

## THE ONLY POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIP TO THE UNIVERSITY TODAY IS A CRIMINAL ONE

“To the university I’ll steal, and there I’ll steal,” to borrow from Pistol at the end of Henry V, as he would surely borrow from us. This is the only possible relationship to the American university today. This may be true of universities everywhere. It may have to be true of the university in general. But certainly, this much is true in the United States: it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of – this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university.

Worry about the university. This is the injunction today in the United States, one with a long history. Call for its restoration like Harold Bloom or Stanley Fish or Gerald Graff. Call for its reform like Derek Bok or Bill Readings or Cary Nelson. Call out to it as it calls to you. But for the subversive intellectual, all of this goes on upstairs, in polite company, among the rational men. After all, the subversive intellectual came under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love. Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings. And on top of all that, she disappears. She disappears into the underground, the downlow low-down maroon community of the university, into the *undercommons of enlightenment*, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.

What is that work and what is its social capacity for both reproducing the university and producing fugitivity? If one were to say teaching, one would be performing the work of the university. Teaching is merely a profession and an operation of that onto-/auto-encyclopedia circle of the state” that Jacques Derrida calls the *Universitas*. But it is useful to invoke this operation to glimpse the hole in the fence where labor enters, to glimpse its hiring hall, its night quarters. The university needs teaching labor, despite itself, or as itself, self-identical with

and thereby erased by it. It is not teaching that holds this social capacity, but something that produces the not visible other side of teaching, a thinking through the skin of teaching toward a collective orientation to the knowledge object as future project, and a commitment to what we want to call the prophetic organization. But it is teaching that brings us in. Before there are grants, research, conferences, books, and journals there is the experience of being taught and of teaching. Before the research post with no teaching, before the graduate students to mark the exams, before the string of sabbaticals, before the permanent reduction in teaching load, the appointment to run the Center, the consignment of pedagogy to a discipline called education, before the course designed to be a new book, teaching happened.

The moment of teaching for food is therefore often mistakenly taken to be a stage, as if eventually one should not teach for food. If the stage persists, there is a social pathology in the university. But if the teaching is successfully passed on, the stage is surpassed, and teaching is consigned to those who are known to remain in the stage, the sociopathological labor of the university. Kant interestingly calls such a stage “self-incurred minority.” He tries to contrast it with having the “determination and courage to use one’s intelligence without being guided by another.” “Have the courage to use your own intelligence.” But what would it mean if teaching or rather what we might call “the beyond of teaching” is precisely what one is asked to get beyond, to stop taking sustenance? And what of those minorities who refuse, the tribe of moles who will not come back from beyond (that which is beyond “the beyond of teaching”), as if they will not be subjects, as if they want to think as objects, as minority? Certainly, the perfect subjects of communication, those successfully beyond teaching, will see them as waste. But their collective labor will always call into question who truly is taking the orders of the enlightenment. The waste lives for those moments beyond teaching when you give away the unexpected beautiful phrase – unexpected, no one has asked, beautiful, it will never come back. Is being the biopower of the enlightenment truly better than this?

Perhaps the biopower of the enlightenment knows this, or perhaps it is just reacting to the objecthood of this labor as it must. But even as

it depends on these moles, these refugees, it will call them uncollegial, impractical, naive, unprofessional. And one may be given one last chance to be pragmatic – why steal when one can have it all, they will ask. But if one hides from this interpellation, neither agrees nor disagrees but goes with hands full into the underground of the university, into the Undercommons – this will be regarded as theft, as a criminal act. And it is at the same time, the only possible act.

In that undercommons of the university one can see that it is not a matter of teaching versus research or even the beyond of teaching versus the individualisation of research. To enter this space is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons. What the beyond of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing; it's about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection, because one does not possess the kind of agency that can hold the regulatory forces of subjecthood, and one cannot initiate the auto-interpellative torque that biopower subjection requires and rewards. It is not so much the teaching as it is the prophecy in the organization of the act of teaching. The prophecy that predicts its own organization and has therefore passed, as commons, and the prophecy that exceeds its own organization and therefore as yet can only be organized. Against the prophetic organization of the undercommons is arrayed its own deadening labor for the university, and beyond that, the negligence of professionalization, and the professionalization of the critical academic. The undercommons is therefore always an unsafe neighborhood.

As Fredric Jameson reminds us, the university depends upon “Enlightenment-type critiques and demystification of belief and committed ideology, in order to clear the ground for unobstructed planning and ‘development.’” This is the weakness of the university, the lapse in its homeland security. It needs labor power for this “enlightenment-type critique,” but, somehow, labor always escapes.

The premature subjects of the undercommons took the call seriously, or had to be serious about the call. They were not clear about planning, too mystical, too full of belief. And yet this labor force cannot reproduce itself, it must be reproduced. The university works for the day when it will be able to rid itself, like capital in general, of the trouble of labor. It will then be able to reproduce a labor force that understands itself as not only unnecessary but dangerous to the development of capitalism. Much pedagogy and scholarship is already dedicated in this direction. Students must come to see themselves as the problem, which, counter to the complaints of restorationist critics of the university, is precisely what it means to be a customer, to take on the burden of realisation and always necessarily be inadequate to it. Later, these students will be able to see themselves properly as obstacles to society, or perhaps, with lifelong learning, students will return having successfully diagnosed themselves as the problem.

Still, the dream of an undifferentiated labor that knows itself as superfluous is interrupted precisely by the labor of clearing away the burning roadblocks of ideology. While it is better that this police function be in the hands of the few, it still raises labor as difference, labor as the development of other labor, and therefore labor as a source of wealth. And although the enlightenment-type critique, as we suggest below, informs on, kisses the cheek of, any autonomous development as a result of this difference in labor, there is a break in the wall here, a shallow place in the river, a place to land under the rocks. The university still needs this clandestine labor to prepare this undifferentiated labor force, whose increasing specialisation and managerialist tendencies, again contra the restorationists, represent precisely the successful integration of the division of labor with the universe of exchange that commands restorationist loyalty.

Introducing this labor upon labor, and providing the space for its development, creates risks. Like the colonial police force recruited unwittingly from guerrilla neighborhoods, university labor may harbor refugees, fugitives, renegades, and castaways. But there are good reasons for the university to be confident that such elements will be exposed or forced underground. Precautions have been taken, book lists

have been drawn up, teaching observations conducted, invitations to contribute made. Yet against these precautions stands the immanence of transcendence, the necessary deregulation and the possibilities of criminality and fugitivity that labor upon labor requires. Maroon communities of composition teachers, mentorless graduate students, adjunct Marxist historians, out or queer management professors, state college ethnic studies departments, closed-down film programs, visa-expired Yemeni student newspaper editors, historically black college sociologists, and feminist engineers. And what will the university say of them? It will say they are unprofessional. This is not an arbitrary charge. It is the charge against the more than professional. How do those who exceed the profession, who exceed and by exceeding escape, how do those maroons problematize themselves, problematize the university, force the university to consider them a problem, a danger? The undercommons is not, in short, the kind of fanciful communities of whimsy invoked by Bill Readings at the end of his book. The undercommons, its maroons, are always at war, always in hiding.

## **THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AND PROFESSIONALIZATION**

But surely if one can write something on the surface of the university, if one can write for instance in the university about singularities – those events that refuse either the abstract or individual category of the bourgeois subject – one cannot say that there is no space in the university itself? Surely there is some space here for a theory, a conference, a book, a school of thought? Surely the university also makes thought possible? Is not the purpose of the university as *Universitas*, as liberal arts, to make the commons, make the public, make the nation of democratic citizenry? Is it not therefore important to protect this *Universitas*, whatever its impurities, from professionalization in the university? But we would ask what is already not possible in this talk in the hallways, among the buildings, in rooms of the university about possibility? How is the thought of the outside, as Gayatri Spivak means it, already not possible in this complaint?