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Author(s): Marc Bousquet

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# The Rhetoric of “Job Market” and the Reality of the Academic Labor System

Marc Bousquet

*The overall balance between supply and demand in academic labor markets will shift markedly, we believe, over the next few decades. The most dramatic changes will occur in the 1997–2002 period, when we project a substantial excess demand for faculty in the arts and sciences. If present trends persist, we would expect that there would be roughly four candidates for every five positions—a condition that could continue in subsequent years unless significant adjustments occur or policy changes are made. Although we project no comparable imbalance during the 1987–92 period, we do expect some appreciable tightening of academic labor markets to begin as early as 1992–1997.*

—Bowen and Sosa 118

**G**iven the dramatic and startling nature of the conclusions of Bowen and Sosa’s 1989 “job market” study, *Prospects for Faculty* (that faculty jobs would soon appear like manna in the desert), and its origin in an unusual collaboration between a sitting university president (William G. Bowen, Princeton president) and an undergraduate student (Julie Ann Sosa, then the editor of the Princeton student newspaper), it’s more than a little surprising that almost no one seems to have questioned the Bowen study before a 1994 blurb in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*—with the interesting exception of Lynn Cheney, who wrote a scathing *New York Times* editorial regarding the assumptions guiding it. Even after the report’s projections proved wildly erroneous, few have troubled to analyze how those errors came about. Without anywhere confronting the organization’s own history of en-

An associate professor at the University of Louisville, **Marc Bousquet** is founding editor of *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* and coeditor of *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers: Writing Instruction in the Managed University*. His essay, “Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA” received the 2003 Kinneavy award for most outstanding article published in Volume 22 of *JAC*, and a forthcoming issue of the journal *Works and Days* will republish several of his essays on higher education under the title *Information University: Rise of the EMO*.

thusiasm for the Bowen projections, the 1997 final report of the MLA's Committee on Professional Employment (CPE) simply excludes the item from its bibliography. One goal of this essay is to specify some of the failings of the study and assess the causes and consequences of its startlingly uncritical reception in the academic community.

It's also my hope to avoid scapegoating the Bowen project, which didn't create the conditions of its own reception. In understanding how the Bowen report succeeded with its audience of faculty and graduate students in the humanities, we may be able to move toward the more important understanding of the extent to which the flawed assumptions of the report are to an equal extent the flawed assumptions of its audience. That is: no one thought to treat Bowen's very surprising projections critically because in creating them Bowen simply applied the overwhelmingly dominant logic of the time.

For instance, if—as I argue here—the Bowen report erred by imposing market ideology on data about the structure and relations of academic labor, the uncritical reception of that error from 1989 through the present suggests a strong desire by faculty and many graduate students to believe that their work is indeed shaped by market logic. So a large part of this essay will be concerned with trying to explain how the idea of a “job market” came to acquire so much reality to so many members of the academy: that is, if it's not a job “market,” why do we call it one anyway?

One way of describing the recent movement of thought about the academic labor system is as a series of waves. A “first wave” of labor consciousness emerged before 1970, propelling the self-organization of the academic work force, especially in public institutions, where more than half the faculty are unionized. This labor awareness was contested by the administratively oriented second wave (of which Bowen's “job market” study is emblematic), generally informed by a neoliberal ideology idealizing market epistemology and naturalizing market relationships. Sweeping to dominance about 1980, this wave has the virtue of focusing on the connection of graduate education to the larger system of academic work (which the unions have been slow to do); nonetheless, in characterizing that connection primarily as a market relationship, administrative knowledge has been strongly contested by a third wave of knowledge produced by what is in North America a fifty-campus movement of graduate-employee unionists (Coalition). While far from dominant, the knowledge of the GEU movement has been sharply ascendant in recent years, to the point where a *Chronicle* article on the graduate-employee coalition dubbed 2001 “the year of the graduate student.”

In this essay I focus on the emergence of the failed “market knowledge” of the second wave. Market language gives the impression that we've collectively decided to put aside the playfulness of our cultural activities when talking about something as important as the situation that we also name the “job crisis.” The rhetorical rich-

ness of this market language has had a profound effect on how we think about graduate education. In particular, the rhetoric elaborating the market-crisis point of view sustains a general consensus that the system of graduate education is producing more degree holders than necessary, and that this “overproduction” can be controlled “from the supply side” by reducing admissions to graduate programs. This common sense is deeply flawed, to the point where I think we have to acknowledge that “*market knowledge*” is a rhetoric of the labor system and not a description of it. Because the incoming flow of graduate students is generally tightly controlled to produce “just enough” labor, graduate departments really can’t reduce admissions without making other arrangements for the work that the graduate students would have done. Since the restoration of tenure-stream lines is rarely a department-level prerogative, a department with the power to reduce graduate-student admissions will generally be driven to substitute other casual appointments (postdocs, term lectureships, single-course piece workers). In terms of casualization, there is clearly no net improvement from this “supply-side” fix. Indeed, these other modes of casualized work are filled by persons equally enmeshed in the system of graduate study. The system will continue to require “just enough” of these other term workers, all of whom will have had some experience of graduate education (see Bousquet, “Waste”).

This supply-side fantasy supports the most pernicious armchair activism of them all, persistently circulating the notion that graduate faculty can balance “the market” from the conference table at which they discuss the dossiers of applicants to their programs. On the one hand: of course it is reasonable to imagine that reversing thirty years of casualization (by recovering jobs, for example) will result in a reduced need for graduate students to do flexible labor. This could eventually reduce the graduate student population. On the returning trajectory, however: it simply does not follow that reducing the graduate student population will alter the labor system. (This is like arguing that blowing smoke up a tailpipe makes a car run backwards.) To a certain extent the fantasy of supply-side control reflects the depoliticization and privatization of the professoriate, the desire to “be ethical” without having to enact a politics, to solve the problem with better management rather than struggle in solidarity with other persons who work.

Ultimately, the notion that the employment system can be controlled by the administration of graduate programs (that is, by reducing PhD “production”) has to be seen as profoundly ideological. Even where there is a vigorous effort to diagnose the nature of the labor system, the ideology of the market returns to *frame the solution*, blocking the transformative potential of analysis that otherwise demonstrates the necessity of nonmarket responses. Encapsulating his own earlier arguments on “Literary Study in the Transnational University,” J. Hillis Miller enumerates “worldwide changes” framing the material base of casualization, including the end of the Cold War, the globalization of economies and media, and the conversion of the

research university to a technological service mission, as well as the “concrete, material changes” of corporatization: defunding, growing class size, threats to tenure, the conversion to part-time faculty, underemployment of degree holders, the commercialization of knowledge. And yet after providing a sweeping analysis uniting transformations in university work to structural realities on the global and continental scale, Miller has nothing more to offer in terms of a solution than the supply-side fantasy of clean hands: “It is not clear to me that it is ethically justifiable to go on producing new PhDs if there are not going to be jobs for them” (“Reply” 234).

Miller sees—he *knows*—that the problem is casualization, that graduate students and former grad students are flex labor, and that there are always “just enough” of them. And yet he retreats from the standpoint of globalization studies to speak in the folksy tones of the line supervisor at the plant when framing his solution: *Well, I guess we better hold up the line and slow the production, boys. “Demand” for our “product” is down.* There is a steep-walled canyon between the analysis and the action plan that is not specific to Miller but instead nearly uniform across the profession, which is reluctant to see the political nature of the struggle with casualization. (Reminding us that ‘markets’ are social formations, Evans Watkins calls the academic-disciplinary responses of which Miller’s is typical “an interesting notion of ‘ethical’” that “folds neatly” into marketization processes more generally: “Thus ‘economic realities’ don’t intrude from the outside to set a limit on how many Ph.D.’s we should ‘ethically’ produce; economic practices are part of the training from the beginning”[164]). Insofar as the Fordist ideology of production and neoliberal ideology of “markets in balance” provide false solutions to the post-Fordist academic economy, they help that post-Fordism along.

The Fordism of the discourse surrounding graduate education is a nearly unchanged survival of the dominant interpretive frame established between 1968 and 1970, when a freight train of scholarship decrying a Cold-War “shortage” of degree holders suddenly reversed itself in attempting to account for a Vietnam-era “surplus.” I focus primarily on the development over time of the state-of-the-profession discourse of one organization, the Modern Language Association. MLA-centered communication does not fully encompass the discourse even of its “own” discipline, but there is remarkably little difference in the analytical frames employed by the various fields of study across disciplines: most appear to employ the market heuristic. (If anything, the “hard sciences” appear more addicted to the ideological introjection of market values, perhaps because they are often less inclined to address casualization as a structural issue. See, for example, the mathematician Geoff Davis, whose model and recommendations are widely quoted by university administrations; claiming that the “history of mathematics Ph.D. production” is one of “perpetual instability” and “continual alternation” between shortage and surplus, Davis models a “10-year boom-bust cycle” in the job market. The positive knowledge

represented by this model leads Davis to claim that "there are straightforward ways to remedy the situation," primarily better modeling and the "rationalizing" of "Ph.D. production.") Additionally, the MLA discourse appears to have influenced other humanities scholarship on employment issues, and has been widely acknowledged by the mainstream press as authoritative on these questions. Featuring labor-intensive classes that often serve as university-wide requirements (writing, second-language acquisition, introductory cultural surveys), language departments have long been at the leading edge of casualization, together with mathematics and other humanities disciplines providing general education. It is probably as a result of this early and extended experience of casualization that language and cultural studies faculty are among the most visible authorities on the question. (Or perhaps it is only because so many journalists have studied in English departments.) While there is unevenness in academic casualization, there are systematic consistencies across disciplines as well: in science and engineering, casual postdoctoral employment can last ten years before a full-time appointment is secured (Regets). In any event, the MLA discourse does appear to fairly emblemize the general state of disciplinary discourse on higher ed workplace issues.

For language faculty, the Fordist rhetoric employed after World War II reached its peak in Don Cameron Allen's 1968 study financed by the MLA and the Danforth Foundation, *The Ph.D. in English and American Literature*. This was a book so overtaken by events that it was out of date at the moment it appeared in print. The 1968 and 1969 MLA conventions were turbulent for a number of reasons, not least of them the recognition by job seekers that for the first time in years there weren't enough jobs to go around, yet Allen's study was a mammoth survey of ways to increase the "production" of graduate schools. His proposals included abbreviated requirements and shorter dissertations, more funding and better advisement, the expansion of existing programs and the development of new programs. Begun earlier in the 1960s, Allen's study responded to what he characterizes as nearly eight decades of "chronic shortage" of "trained English teachers" in higher education, from the 1890s to the "acute shortage" after 1950: "[I]n fact, it was only in the unhappy period between 1931 and 1940 that there was any reasonable relationship between what was wanted and what was to be had" (16). For Allen and most others of his generation, a shortage of trained English teachers translated directly into a "scarcity of Ph.D.'s" (84) in the field. While he also extensively discussed the viability of credentialing less arduous teaching-track degrees, the goal in increasing the "productivity" of graduate programs was to place degreed persons in jobs (rather than to substitute student labor for teacher labor).

For Allen, the application of Fordist rhetoric to graduate education still has the character of analogy. After surveying the number of degrees granted by the eighty-eight doctoral programs in English operating in 1965, Allen writes, "It is as clear as

a manufacturer's annual report that not all the plants are in full production"(22). How to fix this problem? Because "industrial production is increased by building more plants" (118) and "streamlined" production (30), the same might be true for graduate schools, so he recommends opening new graduate programs and shortening time to degree at existing programs to the four years recently recommended by the Ford and Danforth foundations (18, 30). The reform of graduate education takes the form of a modernization process, leading to a system that is "more rational, more attuned to our century and its demands" (89). While the language of industrial production in graduate education is current as early as 1925 (qtd. in Berelson 29), it becomes widespread after the war in foundation-funded work like Bernard Berelson's 1960 Carnegie study, *Graduate Education in the United States*, which serves up an institutional history of graduate education leading to an exposition of the crisis represented by the Cold War demand for "the doctoral product" (219), while strategizing means of supplying it. Most of Allen's 1968 recommendations to his disciplinary audience follow the general outlines laid out in Berelson's work, begun in 1957, the year Sputnik was launched.

This Fordist language was not, even at the time, adequate to the task of describing the structural transformation of the university, which was already beginning to disarticulate from the nation state and retool itself into the transnational bureaucratic corporation described by Bill Readings (continuing the process observed by Clyde Barrow, of the university's adoption of a "corporate ideal" in the first decades of the twentieth century). But our immediate concern is to read rhetorically and not symptomatically: as a practical matter, was this Fordist rhetoric adequate to the task of enlarging the system of graduate education? And the answer is yes, of course it was: many more "plants" were built, a lot more doctoral product was moved, and "knowledge production" was enormously enlarged. Fordism provided an exceptionally powerful set of heuristics, values, and legitimations for the Cold-War expansion of what the era's ideologues were proud to call the knowledge industry. In other words, so long as "demand" for the doctoral product remained apparently limitless, Fordism was good knowledge, or at least made sense. But between 1968 and 1970, the good knowledge of the Cold War rapidly became the bad knowledge of retrenchment and casualization.

Initially, the term "job market" described an annual face-to-face event at the MLA convention, and not an ongoing systemic reality (as in "the market is really bad this year"). Inaugurated in 1955, the "Job Mart" (formally named the "Faculty Exchange") represented a modernization and rationalization of the hiring process formerly conducted by the old-boy network: the association collected the dossiers of all job seekers into a single room and department chairs then perused them. This was a "two-room system": in a neighboring chamber, job seekers were invited to wait for messages from chairpersons requesting interviews. This Job Mart operated

a great deal like a face-to-face labor market, in which persons certified to do higher education faculty work actually gathered in a room (somewhere between a marketplace and a shape-up hall) to “sell their labor.” This system was not replaced until after 1969, when it “broke down” because the problem “was now one of locating jobs rather than candidates.” At this point, the association dismantled the Job Mart and initiated the Job Information Service—it ceased to collect candidate dossiers and began to publish job listings (Assoc. of Departments of English i–ii).

To this moment, the 1971 inauguration of the Job Information Service, we can trace the first stroke of what I think we can accurately call the informationalization of the MLA. The job market was no longer the humble “mart,” an event arranged by the association. Instead it had become an external system or force that the association was obliged to provide information about: “[T]he one thing needful—the one thing the profession has never had but which MLA is uniquely qualified to provide—is complete and detailed information on the job market at regular intervals throughout the year” (association officer William Schaefer qtd. in Assoc. of Departments of English ii). Not incidental to the emergence of this new “informational” mission is the pressure exerted by members of the association affiliated with the antiwar and other social movements for the association to figure as an instrument of social agency (which had resulted in, among other things, a successful effort by Paul Lauter and others to elect Louis Kampf to the presidency of the association in 1968; see Ohmann, Chapter 2; Pannacker; Parascondola; Kampf, “I Want”). Implicit in the informational mission was the disavowal of responsibility for making things happen: instead, the task is to describe, forecast, and advise—ideally, in exchange for a fee.

A key component of the informationalization process was the literalization of the market analogy, so that the market became something that needed to be reported on continuously (at “regular intervals throughout the year”) and such reporting could be construed as a useful contribution. At the 1969 meeting, the MLA voted to create a Job Market Study Commission, charged primarily with two responsibilities: “(1) examining the procedures of the Association as they have historically affected the market” and “(2) studying the operation of the market itself within the larger economic context” (Orr 1185). The framing of these tasks clearly identifies “the market” as something external to the profession (and its association), something with an internal essence (“the market itself”) unfolding in continuous and uniform time, embedded in an impersonal “larger economic context.” No longer merely an analogy, the concept of “job market” now has empirical reality for humanities faculty and evidently borrows some of the aura and aspirations—the realpolitik and econometrics—of labor-market analysis, such as the 1969 Carter study, “Academic Labor Market Projections and the Draft,” designed to assure the wartime Congress that it could expect a comfortable “oversupply” of higher educa-

tion faculty despite the prospect of expanded compulsory military service. The 1970 Orr report, "The Job Market in English and Foreign Languages," crystallizes the terms of analysis that would be applied to what was then called retrenchment, which we now understand as casualization: the one-year drop in job availability was "but the first massive indication that supply and demand in these fields are seriously out of balance" (Orr 1186). While the market analogy makes the most sense from the perspective of the "buyer" in a "buyer's market"—that is, from the perspective of employers, such as industry, the state, and professional academic management—it makes less sense from the point of view of the professional worker, who traditionally seeks collegial participation in determining the size, compensation, and composition of the workforce, including control of the terms under which apprentice professionals can be expected to serve. Rather than leave these considerations to a "market," professionals have tended to exert influence on at least a national scale by way of professional associations (which explains in part the degree to which many faculty seek the leadership of organizations like the MLA in these matters, perhaps even more than their union locals). Indeed, the dean of labor-market econometrics, Allan Cartter, explicitly rejects market-based solutions to the academic labor problem, calling for federal intervention ("Round Table" 309–10). In this context, the adoption by various disciplinary associations of the new "informational" mission needs to be seen as intrinsic to a neoliberal informatics, specifically underwriting knowledge of "the market" *against* the labor knowledge of structure and labor's consciousness of itself as a collective agent in the workplace and in the arenas of law, politics, and "the economy."

While both Berelson and Allen use the notion of "demand for faculty," and rely on graduate education as the supply of "product," both are much more invested in the Fordist production analogy than in the neoliberal language of "market." Berelson and Allen are concerned to describe things that the profession *can do* to "meet demand"—to produce more. When the question is one of enlarging graduate education, the profession is willing to see itself as an agent. But when the situation is that of candidates unable to find employment, the profession is more concerned to describe the things it *can't* do. The literalization of "the market" has the effect of legitimating the passive, observational role of the informant: now the profession is a victim of forces beyond its control. The Orr report, for instance, cites "a number of economic and cultural trends [that] are finally reaching a dangerous convergence" (1185); "pressures upon us [. . .] national if not global in scope," the "limit to what the public will pay for [our] product," (1186), and so forth. The past thirty years of official "analysis" from disciplinary associations and foundations has for the most part simply replayed these chords—of trends, pressures, limits, and forces, all evidently transpiring in a field of titans, beyond the possibility of faculty contestation. The "field of titans" point of view leads to the dissemination of discursive constructions like

the “lifeboat” analogy frequently employed by autobiographical and historiographic narratives of the profession. In “lifeboat” narratives, the era of “well-paid and secure” academic jobs figures as an historical accident (a peculiarity, brought about as a byproduct of military-industrial expansion, or an unexpected historical gift dropped in the lap of a single cohort of the professoriate). From this perspective, succeeding generations are represented as—more naturally—drowning in the tide of history. Of course the young “very much want, often desperately, to be let in, to climb aboard” (Tave): but who can stem the tide?

The ideological content of the Orr report and its successors is exactly its tendency to represent limits and forces as beyond contestation. But in foreclosing the possibility of action at the level of structure, the market analogy also offers new fantasies of action, especially in relation to the concept of supply. One of the key contributions of the market heuristic to the Orr report and its successors is the problematization of the concept of supply, as in the now-familiar formulation that graduate programs are “turning out too many Ph.D.’s and M.A.’s for the market,” that there is a state of “Ph.D. overproduction,” leading to a PhD “oversupply” (1190). While Hillis Miller’s 1997 analysis almost exactly replicates Orr’s 1970 formulation, Berelson and Allen in 1960 and 1968 rely on a different heuristic, largely innocent of the concepts of both market and supply. Berelson and Allen don’t need the idea of “the market” because they don’t need to fantasize an elastic relationship between demand and supply such that controlling the “supply” represents an action affecting the whole system. For Orr, the problematizing of the concept of supply is a real intellectual convenience, because it both offers the fantasy of doing something to “the market,” (balancing it) by “controlling” or “regulating” supply (1186, 1191), and *diverts attention from the real problems of “demand” (the willingness of administrations to utilize nondegreed flexible labor instead of degreed persons in jobs)*. Orr and his successors need “the market” to legitimate the fantasy of a supply-side fix, a fantasy that averts the consciousness of political struggle that would quickly transpire if the concept of “demand” were problematized.

One might expect that from the perspective of thirty years we would have a clearer view of casualization—that our understanding has gotten better and better, and that we are smarter than a naïve earlier generation. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case. Orr’s 1970 report, while it does enthusiastically embrace the market heuristic and the new fantasy of supply-side influence, also provides a trenchant description of managerialism and casualization. Orr is perfectly aware that increased education work does not translate directly into increased professorial jobs, because “American society” is willing to accept colleges “staffed largely by persons trained differently from traditional professors” (1188). He is equally aware that the university has “welcomed new Ph.D. candidates with eagerness,” not only to meet the “national emergency” of the Cold War, “but also for another reason.” This other reason? It doesn’t seem to make any difference

whether most freshmen and many sophomore courses in many areas, particularly English and foreign languages, are taught by experienced Ph.D.'s, by new M.A.'s, or by those even less qualified. Since B.A. graduate students or M.A.'s working toward the Ph.D. can be had at a lower cost per class than established professors, administrations have not overlooked the opportunity that presented itself [. . .]. Somewhat the same forces operated [. . .] in the many institutions which suddenly began to offer the M.A. (1190)

None of Orr's numerous suggestions for professional action actually address this process of substituting student labor for teacher labor, blaming impersonal "economic factors" and "certain forces" that "have caused" universities "to rely more heavily than before on Ph.D. candidates" to teach lower-division classes (1191), nor does he seem to care about lower-division teaching ("[M]aybe it really doesn't matter," he says [1190]). Nonetheless, he is very much aware of the extent and urgency of the casualization process, observing that an unnamed Midwestern school completely without doctoral instruction in 1955 by 1970 employed five graduate student teachers for each full-time teacher. He goes on to observe, complete with exclamation point, that at one "school with an established program" (1191) the ratio of graduate employees to full-time faculty was thirty to one. However appealing it found the market heuristic, Orr's report took it for granted that "the market" was merely one of many lenses for approaching graduate education.

Throughout the 1970s, there is a "first wave" of knowledge about the profession, supported in large part by active faculty unionism and movement politics, that struggled with the new ideological formation of the job market. In 1971, the young activist elected to the presidency of the MLA, Louis Kampf, elaborated in his presidential address to the annual convention the collective understanding that "unionization is a necessity":

We are workers under industrial capitalism. If we understand that, we can understand our alienation, our sense of powerlessness. For teaching, we collect wages: that is our basic connection to educational institutions, not the claims of humanist rhetoric. We are, in short, an intellectual proletariat. Consciousness of this condition can lead to self-hatred or cynical careerism. It can also lead to our uniting around the oppression we share with other alienated workers, the better to rid ourselves of the oppressors. ("It's" 383)

It is hard to see that any subsequent awareness has improved upon Kampf's formulation, and insofar as the structures of feeling dominating the academy from the 1970s forward can be described as "self-hatred or cynical careerism," it has been a temptation for too many to see this unionist, intellectual workerism informed by commitments to a broad movement politics as the "lost cause" of the 1960s. In fact, graduate-employee unionism retained much of the movement commitments aired by Kampf. While, on the other hand, faculty unionism has rarely reached out to

movements beyond the campus (or even to other workers on campus, including adjuncts and graduate employees), there was nonetheless a widespread labor consciousness. High points in this first-wave discourse include, especially, articles in 1974 and 1978 by Paul Lauter and others in *Radical Teacher* and *Universitas*, the journal of the SUNY union. Lauter's were later republished as "Retrenchment—What the Managers Are Doing" and "A Scandalous Misuse of Faculty—Adjuncts" (*Canons* 175–197; 198–209). At this stage, buoyed by a militant labor movement on the national scene, even the discourse of department chairs was frequently pro-union: Marilyn Williamson's 1973 piece is fairly typical in arguing that "the union agreement holds many advantages" even for department administrators, and observing tartly that "to me as a chairman the world 'flexibility' has come to have one meaning: the ability to reduce my staff or my funds" (3–4). During the early seventies at least one anti-union article in the MLA newsletter for department chairs represented itself as an "alternative perspective" in the context of the general enthusiasm for collective bargaining (Alderman 34).

So before 1975 it was common even for department chairs to recognize that the Fordist "production" analogy and neoliberal market analogies were "absurd" or "crude," and to insist that "concretely, we are dealing with live human beings" (Adams 7). In 1979, Paul Hunter understood that the replacement of full-time lines by graduate student labor constituted a virtual war on young people: "[T]here is no youth in our profession any more [and] we face an immediate prospect of being in a profession that gets older every year, that fails to admit the young to its permanent numbers at all, that systematically excludes beginners from its ranks despite taunting them in graduate schools that foster both dreams and expectations" (7). He goes on:

Once the MLA encompassed a variety of languages in its meeting halls. Now there are only two: the language spoken by the tenured and secure, a language of rationalized complacency; and the language of the unemployed, the underemployed, the temporarily employed, the part-time, the untenured, the uncertain, the paranoid, the disillusioned—a language of desperation, fury, and despair. It would be easy to be sentimental about their plight, but it would be trivial to treat the issue sentimentally and thus make it easy to comfort ourselves by the usual cynical reply, "But at least they are young, and their options are still open." (8)

Hunter has no quick solutions to offer, but his piece is in part an attempt to revive a generational frame of analysis, one which is inevitably significant for understanding how the transformation of higher education represents an increased exploitation of the young (which helps to explain why it is commonly students who are the most visible opponents of the corporate university).

By 1980, there is a fully developed "second wave" of response to casualization, one which no longer knows any exterior to market ideology. Second-wave knowledge takes "the market" as empirical reality, and as the practical horizon of study:

the question is no longer to understand or alter the structural forces shaping “demand” for degreed labor, but simply to project and accommodate that demand. The practical consequence of second-wave thought was to generally contain and silence the interventionist labor knowledge of the 1970s, and more specifically, to enrobe the processes of casualization with an aura of market rationality and natural inevitability. Throughout the 1980s, the question of degree-holder “supply” remains highly problematized, with the primary discursive effect of rendering the structural transformation of “demand” relatively unproblematic. By naturalizing the notion of tidal or cyclic “fluctuations in demand,” second-wave knowledge throughout the 1980s repeatedly concealed wholesale casualization beneath a circular and self-authenticating market rhetoric: because the system “is a market,” it naturally fluctuates; because the system fluctuates, it must be a market. In this period, the annual publication by the MLA of charts showing hills and valleys in the number of jobs available from year to year bolstered this new common sense. The charts gave off the aura that there was a kind of “business cycle” to academic job opportunities, from which tidal and cyclic rhythm would inevitably proceed both good times and bad. Accompanying staff essays explained how “outside economic forces” buoyed the occasional bull years and artificially extended the natural bearish periods: the profession was meant to understand that “the market” was, while frequently a source of disappointment to us all, an actually existing system operating according to perfectly understandable and rational principles. This new epistemology radically transforms disciplinary communication in the early part of the decade: whereas the 1981 official “working paper” on employment issues reiterates the 1970s call for “collective activism” in order to protect the workplace circumstances of young people, J. Hillis Miller in 1986 was able to brush aside the concerns of youth with the forecast of a better future, claiming that “demographic and actuarial changes will mean many new positions [. . .] in the mid-nineties” (“Triumph” 285). (Even at the time, it cannot have been clear that the appearance of jobs ten years in the future would address the circumstances of a typical forty-year-old degree holder visiting the convention as a job seeker for the fifth year in a row.) What is important about this informatic futurology, however, is the exclusion during the early 1980s of structural knowledge from the professional discourse. Informationalization doesn’t unfold only by installing the flexible work regime, but sustains the flex system continuously by interfering with the consciousness of flex workers. While the evidence and labor knowledge of casualization occasionally intruded on the flow of disciplinary information, these emergent alarms were quickly muffled and explained away by the dominant heuristic of “market.”

The 1989 Bowen report is in many respects the fullest development of this mode of thinking, and one that appears to vigorously impose the ideology of “market” on data that virtually trumpet the structural reality of casualization. Subtitled “A Study of Factors Affecting Demand and Supply, 1987–2012,” the Bowen project

elaborates its view of the “roller-coaster pattern” of the business cycle in academic jobs in the first lines of its introduction, with talk of “periods of rapid expansion and retrenchment” after 1945, and “swings that have been sharp and sometimes destabilizing”(3). (The cyclic long view over forty-five years is meant to lend credence to the report’s projections of a quarter-century into the future.) Offering what it describes as a “highly quantitative analysis” aimed at enabling university administrations to assure themselves of a smooth flow of “outstanding faculty,” the project views its task as best accomplished by understanding the cycle of academic business: “We hope to provide both a clearer sense of whether the ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ pattern of faculty staffing is likely to repeat itself and an improved understanding of how to avoid such disruptive and inefficient cycles” (4). While Bowen goes to a great deal of trouble to distinguish between “projections” and “predictions” (predictions describe what will happen; projections describe what will happen if specific assumptions are met), this distinction only highlights the counterfactual nature of the Bowen assumptions. It is only by actively excluding the evidence of structural transformation (the replacement of tenured faculty with managed labor, expanding reliance on graduate employees and other nondegreed teachers) that Bowen is able to impose this Platonic vision of the business cycle on the data, leading him to project that fantastic massive upswing in the demand for faculty.

The most dramatic stroke in this regard was Bowen’s decision, as he put it, “to define ‘faculty’ quite carefully” (7). The universe of Bowen faculty included only the ladder ranks and full-time instructors, virtually excluding part-timers and faculty without the doctoral degree. The blundering represented by this decision is obvious in hindsight, though it’s not been commented upon. Most observers have been content to accept Bowen’s explanation that he couldn’t have predicted what he called “massive [. . .] cutbacks” in the 1990s (Magner, “Job”)—as if retrenchment and casualization were a phenomenon of that decade and not well established twenty years earlier. As I’ve noted, there was already by 1989 a well-developed understanding of the exploitation of part-timers and graduate students, and plenty of “hard quantitative” data, too: the 1988 National Study of the Postsecondary Faculty counted hundreds of thousands of part-time faculty, a massive segment of the work force that represents the near-doubling of the ratio of part-time to full-time faculty in less than two decades, from about 20 percent in 1970 to nearly 40 percent in 1987 (Natl. Center for Education Statistics, “Instructional”). The fact that Lynn Cheney—of all people—was essentially alone in attempting to debunk the Bowen projections shows the staying power of the positivist market fantasy even in the most well-meaning and politically committed quarters of the academy.

Bowen’s error is in his attempt to understand the employment system *as* a system while excluding the largest categories of its working parts. Nonetheless, one might be able to excuse this decision as consequent upon the view from Princeton:

that is, naturally from this standpoint he mistook the degree holder and the professoriate as the “real” faculty, and was ill-positioned, in the Ivy League, to understand that nondegreed labor was the real labor of the new system—except that Bowen’s dogmatic imposition of market ideology took such acrobatic effort that it’s nearly impossible for even the most generous observer to let him off the hook. For instance, faced with the evidence that increasing numbers of degree holders had been taking nonacademic work since the 1970s (“the movement away from academia that has been evident for some time now” [120]), Bowen rather perversely ignores the abundant testimony by graduate students that their dislocation was involuntary; and in expressing “considerable concern” about the larger numbers of degree holders who “chose [!] to pursue alternate careers”(13) argues that this “trend” augurs a need to *increase* graduate school admissions (120). This is a breathtakingly flawed syllogism that imposes the market ideology of “free choice” on the statistical evidence of degree holders taking nonacademic jobs (ultimately generating the claim that even more people will “choose” similarly). This particular assumption is only one element of the overall error pattern of the Bowen projections, but this completely unwarranted imposition of free choice ideology is symptomatic of his general failure to process evidence of nonmarket structural relations (see Bousquet, “Waste” 82–83).

Equally problematic are Bowen’s suppositions regarding institutional decision making. Despite enormous evidence to the contrary, Bowen starts his calculation with the assumption that retiring and other departing faculty will be replaced by degree holders “on a one-for-one basis” (25). The reality for many departments since 1968 has been, of course, very different from Bowen’s assumption of 1:1 replacements. Even in those circumstances where the raw number of full-time faculty remains stable, there has commonly been a substantial increase in the number of students; in other circumstances, the 1:1 replacement of full-time faculty has meant the substitution of non-tenure-track instructors for professorial labor. Overall, for most of the past thirty-five years, many departments have slowly given up professorial lines, or else counted themselves lucky when they were able to hire 1:1 despite a radically increased workload. But rather than accounting for retrenchment and workload increases, and lowering or contextualizing his projection of replacement demand, Bowen actually adjusts his figures *upward* (by, correctly, assuming that some of the new entrants will also need to be replaced). Convinced that “replacement demand is much more stable over time than many have assumed” (126), Bowen selectively reports data in support of his understanding of the employment system as a rational “market,” generating a pervasively rosy and ahistorical interpretation of otherwise alarming data. Looking at the plummeting percentage of young people in the ladder ranks (faculty under 40 were 42 percent of the total in 1977 and just 22 percent of the total only 10 years later, in 1987), Bowen fails to consider the obvious

reality that in fact there were *more young people than ever before* working as higher education teachers (only they were working “off the ladder” as graduate employees, part-timers, and nontenurable faculty). For more than ten years young people had been hired into the tenure stream in very small numbers; new tenurable hires were older, having taken longer to complete a degree, to find a job afterward, and so on. Other observers noted with concern the dramatic aging of the ladder faculty; Bowen, however, sweeps any consideration of this peculiarity off the table, representing it as a systemic self-correction, declaring without evidence that the smaller number of young faculty in 1987 was “more ‘normal’” than the 1977 ratio, reflecting his judgment of a system reaching balance and a “smooth” pattern of generational exit and replacement (16–27).

Bowen goes on to estimate various scenarios “leading to an increased ‘demand for faculty’” based on the even more ahistorical assumption that “institutions always *want* to have more faculty and will add faculty positions *when they can afford to do so*” (153). The emphasis is Bowen’s, and probably reflects his moral certitude: doubtless Bowen is right that institutions should “*want* to have more faculty,” but was there any basis in fact for this claim? The evidence clearly shows that the sort of “faculty” that institutions have been “adding” has consistently been term workers and graduate students: while there may well be occasional instances where administrations have chosen to increase the professorial faculty at the expense of other funding priorities (buildings and sports facilities, information technology), these cases would run against the general trend of administrative decision making, and it seems that the most successful pressure to increase tenure-track hiring has come from academic unions. Bowen’s ideas about what “institutions want” reflect the collegial common sense of Dink Stover at Yale (“Gosh, fellas, if the old u. could afford it, they’d keep you on for sure!”), but it’s not clear that they bear any documentable relation to the reality they purport to describe. Faced with the evidence of casualization advancing unevenly in the disciplines (for example, a greater aging of tenurable faculty in the humanities), Bowen reads this datum exactly against the trajectory of its meaning (that full-time positions for humanities teachers have been more quickly converted to part-time slots, and therefore there will be fewer full-time positions to fill). Bowen instead manages to read this datum as evidence that there will be *more* full-time hiring in the humanities—essentially saying that the slowed entry of young people into the ladder ranks “means” that there will soon be more young people in the ladder ranks (which is the same as saying that “because people have been eating less red meat lately, they’ll soon need to eat more red meat”). The closer one looks at Bowen’s study, the more one has to feel that Bowen sees more or less what he wants to see. Where nearly every other observer saw steadily growing reliance on part-time faculty—the ratio near doubling in twenty years—Bowen claims to see “no evidence of a significant trend in the part-time ratio,” and quite eccentrically

assumes “no change” in that ratio while projecting the “demand” for tenurable faculty over a quarter century (77n8).

One further example. With a similar commonsensicality, Bowen suggests that talent-rich doctoral “labor markets” lead to a more accomplished faculty, asserting that institutions are able “to raise hiring standards when there is a plentiful supply of talented young faculty” (151). If Bowen had looked more carefully, he might have seen what the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty was able to conclusively demonstrate: that despite the “oversupply” of degree holders, “new entrants” to the ranks of full-time faculty after 1985 were markedly less (not more!) likely to hold the PhD than previous cohorts. Analysis of the “new entrants” data was completed some time after Bowen’s study, but it’s particularly helpful because it confounds cherished assumptions about the nature of the employment system. Startlingly, the group of junior faculty hired between 1985 and 1992 were almost 30 percent more likely to claim the BA or MA as their highest degree than faculty hired any time earlier. This means that, under conditions of PhD “oversupply,” roughly 40 percent of the “new entrants” do not hold the doctorate. (By contrast, about 70 percent of the senior group of faculty, including many persons hired among the 1960s expansion cohort, hold the doctorate.) This pattern is consistent across institution type: research universities and other doctorate-granting institutions, as well as comprehensive and private liberal arts institutions, all show a substantial slide in the percentage of junior faculty holding the doctorate. The increase in nondoctoral faculty is stratified by discipline rather than institution type: humanities and the fine arts show the most dramatic decline in doctorally degreed junior faculty, with a mere 55 percent of junior faculty in the humanities holding the PhD (by contrast, 73 percent of senior faculty in the same fields hold the PhD). But all program areas showed a substantial slide, with the exception of natural sciences, which showed a slight increase in doctorates among the new entrants (Natl. Center for Education Statistics, “New” 22).

Under the actually existing system of academic work, the university clearly does not prefer the best or most experienced teachers, it prefers the cheapest teachers. Increasingly that means the creation of nontenurable full-time instructorships and other casual appointments, a casualization that has unfolded unevenly by discipline and is especially pronounced in English and writing instruction (see Bousquet, “Composition as Management Science”). In this instance, Bowen has again simply applied the dominant logic and assumed that even within the context of a general assault on the tenure system, “of course” the managers would hire the best “doctoral product” available. From the posture of common sense, it seems reasonable to assume—as many people have—that the replacement of tenured positions with “full-time” term contract positions means that persons holding doctorates will be awarded those jobs. The fashionable notion that we have an “oversupply” of degree holders

sustains this assumption: many graduate faculty imagine that their students who don't get tenurable work will be leading contenders for contract positions, in which, it is further assumed, they will pursue the scholarship, teaching, and service that they would have done in a tenurable position—albeit on a speeded-up basis, with less pay, and without the protections of tenure. While it is true that numerous degree holders seek and would gladly accept these positions, the facts are quite clear: holders of doctorates don't have a preference for those jobs. Non-tenure-track positions are awarded to persons without the doctorate in numbers large enough to substantially reduce the overall percentage of PhD holders in the full-time workforce.

Taken as a whole, including trends in the use of graduate employees, part-time lecturers, and the number of non-PhDs hired into full-time instructor positions, the academic labor system increasingly prefers teachers *without* the PhD—even when, as in the languages, desperate and deeply indebted holders of the PhD are willing to work without tenure and for salaries below \$30,000. Bernard Berelson's 1960 study of graduate education was able to demonstrate, by survey of department chairs, an empirical preference for the doctoral degree holder as an undergraduate teacher (52–53). By contrast, Bowen thirty years later can only offer an impressionistic assumption that the same holds true. (If he'd surveyed the literature, he would have found that academic management was busy developing a large discourse advertising the “quality of instruction” delivered with ever-fewer numbers of degreed faculty.) And in the circulation of this “bad information” through Bowen, despite what are certainly Bowen's individual good intentions and earnest scholarship, we begin to understand the real nature of an informationalized higher education: not the classic liberal and Enlightenment fantasy of information that “wants to be free” for everyone, but the power of capital and the corporate university to make neoliberal ideology count as reality. When we think about it, of course the information university doesn't “want” doctoral degree holders as faculty: as a general rule, the holders of doctoral degrees are disinclined to view students as information deficits or themselves as information-delivery devices. In believing that “education,” “knowing,” “research,” and “study” are embodied human practices, dialectical or dialogic and not reducible to information transfer, the typical doctoral degree holder represents an obstacle to the fantasy of dollars for credits driving the managerial revolution toward a fully informationalized higher ed.

Through the 1980s and early 1990s, second-wave fantasies of the “job market” such as Bowen's were all but unchallenged as they proceeded to do the corporate university the enormous service of covering up the processes of corporatization, managerialism, and casualization. It's important to understand that this supply-side second-wave knowledge does the same disservice even when it projects the opposite of Bowen's conclusions, as when the 1995 Massy-Goldman paper found “oversupply” and “overproduction” in the fields of science and engineering (though it is

instructive to see the corporate university's swift response to small errors in that paper: the methodology of Massy and Goldman's study or "simulation" was carefully and promptly critiqued by staff employees at the Council of Graduate Schools [Syverson], in stark contrast to the uncritical celebration surrounding Bowen's projections). In acknowledging that Bowen's projections were flawed, the managers of university business have carefully conserved the neoliberal assumptions that created his projections in the first place, leaving their own agenda not only undisturbed but actually advanced, having given the clear impression that this "market" was volatile ("markets" always are) and difficult to predict, even by venerable experts, leading to an even larger interest in expert information. Through this period and to the present, the notion of a job market continues to provide the dominant narrative of academic work in the liberal and corporate media. In bold capital letters, headlines in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *New York Times* scream the intelligible tale of second-wave knowledge: "Study Says U.S. Universities Produce Too Many Doctorates" (Magner); "A Surplus of Scholars Fight for Jobs in Academia" (Hodges); "Tenure Gridlock: When Professors Choose Not to Retire" (Wyatt); "Slaves to Science: For Post-docs, Finding a Supernova Is Easier Than Finding a Job" (Weed); "Oh, the Humanities! Pros Use Prose in Job-Hunting: Post-Tweed Breed of Professor Knows Marketing" (Argetsinger). At the present time, we can see the full ripening and culmination of second-wave knowledge: the system of graduate education is no longer understood as being "like" a market, it is generally understood, simply and self-evidently, that graduate education *is* a market.

By 1997, the dominance of market ideology had fully bloomed into a resplendently laissez-faire structure of feeling. In November of that year, Jules LaPidus, then president of the Council of Graduate Schools, took to the pages of the *Chronicle* to endorse a strong free-market theory of graduate education, bolstered by a vigorously neoliberal ideology of the graduate student as consumer. Conceding that pursuing the PhD is a "risky business" for many students, LaPidus represents that it has "always" been so, and vigorously opposes any regulation of the system: "The idea of developing some method to relate enrollments in graduate programs to projections of supply and demand in the job market runs counter to the American value of free choice." Concluding that "[s]tudents have to decide for themselves if they believe that doctoral education is a good investment of their funds and their time," LaPidus seems to feel that the ideology of choice ends the matter: "[A]s far as I know, no one is being forced to study for the Ph.D."

The market epistemology is perhaps most distressing when it is adopted by those who are hurt most by it: graduate employees, term faculty, and junior members of the professorate. A historian in his early thirties unable to find a permanent job despite having published three monographs, Robert E. Wright argues in his *Chronicle* editorial, "A Market Solution to the Oversupply of Historians," that "THE

SOLUTION IS CLEAR. THE SALARIES FOR NEW ASSISTANT PROFESSORS [CURRENTLY ABOUT \$40,000] SHOULD BE LOWERED UNTIL THE NUMBER OF QUALIFIED JOB APPLICANTS [. . .] AND THE NUMBER OF JOB OPENINGS BECOME MORE EQUAL” (caps in original). Being of a literary bent, and reading quickly, naturally I sought in Wright’s proposal some satirical intent. I even heard an echo of “A Modest Proposal” in “A Market Solution.” But on careful reading, Wright turns out to be in deadly earnest. An economic historian with a book from Cambridge University Press, Wright sincerely means to propose that academic employers get together to fix the woes of the “market,” not by intervening rationally (say, by restricting the use of graduate student labor and regulating the overuse of term faculty), but rather by further degrading the conditions of academic work. On the one hand, of course the absurdities of what Wright calls his “market-oriented approach” are obvious: his plan would simply sort, not for the best faculty, but the faculty that can afford to teach for smaller wages (by virtue of moonlighting, a pension, or other source of income); nor does it acknowledge the empirical, historical fact that the wage savings of the university’s vast expansion of term labor have not so far been dedicated to creating new professorial jobs: what guarantee does he have that the university would dedicate these new wage savings to a larger pool of tenure-track faculty? And if we could find a mechanism to enforce such a guarantee, why not develop that enforcement mechanism without lowering wages in the first place?

Perhaps we should acknowledge the degree to which Wright’s “proposal” simply realizes the absurd assumptions driving our own ideas about “the market” and academic work, especially our understandable but exaggerated sense of helplessness before its demands. What if, instead of constantly adjusting ourselves (and our compensation) to “meet the needs of the market,” we started to *adjust or regulate the “market” to meet our needs*? This would mean as a matter of course that faculty would have to take more control of their workplaces and, rather than lower faculty wages to the level of graduate employees and adjunct instructors (as Wright distressingly proposes), *raise the wages of graduate employees and adjunct instructors to the level of the faculty* (or even higher, in order to eliminate the motivation for replacing faculty workers with discounted labor). There is nothing utopian about this proposal; most observers will agree that graduate employees as true apprentice teacher-scholars and not cheap labor should (a) teach no more than one course a year and (b) receive a living wage, currently about \$15,000. One can easily argue that it should be more expensive to have a graduate program than not to have a graduate program (as it is in some of the less exploitive circumstances at present, and in many cases in the past). One might argue likewise that it should be more expensive to use flex labor than to use faculty labor (in the same way that it is more expensive to buy groceries at the convenience store). So the base calculations for the salary of a part-time lecturer

could begin at around \$5,000 per class (one-eighth of a 4/4 load, starting salary of \$40,000), and end up—after calculating fair health coverage, a retirement contribution, other benefits, a premium for “convenience” and a multiplier for years of experience—in the range of \$8,000 to \$10,000 per class, possibly quite a bit more for the term worker with many years of service. Of course at these reasonable wages, the university has little motivation to admit “too many” graduate employees or rely unduly on term faculty. All of these calculations are perfectly rational—they can even be represented, if one wishes, as a “correction to the market” (à la Wright’s pro-market plan to lower wages)—and have the advantage of being ethical. Furthermore, all of the problems of “the market” would vanish when fair wages were instituted across job descriptions. At the moment when everyone doing teacher work nonprofessionally is paid fairly, that is, far more expensively than heretofore, the assistant professor will become the cheapest labor available (relative to the fair wages of graduate employees and term faculty), and “demand” for assistant professors will cease to be a problem. Not incidentally, in an environment of reasonable wages for everyone, Bowen’s projections would in all likelihood have been more or less accurate.

At the forefront of this nonmarket or market-regulation approach to the “job crisis” are the union movements of graduate employees and adjunct academic labor. It is commonly remarked by members of the faculty that organized term faculty “are organizing themselves out of a job,” as if by eliminating the university’s motivation to hire them on exploitive terms, they are ensuring that there will suddenly be no work for them. The same sentiments have commonly been expressed in other workplaces, as in the railroads and steel plants when white workers derided the efforts of African American workers to organize. In fact, of course, the work of the academy will remain to be done: students will still need to be taught, advised, and inspired. (Furthermore: in practical terms, since the turnover rate even of full-time term faculty is 30 percent a year, it is hard to imagine the need to “fire adjuncts” in order to create professorial jobs faster than the already existing attrition.) Even if it were true on some abstract or collective level that graduate employees and the former graduate employees working on a term basis were indeed organizing themselves out of a job, it is only to organize themselves collectively into better ones.

Certainly, not all graduate employees and term workers reject the “market-oriented” approach to their present and future work prospects. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* has been able to report on small groups of graduate employees opposing unionization. And both graduate employees and term workers inevitably feel the pressure of having to “sell themselves” in a cruel, irrational, and exploitive workplace so that for many it feels, just as the *Washington Post* contends, that “job-hunting” in some sense equals “marketing” (Argetsinger). But an estimated 20 percent of graduate employees in the United States are now covered by union contracts

(a figure that Gordon Lafer considers "comparable to the most highly organized states in the country and 50 percent above the national norm" [63]). And there appear to be many more contracts on the way: it is at least likely that soon enough the majority feeling among graduate employees (who eventually become all of the labor in the system, term faculty and tenure-stream alike) will become the concerted will to make the "market" responsive to their needs, and not the other way around.

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