



Bousquet, M. (2003). The Academic Labor Movement in One Volume: Review Of *Chalk Lines* and *Steal The University*. *Workplace*, 10, 214- 218.

MARC BOUSQUET

**THE ACADEMIC LABOR MOVEMENT IN ONE VOLUME:  
REVIEW OF**

*Chalk Lines: The Politics of Work in the Managed University*

Ed. Randy Martin. Duke University Press, 1998

*Steal This University: The Rise of the Corporate University and the Academic  
Labor Movement.*

Eds. Benjamin Johnson, Patrick Kavanagh, and Kevin Mattson. Routledge, 2003

1.1 Readers looking for a single volume addressing the “rise of the corporate university and the academic labor movement” will probably continue to turn to Randy Martin’s superb *Chalk Lines: The Politics of Work in the Managed University* (Duke, 1998). An exceptionally diverse collection of contributions by labor historians, sociologists, specialists in higher education, theorists and organizers, *Chalk Lines* addresses the organizing experiences of traditional faculty, graduate employees, and adjunct lecturers, as well as undergraduates. It emphasizes public higher education and the connections between different sites of struggle, including the public-policy arena affecting such specific campus constituencies as the adult learners served by adult literacy education centers.

1.2 In addition to organizer narratives, the *Chalk Lines* volume serves to provide an overall “taxonomy of teacher work” and political economy of the university under what Bourdieu calls “the tyranny of the market.” Containing serious, responsible scholarship of patterns in university employment since the 1960s, it introduces core concepts for organizing and analysis, such as privatization, de-skilling, the increasing division of even tenured faculty into the “managerial” and the “managed,” segmentation by gender and job description, casualization, outsourcing and other forms of tiering the academic workforce. Taking a global perspective that includes Canadian and Australian as well as U.S. campuses, the volume presents indispensable analysis of the phenomenon dubbed “academic capitalism” by Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, describing both the rise of for-profit education and the increasing willingness of traditional universities to adopt for-profit methods, including the privatization of many public functions, and the steady growth of market behaviors in the faculty as a result of Toyotist innovations by university management. This market behavior includes competition between colleagues for grants, released time, “merit pay,” lab time and other resources; the speed-up of faculty work processes; increased responsiveness to managerial command; re-direction of loyalties from the profession at large to an individual employer or academic unit; and an increasing tendency to value research in relation to its

revenue potential and not the public good. At present, for instance, 90% of medical research dollars flow toward diseases experienced by the wealthiest 10% of the world's population.

1.3 Those readers looking to supplement the organizing narratives in *Chalk Lines* might want to turn to Barbara Wolf's brilliant two-cassette documentary film, *A Simple Matter of Justice: Contingent Faculty Organize* (2001) which provides a five-part follow-up of her path-breaking *Degrees of Shame* (1997) (both available at: [br\\_wolf@hotmail.com](mailto:br_wolf@hotmail.com)), or the new volume by Julie Schmid and Deborah Herman, *Cogs in the Classroom Factory: The Changing Identity of Academic Labor* (Greenwood, 2002), featuring a foreword by David Montgomery. Those looking for a multi-volume experience of the core issues of the academic labor movement will certainly want to look at other work published by Slaughter and Rhoades, especially Slaughter's collaboration with Larry L. Leslie, *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University* (Hopkins, 1997) and Rhoades' indispensable study of faculty unionism, *Managed Professionals: Unionized Faculty and Restructuring Academic Labor* (SUNY, 1998). Those looking for more detail on "corporate power in the ivory tower" might turn to Aronowitz's *Knowledge Faculty Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning* (Beacon 2000), the compelling collection gathered together by Geoffrey White in *Campus, Inc.* (Prometheus 2000), or Bill Readings' influential discussion of university as a transnational bureaucratic corporation and its managerial rhetoric of "excellence," *The University in Ruins* (Harvard, 1996). Some of the essays originally published in three influential double issues of *minnesota review* on academic labor have been reprinted in Jeff Williams' 2002 SUNY volume, *The Institution of Literature*. You might also continue to read *Workplace* and the website of the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions ([www.cgeu.org](http://www.cgeu.org)).

2.1 The more recent volume by Routledge, despite its encompassing subtitle, primarily features the perspective of graduate employee unionists at private institutions, especially at NYU and Yale: with a couple of exceptions, the volume's discussions of tenure stream faculty tend to feature them either as successful job candidates ("the winners of the academic lottery"), or in supporting roles to graduate-employee organizing, such as Cary Nelson's discussion of the MLA Graduate Student Caucus and the compelling account—previously published in *Workplace*—by Joel Westheimer of NYU's wrongful denial of his tenure case in connection with his support of graduate student unionism.

2.2 While this perspective will resonate with some readers, the volume's version of "the academic labor movement" scants the overwhelming reality of faculty unionism (nearly half of all tenure-stream faculty are unionized; including almost 2/3 of the faculty in public higher education, much more, if the top 100 research universities are excluded). Higher education faculty are three times more likely to be unionized than the average American worker.

2.3 As I wrote in the foreword to the first volume of *Workplace*, I happen to agree with the volume's editors that the graduate employees and former graduate employees working off the tenure track have the best standpoint from which to describe the most just solution to the problems of academic labor (see my "The 'Waste Product' of Graduate Education: Toward a Dictatorship of the Flexible."). But I make that claim for what I call the "third wave" of consciousness in relation to the academic labor movement in connection with the "first wave" of tenure-stream unionism, which has had notable successes as well as failures (especially in failing to address casualization), and in relation to the second wave of managerial consciousness (charted by the critical scholarship of Slaughter, Rhoades, and others collected in the Martin volume), a subset of which was the 1980s phenomenon of "job market theory," made popular by the MLA staff and such bad scholarship as the 1987 Bowen report (which predicted twenty years of "job surplus" beginning in the late 1990s!).

2.4 The absence of a coherent critical narrative of changes in higher education ultimately cripples the Routledge volume for purposes of analysis: its section analyzing the "rise of the corporate university" consists of just four essays, one of them a reprint of David Noble's "Digital Diploma Mills," widely

circulated on the internet six years ago. While an important document regarding the mid-1990s managerial dreamscape for the application of technology to the academy—of dollars for credits without faculty labor time--the Noble essay's weakest point is its narrative of teaching labor: he erroneously describes the "commodification of the the teaching function of the university" to the mid-1980s and in primary relationship to technology, when the better-documented scholarship dates this commodification to the 1960s, in connection with the ascent of managerial professionals and market ideology.

2.5 The only other piece to offer a big-picture assessment of changes in higher education is a chapter which doesn't purport to offer them, Ana Marie Cox's genuinely interesting report on the University of Phoenix. Though primarily a case study of one for-profit institution, Cox's piece goes on to make some apt observations and predictions about the ways the "for-profit model" informs the practice of traditional universities. To the best of my careful reading, none of the essays in the collection address such significant previous scholarship on higher education as the work of Readings, Aronowitz, Slaughter and Rhoades.

2.6 Tellingly, the most significant chapter in the collection, by COCAL organizers Barbara Gottfried and Gary Zabel, is one which pervasively addresses the relationship between tenure-stream unionism and the organizing efforts of other academic workers. This remarkable essay makes multiple contributions at the level of theory as well as narrative, illustrating the possibilities for multi-campus organizing, the usefulness for establishing solidarity with other workers, and actively working to heal the longstanding rift between labor and the New Left social movements. Observing that the experience of low-paid contingent labor is also the experience of "the overwhelming majority" of Boston-area undergraduates, Gottfried and Zabel envision a model for organizing redolent of the IWW which "would send ripples throughout the city, affecting students, parents, politicians, public workers and private corporations" (209).

2.7 Of particular importance is Gottfried and Zabel's discussion of the close and complex relationship of the Boston adjunct coalition to unions and professional associations traditionally dominated by the agenda of the full-time faculty, such as AAUP and the Faculty Staff Union (FSU) at U Mass Amherst. Winning recognition in 1976 at the expense of excluding most part-timers from its ranks, the U Mass FSU, like most unions dominated by tenure-stream faculty over the past thirty-five years, gave precedence to "defending the interests of full-time faculty" (211). But by 1986, part-time faculty had formed an insurgent caucus within the FSU that continued to pressure a sometimes-recalcitrant union leadership through 1997, eventually appealing directly to the full-time faculty membership, where they polled overwhelming support, forcing the full-timer dominated bargaining team to negotiate truly "extraordinary" new contract provisions for the part-time faculty, including a massive expansion of eligibility for full medical, dental and retirement benefits, a pro-rated course floor in the upper 20% of adjunct pay rates, a 16% salary increase, and a guaranteed cumulative wage increase each semester. In the aftermath of this 1998 victory, the activist part-time members of the U Mass faculty union were instrumental in forming a Boston COCAL chapter representing twenty campuses, many of them private institutions.

2.8 In short, one of the core lessons of the COCAL Boston experience is the degree to which, in addition to forming solidarities with other workers and activist organizations such as Jobs With Justice, the organizing efforts of part-time faculty members benefit from actively engaging institutions controlled by full-time faculty, including their unions. The closing section of Gottfried and Zabel's chapter details the way in which the U Mass part-timers used their success as a "springboard" to develop an insurgent caucus within the FSU's parent union, the Massachusetts' Teachers Association, an NEA affiliate. In many cases the caucus of part-timers works against the strong opposition of entrenched full-time faculty union officials (and restrictive regulations giving each part-time member only one vote, even though they outnumber full-timers on many campuses, as in the community colleges, where the part-timers number 4000 to the full-timers' 1700.) This insurgent movement hopes to put over a reform agenda that would simultaneously affect the working conditions of fifteen institutions of Massachusetts public higher ed.

2.9 Overall, the Martin volume remains the best choice for a one-volume text on corporatization and the academic labor movement. But graduate employees at private universities may want to pick up a copy of the Routledge volume as a supporting text for libraries that already include *Chalk Lines*, *Cogs in the Classroom*, *Campus Inc.*, Cary Nelson's *Will Teach for Food*, and Barbara Wolf's videos.

## References

Aronowitz, Stanley. *Knowledge Faculty Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning* (Beacon 2000).

Bousquet, Marc. 1998. "The Institution as Artificial Horizon." *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 1.1 (February).

--- 2002. "The Waste Product of Graduate Education: Toward A Dictatorship of the Flexible." *Social Text* 70: 81-104.

Nelson, Cary. *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis*. (Minnesota, 1997.)

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins* (Harvard,1996).

Rhoades, Gary. *Managed Professionals: Unionized Faculty and Restructuring Academic Labor* (SUNY, 1998).

Schmid, Julie, and Deborah Herman, eds. *Cogs in the Classroom: The Changing Identity of Academic Labor* (Greenwood, 2002).

Slaughter, Sheila and Larry L. Leslie. *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University* (Hopkins,1997).

White. Geoffrey. *Campus, Inc.: Corporate Power in the Ivory Tower*. (Prometheus 2000).

Williams, Jeffrey. *The Institution of Literature* (SUNY, 2002).

Wolf, Barbara. *A Simple Matter of Justice: Contingent Faculty Organize* (VHS, 2001). Available at: [br\\_wolf@hotmail.com](mailto:br_wolf@hotmail.com)