Appalling

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> There's no escaping the real economic problem here: labor exploitation
>
> —Thompson, in Schell and Lambert, 2001, 187

> Who is to say whether it would be better for the university to offer higher wages? … charges of exploitation are difficult to prove.
>
> —Bok, 2003, 96

> But for purposes of getting started in our own inquiry, the most interesting question raised by the Porter essay is meta-discursive. Exactly what has gone on in the rhetcomp discourse that the essay's dramatic rhetoric frames the otherwise banal observation that "institutions can be changed" as a revelation to its readership? What hopeless structure of feeling so dramatically composes the audience for this piece that such an uncontroversial claim needs to be advanced at all, much less receive the disciplinary equivalent of a standing ovation (the Braddock award)?
>
> —Marc Bousquet, from manuscript version of "Composition as Management Science," p. 3

> Capitalism doesn't solve its problems; it moves them around
>
> —Meyerson paraphrasing Harvey on Engels[1]

The rhetoric of flexibility weds the discourse of free-market entrepreneurial and consumer capitalism—centered on the myths of free exchange and consumer sovereignty—to the discourse of neoliberal globalization. This is well known. But flex discourse weds these in turn to a host of other discourses which are to vary-

ing degrees subordinate to—and imbricated with—it as well as with each other.

Flex discourse is closely connected to modernization narratives, with their emphasis on a depoliticized language of inevitable change, brought about by the unstoppable march of technology. It is closely connected to anti-union and anti-communist or anti radical discourse. The modernization narrative is also a narrative celebrating complexity as a virtual synonym for the new economy, to be set against the old economy, characterized by institutions now anachronistic: for example, tenure. The discourse of anti-tenure in turn plays off of anti-union and anti-communist narratives, but also, in the larger field of modernizing market ideology, the narrative of post-Fordism. But part of this flex force field includes elements that have significantly disparate histories. Here I include languages of ecology (biodiversity, the alternative), evolutionary biology (adaptation, fit, optimization, niche), postmodernism (hybridity, niche, diversity, multiplicity, contingency, the new), and (corporate) multiculturalism (difference, diversity). As one can see from my sketch of discursive components, these more disparate narratives borrow from each other to a significant degree.

How all these significations relate to one another will I hope become clearer as the essay unfolds, but a few comments are in order about the role of evolutionary discourse here—not just because of its importance to my argument but because in discussions of flex ideology, this trope has not, to my knowledge, been discussed. The flex language that plays off of the popular discourse of evolution is often seriously at odds, not surprisingly, with the evolving scientific discourse on evolution—though it bears noting that this discourse itself is riven with disagreement and contradiction.[2] For the most part, the older pop usages, Darwinism as social Darwinism, are muted. This seems somewhat odd since flex rhetoric celebrates competition. But as I shall show, competition's vicious (social Darwinist) aspects, while there for all to see, are deemphasized. Instead of few winners and many losers, we've got win-win or optimization discourse.[3] The new economy produces aptness, adaptation, fit—a place for everything and everything in its place. The new economy serves diversity, cultural and "racial." As this diversity is associated with niches and niche marketing, the eco friendly connotations associated with biodiversity get pulled along. While natural selection can often eliminate diversity, there are other forms of selection—adaptive radiation—that encourage diversity and the multiplication of niches—a term that connotes, as mentioned, aptness to environment but also snugness, hominess, smallness, and multiplicity (a diversity of niches, small markets). The pop discourse of adaptation and fit, part of optimizing talk, works well with the discourse of inevitability. Insofar as inevitability works together with notions of progress, there is certainly a difference between pop evolution and the science version, which usually sees evolution as a non-teleological process. But again, the pop notions of evolution are closely connected to talk of progress, modernization etc. Flex discourse's critiques of tradition and

anachronism are harnessed to notions of evolution as progress. And however much the social Darwinist significations are muted—and in corporate multiculturalism and diversity discourse the racial supremacist component is absent—they are always in reserve and could become prominent with a slight change in environment (and are still prominent in slightly different ideological domains). What's constant historically is that Darwin is harnessed to the market—as is the discourse as a whole.

These elements, as the notion of degrees of imbrication suggests, are hierarchically related, most importantly in the sense that they are all subordinate to the legitimation of capitalism. While this force field is internally inconsistent and heterogenous, and while postmodernism is itself thematized there its characteristics do not undermine the capitalist totality but are crucial to its functioning—the components shaped by the gravitational field of market ideology, itself in the service of ongoing capital accumulation. Thus the field, if postmodernist in form, is capitalist in content. What I would suggest, albeit too briefly, is that what we might call the outer reaches of this discursive field give market ideology great flexibility.

As I hope to show, the decidedly hybrid, heteroglossic, inconsistent character of flex discourse helps to mystify its conceptual incoherence, which in turn functions to mystify the contradictions of capitalism. It rewrites the contradictory dynamic of capital accumulation as compromise formation, one oscillating between reified categories that nevertheless often blur or coexist illogically, the most basic categories being those of freedom and determinism or voluntarism and fatalism, with a host of substitutes: euphoria and permanent crisis; student-centered learning and standardization; authoritarianism and anarchism; antiracism and racism; competition and cooperation; but also competition and monopoly or oligopoly.[4]

"Appalling" complements Marc's critique of managerial ideology, especially (his critique of) the pragmatism informing the rhet/comp manager's wide-eyed invocation of change, with its evocation of, if not source in, Nike slogans, and "one market under god" (Frank). That this pragmatic discourse of change, by definition optimistic—thus the applause in Marc's description in the epigraph—is yoked to a hopeless structure of feeling is a paradox common to flex discourse, as we will see.

I will examine the rhetoric of flexibility sketched above by focusing on its uses in some recent policy texts—principally Oblinger et al's *What Business Wants from Higher Education* and Baldwin and Chronister's *Teaching without Tenure*. I will then examine Derek Bok's far less euphoric, post 9/11, sobering managerial worries about the commercialism of higher education in his recent *Universities in the Market Place*. In my final section, I want to talk briefly about labor struggles at the right-to-work North Carolina State, where I taught until recently, and at UC Davis. While I call for unionization, in keeping with efforts to keep the contradictions of capitalism at the center, I will raise the question of the limits of

unionism and the possibilities for CHANGE in a society ever dominated by the God that, to paraphrase Frank, Sucks.[5]

Free Markets and Globalization

As I mentioned at the start, flex discourse is usually bound to neoliberalism's mantra of globalization and free markets, both endorsing it and taking it for granted. In the global economy, knowledge, so goes this talk, has become the main productive force. So the global economy is "the knowledge economy." This means that the image of the university as ivory tower is over. "Institutions of higher education *are being viewed* as major economic resources—generators of productive capacities in their own right—to an extent never before witnessed" (Oblinger v, my highlight). This change is at times, bizarrely enough, described as implicitly postcapitalist. And yet the discourse legitimates corporatization of the university as an inevitable correlate of the knowledge economy and globalization. "Corporations have had to radically restructure themselves to survive and thrive in the global economy" (in Clinton's phrase, "compete and win") (Oblinger vi). And, as legitimating neoliberalism, it takes for granted the economics of flexibility: downsizing, outsourcing, capital and labor mobility (in the form of the end of job security). Due to the inevitability of the latter, lifelong learning is required to train the flexible employee for the many jobs he or she can expect to have. In a recent article on the skills crisis in higher education that once again puts the "nation at risk," Frank Leibold predicts that "higher education graduates will have four careers and at least 10 jobs."

And yet, if the university has already been corporatized as an inevitable part of the pace of change wrought by globalization and technology, it also has not and must recognize these new realities. The language is thus quite odd, combining the rhetoric of agency and exhortation—either in the mode of crisis and threat or in the go-for-it-just-do-it mode of "taking it to the next level"—with frequent use of the passive voice to describe what are from one point of view, faits accomplis. The passive voice is often combined with a list of constraints treated as apolitical facts meant to explain changes in hiring practices:[6]

> The loss of public confidence in higher education has taken place at the same time that other social issues such as public safety, corrections and health care were ascending in priority and in their access to government subsidy at the state and federal levels. Compounding the problem for colleges and universities was a loss in public confidence in the outcomes of higher education at a time when tuition levels were rising sharply to meet growing operating costs (Zumeta and Looney 1994, 79). Many observers of the higher education scene believe that funding for colleges and universities will be tighter as we move into the twenty first century than at almost any time since the Great Depression…. Higher

> education will not be at the top of state funding priorities nor is it likely to move up in the near future…. Under these circumstances, the use of non-tenure track faculty who are hired with a full-time responsibility to teach undergraduates may be an institutional attempt to show the public that colleges and universities do have a commitment to undergraduate education and thereby to regain a measure of the previously lost trust. (Baldwin and Chronister,15)

In a subsequent passage, budget cuts are put in an early nineties context of recession, slow and erratic growth and budget deficits. That there might be a politics to all this goes unmentioned. We are told that "in a turbulent environment" institutions are reluctant to "lock up resources for a long period of time by granting tenure." And in the light of inflexibility among tenured faculty, "more part-time instructors and non tenured faculty will be taken on to handle the niche teaching…" In the face of constraints, faculty "*have increasingly been viewed* as either the source of institutional inefficiency or as an obstacle to solving the problem" (Baldwin and Chronister, 25, my highlight). During the downsizing of the eighties and nineties that produced high unemployment among college graduates, "the tenure system" seemed "anathema" to "the public":

> Many of higher education's patrons were asking why, if colleges were facing …deficits, faculty were protected from layoffs or from significantly increased teaching loads by tenure, an apparent anachronism. (Baldwin and Chronister, 25)

As a central part of this rhetoric of inevitability and deleted agency, technology is viewed as the cause of change. In *Teaching without Tenure*, the section on technology and change is entitled, "the rise of new technologies." We "have seen" an "acceleration" in the use of new technologies, the impact of which "has been felt" in "administrative, research and instructional contexts on campus…. These technologies and their rapid pace of change have introduced a heightened sense of uncertainty…" (Baldwin and Chronister, 18).

There are multiple references to the public's perceptions as if these perceptions are the mere result of looking instead of being largely engineered by culture warriors of the right and an uncritical media. "Faculty have increasingly been viewed" by whom? And what are the politics of this viewing? In a rhetoric of inexorable, largely agentless trends, the word "increasingly" suggests that while everyone else can just see the writing on the wall, the tenured faculty either refuses to see the obvious or sees the obvious but doesn't give a damn. Thus they refuse, in their elitism (I will expand upon this theme in a short while), to share the burdens with the rest of us.[7]

If will is largely deleted from this sort of discourse (fatalism, inevitability), it is allowed to the tenured faculty, who exercise agency only in the sense of being, like spoiled children, willful,

who exercise agency only in the paradoxical sense of not moving with the times. While the rest of the world is in step with the "accelerating pace of change," in a turbulent world, the behemoth that is the tenured and tenure track faculty refuses to budge. In response to statements emanating from administration like "Pressure for change in higher education is unrelenting," James Slevin's comment in a recent Profession is apt. As Slevin notes, "pressure for change in these discourses is never demonstrated or even explained but rather elaborated through a milennialist rhetoric by means of which contingent and interested initiatives are simply chronicled as change and naturalized as necessity."

While I have here focused on the rhetoric of inevitability, perhaps the key point is how it merges with the discourses of free agency, a discourse conceptualized as either a necessary correlate of or identical to the free market. What is crucial to this view of agency is human capital theory, the view that in the new knowledge economy, "the economic well being of Americans no longer depends on the profitability of the corporations they own, or on the prowess of their industries, but on the value they add to the global economy through their skills and insight. Increasingly [that word again], it is the jobs that Americans do, rather than the success of abstract entities like corporations, industries or national economies that determine their standard of living" (Reich 1991, 196, quoted in Oblinger, 1998, 5).

Note that industry and corporation are owned by us—Americans. They are "ours." One of the many paradoxes of this discourse is that while corporations grow more and more powerful, more dominant ("huge corporations are coming together," Oblinger accurately informs us), they are simultaneously either irrelevant (they are abstract entities, irrelevant to our well being) or our servants. Some of this notion of service is straight consumer sovereignty rhetoric, a rhetoric which assumes central importance to be sure, especially in education, as we will see. In this schizophrenic discourse, corporations dominate even as there are no corporations, only skilled workers (or workers lacking skill and so in danger of being left behind—with disgruntled tenured faculty perhaps). It ought to be noted how similar this is (despite Reich's liberalism) to Margaret Thatcher's denial of society or the postmarxist "impossibility of the social."

The new economy presumably brings with it a new kind of labor force, not low paid, desperate and insecure, but multi-skilled and ready for anything. In the rhetoric of flex, job security is a thing of the past and workers "can be expected" to hold four or five jobs during their lifetime (Leibold above). If this sounds like a future that combines disposable workers and lifelong work, worker as, to use Marc's phrase, waste product, not to worry. In a world of continuous, lifelong learning, it is the worker with all that human capital who has the advantage. In one version of new economy narrative, the traditional relation between employer and employee is reversed in the permanent buyer's market of the (now defunct) new economy. The corporations come to the worker, who has so many

choices and so much knowledge that corporations will either hire her or face the consequences. As Thomas Frank puts it, "management would have to do whatever it took to keep such a worker pleased—or else that proud proletarian would just reenter the job market, that zealous protector of worker' rights" (202). In this narrative, downsizing turns the worker into a "free agent," who can then, like Sammy Sosa or Greg Maddux, bargain with a vulnerable ownership. Sadly for the corporations, the new worker, and again I'm following Frank, values her independence above all and is way too hip to stand still for long. Frank quotes management guru Charles Handy who noted way back in '89 (he could see the trends coming even if tenured faculty cannot) that "organizations have to get used to the idea that not everyone wants to work for them all the time even if the jobs are available" (204). In the recent film *Spiderman*, when asked by Peter Parker, posing as Spiderman's photographer, whether he, Peter, could have a job, the boss says: "No jobs! Free Lance." Instead of jumping for joy, Peter, ensnared in the web of the flexible job market, looked disappointed—which just shows that pop culture does not always keep up with the latest workforce trends.

In this world of flux, change, and Blur, nothing is certain. If flexible workers hold employers hostage on the one hand, on the other hand, this very distinction between employer and employee breaks down. To paraphrase Charles Handy, "we are all workers now" (Frank, 201). Alternatively, we are all entrepreneurs, change agents (if the tenure track faculty would just get with the program—which of course in a sense they have). Baldwin and Chronister catch the excitement:

> Kanter sees a whole new stream of entrepreneurial careers emerging in the corporate world unconstrained by rigid hierarchies and traditional institutional practices [tenure]. These types of careers evolve and advance "by creating new value rather than by simply preserving and complying with old ways."
>
> The emerging non tenure track component of the academic profession may be the professorial counterpart to this corporate development. The diverse hybrid positions we found under the ntt label demonstrate how easily these positions can be molded to meet specialized institutional needs and to accommodate unique personal circumstances. (192)

The corporate careers are part of a stream. They thus flow and move, unlike careers of fossilized professors—frozen in their tenure tracks. It might seem somewhat odd for careers to stream and emerge (from the stream), but the important thing is that both terms connote change and perhaps directionality, progress. The parallel in academia can be read as convergent evolution, suggesting the fundamental independence of processes—corporate and academ-

ic—that meet the demands of the environment. In the case of the ntt, it's a perfect case of supply meeting demand, the two parties "partnering" perfectly, playing entrepreneur and sovereign consumer to the other. The university has special needs, a niche that needs filling. And ntt's fill this niche while universities "accommodate unique personal circumstances."

Still: beneath this happy marriage of administration and ntts who just love to teach, there is a skills shortage, and the "nation is at risk" unless it imposes standards and accountability. In the Leibold piece referred to above, there's a skills gap and there will be a shortage of 12 million skilled workers by 2020 unless the gap is addressed. What are these skills? "Lifelong transferable competencies that can transcend careers, occupations, and responsibilities have taken on added importance." They need an education that "teaches the skills of synthesis, abstraction, systems thinking, experimental inquiry and collaboration…greater interpersonal effectiveness in a team environment, managing increased cultural diversity (H4)." Teachers need to empower their students "with an ability to synthesize, analyze and effectively problem solve in an increasingly complex, team oriented and diversity rich environment." The flux and blur and constant change 24/7 of the market should be reflected in the personality of the new worker.

"As the environment gets more complex, ambiguity becomes greater"(Oblinger, 13). The worker must match this. Ambiguity and complexity are thus properties of individuals (or need to be properties of individuals). Such ambiguity and complexity is the mark of independence, so such walking well-wrought urns require less supervision: "many of their [the new worker] new roles are undefined and ambiguous" (13). This ambiguity facilitates the collapsing of antinomies. The workers are flexible in the sense of creative and self-motivated, "unconstrained by rigid hierarchies," yet also flexible in the sense of adaptive. Ambiguity is a property of the environment, which the worker must match, yet it is also a property of the worker which the environment reflects. And if teachers are the ones responsible for teaching this tolerance for ambiguity and flux and uncertainty, they must themselves embody the characteristics they teach and so must themselves tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty in the form of giving up job security.

Thomas Frank zeroes in on the essential function of the change doctrine: "'[C]hange' is good for management theorists because it so thoroughly muddles the crucial issues of inevitability and agency;" consequently, it "allows management thinkers to have it both ways":

> The big changes are made by market forces beyond our control, but still we must make our own changes to be in compliance with the big ones. We have no say in the matter yet are responsible for our own failings. Change is what downsized you, not Jack Welch. (243-4)

Yet this confusion of agency and inevitability goes, as I suggested, well beyond blaming the victim. For blur allows cause and

effect to be not just displaced (from corporation to change) but reversed so that downsizing liberates the worker into a tight labor market. And further blurs the distinction between big and small, so that market forces and individual change lose pertinence. Market forces are us; we are market forces. If corporations in this discourse of choice are nothing but abstractions, so then are market forces.[8]

The individualism underlying "the church of change" (Frank) is not incompatible with euphoric eulogies to cooperation and teamwork. After all, as indicated above in the relation between ntt and university administration, the market can easily be viewed as the acme of sociability. You demand, I supply and vice versa: free exchange. This cooperation/competition aporia is indicated above in the language of crisis. The skills gap, in which "we" (collaboration) are in danger of falling behind in the global race (competition) is much about social skills—learning how to work collaboratively, in teams, getting along in a diverse world. Yet globalization is driven, of course, by the individual, the sovereign consumer's "customer power":

> The fact is that people can increasingly bypass local monopolies or protected local suppliers and shop the world for the best goods and services. In short, leaders of the past often erected walls. Now they must destroy these walls and replace them with bridges.(Oblinger, 87)

Oblinger et al note that:

> Kanter applies the term cosmopolitans to leaders who are comfortable operating across boundaries [they complement the new workers, comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty] and who can forge links between organizations. These leaders encourage people from diverse functions, disciplines, and organizations to work toward goals that improve an entire industry, community, country or world, expanding the pie for everyone, rather than pitting group against group. (87)

Cosmopolitans are "integrators," "diplomats," "cross-fertilizers" (these cross fertilizers are likely behind the creation of "diverse, hybrid positions"). Global interdependence lessens the sense of us and them, for we are they and they are we and we are all together. Globalization eliminates "local monopolies," in favor of the interdependencies of "global webs" (how webs came to signify mutual interdependence instead of captivity is itself worth an essay).

Terrific: as Barnet and Cavanaugh informed us back in '94, this vision of cooperation driven by global consumers leaves out the fact that 2/3 of the world's population do not have the money to participate in this economy as consumers. They participate only as

producers. They supply but they cannot demand. "Globalization," thru privatization, structural adjustment, trade laws etc, has devastated local economies (local monopoly!), bringing walls down and building bridges to transnational capital, the erection of which requires constructing more divisions to pit against one another. The only universality here, if some leftist theorists are right, is that processes of divide and conquer are, appropriately enough, more fluid than ever, given capital mobility and relative immobility of labor—which means that the first world /third world division erodes enough to bring the third world back to the first world in certain respects—mortality rates in areas of big cities reaching third world proportions, the reintroduction of sweatshops etc. On the other hand, this instability brought about by globalization has led, as is well known, to an explosion of virulent nationalisms.[9] The concentration of wealth and power augments astonishingly. Global inequality has been, in the words of Tony Robbins or your favorite management or sports star, "taken to the next level."

In its own way, the business text praising win-win and sharing the pie registers these tendencies perfectly. In a section entitled, "competition comes from all directions," Oblinger et al note the phenomenon leftists call the "race to the bottom":

> Global competition is one of the most significant forces of change for business in the last decade . . . even the smallest company now needs to do business on a worldwide scale. We are facing a host of new competitors, globally. For example, until the late 70's, AT & T had depended on workers in Shreveport, Louisiana, to assemble standard telephones. It then discovered that firms in Singapore would perform the same tasks at far lower cost. Facing intense competition, AT &T felt compelled to switch. So in the early 1980's they stopped hiring labor in Shreveport and began hiring cheaper workers in Singapore. But under this kind of pressure for ever lower production costs, today's Singapore can easily end up in the same circumstances as yesterday's Louisianian. (59)

The authors continue in this vein, taking time to note, contra the education euphoria, that this race to the bottom occurs among highly educated workers too.

If the emphasis above is on "the bottom," the emphasis in what follows is on the "race": "with the pace of change and the enormous competitive pressures to bring innovative products to market faster than the competition, keeping a team working 24 hours a day may become more routine." Oh, it's not as bad as you think. There's a division of international labor among the team so that companies "can take advantage of time zones." A software project can move from Silicon Valley to Asia, "and spend the final leg of its 24 hour evolution with a team in Europe." Again, we see the language of sports, the relay, and the language of evolution (Oblinger, 59).

This nightmare description of globalization as accelerated cannibalism does not last long though. In the new economy, with work depending on information (the myth of the weightless economy), "the strategy of many countries is to skip over being an industrial power and move directly to being a power broker in the information age. It is a savvy approach for many. For those with massive populations, their raw power is in people. If they are educated, have a strong work ethic and are motivated to become middle class consumers, they will *become fierce competitors* with the United States and Europe" (59-60, my highlight).

As we know though, or should know, neoliberal globalization demands cuts, often devastating, in the social wage, which includes, most notably, money for education. One may ask, how would this savvy strategy stop the race to the bottom? The authors already acknowledged that the race to the bottom logic cannot be transcended by "skill." Globalization will encourage simultaneously teamwork, global teamwork on the global assembly line 24/7, lifelong learning for endless work, and bridge building even as neoliberalism destroys and/or privatizes infrastructure, so real bridges don't get built or don't get repaired.[10]

Human Capital Again

At this point, some additional commentary is in order about human capital theory, so central to management rhetoric and the rhetoric of flexibility in the capitalist U.S.A.

Human capital theory is the grossest of frauds—from be all you can be to no child left behind— but insofar as it is part of the rhetoric of flexibility, with the emphasis on new economy, we are encouraged not to see how old this theory is in essence. The Horatio Alger—you-can-make-it-with-hard-work—idea is obviously false. Hard work isn't enough. But neither is education. Both the hard work and education solutions are forms of cultural reductionism. To paraphrase Richard Lewontin, if everyone could read *The Critique of Pure Reason*, many would be reading it in the unemployment line. His point is that the capitalist division of labor is not a reflection of people's talents and abilities. It is an independent property reflecting the imperatives of capital accumulation (intrinsic to which is the competition between capitals) and the structural domination of capital over labor, the particular way that imperative is realized depending on both the "class struggle" and inter-imperialist rivalry. So any talk about a skills gap is basically nonsense in numerous ways—because this kind of scarcity is not something that can be overcome—like you would overcome a bad harvest.

Scarcity—and therefore the skills gap—is a property of the capitalist system and increasingly so in the new economy. It is true that this scarcity can seem hidden or mitigated in an economy of endlessly augmented consumption (customer power) driving accelerated labour productivity. But such an assumption is a fantasy that denies both capitalist crisis and the limits of nature—mystify-

ing scarcity under capitalism depends upon denying its reality in our surround (none of this is to deny the obvious need for labor in some sectors more than others). The metaphor for the skills gap is not a ladder or a tall building where you could "take it to the next level," or next step, lifelong learning for continuous improvement. It is more like a treadmill for the vast majority, who must run faster and faster to stay in place (continuously improve). And even then, many will fly off it and end up in the unemployment line—where they can then catch up on their Kant.

Technology and education do not, as human capital theory would suggest, eliminate the division between mental and manual labor so much as reinstitute it at another level (Aronowitz, 1994). In reality, the economy creates relatively few good hi skill hi tech jobs and many more low wage jobs for which, due to the competition, a college degree may be required. And if there's a skills gap in one place, there's an even bigger overproduction of skills, relative to the jobs available and relative to the jobs one gets (production of overcapacity so to speak) in other places.

It is important to remember that the skills issue is less a question of learning than of controlling the labor process. And as long as there is redundancy, there will be in essence deskilling: the laborer can be replaced. So in the human capital fantasy of hi tech hi wage hi productivity workers with transferable skills, it is precisely these transferable skills which render the workers vulnerable.

Teachers/Tenure/Racism

In the rhetoric of flexibility, relying as it does on human capital theory, the teachers—this is suggested above—become the most important people in the new economy. If "education is the answer," if the world demands an army of freelance workers with transferable skills, the teachers are the ones responsible for the training of this army.[11] As the discussion of the managerial rhetoric surrounding tenure suggests, the managerial literature, in education and out, views labor unions and job security as both anachronistic and elitist. Teachers with tenure or other forms of job security are lazy, overpaid, under-worked, and selfish. More precisely: anachronistic, traditional, rigid, selfish, elitist, communist, Fordist, racist and sexist, yet also carrying a hint of the welfare queen. Baldwin and Chronister:

> The overrepresentation of women and minorities in full time non-tenure track positions throughout higher education is another symptom of the disconnection between the standard academic model and new realities—societal educational, institutional, and personal. An academic staffing model designed primarily with traditional Caucasian male professors in mind will not be a comfortable fit for women and minorities who bring a host of different experiences and concerns to the campus. In a rapidly changing education environment, such a model will not meet the needs of evolving

> institutions very well either. If colleges and universities truly wish to offer equal opportunity and diversify their faculties, they must be willing to expand their definition of faculty work and adapt their expectations and policies to reach out to a larger portion of our complex society. If higher education refuses to adjust the standard faculty model, women, minorities and other persons 'who don't fit the mold' will remain on the periphery of the academy. The whole educational enterprise will suffer…. (176)

You can see in a passage like this much of the rhetoric as I tried to lay it out in my introduction. Tenure is associated with rigidity, anachronism, tradition, a form of life that is threatened, via selection pressure, with extinction if it doesn't flexibly adapt to a "rapidly changing world." It's out of place, lacking "fitness." It's a dinosaur, a Fordist institution in a post-Fordist world, a Jim Crow throwback in the age of multiculturalism, and niche marketing—the latter two working off one another: product (read multicultural) "diversity," niche marketing, with multicultural diversity being itself the home of multiple niches, to be filled with the appropriate service or product:

> Being able to identify the niche and describe what is needed to fill it is a complex skill requiring detailed understanding of the customer, the marketplace, and the product or process involved. Customization is often based on demographics. More and more firms are specializing in products or services for African- Americans, Latin Americans, or other specialized interest groups. (Oblinger, 12)

Recall that in human capital theory, one of the skills needed for the hi-tech, multicultural world is diversity training, a, of course, "complex" skill which the simple and traditional university fails to accommodate at its peril, and our peril, all of us. In our new world, it is forward looking administrators taking the side of the multicultural underclass of the educational world against the tenure monopoly (a version of Oblinger's "local monopoly") fast being undone by the liberating forces of globalization/multiculturalism. And if "the local monopoly" is a code word for local cultures, flex discourse avoids the implications of an imperialist consumer culture since consumer culture is the ultimate good listener, celebrating diversity, giving cultures what they want: really, to paraphrase Robert McChesney, giving the people what they want consistent with what the transnationals want them to have and what the people, devastated by neoliberalism, can afford—which is not much, for as I suggested, the very corporate multiculturalism that celebrates diversity must include only that small portion of the third world that most resembles the first world—excluding in addition the growing component of the first world that more and more, as also noted, resembles the third.

In corporate flex rhet, trends toward the reduction of tenure are trends toward the non-standard, the non-conformist, those who don't fit the one-size-fits-all mold demanded by the Caucasian males imposing their standards, which they claim universal, on difference (once again, the cooptation of leftist identity politics is striking). As a part of this new democracy, no child will be left behind. And the schools will become more and more standardized in order to meet the needs of minorities in a post-Fordist world. Under the guise of giving the customer (the learner) what she wants, or keeping up with the rapid and inexorable changes in the economy, standardization schemes have been imposed most forcefully in the elementary and secondary schools, where they were always present. But the same call for standards has begun to leave its mark on the colleges and universities, at least the non-elite ones, the publics. In sum, this flex discourse critiques the one-size-fits-all model as itself a form of white supremacy; for this it will substitute one-size-fits-all-but-the-elite testing regimens in the name of diversity.

This apparent contradiction between flex and standardization can be muted because it's bathed in a larger rhetoric of diversity and choice. The former is especially effective since it plays on "white liberal guilt," and tells black people that they are being taken seriously—held to high standards etc. It also plays on an anti-intellectual racialized populism according to which opposition to standards is a white privilege thing—a liberal elite luxury. And this last idea nicely crystallizes a point made in my introduction—that capitalist ideology best covers its flaws when it co-opts discourses distant from it—both politically and perhaps disciplinarily. Thus the use of niche, coming as it does from ecology/biology, and given its connotative role in language of biodiversity, is very effective at obscuring how markets and neoliberalism really work.

A similar merging of incompatibles functioning as compromise formation—the merging of commercialism, student centered learning and diversity—is what recommends the for-profit university. As Caluori argues in *Profession*, to cater to business is to cater to the nontraditional students and she continually poses the anti-racist flexibility of the for-profits engaging in "a pedagogy of outreach and inclusion" against the traditional campus (104-13). In this discourse also (I am referring here to material on the website of the Project for the Future of Higher Education), the traditional campus is associated with the teaching (and teacher) centered as opposed to learning centered pedagogies of the innovators. This is all part of legitimating distance education versus traditional classroom based (associated preposterously enough with teacher centered) education, with its supposed fetish on "seat time." In the learner centered university, teachers will more and more become or depend upon facilitators who, in a time of crisis, can help students use technology to work more independently, thus reducing face-to-face time between teacher and student (less lecturing). In this discourse, technology seems to offer reduced cost education and yet,

because it is so costly to install, the university, if it is to do this, cannot remain traditional. As Carol Twigg notes (I paraphrase), technology substitutes for labor; if you go technological, labor costs must be reduced. In the discourse of PFHE, technology serves independent learning, teachers decenter themselves or are decentered, and teaching functions are outsourced, presumably in the interests of nontraditional learners. Unions are nowhere to be found and scarcity is a given. There will be less teacher-student interaction but what interaction there is will be sensitive to student need, intense and hi-quality: quality time, the pedagogical equivalent of tqm—total quality management (Marcy). Baldwin and Chronister are cautiously optimistic that the tenured faculty can convert to this new paradigm:

> Perhaps, like the Catholic church finally accommodating the discoveries of Galileo or the American auto industry finally acknowledging that it has foreign competition, higher education must adopt institutional policies and practices to acknowledge the reality that is already in place. (177)

The Catholic Church in the time of Galileo was hierarchical and dogmatic (as recent revelations suggest, the church still has some work to do on this score). The university, too, by virtue of its supposed outmoded commitment to tenure is hierarchical and dogmatic—both unjust and anti-science (social science) and if the principal target of this criticism—the tenured faculty—is innocent of certain hierarchical practices of certain church authorities (like child abuse), they are not innocent of others like racism and patriarchy (Baldwin and Chronister, 177).

Neither Communism nor unions have been mentioned in the higher education discourse examined here. This is no surprise, for even to admit the existence of unions as a real option for ntts would clash with the overall rhetoric of this position. If there are unions, then there is politics and much of this rhetoric—this was discussed earlier in the essay—is designed to eliminate politics. If there are unions, then it is harder if not impossible to argue that the main antagonist to the ntt are tenured faculty.

But both unions and anticommunism are part of the subtext of flex rhet as a cursory examination of the wider management literature shows, not to mention the overall ideological context of American life. Predictably, Baldwin and Chronister (nor Oblinger for that matter) say nothing about unions or ntt's in the broad sense organizing for better conditions. And this shows the hollowness of the Teaching Without Tenure's concern for ntts. But there's more to say. The rhetoric of anti-tenure and the rhetoric of anti-unionism are quite similar—despite important differences. The rhetoric of flexibility got its origins thru the attack on big labor. Unions are self-interested, rigid, anachronistic (associated with Fordism, in turn seen as a stage to be bypassed) in a postmodern age. The parallels are pretty clear. And just as tenure is seen as the preserve of white males, so has the union movement been seen.

All of these significations are central to the discourse of the wider management literature (I am following Frank's account here). Free markets are flexible and thus, so goes the rhetoric, democratic, perhaps revolutionary (the rhetoric of revolution is absent in the sober policy discourse). They are opposed to monopoly—Fordist corporations and trade unions, both of which are coded as old, anachronistic, totalitarian, and communist. The leading force for change in the world are entrepreneurs, who are forward thinking enough and courageous enough for paradigm change, for true learning. As for racism, the market, according to this new paradigm, this revolutionary science, is intrinsically antiracist (this new thought is straight Milton Friedman by the way), for if an employer is racist, the discriminated against employee will simply be hired elsewhere and the racist will suffer the consequences.[12]

The new entrepreneurialism is continually associated with the other, with the simultaneously primitive, spontaneous, energies of the multicultural masses who can "suspend assumptions," and deconstruct paradigms just by being ethnic. This celebration of ethnicity and the world's nonwhite peoples might seem at odds with the celebration of the entrepreneur, but this is just another paradox that old white people and their symbolic equivalents fail to understand—these equivalents being the multiracial Seattle protesters whose elitism cannot compass the shock of the new: that the third world masses were "inside the conference room not outside," where the privileged west revealed their "racist contempt for the third world" even as they claim sympathy for the downtrodden (Frank, 236-9).

Before turning to Derek Bok, I'll conclude this part of the discussion by noting that *Teaching without Tenure* fails to discuss the trend toward ntt labor in the broad sense (including adjuncts and part-timers, exploitation of graduate students) as part of larger trends toward contingent labor. Though the book does make use of the corporate analogy, for the most part, the university is seen as a world unto itself and in general processes that need to be connected and explained are neither connected nor explained. Again, the reason is fairly obvious. To connect the goings on in the university to larger corporate practice would make it harder to read contingent labor in terms of ad hoc, mostly unconscious (the authors refer to the process as taking place "almost unconsciously") processes of adjustment to changing conditions—while making it easier to read it as a centerpiece of the class struggle of capital against labor, with the rich getting richer and formerly "professionalized" classes becoming proletarianized (BC, 8). So the discursive repression of unions is connected to the repression of the totality, so to speak. And we can note once again the marvelous flexibility of the change talk. Change can be inexorable, yet also contingent and piecemeal. The first meaning of change facilitates the tenure as anachronism view while the second allows administrators to disavow their role in systemic trends. The implication in this contingency discourse is that a systematic trend requires, basically, the intentionality of "corporate plot." But as Richard

Ohmann has noted, trends serving the interests of capital can and often do take place over time, with varying intentional states, piecemeal (in the discussion of Bok, I will return to this notion of intentionality, which plays a significant role in Bok's apologia for current flex practice).

Because *Teaching without Tenure* consists of interviews of ntts, ntt exploitation and oppression isn't ignored. But at the same time, it is decidedly not a matter—as Thompson asserts in my epigraph—of labor exploitation and class struggle. For Baldwin and Chronister, insofar as this exploitation is a largely unconscious process, the implication is that there is no reason this problem cannot be fixed—since there are no large-scale forces, besides the tenured faculty, standing in the way. They tell us that the trend toward ntt is both "positive and negative," a banality that is nonetheless tied to all I have said to this point. Positive and negative for whom? Relative to whose interests? But in this discursive field, such a question is presumably asked from a standpoint both neutral and (abstractly) universal. The ntt question has its positives and negatives for "society". What can "we," for we're all in this together, do to turn the negatives into positives? The contradictions of capitalism are transformed into depoliticized, disconnected costs and benefits, positives and negatives. We will see this dynamic repeated in Bok's work, to which we now turn.

Bok's *Universities in the Marketplace*

Derek Bok's recent book, *Universities in the Marketplace: the Commercialization of Higher Education*, asserts that commercialization can distort the purposes of the university, purposes which Bok, rather traditionally, defines as the search for truth, the pursuit of excellence. Bok's concerns range from the commodification of college athletics and the corporate influence on science to for-profit trends like distance education.

Bok's high-minded defense of academic values against commercialization nevertheless rests on almost total acceptance of free market premises, political and philosophical, premises which lead to the same sorts of antinomies I analyze in the more go for it flex university stuff (though as we saw the euphoric flex discourse has its crisis ridden underbelly). Much of my focus is on the problems with Bok as disinterested, rational consumer judiciously distinguishing between the costs of markets (shorthand for commercialization) and their benefits, a cost/benefit analysis predicated on splitting apart intrinsically connected phenomena (contradictions of capitalism) into distinct phenomena so that the good can be chosen (dynamism, excellence, freedom: marketplace of ideas), the bad avoided (monopoly, secrecy, conflict of interest), benefits maximized, cost minimized, educational values preserved despite the lure of a commerce gone too far (the position of disinterest sometimes rather conventionally opposes "the economic," yet also embodies the rational consumer of market lore).

Bok begins his analysis of commercialization by splitting off a section of the phenomenon from its constituent parts, defining

commercialization as referring to "efforts within the university to make a profit from teaching, research and other campus activities." He explicitly divorces this meaning of the term from ideological concerns—the influence of the surrounding corporate culture, the accountability movement—and "economizing" concerns which lead to hiring adjuncts and incorporating business methods" (3).

In his analysis of causation, Bok begins by discrediting, or so he thinks, the leftist analysis. This critique is part of his centrist, cost/benefit rhetoric of avoiding extremes, neither Marxist critique nor unbridled market celebration. According to Bok, commercialization, for leftists, is "simply" another attempt by businessmen and lawyers sitting on boards of trustees "to 'commodify' education and research, reduce the faculty to the status of employees and, ultimately, make the university serve the interests of corporate America," "the selfish interests of American business" (6, 8). But, he notes, "it is one thing to note the effects of the economy on academic institutions but quite another to imagine a plot on the part of business leaders to bend universities to their corporate purposes."[13] This reference to a "national corporate plot seems rather farfetched." In addition, he notes that businessmen sit on boards of trustees not to make profits but because they are "civic minded" (7).

This conspiracy theory description of Marxist interpretations of the university under capitalism is one of the standard ways of distorting Marxian explanation. In brief, Marxian explanation is based on institutional imperatives which are not reducible, pace Bok, to the will of an all powerful class, ruling in a Machiavellian and totalitarian manner. The main institutional imperative in Marxian interpretation of central institutions is the imperative to maximize profit and to reproduce the conditions of profit maximization in the context of class struggle and the competition between capitals. Interestingly, Bok recognizes in a certain fashion the power of the latter, but by splitting it off from radical interpretation, he manages to depoliticize it. I will return to this issue below.[14]

Having dismissed the radical interpretation, Bok is then free to offer what is in his mind a complex, plural analysis of commercialization, though the analysis is also in a way simple in the sense of commonsensical and straightforward—no deep, dark national plots. This commonsense and "benign explanation" of commercialization is at one with the depoliticizing imperative of the book, something centrally characteristic of the flex discourse above as we saw. Here is a brief narrative of such de-politicization (7). Businessmen and lawyers dominate boards of trustees because they are "simply better suited to the changing needs of the university" than clergymen. As universities became "larger and more complicated," they needed people who knew how to raise money.

As for the universities' new entrepreneurialism, which Bok dates from the early 1980's, this results from the necessity of meeting the ever increasing needs of students and faculty, especially the best students and faculty whose ever expanding ambition—they are

"constantly asking...for more of everything...to satisfy and pursue their new interests and opportunities"—drives their ever expanding needs. With respect to faculty needs, Presidents want to satisfy these needs in order to please the faculty for pleasing the faculty is necessary to maintain university reputation and standing. One consequence of these interests and ambitions is that "Better" and more expensive "technology and scientific apparatus constantly appear and must be acquired to stay at the cutting edge" (9-11). The university is able to satisfy all these needs—our common needs—in return for lots of money, corporate money, for with the end of the cold war and increased competition from Europe and Japan, the government began to consider "new ways of linking universities to the needs of business," needs which would be easy to distinguish presumably from the leftist notion of business interest (11 and see 6). I would note that these explanations also serve to limit the applicability of the budget cuts explanation for the new entrepreneurialism, cuts in part driven by competing concerns: "the mounting costs of prisons, welfare, and the health care crisis" (8). In brief, these changes can be summed up in two words, "market forces," forces which have made universities "more attentive to public needs," "causing universities to become less stodgy and elitist and more vigorous in their efforts to aid economic growth" (16).

Many of the free market myths peddled in the previous sections are repeated here. The free market brings vigor and dynamism to the university. Dynamism derives from competition, but perhaps more so from what the competition is about: serving the needs of a dynamic public, at least the best and the brightest of them, who constantly strive for excellence. Competition for prestige is in turn competition over the best students, the students who can serve the public with excellence and, insofar as this competition is also competition for the most excellent teachers and scholars, competition for prestige is competition in the service of "basic values" like the production of disinterested inquiry, itself rooted in "faculty autonomy." That he can explicitly talk about new ways of linking university to business needs now seems simply to flow from the needs of the sovereign consumer: as business needs to serve the needs of the best and the brightest. Very clearly the self expanding properties of capital are turned into properties of the excellent and sovereign consumer that competition serves. And the technocratic, depoliticizing discourse allows intercapitalist competition and "the mounting costs of prisons and welfare" to be abstracted from the socio-political phenomena of neoliberalism: the interconnections between skyrocketing inequality, and; the bogus, racist war on drugs, fueling both the racist prison-industrial complex and the rolling back of the minimal welfare state, all, as Webb's *Dark Alliance* shows us, working in tandem with a U.S. foreign policy making the world safe for capitalist globalization.

Despite this acceptance of the market, Bok notes that commercialism can lead to deplorable behavior, behavior at odds with "basic values". And here's where we see the impact of the institutional pressures at the heart of the Marxian analysis. One of Bok's

central worries is the impact of commercialization (which above serves "excellence") on the objectivity of research. As he notes, recipients of corporate funding (he's talking about pharmaceuticals) "vigorously deny" such charges of influence: Those subsidized by sponsoring firms are established academic experts, accrediting sources forbid corporate influence over program content, and doctors would quickly detect any favoritism and protest loudly. As Bok notes, most researchers are convinced that material considerations could not possibly influence their judgment, although a large body of evidence suggests that such biases do occur. And Bok notes rather straightforwardly that corporations wouldn't contribute so much money "to the education of physicians" unless they expected a "handsome reward" (86-7).

This admission opens up a can of worms. Why does he reject the ethic of professionalism here, an ethic built on the assumption of professional autonomy and commitment to craft, to "basic values," but accept the view that trustees do not exert significant influence on universities because, among other reasons, they are civic minded? Not to mention that in a discussion of the drawbacks of distance education raised by leftist concerns about market forces trumping quality education, Bok notes that "presidents and deans do not believe that they will take advantage of anyone or try to sell an inferior product" (97). This oscillation between voluntarism (in this case, taking people at their word, assuming that what people believe is what is true) and institutional pressures strong enough to undermine such voluntarism characterizes Bok's text.

One might argue that the case of trustees is different because they don't get paid. Putting aside the obvious rebuttal that the civic mindedness of trustees is perfectly compatible with looking out for the needs of the profit system as a whole, Bok himself clearly demonstrates, something demonstrated time and again by others, that institutional pressures caused by competition, pressures set to work thru the class politics of neo-liberalism, force universities, always dependent on subsidy, to become dependent on corporate money.

At one point, Bok imagines the response of university presidents to his cautionary remarks about commercialization, and his call to resist such pressure in the name of "basic values." In this response, Bok might be seen as "high-minded," the term here used not positively—as in Bok's earlier "civic-minded"—but negatively. Interestingly, "high-minded" is a term he himself seems to hold in mild contempt, the term he uses to dismiss Norbert Weiner's "purity," referring to Weiner's view that universities should not take corporate money at all (here, Weiner is clearly linked with the leftists, who are, in addition to paranoid, also high minded). At any rate, here is Bok's sympathetic view of university presidents of colleges other than Harvard:

> These cautionary remarks could provoke a tart response from enterprising university presidents who are working hard to move their institutions into the higher reaches of the academic hierarchy. 'Such high-minded arguments,'

> they may declare, 'are all very well for a former president of a university accustomed to a secure place in the academic firmament and buffered from misfortune by an endowment that approaches 20 billion. But how can other institutions without these assets hope to achieve greater eminence unless they can pursue every available opportunity to gain the resources that excellence invariably requires.' (104)

"This is a valid question," Bok tells us, for "the cards are stacked against any institution that lacks an established reputation and a lot of money." The excellent go to institutions that "already have strong facilities." Government and foundation money flow in the same direction. The graduates of these institutions perpetuate the process: "the strongest universities tend to perpetuate themselves automatically. Success begets success which helps to explain why the list of top-rated universities in 2000 looks remarkably like a similar list in 1950 or even 1900" (104).

This makes mockery out of voluntarism. The rich get richer, forcing the poor to commercialize excessively in order to compete, thus taking them down a dangerous road that threatens "basic values." But if they don't take this road, they cannot be faithful to "basic values" like excellence. I would note further that this critique of high-mindedness bears significant resemblance to the rhetoric of the for-profit university discussed above, where the humanistic university is posited as elitist, not meeting the needs of new customers, those historically deprived of access to higher education. Thus, for universities, their democratic mission requires them to compete with the for-profits in order to parry the charge of elitism and racism. In order to be more democratic, they must engage in what Bok verges on admitting are "beggar thy neighbor" tactics. These pressures Bok mitigates by arguing that, here he's talking about competing with the for-profits, there is no alternative to this competition. If student "needs" are not met by universities, they will be met by the University of Phoenix, "with even more blatant commercial results" (97). This no alternative argument dovetails nicely with his obviously false statement that the process whereby the rich get richer is "automatic." It's not automatic, though it might seem so once you take market forces arguments for granted.

The problem of voluntarism and fatalism is closely bound up with his schizophrenic view of competition. On the one hand, competition is what drives excellence and what drives competition is the sovereign consumer. Competition is based on free exchange and free exchange facilitates honesty and market transparency. On the other hand, "unhealthy competition" can lead to monopoly, to secrecy, to the refusal to share discoveries. And yet this same monopoly is what allows universities like Harvard to preserve educational values. Bok splits competition and monopoly—itself an act of voluntarism—from the dynamics of capital accumulation, and chooses the former against the latter: but the whole thing collapses since, to recap, under capitalism, competition leads to monopoly, and, conversely, monopoly forces the weak to compete

and become more and more corrupt with regard to "basic values" which are presumably competition's end result. For Bok, competition is the secret of faculty autonomy, which Bok points to against arguments from corporate domination. Faculty, if not pleased by trustees, can walk across the street. But the same process of competition, making the rich richer, erodes faculty autonomy, through the erosion of tenure and spread of cheap labor, and severely limits any faculty mobility in tight labor markets, the environment assumed by Bok's defense of faculty autonomy.

In my earlier discussion of Bok's reading of the leftist view of the university, I noted that central to his distortions of the radical point of view was his omission of competition and class struggle. I have tried to show how a certain "leftism" (though couched almost entirely in a patrician dislike for the crudity of market excess) returns as competition's "bad" side, whose antidote is its "good" side. Class struggle, however, is jettisoned and the reason is once again related to the domination of free market assumptions. Bok's technocratic assumptions lead him to view the labor problem as involving "economizing concerns." While he raises the issue of the exploitation of labor, he basically dismisses the idea on the grounds that such labor is chosen:

> ...the instructors involved would rather take the work than seek alternative employment.... If the pay seems low, the root problem probably is that too many students have attempted to earn phds. Moreover, who is to say whether it would be better for the university to offer higher wages? after all...the money the institution earns will not go to wealthy shareholders but help to buy books. Under these circumstances, charges of 'exploitation' are hard to prove" (96. Note how Bok's liberal relativism of who's to say dovetails with free market choice relativism).

That cheap labor would be justified because the money saved helps buy books is, of course, irrelevant but also an accounting trick. Maybe the money goes to upgrade corporate parks, or goes to pay star salaries or helps pay the health costs of part-timers. As is well known, the growth of cheap labor is primarily a managerial prerogative, something managerial discourse tries to chalk up to contingency (it just kind of happened), or blame on the autonomous faculty, who encourage the spread of cheap labor in order to weaken themselves as a group. But the main characteristic of managerial self-understanding here is that there is no exploitation because the work is chosen: they (the low wage academic work-force) would rather take the work than seek alternative employment. And correspondingly the "overproduction" of phds is not a property of the capitalist division of labor determined almost entirely by management but is also caused by student choice: choosing to go into an overcrowded field in the first place.

Put another way, waged labor is, on this view, by definition non-exploitative. The only cause for complaint would be a lack of "market transparency," a situation where students lack proper information. For Bok, as we discussed above, market transparency is the natural state of markets—secrecy, lack of sharing, etc., are corruptions. If students know the market is bad in one occupation, and choose it anyway, it's their stupidity which is to blame. Under conditions of market transparency, rational choosers would go where the jobs were; there would never be unemployment. Though strictly speaking, it is their bad choices which produce the bad market. Ideally, if the choosers are rational, there is no such thing as a bad market. Class struggle, if it does exist, shouldn't exist. If it does, it's workers' fault, the result of irresponsible market behavior (yes, market competition leads to secrecy as a rather natural result of private property but the solution to the market is the market).

Markets are, for Bok, inherently anti-elitist because they are products of free choice and freedom is the ultimate value. Leftist critics of markets are elitist, disrespecting choice, for whatever is chosen in the market is right. Yet we see that market proponents cannot themselves reduce standards to choice. This distinction between what people choose and what they ought to choose appears in the distinction Bok makes between wants, what one chooses in the market, and "preserving basic values," values assumed to be objective. It is a distinction which makes Bok's market apologetics, by his own definition, elitist.

Numerous times in his book, Bok dismisses the leftist critique with the Thatcherite response, "what's the alternative?" Thus is leftist argument dismissed both when there is an alternative (walk across the street. There is no exploitation, only opportunity costs) and when there is no alternative. Capitalism is justified as free choice; or, if not that, as inescapable.

Conclusions

I would like, in closing, to move away a bit from the relatively self-enclosed world of managerial ideology, of managers talking primarily to themselves, and look at managerial ideology in the context of labor struggles, first at UC Davis, which faced a unionized ntt/ptt faculty, second, at NC State, where I taught as a lecturer until recently.

At Cal Davis, the administration did succeed, though perhaps at great cost to their credibility, in eliminating the positions of highly talented, experienced and needed lecturers. These lecturers were "replaced" by several postdocs. The lecturers were unionized, so you might be thinking, ah, cheap labor post docs, but the postdocs were not cheaper than the lecturers. They were in fact more expensive. So on the surface, this does not fit what we've seen as flexible practice.

But flexibility is after all about control, and control is about divide and conquer. And in this latter respect the action takes on new (actually quite old) meanings. For the administration at UC

Davis pitched these changes as following MLA guidelines (themselves the result of years of struggle) calling for lower rations of part-time and ntt faculty to tenure track. And this could be interpreted as fulfilled by eliminating decent ntt jobs, whatever the effects on the students. In addition, the UC Davis administration interpreted the hiring of post docs as in effect following the guidelines since post docs, on this view, were tenure track in waiting.

Moreover, and here we see the components of market ideology, the post docs bring newness and the cutting edge to their work, and if that suggests lack of experience, well, they have experience too ("like the lecturers they bring several years of experience")—even if there is a difference between a couple years of experience and, oh, say, 15 years of experience. Since the field of writing "is changing rapidly," this greater experience, it is suggested, very well could be anachronistic, less responsive to rapid change. In addition, the ideological connection between cutting edge and excellence is reinforced. The postdocs bring "the latest expertise" (the quotes are from Dean Langland).

Needless to say, this rhetoric rests on false assumptions and dubious innuendo. One senate member, defending the practice of the administration, argued against the over-reliance on ntt on the grounds that ntt was made up largely of women workers and that reliance on a cheap labor force of ntts was sexist, reinforcing a gendered division of labor. If administration, pace the argument in part one of this paper, can combat racism and sexism by combating the patriarchal white supremacist institution of tenure, it can also wage class war against ntts in the name of combating sexism and defending tenure.

Of course, the lower tiered labor force does have a gendered character, though there are indeed many men in these sectors who share in that exploitation and oddly enough, in a desperate market, are at a disadvantage in the competition for these jobs (this division could become yet another magnet for the discourse of neoconservativism: gender discrimination in reverse etc!). The argument reminds me of the well intentioned one coming from sectors of the left, though it seems no longer, that there was an overproduction of phds (this is standard in both Bok's humanist defense of the university and the euphoric defense of commercialization), an argument that Marc Bousquet by the way has done much to put to rest. In both cases, cutting programs or cutting faculty becomes an egalitarian gesture.

At NCSU, ntts, who at the time were responsible for around 70 percent of the credit hours, teaching comp and a variety of intro and intermediate literature courses, formed "the faculty association for campus equity"—a few went further and joined the United Electrical Workers union, which had organized grad students at Chapel Hill.

While we won a significant salary increase (from abysmal to appalling), we were ultimately derailed, trounced really, and made little response to the trouncing. At any rate perhaps the height of our organizing campaign coincided with a conference the ntts

organized on academic labor. It was held in November 2001 and we had three speakers, including Marc, who gave a version of one of the essays we are all discussing.

At the conference, we circulated our petition "demanding" a 3/3 load and 5500 per course, both of these consistent with AAUP and MLA guidelines (see *Profession* 2002). Our petition was attacked hard by the chair and most tenure track faculty did not sign it. A small minority,, about 6, did. The chair accused us of engaging in disinformation, with the main accusations turning out to be false.

We got attacked harder, several lecturers basically "yelled at" by the chair (infantilized); a spy on a private ntt list passed on the substance of some of our conversations to the chair, stuff like that. The important point here is that these tactics basically worked. We backed down and by the next fall, had disbanded, with 30 of our lecturers having been "let go" in the interim (I'll return to this in a moment)

We backed down out of fear of losing our jobs but we also backed down I think for a bunch of ideological reasons. Interestingly enough, though, none of those included market based ones. None of us, or practically none, bought standard arguments coming from administration or even the legislature about "apprenticeship," or supply and demand, or "it was your choice." We backed down largely due to "professionalism." When we were accused of having our facts wrong or engaging in disinformation, our forces became way too self critical, even self destructive—despite the basic falsehood of the disinformation charge. We turned on each other a bit. Above all, if I may speculate, we did not want to appear incompetent in front of the tenured and tenure track faculty. The fear here was tied I think to a very powerful image of professionalism. Lower tiered faculty who accept this ideology are very vulnerable as such faculty, despite by and large excellent teaching, and various advanced degrees, are acutely aware of their status and will defend and be defensive about it (at one meeting I attended, one low paid phd in sociology said she would never tell the students what she made because they would lose respect for her). NTT makes a mistake, NTT is incompetent, a loser, not excellent—signifiers that became closely bound to an older ideological trope of civility, itself significantly tied to professionalism via notions of rational discourse, the inappropriateness of professionals engaging in union type activity etc.

By fall of 2003, while we kept our raises, many of us were eliminated, largely because the administration wanted to solve the lecturer problem (we only became a problem when we became visible). But how it got done is worth a comment. The new director of composition, not clearly on the side of the administration, as part of a package of changes to the program decided to eliminate the second semester of composition and turn a 3 credit one semester course into a 4 credit course, meeting three days a week. This elimination of the second semester of composition was the basis for letting go the lecturers. In return (money was saved), the dept. was allowed to hire new tenure track lines—8 in fact. The logic of

this process, whatever the complex intentionality, was similar to UC Davis. Adhere to the humane guidelines of reducing reliance on part-timers and ntt by getting rid of 30 ntt during a recession and replacing them with eight tters—a process facilitated by eliminating an absolute necessity. I suspect to some of you reading this, this doesn't sound that bad—"wow, eight tenure track lines." If this is your response, think again. The problems of academic labor and the commercialization of the university will not be solved either by hiring cheap labor to discipline those with job security or hiring more "prestige labor" and firing "the losers." This is what bosses do. Finally, I would note that ntts also lost any job security provision in the form of three year contracts for those with three years of service and above.

What do we do? We can start by taking seriously the pay recommendations in Profession 2002 (234-6). But the rather generous sounding per course pay cannot be abstracted from the academic division of labor as a whole. It's nice to think that you can humanely call for more money for those at the bottom without addressing the status hierarchies. I confess that even as I was part of the Radical Caucus labor deliberations that had something to do with passing these minimum requirements, it never occurred to me that the caste system should be abolished, the essence of which is that teachers on the non tenure track can never make more than the salary of a beginning assistant professor.

Unions would seem to be a necessity for addressing these issues seriously. Without organization, these recommendations will just become irrelevant, nothing more than humane sentiments and humane sentiments are a powerful tool in the arsenal of the managers. When ntters at NC State began making noise about work conditions and pay, we were somewhat amused to find that everyone, from the new chair to the chancellor, found our situation "appalling." Very strong words. And yet 3/3 and 33,000 dollars a year was treated as a demand that only children could make. Unionized faculty make more money than nonunionized faculty, this is clear. And, despite managerial rhetoric, unions are in a better position to soften the divisions between tiers of faculty (see Rhoades). Unionization also facilitates the construction of adult identities, far preferable to the quasi-childlike status we enjoy now.

But even as we call for the spread of unionization, we need to address always its limits under capitalism. Social democracy, unionization writ large, leads, it would seem, to neoliberalism, not to a society whose main product is healthy human beings. And we need to take seriously Engels' claims about capitalism, which we can begin to do by noting that capitalism does not merely move its problems around. In its attempts to solve its problems within the framework of accumulation for accumulation's sake and ruling class maintenance, it generates more problems, if not "here," "there" and if not "there," "here": racism, sexism, imperialism and imperialist war, overproduction, underconsumption, ecodevastation, endless overwork, endless underwork, most of all the wrong kind of work, the wrong kind of lives. So even as we work contin-

ually on bread and butter issues, I think we need to begin to call for an end to the labour productivity model of work, an end even to progressive sounding slogans like equal pay for equal work, not in the name of unequal pay, but in the name of a shorter work week and the end of endless work (Aronowitz).

Addendum

I write this on June 26, 2003. I have just found out that NC State has eliminated one year contracts for part-timers and several full-timers, replacing them with six month contracts, in order to avoid paying health benefits. In sum, the university has shown its commitment to ntt by giving us a raise, eliminating a semester of composition in order to get rid of 30 lecturers, suspending the three year contracts, and now, eliminating many one year contracts for the reason mentioned above. From what I understand, in the English Dept., there is a special needs category allowing for one year contracts. Those who attended a two hour workshop on the "computerized classroom" might be eligible but those who did not attend are not, and lose health care. The facts should speak for themselves (but never do) and there should be only one word for this policy and the behavior of those in authority who go along: appalling.[15]

Notes

[1]I'd like to dedicate this essay to my good friend Jim Neilson—who read the essay and helped with some nice quotes and even better jokes. Thanks to Michelle Squitieri for the information on the University of California at Davis. For helpful criticisms which helped me get my intro straight, I thank Patricia Carter and Leo Parascondola. Thanks also to Richard Ohmann for sharing some of his important work on commercialization and, more generally, for reading this essay and offering encouragement as well as some useful suggestions. Penultimately, Barbara Foley gave it a diligent late read; her contributions were both formal and substantive. But especially the former: man oh man, she didn't always like my syntax. And finally, I'd like to thank the Leaker for being a good comrade under shit conditions. We've both moved on: "good things come to those who wait," they say. Well: we both know the solidarity-busting, delusional character of such sentiments.

[2]This field of evolutionary discourse is, to say the least, complicated. If I were to recommend one text, it would be Stephen Jay Gould's *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002.

[3]Optimization discourse is quite prevalent among evolutionary biologists—it is predicated on, according to its critics, an overemphasis on the power of natural selection that these critics—like Richard Lewontin and Stephen Gould—call "panselectionism." See Gould's book above for a thorough discussion of the problems

here, especially the long critque of Dawkins and the discussions about "exaption." Optimization discourse tends toward panglossianism—justifications of the present or status quo.

[4]The notion of compromise formation, while it has its origins in psychoanalysis, comes also from philosophy of science—Roy Bhaskar. The latter is the meaning I have in mind here. The function of a compromise formation is that its plasticity, its incoherence, is precisely what allows it to meet challenges. So for example, if a critic dismantles the inevitablist component of flex discourse, the discourse/writer can defend itself by emphasizing contingency and choice etc. The import of oscillation is that it facilitates the misrecognition of the compromise formation's incoherence. For a dazzling demonstration at the level of philosophical discourse, see chapter three of Bhaskar's *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*. New York: Verso, 1986.

[5]This is a reference to Thomas Frank's essay "The God that Sucked." The God is capitalism or the market and the title is a takeoff of the cold war text *The God that Failed*, the God here being communism.

[6]My own use of the passive voice is ironic.

[7]In this structure of feeling, job security, instead of being viewed as the goal of a decent workplace, is viewed as undeserved privilege, and, as we will see, draws on the discourse of tenured faculty as party functionaries or liberals—egalitarian in rhetoric but not reality. Hypocrites. Hierarchical. But in the discourse of hype and euphoria, they're just not with it—failing to see that job security is analogous to working on typewriters instead of computers. Insecurity is transformed into lifelong learning and a rhetoric of continuous improvement: speed up and dispossession are converted into Marx's utopia of hunting in morning, fishing in afternoon, etc.

[8]"Blur" was the title of one of the management texts celebrating the cult of change. See Frank, chaps 5 and 6.

[9]This essay has not highlighted enough the role nationalism plays in flex discourse. Barbara Foley made this criticism and I wish to acknowledge it here. Nationalism in fact works precisely as a compromise formation in flex discourse—using it when needed (nation at risk), denying it when necessary (global capitalism takes us beyond the nation state). And misrecognizing the contradiction whereby neoliberalism intensifies the nationalism it denies ideologically.

[10]At this very moment, in New York, classes are being drastically cut in public universities, wreaking havoc with student graduation plans.

[11]In 1998, when I was unemployed, I drove to the unemployment office once a month past a sign saying, I paraphrase, "No Education, No Future." In a rather unpleasant year, I took my pleasures where I could find them. And this was one such place.

[12]The distinction I invoke is of course Kuhn's distinction between normal science and revolutionary science. It is the latter that enacts paradigm changes. I would note that this language of para-

digm change, the quintessential language of postmodernism, is theirs, the managers, not mine.

[13]As Michael Parenti notes, "conscious intent is not always denied. If the issue involves antiwar dissenters, labor unions, militant feminists, leftist guerillas, or communists, then intent—often of a quite sinister kind—is readily ascribed. Only when talking of the dominant politico-economic elites of capitalist nations is one or another innocence theory called into play." (*Land of Idols*, 164). Thanks to Neilson for this quote.

[14]This distinction should not be pressed so far as to mystify agency. The institutional imperatives which discipline capital discipline big capital the least. And in certain circumstances, the agency of big capital has enormous power and often gets what it wants. If we examine the emergence of the capitalist university in the U.S. in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the major players are the robber barons, subjecting others—from presidents of universities to faculty—directly and indirectly to market discipline much more than they are subjected to the discipline of competing capitals. The public spirited philanthropy of the robber barons had "immediate" and "devastating" effect. As David Smith notes, "galvanized by pressing financial needs, American colleges and universities began an intense scramble for the money. In Wall's words, 'there were emergency sessions of boards of trustees throughout the country and charters that had been considered inviolate were in many places quickly changed '" (Smith, 1974, 99). The role played by this public spirited giving points out how meaningless Bok's comment about the trustees' civic mindedness really is. Also, within these institutional limits, there are conspiracies—the assassination of Martin Luther King looks more and more plausibly like a conspiracy involving the government. The "dark alliance" between various government administrations and drug dealers to trade arming the contras for free passage of cocaine to places like south central would also seem to fit the definition of a conspiracy, though in both cases, institutional imperatives need to be invoked in order to explain why the many perpetrators of illegal and immoral acts got off scot free or with slaps on the wrist. There is the phenomenon of looking the other way. But, often even when all the info is there, collected in public trials, nothing comes of it. (Webb, 1998)

[15]I asked Jim Neilson, one of the victims of the cuts, to update me on State and here's what he wrote:

> Here's the paragraph you asked for.
>
> Because I hadn't taken a two-hour computer class, the Head of the English Department, conveying the sentiments of the Director of Freshman Composition, concluded that I wasn't qualified to teach computer-based English 101, my twenty years of teaching composition, my phd., my graduate training in web design that I picked up as part of my masters level course work in Library Science at Chapel Hill notwithstanding. Hence I was given a six month contract with no benefits. Trying to pick up Cobra to replace

my lost health insurance led to the inevitable bureaucratic snafus, which meant that the prescription for a critical medication I take for a life-threatening condition cost $370 (as opposed to the $25 cost with insurance). I paid $40 for a few days of pills which, luckily, lasted until the snafus were straightened out. Since my medical condition—Crohn's disease—can be exacerbated by stress, and since I'd recently had a flare-up, the few days with insufficient medication and worries about being ensnared in a bureaucratic tangle could have had serious health repercussions.

Failure to take the computer class, it seems, was merely an initial pretext for saving money during this time of state budget shortfalls. The Head revealed that a "number" (she didn't specify what number) of lecturers with one-year contracts would be receiving letters announcing their contracts would be rescinded. They, like me, would be contracted for six months and would be denied medical insurance. Notice of this change was sent out one week before school was to begin, offering lecturers no chance to find other jobs. Since their health insurance, presumably, was good only through August 1st, they may find themselves in particularly desperate circumstances.

One of the striking (or appalling), though not surprising, circumstances surrounding this atrocity is the utter silence of the Department. Not a word has appeared on the English Department's listserv, no announcement, no complaint. Lecturers like me suffer in silence (I know of no planned meeting of lecturers). The Head of the Department did say that she tried to transfer money from the Department's travel budget to cover insurance costs but was not allowed to do so for legal reasons. One tenured faculty member was relieved to learn that the travel budget was retained since, otherwise, he couldn't have afforded to fly to England for a John Donne conference. I'm tempted to object to this attitude until realizing that further explication of "Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God," with its concern for transcendental verities, is far more important than a narrow preoccupation with my own physical well-being. Actually, I find a striking analogy between explicating Donne's poetry and shitting bloody diarrhea.

In the midst of these changes, the Dean of the College sent an e-mail announcing, in almost wholly generic and dispassionate language, the changes that were caused by budget reductions. Here's a bit of her letter:

> The college conducted meetings with department heads and dean's office staff to determine how to take reductions in a strategic way that will minimize the impact of the cuts on our primary missions of teaching, research, and service. . . .
>
> The top priority is support of the college's instructional mission, with an emphasis on serving CHASS undergraduate majors and graduate students. . . .
> Finally, all CHASS departments and some programs and

> centers have assumed additional cuts in their operating budgets. These cuts have been taken strategically, in an effort to protect the infrastructure supporting classroom instruction. No cuts have been taken in allocations for graduate teaching assistants, who will be critical for support of classroom instruction.
>
> Hope that gives you something useful, Greg boy. Makes me feel like vomiting or reading the metaphysical poets.

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