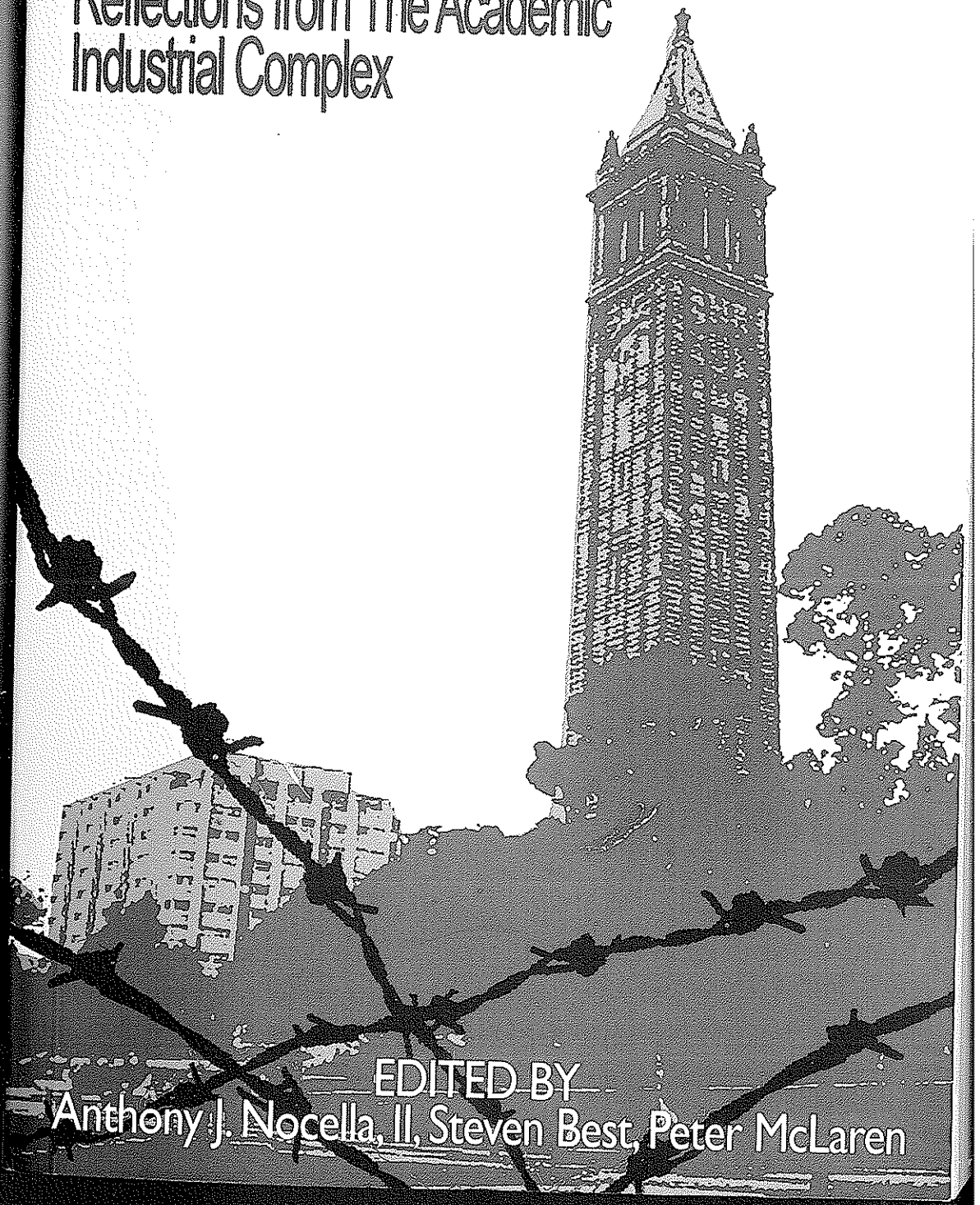
Academic Repression

Reflections from The Academic Industrial Complex



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Afterword

Management's *Kulturkampf*

Marc Bousquet

THIS VOLUME COULD NOT BE TIMELIER. The editors have brought together an exceptionally diverse collection of desperately-needed perspectives on two generations of backlash and reactionary struggle by university management, in close alliance with state and corporate actors. Rather than a feature of a distant era of McCarthyism, or an immediate reaction to 60s radicalism, the assault on academic freedom has accelerated and intensified in the long, grinding era that began in 1980. In July 2007, the American Sociological Association reported that one-third of its members felt that their academic freedoms were threatened, a significantly higher figure than the one-fifth ratio recorded during the McCarthy years. How are we to understand this regression and current moment? How did we get here?

Most people feel that the answer lies, at least in part, in something called the "corporatization" of the university. This is at best an awkward term, because it can and does mean so many things. For one group of observers, it especially signifies the myriad direct relationships between nonprofit campuses and profit-seeking organizations. The consequences of these intimacies between educational and capitalist institutions are of course enormous, ranging from the corporate corruption of research (Washburn 2006) and the militarization of the curriculum (Saltman 2003) to the rampant commercialization of campus life (food, housing, clothing, leisure, culture, and so on). Ali Zaidi's pathbreaking reporting of the relationships between corporate entities and institutions as diverse as Adelphi and the University of Rochester, some of it printed here, has been widely influential in this vein. As one commenter noted, comparing the ethics of university management of campuses like Adelphi to Enron (analogies involving sweetheart deals, corruption, off-balance-sheet transactions, and the like): "It is not the extremity of Adelphi that was the problem, but its very commonality. Adelphi was something of an extreme to be sure, but only in carrying certain widespread assumptions and practices of institutional executives—union busting, program cutbacks, privatization of costs, heavy capitalization, insider enrichment, a logical free-market

sequence—beyond the realm of what even New York's conservative attorney general saw as legitimate" (Lauter 2003, 75).

As the experiences of Carl Boggs, Michael Parenti, Ward Churchill, Norman Finkelstein, Sami Al-Arian, Victoria Fontan, and countless others demonstrate, the close relationships with commercial and industrial interests are also intimate dealings with military interests and the state itself. Rather than enjoying special freedom from retaliation under the rubric of academic freedom, taking on the state from a position within the university can mean special vulnerability, as the experience of these five scholars and so many others strongly suggests. And as Stephen Sheehi and numerous other contributors to this volume point out, the vulnerability of some produces a climate of fear for all. One major component of the climate of fear, as so evident in the Ward Churchill case, is the ease with which state power, corporate media, and administrators can highjack the system of peer accountability. Even to those who don't trouble to inform themselves, the lurking suspicion that the victim of the show trial wasn't guilty only adds to the power and terror of the corporate-state complex.

A second usage of the term "corporatization" refers to the rise of for-profit education corporations themselves. With the active support of reactionary government policy, the education industry has taken market shares from traditional campuses, especially the community colleges, and, between 2001 and 2003, publicly-traded education corporations averaged annual returns on investment between 63 and 75 percent.

With these large profits in mind, it is sometimes argued that the rapid growth of for-profit education vendors has "influenced" other campuses (e.g., see Cox 2003). This is an appealing fantasy. However, the reality is that non-profits adopted corporate-managerial techniques long before the for-profit competitors shot to prominence. In fact, as I've observed elsewhere (2008, 8–10), it is the techniques and culture of super-exploitation developed by the not-for-profits (to enable their own accumulation strategies) that made the huge profits of the for-profits possible, not the other way around.

Without any pressure from for-profit competitors, the nonprofits eagerly and voluntarily reduced the tenured stratum to a thin veneer at a broad swath of institutions—receiving accreditation for a curriculum largely delivered by doctoral candidates, masters students, and even undergraduates. Egged on by deregulation, privatization, and lax enforcement, for-profit educational institutions emerged to use the same staffing methods of the nonprofits in the service of maximizing revenue, and the nonprofits, having established contingent appointment as the norm, could hardly cry foul on the basis of the for-profit's nontenurable faculty.

The fact that the nonprofit campuses showed the for-profit schools how to accumulate record returns on capital is, in my view, a key insight for further analysis.

Plainly put, the leading edge of contemporary capitalism is the kind of super-exploitation practiced by campus employers. All other employers want to be like Higher Ed.

As of 2005, at least 70 percent of US faculty were teaching on contingent appointments. Counting the graduate students who do the bulk of teaching on many campuses, and factoring in the tendency of administrations to under-report the non-tenurable, the real number may be 80 percent or more, and the trend line continues sharply upward. At nonprofit institutions, the scant fraction of the tenurable comprise little more than a small group of grant-writers—more and more of them funded by profit-seeking corporations—and the candidate pool for administration posts. At many institutions, the tenurable group amount to little more than the individuals who have served, are serving, or soon enough will serve as deans, department chairs, program heads, and other functionaries.

For decades now it has been the case that the norm of faculty appointment is not tenure or the prospect of tenure, but extreme tenuousness: faculty serving contingently are dismissed at will, enjoy few to no due process protections, often lack basic academic freedoms such as the choice of syllabus or course texts, and many have no future in the profession except on the basis of pleasing management.

We must ask: what does it mean that extreme precariousness is the normal, unexceptional experience of academic employment in the twenty-first century?

The current president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Cary Nelson, told me bluntly in a 2007 interview that faculty serving contingently at most institutions simply don't have academic freedom at all, echoing the conclusions of the organization's ground-breaking 2003 report on contingent appointment. If that's true, "academic freedom" has not been an academic norm for decades, and likely will not be for decades to come.

As Douglas Kellner, Robert Jensen, Emma Perez, Takis Fotopolous, Bill Martin, Mark Rupert, Peter Castro, and Dana Cloud document, individuals and organizations outside the academy have long assaulted academic freedom directly, often with the collaboration of institutional executives. More typically, administrations have curtailed academic freedom by the simple expedient of reserving it—in limited, degraded forms—to the privileged few. The fact is that it is far more typical for police officers, civil servants, and kindergarten teachers to enjoy the basic workplace protections of due process normally associated with tenure than rank-and-file college faculty. As Caroline Kaltefleiter and Mechthild Nagel point out, one does not need to be an enemy of the state, or even a radical philosopher or critical pedagogue, to be dismissed without cause. Any group of five faculty serving on term contracts will have a dozen stories of being terminated for grading too harshly, questioning student assumptions, assigning too much reading, or the like.

In a recent essay, "White Collar Proletariat: The Case of Becky Meadows" (2007), I reported on one of my former grad students whose working-class experience of schooling echoes that of Deric Shannon and William Armaline. Like them, she struggled to pay for books and navigate the institution, but, with the majority of "successful" working class students, she absorbed the lessons of compliance. The chief goal in her academic career was literally to join the administration (sincerely, if naively, believing that as dean she could do some good). Despite her entirely pro-administrative orientation, she was fired from her first full-time faculty job, department chair at an Ivy Tech campus, for proposing a country-music concert to help raise funds for the health insurance of campus adjunct faculty.

Even for the privileged minority, precariousness strongly conditions—and I would say acculturates—the few who succeed in entering the tenurable track: precariousness as a graduate student and graduate employee; temporary hiring as the typical funding option after graduate assistantship expires; contingent appointment during years of failed searches for a tenurable position; and the insecurity of probationary employment (as Maria Cotera's report makes clear: if Andrea Smith can't feel secure, who can?). Moreover, there is the burden of living with education loan debt on bartenders' wages after securing tenure; and the belated discovery that promotion and/or a securing a decent living can depend on pleasing or becoming management. Let's not forget; the fragility of many tenured appointments themselves, which are predicated on the continuation of departments—easily shut down on administrative whim—or on due process protections that have grown gossamer-thin at all but a few institutions with a vigilant or militant faculty. While the minority of faculty serving in the tenure stream are heavily-unionized by US standards, it has generally been the weakest sort of trade-unionism, one that is profoundly complicit in the permatemping and management dominion of campuses and that is all-too happy to sell future faculty into contingent appointment in exchange for 4percent salary increases.

In short, the tenured—as individuals in myriad ways and collectively in faculty senates, committees, and unions—have been actively complicit in disassembling the tenure system and the academic freedoms associated with it.

To a very real extent: we did this to ourselves.

Explaining how we got to this sad impasse is the goal of a third line of thought that approaches "corporatization" as the active, intentional, aggressive transformation of academic culture by university management.

In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars and journalists documented a vigorous, rising "student culture" associated with political activism and lifestyle experimentation, which co-existed with a liberal faculty culture, with strong left-labor contact points that fostered free speech as well as certain civil rights, including collective bargaining. Christian Davenport is correct to point out that the notion of a fundamental relation-

ship between academic life and certain freedoms emerged in recent history, in close relationship to continual, watchful maintenance and activist struggle by determined, diverse actors. With strong faculty and student culture in support of basic academic and social freedoms, those liberties have traditionally existed in the limited form of protections for those who practice what Michael Parenti accurately describes as "politically safe brands of teaching and research." In bold contrast, Parenti notes, "It is a rare radical scholar who has not encountered difficulties when seeking employment or tenure, regardless of his or her qualifications." Many readers of this volume will already understand from experience the vulnerable relationship of the Left to the institutions of liberalism and the dynamics of "repressive tolerance" chronicled by Mark LeVine, even in the best of times. With weak, quietist faculty and student cultures, such as at present, academic freedoms have largely melted away, even for the most compliant.

With the era of reaction that emerged in 1980, a new culture appeared on campus, the culture of administration, which swiftly rose to dominance over students and faculty. This administrative regime emerged in connection with Toyota-inspired organizational-culture theorists who promoted a managerial paradigm for corporations. The purpose of nurturing an administrative culture—one of, by, and for administrators, a bureaucratic solidarity founded in administrator identity, ritual, language, practice, and daily being-together—was itself, literally, reactionary, a response to the perceived strength of existing faculty and student cultures. Administrators now envisioned themselves, in cultural-materialist terms, as "change agents" whose goal was to shape faculty beliefs and values so that they conformed to, rather than contradicted, the instrumental, economic, and hierarchical values of managerial dominance.

Critical contributions by Gaile Cannella and Henry Giroux in this book (and elsewhere) join with the single most significant and sustained analysis of administration's effort to transform campus culture. I am speaking here of the seminal work of Sheila Slaughter, Larry Leslie, and Gary Rhoades (1997, 2004), who coined the term "academic capitalism" to describe how university administrations, in cooperation with state and capitalist actors, entice and compel faculty to engage in market behavior. The full range of these activities is by now enormous and familiar, and include entrepreneurship, competition for resources, incentivized research mission, return-on-investment valuation of activities, and assertion of intellectual property rights. Michael Yates (1998) has closely related these cultural strategies to the critical union literature of speed-up and "management by stress."

An essential companion to the critical, left-labor literature on management's *kulturkampf*, however, is management's own vast literature. Far from concealing its purpose, management is overt in its intention to control the campus by spinning tales (Burton Clark's "organizational saga" [1972]) that bind individuals together, and offering incentives to conform to the organizational mission, while starving out the opposition. In a key essay paralleling the management of HMOs to higher education, "Lessons from Health Care," one of the architects of responsibility-center-management, William Massy (1996), actually celebrates the contemptible, murderous practices of insurers that refuse payment for procedures that health professionals dub necessary to save lives. With denial of payment, Massy cheerfully observes, insurers trigger "organizational learning" so that hospitals, clinics, and individual practitioners "will be less likely to perform the procedure again" (191). Like doctors and their practices, tenure-stream faculty and their organizations (e.g., disciplinary associations, unions, senates, and departments) learn to take the extra ration of gravy and shut up.

Amory Starr's experience underscores the utility and manageability of institutional culture, incorporating non-threatening "dissent," but swiftly moving to isolate and subordinate those who challenge or unintentionally undermine administrative control. One of the essential insights that Slaughter and Rhoades draw out in *Academic Capitalism in the New Economy* is that "the university" is not an innocent victim "subverted by external actors," but rather is a location situating myriad complicit actors—administrators, faculty, students, staff, and workers—in intimate collaboration with corporate and state interests. What this moment of near total administrative-cum-capitalist/state dominance of campus culture means is that any insubordination—for instance, agitation with respect to ability status, racial or gender discrimination, or in-house environmental policies—can mean swift retaliation. Short of severe penalties such as termination, this reprisal often represents dissent or criticism as uncollegial and unprofessional, as if the subordinated were, without administrative intervention, a risk to the freedoms of the compliant and privileged, and to a safe, peaceful, and secure "learning environment" (see the essays by Joy James, Liat Ben-Moshe and Sumi Colligan, Micere Mugo, and Richard Kahn). As Howard Zinn urges, those who can't leave the campus must at least find ways to build counterpower from outside.

With *Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic-Industrial Complex*, Anthony J. Nocella II, Steven Best, and Peter McLaren have compiled an amazing volume that throws a blinding light on the causes, nature, and effects of the dramatic transformations shaking up universities and colleges, while it shatters quite a few myths regarding the much-fabled "free speech" environment of academia.

Academic repression is, in most cases, inextricable from management's efforts—conditioned by larger social, economic, and political forces—to maximize the extraction of value from its own workforce, and to groom professionals, managers, and trained workers for the production and reproduction of capital. Separating the compliant wheat from the dissident chaff, administrators label those who don't get in or don't persist as failures—market losers bearing a well-deserved fate.

This means we face the oppressor daily, in the workplace, as workers. From Rhoades' early formulation for the degraded posture of tenure-stream faculty (the

"managed professional"), I think we have moved to a position where we have to acknowledge that "normal" faculty—serving contingently or living on food-service wages after decades of work and service—are proletarians. Correspondingly, we need to concede that the more fortunate, in the steadily shrinking minority represented by the tenure stream, are, at best, a modest labor aristocracy.

But this begs a question: is the de-professionalization of university and college faculty to be mourned? Certainly the impunity with which management violates our nostalgic sense of professional privilege and pride is hurtful to us psychologically as well as materially, as we see our labor increasingly without illusion, as steadily directed by an administrative hierarchy working in the direct service of capital accumulation.

Management's campaign against the professoriate's professional culture has been too successful for its own good. In our dawning sense of ourselves as workers, there are prospects to celebrate. Once more, there is an academic labor movement, now led by those in the most precarious, always-already repressed positions—graduate students and term faculty. Discovering that we are repressed and exploited in the workplace—therefore that we are in fact workers—is itself a major victory. The step that remains is to seize the understanding that as workers we, not management, are the ultimate "change agents." In accepting the unpleasant truth that we allowed this to happen, we learn that we could have done otherwise. Perhaps we still can.

About the Authors

John Asimakopoulos, Ph.D. is Director of the scholar-activist Transformative Studies Institute (TSI) and Assistant Professor of Sociology at the City University of New York-Bronx. He also edits the interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal *Theory in Action*. His work focuses on labor, globalization, and sociological theory. He has taught Economics, Sociology, and Political Science at many New York and New Jersey universities. His publications include a number of articles and books focusing on the history of social movements and how they can inform a new working class global movement for the ushering of epochal change toward a just society. His works champion the formation of a counter-ideology, independent working-class media and educational institutions, and direct action toward this end. As the child of immigrant Greek factory workers, formerly landless farmers, he has dedicated his life to promoting equality and social justice for the working people of the world. He is currently working with his colleagues at TSI to establish a new free and progressive university, operated by scholars. The vision is to create a new academe focusing on social justice and activist scholarship that will transform individuals and society.

William Armaline is a multi-disciplinary scholar, activist, and teacher in "Justice Studies" at San Jose State University. His recent research is on systemic racism and human rights abuses through the institutionalization and incarceration of youth. Generally, his areas of interest are social justice, inequality and youth, the philosophy and practice of human rights, and Participatory Action Research.

William Ayers is Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and author of several books including *Teaching Toward Freedom*, *A Kind and Just Parent*, *To Teach*, *Fugitive Days*, and (with Bernardine Dohrn) *Race Course*. In 2008, he was the target of a right-wing McCarthy-style attack engineered by the McCain/Palin campaign—Ayers was the "domestic terrorist" Governor Sarah Palin tirelessly accused Barack Obama of "pallin' around with." The attempt to demonize Ayers because of his activities during the Viet Nam war, and at the same time to tar Senator Obama through a guilt-by-association tactic backfired as every mention of Ayers was accompanied by a drop in the polls for the Republican team.

Liat Ben-Moshe is a finishing up her doctoral studies in Sociology, Disability Studies, and Women's Studies at Syracuse University. She is a core member of Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee (BCCC), active in anti-occupation, anti-war, and disability struggles in Israel and the US, and is trying to nibble at global capital in the process. She is committed to making all struggles inclusive and has written and presented on in/exclusivity in activism and pedagogy. She is co-editor of *Building Pedagogical Curb Cuts: Incorporating Disability in the University Classroom and Curriculum* (SU Press); author of "Infusing Disability in the Curriculum: The Case of Saramago's Blindness," in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 26 (2); and co-editor (with Sumi Colligan) of a special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, entitled "The State of Disability in Israel/Palestine."

Cary Nelson and the Struggle for the University

poetry, politics, and the profession

Edited by Michael Rothberg and Peter K. Garrett