

# Schol...Exodus?: Learning Within/Against/Beyond the Institution

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## I. Scholactivism or Schol Exodus?

Critical approaches to the political landscape of higher education are often divided between suggesting either that the university is in such a ruins that it must be abandoned, or that it exists as one of the only vestiges of a public good that needs to be restored and defended.<sup>1</sup> Here, we take an alternative approach to analyzing the crisis-ridden landscape of higher education: class composition, a term we inherit from militant co-research projects. As defined by Marta Malo de Molina, class composition is the “subjective structure of needs, behaviours and antagonist practices, sedimented through a long history of different struggles.”<sup>2</sup> This use of composition seeks to understand how worker and student subjectivities are forged through antagonism and difference to capitalist exploitation and its investments in technology, development, and “progress.” As we draw from it here, class composition reveals *potential* struggles within sites that otherwise appear strictly as locations of domination. This alternative methodology asks us to convert the all-too-common cry of powerlessness we hear from faculty, administrators, and sometimes ourselves into an analysis of exploitation—not for the purposes of reforming the neoliberal university but for mapping the crisis points that we can exploit. This kind of analysis is oftentimes called co-research and associated with the Italian tradition of *operaismo*. Such research starts from the bottom up, privileging workers’ antagonism and resistance to their own exploitation as it is enacted by workers themselves, rather than starting an analysis with the determinate and objective conditions of their labor. Thus, it views resistance and even sabotage as a regular occurrence and seeks to understand how such acts can be enacted in an organized fashion.

In this essay we speculate on spaces that are materially reproduced by the university, but spaces that are *not* classrooms because, as many of us have experienced, attempts to challenge the hierarchical

**WORKS AND DAYS 65/66,67/68,Vol.33&34, 2016-17**

constructs of and in the classroom are easily frustrated. Even if an instructor attempts to neutralize his or her authority, students will often still project that authority onto him or her. And while putting students in charge of class has become a popular mode of instruction, most prominently by “flipping the classroom” (a figure of speech and style of pedagogy popularized by a Harvard physics professor), such “innovations,” as we show below, often serve neoliberal aims under the cover of challenging inequality. As teachers and students experience it on a daily basis without necessarily thinking about it very much, design of the built environment itself structures and conditions how teaching and learning occurs. These material-spatial practices themselves teach students a sort of civics lesson in what it means to teach and learn. A lecture hall privileges the authority at the front of the classroom, with students arranged in a stadium-like seating facing or surrounding the instructor, and while seminar rooms enable more modular arrangements that facilitate work in small groups, or that enable large group discussions in a circle or around a seminar table, students will most often save the chair at the head of a rectangular table for the instructor. Such quotidian arrangements of our bodies in classrooms, insignificant as it may seem, daily represents a now-naturalized relationship that teaches students not only how to be good students, but how to be good workers as well. We thus sympathize with Harry Cleaver’s recognition that, “the job [we] are paid to do vis-à-vis students is not at all ‘helping them to learn’ but rather imposing work and its discipline on them.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, these ostensibly academic innovations are perhaps nowhere more visible than in the open corporate workspaces of technology start-ups.

Rather than flipping our classrooms, we find ourselves increasingly interested in leaving the classroom in favor of more hospitable spaces for conversation. This paper attends to a number of concrete ways to enact such an exodus, both spatially and intellectually, that might put us in a position to adopt co-research as a practice. We could envision this “tactic” of exodus working in all of the spaces we describe below. For instance, if dining halls are indeed becoming strategic sites of circulation *and* exploitation on campuses, then we could imagine holding teach-ins where dining hall and other service workers lead a discussion about their working conditions. These could be organized in conjunction with small- or large-scale work stoppages. Another scenario might involve students setting up an on-site food pantry for a day, or even students taking over the dining hall to give university-purchased food away, as a group of students did at the University of Bologna in Italy in 2013.

Alternatively, adjunct and graduate instructors might choose to take students on field trips on and beyond their own campuses, focusing on strategic sites of circulation and exploitation, as the Southwest Corridor Northwest Passage project has done outside Chicago.<sup>4</sup> Such cartographically inspired projects assist in cognitively mapping not just where the wealth for such ventures comes from, but also how they represent universities in the globalized, interconnected way they do. Further, in the highly deterritorialized world we tend to inhabit in late capitalism, such mapping projects help us to re-

member that there are still crucial sites in our localities and on our campuses that keep capitalism moving. We highlight such spaces as important sites of analysis and struggle because they demonstrate the extent to which changing objective conditions produced by the university—conditions of wage labor, debt, gentrification—have re-composed the workforce and population of non-academic workers, student and faculty workers, and those outside of the university who might contest them today.

## II. The “Public” University

First, it is important to briefly recontextualize the emergence of the neoliberal university in relation to the “Cold War University,” instead of the quasi-mythic “public university” that is often mourned as an ideal of the past. This long view of the political economy of the university will help to demonstrate why it is no longer an option, if it ever was, for us to double-down on professional distinctions and a hierarchical division of campus workers, whether those be student, teacher, or staff. This move is not merely taxonomic: it pulls us away from an archetypal juxtaposition of public and private as timeless, Platonic forms towards a more rigorously materialist understanding of “the public” as itself the historical product of specific social, political, and economic forces. It helps to explain why a return to the “golden age” of the post-war university is both unfeasible and undesirable. But, similarly, it is just as much a fantasy to imagine we can return to well-worn socialist strategies of a pre-Fordist era of organizing blocks of infrastructural industries that seemed to “approximate the collective class, the class in-and-for-itself.”<sup>5</sup> Such “returns” are unfeasible because the Cold War University was the product of a unique confluence of social, political, and economic factors that cannot be repeated. But they are also undesirable—among other reasons—because the so-called golden age was not golden but male, middle class, and white. Structural changes in higher education undoubtedly imperil those to whom the Cold War University opened its doors and graduated into the white middle class.

In our historical narrative, we define “The Cold War University” by the passing of the G.I. bill in 1944, which complicated class composition by absorbing an unemployed and working-class labor force into a cultural and economic sphere previously reserved for the children of the upper and upper-middle classes. With the entrance of these working-class veterans into the academy, the professional class swelled, birthing an ideology of class redemption and mobility that was sustained in part by anticommunist animus. That this drastic educational shift occurred in relationship to the armed services, though, has a number of implications in regards to the value associated with higher education, the disciplinary models the university adopted, and the racial dynamics, particularly in regards to work, of this new university.

As Ira Katznelson and others have noted, and despite the promise of a college education mandated by the G.I. bill, veterans of color continued to experience de facto exclusion from college campuses even after the conclusion of their military term.<sup>6</sup> Just as the armed

services in World War II were technically integrated but practically still segregated—with service members of color in integrated units almost always serving on the front lines rather than in more protected positions of authority—the opportunity for integration that the G.I. bill potentially represented, in its most generous form, was never realized. It is almost too obvious to point out that women remained outside of this system altogether, since nurses, telephone operators, and other kinds of military aides were not considered veterans for the purposes of the G.I. Bill. This means that the Cold War University reconfigured a class distinction—with working class peoples doing service work while wealthier peoples occupied the professional spheres—into a racial and gender one, with women and people of color working service jobs, and mostly white males teaching and taking classes. These racial and gender distinctions have persisted despite the adoption (and subsequent discarding) of affirmative action strategies and the end of formal segregation, again complicating the notion of a rift between today's neoliberal university and the university of yesteryear.

Finally, the growth of white-collar workers demanded the growth of white-collar jobs, unless civil unrest was to follow mass unemployment. As noted in *Endnotes*, this was the ambivalent “key to the revolutionary position” of industrialized workers.<sup>7</sup> Those workers were the limit to the development of capital in a WWII and post-WWII era, and socialists and union organizers understood their collective power. But workers' own demands, over time, became limited to what capital was offering: entry to the middle class of managers and bureaucrats. Similarly, we understand the growth of the mid-century middle class within the context of geopolitical manufacturing shifts: the erosion and destruction of western European infrastructure that allowed U.S. and Soviet manufacturing interests to compete for predominance over a reorganizing world-market once controlled by England, Germany, and France; the transition of the U.S. war economy towards new international and domestic markets for consumer appliances; and the post-war revival (and subsequent stagnation and decline) of the rate of profit, itself the product of both labor defeats and the aforementioned destruction of fixed capital, namely those industrial machines that had once ushered Europe into modern-day capitalism.

The public university—like the white middle-class public it helped to foster—was both product and catalyst of this conjuncture, helping to contain labor unrest through the selective incorporation of certain subjects into relative affluence and suburban domesticity, albeit at the price of accepting time-work discipline. For a variety of reasons this compromise proved unsustainable and began to dissolve from the early 1970s—not coincidentally the very moment when women and people of color began to break into institutions (including, but not only, universities) from which they had long found themselves excluded as students.<sup>8</sup> Situating the Cold War University in this context allows us to understand one element of a historically specific welfare-warfare state that has long since reached its apotheosis and entered a long and likely terminal decline. If this decline is not exactly to be celebrated, neither should we seek to reinstate the

classed, raced, and gendered divisions of an earlier era.<sup>9</sup> To put it bluntly, our fear is that calls for the restoration of the public often amount (if inadvertently) to just such a stratified view of public good.

Coming to terms with the process of politicization that opens up within this “terminal decline” may be fruitful than hoping for a messianic return. The process of politicization in the university will not look like it did in the factory and indeed there are good reasons to believe it may never equal its consolidated force. At the same time, the university is at once a massive low-wage employer, real estate and hedge fund manager, and site of debt accumulation, and thus integrates many of the dominant tendencies and complexities of late capitalism. Thus the continual and conflictual processes of subjectification within the contemporary university must be considered, even if at the same time we acknowledge that the significant objective and ideological barriers operating there create an insuperable limit to its revolutionary potential. Indeed, as Roggero puts it, capital produces “subjectivity as a battleground”—a battleground that takes place between “*technical composition*, based on capital’s articulation and hierarchization of the workforce [and] *political composition*—the process of the constitution of a class as an autonomous subject.”<sup>10</sup>

In the remainder of this essay, we treat the example of the Gordon Commons Dining and Event Center on the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s campus as an important instance of the university’s continual and quite often successful project of self-representation that neutralizes what Roggero calls a “battleground.” This case study attempts to make visible the otherwise invisible pedagogical imperatives of the contemporary university that are, we argue, processes of class composition that are always occurring there. In other words, this example helps us to understand how the reproduction, even the expansion, of the university comes to appear today as the necessary condition for the reproduction of its internal workforce and student body, much as it did when workers and union leaders came to accept or believe that the factory itself was going to produce a future for the working class.<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that everyone or even most workers and students in the university believe it to be an inexhaustible institution today, but rather that the structural conditions by which it has emerged in its contemporary form have made it almost impossible to imagine a paycheck, a job, a family, or a future without it.

### III. Constructing Consumption

In 2012, UW-Madison released what might be the first and only of its kind: a promotional video taking viewers on a virtual tour of the newly reconstructed Gordon Commons Dining and Event Center. Released by the Division of Housing, the audience was likely a mix of out-of-state and in-state students who were considering attending UW-Madison, but who also had other options and required the persuasion of non-educational amenities. The virtual tour of the Gordon Commons Dining and Event Center opens with a view of the United States from outer space, a nod to the geopolitical frame that provides

the default justification for financial expenditures guaranteed to shore up, and in some cases increase, academic significance and prestige in the neoliberal era. As the logo for the UW-Madison flashes across the screen, the camera zooms first to the state of Wisconsin, and then to the campus itself.



Global View

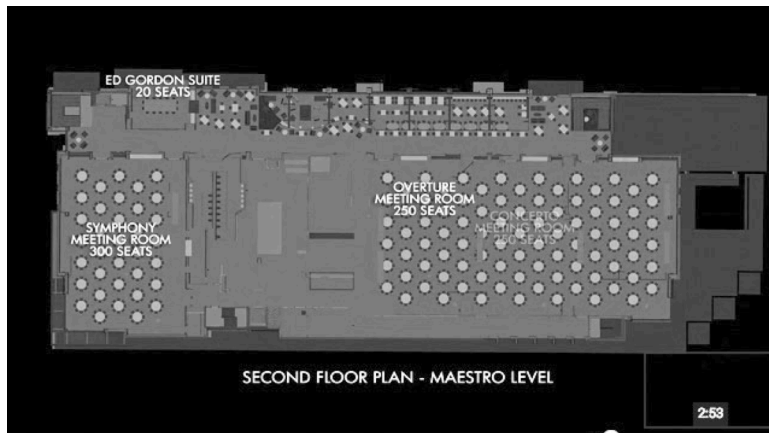


Gordon Commons

These moves position the local scene at the heart of the globe, the location to which all compositional lines converge. The names of various buildings that surround Gordon Commons drop from the sky to land on their locations on the landscape before the space for the Dining and Event Center is illuminated and the camera, again, zooms in. No longer the paradigmatic site of the banal, the dining hall in this opening sequence has been transformed into a cosmopolitan shrine. Within its gleaming walls, students, faculty, and employees converge in the brick and mortar—or digital—realization of the marketplace of ideas.

The camera pans next to a computer recreation of a flat-roofed building set within a manicured lawn and lush trees. Avatars wearing upper-middle-class college-student standard-issue (casual skirts, loafers, jeans, t-shirts, the errant polo) collect outside as, frame by frame, the building unfolds on the screen: a dollhouse with the roof

removed and the doors flung open. Once inside, the video moves between architectural floor plans of the various rooms (the Gordon Avenue Market, Flamingo Run, the Fireplace Lounge) and computer simulations of the individual markets within the Commons. Computerized figures populate these spaces, too, in the guise of both students and workers. Like the students, the service workers are also dressed uniformly, so as to obfuscate their particularity and reinforce their anonymity and invisibility. These two populations are made vaguely homogenous and distinctive at the same time as workers are divided from students. This homogeneity is wildly inaccurate, as a



Second Level Floor Plan



Digital representation of Gordon Commons market

considerable percentage of housing employees are also students, but it is effective in its representation of clear distinctions between the wage laborer and the upwardly mobile undergraduate.

These scenes of false and placid distinctions illustrate the experience of alienation and anomie that corporate concepts like synergy and vertical integration produce when they are incorporated into a university's spatial self-representation. Indeed, every aspect of this production, from the construction of the space to the actions of its

participants, expresses the neoliberal university's vision of how social relations should be enacted: student and worker interactions are kept to a minimum and reduced to a set of discrete and formal acts of exchange, while the students are structurally coerced, through the semantics of social space, to register that they are in a middle-class area with the possibility—literally—of upward mobility to the Maestro level. The division between material and immaterial labor is not an ideological projection, but a division enacted through material practices of spatial division: *get food here, go read there*. The jaunty electronic music playing throughout the entire sequence endows this illustration of rigid class and workplace boundaries with a gleeful—or manic—air. As the video makes clear, at the University of Wisconsin, students will learn more than an elevated version of the “Three R’s”: the built environment also proves a pedagogical space, one that tells them that moving into the professional sphere entails developing a taste for bureaucratic opulence, standardized roles, and, perhaps most importantly, knowing one’s place. This aesthetic orderliness can be equally applied to the neutral and uncontested advice we get in the process of becoming professionals, advice that tells us to remain in our places, to keep our heads down, and to accept the dictates that come from administrators, legislators, and sought-after job creators.

Yet the tuition-paying students at UW-Madison are not the sole subjects who receive instruction as they move through the Commons. For the employees of the Gordon Dining and Event Center—contract, direct, and part-time student—the Commons, too, serves as a pedagogical space, one seeking to determine their class composition, albeit through disciplinary techniques that differ from classroom ones. Applying Roggero’s articulation of the technical and political composition of labor and class to the context of the Dining Hall, we can see that it is not only an ideologically homogenous space but also a place of low-wage labor and socialization. After all, despite the rigid distinctions the virtual tour of the Gordon Dining and Event Center seeks to enforce, within the actual space of the Commons, students, workers, and student-workers constantly interact. In what way does the necessity of bringing these specialized laborers—student, service worker, professional—together for the university’s social reproduction provide contradictory potential to work against the abstract logic of capital as it is expressed in the space of Gordon Dining Hall? That is, how does the university’s reliance on students’ consumption and workers’ production begin to bring students and workers into more subjectively-aligned positions within the university?

#### IV. Constructing Worker Composition

One way to answer this question, at least provisionally, is to treat the homogenous and immaterial representation offered in the video of the dining hall as a material process, one that involves the production of a differentiated material space and heterogeneous subjects through speculative financial investments. Much like its peer-institution counterparts, UW-Madison has pursued an aggres-



sive building spree of non-academic spaces on its campus dating from around the early 2000s. Since 2005, UW-Madison has completed 112 projects totaling \$2.8 billion and as of 2015 currently has almost \$730 million invested in construction costs for projects at various levels of development. The Gordon Dining Commons Hall and Event Center is one of those projects, constructed between August 2012 and August 2013. If you consult the university's Capital Planning and Management Office, you will discover that the overall construction of this project is \$41 million.

While UW-Madison's overall revenue in 2013 was a little over \$2.9 billion, almost twice what it was in 2002, the university nonetheless cannot afford to allocate much of that revenue to pay off \$730 million of construction projects in a year. After all, the majority of revenue expenditures (fifty-two percent) at the university still go to instructional and research purposes. Since seventeen percent of its budget comes from the state and the university cannot spend tax dollars to build non-academic facilities, the only other revenue contributor for projects like Gordon Commons are tuition and fees. This narrative of using tuition dollars to pay for high-end projects like dining halls, entertainment venues, and dormitories is becoming quite familiar and has been detailed in the ground-breaking analysis of activist-scholars like Bob Meister, Dan Nemser and Brian Whitener, and Amanda Armstrong.

But as they note, it is not the construction costs themselves that are of primary importance in understanding the explosion of high-rise material spaces on public campuses. Our example here, Gordon Commons, bears out Nemser and Whitener's claims that "the university is no longer primarily a site of production (of a national labor force or national culture) as it was in the 1970s and 80s, but has become primarily a site of capital investment and accumulation."<sup>12</sup> Such investments have expanded beyond a welfare-state-style support system in which a very particular demographic of students were allowed to complete degrees at little to no cost, and into the complicated world of speculative investments that rely on universities to maintain stable and high credit ratings and promise the continued rise of tuition and associated costs in order to pay off long-term bonds. So UW-Madison does not simply take in state revenues and spend them when they build a structure like the Commons; indeed, they are barred from using state funds to pay for such projects. Instead, like other large public institutions, they have turned to accumulating massive amounts of private capital that can be spent at will. Here they rely on what is called Program Revenue Supported Bonding, a budgetary term for the revenues generated by student fees (separate from tuition), parking, transportation, housing and dining services, and in part by student tuition. And while the Capital Planning and Management website will not tell you this, reports to the state disclose that the bonds taken out to pay for the project are on a thirty-year term, and those "annual debt service payments are estimated at \$2,300,000."<sup>13</sup> Once the university finishes paying off that bond, which is guaranteed not primarily by tuition but through "self-sustaining" operations like the services provided in the dining hall, Gordon Commons will have cost over \$100 million. In total, based

on the Statement of Net Position issued by UW-Madison to the state, the university currently has almost \$880 million in bond liabilities. Although it is unclear how much of that is due to the construction of non-academic facilities, it's easy to imagine that \$60 million in bonds for *one* \$40 million projects adds up to much of it. This amount is particularly staggering in the context of an institution where layoffs of 400 employees have been announced as a result of expected budget cuts handed down from the state, potentially totaling \$114 million.

In contrast to other state institutions, like the University of California system and the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, UW-Madison doesn't have the legal capacity to issue its own bonds. It relies on the state to issue and guarantee its bond rating, and thus does not have access to quite the same amount of credit that some of its peer institutions have.<sup>14</sup> But this alternative bonding arrangement has not prevented UW-Madison from engaging in similarly competitive construction projects, ones that Nemser and Whitener describe as an "arms race" by other means.<sup>15</sup> The University of Wisconsin system at large participates in this "arms race" by increasing the cost of tuition as much as the Board of Regents will allow, but even more so by radically increasing the cost of housing in recent years. Indeed, the projected plan for paying off the debt service on Gordon Dining Commons is a \$300/year increase in housing costs for undergraduates. Nonetheless, the university has in recent years attempted in various ways to gain the power to manage the bonding of their capital projects, meaning that they would also get a credit rating independent from the state. The most recent bid to separate from the state for that and other reasons recently failed, but those efforts highlight the premium that is placed on private over public funds in an era of ever-dwindling state resources.<sup>16</sup>

But it is not only transformation of funding, construction, and speculative investment that these non-academic buildings signal. Along with the repurposing of profits made by universities, there is also an intense pressure on and reconfiguration of labor in spaces like the Gordon Dining Commons. So while much attention is paid to the impact of tuition raises on students in the form of debt, less attention has been paid in the media and elsewhere to the labor performed *within* the buildings that debt subsidizes, which has strong parallels to fast-food work and other kinds of low-wage, precarious labor. As Robin D.G. Kelley noted in 1996, universities were already one of the largest employers of service workers in the U.S. and that workforce was (and remains) predominantly composed of women and people of color. Those positions are easy to cut and exploit not simply because they are service jobs, but because, as Kelley notes, they are historically aligned with black, Latin@, and female workers who are "unskilled," itself a "raced, sexed and historically determined" category (Kelley 1996).<sup>17</sup>

The increase of such "unskilled" labor in the economic engines on university campuses needs to be understood within the context of capitalism, which must continually lower the costs of social reproduction by immiserating workers in order to invest in the tech-

nological development that Research-1 universities specialize in subsidizing for private industry.<sup>18</sup> But to arrive at a political project in our analysis of these processes and spaces, we must heed Giovanni Arrighi's call to remember that at the heart of Marx's analysis in *Capital* is "the labor process as the contested terrain of managerial prerogatives and workers' resistance to exploitation," or Frederic Jameson's recent claim that Marx's interest in commodification and circulation really had to do with an attempt to apprehend unemployment and its discontents.<sup>19</sup>

At UW-Madison, dining and food services are one of the largest employers on its campus, reflecting the broader growth trends of the U.S. economy towards the increasing feminization of labor and expansion in care and reproductive work. With the massive expansion in university and college populations, the services to provide for them have grown in both quantity and quality—whereas the cafeteria at UW-Madison was once open at three discrete times of the day, the university now proudly offers cafeteria and market-based services from 7:00 AM to 1:00 AM. But while resources are spent lavishly on the aesthetics of dining facilities, workers wages stagnate (classified employees at UW-Madison haven't seen a pay raise in six years), hours are cut short, and job security is increasingly diminished by revamped HR systems. Over 600 of the non-student workers at UW-Madison make under the Madison city living wage of \$12.62/hour, though it's worth noting that other living-wage standards for Madison, one set by MIT and another by the National Coalition for Low Income Housing, come in at closer to \$17 or \$19, respectively.

Currently, low-wage workers across campus make anywhere from \$8.80 to \$15 an hour, and while the university has committed to raising those workers' wages currently under the living wage to the city's living wage of \$12.62/hour through a recent restructuring process, this wage gain comes at the cost of increased managerial powers to review and dismiss workers, alongside a shift towards individuated merit pay for further raises. Add to this the aggressive efforts by the university to free itself from the state and we start to get a better sense of the contradictory movements of expansion and contraction in which the university is trending: expanding service and space, contracting wages and work security. Thus, the material expansion of the university requires, like any other capitalist industry, both oppressive and exploitative practices. This contradiction does not simply need to be better understood, as the straightforward model of knowledge production is too comfortable a position for academics to take, but rather needs to be intensified through our practices within and beyond the classroom. Indeed, it may be the case that there is considerable potential for locating greater class affinity between students and workers given the context we sketch above. Nonetheless, following Roggero, it is absolutely crucial to say that such relationships will only be produced through struggle within and against the university.

## V. Conclusion

We must be careful here, for our intention is neither to suggest that the classroom cannot be one potential site of political intervention, nor to espouse that we prioritize organizing over an analysis of our situations (Although, in our contemporary academic milieu, the latter hardly seems a risk). As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney affirm, a classroom is far from the only possible site of what they call “study,” but it is one of them.<sup>20</sup> And there are certainly ways to integrate a pedagogy of the university into the regular business of teaching. These include the controversial gambit of making a statement about why students should not call a contingent faculty member “professor,” as well as organizing an entire course, let’s say a first-year writing course, around thematics of contemporary struggles in higher education.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, as we have hoped to show, the notion of the classroom as a sort of “public” is itself plagued by insuperable contradictions. First and foremost, the conduct of teaching assumes and to some degree depends on the formal equality of enrolled students, which constitutes a sort of performative fiction within the social medium of the classroom. In the genre of the discussion-based class, all are expected to participate. Yet the fictionality of such formal equality is sustained by what may very well be the substantive inequality manifested in the life histories among the assembled students. Even more damningly, the veil of equality occludes the experience of all those excluded from the classroom. If “the public” always depended on an invisibilized demarcation between those who were “counted” and those who did not “count,” and if those exclusions always operated on predictable classed, raced, and gendered lines, the ongoing neoliberalization of higher education is likely to leave our classrooms whiter and wealthier than ever, and, indeed, to discourage forms of critique among those who have accessed a measure of socioeconomic mobility by way of higher education and hope to keep on climbing.

A class composition or co-research approach as we have tried to use it here necessarily differs from the dominant critical modes of analyzing the contemporary and historical university, frequently but not exclusively associated with the field of critical university studies, which takes as its object the emergence of what is variously termed “the neoliberal university” and/or “academic capitalism.” While our analysis here is deeply indebted to this body of study, in closing we would like to offer a few hesitations, or complications, in terms of the dichotomies through which such work is typically presented. In particular, the notion of an emergent academic capitalism suggests a prior era when the impulse behind higher education was not (or not fully) capitalist in nature, while recent work on the neoliberalization of higher education frequently harks back—whether explicitly or implicitly—to a prelapsarian “golden age” of the public university. If such analyses grasp an important shift, in other words, they also risk romanticizing the recent past, creating a series of polar binaries (public/private, Keynesian/neoliberal, good/bad, etc.) which together construct a familiar narrative of innocence and fall. Reject-

ing this nostalgic parable means understanding that the university has always operated according to the laws of capital, even as this process has been conflictual and even as the dictates of the latter have morphed and changed (Capital, after all, is nothing if not mutable). What happens when we understand the neoliberalization of higher education not as the privation or privatization of some pre-market “public,” but as a reconfiguration of a public-private binary intrinsic to capitalism, one which has always been predicated on principles of exclusion, exploitation, and (only then) selective co-optation?<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps it would mean that we must radically revise the implicit assumptions behind our analyses and action within the university. Is such theoretical and practical work aimed at recovering or even reconstituting something like the public university, or is it aimed, as we said above, at exploiting crisis points within a university subsumed by capitalism? Are we trying to preserve a space in the hopes of possessing it “again” or are we working with the knowledge that many of our institutions are already over-accumulated? If the latter, then we propose that as teachers and workers we continue shifting our paradigm from one of the public, whether that be the public university, the public humanities, or its many other unsatisfying iterations, and take up co-research instead as the model for research production. Such a shift will require far more of, and work far better than, the conjuncture of structural, historical, and theoretical analysis we attempt above. Such work would require astute ethnographies and late-night conversations, rigorous political economy and warm bonds of solidarity, and above all risking a different future than the one offered by the university today. Put more bluntly, it will require transforming the subjective positions that currently divide us between the upwardly mobile and the precarious or the low-wage and short term.<sup>23</sup> Abolishing those divisions means truly giving up on the fantasy of the public university, however, because such a fantasy is structured through them. Abandoning the historically and economically entrenched distinctions between different kinds of workers on campuses must be grounded in an analysis of that past. But it will also have to arise from an appreciation of what de Molina calls, as cited above, a “subjective structure of needs, behaviours and antagonist practices, sedimented through a long history of different struggles.” This paper has tried to balance the subjective with objective forces. While we agree with critical university studies’ desire for a free and open university, we also insist that the radical force of such desire cannot be made free from the history of dining halls, gentrified geographies, and academic capitalism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stefano Harney recently took the former position at the annual meeting of the Cultural Studies Association, when he described the university as a

"corpse." On the attempt to revitalize that corpse, see Giroux, Henry. "Higher Education and the Politics of Disruption." *Truthout*. 17 March 2015. Accessed 5 June 2015. <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/29693-higher-education-and-the-politics-of-disruption>.

<sup>2</sup> Marta Malo de Molina. "Common notions, part 1: workers-inquiry, co-research, consciousness-raising," *eicpc*. August 2005. Accessed 19 June 2015. <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0406/malo/en>.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Cleaver, "On Schoolwork and the Struggle Against It," last modified December 2003, 3, <https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver-/OnSchoolwork200312.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> "Centerpoint Logistics Park." Southwest Corridor Northwest Passage. <http://southwestcorridornorth-westpassage.org/por-tfolio/home/centerpoint-logistics-park/>

<sup>5</sup> *Endnotes: Unity in Separation*, No. 4 (London and Oakland, CA, 2015), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Katznelson, Ira. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. (New York: W.W. Norton Company & Inc., 2005).

<sup>7</sup> *Endnotes*, 106.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of how liberation struggles of the time were accommodated by the university, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> For a recent extensive and excellent debate in the Jacobin over the historical consequences of the welfare state and the unionization of the trades on African-American communities, see Cedric Robinson, "Reparations isn't a Political Demand", March 7, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/cedric-johnson-brian-jones-ta-nehisi-coates-reparations/>; David Stein, "Making Freedom a Fact," March 23, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/coates-reparations-welfare-randolph-du-bois/>; and Brian Jones, "The Socialist Case for Reparations", March 1, 2016, <https://www.jacobin-mag.com/2016/03/reparations-ta-nehisi-coates-cedric-johnson-bernie-sanders/>.

<sup>10</sup> Roggero, Gigi. "Notes on framing and re-inventing co-research." *Ephemera*. 14, no. 3 (2014): 517. Accessed 2 November 2014. <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/notes-framing-and-re-inventing-co-research>

<sup>11</sup> *Endnotes*, 112-119.

<sup>12</sup> Nemser, Dan and Brian Whitener. "Circulation and the New University." *Reclamations* blog. 8 June 2012. Accessed 8 January 2013. <http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/blog/?p=596>

<sup>13</sup> "The University of Wisconsin System 2009-11 Biennium Major Project Request."

<sup>14</sup> The difference here has to do with the fact that UW-Madison can only issue General Obligation Bonds through the state, rather than the General Revenue Bonds that UC system schools can issue. For more on this distinction, see Bob Meister, "They Pledged Your Tuition," *The Council of UC Faculty Associations*. 11 October 2009. Accessed 8 March 2015. [http://www.cucfa.org/news/2009\\_oct-11.php](http://www.cucfa.org/news/2009_oct-11.php).

<sup>15</sup> Nemser and Whitener.

<sup>16</sup> Hanson, Lenora and Elsa Noterman. "What University Administrators Gain for \$300 Million in Cuts." *reclaim UC*. 9 February 2015. Accessed 9 February 2015. <http://reclaimuc.blogspot.com-/2015/02/what-university-administrators-gain.html>

<sup>17</sup> Kelley, Robin D.G. "The Proletariat Goes to College." *Social Text*. 49 (Winter 1996), 37-42.

<sup>18</sup> Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 50-52.

<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith Goes to Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 2007), 20; Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 2014), 92.

<sup>20</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York, 2013), pp. 126-27.

<sup>21</sup> On contingent faculty using syllabi to teach about the casualization of academic labor (originally an initiative of the CUNY Adjunct Project), see Colleen Flaherty, "Don't Call Me That," *Inside Higher Ed*, 6 February 2013, [www.insidehighered.com/news/-2013/02/06/cuny-adjuncts-ask-not-be-called-professors-course-syllabuses-highlight-working](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/-2013/02/06/cuny-adjuncts-ask-not-be-called-professors-course-syllabuses-highlight-working)

<sup>22</sup> In a recent talk at the UW-Madison, Annie McClanahan described neoliberalism as not a historical condition since, "descriptions of neoliberalism often fail to differentiate it from neoclassical economics or liberalism itself, and thus ascribe to it a fundamentally contradictory and incoherent historical content." Instead, she offers that it is better understood "as an ideology, a form of subjectivity, an affective condition, a 'structure of feeling.'" "Debtor's Misprision." Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutions. 6 June 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Laura Goldblatt, "A Specter is Haunting Precarity," *Full Stop: Reviews. Interviews. Marginalia*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.full-stop.net/2014/04/23-/blog/laura-goldblatt/a-specter-is-haunting-precarity/>.

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