



Friday 21st June 2019

Alternative Organisations and Transformative Practices (AOTP) Research Cluster Conference

Call for Papers

From Economic Science Fictions to Labour as Commons

Keynote Speaker: Dr Dario Azzellini (ILR School at Cornell University)

Organised by: AOTP, Middlesex University, London <https://alternativeorganisations.wordpress.com/>

Alternative Organisations and Transformative Practices (AOTP) at Middlesex University, London is accepting submissions for our 1-day symposium in the summer at Hendon Town Hall (Committee Room 1) next to the campus. Paper abstracts of 250 words max are accepted, with a deadline by Monday 18th February 2019. We encourage submissions from academics of all stages in their career, including PhD students and overseas colleagues, although please be aware that we are unable to fund costs. Kindly email abstracts to the AOTP Coordinators, Dr Daniel Ozarow d.ozarow@mdx.ac.uk and Dr Nico Pizzolato n.pizzolato@mdx.ac.uk

Background:

The global crisis has elicited an acceleration of neoliberal capitalism that has been disastrous for labour. Austerity programmes, market flexibilisation, privatisation, venture capital takeovers of failing firms, casualization, the “gig” economy, and zero hour contracts have intensified the exploitative relationship between labour and capital and exacerbated worker alienation and precariousness. Both as an ideology and a set of practices, neoliberalism has recast capitalism as a pervasive narrative to be internalised and reproduced.

In effect, as suggested by William Davies et al. in the edited anthology *Economic Science Fictions* (2018), capitalism might be reconceptualised as an eminently fictional form of how social life should be organised that bears little relations to the actual societal needs. For instance, economist Ha-Joon Chang explains how we come to believe that the existing economic reality is scientifically-grounded and ‘natural’, although in fact it is the product of ideologically-driven political decisions, technological change, or influence from institutions or external forces. If economics is a form of fiction, how can labour emancipate itself from this fiction, return to its essence, and reclaim a non-fictional economy?

Currently, around the globe we have seen the emergence of alternative, non-capitalist production models based on principles of worker democracy, self-management, horizontal decision-making that are emancipatory and solidaristic in nature. Sometimes the consequence of anti-neoliberal uprisings, they may be autonomous of, in direct conflict with, or co-opted by the state. The utopian visions they bring often inspire hope among broader populations or workers, as an alternative to the dystopian path that is often predicted. Diluted versions of such visions are even penetrating the mainstream, with the publication of the British Labour Party's Alternative Models of Ownership (2017).¹

Authors such as De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2010), Bollier and Helfrich (2012) and Azzellini (2016) propose a solution to this problem through the understanding of 'labour as a commons', located in the discussion of how commons can advance the transformation of social relations and society. This is only possible if labour power is no longer perceived of as the object of capital's value practices, but as a collectively and sustainably managed resource for the benefit of society, obtained via social struggle and the cultivation of examples of forms of 'labour as a commons' that already exist in society (or those that have not yet formed).

Call for Papers:

This conference seeks to bring the two parallel literatures of 'economic science fictions' and 'labour as commons' into dialogue by inviting contributors to submit papers that investigate and analyse how can society move away from this dystopian economic science fiction via the practice of the labour commons.

Papers should contribute to one of the three conference streams:

1) Alternative ways of organizing work, including organizations in the social or solidarity economy

This stream includes research on workers-recovered companies, forms of democratic worker governance of enterprises, employee-ownership, cooperatives and other instances of self-management and self-activity.

2) Critiques of economic science fictions and conceptualisation of alternative theoretical frameworks for modes of work and property relationships, guided by the idea of commons.

3) Responses to emerging forms and control of work, including integration of new technologies and digitalisation

This stream includes research on responses to how technology and digitalisation has reconfigured workplace organisation and the body social through intensified monitoring, surveillance and control . It includes also the impact of automation, cloud computing, big data and the Internet of Things on work systems and relations of production.

Contributions are especially welcome if international, comparative or interdisciplinary in nature.

Join/Like the Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/Alternative-Organisations-and-Transformative-Practice-Conference-2019-376742496223219/>

¹ <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Alternative-Models-of-Ownership.pdf>