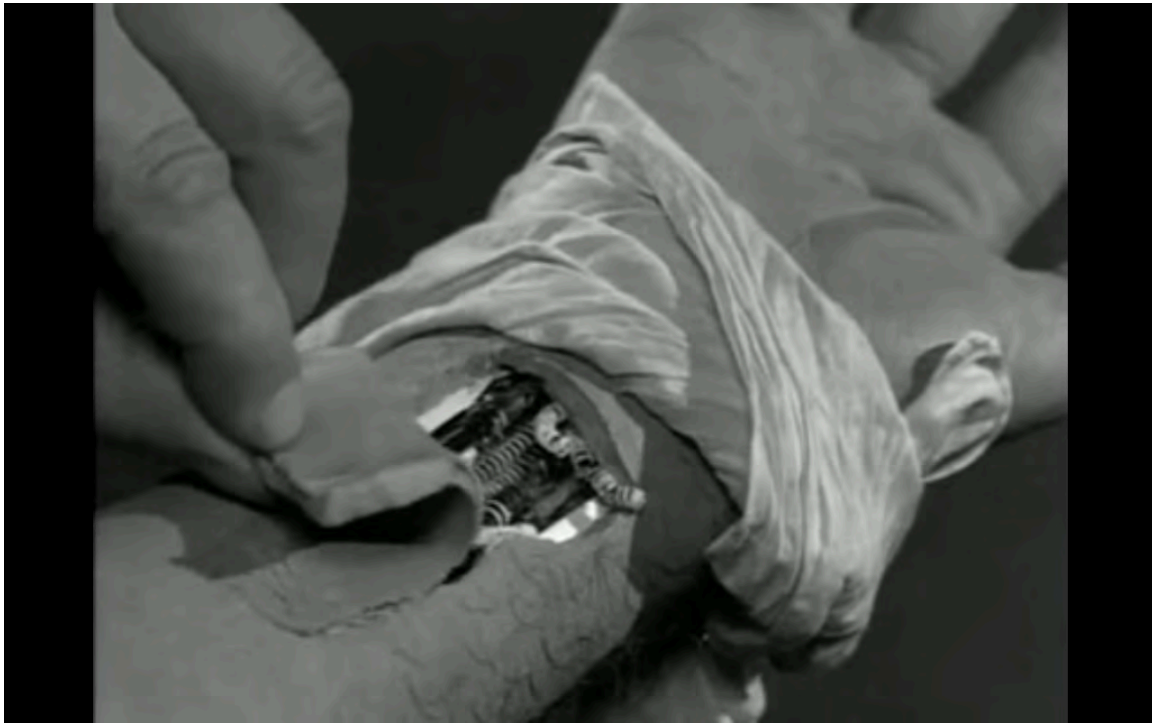


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# PATHOLOGIES OF DISSENT

FROM SUBSUMPTION OF INTEGRATION TO RECUPERATION OF THE SUBSUMED



## Over-Accumulation and the Colonization of the Social

*In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are incorporated into it as its living appendages... Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, of dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labour-power.<sup>1</sup>*

Capitalism is an accumulative regime, a vampiric body, whose vitality is contingent upon its ability to systematically subsume living labor-power within the undead reservoirs of its mystically enclosed ecologies. Sustaining its machinic drives through a hyper-augmented, self-depleting form of ‘consumptive production’<sup>2</sup>, its systems extract value through a logic of *primitive accumulation*: a negative process of expansion that voraciously objectifies the *relations of production* through the hegemonic separation of their social constituencies from the product of their ends. Enclosing these *ends*, which take the shape of surplus-value, in the crystallized reservoirs of its undead organs, the vampiric body’s will towards life is premised on its capacities for violent expansion as its productivity exceeds immediate demand. The over-accumulation of capital, resulting in the depletion of value and financial crisis, premises the body’s historical colonization of markets, resources, and subjectivities that existed outside of capitalist market protocols. The subsumption of affect, subjectivity, perception, or in general the social-relation as a totality within rigidly codified transactional mechanisms that take the shape of what Marx famously coined ‘the capital-relation’ hence becomes a natural consequence, if not foundation, upon which this incarnational regime would grow.

The capital-relation, understood as the social institution upon which the voracious drives of this regime find sustenance, shares an intimate historical genealogy with the rise of the cultural industry in the late 19th century. Like the industrial labor institution of its time, the mercantized cultural industries extracted value through the expropriation of the subject from the socio-cultural resources that facilitated their presence in the world. Alienation, the mass pathology of the capital-relation, hence only became absolute as the sovereign force, of which it now appears, after colonizing the entire social being – not only tearing subjects from the means of their material and hence biological foundations, but also from their symbolic and cognitive faculties, which were embedded in collective cultural rituals.

The vampiric regime’s colonization of geographical resources was thus predicated on its covert modalization of the cultural resources, and thus social institutions, that would provide the infrastructure for its uncontested exponential growth. It was only through the transfiguration of the embedded *social-relation* into the spectacularized vascular systems of its hegemonically

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl. *Capital. Volume 1*. p. 548. London: Penguin Classics. Print, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The product of consumptive production is surplus-value, a form that exceeds its immediate demand. The hyper-augmentation of consumptive production thus requires the constant expansion of a consumer market place.

administrated cultural institutions-cum-social factories -which served as vehicles for the integral seizure of language, gesture, and subjectivity- that the social-relation, in its entirety, was mystically reproduced as the capital-relation.



Egyptian Court, Crystal Palace

### **The dawn of the gesamfabrik.**

It does not seem to be a coincidence that the destination for the first corporate tourist industry was the Crystal Palace Great Exhibition of 1851<sup>3</sup>. Nor does it seem to be a coincidence that Marx conjured the idea of commodity fetishism after visiting the very same location<sup>4</sup>. Uprooted from commercial circulation, expropriated from the field of their social production and then supplanted within a rarefied architectonic cage, the taxonomic collection of worldly objects showcased at the Crystal Palace Exhibition served as an event for the inauguration of a new field of market relations that would premise the integral metamorphosis of the cultural form within the shape of the estranged commodity fetish, of which it now appears.

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<sup>3</sup> In Timothy Mitchell's essay "World as Exhibition," a startling link between capitalist displacement and the tourist industry is drawn through an account of the Crystal Palace Exhibition. "By the 1860s, Thomas Cook, who had launched the modern tourist industry by organizing excursion trains with the midland Railway Company to visit the Crystal Palace (the first of the great world exhibitions) in 1851, was offering excursions to visit not exhibits of the East, but the "East itself."

<sup>4</sup> For more on the relation between the Crystal Palace and Marx, see Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. P.38. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. 1994.

*The “becoming-image” of capital is nothing more than the commodity’s last metamorphosis, in which exchange value has completely eclipsed use value and can now achieve the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over life in its entirety, after having falsified the entire social production. In this sense, the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, where the commodity unveiled and exhibited its mystery for the first time, is a prophecy of the spectacle, or, rather, the nightmare, in which the nineteenth century dreamed the twentieth.*<sup>5</sup>

From this last metamorphosis of the commodity described by Agamben, alienation became an encompassing condition of the human species. Objectified dead-capital, which was torn from the field of its social production, re-awoke as an undead phantasmagoric commodity-form that would act as the artifice through which society would come to recognize itself as an integrated spectacle: an auto-voyeuristic social institution that subsumed the socio-material ecology, in its entirety, within a plane of absolute abstraction. Reality, from the Crystal Palace onward, became a carnivalesque market that ingeniously bound ‘the unconditioned self-regulating laws of aesthetics, and the pure abstraction which is the core of capital as a means to supersede use-values regulation of exchange value’<sup>6</sup> – falsifying the social relations of production through their illusory mediation by a de-regulated plane of aestheticized market protocols.

Expropriated from their language, gesture, subjectivity, material means of subsistence and home, the subjects produced through the culturally managed social factories found themselves with nothing to sell, neither experience nor produce other than their own skins, which were sold out of desperation as a form of capital within the de-regulated vascular systems of the vampiric wage market. As expropriation became total in the spectacle, the masses were given the opportunity to joyously consume and produce their own exploited labor -in a way commensurable with a goat eating its own processed flesh as though it were a product produced like any other- hence becoming alienated from their own alienation.

The process of instrumentalisation of commodity fetishism embedded in a kind of spectacle from Crystal Palace onwards meant that derived forms of capital, accumulated through the mechanisms of the vampiric body, became absolutely dependant from the limitations placed on productivity by human need. The liquidated life-cycles of products, social codes, businesses and culture endorsed by the vampiric body’s negative expansion, or consumptive production, found its ideal engine in the cultural economy’s commodity-forms and de-regulated productivity cycles, which, as Jonathan Lantham suggests “come to follow a generational logic in which their determining aim is the outdating of what exists, its denunciation, devaluation, and **replacement**.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without Ends*. p. 76. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. 1996.

<sup>6</sup> This hypothesis was in part drawn from Marina Vishmidt’s yet to be published, 2010, dissertation, “Allegories of Labor.” In it a thorough analysis on the falsification of the social relations of production via. their eclipse by de-regulated aesthetic relations of production is lucidly pointed to.

<sup>7</sup> Lantham, Jonathan. *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption*. p. 30. Chicago: University of Chicago press. 2002.

Crisis, as the engine behind this vicious generational dialectic, becomes an administrated event under the vampiric regime, taking on the qualities of a secularized seasonal occurrence. Engineered under the protocols of speculative financial markets, the seasons are strategically truncated. Turning years into months, and months into days, the commodity-species life-span (unlike the plant or human organism) is systematically programmed to follow the logic of the crisis economy's tumultuous growth cycles. Severed from the binding temporal orders of biological life cycles, the cyborgic commodity-species becomes a sovereign calendar; a self-regulating omnipotent institution that subjugates all forms of life under the abstract orders of its carnivorous accumulative drives. The zoo of estranged artifacts, tourists, and signs set within the abstract temporal orders of the Crystal Palace, in an uncanny historical coalescence, further illustrates how the fallacious dream of the 19th century would become the reality of the 20th and 21st.

Crystal Palace as the womb through which this new breed of commodity was birthed must also be seen as the founding protocol for the slew of festivals, museums, events, fairs and various other culture-led regeneration schemes that would follow. It is as if the symbolic impact and ephemeral space of Crystal Palace had been a catalyst for the saturation of deregulated, vampiric forms of capital, thereafter propelled beyond the fire which consumed it (in 1936) to propagate towards a schizophrenic colonization of all fields of social life.

The capital-relation is hence not simply a territory, e.g., factory, school, or patriarchical family unit, but an organ. It is a generative algorithm that moves with the operators that are produced through its protocols-cum-ecologies. The cultural institution as a key apparatus involved in the re/production of these integrally designed market algorithms must be considered as a *gesamfabrik* (total-factory) a temporalized territory that, as Hito Steyerl succinctly contends:

*exceeds its traditional boundaries and spills over into almost everything else. It pervades bedrooms and dreams alike, as well as perception, affection, and attention. It transforms everything it touches into culture, if not art. It is an a-factory, which produces affect as effect. It integrates intimacy, eccentricity, and other formally unofficial forms of creation. Private and public spheres get entangled in a blurred zone of hyper-production.*<sup>8</sup>

The cultural sector being the engine through which the social-relations of production-as a totality-were historically eclipsed by capitalist-relations of production would suggest that these social apparatuses, which are currently managed by a class of creative economy bureaucrats, could provide ideal soil for the age-old Marxist imperative of expropriating the expropriators, i.e., counter-recuperating resource enclosures through the expropriation of the sovereign class from the means (institutions) which fortify their hegemonic management over life.

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<sup>8</sup> Steyerl, Hito. *Is a Museum a Factory?* Journal#7. E-Flux Journal. 2009.

## Pathologies of dissent

We have described the capitalist-relation as an algorithm: a code that moves with one like an organ. We have described the capitalist political economy as a vampire: an accumulative machine that operates through a form of consumptive production or negative expansion. We have aligned these terms on the basis that capital, as a vampiric regime in a constant state of expansion, must exponentially subsume resources, organisms, and social forms within capitalist relations of production in order to feed its voracious and ever growing appetite. We have described the cultural institution as a social apparatus or more specifically *gesamfabrik*: a vehicle that premised capital's ability to subsume the entire social ecosystem into its mechanized transactional ecologies. And finally, we have suggested a Marxist-cum-Maoist coup of advanced-capitalist cultural engines on the basis of their formidable role in the engineering and diffuse dispersion of the algorithms that establish market subjectivities. The question of *how* we go about counter-recuperating the *gesamfabrik* still looms in the shadows of our hypothesis however.

Can we, through the cultural institution, whether it be the school, museum, or night club reassemble the elementary constituencies of the social-form by entering into new relations with the spatial, cognitive, and temporal tools through which we reproduce our presence in the world? How, as subjects produced through capitalist relations of production however, could we enter into these new fields of association with the cognitive and material resources, as well as instruments, that *would* establish our relations with these re-envisioned social-forms?

If capital's mass pathology is alienation, a disorder characterized by exclusion, displacement, and withdrawal; whose effects manifest through the expropriation of its victim from the means of their material and cognitive resources, a strategy of exodus must necessarily lie in inclusion. A counter-active pathology must hence be imagined that would hold the capacity to strategically re-enter the very system which expropriated it. Is integration within the vascular system of capital possible without subsumption, however? And on the other hand, is the subsumption (of capitalism) possible through viral integration? Pulling our model from the analogies of the vampiric body and *gesamfabrik* we will diagnose two strands of dissident pathologies through an analysis of recent 'outbreaks' in London that are symptoms of the crumbling welfare state.

The first will be *episodic illness*: an alien intrusion that is immediately recognized by the system and attacked by white blood cells. This is illness as an event, a violent territorial intervention resulting in a medical intervention that either fully cleanses the body of the alien organism, resulting in salvation and in many cases expansion, or on the other hand fails, leading to the spectacular implosion of the body it inhabits. Operating through a crisis/criticality dialectic, which Boris Buden proclaims as a defining axiom of the historical avant-garde, stating the following; "To say that something has gone into crisis meant above all to say that it has become old; that is, that it has lost its right to exist and therefore should be replaced by something new.

Criticism is nothing but the act of this judgment, which helps the old die quickly and the new to be born easily.”<sup>9</sup> Episodic illness will be discussed in terms of the militant left as an insurrectionary transformation that culminates in a lethal blow.

The second, which will be the emphasis of our position, is *chronic illness*. Chronic diseases, unlike episodic disease, linger within the body for extended periods of time. Taking on qualities that systemically situate it on the threshold between a vector (an organism, typically a biting insect or tick, that transmits a disease or parasite from one animal or plant to another) and a parasite, this pathology facilitates volatile ecologies that strategically blur ontological, epistemological, economic, etc. distinctions between the guest and the habitant. The partially symbiotic relation between the chronic disease and the infected body makes it difficult for the predominant organism to detect, much less get rid of, the alien occupant that has inhabited its system. Slowing down the liquidated death drive of the value creation machine, and facilitating a self-reflexive providence where mortality is confronted, life cycles are given a human like liability, and sustainable paths of withdrawal are realized.

### **Episodic Occupation and Chronic Habitation**

During an economic crisis, reactions to austerity measures and cuts in education can manifest themselves within a space through anything from transgressive territorial appropriations to lengthier navigations between institutional demands and individual subjectivities. Like countless public libraries across the country, the Byam Shaw School of Art library in north London was threatened with closure in October 2010, a decision justified by the integration of fine art resources into its affiliate college, Central St Martins, coinciding with the latter's relocation and centralisation to purpose-built facilities. Instead of an imminent death, the library was taken up as a platform for AND publishing and inhabited by students, prolonging the life of an ecology that was scheduled for a ruthless execution via the hand of State legislated financial dispossession. The habitation of this essential institutional organ by a group of alien elements that were expunged from its system marked the entrance of what we will diagnose as a chronic outburst.

The publishing organisation AND, co-directed by Lynn Harris and Eva Weinmayr, played an instrumental role in a systemic organization of the pathology that would chronically situate itself within the school's library. Using it as a space to exhibit AND publications, host workshops, a programme of 'Piracy lectures' which explore issues of copyright and authorship and a lab space assisting in the alteration and creation of published material, the project currently operates through volunteers and skills sharing, highlighting that the habitation is not only

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<sup>9</sup> Buden, Boris. *Criticism Without Crisis: Crisis Without Criticism*. London: MayFlyBooks. 2009.

endorsed by the institution itself, but necessarily by its students. Within the context of Byam Shaw's centralisation and the wounded potentiality of crisis provided by the library's demise, arose the provision for a lasting détournement of these resources, as embedded within an institutional framework. The use and context of these resources were formulated to create new forms of collectivity around objects that replicate the exchange relations of the commodity form.



AND

A central component of the library habitation, the Piracy Project, which facilitates the copying and altering of existing books and plans to exhibit pirated material, offers the provision for an aesthetic re-evaluation of the gesamfabrik, with an institution's resources acting as mediators providing much more than a critique of the logic of a primitive accumulation. The often minute additions to existing books in works bearing the same title and author, point to the parasitical strategies of both the piracy project and the habitation that contextualises it, re-evaluating through a parallel questioning of authorial voices the value of exchanging resources against the exchangeable value of commodities. Mitigating the increasing alienation of students as consumers built through years of deregulation in UK higher education, the library habitation re-imagines the alienated relations of students to institutional resources, in a reversal that extends from the altered, pirated page towards the walls of the institution that determines those relations. The subverted exchange value of resources in this context, with volunteer-led initiatives to inhabit a space, have the capacity, through the model's sustainability and the aesthetic re-investigations of institutional resources, of affecting a terminal illness reaching to the very organs that subject the individual to expropriation and alienation.



The ambiguity of AND's activities in relation to the space and time-frame of the habitation allow it to evolve somewhat organically in a manner that facilitates its navigation past conventional modes of institutional critique. While providing for the resources that are familiar to art schools and at the same time opening its doors to the questioning and alteration of published material, the AND habitation uses the ailing framework of the pedagogical institution -which it successfully integrates- as a potentially subversive potentiality. Systemically positioned on the threshold between a parasitical organism and a vector, the habitation simultaneously operates within the body of vampiric capital -virally infecting its blood streams- while modeling volatile channels that open space for the fusion of social-forms produced within institutional demands with those that decidedly exist outside them. The negotiation entailed in navigating through how to provide a service to students within a double agenda manifests itself here as an aesthetic re-evaluation of conventional services within educational contexts, relying on semantic slippages which are both inherent to the library's very function of exchange and its paradoxical, if not contradictory agendas.



Byam Shaw library habitation, May 2011

The format of an enclosed resource -with its commodifiable items borrowed and returned- offers various forms of potential exchange that an institution can accommodate. The library habitation does not position itself antagonistically to the Byam Shaw School of Art hosting it, since it is not an occupation gained without management's consent, but a habitation endorsed and even promoted by school's administration, which have openly agreed to diffuse AND events. A space inhabited for skill sharing towards the subversion of conventional types of knowledge-production, the library habitation indeed differs greatly from the transgressive appropriation of occupations that antagonise managerial allotments. As AND co-director Eva Weinmayr has claimed, 'it's not like we occupy [...] it's quite soft now and I think there's always negotiation'. Indeed the higher echelons of management support this negotiation-driven habitation, with the school's principal even providing financial support. The habitation is also no

doubt facilitated by the freedom inherent in the liminal space of possibility of a provision's demise. 'For the moment, nobody really knows where we sit' claims Weinmayr, 'we have to almost negotiate day by day where our rights are'. It is this very interstitial space that can sustain an open-ended, collaborative platform as a parasitical model.

There are of course a variety of reactions that can emerge from repressive managerial decisions in higher education. Testament to this are the protests and occupations that spread across UK campuses in the past year, their commonplace nature often filtering into the media as commonsensical antagonisms to a trebled tuition fee increase. Messy legal battles, high court injunctions and the enforced security that impose on schools the control of potential terrorist sites are now part of a normalised rift in UK higher education, deepening the precipice between management and students, desires for free education and the legacy of the Bologna process.

The gaping wound of the *gesamfabrik* became apparent during the occupations in protest against Middlesex University's planned closure of its philosophy courses. The starting point of the campaign against this decision was a meeting scheduled on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2010 by the Dean of Arts and Education to explain the closure. The Dean failed to appear to a meeting he had scheduled, and from this neglected transparency and justification, several dozen students stayed in the building, eventually occupying part of the Trent Park campus for weeks in expectant wait for clarifications and ultimately the reversal of a decision seemingly explained by the few return rate percentage points which the Philosophy and Religion department had failed to deliver. A second occupation, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, at Middlesex University's Trent Park Library was the opportunity of illustrating the logic of accumulation that justified the closure of the programme, while instrumentalising the institution's basic resources in a subversion of that logic. The space of the library, through the seizure of basic resources, was presented as another line pointing towards the erosion of education by the laws of use value. The library occupation can hence be seen as a form of episodic disease, re-appropriating institutional resources in a way that brings to light the precarity and contingencies of those resources themselves against the impending law of use-value.

In the months that followed, blows against generalised cuts in higher education (often investing institutional spaces with symbolic, militaristic or utopian meanings) and the institutional panic that ensued –with the deployment of costly High Court injunctions and small armies of security personnel- could be seen as the development of a governmental and ideological immune system, forms of institutional power flexing their muscle. These forms of power were pitted against episodic forms of illness, which can be understood as the illness born *out of* –and occasionally *specific to*- crisis. Protest as episodic illness can be imagined as both that which disregards elaborate meta-narratives or utopian movements, and escapist futures embedded within the logic of crisis. It is in this sense that the aims of protests and demonstrations with utopian aspirations falling under this notion can be seen as embedded within a spatio-temporal frame determined by the ebbs and flows of capital, the opening and coagulation of its blood streams.



Middlesex University occupation, May 2011

“Refusal of work,” the main slogan for the first stage of autonomia movements in the 1960s, supports a lucid illustration of the intrinsic conflict that underpins episodic outbreak. The slogan, as Michael Hardt affirms, did not simply mean “a refusal of creative or productive activity but rather a refusal of work within the established capitalist relations of production.”<sup>10</sup> This refusal of work took place through the occupation of the production process itself, in forms of sabotage, such as the slowing down and counter use of machinery. The problem which immediately appears for us in this logic is that it presupposes the actors' identification with a fully subsumed subject-position that is constituted through the hierarchically distributed labor force. The issue with this identification is that instead of breaking with the relations of production that are already established, it often happens that the labor class simply re-produces the codes they critique through attempts of self-valorization within the system they attempt to reorganize. Succinctly put, the members of the tennis club that violently occupy the court while wearing its uniforms simply reproduce the relations which the institution establishes in a slightly augmented form – the court topographically changes, but the algorithm goes unscathed, e.g., the players remain human-capital, and the court hence remains as a vehicle for the predominant market.

Half a century on from this "Refusal of work", it remains to be seen how the blows of episodic disease can affect the central organs of capital accumulation, specifically within higher

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<sup>10</sup> Hardt, Michael. Introduction. In *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 2.

education. Through the absorption of criticisms, the digestion of setbacks, the foreign intrusions of episodic disease can equate the re-enforcement of a shored-up immune system for vampiric forms of capital. In this way, formulating new forms of collectivity born out of crisis can be the contradiction by which the old is re-instated into what become 'evolved' variations on a theme. The governmental and institutional acts of clinical sterilization conducted in the aftermath of multitudes of demonstrations, occupations and protests; the new institutional and governmental marketing strategies around what education should represent to potential students<sup>10</sup> are all shifts which hover over the viability of episodic forms of disease, with demonstrations and the 'episodes' of occupation often being the incentive for a refined clinical treatment of the illness.

The space of the AND habitation taking hold of the Byam Shaw library's last months of existence and the Piracy Project generated from its midst reverse the expropriation initiated by the colonizations of vampiric capital towards a subversion of the alienation it effects. The disease, inserting itself within the institutional body, possesses more avenues for propagation by virtue of being placed under the auspices of an institutional framework. In turn it is capital accumulation, within a space such as the Byam Shaw library habitation, that can be seen as the disease to be eradicated (for instance, inserting itself surreptitiously through new forms of false 'community-led' initiatives). The forms of collectivity initiated through the AND habitation use conventional resources and pre-established communal spaces as hinges for the re-investment of relationships tying production to consumption. The forms of collective authorship displayed by the Piracy Project can act as models for effective inhabitation through their workshops and lectures. Attaching itself to an institutional infrastructure with a corrosive fixture, this type of habitation can altogether transform the body that gave it existence, and unlike the reactive impulsive of many occupations, negotiate a relationship of exchange with and within institutional structures themselves. The illness that propagates itself in this way, re-investing the expropriation of vampiric forms of capital, can potentially linger in the veins of organisms accumulating capital until reaching their heart.

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<sup>10</sup> as with Middlesex University marketing itself as a champion of 'work-based learning' (against the superfluous 'excess' of Philosophy)

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