



ELI MEYERHOFF

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RADICAL STUDYING
FOR ANOTHER WORLD

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Eli Meyerhoff



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INTRODUCTION

Against the Romance of Education

SNAPPING IN AND AT THE UNIVERSITY

If our happiness depends on turning away from violence, our happiness is violence.

—Sara Ahmed, “Resignation Is a Feminist Issue”

Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed snapped at her university. After building up frustration over years, in 2016 she publicly called out academia’s sexism, especially the sexual harassment of students by professors, portending the explosion of the #MeToo movement in 2017. Then she resigned. After years of trying to address these problems through the “proper” institutional channels, she concluded that the issue was not merely a few individuals acting badly but rather “an issue of institutional culture, which had become built around (or to enable) abuse and harassment.”¹ Despite some small victories, she became exhausted with the lack of progress: “so much work not to get very far.” In a blog post titled “Resignation Is a Feminist Act,” she described the moment she snapped:

Watching histories be reproduced despite all our efforts was one of the hardest experiences of my academic career—well one of the hardest experiences of my life. I just found it shocking. And to complete the story: I originally asked for unpaid leave because doing this work can be demoralising as well as exhausting. But in the course of applying for unpaid leave (and the difficulty of making arrangements in my absence), I felt a snap: I call it feminist snap. My relationship with the institution was too broken. I needed a real break: I had reached the end of the line.

That snap might sound quite violent, dramatic even. Resigning in feminist protest—and making public that you are resigning in feminist protest—does get attention. It can be a sharp sound; it can sound like a sudden break. In my case, that break was supported by many of my

colleagues; but not by all. One colleague describes my action as “rash,” a word used to imply an action that is too quick as well as careless. Snapping is often a matter of timing. A snap can feel like a moment. But snap is a moment with a history: a history can be the accumulated effect of what you have come up against. And just think: you have to do more, the more you do not get through. You have had hundreds of meetings, with students, with academics, with administrators. You have written blogs about the problem of sexual harassment and the silence that surrounds it. And still there is silence. To resign is a tipping point, a gesture that becomes necessary because of what the previous actions did not accomplish. The actions that did not accomplish anything are not noticed by those who are not involved in the effort. So the action that spills a history, so that it falls out, so there is a fall out, is deemed rash.

Well maybe then: I am willing to be rash.²

On May 30, 2016, Ahmed resigned after working as a professor for twenty years. Without needing to negotiate anything with her university, she could continue to speak out against sexism in academia and beyond, amplifying her feminist work.

Snapping is one way to respond to an impasse in the university—a situation that seems impossible to move past. Ahmed confronted the impasse of sexism (intertwined with those of racism and heteronormativity, among others). Her response of snapping contrasts sharply with her university administrators’ response to these impasses: pushing everyone to move on. Those who refuse to move on are, in Ahmed’s words, “deemed rash,” as their action “spills a history.”

Corey Menafee also famously snapped at his university. On June 13, 2016, he decided the window had to go. During his work break, the thirty-eight-year-old African American service worker at Yale University’s Calhoun College dining hall used a broomstick to smash a stained-glass window that depicted enslaved people of African descent (Figure 1). Afterward, he explained how, two weeks prior to his action, a visitor to Yale talked with him about the image:

It was reunion weekend, [a Yale alumnus] came in with his 10-year-old daughter. . . . [H]e mentioned that image was there way back, like, 10 years ago when he was there as a student, and he said it’s still there. I mean, *you can only imagine the type of emotions that run through an African-*



FIGURE 1. Corey Menafee and the stained-glass window depicting enslaved people at Yale University. Courtesy of *Democracy Now!*

American, if I can say that, seeing a picture of two slaves—two actual slaves picking cotton.³

After he was arrested and charged with a felony, Menafee resigned from Yale and gave several interviews with local and national news outlets. The nationwide outcry against Yale pressured them to drop the charges and to rehire him. But they did so only on the condition of a gag provision, preventing Menafee from making “any further statements to the public” about his action and the administrative response.⁴ The Yale administration sought to bury the controversy that Menafee’s act, and his speaking about it, had brought into the public spotlight. Yale’s vice president of communications, Eileen O’Connor, claimed the reason for the gag provision was “so that everyone can now move on.” Despite their silencing him, what he already said about the event remains public. Reading Menafee’s words, although “you can *only* imagine,” you can still *try* to “imagine the type of emotions that run through an African-American” when he (Menafee) sees this glorified image of slavery, and when he sees the name of the slaveholder and colonialist John C. Calhoun on a Yale University building, his daily workplace.

The typical stories about racism and sexism in higher education portray them as “ugly histories” from a buried past that one has to dig up. By

contrast, Ahmed's and Menafee's snaps show that these histories continue to be lived in the present. This book takes the baton from Ahmed and Menafee, and from all those who are "willing to be rash." I have snapped at the university, also, in my own way. When I was in graduate school, the academic life felt contradictory: we faced hyper-competitive pressure to climb up the professional ladder while the number of secure jobs dwindled. Discussion of mental illness, and of cracking under the pressure to compete, was stigmatized. When a fellow graduate student committed suicide, I snapped. I decided to use my dissertation, and now this book, as opportunities to study the object of my snapping, the university, to "spill its history." I am writing about what it means to snap *in* and *at* the university—to become undone along with others whom the university has undone. Together, we can unravel the university's secrets. Together, we can make places for studying where violence isn't hidden under masks of happiness and between the lines of romantic stories.

The controversy between Menafee and Yale raises questions that motivate this book. Menafee reached an impasse about racism in the university. His response was to destroy the offending object, and this opened up a broad public discussion. Yale responded by narrating a crisis of public relations. They sought to shut down the critical studying that Menafee's action had incited. Unmasking higher education's normative narrative of uplift, community, and romance, Menafee had exposed some of its hidden violence. What does it mean to talk about Menafee and studying together, given the ways that the university represents service labor and studying as irreconcilable? Considering Yale's gag provision on Menafee, how does Menafee's studying threaten the university's normative mode of study, that is, education?

This book argues that education is just one possible mode of study among many alternatives. Modes of study are bound up with different modes of world-making—ways of making ourselves, politics, economies, communities, cultures, and so forth.⁵ I argue that the education-based mode of study supplements modes of world-making that are associated with modernist, colonial, capitalist, statist, white-supremacist, heteropatriarchal norms. In the course of political struggles between conflicting modes of world-making, education has been presented as the best and only

option for study. Because it is romanticized in this way, the possibilities of alternative modes of study have become almost unthinkable. Against the grain, this book takes aim at the romance of education.

The book's argument unfolds through, first, showing how the romance of education is endemic in contemporary debates about the impasse of higher education. The education romance is part of what I call an epistemology of educated ignorance that hinders study of the complex controversies in this impasse. I show how movements for educational equity and justice tend to naturalize romantic stories about education, thereby not only defeating their own purposes but also expanding the racialized and gendered carceral regime. The dominant tendency in university studies has been to present the problems or crises of higher education as *analytical* and *moral* questions that could be resolved through rational debate and persuasion. This approach tends to take on an expert position—what Walter Mignolo calls a “zero-point” position “above” the world—from which one can analyze and moralize.⁶ Adopting such a position has depoliticizing effects, because it forecloses consideration of how one's own position is implicated in producing the problem.

As an antidote, I argue that we should see the impasse of higher education as rooted in *political* questions about conflicts between alternative modes of world-making that are co-constitutive with certain modes of study and self-making. Seeing one's own body and place as thoroughly situated within these political conflicts, the knowledge that one produces about these conflicts is necessarily political. *All* approaches to the impasse are political, including the moral and analytical approaches that attempt to hide their politics behind a veneer of objective expertise. I argue not merely for an *openly* political approach to the impasse but also for a *fanatical* political approach, one that commits oneself as a partisan to particular sides in the many struggles that striate the terrain of universities. As a partisan of abolitionist, decolonial, feminist, anticapitalist movements myself, I offer in this book a theory that can be useful for penetrating the vectors of these movements more deeply into the hearts of universities.

This book wagers that a critical genealogy of education can open our imaginations to new possibilities. Taking my impetus from critiques of U.S. universities as colonial-capitalist institutions in need of decolonization,

I trace the origins of ideas about education that the British settlers brought with them to the colonies. From spilling this “critical history of the present,” we can learn how the romantic narrative of education today is entwined with colonial-capitalism.⁷ The book’s middle chapters give critical genealogies of key elements of the education-based mode of study. The end of the book builds on this analysis of the problem with the romance of education to offer possible solutions. I highlight examples of alternative modes of study and contemporary struggles to expand them against and beyond education. For clarifying the stakes of these struggles, I argue that we need to engage with the hidden histories of alternative modes of study that grappled with the tensions of the university’s “undercommons”—that is, studying *in but not of* as well as *against and beyond* the dominant institutions.⁸

In this introduction I give a taste of the book’s key concepts—“education romance,” “modes of study,” “educated ignorance,” “impasse,” and “undercommons”—by using them as frames for illuminating the controversy between Corey Menafee and Yale. I connect these concepts with Ahmed’s theory of affective economies to describe how Menafee’s alternative mode of study presents a threat to Yale. Then, I elaborate on the concept of mode of study, including descriptions of how Menafee’s studying is part of broader movements of Black radical study, and of how Yale attempts to recuperate Menafee’s threat. I clarify how different modes of study are bound up with different modes of world-making. To explain the origins of this book, I narrate my own path from education romance toward critical research on education’s impasses. Finally, I give an overview of the book’s chapters.

SMASHING THE UNIVERSITY’S RACIST WINDOWS TO SPILL A HISTORY

Before Menafee took on the gag provision, he described in interviews the emotions that ran through him when he saw the stained-glass window:

You know, it’s a picture—it was a picture that just—you know, as soon as you look at it, it just hurts. You feel it in your heart, like, oh, man—

like here in the 21st century, you know, we're in a modern era where we shouldn't have to be subjected to those primitive and degrading images. . . . [I]t was a small piece of glass that was no bigger than a tablet. It was—it depicted a male and a female, both appearing to be African-American, standing in a field of white crops, what appear to be cotton, with baskets over their heads. And I believe one of the figures were actually smiling, which is like so condescending, because looking back on slavery, like, it wasn't a happy time for African Americans.⁹

I took a broomstick, and it was kind of high, and I climbed up and reached up and broke it. . . . It's 2016, I shouldn't have to come to work and see things like that. . . . I just said, "That thing's coming down today. I'm tired of it."¹⁰

I was aware of all the controversy behind the name John Calhoun and what he represented. However, I don't want to go ahead and necessarily say that that contributed to what I did. I just simply got tired of looking at that image. I don't know, you just get fed up. It gets to a point where it's like, enough's enough. I don't know. I think it's like Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." It was sitting in the corner of the room ticking away subconsciously—somewhere in my subconscious.¹¹

His words burst with emotions: *tired of it, fed up, it just hurts, you feel it in your heart, primitive and degrading, so condescending, The Tell-Tale Heart.*

Menafee and Ahmed share academic fame for having snapped at their universities, for different but related reasons: protesting institutional racism and institutional sexism, respectively.¹² Their snaps also both involved their resignations from their universities, but in different ways. Ahmed's resignation was intentional, whereas when Menafee broke the window he was not intentionally resigning but was refusing Yale's plantation-ness. He resigned because it was the option he and his union were offered through negotiations with Yale's human-resources officials.

Ahmed's theory of "the cultural politics of emotions"—which she developed in and through her struggles with universities—can help us understand Menafee's action. Ahmed reframes emotions, not as residing in subjects or objects (seen in common expressions such as "I *have* a feeling" or "the book *is* sad"), but as movements, associations, and circulations of objects and signs that ripple across and between bodies.¹³ What we see as the boundaries and surfaces of bodies—as individuals and collectives—do not preexist emotions but rather are formed through the circulation

of the objects of emotions. Readings of pain, fear, love, hate, shame, and other emotions can bind a group together as a community, framing people either as internal members or as excluded others.

Ahmed describes emotions as productive of the impression of surfaces of individuals and collectives through “*intensifications of feeling*.”¹⁴ In his allusion to Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart,” Menafee describes his subconscious as a “room.” From working in the building for six months, Menafee had accumulated psychic pain in relation to the window, like a covered-up-but-still-beating heart, “sitting in the corner of the room ticking away subconsciously.”¹⁵ He came to see the building’s surface as tied with his identity, with the walls of its rooms representing his body’s own surface. The stained-glass window shows an image to viewers both inside and outside. Seeing the window over and over from the inside, from the “room” of his “subconscious,” intensified his feeling of pain, reproducing the impression of the window as homologous with the surface of his body. Further, imagining external viewers of this image—such as from talking with the visiting Yale alumnus and his ten-year-old daughter—intensified Menafee’s sense of pain, from empathizing with them as they dwelled critically on this image, which he saw as part of himself. An intensification of his pain produced his desire to break the surface—to remove the object of his pain and to reorient his body in relation to the pain.

Menafee’s feeling of pain is related to his memories, both personal and historical.¹⁶ In interviews, Menafee does not relate his action to his personal history, and due to the gag provision we cannot ask him to elaborate. He grew up in New Haven with its inequalities and segregations of race, class, and town-and-gown. He graduated in 2001 from a historically Black university, Virginia Union University, “founded in 1865 to give newly emancipated slaves an opportunity for education and advancement.”¹⁷ He then returned to New Haven, worked for a few months as a substitute teacher in New Haven’s segregated schools, and then worked for nine years in a service position at elite, white-dominated Yale University.¹⁸ Menafee attributes a main source of his pain from the image to its misrepresenting the emotions of the enslaved African Americans as “actually smiling.” He finds it “so condescending” that this image whitewashes the violent history of slavery, presenting it as “a happy time.” His sense of indignation might

have been heightened by the movement to change the name of Calhoun College. Four months after he broke the window, at a protest with the Change the Name Coalition, he gave a speech, saying, “We no longer want the name Calhoun casting a shadow on our university.”¹⁹ The 2001 report “Yale, Slavery and Abolition” described how John C. Calhoun had been a student at Yale with his tuition paid by profits from enslaved people’s labor, went on to gain wealth and political power as a slave plantation owner, and became a statesman who wielded “enormous political influence on the preservation of slavery.”²⁰ In 1930, Yale University decided to name “Calhoun College” in his honor. Profits from slave labor provided much of the capital for Yale’s first scholarships, early buildings, and endowment, and Yale’s campus was itself a site of slave labor.²¹

The attempts to unearth this history of Yale’s ties to slavery have been entwined with labor struggles. The report “Yale, Slavery and Abolition” was written by three graduate student labor organizers. Menafee might have seen his action as continuing the history of worker resistance at Yale. According to historian Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, “the long, submerged history of property destruction and direct action by Yale employees” includes the November 1969 incident of a thirty-year-old Black dining hall waitress, Colia Williams, throwing a glass of water at a white manager who was harassing her, the 1971 actions of striking workers who “slashed the wiring and tires of university vehicles,” and the 1977 firebombing of a university safety office during a thirteen-week walkout, which was one of approximately twenty strikes on Yale’s campus from the 1940s to the present.²² Although Menafee’s action did not take place during a strike, his labor union supported him against the charges and fought for his rehiring.

In addition to considering Menafee’s motives for breaking the window, we can ask about Yale’s motives for silencing him. Why would the administration find Menafee’s words so dangerous as to impose a gag provision on him? How could the public speech of one dishwasher threaten a university with a \$25 billion endowment and over 4,400 faculty members?²³ The answer lies in the contagious power of emotions. With the media amplifying his voice to a national stage, Menafee invited a national audience to “imagine the type of emotions that run through” him

and other African Americans when they see images of enslaved people misrepresented as “actually smiling.” He invited listeners to empathize with him—to connect with the circulating emotions that run between, across, and through him, his fellow service workers, Black students at Yale, and others who feel indignation at racism. Yet, through empathizing with Menafee’s pain, an audience does not actually feel *his* pain.

Ahmed highlights “the impossibility of feeling the pain of others,” as “empathy remains a ‘wish feeling,’ in which subjects ‘feel’ something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels.”²⁴ She calls for an “ethics of responding to pain” that “involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel. . . . [T]he ungraspability of my own pain is brought to the surface by the ungraspability of the pain of others.”²⁵ She also promotes a *politics* of responding to the pain of others. Heeding the call of “a pain that can’t be shared through empathy” entails “a demand for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning to live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one.”²⁶ Making such ethical and political responses to Menafee’s pain would require grappling with the impasse of racism at the university, such as by participating in the critical mode of study practiced by Menafee and others in the Change the Name movement. Ahmed’s call for a *politics* of responding to the pain of others resonates with my argument that we should interpret the impasse of higher education in terms of a *political* question: provoking the audience to ask themselves, Which side am I on? My concept of “mode of study” can help clarify the conflicting sides in this political struggle as well as the stakes involved in choosing a side. Will you choose to be an accomplice with Menafee and the Change the Name movement’s struggles to dismantle institutional racism in universities, or will you side with the administration’s attempts to maintain the dominant order? Will you participate in Menafee’s mode of study, which combines direct action—such as breaking a window—with critical reflection on, and organizing around, Yale’s racist history and present?

This political approach contrasts sharply with how Yale’s administrators responded to the impasse brought up by Menafee’s action. Their

response presented an interpretation of this impasse as a moral and analytical question, attempting to depoliticize it by obscuring the sides and stakes of the conflict. They deployed moralizing language with their claims of opposition to “violence” and support of “non-violence.” They sought to redirect concern about Yale’s white-supremacist history into normal circuits of education within the university—as if the problem can be solved through more education. Their moral and analytical rhetoric aimed to make us *turn away* from Menafee’s pain so that—in the words of their vice president of communications—“everyone can now move on.”²⁷ To make everyone move on from reflecting on his pain—short-circuiting political questions about how to respond—they used two affective strategies: first, normalizing an emotional economy of happiness, safety, and fear; and second, appropriating his pain through claims of shame, generosity, and reconciliation. These strategies sought to neutralize Menafee’s challenge to Yale’s dominant, education-based mode of study.

One aspect of Yale’s normalized emotional economy is seen in the stained-glass image’s representation of the slaves as happy—a performed happiness that masks the violence of an exploitative situation. For contemporary service workers, this affective economy is continued in performance reviews that evaluate whether employees, such as dining hall workers, appear happy and friendly when interacting with customers. For academics, this is seen in academic norms of civility and collegiality that suppress and stigmatize expressions of anger.²⁸ For students, the prescribed happiness is seen through their romantic relation to education: they are framed as heroes in a romance narrative of climbing the educational ladder, overcoming obstacles on the way toward a happy life after graduation. Yale’s response to Menafee’s action is a way to restore this romance of education and its associated performances of happiness.

A second aspect of this normal affective economy is seen in the Yale administration’s narratives of safety. In the romantic narrative of education, the protagonist is the Yale student. Service workers like Menafee are supposed to contribute to this narrative by creating a protected space in which the Yale student can learn. Menafee’s action ruptures the romance of education. He presents a mode of study that is both alternative and threatening to Yale’s education-based mode of study. Menafee’s response

is studied (e.g., his reference to “The Tell-Tale Heart”). He is not only a college-educated man but is also engaged in the wider body of thinking around the movement to grapple with Yale’s legacy of slavery. He shows how study and the desire to do violence to certain kinds of property are not diametrically opposed. As such, this makes him a teacher of students in a way that the university does not want. Yale’s attempt to gag him is also an attempt to obscure how studied he is—to have him take on the appearance of an uneducated person whose only response can be a violent one rather than one that comes from a place of study. According to Yale vice president Eileen O’Connor, “a stained glass window was broken by an employee of Yale, resulting in glass falling onto the street and onto a passerby, endangering [her] safety,” and in a follow-up interview O’Connor said “she doesn’t know for sure if the glass fell on the passerby or in front of her, but ‘it was scary enough nonetheless.’”²⁹ In his response, Menafee contests the university’s framing of him as a threat to students: “I didn’t commit any acts of violence against anyone or any living thing. I didn’t be belligerent, or yell. I just broke the windows.” Through metonymic slides, the administration’s narrative slips between objects—from the threat to a passerby of the falling glass, to the whole situation framed as “scary,” to Menafee himself—sticking them together as objects of fear.

Ahmed notes that fear is not only about an unpleasant experience in the present but also “an *anticipation* of hurt or injury” in an imagined future.³⁰ The future-oriented and individualizing character of fear counteracts Menafee’s studied connection of Yale’s present with its past, his call for collective unforgetting of Yale’s legacy of slavery as its “Tell-Tale Heart.” Further, through the administration’s narrative attaching the signs of “scary,” “danger,” and “threat to safety” to Menafee’s body while gendering the passerby as female, they draw on stereotypes—associations of Black men with criminality, particularly with sexual danger to white women. These stereotypes serve to intensify an audience’s referencing of the object of fear onto Menafee, rendering his body as “a site of insecurity.”³¹ Through framing his response as violent and unstudied, the university attempts to restore him to the role of servant and make clear that he is not a teacher of students. Thereby they seek to neutralize the threat that he poses to the education-based mode of study.

MODES OF STUDY: EDUCATION AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

In my analysis above of Menafee's disruption of Yale's normal order, I have introduced the concept of "mode of study." Inspired by Gustav Landauer's argument that the state is a relationship and that we dismantle it by relating to one another differently, I contend that when new concepts allow us to think differently about the university, we can enact new ways of relating in and beyond it.³² In order to open up imaginative possibilities, we can view education as only one mode of study among many possible modes. By understanding how education has become the currently dominant mode of study through a contingent, conflict-ridden history, we can broaden our imaginative horizons.

To explain the concept of modes of study, I elaborate its elements. I see study, generally, as an activity in which people devote attention to the world. This sustained attention modifies their capacities and dispositions for understanding the world. A mode of study is a way of composing the *means* and *relations* of study. I see this distinction between means and relations as a fluid one, posited here for analytic purposes. The means of study are the various actors involved in any activity of studying. These actors include both *who* is studying as well as *what* they are studying with—the tools, objects, and techniques with which they study. There are infinite possibilities for such means, but some examples that might seem obvious to a contemporary reader include pens, paper, books, classrooms, chalkboards, computers, exams, grades, the Internet, laboratories, teacher salaries, student tuition, school and university buildings, and divisions between classrooms. The means of study also might include collectivities of students and teachers themselves. Using Bruno Latour's division of movements of association into processes of collection and composition, we can ask two key questions about these means of studying: *Which* means are collected together, and *how* are they composed together—that is, how are they related with each other?³³ We can imagine infinite possible collections of different means of studying, as well as infinite possible ways of composing the relations between them.

Compositions of the relations of study can be analyzed on multiple scales. On a meso scale of everyday human-to-human practices, they might

refer to the relations between people involved in studying practices, such as between students, teachers, school police, and school administrators, and the relations with their tools for studying, such as classrooms and computers. On more micro scales, these relations of study entail affective, imaginative, and evaluative practices and processes, such as students feeling joy in studying their favorite subject or feeling shame in receiving a bad grade. On more macro scales, the relations of study might include transportation of students between their homes and schools, funding and accreditation of schools by local, state, and federal governments, and rankings of schools and universities.

The means and relations of study are collected and composed in various ways. Focusing on composition, I argue that we can generalize across different modes of composing collections of the means of study. This is what I mean by the term “mode of study”: a theoretical abstraction that refers to a generalized, idealized way of composing the relations among collected means of studying. Differently composed relations of study limit or enable who can access the means of study and how they can study with them. For example, when teachers are positioned as experts, they tend to control the means of study in a classroom and to limit when and how different students can access those means. Differently composed means of study create enabling or limiting conditions on the formation of relations of study. For example, the mass-production of books with printing presses enabled studying with books among a wider populace. Charging higher prices for those books, or writing them in inaccessible language, limits who can study with them.

A mode of study is a generalized way of composing the means and relations of study in any given place and historical moment. Considering the infinite potential ways of describing and delimiting the collections and compositions of different means and relations of studying, there are no necessary ways of describing different modes of study. In other words, any definition of a particular mode of study is relative to the political motivations of whoever is designating it—an idealized abstraction constructed for particular political purposes. For my purposes, I give general concepts of different modes of study through identifying particular patterns across histories and geographies.

I define the education-based mode of study as entailing seven main features that have powerful effects for composing the means and relations of study:

a vertical imaginary—students rise *up* the levels of schooling (e.g., pre-K through twelfth grade through *higher* education)

a romantic narrative—students face obstacles, and overcome them as heroic individuals, along their journey up education’s levels

relations of separation between students as producers and the means of studying—the teacher enforces this separation and regulates relations across it

techniques of governance—students’ subjectivities are shaped with dispositions of obedience to the teacher’s authority as an expert

a zero-point epistemology—the teacher’s expert knowledge is seen as universally valid, from a position above any particular bodies and places in the world

an affective pedagogical economy of credit and debt—students are disciplined to desire honor and avoid shame in the eyes of their teachers and fellow students, often taking the form of grades on exams

binary figures of educational value and waste (e.g., the success vs. the failure, the college-bound vs. the remedial, the graduate vs. the dropout)

This book’s chapters 2, 3, and 4 present critical genealogies of some of these features, showing how they emerged from political struggles. Different practices called “education” exhibit these features to varying extents. Some, such as mass education with standardized testing in most U.S. public schools and charter schools, exhibit these features more than others, such as Montessori-style education and democratic education. The education-based mode of study is also distinct from the global set of formal educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities. Many different modes of study are happening in practices and institutions that we might describe as “educational.”

Now that we can comprehend education as a specific mode of study and not a universal one, I can explain the aim of this book more clearly: to

help us diagnose the problems with the education-based mode of study, understand its contingent historical emergence, analyze its relationship to alternative modes of study, and explore possibilities for some of those alternatives. Key controversies in the politics of study are about the conflicts between promoters of different modes of study—in association with different modes of world-making—as they struggle for access to, and composition of, potential means of study. Examples of modes of study alternative to that of education include the modes of study in Indigenous communities, in Black radical social movements, and in other traditions of movement-embedded studying. For example, in France’s May 1968 rebellions, students’ and workers’ practices of organizing were bound up with studying that gave them capacities to occupy and collectively manage universities and factories.³⁴ Another example is that, according to Indigenous Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson, studying in Nishnaabeg communities entails practices that break from the features of the education-based mode of study. Rejecting the separation of students from the means of studying and refusing the zero-point epistemology, the Nishnaabeg ground practices of studying in a complex “compassionate web” of more-than-human relationships.³⁵ Through centering Indigenous storytelling as a mode of study, Indigenous people narrate the meaning of their lives as interwoven with the land, wherein “land” takes on a capacious meaning to include wetlands, sea, air, mountains, cities, soil, and the animals, plants, and ancestral spirits who are seen as cohabitating and studying with humans.³⁶ A more-than-humanist perspective on studying can also include micro scales within human bodies, such as with the “sym-poetic” compositions of bacterial and human cells in the production of emotions.³⁷ Simpson criticizes academia for co-opting Indigenous study projects into the trap of “reconciliation” that maintains settler colonialism; instead, she calls for appropriating academia’s resources for a “radical resurgence project” that intertwines land-based Indigenous study with anticolonial resistance movements.³⁸

Corey Menafee also participated in an alternative mode of study—Black radical study. His direct action of breaking the window must be seen in the context of the spread of the Movement for Black Lives from the streets onto campuses in 2015 and 2016, which has drawn attention to

universities' racial inequities, especially with the decrease of affirmative action while systemic racism continues to fester. Led by Black students, these protests sent shock waves of revolt across U.S. campuses. The students' demands—articulated in different ways in more than eighty statements from different campuses, including Yale—challenge racism in its overt, institutional, structural, cultural, and strategic forms.³⁹ Their struggles have forced institutional changes, from the adoption of task forces on racial equity to the ouster of college presidents.⁴⁰ By connecting the Black Lives Matter message to campus issues, these insurgent students have amplified the complexity of narratives about higher education's impasse.

An important public forum for debate about this impasse was hosted in the *Boston Review* under the title “Black Study, Black Struggle” in March 2016.⁴¹ A key controversy in this debate was whether universities can be engines of social transformation or if, instead, such a function should only be seen in the work of political education and organizing from outside the university. Robin D. G. Kelley articulates this controversy in strategic terms between, on the one hand, a strategy of pushing the university through struggle to live up to its enlightened ideal, and on the other hand, the undercommons approach, which Kelley, drawing on Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, defines as “a subversive way of being *in* but not *of* the university.”⁴² Rejecting the idea that the university could ever become an enlightened space, devotees of the undercommons refuse to narrate the university's structural racism as a crisis that administrators could resolve through reforms of “more diversity, better training, a culturally sensitive curriculum,” and increased “safety and affordability.” Instead, the undercommons strategy aims to steal and repurpose the university's resources for collective study, acting as a “fugitive network.” While the university's means of study are normally devoted to the education-based mode of study, the “guerrilla intellectuals” of the undercommons seek to redirect these means into an alternative network of Black radical modes of study. Insurgent students can grapple with the impasse of the university in their own autonomous study groups. Thereby, they not only aim to transform the existing university but also, through their study, they prefigure a liberated university.

The debate in this forum brings up controversial questions around

the relations between study, labor, reform, and revolution. *Who* is in the undercommons? How do the different ways that people are “in” or “outside” the university condition their participation in the undercommons? How does the undercommons relate to different space-times within and beyond the university, from the classroom and cafeteria to the public sphere and marginalized neighborhoods? How do people’s different positionalities as studiers and laborers of various kinds—as students, service workers, contingent faculty, tenure-stream faculty, or people unaffiliated with the university—affect their roles in studying and organizing together for reform and/or revolution?

In order to engage these complex questions, I contend that we need to interrogate an ambiguity contained within the “Black Study, Black Struggle” debate, namely, between study and education.⁴³ Kelley draws from Harney and Moten both the theory of the undercommons and their advocacy of study. In an interview, Harney and Moten have also made a distinction between study and education.⁴⁴ Picking up on their attempt at a more nuanced theory, I offer the concept of modes of study. With this concept we can distinguish between the modes of study in the formal classroom, in service workers’ everyday conversations and organizing, and in autonomous study groups. We can imagine possibilities for breaking from the education-based mode of study in these different situations. The concept of modes of study allows for engaging with, rather than burying, controversies over how the different positionalities of students, faculty, service workers, and people beyond campuses are related with inequalities of access to the means for study and conflicts between their different modes of study. For example, the education-based mode of study is co-constituted with universities’ “unequal temporal architectures” in which tenured professors’ privileged experiences of engaging in “slow scholarship” are interdependent with oppressive, “sped-up” labor conditions for many others in the university—service workers who maintain the professors’ offices, students who take on extra jobs and debt to pay tuition, and contingent faculty who teach more classes.⁴⁵ When the latter are working to enable the tenured class’s conditions for studying, their possibilities for exploring alternative modes of study are limited. Conversely, movements on campus—such as for Black liberation and

Indigenous resurgence—can open up spaces on campus that enact more equal temporal architectures and facilitate alternative modes of study. With a political theory of study, I offer framings for these movements to affirm their modes of study in association with their projects for making a new world.

RECUPERATION OF ALTERNATIVE MODES OF STUDY

A key danger these movements face is that their alternative world-making projects tend to become absorbed into the dominant world-making project. My concept of modes of study allows for a more nuanced view on how this recuperation occurs. Institutions built around the education-based mode of study are *parasitic* upon alternative modes of study. Rather than being based on a homogeneity of their mode of study, these institutions' success is dependent upon their ability to appropriate and recuperate alternative modes of study *up to a point*.

To elaborate this argument about recuperation with a concrete example, I return to Corey Menafee. To stabilize their normal educational order, Yale's administration tries to recuperate his alternative (Black radical) mode of study. Their attempt to maintain a normalized affective economy of the university includes their politics of shame, which has two interrelated aspects: first, shame is "brought onto" the Yale community by an illegitimate Other; and second, Yale brings shame "onto itself."⁴⁶ When Menafee is framed as a violent threat, he experiences shame—seen in his act of apologizing. The administration frames his response as having "expressed deep remorse about his actions." Ahmed notes how this kind of shame is experienced "as the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence."⁴⁷ Menafee violates Yale's liberal norm for dealing with conflicts, namely, through ostensibly nonviolent discussion. Conversely, this norm frames direct actions—such as in Yale's history of service worker strikes—as violent. By seeking an apology from Menafee, the administration shifts guilt and shame onto Menafee, and thereby diverts attention away from one of his objectives with Black radical study: to inspire the collective "unforgetting" of, and critical reflection on, Yale's legacy of slavery.⁴⁸

At the same time, the administration tries to co-opt Menafee's action into their preferred mode of acknowledging their legacy of racism. This entails a second sense of Yale's politics of shame. The administration incorporates Menafee's action into an official narrative of how Yale has brought shame "on itself," exposed as "failing" a liberal multicultural ideal. The administration performs an act of "generosity" by giving Menafee his job back and presents this "reconciliation" between Yale and Menafee in connection with Yale's attempts to heal the wounds of slavery. They represent their efforts to deal with this painful history as forms of healing for the Yale community.⁴⁹ In Yale's narrative of reconciliation with their legacy of slavery, they claim the pain of Black bodies as their own, recuperating their pain as a means for affectively intensifying people's subscriptions to the identity of the Yale community.⁵⁰ This reconciliation narrative deflects attention from Yale's continuing expansion into New Haven's Black neighborhoods, an expansion for which slavery laid the groundwork.⁵¹ Their performance of a moral reconciliation might trick their audience to "move on," to turn away from the political controversy that Menafee's snap revealed. This controversy is between conflicting modes of world-making that are co-constituted with certain modes of study.

THE CO-CONSTITUTION OF MODES OF STUDY AND WORLD-MAKING

My critique is aimed neither at the term "education" nor at educational institutions, but rather at the education-based mode of study. My concept of modes of study is similar to the Marxist concept of modes of production, which is defined as a configuration of means (i.e., forces) of production and relations of production. But, unlike orthodox Marxists, who envision "natural progress" through changing modes of production (e.g., from feudalism to capitalism to communism), I do not theorize any necessarily developmental, progressive, or teleological relations between different modes of study. Also, instead of using the term "modes of production" I prefer "modes of world-making." The former tends to carry the orthodox Marxist baggage of a dualistic worldview (i.e., material base vs. ideologi-

cal superstructure), whereas “modes of world-making” implies a monist worldview with ideas and materiality on the same immanent plane of existence. By asserting that modes of study and modes of world-making are co-constitutive, I am discouraging a dualist or transcendent view in which adopting a certain mode of study could give a vantage on the world from a point outside and separate from the world.

Relations between certain modes of study and certain modes of world-making are relatively congruent or dissonant. A key example of this, which I will elaborate in the book, is the supplementary relation between the education-based mode of study and the capitalist, modernist/colonial mode of world-making, particularly through theorizing the education-based mode of study as part of the processes of creating the preconditions of capitalism, what Karl Marx described as “so-called primitive accumulation . . . the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production.”⁵² Another example is how modes of study in particular Indigenous people’s communities, such as the Nishnaabeg mentioned above, are congruent with their modes of life. A mode of study can vary in the extent that it is normalized and institutionalized. It can be a marginal mode or a minor, counterhegemonic mode, or a major, hegemonic mode. The latter I also call a “regime of study.” The elements of the education-based mode of study began emerging as marginal practices in the feudal mode of world-making (a process described in chapter 3). Along with the rise of the statist, modernist/colonial, capitalist mode of world-making, more elements of the education-based mode of study emerged and congealed with each other, becoming more normalized and institutionalized as a hegemonic regime of study (the subject of chapter 4).

To further clarify the education-based mode of study, we need to disentangle the typology of *modes of study* from the question of one’s *stance toward any particular mode*. My critique of the education-based mode of study is not aimed only at this mode of study but also at the romanticized stance that people tend to take toward it—with their moralizing, reparative, and melodramatic narratives about it. This distinction gives a double meaning to the title of this introduction, “Against the Romance of Education.” First, I am against the romantic narrative that is *part of* the education-based mode of study (the view of students as heroically

overcoming obstacles as they climb up education levels). Second, I am against taking a romanticizing stance *toward* the education-based mode of study. My critique is not of the romanticizing of modes of study per se. In fact, I am a romantic about some (but certainly not all) alternative kinds of modes of study, but in our current historical conjuncture I find the education-based mode of study unworthy of romance. Likewise, for any alternative mode of study that I am more romantic about now, I recognize that it can be liberating now but probably not forever. The next section explains why I am a fanatic for some modes of study that are in conflict with the education-based mode.

EDUCATION AS IMPASSE OR ROMANCE: SITUATING THE AUTHOR

I've felt ambivalent about education for a long time. I love to study, and I've succeeded at education, but something about it seemed rotten. On paper, my trajectory from kindergarten through the PhD was near perfect. My parents sent me to a private Montessori school, where I was encouraged to explore my own interests and to study cooperatively with my peers. When my parents divorced, school was my refuge from familial turmoil. But when I transferred to a public school in fifth grade, its lectures, exams, and grades felt stultifying. I was a white, middle-class kid in the honors track of mostly white, suburban schools in the segregated city of York, Pennsylvania—a dying industrial town known for race riots and white flight. I loved studying, but York's schools were shaping kids for the predictable American dream of a patriarchal family, a manicured lawn, and lifelong work. I was at an impasse.

To escape, I subscribed to the romantic story of education. I jumped at the chance to leave for college a year early. My high SAT scores got me a full scholarship at the University of Southern California. I wrote myself into a romantic narrative of a heroic individual climbing the educational ladder: “rising up” through the K–12 grades, graduating rather than “dropping out,” and entering “higher” education. The romantic genre framed my ambivalent relations to education in a way that allowed me to escape the impasse I had faced in York. The romantic story portrayed the student,

myself, as engaging in a quest, climbing up education's levels, overcoming obstacles (such as exams and graduation requirements) at each step, and rising toward an image of the good life defined by success, security, independence, maturity, and happiness. The romance framed my grappling with the challenges along the way as an internalized struggle between forces of good and evil, with evil personified as education's Others—the failure and the dropout.⁵³ I feared becoming such Othered figures. But I found ways to overcome these obstacles—such as by escaping to college a year early on a full four-year scholarship—thereby temporarily deadening my ambivalence about education and allowing me to enjoy my new situation at a higher level of education.

I wanted to be independent from my parents, so I chose the major that had the highest starting salary post-college: chemical engineering. At college, by conforming to the norms of the education-based mode of study, I was on a path to become a successful engineer. But from hanging out with film and humanities majors and listening to punk rock and hip-hop, engineering began to feel unfulfilling. I was at another impasse: I needed a career, but I feared becoming a tool for the status quo. To find a way to grapple with my dissident feelings, I added a philosophy major, staying an extra year to graduate with two degrees, while taking on student debt. Philosophy gave me the opportunity to come to terms with the sense of precarity and unfreedom that I felt. I also learned that I wasn't alone. The feeling of precarity is widespread among the American population in the early twenty-first century: a mess of confusion, disorientation, anxiety, and apathy, mixed with concerns about our future relations with what we need and care about in life—our employment, health, family, housing, food, and so forth.⁵⁴ Through introducing me to critical theories of capitalism and the state, philosophy allowed me to dwell on the underlying causes of this feeling of precarity—phenomena such as outsourcing, deindustrialization, intensified labor exploitation, expensive health care, immigration control, racial and economic segregation, the state violence of police and prisons, industrial pollution, anthropogenic climate change, the corporatized politics of liberal democracy, and the decline of labor unions, among others. Through philosophy, I began to find some bearings for how to endure and adapt in the impasse.

With student debt looming, after college I got a job as a sanitary engineer at Los Angeles's largest sewage treatment plant. Each day at work, several million people's wastewater flowed under my feet. Bacterial and chemical processes purified the water before it flowed into the ocean. After work I would go surfing. Bobbing on the waves, I reflected on how humans collaborated with bacteria to turn the wastewater into clean water, allowing the beach to remain a playground. Despite my awe at this technological miracle, my philosophy background motivated me to study how the industry I worked in was complicit with global inequalities. The rich city of Los Angeles can afford advanced wastewater treatment technologies, while people in the Global South suffer from polluted water that causes millions of deaths every year. I felt an impasse again: I wanted to do something about this inequality, but found the industry more concerned with questions of efficiency and profitability. With my office hidden in the city's vast bureaucracy, I stole time to study the political-economic questions that were ignored in our work. I also stole time to apply for graduate school. My philosophy degree gave me an escape route to a place with more resources for critical study, the University of Minnesota's departments of philosophy and political science.

As I moved on from my engineering career to begin graduate school, I became more and more aware of the lives and struggles of people around me. I learned of perspectives that my education had never addressed, including the stories of campus workers whose often-hidden labor is essential for making the university work. In the fall of 2007, nearly thirty-five hundred clerical, technical, and health care workers in the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union at the University of Minnesota went on strike, demanding a wage increase to keep up with the cost of living. I joined other students and workers in solidarity actions. It was, in many ways, this experience that showed me how much I had to gain from *studying* outside of education.

Earlier that year, I was unsettled when a grad student friend in my department committed suicide—at a university with a long trend of lack of support for students' mental health. This shook my loyalty to and identification with the university. *I snapped at the university*. My sense of an impasse became focused on the university itself. I could no longer

escape my impasse through the romantic story of education. That romance had died along with my friend. At the same time, I took inspiration from my friend's empathy with communities of anger. Before he died, he was studying how Indigenous peoples resist the ongoing structures of settler colonialism. Picking up his desire to learn how to be a white settler accomplice with movements for decolonization, I began to inquire into the relations of colonialism and universities.

I became drawn to people who were resisting the soul-crushing features of our own university, built on land stolen from the Dakota peoples. During the AFSCME strike, I joined strike supporters in organizing protests, occupying a board of regents meeting, and holding a four-day hunger strike. Despite our efforts, the administration didn't give the union a better contract.⁵⁵ Yet through our struggle we had built strong relationships that we did not want to lose. We channeled our desires for change into a forum for reflection on the strike and on what to do next. One of the presenters at the forum was from the Experimental College of the Twin Cities (EXCO), a free, anarchistic university that had an organizing group based out of a local liberal arts college, Macalester. Seeing resonances between our struggle at the university and the one that had founded their project—against a shift to a more elitist admissions policy—some of us decided to found a new chapter of EXCO at the university, as a free, open, egalitarian project for modes of study alternative to education. We used student groups to appropriate funds and spaces from the University of Minnesota and Macalester for EXCO classes, building an alternative university within the cracks of higher education.

I learned as much through studying in EXCO classes as in graduate school. Through study groups on anarchism, feminism, Marxism, and university politics, we built relationships that gave life to projects against and beyond the university, including a grad student union, a social center, and the decolonization-focused groups Unsettling Minnesota and Teachers against Occupation. I came to understand the university as a terrain of struggle. This terrain penetrated my own subjectivity, as I felt a tension between surviving in academia and resisting it. After three members of my PhD committee moved to other universities, one of them asked if I was planning to drop out. I wasn't. But this question sparked a line of

self-inquiry. Why was I seen as “dropping out” when I felt more like I was being *pushed* out? Did my friend who committed suicide “drop out” of grad school? Would it be better to drop out than to struggle with precarity like my friends who had earned PhDs but were un- or under-employed in the brutal academic job market? Looking back, I wondered why leaving my white, suburban high school a year early for college was considered praiseworthy while kids in the mostly Black and Latinx, working-class, inner-city school were pushed out, criminalized, and stigmatized as “drop-outs.” How were our different education and life trajectories bound up with each other? “School dropouts” and “contingent faculty” seemed connected as figures of “waste” for the education industry. Having left my career in the wastewater industry due to its inequities, how could I now justify pursuing a career in an unjust system of education?

Grappling with these questions brought my relations with education to an impasse. To study this impasse, I embarked on critical research about education. Studying began to peel away my layers of “educated ignorance” about my complicity with an oppressive system of education. Instead of seeking an escape from this impasse, I built relationships with others who were studying their own impasses around education. I found that other people have different understandings of the impasse, and different stories of how they came to it, endure in it, or escape from it. For my research, I interviewed thirty-five people engaged in organizing within, against, and beyond universities.⁵⁶ Coming from different positions as undergrads, grad students, and faculty, they shared various experiences of their ambivalent relations to education. In addition to tensions around feelings of anxiety, depression, and shame in relation to education, these organizers experience another, interrelated set of tensions. Their critical feelings about the education system and their desires to organize against it are in tension with their desires to accept the status quo so as to compete and succeed, or at least survive, within it.

Through studying and organizing in EXCO classes, I met people who told very different stories about their experiences of an impasse with education. Some introduced me to alternative framings of school non-completion. One of my co-studiers in an anarchist reading group said that he had “risen out” of high school, not only rejecting the stigma

of “dropping out” but also affirming his refusal of the education system. The EXCO classes fostered modes of study outside of, and alternative to, education. I came to wonder: Could our different modes of study in these EXCO classes enable modes of world-making alternative to the dominant ways of world-making through education in settler-colonial, racial capitalism? Could alternative modes of study help challenge and even abolish the status quo? I took these questions as a spur for my research.

Rather than assuming the inevitability of the education-based mode of study, I examined its historical contingency. I found that modes of study within the institutional situation of schools emerged at various times in different cultures, such as in Egypt around 3000 B.C. In Europe, practices of study occurred in schools and universities for centuries prior to the birth of the modern concept of education, with the first universities emerging in the eleventh century A.D. and the first monastic schools in the sixth century A.D.⁵⁷ The first use of the term for “education” in French was in the late fifteenth century, and in English in the early sixteenth, concurrent with the rise of capitalism, colonialism, and the state.⁵⁸ The education-based mode of study has become so foundational to the other institutions of the liberal-capitalist, modernist mode of life that it acts as a systemic blind spot, not only for modernity’s boosters but also for its critics.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

To elaborate how narratives of crisis are tied with the romantic story of education, chapter 1 examines contemporary debates on higher education. The impasse of higher education can be engaged in a variety of ways, but most authors of recent books on higher education politics in the United States respond to the impasse as a crisis. Rather than treating the impasse as a political question about conflicts between alternative modes of world-making and study, they treat it as a moral and analytical question to be resolved through rational persuasion. Narratives of crisis imply a moral distinction between past and future and ask, Where did we go wrong? The genres of jeremiad and melodrama give simplified ways of narrating the answer, which set up a prognosis for how we can improve. However, these narratives repeat the education romance, thereby

suppressing motivations to grapple with the impasse and reproducing an epistemology of educated ignorance. This problem is evident in the growing field of critical university studies, whose calls for fighting privatization and neoliberalism via a return to a public ideal of higher education fail to grapple with, and take a stand on, the impasse of ongoing settler-colonial and racial-capitalist structures in universities. By contrast, some recent student movements have engaged in alternative modes of study around this impasse, rejecting crisis managers with the call of “We are the crisis!” Taking inspiration from them, I describe how the modernist blind spots of crisis, security, and education reinforce each other in a self-enclosed logic. This problem spurs the book’s inquiry into a critical genealogy of the education-based mode of study.

The crisis narrative has supplementary relations with other education narratives. In chapter 2, to intervene at a point of interconnection between these supplementary ideologies, I give a critical genealogy of the narrative of school dropout crisis. The political origins of the “dropout problem” narrative are in the early 1960s United States with the liberal-capitalist modernist project promoted by the Ford Foundation and the National Education Association. In response to threats from the left and the right—as well as from migrants’ alternative modes of study and world-making—liberal capitalists created color-blind institutions that focused on “urban problems,” including the “dropout.” Narratives around the dropout include imagined vertical life trajectories tied with a certain emotional economy—imagining life as a dropout produces shame and fear, while rising up as a graduate produces pride. This emotional economy constructs and stabilizes the boundaries of key entities in the liberal-capitalist imaginary: the individual, the community, and the nation. The dropout problematic creates a terrain of intervention for liberal-capitalist governance that is framed as an individualized process of disposal and salvaging. In the 1960s, the Ford Foundation’s “dropout” project dovetailed with its promotion of an end to free tuition and commodifying of higher education. With the rise of liberal and neoliberal versions of multiculturalism from the 1970s through 1990s, the framing of dropouts as “culturally deprived” was replaced by non-cultural descriptions, such as “educationally disadvantaged” and “at risk.” But the narrative of the

“dropout crisis” retains its effect of focusing on governance of individuals, families, schools, and communities while diverting attention from structural racism.

The next two chapters explore the origins of further key elements of the education-based mode of study. Chapter 3 details the history of struggles between conflicting modes of life and their associated modes of study during the emergence of capitalism. I examine how, in thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Lower Germany, communities of women in the cities, particularly in beguinages, created new modes of life, spirituality, commons, and enclosure entwined with new modes of study. In opposition to the beguines’ horizontalist mode of study, others developed more verticalist modes, particularly the institution of ascending levels in schools associated with the Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life. Splitting schools into ascending levels and narrating an ideology of spiritual ascent for an individualized self gave the schoolmasters means for managing the crisis of disorder among the increasing number of students in their schools. Along with the colonial dispossession of land, plundering of colonized people’s labor and resources, and patriarchal repression of rebellious women, the institution of school levels spread throughout Europe, contributing to the creation of the preconditions for capitalism.

To elaborate on education’s role in the rise of capitalism, chapter 4 describes how education was used in reactions to resistances in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The first part of the chapter focuses on the emergence of the term “education” in 1530s England. People’s rebellions pushed King Henry VIII’s regime into a widespread crisis of legitimacy. The political technology of education served as a narrative solution when coupled with a constellation of binary, individualized figures—for example, “idle” people with “bad education” versus “hardworking” people with “good education.” The rising liberal, colonial, patriarchal, capitalist project was entwined with political theorists’ development of the education-based mode of study. To examine an emblematic example of these theorists, I analyze how John Locke frames the Others of modernity—the poor, women, slaves, and natives—in co-constitutive oppositions with the figure of the self formed through education. Locke revises the conception of the self from an essentialist view to one constructed through experiences. He

prescribes education for shaping these experiences in ways conducive for self-governance. The teacher should manage the student's self-formation with modernist/colonial narratives and a household-based emotional economy—shame, pride, fear, and anxiety—that creates a system of credits and debts. This mode of accounting gives teachers educational tools for suppressing subversive collaborations across class, gender, age, and race.

Building on insights from the earlier chapters' critical genealogies, chapter 5 returns to the undercommons approach to contemporary struggles on the terrain of higher education. My coauthor, Erin Dyke, and I present reflections and analysis from several years of militant co-research with an alternative study organization called the Experimental College of the Twin Cities. Using the concept of "modes of study" to frame our analysis, we show how this project's participants developed new ways of thinking and relating that enacted alternatives to the education-based mode of study, intertwined with alternatives to liberal-capitalist modes of subject-formation and governance. For example, a course on "Radical Pedagogy" engaged participants in anarchist modes of study, and courses on "Dakota Decolonization" and "Unsettling Minnesota" engaged non-Indigenous settler descendants with Indigenous people's modes of study. This account highlights limits and possibilities for projects with undercommons relations to universities, stealing resources for supporting alternative modes of study.

In the conclusion I apply my book's theory of universities as terrains of conflict between alternative modes of study and world-making. Returning to the phenomenon of snapping in and at the university, I ask, Why doesn't everyone who experiences exploitation and oppression snap? I hypothesize that our anger at the university is continually mollified by the epistemology of educated ignorance. We fall back on romanticized views of higher education, where some ideal—the academic vocation, the public university, academic freedom, tenure, the liberal arts, slow scholarship, and so forth—is framed as in crisis and in need of defense. As an antidote, we need to engage in more thorough critical genealogies of *all* of the elements of this epistemology. Seeing this book as the beginning of a broader, collaborative research project, I call for further genealogies of these romanticized ideals about higher education. By showing how

these ideals emerged as moralizing crisis responses to struggles, we can unsubscribe from these narratives and expand our horizons to alternative modes of study and world-making. Going beyond critical university studies, I call for not only an abolitionist university studies but also an *abolition university*, one that aligns itself with modes of study in abolitionist movements within, against, and beyond the university as we know it.

Academic study does not have to take the form of reified expertise within the education-based mode. Instead, academics and non-academic movement participants can collaborate in continually unsettling flows of teaching, knowledge, study, and organizing. As we kill the romance of education, we can bring to life new modes of studying and remaking the world together.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Sara Ahmed, "Resignation Is a Feminist Issue," *feministkilljoys*, August 27, 2016, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/08/27/resignation-is-a-feminist-issue/>.
2. In this excerpt, Ahmed links to her initial blog post in which she announced her resignation: Sara Ahmed, "Resignation," *feministkilljoys*, May 30, 2016, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/05/30/resignation/>. For her elaboration of the idea of a "feminist snap," see her book *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
3. Menafee quoted in "Yale Dishwasher Broke Window Depicting Slaves: 'No One Has to Be Exposed to That Anymore,'" *NPR: Weekend Edition*, July 17, 2016. Emphasis added.
4. The gag provision only pertains to the act itself and the administrative response. Menafee has subsequently spoken publicly at rallies in favor of changing the name of Calhoun College. Daniela Brighenti and David Yaffe-Bellany, "Yale Gags Rehired Cafeteria Worker," *New Haven Independent*, July 26, 2016.
5. I draw the concept of "ways of world-making" from Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978).
6. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 80.
7. According to Mitchell Dean, what Michel Foucault calls a "critical history of the present" is "concerned with that which is taken-for-granted, assumed to be given, or natural within contemporary social existence, a givenness or naturalness questioned in the course of contemporary struggles." Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35.
8. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

9. "Exclusive: Meet Yale Dishwasher Corey Menafee, Who Smashed Racist Stained-Glass Window," *Democracy Now*, July 15, 2016.
10. Daniela Brighenti, Qi Xu, and David Yaffe-Bellany, "Worker Smashes 'Racist' Panel, Loses Job," *New Haven Independent*, July 11, 2016.
11. Menafee quoted in "Yale Dishwasher Broke Window."
12. For Ahmed's explanation of her resignation, see Ahmed, "Resignation Is a Feminist Issue."
13. Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117–39; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
14. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 24.
15. Menafee quoted in "Yale Dishwasher Broke Window."
16. Ahmed notes that sensations of pain are connected with memories: "How the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of *recognition* (of this feeling, or that feeling) is bound up with what we *already know*" (*Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 25).
17. Lindsey Bever, "A Yale Dishwasher Broke a 'Racist' Windowpane: Now, He's Fighting to Reclaim His Job," *Washington Post*, July 19, 2016.
18. Brighenti, Xu, and Yaffe-Bellany "Worker Smashes 'Racist' Panel, Loses Job."
19. Menafee quoted in Michelle Liu, "Corey Menafee Joins Rename-Calhoun Cause," *New Haven Independent*, October 28, 2016.
20. Antony Dugdale, J. J. Fueser, and J. Celso de Castro Alves, "Calhoun College," *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 2001, <http://www.yaleslavery.org/WhoYaleHonors/calhoun1.html>.
21. Dugdale, Fueser, and Alves, "Calhoun College." Also see Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 63–64, 117–18, 120–22.
22. Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, "Broken Window Theory: Corey Menafee and the History of University Service Labor," *Weapon of Class Instruction Blog*, July 21, 2016, <http://weaponofclassinstruction.blogspot.com/2016/07/broken-window-theory-corey-menafee-and.html>.
23. "Investment Return of 3.4% Brings Yale Endowment Value to \$25.4 Billion," *Yale News*, September 23, 2016. Number of faculty from "Yale by the Numbers," <http://www.yale.edu/about-yale/yale-facts>.
24. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 30.
25. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 30–31.
26. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 39.
27. Brighenti and Yaffe-Bellany, "Yale Gags Rehired Cafeteria Worker."
28. An example of the use of the norm of civility to suppress dissent is the

- University of Illinois's use of the rhetoric of incivility to justify Steven Salaita's termination. For an analysis of the colonial character of this rhetoric, see Jakeet Singh, "Why Aren't We Talking about Racism and Colonialism in the Salaita Affair?" *Electronic Intifada*, September 9, 2014.
29. Brighenti, Xu, and Yaffe-Bellany, "Worker Smashes 'Racist' Panel, Loses Job."
 30. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 65.
 31. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 63–64.
 32. According to Landauer's relational anarchist politics, "The state is a relationship between human beings, a way by which people relate to one another; and one destroys it by entering into other relationships, by behaving differently to one another." Landauer, "Weak Statesmen, Weaker People," excerpted in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1, *From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE–1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (1910; Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 165.
 33. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 254.
 34. For example, the workers who occupied the Lip watch factory in Besançon, France, in 1973 had learned through their involvement in the 1968 struggles how to self-manage an occupied workplace through committees. Donald Reid, *Opening the Gates: The Lip Affair, 1968–1981* (New York: Verso, 2018). For research on how participants in social movements engage in studying practices, see Aziz Choudry, *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); and Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking across Today's Transformative Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
 35. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1–25. I developed my understanding of these differences between Indigenous modes of studying and the education-based mode of study through writing with Fern Thompsett in our article Eli Meyerhoff and Fern Thompsett, "Decolonizing Study: Free Universities in More-Than-Humanist Accompliceships with Indigenous Movements," *Journal of Environmental Education* 48, no. 4 (2017): 234–47.
 36. Different Indigenous groups have different modes of studying and different interpretations of "land." For some examples of these differences, see Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy"; Jennifer Adese, "Spirit Gifting: Ecological Knowing in Métis Life Narratives," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 48–66; Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy, "Land Education: Indigenous, Post-colonial, and Decolonizing

- Perspectives on Place and Environmental Education Research,” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 1–23; and Hilary Whitehouse, Felecia Lui, Juanita Sellwood, M. J. Barrett, and Philemon Chigeza, “Sea Country: Navigating Indigenous and Colonial Ontologies in Australian Environmental Education,” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 56–69.
37. On the role of bacteria in co-producing “more-than-human” emotions, see Myra Hird, *The Origins of Sociable Life* (London: Palgrave, 2009). On “sympoetic relations,” or “sympoiesis,” Donna Haraway notes that “M. Beth Dempster suggested the term sympoiesis for ‘collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change.’” Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 61, quoting M. Beth Dempster, “A Self-Organizing Systems Perspective on Planning for Sustainability” (MA thesis, Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo, 1998).
 38. On the radical resurgence project, see Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
 39. For eighty lists of demands, see <http://www.thedemands.org/>.
 40. Amy Goodman, “Black Student Revolt Ousts 2 Top Officials at University of Missouri,” *Democracy Now*, November 10, 2015.
 41. Robin D. G. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle,” *Boston Review*, March 7, 2016, <https://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle>.
 42. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle”; Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*.
 43. Kelley and the other forum participants shift between “study” and “education” in an undifferentiated way. Kelley seems to favor “study”—as seen in his essay’s title and in his promotion of study groups—but he neither gives any reasons for doing so nor distinguishes it from “education.” At times Kelley appeals to some more differentiated concepts of study, such as in his essay’s title, “Black Study.” Also, in reply to Randall L. Kennedy, professor at Harvard Law School, who implies that Kelley “sneers at intellectuality,” Kelley stresses the importance of “critical study” and describes students who practice such study as “attempting to work horizontally, not just across the faculty/student divide, but the university/aggrieved community divide,” and as “not afraid to read anything, to change their minds, to challenge their own assumptions.” Rather than simply promot-

- ing study in general, Kelley's concept of "critical study" implies the need to ask questions of who is engaging in study, for what purposes, and how they are doing it.
44. Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, and Marc Bousquet, "On Study: A *Polygraph* Roundtable Discussion with Marc Bousquet, Stefano Harney, and Fred Moten," *Polygraph* 21 (2009): 159–75.
 45. On the university's "unequal temporal architecture," see Eli Meyerhoff and Elsa Noterman, "Revolutionary Scholarship by Any Speed Necessary: Slow or Fast but for the End of This World," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18, no. 1 (2017): 217–45, <https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1429>.
 46. For this analysis of the two ways that Yale reproduces itself as a community through expressions of shame—having shame brought onto it and bringing it on itself—I draw on Ahmed's theory of two ways that "the nation is reproduced through expressions of shame," and I analogize the university community with the national community. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 108.
 47. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 107.
 48. On the ethical and political importance of unforgetting for efforts to dismantle settler colonialism and white supremacy, see Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 23–54.
 49. According to Yale's president, Peter Salovey, these forms of healing for the Yale community include an interactive history project on the legacy of Calhoun, a competition to select new art to be displayed in Calhoun College, and a committee surveying art on campus and recommending "ways that art can help us to engage with and understand our past." Salovey, letter reprinted in "Slavemaster Still Honored; 'Master' Bites the Dust," *New Haven Independent*, April 28, 2016.
 50. The relation between shame and the Yale community here is similar to what Ahmed observes in the case of Australia's reconciliation with Indigenous peoples: "Declarations of shame can bring 'the nation' into existence as a felt community," as "a form of nation building in which what is shameful about the past is covered over by the statement of shame itself" (*Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 15, 101–2).
 51. On the expansion of Yale's university-medical complex and struggles against it, see Jennifer Klein, "New Haven Rising," *Dissent Magazine*, Winter 2015, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/new-haven-rising>.
 52. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 874–75.

53. On the romance genre as a quest and a form of wish fulfillment that aims at transformation of the everyday world, entailing a struggle between forces of good and evil, “white and black magics,” or “higher and lower realms,” see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 187–88, 193. In building off of Frye’s work, Fredric Jameson sees in romance that the organizational categories of good and evil subsume all other attributes (light and dark, high and low). Evil is linked with the category of Otherness: “The point, however, is not that in such figures the Other is feared because he is evil; rather, he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar.” Jameson, “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre,” *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 140. This ideology linked with the romance genre serves the political functions of “drawing the boundaries of a given social order and providing a powerful internal deterrent against deviancy or subversion.” In Jameson’s historical analysis of the romance genre, what had been its magical elements in medieval times becomes replaced with the miracle of conversion and eventually, in more modern times, with elements of psychology: an interiorization of the struggle between two worlds (144–45).
54. How one characterizes these affective conditions depends on the genres of political narrative through which one is describing them. In her treatment of political melodramas, Elisabeth Anker uses the term “unfreedom,” while Lauren Berlant, in her analysis of political impasses, uses the term “precarity.” Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodramatic Politics and the Pursuit of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
55. For more on this strike and related solidarity protests, see Amy Pason, “We Are All Workers: A Class Analysis of University Labour Strikes,” *ephemera* 8, no. 3 (2008): 331–39; and Isaac Kamola and Eli Meyerhoff, “Creating Commons: Divided Governance, Participatory Management, and Struggles against Enclosure in the University,” *Polygraph* 21 (2009): 5–27.
56. To read many of these interviews, see <http://classwaru.org/interviews>, where I have posted twenty-one interviews in versions that I edited in collaboration with my interviewees.
57. Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: From the Sixth through the Eighth Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1978). The original sense of “university” was the totality of a group of students who organized as a kind of union to study together, manage their own affairs, and protect themselves from the price-gouging activities of

- the townspeople and teachers. Alison Hearn, "Interdisciplinarity/Extra-disciplinarity: On the University and the Active Pursuit of Community," *History of Intellectual Culture* 3, no. 1 (2003): 1–13.
58. Ivan Illich, *Toward a History of Needs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 75.

1. "WE ARE THE CRISIS"

1. "WE ARE THE CRISIS: The Student Movement and the Coming Decade," November 22, 2009, <http://wearethecrisis.blogspot.com/2009/11/we-are-crisis-student-movement-and.html>.
2. Occupy California, "Chronology: Occupations and Struggles in California," <https://occupyca.wordpress.com/timeline/>.
3. "An Occupation Statement," November 19, 2009, <https://occupyucla.wordpress.com/2009/11/19/an-occupation-statement/>.
4. Amanda Armstrong and Paul Nadal, "Building Times: How Lines of Care Occupied Wheeler Hall," *Reclamations Journal* 1, no. 1 (2009), https://web.archive.org/web/20170613070307/http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue01_armstrong_nadal.html.
5. This observation of the "double barricade" is from another essay on the Wheeler Hall occupation: Jasper Bernes, "The Double Barricade and the Glass Floor," *Reclamations Journal* 2 (April 2010), https://web.archive.org/web/20170612044629/http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/issue02_jasper_bernes.html.
6. Armstrong and Nadal, "Building Times."
7. "WE ARE THE CRISIS."
8. For an account of liberal-capitalist modernity in universities, with attention to its current "neoliberal multiculturalist" phase, see Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
9. According to Berlant, "the impasse is a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event." Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.
10. Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).