplemental worker or ad hoc byproduct) and being a paragon (an exemplary person of what it means to cultivate and generate in the face of what we don’t yet know). We vacillate between these polar modes of being and in these hesitations between moments of decision making knowledge is generated.

CIRCULATING THE PRACTICE OF KNOWLEDGE-MAKING

The practice of knowledge-making that marks our knowledge economies circulates so much text, and from the advent of publishing the para-academic has haunted public life. I’ve previously argued that publication is the process of public-making,²⁶ but I am arguing that para-academia meets the Michael Warner’s characterization of counterpublics, “spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not merely replicative.”²⁷ The generation of counterpublics occurs when the dominant modes of public address make it such that the

individual can pay attention to the fact that there is this public address, but that public addressing doesn't allow the individual to participate. This isn't to say that para-academics are limited in their relations to academics through antagonisms, a loser's club that generates its own cool by being defined only by the membership's inability to be brought into the academic public. Although it can be that: a crowd of disaffected bright, committed, well-read folks that heard the promise of education as a panacea against the social ills of our times. And of the times before us, to go not too far back we could thank the Marie Curie for her sacrifice, or we could go way, way back and ask Plato if his pharmacological betrayal of Socrates was a promise or a curse to future generations.²⁸

Indeed, the question still hangs in the air: how do we collectively make sure that promises are kept? During the early modern era this was achieved through conversation as commerce. "Conversation" was Richard Eden's word for commerce in his *Decades of the Newe Worlde* (1555)²⁹, and referred to equal exchange among strangers—the sine qua non of public life. Abbé Du Bos in 1719 defined "public" as those that have gained enlightenment either through reading or through life in society [*le commerce du monde*].³⁰ These are calls to *isegoria*, the promise of equal access to the agora as both point of social assembly (or *ping*)³¹ and the place for exchanging material goods. Indeed, the very concept of democracy as a social relationship is impossible without the Ancient Greeks' simultaneous churning over of what *isonomia* could possibly mean during their years of colonial expansion.³² In short, the development of economic crises has fueled the development of our thinking about what qualities an educated person ought to have to make living in society bearable. Isn't this at the heart of Hesiod's *Works and Days*? "Hey, brother, don't be a jerk. Learn how to plough. Here's how you ought to be comporting yourself going forward," is among the earliest messages to be transmitted to us from the Big Bang of literary practice.³³ A public is the result of the circulation texts, a text being understood in the broadest way possible to encompass reading as a technique for consuming manifold media. But this circulation of texts is not only the mechanism by

which subjects are interpellated, it is also the mechanism by which the common good is established.

TOSSING LOVE LETTERS INTO THE SEA

Please allow me a moment of autobiography as I try to make sense of both how I came to be involved in the para-academic conversation as well as something I said at my first "official" para-academic event. I had accepted an invitation from Eileen Joy to join a panel discussion at the Public School New York that included people from *Cabinet*, from Sequence Press, Eileen, and several others in 2012. I'd never heard the phrase "para-academic" before then. During the panel discussion—for which I had not prepared notes, a situation that had me very nervous since I've been taught that a speaker should always value the audience's time and thus prepare notes—I heard myself say at one point that *continent*. in many ways operates as a love letter stuffed into a bottle and tossed into the sea. It was a bit heavy-handed and smarmy, but it is true. When we began we didn't know to whom these texts were being sent and certainly can't say what value ought be attached to our publishing what we publish. I can't say that I know any better who our readership is, what they want, or why we agree to read each other, but the experience of publishing *continent*. has consistently demonstrated to me a lesson I first heard when Jacques Derrida eulogized Emmanuel Levinas: that every gesture is always toward an Other that is entrusted to me.³⁴ And that language is, in its essence, friendship.

In the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition a subjective promise becomes an objective legal obligation when there is the circulation of a text, called a material consideration, between two parties.³⁵ This transformation from, essentially, private words between two people into a communal concern is at the heart of what it means to live in a society. Communal living, regardless the scale, appreciates in value when people are able to deliver on what they say they will. The virtue of these acts radiates across societies and creates a flourishing that is distinct from the "safety" of order that

policing demands. The consummation of one's promise, delivering on what one has promised, is an expression of mutual determination that affirms the communal in being in a communicating community. Being a para-academic publisher is a practice that enables me to demonstrate publication as a process of public-making.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to the comments and conversations that came from sharing early versions of this presentation at the Neil Postman Graduate Conference at NYU as well as at the New York Public School in February, 2013.
- 2 Both *continent*. (www.continentcontinent.cc) and *Speculations* (www.speculations-journal.org) are Open Access online journals established by graduate students in the late oughts of the twenty-first century. *Speculations* is a member of a broader Open Access publishing initiative, Punctum Books (www.punctumbooks.com). We learned at the Basel conference that none of the editors of *Speculations* had ever physically met one another prior to convening in Switzerland that weekend. Such is the nature of academic collaboration in the early twenty-first century.
- 3 We at *continent*. also published preliminary remarks about the matter in 'Discussions Before an Encounter', *continent*. 2.2 (2012): 136–147.
- 4 Video documentation of our conversation can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/continentcontinent/para-academic-practice>. Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 5 See the New Faculty Majority Foundation's national summit from 2012, 'Reclaiming Academic Democracy: Facing the Consequences of Contingent Employment in Higher Education' reportage with summaries and links to presenters available from John A. Casey, Jr. 'Reflections on the New Faculty Majority Summit 2012', <http://johnacaseyjr.com/2012/01/29/reflections-on-the-new-faculty-majority-summit-2012/>. Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 6 On the cognitariat, see Matt Fuller's (2001) interview with Franco Berardi (Bifo). Berardi discusses the cognitariat as a virtual class, a class whose effect is only known by the aggregation of knowledge workers' micro-actions (<http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0106/msg00033.html>). Accessed 3 August, 2013. See also Berardi, Franco (2010) 'Cognitarian Subjectivation', *e-flux journal* 20 November (<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/cognitarian-subjectivation/>). Also see Bruno, Isabelle and Christopher Newfield's (2010) 'Can the Cognitariat Speak?', *e-flux journal* March (<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/can-the-cognitariat-speak/>) and Newfield, Christopher (2010) 'The Structure and Silence of Cognitariat', *Edufactory* 0: 10–26.
- 7 Macfarlane, Bruce (2011) 'The Morphing of Academic Practice: Unbundling and the Rise of the Para-academic', *Higher Education Quarterly* 65.1:59–73.
- 8 *ibid*.
- 9 Williams June, Audrey (2012) 'Professors Seek to Reframe Salary Debate', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* April 8, 2012. (<https://chronicle.com/article/faculty-salaries-barely-budge-2012/>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 10 See, for example, Carlson, Scott and Goldie Blumenstyk (2012) 'For Whom Is College Being Reinvented?', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* December 17, 2012. (<https://chronicle.com/article/The-False-Promise-of-the/136305/>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 11 Boshears, Paul (2013) 'Open Access Publishing as a Para-Academic Proposition: Besides OA as Labor Relation', *tripleC—Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 11 (2): 589–596.
- 12 Fuchs, Christian and Marisol Sandoval (2013) 'The Diamond Model of Open Access Publishing: Why Policy Makers, Scholars, Universities, Libraries, Labour Unions and the Publishing World Need to Take Non-Commercial, Non-Profit Open Access Serious', *tripleC—Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 11 (2): 428–443.
- 13 Harvard's Faculty Advisory Council Memorandum on Journal Pricing. The Harvard Library April 17, 2012. (<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k77982&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup143448>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 14 Ian Bogost shares my point in his contribution to a round table discussion,

- 'MOOCs and the Future of the Humanities: A Roundtable' between Al Filreis, Cathy N. Davidson, and Ray Schroeder in *Los Angeles Review of Books* June 14, 2013 (<http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/moocs-and-the-future-of-the-humanities-a-roundtable-part-1>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 15 Cutler, Kim-Mai (2013) 'Academia.edu, The Social Networking Platform For Researchers, Raises \$11.1 Million', *TechCrunch* September 26, 2013. (<http://techcrunch.com/2013/09/26/academia-edu-2/>). Accessed 11/23/2013.
- 16 Marx, Karl (1990) *Capital* Volume 1, Ben Fowkes [trans] New York: Penguin Classics. 272–273.
- 17 For a profile of what the very rich seem to expect from a college “experience” for their children see Carol Matlack’s report on the development of High Point University, “part corporate campus, part theme park” in ‘Bubble U: High Point University’, *BloombergBusinessweek* April 19, 2012. (<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-04-19/bubble-u-dot-high-point-university#p1>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 18 Some of this we see playing-out, for better or worse, in the trends for students graduating with student loan debt in excess of US\$100,000, see Mark Kantrowitz ‘Who Graduates College with Six-Figure Student Loan Debt?’, (<http://www.finaid.org/educators/20120801sixfiguredebt.pdf>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 19 As Deborah Withers pointed out during the process of editing this writing, there are significant managerial problems with actually delivering this, however, due to the nature of last-minute course assignments from department chairs and so on. I am grateful to her for this point.
- 20 Downey, Maureen (2013) Faced with tuition bills, more GSU and UGA students turning to “Sugar Daddies”, *Atlanta Journal Constitution* January 14, 2013. (<http://blogs.ajc.com/get-schooled-blog/2013/01/14/faced-with-tuition-bills-more-gsu-and-uga-students-turning-to-sugar-daddies/>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 21 Masciandaro, Nicola (2010) *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1* Glossator/Punctum Books: Brooklyn: 267.
- 22 From the organizing notes for a panel discussion on para-academic publishing at the Observatory for the New York Public School held April 17, 2012 (<http://thepublicschool.org/node/28961>). Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 23 I am primarily relying upon the Ames and Hall discussion here and as such I am opened to the criticism that I am forcing the point a bit. Certainly one can make the claim that *educare* is just as much a concern with cultivation, perhaps more so than *educere*.
- 24 Ames, Roger T. and Hall, David L. (2001) *Focusing the Familiar: A Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (□□) University of Hawai‘i Press: Honolulu: 51.
- 25 See Lewis & Short *eduo*, II., A., 1., b. available online Accessed 11/23/2013. (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=educere&la=la#Perseus:text:1999.04.0060:entry=eduo1-contents>)
- 26 Allen, et al (2012) ‘Discussions Before an Encounter’, *continent*. 2.2: 147.
- 27 Warner, Michael (2002) ‘Publics and Counterpublics’, *Public Culture* 14.1: 88.
- 28 See Derrida, Jacques (1981) ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in Johnson, Barbara [trans] *Dissmerinations* University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- 29 Quoted in Pietz, William (2002) ‘Material Considerations: On the Historical Forensics of Contract’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 19.5/6: 41.
- 30 Quoted in Warner, Michael (2002): 67.
- 31 See Pálsson, Gísli (2005) ‘Of Althings!’, in Latour, Bruno and Weibel [eds] *Making Things Public* MIT Press: Cambridge, MA: 250–259.
- 32 “The relevant good to be shared out was not monetary profit, as with a joint-stock company, but land, possibly pasture but more likely the limited fertile plain on which corn and vines and olives could be grown. It would make sense to ask how the available land was going to be shared out before embarking on a hazardous enterprise with strangers, and in the absence of already established custom, an equal distribution would not only seem natural, but would be the only basis on which outsiders would be willing to join.” Lucas, J.R. ‘Isonomia’, Draft available at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~jrucas/libeqsor/isonomia.pdf>. Accessed 3 August, 2013.
- 33 “[L]et us settle our wrangling with straight *dikai*, which are from

Zeus best. For we had already distributed the holding (*kleros*), but you snatched and carried off many other things...” *Works and Days* 27 from (1996) *Hesiod’s Works and Days: A Translation and Commentary for the Social Sciences* Tandy, David W. and Walter C. Neale [trans] University of California Press: Berkley, CA. Thus the opening of the epic poem is a question of how these brothers, Perses and Hesiod, will split the family’s lot (*kleros*) in the wake of their father’s death. It should be noted that *kleros* (lot) carries the same metaphor as in English: fate/land holding. In Hesiod’s day one’s home, *oikos*, (from which we get the prefix eco-) was on a family *kleros*, apportioned (*nomos*, from which we get the suffix -nomy). Hesiod’s epic is concerned with *oikonomia*, the management of one’s lot in life. From the inception of the written word we have struggled with our economic relations.

- 34 Derrida, Jacques (1999) ‘Adieu’, in Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas [trans] *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA.
- 35 Pietz, 36.

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AN ACTIVIST-ACADEMIC’S REFLECTIONS

Louise Livesey

I am an activist, by which I mean a person who engages in activities designed to create social change; in the mode of Walden Bello’s¹ words that “I am engaged because I think one should do something worthwhile with one’s life. There’s nothing heroic about it. It’s just that you have to do it, to be human”. I have also spent the last fifteen years employed in academic roles, evenly split between ‘full’ academic and para-academic roles in the Social Sciences and Women’s Studies. These roles have been variously full-time and part-time on permanent and casual contracts at higher education, further education and dual FE/HE institutions and in the voluntary sector in various locations in the UK. I have taught students on courses ranging from pre-undergraduate to Master’s level across a range of interdisciplinary and disciplinary topics. Most of the casual contracts have been roles which MacFarlane² categorises as “contingent faculty” created by the casualization of the traditional academic role; the development of widening participation roles and consultancy for organisations based on my research work. I am, thirdly, an activist-academic, in that I bring my activism into the classroom, the staffroom and use it as the basis of pedagogic and ethical considerations. Many activists in academia choose to separate these two aspects of their lives, other academics eschew activism entirely and some academics limit their activism to become what Mitchell³ has called “desk bound radicals”. I make no judgement about these choices. My personal ethic