

The pandemic, race and the crisis of the neoliberal university: study notes from lockdown London

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into further crisis the contemporary global university. By focusing on the UK this article examines how this crisis has manifested itself in UK universities, with an increasingly problematic reliance on online teaching and learning. Further, simultaneously universities are being challenged by demands for racial justice and decolonisation following the Black Lives Matter global protests after the police killing of George Floyd. The article argues that the crisis is an opportunity to rework the relationship between pedagogy, technology, race, and cultural studies in local and transnational digital and cultural networks to resist the exploitation of global info-capitalism.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic; COVID-19; race; Black Lives Matter; neoliberalism; university; digital communication; pedagogy, United Kingdom

The university cannot function, and we must thus prevent it from functioning so that this impossibility is made manifest. No reform of any kind can render this institution viable. We must thus combat reforms, in their effects and in their conception, not because they are dangerous, but because they are illusory. The crisis of the institution of the university goes beyond [...] the realm of the university and involves the social and technical division of labor as a whole. And so, this crisis must come to a head. (André Gorz, "Destroy the University," 1970)

"To the university I'll steal, and there I'll steal," to borrow from Pistol at the end of Henry V, as he would surely borrow from us. This is the only possible relationship to

the American university today. This may be true of universities everywhere. It may have to be true of the university in general ... it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university. (Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 2013)

... a conjuncture is not a slice of time, but can only be defined by the accumulation/condensation of contradictions, the fusion or merger—to use Lenin’s terms—of “different currents and circumstances.” It is a “moment,” not a “period”—over-determined in its principle. (Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, 1990)

Pandemonium

The first two epigraphs written over 40 years apart suggest that the university, specifically the university in the Global North, has been in crisis at least twice, or over a long period, and as I argue is currently in even deeper crisis due to the COVID-19 virus. This article speculates what if the pandemic is the crisis form of the contemporary university. The pandemic as crisis has intensified the fault lines that are already informing the breakdown of the corporate university as a public educational institution. The focus here is on the “pandemic university” in the UK, one of the leading nations in the neoliberalisation of higher education. While COVID-19 is propagating globally—it is by its very definition a virus that crosses international borders—the health response to the coronavirus has largely been organised at the nation-state level.¹ I specifically look at the crisis through the prism of race in Britain, as the former imperial nation continues to reposition itself geo-politically in the contemporary world order, especially after “Brexit” with the UK leaving the European Union. The nation-state remains an important context for higher education policy, although many UK universities are like global corporations, with significant numbers of international students; expanding economic relationships with institutions around the world; and by coordinating and attracting

international research funding. The globalisation of higher education integrates the university into transnational circuits of capitalism, information and data (Olssen and Peters 2005).

This article is an “interim report” on the state of UK universities as of mid 2020—during the initial phase of the coronavirus, with myself in “lockdown” and teaching online in London. Given the contingent, unfolding form of the pandemic the article schematically presents some notes on key aspects and contradictions towards thinking the conjuncture.² I consider how the pandemic university crisis has accelerated with the increasingly reliance on online teaching and digital communication technologies, and due to the concurrent proliferation of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests after the global circulation of the video of the police killing of the African American George Floyd, bringing into greater focus the prevailing structures of capitalism, racism and Eurocentrism in UK universities. The articulation of technology and racism exposes the failings of the contemporary university, and the necessity to rethink the relationship of university education, and critical pedagogies in emergent global information networks. I briefly consider to what extent can the approach of cultural studies as an interdisciplinary mode of praxis offer ways of grappling with local, national and transnational culture, economy and politics? Can alternative forms of study and critical practice take advantage of the contemporary crisis and develop modes of resistance to the logics of the neoliberal university?

University as permanent crisis

If as Gorz’s epigraph states that in 1970 the university is in crisis, it is useful to briefly consider the present in relation to this longer history. What was situation in the late 1960s, and in what ways does it relate to the crisis now, if at all?³ The cultural imaginary of the late 1960s, especially 1968, is embodied in student protests—these included demands for greater access to and change within the academy and society in general across the world. The year 1968 is a catalyst, a marker for significant shifts in higher education and political thought. The status quo, with higher education as a site of dominant bourgeois values and social forms, was challenged and rejected (Charnell et al. 2019). The 1970s saw: the emergence of the New Left, the establishment of Cultural Studies with its focus on ordinary people’s history and culture; the development of radical sociology, feminism and anti-racism, which were further consolidated in the 1980s in the UK. Here Michael Rustin (2016, 151) reflects on the historical changes:

Changes in the content of university education, reflecting both the access of different social strata to the system, and new occupational opportunities for graduates, accompanied this expansion. The curriculum innovation which took place in the new universities (both the 1960s generation of “plate glass universities” which included Lancaster, Sussex, Kent, Essex, and Warwick, and the post 1970s “polytechnic” institutions) saw the expansion of sociology, cultural studies and other “radical” disciplinary developments.

With these changes came new subjects in the academy: working class and popular culture, feminism, sexuality and race, which slowly became integral to UK courses in the social sciences and humanities. (At the same time in the US there was the emergence of Black and ethnic studies university programmes and departments as a consequence of the civil rights struggles.) While these initiatives were never central to UK academia, they did become established in some institutions even if only in the margins. The University of East London (UEL), where I taught for over 25 years, is a good example of this, with the establishment of the first Department of Cultural Studies, and a BA in Cultural Studies in 1980, following the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, and the related Centre for New Ethnicities Research at UEL in the early 1990s. This in an UK context where historically the university had been an elite institution limited to about 20 percent of the school leaving population, before the expansion of higher education from the 1980s to the present, where over 50 percent go to university (Kershaw 2019). The expansion of UK higher education led to more working class, and especially second generation immigrant British South Asian and Caribbean students attending from the 1980 to 1990s. Significantly this was also the period of the shift to neoliberal economics in higher education, marked by the move away from local government grants for students, to the payment of much higher fees, and with a student loan system introduced in 1990 (Fazackerley 2017).

The salient features of the neoliberal university are well documented and critiqued (Collini 2012; Giroux 2013; McGettigan 2012; Rustin 2016). In summary, the neoliberal university includes an audit, market driven culture with a focus on student numbers, retention, and employability. The “post-1992” universities (these were originally polytechnics such as UEL, which became a university in 1992) had significant working class, local, migrant students, with innovative, interdisciplinary humanities and social sciences courses. These programmes are now being closed down with the increasing emphasis on vocationalism and

training and less on critical study. The instrumentalisation and quantification of teaching and learning with targets and consumer-led models of student satisfaction, has led to the marginalisation of academic leadership, creating a situation where senior management, supported by finance, quality control and marketing, underpin a corporate mission for the university. Rustin (2016, 157) summarises well the implications of this new managerial class and corporate culture:

In this new environment there was every incentive for university managements to adopt the methods and cultures of corporate institutions. Formerly collegial and relatively democratic forms of internal governance—election by faculty members to senior positions, decision-making by representative senates and academic boards have been diminished in favour of hierarchical systems of management. Since universities are now in open commercial rivalry with one another, the functions essential to this competition—finance, marketing, fund-raising, estates, human resources—are strengthened, and the role of academics in decision-making processes weakened. Accompanying the ascendancy of neoliberalism in the public sector is the rise of occupations whose expertise lies in markets and regulation—accountants and auditors, corporate lawyers, public relations and human resource practitioners, contract managers, administrators—at the expense of the professions concerned with the “primary tasks” of institutions, such as teachers, researchers and doctors. The professionals find themselves subordinated to these new managerial regimes.

The neoliberalisation of higher education has led in turn to the marginalisation, particularly in post-1992 universities, of the study of race, diaspora and globalization, unless these subjects are seen to be able to operate within the market logics of vocationalism and employability. These developments have had a fundamental effect on critical teaching and research across all UK universities, with many of the progressive developments over the last 30 years being erased or absorbed and depoliticised into traditional disciplines.

COVID-19 and the business of Zoom

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the financial precariousness of many UK universities, with a market-driven financial model based on governmental funding being allocated

according to student numbers, and an increasing reliance on further revenue from international students (Adams 2020a). The elite, “red brick” universities with extensive research funding, and/or collaborations with private industries, are in a better place to cope with the impact of the pandemic. Although even these are vulnerable to the potential decline in international students especially from China, and the possible impact of Brexit, with the loss of students and research funding from the EU (Busby 2020).

Like many institutions around the world, the UK universities response to the initial quarantine lockdown was to very quickly transfer most degree courses to fully online delivery. While most UK courses have incorporated some digital communication as part of the learning resources over the last few years, the sudden shift to online teaching was challenging for all courses, especially those which have significant practice components, for instance in art, media and design. The switch to online teaching was undertaken with little training for tutors or students. There is a (faulty) presumption that course content can be taught online with little extra planning or due regard given to the type of course and its mode of teaching and learning, and without any assessment of the appropriateness of communication technologies being used. There has been little attention paid to the unevenness of broadband capacity and connectivity, or to student access to appropriate technology. Students from poorer backgrounds are less likely to have the required technical equipment or have adequate accommodation space to undertake remote online study. Further, it is impossible to reproduce the social environment of the classroom online. The campus provides a more equal and open space for discussion and embodied interactivity in comparison to the technological mediated interfaces. The developments in technology, especially with availability of video sharing platforms like *Zoom*, *Teams* and *Collaborate Ultra*, do make it possible to undertake interactive, synchronous online sessions, which over time may become more familiar and easier to navigate, and to address the myriad of inevitable technical problems. These technologies do allow students from all over the world, in theory, to attend real-time online classes and access relevant digital resources, but the anecdotal student experience so far has been very uneven with varying levels of broadband capacity, problems accessing proprietary software and sharing platforms in different parts of the world, with the added challenge of differing time-zones for synchronous teaching. The developments in these technologies could offer more inventive possibilities of integrating online teaching with campus classes. But this requires far more consideration being given to developing forms of pedagogy, with more bespoke interfaces and platforms for teaching that do not just simplify the complexity of how students learn. These potential developments require time,

expertise and resources. The impact of screen-based teaching and the way students learn and experience classes needs further examination, although it is quite evident already that the lack of social context for students in class learning and face-to-face socialising has tended to reduce the university to something like a customised YouTube video channel (Weiss 2020; Atrey 2020).

The use of corporate video sharing technologies and platforms integrates further the university into the logics of the capitalist market, with the platform providers having control and access to data and the ability to monitor and track students and staff. This raises issues of privacy, and the possibility of student and university data being sold to commercial companies, in a similar way that digital networks and social media are part of the ever-expanding surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019). It is also the case that moving further to digital teaching has been on the agenda for universities with the ambition of reducing teaching and capital costs. The technologies enable the “speeding up” of academia, with less time to absorb and reflect on material, for both staff and students, and with further possibilities in the commodification of modules and courses. The pandemic is an opportunity for universities to pursue this agenda with little resistance or debate.

The plan for the coming academic year (2020-2021) for most UK universities is to offer some form of blended or hybrid teaching—a mix of being on campus and online. It is difficult to predict how the coronavirus will develop and mutate in the coming academic year, but there are strong indications that ~~with~~ further “spikes” in COVID-19 cases and/or a “second wave” with a rapid increase in infections will push teaching back to fully online. Even returning partially to campus, mainly driven by financial concerns, will be challenging with the safe distancing and cleaning requirements, especially as there is no effective testing and trace system in the UK so far. The dangers to vulnerable students with underlying health issues should also be significant cause of concern for the university. The increasing levels of student mental health issues are only being exacerbated with students isolated by online learning, and the limitations in accessing university support services, or being able to meet tutors face-to-face (Watermeyer et al 2020).

Given the UK university financial model is very dependent on student numbers and fees, there are major concerns for the coming academic year that home-based and continental European students may defer entry to next year, and with even greater likelihood that many international students will not enroll this year. The higher international student fees are a critical factor for the running of courses in many UK universities (Adams 2020b). This is a situation where more funds are needed for staffing to cover extra classes of smaller student

groups on campus due to safe distancing requirements, as well as funds needed to develop digital resources. The speeded up digital culture has also greatly increased workloads for academic staff, and the need for extra administration support. Just prior to the UK lockdown in 2020 there was a major six-week national strike by UCU, the main lecturer's union, demanding better staff workloads, equality of pay, job insecurity, and against pay devaluation.⁴ The emergent academic environment gives senior managers even more power, leading to even more exploitation of permanent and hourly-paid academic staff, with job losses inevitable as universities try to balance the budget.⁵

Pandemic racism

The BLM protests have been a catalyst in the UK in making more visible the longstanding problems of institutional and everyday racisms across many sectors of society. In higher education in the last few years there have been concerted efforts, mainly led by students, for fundamental change. These have included demands to “decolonise” the curriculum, and/or “decolonise” the university, with initiatives such as “why is my professor white?” and need for UK Black Studies focused university courses (Andrews 2019).

The institutional racism in UK universities remains with a concentration of black and brown staff in junior positions, with very few professors of colour in the humanities and social sciences, and with majority of staff in support services such as administration, cleaners, catering or security. There has been very little change over the last 50 years in the UK universities as a racialised workplace. In fact in many respects the situation is worse than the 1990s, with more precarious contracts for many academics and the outsourcing of areas such as catering, security and cleaning to private companies. All the rhetoric around “equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion” has failed to make significant changes but gives the impression that these issues are being addressed by universities (Bhopal and Pitkin 2020). The post 1980/90s critical developments in the study of race, ethnicity, gender, migration, arts, media, history, postcolonial and cultural studies have failed to fundamentally change the practices of the university of increasing commodification of education with an ideology of market choice, treating students as customers, and metrics as quantitative measure of research quality and the “impact” of publications.

This situation has led to a more militant critique of the “white” university by especially a younger generation of students of colour. The recent BLM protests have energised the

critique of universities. Immediately as a response many UK institutions and organisations released statements of support for BLM and anti-racism. These statements were immediately critiqued by student groups for being just symbolic and not supported with any concrete plans for institutional change. The university statements were seen as further evidence of the historical failure to adequately address institutional racism (Batty 2020). UK universities have attempted to navigate the challenges of racism by promoting equal opportunities and diversity, including for instance focusing on racial unconscious bias and intercultural communication training. These individually focused awareness initiatives have been easily incorporated within neoliberal agendas, with vague ideas in support of “cultural diversity” and “inclusion,” failing to address institution racism, class inequalities, or the hegemony of whiteness (Ahmed 2012). The recent demands for racial justice have further critiqued these diversity measures for more structural changes at all levels of the workings of the university.

Black Lives Matter

A significant aspect of the BLM protests, in the US, UK and around the world, is that they are largely local and self-organised, with no central group or committee planning them. In the US they appeared to be spontaneous as an immediate reaction and protests to another video of a police killing of black person. Although Robin Kelley (2020) has argued that in fact a lot of work has been undertaken studying, planning and organising the BLM movement:

And one of the things we all have to acknowledge is that we're not here by accident. You know, this is not a spontaneous response to the pandemic, and suddenly white people are waking up and saying, “Oh, wait a second, Black lives matter.” No, this is a product of enormous work, going back well before Trayvon Martin. But you think about all the organizing work, the Movement for Black Lives, Black Lives Matter, the women who organized Black Lives Matter, initiated—Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors—people like Melina Abdullah, Charlene Carruthers of Black Youth Project 100, all the scholar activists who have been working on this question ...

The demands for the abolition of the prison industrial complex, or the critique of the carceral state, have developed over a period of time. The notion of “defunding” the police did not just appear, it had already been studied in local groups and places. In the UK, most organised left

groups and political parties have had very little to do with the BLM protests. The very youthful, multi-racial composition of these self-organised groups' claims for racial justice is being articulated outside institutional forms of politics, in a sense similar to, and informed by, the politisation and organising of youth in relation to climate change and environmentalism. There is a clear refusal to engage directly with the racial state or formal party politics. The protests are part of increasingly global, grassroots youth movements challenging the rise of authoritarian, populist, neofascism and racisms in all their guises. The interminable UK debate and developments over the last few years on Brexit, has further legitimated popular racisms and xenophobia, especially towards migrants, refugees and racial minorities. The pandemic has engendered further English nationalism⁶ and racism, in a context where a disproportionate number of racial minorities have died due to the virus.⁷

These protests are local, digitally networked forms of social disruption, closer to autonomous and anarchist practices with militant demands. The rallying call is not for "equality, diversity, inclusion," but anti-racism, against anti-blackness and for the defunding of the institutions such as the police and other agents of state and economic violence. Mutual aid, self-help, community and religious groups, local social care, are the modes in which these grassroots social politics are emerging, and are the contemporary context for the critique of the university and education (Mohdin 2020).

In recent times in higher education the UK student-led demands for racial justice have coalesced around the notion of the "decolonial." This concept has been articulated in a number of ways: decolonising the curriculum, fields of study, and the university (Bhambra, Nisancioglu, and Gebrial 2018). The ubiquitous use of the "decolonial" as a pre-fix across all sorts of disciplines, publications, events, signals that it is quite an ill-defined concept being mobilised in quite differing ways across academia and beyond. It becomes particularly problematic when the term is appropriated by universities as a continuation of their diversity management policies. While this could still open up spaces for more radical interventions, it does indicate the weakness of the way the concept is being posited, especially by not adequately situating it in the longer anti-colonial histories of political and economic decolonisation of the Third World independence movements, and anti-racist struggles in the twentieth century. The decolonial in the contemporary academy with a focus on "non-western," indigenous epistemologies, is largely derived from the ideas of Walter Mignolo and his colleagues at Duke University (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). This has been the main way the term has entered Anglo-American universities, although it now draws from a wider range of discourses to the point that decolonisation stands in for many forms of social and cultural

critique. Further in the context of the metropolitan university the critique of Eurocentrism is not developed in relation to the contemporary, neo-colonial production of knowledge globally, with the continuing dominance of English-speaking Anglo-American universities and fields of study. Instead the focus usually has been on changes in reading lists and objects of study. This is partly the case given that there are also very few staff in UK universities with expertise in Asian, African, Latin American culture or global politics to address the complex relations of power and knowledge across the regions of the world. The teaching of the reconfiguration of global economics and politics with the rise of the BRICS countries is largely limited to specialist areas of international relations and economics in some universities. Instead the decolonial has replaced diversity as the preferred term in the management of the demands for racial justice in the university. Ironically decolonisation in the UK remains an idealist, Eurocentric project, which is being comfortably incorporated in the neoliberal branding of the “cosmopolitan” global university.

The demands for racial justice in recent UK protests has articulated together with racism and the pandemic crisis. This is a complex contradictory formation in which universities are having to at least be seen to be giving support to anti-racism and BLM in the context of planning for COVID-19. Given this the pandemic as crisis is an opportunity to re-articulate the contradictions of race, decoloniality and the university, while also working towards a dismantling of the contradictions of neoliberal economics and English nationalism. One area where the recent BLM protests have direct implications for education is the focus on racism and colonial history, given the relationship between British history, slavery and empire are largely not studied. The toppling down of public monuments of slave owners and colonial figures has made visible the relationship of English nationalism to slavery and colonial histories, informing decolonial agendas by connecting these histories to contemporary racism (Iyer 2020; Parveen et al. 2020). Further, the longer histories of orientalism and racism have been made visible with the increasing levels of racism and violence towards Chinese students in the UK (Parry 2020). The pandemic as an organic crisis potentially opens up spaces to intervene in anti-racism given the contradictions of capitalism, race and technology in neoliberalism.

Another university is possible?

The racial critique of UK institutions especially the university but also museums, art and cultural organisations, has been led by urban-based, independent groups and interventions including art projects, digital activism, developments in music, fashion and publishing. These self-organised black/Asian/POC/feminist/queer/trans-led initiatives are addressing the theoretical, social, political, aesthetic and subjective complexities of identity and culture from outside, or at the edges of higher education and cultural institutions. Significantly these groups, projects, and events-based activities are autonomous of the university and other institutions, with many of them arts and culture focused, working across theory and practice. (See Brar and Sharma 2020, 106-109, for examples of some of these groups and projects). Many of these groups are interested in (black) study as a core aspect of their practice. These initiatives have drawn upon ideas of the “undercommons,” “black study,” “fugitive planning” as conceptualised by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) in *The Undercommons*. The publication is a sort of “underground manual” for autonomous black study and planning. Harney and Moten offer a trenchant critique of the contemporary university arguing for a practice of study “in but not of” the university—what they call the “undercommons.” These ideas are part of a new wave of black thought in the US, which offers a productive way of thinking race, blackness and black culture in relation to the history of slavery and its afterlives. They do this through addressing anti-blackness ontologically as well as historically, with a critique of the “grammar” of race, subjectivity and identity in hegemonic white post-slavery society. This has included US writers and theorists such as Hortense Spillers, Sadiya Hartman, Cedric Robinson, Frank Wilderson III, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Naham Chandler and David Marriott (Brar and Sharma 2020). They offer a way of thinking blackness and black study in and beyond racial capitalism, drawing on the “Black Radical Tradition” including figures such as C.L.R James, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon. As summarized by our Black Study group (London) (2015):

Black study is the modulation of the general antagonism of blackness into forms of sociality. It is the quotidian, communal manifestation of blackness as a paraontology of lived experience. Black social life, like blackness, is not singular, in that it is not simply the property of a given body, but the manifestation of collective experiences, hapitalities, and inhabitations. Study refers to a generalized coming together in full

recognition of common incompleteness. Black study is another name for the modes of social organization generated by black diasporans.

This idea of Black study and the “undercommons” is a utopian one, a concrete utopia, in some respects it is in the spirit of 1968, and in the historical ethos and practice of cultural studies. A crucial aspect of these independent projects in comparison to the neoliberal university is the idea of experimentation and improvisation across different fields and modes of study, within safe spaces with possibilities of risk or failure. They provide networks of collective support, care and sociality, especially in the case of Black feminist/queer/trans groupings. These inter-disciplinary groups and projects have interests in archives and futurity, in speculative thought, and re-imagining other ways of thinking about culture, art, social relations. They stress the importance of aesthetics, ethics and politics against the mutating enclosures of racial capitalism.

Again the Black Study Group (2015) explain:

We are interested in black study as it re-imagines, experiments with, creates new forms of sociality, affect, knowledge, and operates as a subjective mode of antagonism always escaping racial capitalism. This to us seems an imperative given the inability of current black praxis to break out of the language, forms and logics of neoliberalism.

Harney and Moten’s notion of Black study and the undercommons happens in different spaces inside and outside of institutions, especially the university. It is too early to make an in-depth assessment of these initiatives. These groups and projects are putting pressure on the university, as well as other established institutions, but they need to experiment further their modes of operation, including more creative and critical reconfiguring use of digital technologies and networks. At present these projects transverse the academy and arts and online spaces. They have some, if limited, relationship with activism and politics on the ground. This relationship between the everyday culture and the lived experience, and activism and politics is necessary for these projects to be effective in resisting, refusing and having an impact on the university. There also needs to be more connections between local groups and transnational projects and developments in the university and politics across the world, especially with different sites and projects in the Global South. Further consideration should be given to the fundamental shifts in global politics, power and capitalism in light of the emergence of the BRICS nations. This is where more innovative and critical developments in

communication technology could be used to form networks and study projects that together resist the logics of corporate culture and state controls across the world. The role of open access, open source and digital peer to peer networks need to be further developed, with more critique of corporate technologies such as social media and video communication, given that these are not neutral tools but materialise racism and global cultural marginalisation (Benjamin 2019; Noble 2018).

The “pandemic as crisis” is a struggle over the university and its relationship to social and cultural change at the local, nation and transnational levels. These projects are re-invigorating Cultural Studies mode of inter/anti-disciplinary thought and practice. They offer ways of repurposing the relationships with institutions and everyday culture globally and ethically, against the hegemony of corporate globalization of social space. The *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* project could be a model for how comparative and critical work across nations is undertaken and discussed in local and transnational politics. The focus on questions of race, nation, diaspora, capitalist globalization, technologies, ideally repositions study in and outside the university as spaces to articulate thought and politics of the everyday, engendering further the pandemic university as crisis for the activist organisation of study and “radical technics” for a sociality of resistance and revolt.

Notes

¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) has attempted to provide global leadership and guidance on the pandemic but has largely been marginalised by national governments. See <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

² This article is partially informed by my immediate experience of teaching online during the height of the pandemic and UK quarantine in 2020. I am the course leader for the BA(Hons) Film and Screen Studies at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. An arts-based university that has a very diverse body of home-based and international students, especially from East Asia.

³ This also poses the question that if there has been a permanent crisis over the last 50 years, how useful is the notion of crisis to understand the university? It is not a question I directly answer here but one that informs the thinking of the conjuncture, hegemony and crisis.

⁴ See <https://www.ucu.org.uk/he2019>.

⁵ See <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10964/Universities-must-not-become-the-care-homes-of-a-Covid-second-wave>.

⁶ Brexit has led to the emergence of English nationalism as opposed to British nationalism, with divergent positions on leaving the EU especially between England and Scotland.

⁷ Many of the key UK frontline workers in the health service and care homes who died have been from racial minorities, including recent migrants. The lack of protective equipment for

these workers has been a major factor in the high number of deaths. There have also been socio-economic factors—for example multi-generations of migrant families living together in small houses has led to the further spread of the virus, and especially higher proportion of elderly death.

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