

**On Study:  
A *Polygraph* Roundtable Discussion  
with Marc Bousquet, Stefano  
Harney, and Fred Moten**

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**Polygraph:** *While today students are certainly involved in various political and social movements, it is no longer around the figure of the student that these struggles revolve. So, we would first like to ask: what happened to the figure of the student as a political agent? In *How the University Works*, Marc Bousquet proposes that we understand the student as a worker, and while we see this as an indispensable move in many contexts, we are curious about what might be lost in identifying the student completely with the worker.<sup>1</sup> We wonder, for example, about a need or a desire to retain the specificity of the student as one who studies, or perhaps as one who postpones or even refuses work. In addition, in their piece “*The University and the Undercommons*,” Harney and Moten forward concepts of the subversive intellectual and also of a maroon community, which includes all sorts of agents and actions not entirely covered by either the figure of the student or the figure of the worker.<sup>2</sup> So, we’re curious to hear about this move away from more traditional categories of political subjectivity.*

**Fred Moten:** The question that immediately comes to my mind is whether or not a movement or political mobilization is dependent upon the figure—not just the figure of the student, but the figure as such. On the other hand, to ask that question is to immediately wonder about the body that constitutes the ground of that figure. The interplay between body and figure is reminiscent of that movement of abstraction and re-materialization that’s so powerful in Marx’s work around the interplay between labor and labor-power. So I just want to raise that question, not to try to answer it but to keep it open and maybe as something we can come back to.

If we do believe that movement or political mobilization is dependent on the figure, and on the figure of the student, then we have to ask some questions about the success rate of such movement and mobilization. In other words, at the very same time that it is cause for concern that the figure of the student is not at the center of a certain kind of political mobilization, it's also important to consider the value, the utility, the success of a range of movements that we all appeal to, especially now, on the fortieth anniversary of '68. One might retrospectively begin to evaluate those movements that were centered around the figure of the student and think through what has been gained and what was also potentially lost or given up by such a centering. I'm just answering the question with more questions, I guess.

What I would want to do is not so much keep producing questions but to step to the side of the question a bit and think through the importance of study—that maybe it might be possible to imagine a form of movement or political mobilization that would be driven by or centered on the activity of study in a way that does not require the figuration of the student, or potentially some sort of reification of the figure of the student. And so one of the things that I hope we get to talk about today is the importance of study, maybe what the relationship is between study and a good old Marxian term: our species-being. What's the relationship between what it is to be human and what it is to study? I think that might be a fruitful way to think through things; maybe we'll dig up a whole bunch of stuff that way.

**Stefano Harney:** I just want to acknowledge first that it's a real event for Marc's book to come out. We have known Marc for a while and know the work that he does and how hard he works, so for him to finally have the time to do all of this for us in book form, it's really a treat for me, and a pleasure. It occasions the question of just why does the University go to such lengths to avoid the identification of students with study. Is there a possibility that by thinking this relation of study, we could open up a politics in and beyond the university that would be a proper challenge to university power and a challenge to ourselves? I'm thinking in particular of a few aspects of study, and it makes me want to re-pose the question you asked (although I always hate people who re-pose the questions they are asked, but still...), which is: how might the student be possible in the university? It seems to me that the student would only be possible if there was already study. And so, rather than starting with the figure, if we actually started with the relation of study. One of the things that interest me about study is that study seems to me perpetually immature, perpetually premature, perpetually unready. Recently, as I've been consumed and caught up with questions of management and governance, not being ready for governance is for me of growing importance. So, I'd like to think about study with you, partly as this immaturity, partly as this premature moment, collective moment, that is not ready. Part of the reason I would like to do that is that all the work Marc has done shows me very clearly that the University is very intent on making sure that study is not at the center of what goes on at the University.

**Marc Bousquet:** I couldn't agree more that the University itself is displacing study, and therefore suggesting a further displacement of the familiar terminology for per-

sons performing study, that is, students. I wonder, Steve, what you would call the embodied persons describing themselves as students. How would you characterize their relation, since, I think we probably would all agree that it is not one of study, and that that is a source of communal disappointment?

**Stefano Harney:** Well, I'm still working through exactly how I would characterize the relation of study in general, but I don't mean to suggest that we wouldn't have to, through analysis, consider the student, at least in part, as worker. Certainly we have to do that. For me, it's more a question of what we want to do with that. One of the risks that I've persistently encountered in university politics is that in the process of the battle, I forget why I'm doing it. Suddenly I'm doing it because it's a battle. So, figuring out some way to maybe use study as a way of remembering why I'm doing it is not just a matter of making myself stronger to do it, or making us stronger, but really also because it would have everything to do with strategy and tactic. To put that very clearly, if we have a lot of energy around the fact that we are exploited and we're not getting a chance to study, there's different things you could do with that. You could decide to contact the local union, and fight it out through the local union, and that's where your political energies would go, and that's fine. But you also might say, I don't want to change one institution for another, the union, where I know there's no study, where there's nothing, you know, there's a research department full of thugs. That doesn't seem like much of a trade. It's partly about tactics and strategy. You have to say this is about study, in part, because you're not studying, you're doing work.

**Marc Bousquet:** I was really captured by the address that Steve gave last week at CUNY Baruch College on the city as business school, which traverses a lot of concerns, including the pervasive role of governance in the network of crossings between what used to be called public and private interest. In introducing the concept of study, it raised for me the question not just of what's going on with those students who work, or those persons who work within the University, but of the persons with leisure who do not study, and the persons with leisure who do not study while becoming professionalized, and being professionalized in a variety of ways, but with specific intensity in the business school. This is a conversation I had with some of you last night, two bourbons in. Reading your address is the first time I can think of in 5 years or more that I have been interested at all in talking about curriculum. Because I haven't known how to think about its transformation, and certainly it's the first possibility I have seen to aggressively address what has happened to curriculum. If the curriculum has been evacuated of study, and something else has been substituted for study, that's what I'm looking for: what is the name of that other thing?

**Polygraph:** *One of the things that we were curious about is recognition, and how this is very different in your respective projects. For instance, Marc's discussion of the student-worker in *How the University Works* implies a desire for recognition of the work that students do. On the other hand in the "Seven Theses" Fred and Steve propose that the "only relationship to the university is a criminal one." I don't know if you would*

*consider the subversive intellectual or the criminal or the maroon to be figures, but in all of those cases one does not want to be recognized. If you're a thief that's the worst thing that can happen to you; you don't want to be called out as a thief, you want to be unrecognized. Could you talk a bit about the difference there in how thinking agency in terms of imperceptibility or something like that would relate to study as something you have to steal?*

**Fred Moten:** I think it links up with Marc's question; maybe the follow-up to Marc's question is the question right before your question. Let's say that there is a kind of curriculum that has been imposed upon the one who would be a student, and in that imposition the one who would be a student is rendered a non-student, or rendered incapable of studying or at least his or her capacity for studying is greatly diminished. Given that, the question would then be: is that capacity actually liquidated, or has it been suppressed and diffused in ways that then require the one who would study to go and find it, as it were, in a whole bunch of secret, surreptitious zones, that in maybe one complex movement one both finds an object of study and finds study. In such a movement one also finds oneself as a student, but the issue then is how you go about that process. In other words, given what it is that the University appears to demand of the ones who would be students, how do you deal with that demand and then go do something else?

Here's where a range of issues come into play, where I think it really is necessary to get some kind of a clear sense of what it is that the University actually now seems to be demanding from the ones who would be students, get some sense of what that curriculum is. My tendency is to believe that, on the one hand, what they demand is massive and huge, and if they get what they demand it has massive implications, but then there's this other sense that I have that what they really demand is not actually much. It's a massive demand that does not actually make much of a demand on the one upon whom it is imposed. What I'm really thinking of, just on an experiential level, and maybe it happened to a bunch of you guys, it certainly happened to me a couple times as an undergraduate, when I realized that what they wanted me to do in order to get a certain grade was really a minimal thing; I could do what they wanted me to do and then do what I wanted to do in terms of study, in terms of a certain kind of collective intellectual and alcoholic activity (in which Steve and I have been engaged in very serious ways for well over two decades now), but that's what I really wanted to do. You mention bourbon and I don't think it's peripheral, you know, but that's another issue. What I'm saying is there's that moment when you realize that they're not even asking that much of you. The realization that they're not asking that much actually makes a whole range of things possible that had not seemed possible before. I think there's another moment in which this can occur in graduate school around exams, when you start to realize, you know, "Wait, is that the question you were asking me? I thought you were going to ask me some deep question that I would have to think about, and instead what you have done is you made me go through this horrific experience in order to ask me simple, stupid questions just to see if I did the reading. I thought we had all agreed that we were all going to do the reading and

you just asked me this to see if I was going to do it. Why? Why did you ask me that? What were you getting out of me? What were you demanding of me when you set this situation up?" The demand is a certain kind of commitment to a certain kind of professionalization, which, if you allow yourself to be fully taken by it, you are well on the way to doing the work of reproducing the University as it already is.

I'm talking a long time because I'm trying to get at a point which is kind of hard to say. I'll see if I can say it a simple way, try and repeat it at least. What they demand of you is massive, but it's as if what they demand from you is the obsession about what they demand from you. Somehow, appearing to give them that thing that they demand where appearing to give that makes you apparently recognizable, then opens up the possibility of a whole range of activities that you could undertake that would operate under the rubric of a certain kind of criminality or misrecognition. It's a moment of dissimulation, and I just think it opens up a range of possibilities. There's a moment where you just don't take it. Again, it's easy for me to say this. I've got a job, and tenure, at this sort of ridiculously luxurious place, but it still doesn't disqualify what I'm saying from being possibly true, which is that there's a certain fundamental right, and maybe even an obligation, on the part of the one who would be a student not to take certain structures within the University seriously, to actually look at them clearly and give them all of the value that they actually deserve, which is really, really not much.

**Stefano Harney:** That was really deep, so can I tell you a joke? I had a colleague at the University of London who was invited to the Fuqua Business School to give a talk. So he prepared the talk, shows up at the school and says, "I'm really honored to be here at Duke. I am going to start with a quote by Fred Jameson, since I'm here." He does the talk. At the end they come up and say, "That was a really good talk. Who is this Fred Jameson guy?" The point of that story is not that Fred Jameson is insufficiently famous, it's that this colleague of mine went across and he did Fred Jameson at the Fuqua Business School. And although they didn't know who he was, they loved the talk. Two things I want to say about that. One is if you want to look for the critical, look no further than the business school. It describes every course in the Business School: critical approaches to the market, critical approaches to accounting, etc., etc. But at the same time, to echo what I think Fred [Moten] is talking about here, the real burden on those students is that the curriculum is about almost nothing. This makes it a really difficult curriculum at one level because they have to become this almost nothing. And many times they are successful, as you know once you meet them as trustees; they are fully nothing by that point. But I think there is, nonetheless, in the Business School more than anywhere else, there is this kind of space to say, "Critical, what do you mean critical?" So I think this question of a kind of emptiness is something that we need to turn to our advantage. To fill it with study would be one useful thing.

**Polygraph:** *In our readings this past year we found ourselves moving further and further away from understanding what the University actually is in our contemporary moment. We find in your projects really different approaches to thinking about the University. We would like to hear how you might describe the University as a site of*

*production, of work and/or immaterial labor, of education, of research, of profit, of emancipatory projects and so on. I guess it's a real simple question, but what is the status of the University today? What kind of site is it? Is it even possible to answer that question? At what point does the conversation about the University itself break down? Is that the point of these conversations? I am thinking about the boundedness or unboundedness of this thing called the University.*

*In addition, since we are circling around the question of critique, maybe you could comment on the relation between the university understood as the site of critique, and the University as it emerges as a very different kind of space in "Seven Theses."*

**Fred Moten:** One of the things that comes to mind immediately is this notion of governance, which I take wholly from Steve's piece called, "Governance and the Undercommons." So I am going to quote this passage that says "And what does governance look like? I would say in large part it looks like the continuous production and exhibition of self-generated intelligible public interests."<sup>3</sup> I take that to mean that the insidious way that governance manifests itself is in a massive over-proliferation of choices, which are probably best understood as false choices. This returns me to your earlier question, Marc: What would we call this body if we don't call it a student? Well, I think at the institution I just left, there was no decree that ever came out that said that we should call the student this name, but everything pointed toward the student as consumer. And the work that the student was required to do in the University, by the University, was the work of consumption, which was manifest primarily as a constant proliferation of choices. And part of the professoriate's task was to produce more and more stuff that the student had to make a choice about. I think about this too at the level of exams in graduate studies. There was a moment when in English departments there was a canon, and the way that the exams operated was like this: I took my exams and it was sixteenth-century, seventeenth-century, and John Donne. It was pretty straightforward. There was never any of this endless torture of making one's own lists. The self-administration of the exam is justified as a giving over of choice, but within a context of coercion. It is coercion made to look nice and be smooth—the mythical velvet handcuff type thing. So that strikes me as a mode of governance. I guess the thing that I am thinking a lot about now is whether or not it's possible to move beyond a discourse that is predicated on these, I think, misguided ideas about choice. But I think I am far away from where the question started.

**Marc Bousquet:** Maybe I'll follow Fred and throw in something in your direction, as I would follow exactly the same point about the nature of governance as the act of production of public interests. I guess the angle I would take on it is similar. I would take it in the direction of NGOs and this sort of Clinton-Blair technocratic tradition of the management of the movement and the multiplication of the movements which can be read as a version of consumerist choice in movement culture—but one that is very aggressively managed in very particular sorts of ways. So I guess I would love to hear a little bit more about the ways in which the University can be a site of these kinds of unprofessional resistances, anti-professional resistances even. I talked

a little bit about the UPS workforce in my classroom, and I cannot think of a better phrase than “dumb insolence” to describe the affect of the student who showed up in my class after working until 4 a.m., having a couple of beers, and at 8 a.m. sitting there with alcohol on his breath wondering what the fuck he was doing there. And so where do we go with that manifestation and does it become something larger at the site of the University, or do we have to follow it as it’s kicked back to Appalachia as failure and waste?

**Stefano Harney:** These are interesting questions that are kind of swirling for me now. I think I would like to say a quick thing about NGOs, creative cities, creative industries (I don’t know if you have any locally, but coming soon to a neighborhood near you), and something about the University. I think they’re connected. I’ll say this as quickly as I can. The NGO is in some ways the laboratory—the research lab—of this new kind of governance. The point about this new kind of governance is that it’s based on the ethos of the NGO. The NGO is not satisfied until you are speaking for yourselves. The NGO isn’t here to speak for you; the NGO is here because you’re not speaking for yourselves. The day you are speaking for yourselves the NGO’s work is done. So getting you to do that is the constant project of the NGO, which was borrowed by the Clintons and by all sorts of corporate governance models. The solicitation out of you of interest that can then be taken up, collected, and used is the movement of the NGO. Gayatri Spivak has a lot on this, so I don’t need to go over it more. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri also bring this to our attention with the concept of immaterial labor. The point about your interests is that they’re directly productive and that’s why we need them. But they’re also not apparent to capital: hence the NGO, and hence the University. This also means that there is a certain emptiness at the heart of that operation: purposeful emptiness. The University must remain empty as a way of pulling these interests out of you. It’s no good anymore for the University to deliver a national curriculum as if capital could still use it. It’s obsolete.

And to the creative cities, if we dare! I don’t know if you know this whole discourse of Richard Florida.<sup>4</sup> He has all these theories about how urban development is gonna take place through the infusion of culture and creative industries, which in turn are marked and represented by figures of the artist, queer couples, people who frequent expensive coffee shops, all these sociological profiles. And the point is not to find the profile, but actually for the city to create it through policy. So again there is this attempt to manage something out of a population that then will be made productive. It’s more awkward than what goes on in the NGOs and the University, and I think it’s ultimately doomed to fail. But the point about these creative industries and the notion of “creative cities” is that you’re supposed to be able to fit yourself into them. Richard Florida writes all these books, he has a new one called, *Who’s Your City?*, which is supposed to be like a management text.<sup>5</sup> The only possible reply is, “My city is New Orleans, the most creative city in the country, and it’s been wiped off the face of the earth.” I don’t really see the connection between survival and creativity at quite that level. I grant that the creative cultural industries are probably fake, but

I think the NGOs and the University are for real around this governance question, which is why I bring it all the way around to study again.

Study isn't ready for governance and study needs to be self-directed. Even at a place full of such riches as Duke, the University is lacking. Maybe it's not what we can do for the community of Durham because of all our rich resources; maybe there is also a certain lack here that means you have to go outside to study. This is not something that I thought of; it's something that I encountered recently at a social center in Rome called ESC [*Eccedi sottrai crea*]. This social center set up just outside the gates of *La Sapienza*, the big university in Rome, and basically said to people, "If you want to study Rousseau, if you want to study for your exams, we are going to be doing a study group over here on Rousseau, and then next week we are going to do Montesquieu. Want to come over, out of the University where they are not teaching anything, and come study with us?" So that is a different model, obviously, of what you do strategically with the fact that a student in *La Sapienza* is just some bureaucratic piece of paper that gets moved around. It's not the same move as some of the things that Marc documents. It's a different move based on thinking of the University as hollow and that study might have to occur not within it but somewhere else.

**Fred Moten:** This outside of the University is inside of it, too, it seems to me. One way to think about it, just to augment Steve's point, is that I still consider the University to be a refuge for study. It's a place where, if you want to study—there are not a lot of better places, especially in the United States, you could go if you want to engage in study. And all of the critiques of the University, all of the exposure of the corporate nature of the University doesn't negate that point. To lose sight of that point is to lose sight of something important. That raises the question of what one's relationship ought to be to a place which is, on the one hand, a refuge for study, but on the other, an institution that exerts a quite vicious and brutal—however much it is comfortable and gentle—control over study. So much so that it tends even to render study less possible than it ought to be and thereby produces the effect that Steve just mentioned: namely, you went to the University to study Rousseau, but now you have to go out of the University in order to study Rousseau. What I'm interested in, however, is whether or not there are other surreptitious underground zones within the refuge. Or another way to put it might be that we consider a refuge a place you run to in order to be a little bit more free. But maybe that running to the refuge, which, however legitimate it remains, is a possible choice that has to be bound up with a whole bunch of extra running that one does within the refuge. That as much as it's necessary to talk about escape from the institution, it is also necessary to talk about escape *within* that institution. The question then becomes how one takes up this other kind of refuge status within the University.

**Audience:** *I wanted to follow up on this idea of the outside, which is present in both of your projects. I felt you were grappling with how the outside is figured in the "Seven Theses on the Undercommons." The moment of criminality—I think we were facetiously characterizing it as stealing office supplies from Duke and then running over to, like, your local nonprofit, and, you know, making copies for them or something like that—*



*implies a relationship to the outside. In your work also, Marc, there is a moment at the end of Chapter Five where you talk about student debt, and who really is incurring the cost of student debt. It's not just the students, it's the community. You say it takes a village to create the situation of debt, because they're going to be the ones incurring the cost. So pushing the question of the relation of the university to its outside, is the outside a collectivity? A place? A lever where you can put pressure on the University itself?*

**Marc Bousquet:** This is the first time I've heard anybody say it in just this way: the traditional hope for the University as refuge is to see it as a universal point from which to leverage anything else you want to do. This is the fantasy place, the cloud-circled meta-plane from which you can emerge as the director of the transformation. Yet, for the first time, someone has said, we need the fulcrum point to be someplace outside in order to leverage what's fucked up within the University. So that's an interesting reversal.

To address your question about the outside, I'd like to turn to an earlier example of extra-institutional study. It might be useful to look at the shift in industrialization during the early nineteenth century. There you have a practice of worker literacy, and very much outside of, not just the University, but of schooling altogether. This moment is deeply enabled by the production of cheap badges, of flags, of uniforms for voluntary associations, so that people can parade around as members of a self-educated group that produces its own culture. This production allows them to aim at solidarity within, and after having produced that solidarity, to appear as a collective actor in some version of the public. The ability to print its own culture, to purchase the services of printers and to distribute artifacts that are of and for the group, is part of that moment of worker self-education that then began to mutate and became middle-class. This movement, which began as self-determination rapidly became an instrument of social control. But I think we can use that moment to reflect on our present. How, for instance, do new media work in this context? In what sense do new media enable new forms of self-education, of the production of alternative solidarities as well as cultural production outside the model of mass media? What is this moment and how does it relate to our hopes for a new model of educating oneself as part of a group? I think this links up to the sort of anti-professional model of education that Fred and Steve have articulated so well when they talked about professionalism as neglect of sociality, which is not the same as solidarity, but there's a wonderful interplay between them, and it helps us think the possibility of solidarity, of negotiating the complexities and intersections of multiple solidarities.

**Audience:** *I have a question about pedagogy, I guess. It seems to me that you describe really well the University as something evacuated of any sort of curriculum but which is nevertheless this kind of purely formal operation of soliciting people to invest something in filling this space. And I think in the case of the exam, it's a similar thing. The student produces all the lists, it's already forming a kind of self-education, but it's a self-education that's not emancipated from a certain form of authority. In fact I think authority is that much stronger since it doesn't have to intervene in its traditional guise.*

*So it seems there's a shift there from a traditional form of pedagogy to a kind of lack of pedagogy which nevertheless sustains itself in the form of authority. And then when you say, let's move out of the University, it seems to me that all of you tend toward a model of collective auto-didacticism. But I wonder if you also have a model of pedagogy. What is the status of pedagogy? Because it doesn't seem to me that moving out of the University would necessarily liberate you from all these points of authority which exist inside University. Thinking about a new form of collective auto-didacticism, a new form of collective study, necessarily has to include thinking about new forms of pedagogy. Is a relationship to authority necessary in the process of study? What happens to this relationship once you have a new collective form of study?*

**Audience:** *I'm from UNC, which is a public university. We are going through a period where they are cutting down on graduate students taking a long time. I'm in the department of anthropology, where we notoriously take forever, and we're getting horrible mean notes that really put a limit on it. So I'm just wondering if you have a take on that. And then secondly, do you have a figure of resistance, or if we're questioning that, do you have a notion of resistance?*

**Polygraph:** *So we have a question about resistance, and also a question about pedagogy.*

**Fred Moten:** First of all I just want to say I'm completely committed to a certain notion of the outside. But I guess it would be an outside which is not only not opposed to, but actually quite often manifests itself *within*, the inside. When I was coming up in school, the inside/outside opposition was one of the early training grounds for infantile deconstructive disorder. So I'm wary of the opposition but at the same time I'm now much more committed to the value of both terms. I'm shocked to hear myself say such a thing. But still, given that, what I would want to say would be that this only redoubles the importance of the question of pedagogy. It doesn't negate that question at all, because the question remains: what would be the situation, whether inside or outside, or both, of learning? How will that situation operate? How will it take form? It's not a question that I can answer, but your phrase "collective auto-didacticism" is an interesting one.

Just allow me for a couple of minutes to make what will seem like a really intense detour; it's actually not, because it raises the question of the collectivity of auto-didacticism. My first impulse is to totally valorize collectivity in whatever form, but here let's think about what that might mean, let's say within the context of an individual case.

So one of the things that I was thinking about yesterday, in thinking about the figure of the student, I started wondering, is there something about the students whom we have in school now, the undergraduates, that's different from 40 years ago? Many things, obviously. But one thing that might be really different is that these students have been brought up almost completely within a quite intense, and I think oppressive, regime of childhood development. I went to the pediatrician with my one-year-old for his one-year check-up, and basically what I realized is that the one-

year check-up is not so much to make sure his heart is beating okay and to look down his throat; it's about whether he has achieved certain developmental milestones. One way to think about this sort of ubiquity of the developmental milestone is that it allows you to impose upon children at an ever-younger age a kind of schedule for their fitness, for governance. Or in Steve's term, their "readiness for governance." What's interesting about the developmental milestone is it's all about trying to understand their readiness at a given moment.

This is ultimately just a way of rephrasing the question: How can we begin to imagine a pedagogy that is not predicated on the readiness for governance of the student? We live in an age where little five-year-olds are interviewed for acceptance into schools. Rather than just say, "this is ridiculous," it raises the question, what is it that the interviewer is looking for? They're looking for something! They're looking for, ultimately, fitness. You know, at Carolina Friends School, they pride themselves on giving the students more choices. So what they're interviewing for is readiness to make choices. If we folded that into what we were saying before, this would be another version of readiness for governance. I'm just asking, is there a pedagogy that does not require the exclusion of the one who is unready for governance?

So it's not an answer to your question, maybe just a reframing of the question that gives it a little bit more contour. If we began with a certain wariness toward the figure of the student, it seems to me that such a pedagogy would begin with a wariness toward the figure of the teacher. There's more to be said about it but rather than go on another whole long tirade—

**Stefano Harney:** It's important to recognize, you know, that of the four thousand higher education institutions in the country, Duke is not that typical, right. But also I think it's important to recognize that wherever you're sitting in the University, you're probably not very typical either. You're probably not sitting in the middle of it, and certainly if you're sitting in the humanities, you're not sitting in the middle of the University. The ideology, in the old-fashioned sense, of the liberal arts makes us think that the humanities are the heart, and that this other stuff has happened to the University. But clearly that doesn't really hold up anymore.

I just use my own example—I find it important and interesting to study the business school. Just to give one simple example: There was a group of people from the humanities trying to do critiques of management. And they would say about management that it's actually cultural, that it's actually discursive, that it's really about power relations, you know. And one day they discovered that that's exactly what they say about management at the Harvard Business School. So there wasn't a critique where they thought there was. And, basically, the group collapsed. Now what's interesting to me about that is that I do a lot of that myself. I talk about self-organization a lot. But do I know what the difference is between that and self-management? I'm not sure I do. If I had to try to study it in the Business School, though, I think the difference would become apparent pretty quickly; if they were to try to stop me, that might be an indication that I had actually hit on self-organization rather than self-management. But the truth is I don't know. But I do know how close a lot of these

professional knowledges are shadowing what we think we're doing. There's some strength in that, but there's also a huge risk, obviously.

**Marc Bousquet:** I just want to add two terms to the discussion. The first one is *institution*. In terms of your question about the shape of resistance and the possibilities of resistance, we have to face the question of what to do with existing institutions. If the relationship to institutions is to hijack or hotwire them for our own purposes, then, which institutions are we going to seize? I feel almost the same way about the University as I do about trade unions: they're both deeply flawed institutions and yet what else are you going to jump into when you want to get from A to B in a particular instance, absent larger kinds of transformative possibilities?

The other term I want to throw out—it's probably unwary of me to do so to an anthropologist—is the term *culture*. Steve's exactly right that the organizational-culture school of management is something that we should read for informational purposes, that is to say, uncritically. Because there is no point in being critical about aims that they are quite frank about. There is absolutely nothing you can do about exposing their aims that they aren't aggressively trying to do themselves. Their aim, quite explicitly, is to institute a culture war from above. As Steve points out, it's not just a question of managing the culture of an organization; they have transferred, through the logic of governance, that model to managing much larger systems—the organizational-culture approach to managing the country, the globe.

What interests me is not to expose—"A-ha, it's culture war from above!"—but to ask what the responding culture war from below would look like. To the extent that I have viable disciplinary interests in literary-historical activities, I've returned to the literary on the basis of the question: What does the culture war from below look like? When did we have it? What was its shape? Who did it engage? What lines were crossed? And then, what was the nature of the reaction to whatever gains were made at any particular moment?

**Audience:** *And could you say more about this notion of study and its relation to a perpetual unreadiness for governance? I'm not quite sure what it means, what is this unreadiness?*

**Stefano Harney:** I think governance has some still more traditional applications, but it also has this element of a kind of prospecting of mass intellectuality. Like prospecting, it's a bit unsure, you know, about where it actually wants to drop the drill to extract this mass intellectuality. It has the added problem, unlike mining that it actually has to care about environmental destruction because the capacities that it wants are relational capacities; they're very hard to extract from bodies unless you are able to extract them from populations. So, starting from that premise, it seems to me that whatever else study is, it has to be something that occurs at the level of relational resistances of populations. That's why I do think it is so important to raise the question of pedagogy. It's really important to raise the question of what we mean by engaging in a kind of sabotage or a battle, or whatever you want to call it, in the University as well. You know, I don't think that we can think in terms of a complete

retreat in those regards, partly because the battle is brought to us all the time, but also partly because it's a way for us to get a feel for study. I don't have a worked-up conception of it, but what I like about *study* is that it's the opposite of *exam*. Exam is the finish of study, if you like, and study is the exams yet to come. It's the opposite of expertise, in some ways, you know. If somebody says, "I made a study of this," it means "study's done, and now I'm an expert." But I like it as a relational term to think about this kind of circle of knowledge—teaching—study, as that set of relations that never really leaves prematurity. Each time more teaching happens, we realize we're not ready; each time more study happens, we realize we're not ready. I'm not above associating that with a basic kind of communist notion like, "You're supposed to do critique in the afternoon." Okay, then let's do it, and that would look more like *study* than a critique where we pulled the veil back, right, and discover the corporate University, where we say "Look, I told ya. See who those trustees really are?" But once we discover that, what have we done? Well, maybe we now have the power to actually fight that through unionization or something else. But what usually ends up happening, because of the power of the University, is that one is just left with moral appeals. And who wants to be left with that politics? So that's what I'm trying to think of something outside of that.

**Audience:** *You were talking about maturity and especially the way that governance in the University maintains the student in this kind of forced choice, where one is unable to choose what one really wants without having a kind of adult relationship to it. I was wondering, and looking again at the kind of immaturity before governance, where's the place of in loco parentis? This is something that Universities legally have been hammering away at for the last fifteen to twenty years, making themselves less and less legally responsible as the parental figure over their students. When students commit suicide or do something off-campus that might be illegal, the University doesn't seem to have any kind of bearing on it. If we're going to think about this kind of immaturity, and if we're going to think about the figure of the child, is there this kind of parental relationship in the University? It seems like that's something that's been thought through for a while. Does it still hold? Are we going back there? Are we looking for another way of thinking about it?*

**Stefano Harney:** Well, I'm conscious that this has a particular context at Duke, obviously, which I can't really address authoritatively, but I think it's part of the way Universities in general are changing. I see it in British Universities. The disciplinary stuff happens early on, but you graduate from that, and by the time you get to the University, you're in another register, right? The kind of register Foucault talks about, where it's not really necessary to work with individual bodies anymore. Where the work is at the level of population. I think that the University is operating more at that register. So if something tragic happens to an individual student, that's not really a crisis in the governance of the University. It's only a crisis if the population doesn't continue to be a self-managed population who are ready for governance. That would be a tragedy. But one of the reasons we're doing this stuff is that we don't see much evidence of that tragedy at the moment, so we gotta figure out some way to provoke it. So I think it's just a more sophisticated version of *in loco parentis*

that the University's involved with, and I think it speaks to the question of why Universities are so big now. They need to modulate mass intellectuality outside the University, and that requires more sophisticated tools.

**Fred Moten:** I want to get back to the question of what would be an example or a figure of resistance. This is a horrible thing to do, but I propose as a figure of resistance my son, Lorenzo. 'Cause to be a parent nowadays is to have a certain model of development imposed on you. You must then constantly watch your child to make sure that he or she adheres to it. This model of development is very much bound up with governance inasmuch as it is bound up with the child showing at certain moments that he is ready to make certain choices, some very basic, some elaborate, up until the moment that he chooses to go to Duke or UNC or, you know, wherever, Cornell.

And so what's at stake, I think, in that regard, is not to oppose, but rather to imagine some other possible formulation of development. In other words, I'm still fairly committed to the notion of development, both on the individual and the social level. It's just that, I'm interested in what Steve earlier today called, "development all over the place," a transversal development, rather than a linear one, the kind of development that Guattari might be interested in or something like that. And as such, I propose my son Lorenzo as a model of such development. Now this imposes upon me not only a different set of parental demands, but also a different set of pedagogical demands. I have to situate myself in relation to that development, which is, in other words, at a certain moment, to situate myself all over the place. It's like, you know, what would you do if Sun Ra were in your class; that's kind of the question I'm asking. What would you do then? What would you do, you know?

According to a certain kind of really vulgar business model it would be advantageous to relinquish as much of that responsibility as possible, and that goes hand-in-hand with the imposition of choice on the student as a mode of governance. These things link up together. But rather than relinquishing responsibility, how else might we respond to these pedagogical demands?

I don't want Marc's turn or return to the literary to be passed over in silence, because I'm an English teacher or a student of English, myself, and he is too. So I think this becomes a quite crucial thing. I took a class on modern poetry at Harvard from Helen Vendler. She once said something about how she felt so bad for people who didn't have the opportunity to make aesthetic choices in their lives. And I used to think, "You crazy person. These people who you think don't make aesthetic choices make aesthetic choices all the time." But now that I have, hopefully, a little bit more rational understanding of either rational or irrational choice, I'm thinking that maybe the better way to put it would be, "Those people who she thinks lost or never had the capacity to make aesthetic choices are actually moving all the time in more or less sensitive ways within a political *aesthesis*." One way to begin to understand that movement is to turn to the literary or to turn to music, which in and of itself already implies a turn or a return to study and to certain questions regarding both the object and the concept of the object of study. And I think this opens up some space not

just to think about politics, but about how to act politically—how to move and how to act *within* a politics.

**Audience:** *What would the relationship between study and creation be? As you were talking, I was reminded of another sense of study as a preparatory act, as when one makes a study for a painting. Is study a preparation for creating something? Or is study itself a creative practice? You study in order also to create. When you're talking about study and the temporality of study, is it a preparation to remain not prepared for governance? Or to prepare for something else?*

**Fred Moten:** I would say that in thinking about this notion of a study as a sketch in preparation, two things come to mind.

One, the importance of maintaining oneself within the structure of a rough draft. To move sensitively within an ongoing set of gestures or maneuvers is what I called earlier a kind of *political aesthetics*. It's the ongoing-ness, the roughness, the drafted- or draftiness of it that I think is really important, and it goes hand-in-hand with this notion of the unfinished or the unready or the unfit. And secondly, within this question of the rough draft or the sketch, what is in the process of being made is a set of quite specific and, I think, detailed conceptualizations of and about form. In other words, this roughness or this drafted-ness or this unreadiness or unfinished-ness or unfitness is not to be confused with nakedness or bareness, to bring up an Agamben-type formulation. This is where the form of art and the form of life converge in ways that I think are worth paying attention to.

But with all that said, here is where it's really crucial to get a handle on how it is that a certain notion of creativity and creation is being used now. Maybe Steve can say more about this creative city stuff and why it ought to have the effect of making us wary about an already-given discourse on creativity that is easily appropriable in various problematic ways. Folks like us or maybe some of the folks that we study are meant to be the engines or the shock troops, you know, of this new eruption of creativity into the city. Those of you who are from New York will know what I'm talking about: certain neighborhoods in New York have become, as the result of the gathering of creativity in those neighborhoods, the most uncreative places you can possibly be right now. And this is not an accident, it happens all the time; it happens all over the place. This doesn't mean we dispense with creativity or creation, but just that we need to be careful about how we distinguish what we mean by it from what—I still believe in they—*they* mean by it.

**Audience:** *But in thinking about an idea of immaturity and the freedom to study—isn't there a real kind of class position already implied there? The people who would be most able to do that, to embrace study, to screw around, to get outside the rules, are the very people in a privileged class position, whose parents are paying their way through school and may not have to work at all. And the people who have to have the most adult relation to the University, who have to attend their courses diligently, who take on work-study jobs, are the least able to embrace that attitude of immaturity because they're working around the clock.*

**Audience:** *And I was wondering if we could add the question of student debt to the discussion. I know that seems like quite a detour, but we've been thinking a lot about student debt and it seems like something that is actually pretty under-theorized at this point. Earlier today, Marc brought up the question of forms of subjectivity that may be produced by student debt in the contemporary moment. So I was wondering if you have any thoughts about student debt.*

**Stefano Harney:** One of the things that I've spent a lot time trying to do is map this thing called the university so that it doesn't end up in only one kind of class configuration or another. On the other hand, you know there are problems with study everywhere, and the problems were different everywhere. It's a question of trying to equate them, and a question of trying to link them, I think. I went to a very privileged school, and nobody did any studying there. But of course they ended up doing a lot better than somebody who didn't do any studying somewhere else, in many cases.

But I think one way to approach this is to think of student debt in more than one register. For example, what would it mean think of *study debt*? One of the things it would mean to think in terms of study debt would be that it wouldn't really be possible to undertake study except in the context of some kind of constant reiteration of who makes it possible for you to do that, in terms of history, in terms of class, in terms of scholarships, etc. At the boring level, this is the problem of the traditional idea of the professor as craftsman, those people who think they really are the author of their own work. But that's not as interesting as study debt, because study debt is already so much more dispersed, and reliant on so many more different kinds of historical conditions. At one level at least, study debt dwarfs student debt, right? Your debts, you know, your material debts, they may kill you, but they're not as large as our debt to be able to have this conversation. And if we could have that kind of conversation about social debt, that to me would be a lot more interesting. Alvaro [Reyes] and I were talking about this in the context of the debt at a distance of Italian Marxist thought to the whole history of black radicalism. It's immense and rich and it functions to enrich as debt, rather than you know, to be a burden. So it would be really interesting to think about study debt in those terms, and it might be a way of reversing the power of student debt in some ways.

**Fred Moten:** This reminds me of Walter Rodney's *History of the Guyanese Working Class*. There's an amazing formulation in the book, where he says that the historical problem that emerges when thinking about the history and the origins of the Guyanese working class is how soon something that would be recognizable, in a classical Marxian sense, as a working class emerged after emancipation.<sup>6</sup> It's sort of an intellectual problem along the lines of this old experiment that Einstein did when he was still trying to believe in all the stuff he was believing in, called the EPR experiment. He basically said: you take two particles and you place them in this sort of space-time separated distance from one another so that if there is seemingly any kind of communication between the particles, it would have to occur at a velocity faster than the speed of light. They did the experiment and found something that



appeared to be communication, some kind of coordination in their movement. At which point Einstein said that either quantum mechanics is wrong, or there is something called “spooky action at a distance.” It’s a similar kind of problematic: how did the Guyanese working class emerge? A working class is not supposed to emerge that fast, right? If underprivilege is the general, historical zone, a political and economic zone, that in its most extreme form completely negates the possibility of study, then how do we explain all of these students who emerge from zones of acute underprivilege? Most of the folks that I pay attention to in my work emerge from just this unlikely place. I’m not trying to say that the question about class position is wrong, because I actually think that it’s right. But this other thing is also right. And we have to figure out how these two things can be right at the same time: namely, that study is both an effect of privilege, but also seems equally to be an effect of under-privilege. Right? Maybe by thinking through those things, we can get a different understanding of privilege, as well as a richer understanding of study. ■

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- 1 Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). Reviewed in this issue of *Polygraph*.
- 2 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses,” *Social Text* 22.2 (2004): 101-115.
- 3 Stefano Harney, “Governance and the Undercommons” (2008). See: <http://slash.autonoma.org/node/10926>.
- 4 See, for example. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
- 5 Richard Florida, *Who’s Your City: How the Creative Economy Is Making Where To Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
- 6 Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).