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## THE GOOD PROFESSORS OF SZECHUAN

Until last spring, I was assistant professor of critical theory at UNCG. I didn't get tenure. Now I'm unemployed. Much of what I will be saying involves a critique of meritocracy. But as we all know losers are in no position to critique the meritocracy. Every word out of the mouths of losers is instantly discredited — instantly turned into its opposite in some sort of parody of the interlinked processes of speedup and devaluation served by the self-legitimizing discourse of merit. When I began thinking about this paper, in fact all the way to yesterday, I felt that I had to display my superiority — to engage in merit talk in order to exit from it. But I've changed my mind. And I'm not going to prattle on about my excellence. Even though I am indeed better than all of you [laughter].<sup>1</sup>

Jokes aside, I don't think tenure denial has much to do with me or anyone unlucky enough to fill—under present social relations—this necessary role. I think it has to do with the division of labor and reproducing the conditions of capital accumulation; I think it has to do with downsizing, privatizing, speed up, credential inflation, overwork, not enough work—low pay and no pay at all.

The core of the problem is that our economy is not a meritocracy, at least in one sense of the term often emphasized by human capital theorists. The division of labor is not even loosely a reflection of the skill packages of the individuals making it up. Nor in a related concept is it a technical division of labor requiring a more skilled workforce—making un- and underemployment a function of a skills deficit which could presumably be remedied by more education, investment in human capital etc. What underlies such widespread views is an assumption that the proportion of persons in given roles with given status is determined by the availability of talents and abilities. But as Lewontin notes, the reverse is true: the number of persons filling particular jobs is determined by structural relations almost independent of potential supply." To make his point Lewontin quips, "if every person in the Western world could read *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the ranks of the unemployed would not ipso facto be decreased—though they would be more literate."<sup>2</sup> As a number of critics like Julia Schor have noted, underemployment works in tandem with overwork and just as underemployment is subject to individualist and culturalist misinterpretation, so is over work—viewed for example as "workaholism."<sup>3</sup>

Such points are at times reinforced by elites themselves. Thus the Trilateral Commission response circa 1975 to what they perceived as a "crisis of democracy," embodied in the expansion of higher education of the 50's and 60's. In Samuel Huntington's words, this expansion leads to an "overproduction of people with university education in relation to the jobs available for them, thus creating "frustrations and psychological hardships among university graduates who are unable to secure the types of jobs to which they believe their education entitles them." This dilemma led Trilateralists to propose two possible solutions: either higher education should be redesigned "so as to be geared to the patterns of economic development and future job opportunities" or "the job expectations" of those who receive a college

education "should be lowered."<sup>4</sup> Today, we have hype: thus Clinton's message to America is to get educated so we can all compete and win in the global economy; yet he has also said, in a Rolling Stone interview, that "Americans are going to have to get used to lower wages."<sup>5</sup>

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I, and all for whom I stand, have been thrown into the reserve army to compete with new Ph.D.s for a shrinking pool of jobs, adding another wrinkle to the dynamic of reserve armies. There's not just a surplus population but one with uneven skills— leading to the phenomenon of what Guillory calls pre-professionalism or, putting it as paradoxically as possible, having to get tenure to qualify for an interview. Those of us denied tenure are not often seen as part of the job crisis, but let's not underestimate the role we play in the race to the bottom, with its attendant economic hardship and emotional collapse.

Now, I'm competing with my students, some of whom were not my best, for one year jobs around town—and I'm losing. This is painful and deeply humiliating because in the meritocracy, self respect depends on job status—even if you hate status. Next semester, unemployment runs out (As I turn right on Elm/Eugene toward the unemployment office, I pass this big sign, the word "Education" inside a circle with a line through it. And the word "Future" inside another circle with a line through it. NO EDUCATION. NO FUTURE—the "hegemonic" interpretation of this billboard is quite clear, no? Though indeed, there are other less sanguine interpretations). I've been fortunate enough to line up two composition jobs, conveniently located within walking distance of my home, offering a flexible schedule allowing me to meet child care needs—meet Joe when he gets home from school. His mom works 10 hours a day for \$17,000 dollars. I'm getting paid a flexible and convenient \$2,000 per course without benefits (I'm not on my wife's plan since it's too expensive: it was either our son or me). Cary Nelson, in his discussion of the exploitation of graduate students, points out what he takes to be the shocking disparity between per course graduate student pay and the pay of average tenure and tenure track professors. The average departmental faculty salary is \$11, 875, of graduate students, \$2,64 I'm getting less than my former graduate students at UNCG.<sup>6</sup>

Where is all this heading? Well, Nelson may be right when he suggests that these tendencies might continue to the point where things like tenure and research universities are a thing of the past. Or to be more precise, a handful of prestige universities granting tenure, and the McDonaldization of everywhere else. Initially I thought such scenarios to contain a grain of truth but to be largely hype. That this neoliberalization would threaten a central ideological function of the university. Says Bertell Ollman:

For universities to play their appointed role in the capitalist drama, it is not enough that everyone who wants to get an education be able to get into a university. In both its structure and content, higher ed. must appear to give everyone a more or less equal chance to prepare for the best jobs. Should the universities be perceived as vocational schools, providing low-level skills and indoctrinating students with the values and attitudes deemed important by their future employers, as a simple continuation of the tracking system already begun in high schools, the crucial ideological work of the university in promoting belief in the existence of a real equality of opportunity would suffer irreparable damage.<sup>7</sup>

I also thought that to the extent that the ruling classes have basic control over these things, the proletarianization of professionals would not be allowed to go too far, for obvious social control purposes. Tenure would be secured and the rest of the folks would continue to shuttle between secondary labor markets. Though it may be at this point in social evolution no longer possible for capitalism, U.S capitalism, to harmonize accumulation and social control, that the structural mismatch or disruptive duality between these two imperatives latent in this mode of production has become irrepressible.<sup>8</sup>

I now think the Nelson possibility could in fact happen, though either one is very bad and the two paths may converge. The negative trend would be anticipated by the University of Phoenix—I'm getting info from an article many of you probably read on the Phoenix program (humor for foreign policy enthusiasts)—the appropriately titled "Drive Thru U: Higher Education as a Twenty Four Hour Service Station." In Arthur Levine's words, "we'll still have some number of residential colleges and research universities, but most of the rest will disappear."<sup>9</sup> Elimination of tenure, contingent labor forces suitable for just-in-time delivery systems customized to meet the immediate ("market"-dictated) needs of the consumer, accompanied by total quality management—with its labor management cooperation and greater worker participation: in other words, speed up and job insecurity cloaked as empowerment and "having it all." Or, in Staughton Lynd's words, "you and I learning each other's jobs so next year one of us will be gone."<sup>10</sup> One form of this is the response of university communities to problems caused by the perception of a research/teaching split. The solution is not to improve working conditions but to expect more out of the teachers—including more "community service," more concern for teaching manifested in requiring teachers to put together detailed portfolios, on the basis of which one might win a teaching award—and to train graduate students in these time consuming pedagogies while rewarding them primarily for their publication.

There are some science fiction tendencies at work here. As graduate students are now elaborating on electronic discussion lists, there are, according to Jude Morrison from Brit. Columbia, cases of graduate employees being "paid abysmal wages to develop highly technical web-based software only to be forced to hand it over to the University". And, she goes on, "other cases where distance education courses are being transformed in such a way as to eradicate huge numbers of jobs for TAs."<sup>11</sup> We have a situation not far different from that jokingly envisioned by Joseph Aimone: "internet infomercials in cutthroat competition for subsistence teaching contracts at non accredited schools or multilevel marketing our scholarship on low budget zero royalty vanity compact discs."<sup>12</sup>

One of the most disturbing things about this trend is how it will be legitimated thru a kind of corporate/consumer populism: with "terrific service, quality control and convenience offered to students at the lowest possible cost." Of course, this is ideology, but ideology almost always carries within it in distorted form the truths of experience. Thus, given the escalating costs of higher education and the corresponding requirement for students to work long hours, leaving less time for study, the necessity for getting something immediate out of this education becomes clear: Phoenix delivers the goods.

This anti-elitism is continued in the rhetoric of the President of an Arizona community college who calls Phoenix the wave of the future and who talks about demonopolizing the University—here employing the ideological notion of competition as the opposite of monopoly instead of seeing it as part of a contradictory unity where competition leads to monopoly and monopoly leads to a process of fragmentation and decentralization (not the opposite of monopoly so much as a new form of it Bennet Harrison has called "concentration without centralization").<sup>13</sup> John Sperling, the President of Phoenix U, is quoted in the New Yorker article as unsure whether Phoenix is an alternative to the current model of higher education or a substitute. The article suggests that despite appearances, there's less difference between the public university committed to academic freedom and the corporate university that threatens to become an in-house corporate function. Unfortunately, it may be rhet/comp that mediates the movement of the former in the direction of the latter — that mediates what T. Ebert calls "the redefinition of the humanities into communication skills at the insistence of transnational business." For me, it is difficult not to see the fairly recent surge of rhet. comp jobs, as an attempt to frame a sort of preemptive strike against Phoenixization.<sup>14</sup>

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Now, some of my best friends are in rhet/comp. and I am aware of its roots in Freire and its overt opposition to skills-based pedagogy (perhaps undermined somewhat by what often seems to me a watered

down pragmatism). Yet it frequently depoliticizes critical thinking—think of Mark Johnson's comment that "my experience in the software industry tells me that the world at large can never have too many critical thinkers." Similarly, given its identity-politics orientation (giving marginal groups a voice, writing thickly descriptive ethnographies about these marginal voices and having the people themselves write ethnographies) and its reluctance to focus on large scale structures of oppression (which would shatter its often easy rhetorics of inclusion and dialogue), I, at least, can see how rhet/ comp might work in tandem with a corporate populism whose slogan is, to refer to another Phoenix, "Ottawa majors in You," with ethnography functioning much like advertising—adding the personal touch to dedefinition and Mcdonaldization (Traub, 116).<sup>15</sup>

Let me elaborate for this is no simple reproductive process and there are many resources in the complex field of rhet. comp for contesting some of the trends sketched above. What I'm suggesting is that the powerful logic of capitalist institutions will open itself up to what I'll call rhet/comp's liberalism and close itself off to its more radical elements, a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion by no means limited to this field. How this happens can be seen in Ebert's case study of crises in the SUNY Albany English Dept which have in effect involved putting the department under receivership, making rhet/comp hegemonic and dedefining the critical theory camp of the dept. It is a process, she suggests, that is occurring elsewhere (Ebert, *AO*, p. 37).

At SUNY, according to Ebert, this is happening in part thru the agency of an administration whose Dean—C.H Knoblauch—is strongly committed to the liberatory discourse and pedagogy associated with the Freireian rhet.comp tradition. His book, *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy* (co-authored with L. Brannon) aims to deploy critical teaching to transform existing realities in the direction of a social equality that can only be achieved through therapeutic self-knowledge—which becomes the only knowledge there is (Ebert, *AO*, 22-3).. This discourse is predicated on the practical exclusion of radical composition theory: it is excluded as extremist, doctrinaire, dogmatic, melodramatic, therefore unreasonable. Yet if this theory is excluded in practice it is included as "story," one story among others. "Story" becomes not just a relativist category but a subjectivist one as well, a personal category, a move rendering opaque the institutional forces shaping and limiting this personal knowledge.

Ironically, radical theory is unreasonable because it is rationalist, and liberal rhetorical theory is reasonable not because of its explanatory power or evidential status but because of its tone, its attitude, its inclusiveness, its good taste—its drama, not its "melodrama" (Ebert, *AO*, p. 24). Liberal liberation theory, like the liberal discourse of which it is part, is simultaneously relativist yet all-inclusive, neutral with respect to the voices and stories it magnanimously, tolerantly entertains. Yet it is a position which denies (excludes) its own institutional role, which involves the suppression (exclusion) of the class character of the university while giving "voice" to class "experience."<sup>16</sup> It substitutes an egalitarianism of voice for an egalitarianism rooted in the transformation of the social relations of production. This tacit reduction of knowledge to the therapeutic further encourages the relativization of needs and voices. Such a reduction is inseparable from liberalism's inclusivist fantasy in which all student's needs can be met, the needs of business and labor, oppressor and oppressed. At this point, we see the proximity of liberal liberation theory to the theories of sovereignty voiced by Phoenix.<sup>17</sup>

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Those of you who've read Brecht's "The Good Woman of Szechuan" know it's a play about the contradictions of capitalism. The dilemma of the good woman Shen Te is that if she is good she can't do any good because she's powerless. To do any good, practical good (give to charity), she needs to be bad, accumulate capital, exploit masses of people. She splits in two, a split allegorizing the larger contradictions. In other words, the good woman, Shen Te needs her bad cousin, Shui Ta. Toward the end of the play, Shen Te puts on Shui Ta's mask and sings: "You can only help one of your luckless brothers

by trampling down a dozen others. Why is it the gods do not feel indignation and come down in fury to end exploitation/Defeat all defeat and forbid desperation/Refusing to tolerate such toleration. Why is it?" Tom Lewis asked me to talk about solutions. Brecht of course can do no such thing. The play ends with the god's disappearing into the clouds uttering evasive banalities, leaving the good woman one word: "help."<sup>18</sup>

We need to keep the contradictions of capitalism at the center of our analysis and our political strategy. Good ideas serve bad practice given the prevailing social relations. Student-centered learning can serve speedup and corporate populism. The democratic potential of distance learning serves atomization, cheap labor, and no labor—automation replacing graduate employees who themselves replaced tenureable faculty — ed.. More Ph.D.s in community colleges and high schools displaces speed up from university to high school at a time when the same cut throat processes have already engulfed the latter—I could even imagine Ph.D.s brought in to break teacher's unions — all under the guise of quality.<sup>19</sup> Most graduate students I know are wonderful people: they want to help people and they want to think. Graduate school, on this view (and it was my view), is a haven in a heartless world dominated by cut throat entrepreneurship. Such humane intentions turn quickly into their opposite via preprofessionalism. I had to lose my job to learn how to be a petit bourgeois entrepreneur, our version of Shen Te turning to Shui Ta—though without the latter's capital. There are, of course, also bad ideas in the service of good intentions: cutting programs as a strategy for combating the exploitation of graduate student labor.

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Sandra Gilbert, in her CPE report, as part of a discussion of the complexity of the "job system," quotes Larry Mitchell: "this system is so intricate that if we tweak it in one place, the effects will be felt in other, apparently more distant spots."<sup>20</sup> This is an astute comment if understood in the context of the contradictions of capitalism and not in terms of an essentially technicized, apolitical complexity. That this is the direction the CPE report is going is indicated in its concluding comments where it poses its complexity and nuance against "finger pointing and political posturing" — a binary opposition which I fear fingers vulgar Marxists (and all Marxists are vulgar except John Guillory for reasons I'll get to in a moment) and left-liberals — like Cary Nelson — who advocate civil disobedience. The document talks about activity on many fronts but calls for no political resistance— typical of the tendency to turn political problems into technical ones. I'm afraid the only actions to come out of this will be cutting programs and changing grad student's presumably grandiose perceptions about jobs in research universities, with lip service paid to real problems like the spread of part-time labor and silence on the fundamental assumptions of the meritocracy that in my view drive the problem.

This complexity leaves it open for viewing downsizing as, in postmodernist idiom, "not necessarily elitist." It depends how it's used goes this argument. To quote Steven Watt, "like most strategies it can prove either helpful or detrimental" in that it, for example, might force professors back into the undergrad classroom and thus improve relations with the main constituency of the university.<sup>21</sup> Well, on such logic, unemployment, even though crucial to the process of capital accumulation, might not necessarily be elitist because it gives me more time with my son, who I can then teach anti-elitist values. Downsizing, like unemployment, under present social relations is inherently elitist. If it is unavoidable, that is a harsh truth about current social relations—let's not resignify unavoidability into a helpful strategy or, in a pragmatic vein, perhaps out of powerlessness or our own fear of falling, turn the bad into the good— inverse Brecht.

I'm also against Guillory's complexity, perhaps the most complex complexity of all, for, as I am suggesting, he puts capital accumulation at the center—but instead of seeing the politicization of graduate students as a healthy response to the problems he diagnoses, he sees it rather as a pathology, a neurotic symptom of the social marginality of the humanities flowing from the concrete logics of accumulation at work in the university and elsewhere. So Marx makes his appearance only to be combined heterogeneously

and incoherently with Moynihan.

Before concluding, I want to make a brief comment about academic freedom, for I suspect that whatever fight that is waged will be led by a politics stressing the defense of academic freedom and I want to suggest the limits to such a path. In his essay, "The Ideal of Academic Freedom as the Ideal of Academic Repression," Bertell Ollman offers a criticism of the concept bearing some relation to Stanley Fish's critique of liberalism's regulative ideals. Ollman's point is that our common understanding of the ideal "relegates what actually exists to the role of a passing qualification":

What actually happens is viewed teleologically, in terms of what one thinks the ideal is going to become, eventually, in time, with patience and more propagandizing of the ideal. The possibility that the gap between the actual and the ideal is more or less fixed and that the ideal may even play a role in keeping it so is hardly entertained and can't be so long as what occurs is not examined on its own terms and within its real social and political context...it is only because most people in the university misunderstand academic repression in terms of an imperfect academic freedom that academic freedom can function so effectively as academic repression (Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations*, pp. 121, 128).

It's pretty clear that universities in the U.S since World War II have been crucial to the accumulation process, in effect helping to socialize the costs of research and development for capital. Yet discussions of the job crisis talk about corporatization and the threat to academic freedom—as if what came before (here, the ideal works nostalgically instead of teleologically) neo-liberal accumulation strategies was somehow non-corporate and thus fails to recognize how much our contemporary notion of academic freedom was a product of and by and large a servant of the Cold War and a U.S capitalism more secure in its global hegemony than it is today.

I can't get beyond the feeling that academic freedom, however cherished a concept, is fatally rooted in the mystifications of liberalism, which promote the illusion that capital and labor are in something other than in a relationship of structural antagonism and thus disguise the way the capitalist division of labor really works.<sup>22</sup>

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We need to fight for more jobs, more job security, health benefits for all, part time work that pays at least two to three times what it pays now. We need to know that these things are probably not winnable under present social relations—if they are only at someone else's expense. The "inspiring" call to close programs doesn't fit here. You can't hold up signs that declare at once, WE WANT JOBS/CLOSE MARGINAL PROGRAMS. Such an idea is not complex—in pomo idiom—but incoherent. We need to build the left not legitimate the center, a left which keeps class exploitation at the center, a left which will fail to do this and thus be worthless if it doesn't place the fight against sexism and racism at the heart of its project. I believe that equal opportunity will never be more than a myth legitimating inequality unless there is rough equality of result.

If I'm wrong and, to quote Gorbachev and Thatcher, "there is no alternative," I'll be the first in line to advocate closing down programs and cutting our own throats to solve the problem of, in Nelson's apt words, "a profession that eats its young" . . . and not-quite-so-young.

## NOTES

1. This paper was presented at the MMLA Presidential Forum on academic labor and is written as a talk, not an essay. I want to thank Leo Parascondola, Jim Neilson, Barbara Foley, Patricia Carter, and Teresa Ebert for their help.
2. Lewontin et al, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p.80
3. Julia Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 70. Schor notes that "however strong the cultural predisposition to hard work, 'workaholism is to some extent a creation of the system, rather than its cause. As long as there are even a few workaholics, competition will force others to keep up. Employers will prefer the hard workers, and these will win out over their colleagues who, either out of personal preference or because they have family responsibilities, do not put in the hours. One engineer noted, 'I don't like to put in 80 hour weeks, but a lot of people do. And those are the people who get the projects and promotions.'"
4. Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York University, 1975), p. 183-4.
5. Rolling Stone, September, 1992.
6. Cary Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), p. 168.
7. Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 124.
8. See Istvan Meszaros' *Beyond Capital* (Monthly Review, 1996) for a 950 page elaboration of this paragraph.
9. Quoted in James Traub, "The Next University: Drive Thru U," *New Yorker* October 20 & 27, p. 122.
10. Quoted in *Beyond Capital*, p. 238.
11. Jude Morrison, 10/8/97, from the e-grad listserv of the Graduate Student Caucus.
12. Joseph Aimone as part of PMLA forum entitled "Letters on the intellectual in the twenty-first century." *PMLA*, Oct. 1997, p.1137.
13. Dr. Linda Thor, President of Rio Salado Community College, quoted in Chronicle. Harrison's phrase comes from *Lean and Mean: The Changing Landscape of Corporate Power in the Age of Flexibility* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
14. Teresa Ebert, "Quango-ing the University," *The Alternative Orange*, Summer/Fall 1997, p. 5. The article can also be found on-line in *Cultural Logic: an Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* at [eserver.org/cllogic](http://eserver.org/cllogic).
15. Johnson's comment is from Profession 96, "Professions Beyond the Academy," p. 64.
16. One form of this denial involves excluding the role of, in James Sledd's words, "boss compositionists" in perpetuating two-tiered labor systems as empowerment, not to mention, in the case at hand, the SUNY Dean's actual role in blocking "democratic process" (Ebert, AO, p. 23). See Ebert's discussion in "Quango-ing" of the role of pragmatism in legitimating repressive administrative practice--pp. 22-5. And for "boss compositionists," see James Sledd, "The Culture of Composition." I want to thank Leo Parascondola for sending me a manuscript version of this essay.
17. Even what might be considered to be in the rad pedagogy camp runs aground on the micro/macro tension in efforts to politicize the personal. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks notes:

There can be no intervention that challenges the status quo if we are not willing to interrogate the way our presentation of self as well as our pedagogical process is often shaped by middle class norms. My awareness of class has been reinforced by my efforts to remain close to loved ones who remain in materially underprivileged class positions. This has helped me to employ pedagogical strategies that create ruptures in the established order, that promote modes of learning which challenge bourgeois hegemony. One such strategy has been the emphasis on creating in classrooms learning communities where everyone's voice can be heard, their presence recognized and valued.

The grandiosity of this claim to undermine bourgeois hegemony in the classroom seems to be undermined by the apparent assent she gives to the "reproductionist" thesis by Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey:

Critiquing the way academic settings are structured to reproduce class hierarchy, Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey emphasize 'that no matter what the politics or ideological stripe of the individual professor...he or she nonetheless participates in the reproduction of the cultural and class relations of capitalism.' Despite this bleak assertion, they are willing to acknowledge that 'nonconformist intellectuals can, through research and publication, chip away with some success at the conventional orthodoxies, nurture students with comparable ideas and intentions or find ways to bring some fraction of the resources of the university to the service of...class interests of the workers and others below.'

Hooks wants to acknowledge the structural properties of class domination but nevertheless feels that such acknowledgment somehow negates agency (it doesn't). While I'm not entirely crazy about the way Ryan et al put the case for challenge, it is far better than Hooks grandiosity. You simply cannot really understand the structural domination of capital yet talk about subverting bourgeois hegemony in the classroom. For one thing, there's the scale problem. Individual's classrooms cannot subvert bourgeois hegemony. We can resist some bourgeois assumptions in the classroom, though just by virtue of giving grades and ranking in order to credential, we cannot resist much. Resisting bourgeois "values" is not the same thing as subverting hegemony, which is a property of a mass movement challenging capital.

The conclusion of her essay on class returns to the discourse of emancipationist fantasy.: "Any professor who commits to engaged pedagogy recognizes the importance of constructively confronting issues of class. That means welcoming the opportunity to alter our classroom practices creatively so that the democratic ideal of education for everyone can be realized" (from bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 177-89). All of this really comes down to the difficulty of breaking with liberalism. For an excellent essay on this issue, see Barbara Foley's upcoming review of Nelson's *Manifesto* and *Will Work*, "'Lepers in the Acropolis': Liberalism, Capitalism and the Crisis in Academic Labor."

18. Bertolt Brecht, "The Good Woman of Szechuan," quoted in Allison, Carr and Eastman, eds, *Masterpieces of the Drama* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 759, 780.
19. The threats against tenure in the university are commonly made in the high schools and are based on the same arguments about job security's incompatibility with "excellence." There are other forms of speed up. For example, with budget cuts, schools rely more and more on outside funding, especially neighborhood fundraising activities by PTA's not merely to supplement budgets but to provide necessities: such a "fundraising frenzy," results in huge disparities since, not surprisingly, some areas raise a lot more money than others: as the local PTA president in Greensboro put it, recalling when her child participated in a fundraiser, "we raised 600 dollars while the same PTA fundraiser in rich Irving Park raised 10,000 dollars, "in one day" (Greensboro News and Record, Sat. Oct. 25, 1997, A3)
20. Gilbert et al., unpublished manuscript of CPE report, p. 11.
21. Steven Watt, "On Downsizing and Elitism," forthcoming in *minnesota review*.
22. At the level of the individual classroom experience, many teachers have experienced (many have not) "the free exchange of ideas"--which is one experiential basis for its seeming self-evidence. But the more we move from micro levels to macro levels, the more we see the "free exchange" shaped by the constraints of capital accumulation. The basically privatized notion of freedom assumed here is I think brought out by Ollman when he asks "at what point do a few radical professors become too many?" (Dialectical Investigations, p. 125). I personally was quite proud of the principled "free exchange" that took place in my critical race theory course, the last graduate course I taught before losing my job--something I took to be an impediment to "free exchange." But this doesn't lead me to believe that the same "free exchange" takes place among boards of trustees, much less such free exchange taking practical, institutional forms. People who question academic freedom--certain (the really vulgar ones) Marxists especially--are often viewed as engaging in self-defeating activity or worse a kind of gross naivete, a failure to appreciate the difference between being allowed to speak and being thrown

in jail . Well, let me just say that I 'd rather be allowed to write this essay than be thrown in jail. And with Habermas I agree that the unforced force of the better argument is way preferable to force. Yet that is perfectly consistent with my belief that as long as class society exists, force decides the issue. And that any substantively free society would forcefully prevent the return of class society. Moreover, I think the presuppositions underlying the activity of argument and "undistorted communication" are at bottom incompatible with some liberal notions of academic freedom--which are premised on the idea that ideas don't matter and that "there is no such thing as a false idea" (See Fish, 1994, ch. 9 for an insightful discussion) There is, of course, the apparently opposite premise of the free exchange of ideas--not only do ideas matter but the truth will out as a result of this process, with the measure of truth being the market process itself (needless to say, not a valid epistemic criteria) . We might refer to these tendencies as the dematerialization of ideas and the decontextualization of free exchange--both are rooted in liberalism's mystification of power relations under capitalism. ( I would insist by the way that reliable systems of knowledge production require fallibilism. Fallibilism and liberalism are not the same). I think it is crucial to have this debate over academic freedom and its entailments among and between Marxists and progressives, reformists and radicals. Yet there is nothing self contradictory in my questioning academic freedom while being committed to particular debates (but not all debates. I think Fish is right in arguing that such openness is in principle not possible. But we can see this empirically also. Assuming it is true that the use of certain kinds of pornography in the workplace is a form of sexual harassment, such "speech" in the workplace will be excluded). Debates which are perceived to threaten the basis of a society's core values and practices--production for profit for example--will, on my view, be suppressed and/or marginalized. Conditions for Habermasian fair debate will not be allowed to emerge (and will thus remain transcendental presuppositions). Liberals, of course, disagree, thus the need for debate. The irony is that the more this debate becomes public (especially in an atmosphere of heightening class struggle and heated competition among capitals), the more the antagonisms (on a Marxian view) between liberalism and Marxism will exert themselves so as to undermine the conditions of fruitful dialogue. Such, on this view, are the dialectical limits of even this debate.

## AFFILIATIONS

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