Excursions

NETWORKS

Cover photo: Students in Bangladesh protest 7.5 per cent VAT on their tuition fees, 10 September 2015.
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Nehaal Bajwa and Heather McKnight, Preface

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Preface

International solidarity has gone from being a pleasant phrase to a source of strength for those of us now on strike. A picture or tweet or message of support can raise morale; a victory in one country can encourage those struggling in another; and the successful strategies used in one action can make victories elsewhere more likely.

Parfitt, *Why the UCU Strike Matters,* 2018

Like the previous issue of this journal, on *Failure,* this issue of *Excursions* is released under the shadow of Trump's presidency in the US, ongoing Brexit 'negotiations' in the UK, and the fear and uncertainty that these interwoven circumstances create. In *Networks,* we wanted to recognise and reflect on the constraints and opportunities provided by networks that empower but

also exclude; ingrain practices of exclusion, hierarchy, and privilege; but also break them down, and change the rules. We wanted to allow a critical focus on the movements of change, and of resistance to change, in our personal lives, at work, in academia, in politics, and in society.

Thinking in terms of different kinds of work that networks enable has become particularly prescient in a year in which we have seen unprecedented strike action by University staff, supported by many students, over cuts to their pensions. Networks of resistance have emerged and produced demonstrations of student-staff solidarity, a proliferation of literature, occupations, hot meals; they have re-routed local buses, and helped to 'crowdfund' a legal campaign challenging the actions of Universities UK, as well as local unions raising additional money to replace lost salaries for vulnerable staff. There have been international messages of solidarity from Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, and striking lecturers in West Virginia; and solidarity with other struggles from the women's movement to Black Lives Matter (Bergfeld, 2018). These networks have come out in a defence of the public university as much as of the rights of staff to a fair pension (Bhambra, 2018). Reaching beyond the duration of this strike, such networks have also turned inwards to trouble, and potentially renew, the democratic processes of the unions, as well as outwards to criticise the neoliberal managerialism enforced on students and staff in their everyday working lives.

This is also the year in which a data analytics firm (Cambridge Analytica) run by a hedge fund manager and aided by academics, harvested users' data from the global social media company Facebook to profile 50 million US voters and target them with 'personalised political advertisements', possibly swaying an already very tight election result in favour of reality TV celebrity and Twitter troll, Donald Trump (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison, 2018). Late last year, it was reported that divisive social media posts by 'Russia-based operatives' may have been seen by 129 million American voters in the

run-up to the US election, and an investigation was started into collusion between Russian actors and Trump's political campaign (BBC News, 2017). Accustomed as we are to seeing social media websites, and technology more broadly, as tools for grassroots organising rather than weapons of big business and wealthy, organised politicians, this has seemed to increase the potential for co-opting or derailing collective political projects. Our contemporary world looks increasingly disparate, disconnected, and at times darkly hostile, with control by the powerful reaching right into the way we perceive our friends and family and, apparently, affecting our political processes in ways more direct than we had imagined. It also offers, as the articles and images in this issue explore, possibilities for resistance to power: the reworking of its narratives, the tracing of its critical outlines, and the potential for solidarity.

Our first article, Compton's work on Gamer Girl Visibility explores how networking within massively multiplayer online role-playing games can teach us about gendered, and other, in- and outgroup dynamics, in gaming and in the real world. It argues that sexist norms permeate these online communities and, through both visual representations and behavioural practices, create a 'learning curve', in which gamers are socialised to be more sexist in-play. Some of this sexism is even pre-programmed by game designers; however, a tipping-point of women, more visible in-game and in online gaming communities, could soon demand and bring about a lasting change in expectations.

Deng examines how documentaries and films throughout the 1990s have documented the schisms produced by the Chinese household registration system–*hukou*–which endowed peasant workers with social identities as both urban and rural residents. These films engage with the system by examining spatial migration, value transformation, and social status, and their effects on people and their relationships. Through this, Deng demonstrates that Chinese Sixth Generation cinema and independent

documentaries have constructed an intertextual cinematic network in their criticism of the Chinese *hukou* system.

Gelardi provides an exploration of film culture dissemination within and beyond national borders, through a case study analysing the networking strategy of a world-class film institution, the *Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna*. Using theories of translocalism and transnationalism, Gelardi explores the FCB's role in cross-territorial linkages and cultural flows over its history.

Gillie observes how the 'network imaginary' features in J.G. Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash*. This article indicates how road networks in the novel can be examined in historical, social, and political terms, and that the repurposing of this network discourse contains within it both the potential for catastrophic destruction, and the possibilities for new worlds.

Tensions between local and global communities, are explored by Hignell-Tully, who demonstrates how externally-imposed states of perpetual crisis can be seen to be reliant on the networked nature of a community's membership. Political agency, in this reading, is potentially limited by technology and its pre-emptive generalised symbolic modes of communication.

Melossi provides a study of the working and living conditions of African migrant workers in the agricultural sector of Southern Italy. This work provides, on one hand an exploration of the *caporalato, an* exploitative labour contracting process, in historical perspective and, on the other, the enmeshment or autonomous functioning (variously) of the migrant networks that are both created through this process and used as a tool for survival and possible resistance in a hostile working and immigration environment.

O'Shea posits that the emergence of Creative and Critical Writing as a taught Master's program in the academy can be seen as a form of resistance to the ongoing marketisation and consumerism of the Higher Education

Sector. He demonstrates how the pedagogy of these courses interacts with the forms under examination, and demonstrates through analysis of poetic texts which are linked to the MA Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Sussex.

Through an in-depth anthropological case study from her research with the Portuguese migrant community in London and their families in Portugal, Rodan gives us an insight into transnational, digitalised kinship practices. Extending on some themes from earlier in the journal, this article explores the use and immediacy of smartphone technologies and the multi-sensory nature of communication offered by them, and how this enables while also disrupting our ideas about and experiences of intimacy and connection.

In Tonini's article, *Men are Vulnerable, Too,* the precise and shifting ways in which networks of Men's Rights Activists in India use discourses that reinforce patriarchal dominance are traced. This work demonstrates how these issues are framed in relation to traditional Indian discourses on the nation and family, and interact with and incorporate ideas about 'modern and suitable' masculinities.

We have reviews of four books with very different approaches to networks. Emily Cousens reviews Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life*, Ian Lovering comments on Mirowski and Nik-Khah's *The Knowledge We Have Lost in Information*, Ana Carolina Minozza gives us insight into Segal's *Radical Happiness*, and Karolina Szpyrko explores Fotopoulou's *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks*.

This issue also showcases images from the Doctoral School's Research Image Competition, held at the University of Sussex this year in conjunction with their Festival of Doctoral Research. These communicate key research concepts across multiple disciplines and, in this issue, extend the reach of *Excursions*' own networks into the Life Sciences and the Mathematical and Physical Sciences. However, Sontag reminds us of the limitations of such easily accessible forms, that '[d]espite the illusion of giving understanding …

really [invite] an acquisitive relation to the world that nourishes aesthetic awareness and promotes emotional detachment' (Sontag, 1979). Encapsulating only a moment from the full and detailed breadth of doctoral research they represent, these images are but pin point references to these projects, whether microscopic, abstract, or emotive. At the same time as they connect us to their research concepts and findings, their framing also cuts us off at the edge, and we encourage readers to see the images as just the beginning of a broadening curiosity in the work of the researchers behind them.

Discussions at our event for this issue of the journal, a symposium held in September 2017, brought together many interdisciplinary observations on *Networks*. The debates here reminded us to be reflexive in our own connectivity, highlighting both the limiting form of traditional journals and the rigid rules that can seem to restrict what is seen as legitimate, academic knowledge production, but also the connected ways we can nourish submissions and engagement in future, through co-authorship, greater encouragement of alternative formats for submission, and diversification of engagement both within and outside the sphere of the University.

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