

Redefining career models: ambitions, values, stereotypes, or, how to turn a career into a commons

By Paolo Plotegher

In its own words, and with a full, clear voice, *Precarity Pilot* constitutes a “subversive career service”: this text aims to contribute with some tools to help people to subvert their careers. As the title implies, it’s not simply a matter of analysing existing career models, but of redefining them. My role here is that of a subversive career advisor. As such, I am also working out this subversion for myself, but not solely by myself, and not without impasses, arguments with friends and complicated negotiations.

Subversion has to be acted on from within, right in the middle of the dominant models of career designed for us, models embodied through the education system, through career advisors and coaching, and by the rules of the job market. You cannot subvert something without subverting yourself: And I start from within this middle because these are the models of career we all have to deal with. Their subversion implies a constant confrontation.

Dominant models are those we receive often without criticizing them, and we don’t criticize them especially when we don’t perceive them as dominant. Such awareness and criticism are important to operate subversively. *Precarity Pilot* offers tools to critically analyse precarity, precariousness and neo-liberal models of career. I will make reference to some of those other tools but without starting again from a critique of neo-liberal career models and of our working conditions. I would encourage you to collectively re-build this critique yourselves, you and your friends, by using the tools available here and also by sharing your experiences. This is how in effect it all began with the Cantiere, a militant investigation that preceded *Precarity Pilot*. A questionnaire was created by designers for designers, reconnecting with an autonomist practice that has in Marx’s “A Workers Inquiry” its antecedent.¹ Militant investigation: how to produce a knowledge that can be turned into action, starting from your shared conditions and experiences as students, interns, workers, the unemployed, the oppressed, the ambitious, the precarious, the anxious, the (self) exploited, the rebellious, the paranoid.²

I am part of an open collective based in New Cross, South London, we call ourselves the New Cross Commoners, and we are in the process of organizing *The Field*, a place we recently got rent free for five years from a private landlord.³ What I am writing here partly comes from that experience, but it also intends to feed it: amongst the many ideas and proposals on how to use *The Field*, we also had that of setting up a “job de-centre” where we can advise ourselves and other people how to work less whilst happily sustaining our lives together. This idea comes out from the Commoners’ preoccupation with the workaholicism of some of us who spend most of our time in front of our laptops, and with the precarious working conditions of most of us that make difficult the construction of a consistency for *The Field* as a place continuously engaging with new people living in the neighbourhood. This “job de-centre” is also born out of our wonder for the many extraordinary skills and knowledge that people engaging with *The Field* have, and from the desire of creating a device (a “centre”) to collectivize them.

This text will gather some initial suggestions as to how to set up this “centre”, to “decentralize” people’s jobs from their lives, and the other way round.⁴ I bring together here what I can, inviting others to add more points and materials to this tool kit for a decentralization of work.

1 <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/ni/vol04/no12/marx.htm>

2 This is an amazing text that gives you insights into different trajectories of militant investigation: Marta Malo de Molina, “Common Notions” part 1 <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0406/malo/en> and part 2 <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0707/malo/en>

3 <http://newxcommoners.wordpress.com/> and <http://thefieldnx.wordpress.com/>

4 There is an interesting similar experience already existing in Italy, an “Ufficio di scollamento”, organized through workshops, online notice boards and a book: Simone Perotti e Paolo Ermani, Ufficio di scollamento, Chiarelettere, 2012. Inspired by the de-growth movement, the office helps people to wander away from the tracks of their career in search of an ecologically sustainable job: http://www.ufficiodiscollamento.it/chi_siamo/

To talk about a “job de-centre” is also a way of introducing the three main points of subversion of (neoliberal) careers:

1. A shift from individual to collective careers and a re-definition of collective as commons (for a commoning of careers);
2. A shift from jobs to life, a process of freeing our lives from the slavery of individualized careers, a decolonizing of our lives and bodies from professions, turning work into something else: eating, sleeping, drinking, watering plants, swimming in a lake, reading books, walking in a park or in the woods, making love, printing with a risograph machine, cycling, telling stories, playing games, crying together, building a box made from scrap wood, giving each other Chinese massages, painting the front of a building, and so on;
3. Or, in more precise terms, a shift from production as working to earn money in order to sustain your life as a consumer, to reproduction as taking care collectively of our subsistence⁵ and our relationships: how to emancipate ourselves from work, and the needs and desires as organized through capitalism, how to learn to gradually self-organize our needs and desires?

Redefining career models. In its handbook on career counselling UNESCO defines career as “The interaction of work roles and other life roles over a person’s lifespan including both paid and unpaid work in an individual’s life. People create career patterns as they make decisions about education, work, family and other life roles.”⁶ Work and other life roles: the first feature of a career is that it concerns not only the (paid or unpaid) work you do but other aspects of your life as well. The document classifies those aspects as roles, tying a career to an individual: a career is individual, and this is its other basic constituent feature. This is precisely what needs to be challenged to subvert careers, its individualizing nature and the containment of its relevance to roles, to defined aspects of our lives.

Ambitions, values, stereotypes. Ambition is usually understood as a positive human force that makes you as an individual worker move upwards towards the top and makes you willingly embrace a “healthy” competition (“I will make it, as long as I work hard”); neoliberal values are based on a specific kind of individual “freedom” or “liberty”, to stay closer to the etym of the term, that produces the illusion of being free to chose your working destiny and be responsible for it (“I believe in myself and that’s what matters”); stereotypes are fixed images, culturally constructed and embodied, they are “imaginings” already available to us, they help in setting ambition into motion towards a model for yourself, and they shape your values, what you think is good in life (e.g. the stereotype of the successful designer and putting my face to that picture). Ambitions, values, stereotypes: where do they come from, why are they shaped the way they are, should I subject myself to them or should I challenge them? To subvert neoliberal ambitions, values and stereotypes we can:

- turn ambition into a “going around” (ambulare), in an ancient meaning of the term, to make encounters and allies, rather than going by yourself towards the promise of the top;
- turn neoliberal “freedom” into an ability to develop interdependency (and not just amongst people);
- turn stereotypes, against their etymology, into mutating virtual images that facilitate the encounter and relationship with the different, with the others.

Collective, commoning career. To move away from career as an individualizing enterprise, to think of careers as collective, we need to think the “collective” not in opposition to the individual. A collective career is not, for instance, that of a group of designers that work together in a studio, it is not based on a collaboration amongst professionals, on a team as a sum of individuals. This other “collective” is formed through a process that keeps renegotiating boundaries, allowing for more and different elements to be welcomed and simultaneously taking care for a consistency to be produced. Deleuze and Guattari have beautiful descriptions of this “collective” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they call it assemblage, multiplicity, war machine and so on - an image of a pack

5 Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy*, London, Zed Books, 2000.

6 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001257/125740e.pdf>

of wolves can operate as a counter-stereotype.⁷ This is what I call an “open collective” to describe the New Cross Commoners / *The Field*. How to think a career for *The Field* and the New Cross Commoners (how to think a career as a pack of wolves)? It would not be simply a career made of tracks by myself with my cart that I am required to follow.

And yet that classical notion of career is not to be dismissed since it is very much in place everywhere: we need to make a collective use of it. With a scholarship and other public funds I have studied a PhD at Goldsmiths College and I am still teaching a seminar there, two hours a week. This is something important for my CV, it is part of “my career”: but how to collectivize it, how to activate this affiliation with Goldsmiths and to make it useful for *The Field*? I have written a proposal for a free course on “Art as Commons” to be held at *The Field*, we are now in the process of discussing and revising it with the Commoners, the idea is to get funding for it through Goldsmiths in order to financially sustain *The Field* as a project and also to sustain some Commoners more precarious than myself who will organize the free course together with me.

I don’t want for this to sound easy because it’s not, we are scared of the strings attached and the negotiations with Goldsmiths but we are also gradually finding allies at Goldsmiths that can help us to navigate this process. As a large educational institution in our neighbourhood Goldsmiths has the power to capitalize on a self-organized experiment like the New Cross Commoners, to put it to work for its own advantage (and it is already doing this): how can we make use of Goldsmiths’ in turn, and how can we make use of the power we can have over Goldsmiths (the engagement with the “local community” that Goldsmiths desperately seeks).

The “Art as Commons” course is also important for me to make more sense of my job at Goldsmiths, and yes, one could also say that it is a way of nurturing my academic career, but do I really want this career? Yes, I want it as long as it can help me sustain my subsistence and something like the New Cross Commoners. We could all move to a farm in the countryside right now and quit our precarious jobs, jobseekers allowance and other benefits, but we need more time in order to operate this transition. In the process of experimenting with a different way of living, learning, playing in the neighbourhood, other aspirations might become tangible.

All this is not easy also because the model of an individual career is dominant: “You do the New Cross Commoners for yourself, you do it for your own career!” After feeling something between guilt and rage, in affirmation I answer: “Yes, and what can we do for your career, how can we use the New Cross Commoners for your subsistence and how can your career be used for the subsistence of the Commoners?” What can we bring as individuals and through *The Field* into this re-articulation of a local economy made of wages, funding, benefits, skipping, self-production, stealing and gifts? How to gradually and carefully shift from individual reproduction to collective reproduction? This is also the sense of having a job de-centre.

Commoning is the activity that constitutes a commons. Silvia Federici, Massimo de Angelis, George Caffentzis, Peter Linebaugh have written on commoning and this is where to start to understand the commons.⁸ A commons is not a resource out there that we need to declare as commons, a commons always implies care, and commoning is this labour of care. It is a care, and taking care of the resource and caring for ourselves sharing that resource, but it is also a confrontational kind of “caring”, a negotiation and a struggle with the privatization of the market and the control of the State. Commoning is reproducing our subsistence, there is commoning around housing, food, knowledge, health... whenever we get together to shelter ourselves, produce, cook and eat food, learn to take care of our bodies and their relationships. What would be a commoning of careers then? It would be taking care of our careers so that they can be used as resources to be shared, resisting their privatization by the job market and the control of the State (their professionalization). Instead of “analysing the job market” to see how better you can fit into it, as career services do, you would make use of your job beyond the wage relationship to tap into all its potential resources in order to collectivize them. Instead of pursuing a professionalization of yourself (in my case by attending academic conferences and publishing as much as I can to score points for the REF system)⁹ you cultivate something that could allow you to keep a job without having to give up your life (as a commoner) to it.

7 I find especially amazing their description of a pack of wolves (yourself / a collective as a pack of wolves): Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp 26-38.

8 See for example De Angelis and Stavrides interview on the commons <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

9 <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

“OK, yes, but it seems you actually have a career already, what about those who don’t, those who are unemployed and won’t be able to find a job?” A career as commons is not really a career anymore: some of the New Cross Commoners have jobs, some of them don’t and get benefits (we call them our “public workers”!), some of them work one day a week, the point is to share what we can share, even if it is, sporadically, “just” knowledge, food, sofas, time together and mutual care, according to the different forms of relationship amongst the people of this collective. This is nothing necessarily far away from your life. Don’t spend all your time and energy sending CVs around, applying for jobs, worrying about your career: look around yourself, talk to your friends and neighbours, set up a reading group or a screening program in your living room if you have one, organize walks to explore the neighbourhood, as a way of starting something that has started already. Commoning careers might also mean to support each other with the shit one has to face when working. The point is not to work more and get more jobs but to gradually and partially emancipate ourselves from our jobs. I wish one day soon to be able to “retire” from my academic career, to be able not to need it anymore, to find other ways to feed into a collective / common economy.

To build transversal alliances. In his definition of the commons Massimo De Angelis talks of a “non-homogeneous community” as the collective of commoning people. To further explore this non-homogeneity we could make use of Guattari’s concept and practice of transversality.¹⁰ This term comes from his experience as a therapist at La Borde clinic, where as a tool to practice transversality Guattari instituted the “grid”, a system forcing workers and patients of the clinic to periodically shift roles.¹¹ The transversal undoes the verticality of hierarchies but also the illusion of a democratic horizontality in groups, collectives, and communities. Transversality is a practice of bringing differences into contact, so that in their encounters a modification of subjectivity / identity can happen, with consequences in the functioning and structuring of the institution as well: nurses, gardeners, patients, cooks... differences of class, gender, sexuality, race, ability, age... Transversality counters what Guattari calls micro-fascism, the tendency of groups to stiffen around an identity, of turning difference into a self-defensive, self-policing and self-asphyxiating unity (into a homogeneous community).¹²

Precarity has recently encouraged workers to find new ways of coming together within a defined profession, to explore new possibilities of protecting themselves and their careers after the weakening of institutions like the unions. There are several categories that function as catalysers for workers’ re-organization: the macro category of the precariat(o) and cognitariat(o), others like the “Workers of the Arts”, and categories more specifically tied to a profession (e.g. ReRePre, Rete dei Redattori Precari). I would say that it is crucial for these forms of self-organization to develop a transversality, and this would imply: to stop thinking about your job as separated from everything else in your life (see below on work / life), to stop thinking about your job as the only means you have to sustain yourself and as the only terrain for self-organization (see below on reproduction), to stop thinking you can change your working conditions without getting allies beyond the boundaries of your profession. This last point has to do more specifically with transversality: to improve your working conditions you need to rethink what you do away from professionalization.¹³ For example, if you are an artist you need to question the very meaning of art: What is it for? Why do I do it the way I do it? What is its meaning beyond being a means of gratification and (possibly) income for myself? Who benefits from it? How can I think of my career also as the career of others who have a different career or no career?

I started writing this text from my experience as a precarious worker, as a cognitive worker, and as a worker of the arts. Art is not reducible to my profession: it is what allows us to sense reality differently, to open up the possibility for something else to happen. This is the case for myself as an “artist” as well as for the plumber that comes to *The Field* to help fix the pipes without asking

10 Guattari, “Transversality” in *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1984. See also Susan Kelly, “The Transversal and the Invisible: How do you really make a work of art that is not a work of art?” http://www.republicart.net/disc/mundial/kelly01_en.htm

11 “Forcing” is the right term to use since the “grid” was not always happily received at La Borde, as Francois Dosse tells us in *Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, pp 55-59.

12 Guattari, “Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist” in Felix Guattari, *Chaosophy*, Semiotext(e), 2009, pp 154-175.

13 Ivan Illich wrote important pages on professionalization, for example: Ivan Illich, *The Right to Useful Unemployment*, London, Marion Boyars, 1978.

for money in return. We become allies around *The Field* as an institution of the commons, we build interdependency, the primacy of immaterial and cognitive labour collapses. Transversality here means to question the boundaries of a profession, not as in transdisciplinarity, where different disciplines come together, but beyond professions and disciplines. Instead of competing silently at the distance of CVs, applications and covering letters, find different allies, across and beyond disciplines and professions.

To work / to live: decolonizing life from work. The *Precurity Pilot* glossary states this definition of precarization and self-precuarization: “The forty-hour week is an illusion. Working time and free time have no clearly defined borders. Work and leisure can no longer be separated. In the non-paid time, they accumulate a great deal of knowledge, which is not paid for extra, but is naturally called for and used in the context of paid work, etc.”¹⁴ This collapse of the separation between work and the rest of our life is something that is easily experienced when doing a job that involves creativity, care, cognitive and affective labour, jobs that put our bios to work. You carry your work within your body as you carry your creative and cognitive ability with you all the time. Even if we switch off the laptop our creativity is still at work. Unless we switch it off with some kind of anesthetic (e.g. watching crappy stuff online). If you think about it, this is horrifying, precarious work is colonizing our lives. Autonomists like Bifo have written many important pages about this issue.¹⁵

This collapse of the separation between life and work could be also reversed: life starts colonizing work. For example, I make use of my job to gather knowledge around it, knowledge of the mechanisms of oppression, exploitation and self-exploitation, organizational strategies and so on, to prepare some alternatives. This is what Foucault meant when talking about a “specific intellectual” (beyond the profession of the “universal intellectual”): everyone can be an intellectual today, by developing a knowledge of your working conditions and by sharing this knowledge to produce your transformation and a transformation of our life.¹⁶

The passage from the specificity of the individual to a collective sharing is fundamental: here we can think again about militant investigation, and more specifically about the examples of *Precarias a la Deriva*: if the strike is not effective anymore in precarious times, we will come up with its transmutation, going around the city together, analyzing together the everyday details of our working life, asking others to stop working at least for a few minutes to engage with this shared analysis (*Precarias a la Deriva* as specific intellectuals).¹⁷

If my job is not separated from everything else I can either turn the experience with the New Cross Commoners into academic essays to advance my career (my job colonizing my life), or, making use of what I learn with the commoners, I can try to twist the rules of the teaching game at Goldsmiths: my life colonizing my job, self-organization trying to reshape something of the established institution, to undo part of the enclosures academia produces around knowledge. Here the process is more complicated, especially if I don’t find allies outside the classroom.

This example might be still fixed in a reversibility between work and life. To decolonize life from work would mean to experiment with new forms of collective life where work as in employment would be reduced to nothing, where needs and desires would be reconstructed bottom up, away from their capitalist production. Do I have to desire what I desire? Do I have to need what I need? Do I have to work to reproduce my / our lives? Eating, sleeping, drinking, watering plants, swimming in a lake... collective reproduction feels something else than work.

Reproducing what? Marxist Feminists in the ‘70s used the terms reproduction and reproductive labour to show how the productive labour of the factory was only the most visible part of the capitalist labour system, and how the productive work in the factory was actually sustained by the reproductive labour of housewives: caring for the children, for the elderly, for the husband, for the house, cooking, cleaning, loving. Reproduction was not considered as labour, it was naturalized

14 Isabell Lorey, ‘Governmentality and Self-Precuarization’, 4 May 2006, <http://eipccp.net/transversal/1106/lorey/en>

15 For example, Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, London, Minor Compositions, 2009.

16 Foucault, “Truth and Power”, in Paul Rabinow Ed., *Foucault Reader*, New York, Pantheon Book, 1984.

17 *Precarias a la Deriva*, “Adrift to the Circuits of Feminized Precarious Work” <http://eipccp.net/transversal/0704/precarias1/en> See also <http://www.traficantes.net/sites/default/files/pdfs/A%20la%20deriva-TdS.pdf>

and seen as the “natural” task of a woman. Militant struggle at that time had the factory as its privileged site and to talk about reproduction was also to claim for the home to be a place of political struggle, understanding how the nuclear family and not the assembly line was the basic unit for capitalism to function.¹⁸ Wages for Housework was an international Feminist movement that demanded wages for reproductive labour to generate a debate and an engagement with the issue of reproduction. It is important to underline that the point was for reproduction at home to be recognized as labour and not to demand more work for women! Feminists were clear on that: we fight for a liberation from labour not to be enslaved in the same way men are.¹⁹

How do existing models of career change if we take into account reproduction? If a career has to do not simply with jobs but with how we reproduce our life? It is always useful to ask yourself who is doing reproductive labour in order for you to have a (job) career. It might be your parents if you are lucky enough, it might be your partner, it might be the East European cleaning lady if you can afford this, it might be more likely yourself, reducing care to a minimum and with the main aim of being a more efficient productive worker. All the “leisure time” you have could be seen as time you use to re-charge the batteries for yourself as a worker. If in the “West” today the nuclear family with its role of the housewife is not so much the basis of the dominant economic system as it was before, reproduction is still largely unperceived and naturalized, the focus goes to production, our jobs, earning wages. We most often reproduce our life in order to work, instead of working to reproduce our lives. This relationship between production and reproduction is complicated because it doesn’t easily come down to individual choices, and the primacy of production over reproduction is an axiom of capitalism. What we should do is to challenge the capitalist primacy of production and productivity, and the related imperative of consumption. Let’s produce less and reproduce better (together)! There is something here we can learn from other forms of life on the planet (see below on economy / ecology).

Autonomist production and feminist reproduction still seem to run almost in parallel today, think for example of the different understanding of the commons by Negri and Hardt and of the commons by Federici and her friends: Negri’s reading of the common connects with the attempts of the “workers of the arts” to reclaim culture as common on the basis of a profession; Federici and the others tell us, once again, that we cannot focus only on employment and our working conditions, that this can be only a part of a larger struggle / experimentation. To fight as workers of the arts is certainly important for us because the primary capitalist mode of production is still very much in place, but at the same time it is crucial to emancipate ourselves from this primacy and to conquer spaces for the collectivization of reproduction. There is a lot we can learn from practices developed in the so called “Third World” or “developing” countries, especially now that austerity measures force many people in Europe to face poverty and homelessness.

If it’s important to recognize reproduction as labour in order to understand exploitation and our position and functioning as part of a capitalist labour system, it is even more important to emancipate reproduction from that labour system. In other words, we should answer the question: “reproducing what?” what is it that I am reproducing with my labour? How can I / we reproduce my / our life without reproducing that of capitalism - the still dominant system that destroys our life and that of the planet? To emancipate reproduction a job has to become one of many possible tools to reproduce ourselves and reproduction itself has to be collectivized. A great example of this, discussed with the New Cross Commoners to rethink the format of the people’s kitchen, is that of the Ollas Comunes in Latin-America and especially in Chile under the dictatorship.²⁰ Women joined forces to get food together and cook together in their neighbourhoods every day. The spark for this form of collective organization around food was practical: the difficulty many women had to feed their families. Soon women realized the political strength this practice had. This was a different politics from that of their husbands’ unions but it was somehow stronger - and also strongly repressed by the government. It was strong because it was transformative and emancipatory: women got out of their houses, challenging the patriarchal structure of the family, learning the power of solidarity and the difficulties of organizing together. Cooking together became something else than simply labour, something very different from a form of silent exploitation and

18 Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, Brooklyn/Oakland, Common Notions/PM Press, 2012

19 Mariarosa Dalla Costa e Selma James, “The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community”, <https://libcom.org/library/power-women-subversion-community-della-costa-selma-james>

20 Jo Fisher, “The kitchen never stopped. Women’s self-help groups in Chile’s shanty towns” in http://newxcommoners.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/out_of_the_shadows-the-kitchen-never-stopped.pdf

self-exploitation, and it was often a way to feed people without a family and without a job whilst exiting charitable models. The Ollas comunes brought together a new form of political struggle and the construction of an alternative to the dominant model of organization around food. It also brought together needs and desires and their interplay, the need to feed your body and the desire for a certain kind of conviviality.²¹

I quote here from some friends of La Electrodoméstica in Barcelona, who are rethinking and experimenting with reproduction by undoing the separation and opposition between needs and desires: “Both our desires and needs might contribute to docility and subjection, when precarious and aspirational subjects work to the stick of unemployment and homelessness, and the carrot of a career or home-ownership.”²² To emancipate reproduction from the capitalist working system we need to undo and re-construct our need and desires, we need to experiment with both desires and needs together, starting from the experience of being together and doing things together as non-homogenous communities. Do we really need (to desire) a career? Do we really need a job that colonizes our life? What can life become when we have more of it? What can reproduction become if we reproduce not the life of capitalism but our life together - a pack of wolves rather than a nuclear family as an individual itself?

We got a small loan to restructure *The Field* but we soon decided not to use it and to try instead to do things by activating relationships with people in New Cross. The whole process might be slower and less easy but through it *The Field* is getting stronger.

You need a career because you need a job, that’s what you learn since you are a child. I remember when I was a child and my dad was saying that one day I would be an adult and I would have to work as well: that was such a scary thought for me. Career advisors might say to you that when it comes to building a career the trick is to really follow your personal dreams and desires. The subversive question here is: how to shift from your personal dreams and desires to multiple dreams and desires, how to construct them as the desires of a non-homogeneous community? And what are the forms of care, organization and struggle that you need to engage with for this collective desire to emerge?

Economy / ecology. The question this section poses is how to create an economy where work as in employment and wage labour gets reduced to something very little. With economy (and ecology) we deal with ideas of wholeness: there is something like a macro system that needs to be considered in its entirety, and as part of this system we can analyse and think the different parts or sub-systems and how to change their relationships and their functioning in order to change how the macro system functions. Hence, economy has not just to do with money and jobs: the challenge is actually how to experiment with economies that activate other elements rather than money and jobs.

The economy of *The Field* and what *The Field* is going to become is undergoing such experimentation:

Very few of us have a full time stable job, some of us work only one day a week, some others not at all.

Many of us get benefits, the government is unintentionally sustaining the project - this is the main difference with the Big Society: there is no direct State control over what we do.

We sometimes join the activities of anti-cuts collectives defending the welfare state.²³

Some of us might get help from parents and relatives.

21 Read also the notes on the Ollas Comunes on the New Cross Commoners website: <http://newxcommoners.wordpress.com/toolbox/>

22 “This seminar series proposes the term “reproduction” to grasp the interplay of need and desire, understood as the ways in which we maintain - we reproduce - our embodied and relational needs for care, food and shelter, and our equally embodied and relational movements beyond ourselves. In other words, we stress the interplay of need and desire.” <https://laelectrodomestica.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/engcast-reproduction-between-desire-and-need-seminar-group/#more-154>

23 Save Lewisham Hospital, Southwark Notes - Whose Regeneration? Radical Housing Network and others. On the necessity of bringing together anti-cuts organizing with commoning see Barbagallo and Beuret, “Starting from the Social Wage” <http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/07-barbagallo-beuret.pdf>

Of the numerous people coming to help who are not really part of the core group yet, some are unemployed, and some are in retirement.

We would like to produce our own beer and give it in exchange for donations. We might do the same with food. We don't want to turn *The Field* into a cafe, we don't want to generate an economy that relies entirely on the pockets of people living in New Cross.

We will try to get funding not directly for *The Field* but for specific projects like the "Art as Commons" and we will come up with ways to redistribute the funding to feed *The Field* and ourselves.

To establish a relationship with Goldsmiths through this funding might allow us to gain enough strength to negotiate with other institutions like the local Council.

We are growing vegetables and we will carry on skipping food to do more people's kitchens (big meals, free and open to everybody).

We are skipping all sorts of material, from woodchips to paper.

People give us all sort of stuff from toilets to tomato plants.

We build stuff ourselves instead of buying it (so far I have only built wooden boxes to plant flowers but I'm sure my manual skills will improve).

We want to grow medicinal plants and make remedies with them.

We read and learn together instead of paying fees to study at a university.

We bring into *The Field* what we can do and how we can be and we share this, learning to do more and be more, to do and be differently.

Some of us don't pay rent because we squat. Life as a squatter is not always easy. We sleep on each other's sofas when needed.

We teach each other how to fix our bikes.

We always share food when we meet, you bring what you can, and when we go to the pub we share beers, you pay if you have money otherwise someone else pays for you. We also share tobacco.

We know there is a lot more we can do to diversify this economy and to get some of us off workaholism and full-time employment. Amongst other examples and resources (we often talk about the Common House and how they run their paid activities) we are going to look into the NEF, New Economics Foundation, and Community Economies for more inspiration.²⁴

Ecology: what could be an ecological economy? It would be an economy that overturns the anthropocentric hierarchies that place humans at the centre and everything else at their service as objects of consumption and exploitation. It would be an economy of inter-dependency of everything that animates the planet.

Do animals and plants have careers? How can we learn from plants, animals, insects, and the sun, water, wind and their economies? This is a question that many have been posing, especially since the consequences of the capitalist exploitation of the earth and of natural resources has become irreversible and of huge proportions. Permaculture has given some answers, proposing an ethics and a way of thinking the re-organization of culture, agriculture and society on the basis of principles observed in nature.²⁵ The Transition movement has made those principles operational for quite

24 Common House <http://www.commonhouse.org.uk/>, NEF <http://www.neweconomics.org/>, Community Economies <http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home>

25 See David Holmgren, Permaculture Principles <http://permacultureprinciples.com/>

some time now.²⁶ Starhawk questions the anthropocentrism of capitalism further by reconnecting permaculture to a pagan tradition that capitalism never managed to suppress entirely.²⁷ Guattari talks of the importance of thinking together an ecology of the planet, of society and of subjectivity, with the aim not for nature to be protected by man, but of creating new forms of relationships between those three ecologies.²⁸ In such ecological perspective reproduction is what reproduces not only the life of humans but the life of everything on the planet. An ecological economy can have the potential to undermine the economy of capitalism together with the dominance of man on earth. Through such a perspective and such an economy, capitalist needs and desires can be undone and re-constructed again: what do we need, what do we desire, when this “we” is not formulated entirely by humans anymore?

Queering careers. Queer originally means “strange or odd from a conventional viewpoint”. The term “queering” could still mean “to spoil”. Queer is also a term people use to identify themselves when they are not happy to be labelled as either straight, gay, lesbian, trans, and so on.²⁹ What would a queer career be? You can queer gender and sexuality, you can queer identities and you can also queer roles and models. Families can be queered as well. Through the unpaid, naturalized labour of the housewife, the nuclear family has been for quite some time the primary site of reproduction for capitalism. Today reproduction tends to be more individualized (I care for myself) and professionalized (I pay for personal nurses, carers, nannies to care for children and elderly people so that I can carry on working, I pay for psychotherapists and sex workers so that I can work better), but the crises of the nuclear family opens the possibility of creating different kinds of families and different forms of collectivized care.

Career advisors say that family planning and your role as part of your family is an important element to take in consideration when planning your career. Often careers come actually before family planning: “I did not have children to dedicate myself to my career”, but a carefully chosen partner or partners can actually advance your career. Mothers are certainly disadvantaged and on the other side gay people have more time and energy to put into their careers and more outcome (income) for themselves because they don’t have children. Or do they? Usually a father brings home money, a mother brings home money and on top of that she has to take care for most of the housework and for a consumer / child that provides love in exchange.

Queering careers means queering families, experimenting with other family-friendship-lovers aggregations and constellations, away from the nuclear model of family as a self-enclosure. Queer families should be monstrous, as in “transversal” (see on transversality above).

There is a close relationship between the nuclear family and the individual career, to make a career not as an individual would likely imply to rethink yourself as part of a family where the classical triangle would extend, where relationships of love and affection would become poly-morphous, where “aunts” and “uncles” proliferate and get mixed up with multiple mothers and fathers. The practice of polyamory becomes political inasmuch as it creates forms of collective reproduction.

Queering families means also queering needs and desires and if by definition “queer” is such in relationship to what is dominant, what gets “spoiled” here are needs and desires as constructed by capitalism.

Share privileges, they won’t disappear. Put stuff in common with your mates. Share things, use them together. Play the “power shuffle” game with them to see what do you have in terms of privileges, skills and possessions, and think how to share some of them, without making a mathematical calculation.³⁰ Privileges have to do with your social class, your education, race, citizenship, gender, ability, age, but also your job and your social networks. To share your privileges

26 Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook*, Green Books, 2008. <http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~sme/CSC2600/transition-handbook.pdf>

27 Starhawk, *The Earth Path*, Harper One, 2004.

28 Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Continuum, 2008.

29 Read this for a definition of queer: <http://houseofbrag.wordpress.com/queer/>

30 You can find a version of the “power shuffle” game in the New Cross Commoners publication http://newxcommoners.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/nxpublication_2013.pdf

with people who don't have them would put transversality into motion. "Why should I do it? Why not keep them to myself?" Because privileges are like love, they don't disappear or diminish if you share them.

When it comes to a career we often have the illusion that it's just a matter of making the right choices for ourselves. One of the many neo-liberal illusions is that of the democratic nature of competition: when it comes to jobs and careers everyone competes democratically and horizontally with everyone else. Such views erase the role privileges have in making competition always something else from a contest where the "best" eventually wins.³¹

Stay away from debts, as much as you can. Don't get loans and don't contract debts in order to pursue a career. Debt is a creepy form of enslavement: you give up your future life and its potential freedom in exchange for the promise of a career. Are you sure that if you will work hard enough you will be able to pay back your debt? Where does this value of the individual hard worker come from? How can you be sure to be willing to adapt to the job market to such an extent to be able to pay back your debts in an unknown future? If you are willing to adapt, will your body cope with your will? Do you believe that pursuing strenuously an individual career will be a guarantee for debt repayment - you against the rest of the world? What will it take for you to fuel this belief? If you believe "you can make it", where do you think this belief comes from? How did it get constructed? Socially, culturally, through your parents, by your teachers... Who and what will gain from this belief in yourself as being good / not good enough, hard worker / not working hard enough? And if you will eventually "make it" what will you make it for? Money? A career itself? Happiness? How would that be? What are the models / stereotypes that make you indebt yourself in the hope of achieving them? Quite a lot of interesting stuff has been written recently on debt and also on organizing together against debt.³²

Popular learning, popular education. Career advisors say that an important part of career planning is to choose what and where to study, and to make consequent investments. Universities have a ranking system and different degrees of accessibilities, you compete even before starting, and you compete in order to pay. The fees have raised to such an extent that if you don't come from a wealthy family the only solution seems to be debts. Universities produce an enclosure of knowledge, they have amazing resources and a huge power to attract tutors, researchers and students, but all this is available only if you pay. With the New Cross Commoners the idea was also for some of us, students and ex-students at Goldsmiths, to redistribute the skills, knowledge, and resources and activate them in the neighbourhood instead of keeping them fenced in the campus. The New Cross Commoners in that respect has been a kind of free school, open to all and self-organized, and an attempt of sharing and taking advantage as much as possible of Goldsmiths as a resource (passing on library cards, printing for free, using empty rooms and kitchens...), of commoning knowledge and academic resources.

Usually free schools in London don't last long and offer a program that has not much coherence, they don't manage to create the consistency academia has. But there are important exceptions to this in the UK, as for example the three years of The Free University of Liverpool, which with its length retraced that of a university course.³³ You don't get a diploma in such a university but you can still put it on your CV and in this case you are also taught and supervised by tutors teaching in other universities.

How much do we already know amongst ourselves? This is the main question of popular education, and of the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Radical pedagogies deal with minor knowledges, forms of knowledge that are almost invisible and mainly considered as useless, often because they cannot be capitalized upon. Through *The Field* we are discovering much of this minor knowledge, knowledge that an academic might laugh at. Like "crazy" people that have been walking around the neighbourhood for years counting trees, plants, birds and registering all the changes in their

31 Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 1986 (on cultural capital and social capital) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm>

32 For example: David Graeber, *Debt*, Melville House, 2011; Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, Semiotext(e), 2012; George Caffentzis, *In Letters of Blood and Fire*, PM Press, 2013 - see also Reclamations Journal, Special Issue on debt, August/September 2011 http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/issue_debt_archive.htm

33 See <http://thefreeuniversityofliverpool.wordpress.com/>

population, their illnesses, the variations of their lives. What to do with this knowledge, how to share it and activate it without turning it into “major” knowledge?

People’s Political Economy (PPE) is a collective inspired by Freire’s pedagogy that engages with different people and groups in Oxford and London to produce a knowledge about economy starting from what people know.³⁴ The assumption is that people are never ignorant, they are not empty vessels a teacher has to fill with knowledge, they have experience and knowledge they carry on their bodies, even if this is not something they would translate into thoughts and words and something productive and profitable. Often Freire’s pedagogy taps into embodied knowledge by use of art, the visual, corporeal expressions.³⁵ We all have experience of what is called economy, we might not understand an economist’s lecture or the economy section of a newspaper, but if we collectivize the embodied experience and knowledge we already have, we will be able to produce a verbal, conscious, spoken and written knowledge that can be used to challenge the dominant knowledge of experts and professionals working for the market and the State.

Spectacular careers. In order to develop a career you are required to appear, to make connections and show up as much as possible, both digitally and in the flesh, with your name, with your face, you need to turn yourself into an image of yourself that circulates as much as possible. As Guy Debord said already in the ‘60s, capitalism becomes spectacle, it turns life itself into a spectacle, into empty images - the spectacle is capitalism sucking our lives and turning them into empty images.³⁶ Facebook can be a post-Debordian example of that, Facebook as a sort of job centre where you find out about opportunities and you make yourself available. The celebrity system dominates the job market, you have to compete using an image of yourself you constantly update and make interesting and shiny. What circulates is never a “collective” (in the sense above) image, the image needs to be individual, an affirmation of your identity, of your personality, of your signature. Despite of all the weight “collaboration” gains in the context of neo-liberal labour, it is our individual name that we have to promote.

Let’s use Facebook then, let’s try to use Facebook instead of being used (consumed) by it. Let’s play the game of the spectacle: this is, for example, what Debord does in his last film, a sort of autobiography where he constructs an image of himself to hijack (détournement d’avion means hijack) the spectacle from within.³⁷ Debord talks about himself but his is never a confession, it is never a way of defining the features of his identity. He uses Hollywood icons, distorted and out of context, to say something about himself / the Situationist International and their relationship with the city. He uses pictures of himself where he is fading away, scratched, ungraspable and yet still visible. This autobiography is Debord’s, it is individual, but it is also strongly that of a collective, the Situationist International and its trajectory. The image of Debord is still empty if you like, but of a different kind of emptiness, charged with uncertain possibilities and possibilities of an imminent collapse, away from the dichotomy of success and failure. This could be the model, the counter-stereotype, for a subversive identity that you create for yourself / yourselves.

The spectacle produces a desire to succeed, a desire to become well known, a desire to be recognized. Let’s play this desiring game by trying to corrode its rules from within. Instead of hiding myself, my name, my face, I make use of them in such a way as to challenge the requirement to reduce my self / name / face to a clean and unequivocal computability, calculability, where one is one in the fluctuating arena of the market.

Self-awareness, career counseling and fucked up bodies. The importance of career self-management: we learn to be managers of ourselves, secretaries of ourselves, self-entrepreneurs. How might this change when an individual career becomes collective?

34 See <http://www.ppeuk.org/>

35 See Augusto Boal’s translation of Freire’s pedagogy into the language of theatre Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto Press, 2000, and also Ultrared’s use of sound as an affective medium to develop collective knowledge <http://www.ultrared.org>.

36 Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm> also watch the film online, the voice over reads the first chapters of the book: <http://vimeo.com/60945809>

37 Guy Debord, In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i26iAjDmjgq>

The following is taken from the career exploration / job search checklist of UNESCO's Handbook on career counselling:

“Self-awareness:

1. What are my values?
2. What are my skills and abilities?
3. What are my interests?
4. What is my personality style?
5. What other life roles are important along with my job or occupation?
6. What are the family and cultural influences on my career path?”³⁸

Career (self) assessment implies a kind of box ticking of what you are and what you can do, a box ticking to see how you can fit a job or job description. It is not far away from the box ticking of social media, from a creative way of portraying yourself, of creating a (worker) identity for yourself. All the above are important initial questions, but the most important is actually missing: “How to collectivize all this? How to activate all I have, all I am and all I can become as part of a collective?”

Self-awareness means also to be aware to the extent our body and subjectivity are fucked up, this is something career services do not say. To be able to change career is good for your career, career advisors say. Flexibility is a very important feature of neo-liberal subjectivity, of a precarious worker. We need to be able to move from job to job, to constantly readapt, and to learn how to do it. Consequently it becomes more difficult to focus on something, we feel compelled to be up to date with so much and to be everywhere there is something “interesting” happening. How not to get lost in an overexposure to stimuli, through this neo-liberal sense that there is so much to choose, when in fact we are not choosing anything?

Think of your body and subjectivity: how is the pursuit of a career fucking them up? How is your current job, the search for one, or the prospect of having one, fucking them up even more? How does the sense of not being right for your job make your body sick: sleepless nights, stomachaches, anxiety, headaches, paranoia... To what extent is the sickness of your body a consequence of how much you manage to make yourself like your job?

You can heal yourself through pills, through Buddhist meditation, through psychotherapy if you have the money, through many other techniques, but you should ask yourself: to what extent do these methods make myself a “better” and more docile worker, makes my body cope with this crap? Can we use these methods for a kind of empowerment that does not make ourselves more adaptable to exploitative (working) conditions but produces instead a collective agency in the form of rebellion?³⁹

The following is an excerpt on career advice from the “Career Guidance” of the European Commission:

“The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including helplines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self-awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services.”⁴⁰

Counselling is an important part of the activities of “career guidance” or career support. The term “counselling” here does not mean therapy and yet one of the aims of career counselling is to develop workers’ self-awareness: awareness of your skills and abilities, self-confidence, and so on. We could say that a career advisor would also provide counselling as in therapy, to try to shape subjectivity into the mould of the good worker, to erase all forms of more or less conscious resistance.

38 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001257/125740e.pdf>

39 This is a question that we asked ourselves throughout the two years of experience with the nanopolitics group: nanopolitics group, nanopolitics handbook, Minor Compositions, 2013 <http://www.minorcompositions.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/nanopolitics-web.pdf>

40 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & European Commission (OECD & EC) (2004). *Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers*. Paris: OECD, 2004.

As a subversive alternative to career counselling that tries to shape you into a perfect worker, I propose schizoanalysis as a therapy that makes us feel, sense and understand how our lack of self-esteem (or profusion of it) is strongly connected to how capitalism functions and to our subjection to it. My fucked up subjectivity has to do with capitalism, before rather than mami and papi and myself as the guilty site of my dysfunction. What am I to do with my dysfunctional self, asks schizoanalysis? From dysfunction as something private I weave it into something collective, I reconnect it with the “dysfunction” of social movements, with a delirium as joyful liberation of expression.⁴¹

What would be a schizo-career? It would be a “career” as being derailed through an anti-capitalist de-individualization and through a connection with the re-creation of needs/desires by social movements.⁴²

About the author

I never quite know how to define myself, it also depends of the situation, I like to say I am an artist if there are no artists around, this is my favourite identity for myself, but I don't really make any art as such, anything like a product at least. I already told you quite a few things about my “career” anyway in this text. If you come to New Cross you might like to see what is going on at *The Field*.

41 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

42 Some of the Commoners come from the experience of the students movement, the anti-cuts movement, and Occupy.