

the university: last words

I am a black man number one, because I am against what they have done and are still doing to us; and number two, I have something to say about the new society to be built because I have a tremendous part in that which they have sought to discredit.

C. L. R. James

The epigraph stays the same. Let's review. There's a figure, now as much digital avatar as analogical body, that sometimes we call the subversive intellectual and other times the critical intellectual. We try to have sympathy with him because he is us when we are torn apart in the lonely complicity of the university relation. We don't dog him, because he's us; but he ain't us because us ain't Him, which is to say one, that one, that sovereign intellectual figure/shadow/glitch, tenured or untenured, adjunct or held, serially liked in his sad, self-acknowledged unlikeability, unloved but desired by those he abusively desires but cannot love. There's a question this over-representative man can't ask, let alone address, even when she's under-represented. It is a question concerning the general and differentiated impositions bearing down on workers in the university before and after the current crisis, whatever the current crisis may be. The question is this: How much of the academy's libidinal political economy is predicated on the fantasy of a liveable (individual) intellectual life? Such predication is both normal and normative. How could it be otherwise? That's the training; that's the discipline; that's the fucking model that administration and/in/of the professors and their apprentices give, not that we live it, because it's a fantasy for us even in our subversive criticality. Assertions of someone else's absolute privilege absolves no one who imagines they should be paid to study, as if the wage were half an honorific and half a right rather than all anti-communist insult, imposition and theft. The various misprisions of subversive criticality have as much to do with why what we do ain't fun as they have to do with why we can't make ends meet. The regulation of pleasure is essential to the war on subsistence. Fleshly and spiritual unsustainability, which are not so much imposed on the reality of individual bodies and minds but given in the very idea of them, form a range of

common differences, hierarchically arranged. It's not that the hierarchy isn't important to understand and analyze; it's just that it's not a physical condition so much as an effect of a metaphysical fantasy—the lone/ly moral-intellectual agent—and its various derivative and supportive institutions.

Let's keep reviewing by dusting of the antiquated phrase "job of work." When did a job of work become a job? What happens when the work and the job are disentangled? Is a job a unit of work? Is it a means to an end or a point in the direction of an end? Is it the end that means disrupt and defer? What do job and/or work have to do with labor and/or labor power? How do we keep the job from taking play out of work and work out of play? How do we keep work from rising to the status of "the work" or, higher still, "my work"? They regulate our work by owning and immiserating our jobs. And then they eliminate our jobs (the jobs being ours only insofar as we are theirs). The line between regulation and elimination is ever more insistently transgressed with every so-called crisis in the ongoing trajectory of the state of emergency. The elimination of the job comes hard on the regulation of work, but we see that hard coming as brutal counter-revolution only after it's gone, work having slipped through the fingers of our hands, which are shackled by grasping, doubly imposed upon us as inheritance, disease, job-related injury. Sadly, our feel for work, for practice, is slightened, obsessed as we all are and must be with the mechanics, economics and metaphysics of the job. The debt we owe but never promised is disappeared for credit. We merely pass and fail unless we keep practicing and reviewing.

The institution (the university, the prison, the hospital, the state) is regulatory; and regulation tends towards elimination. The university regulates certain kinds of theoretical and empirical, intellectual and sensual, study; the prison regulates mobility; the hospital regulates health; the state, of which these other institutions are apparatuses, regulates sociality, in general, by imposing the individuation it implies. These institutions do what they do unto the elimination of what they regulate. They lure those of us who are interested in these things into their regulatory snares by saying those snares are here to protect these

things, to provide them refuge within a general politico-economic structure/idea that neglects and abandons these things, while desiring and consuming the fruit of their owned instrumentalization. These dispositions are themselves effects of metaphysics, separability, or the metaphysics of separability. We gladly accept the invitation of Abigail Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein to abolitionist university studies, by which we take them to mean, as well, study in and the study of the abolitionist university, and we recognize, along with them, that an abolitionist university would be kinda like an abolitionist prison or an abolitionist plantation. It would be where the generation of knowledge in the university—at the level of its form, content and practices—tends towards the knowing degeneration, disorganization and disequilibrium of the university.

When Arendt saw black studies, soul studies, as a threat to the university, she was giving our approach a (decidedly backhanded and dismissive) compliment it must continue to strive to deserve. Perhaps what she saw and feared in black studies was the animating, corrosive force of black study. What we want for black studies is that they aim for the degeneration of their object—which is western civilization and/as the shadow/specter of (even “our”) natal community—in the ongoing generation/approach of blackness (as anti- and ante-natal undercommonality). Now, we have to come to grips with the fact that what we want is seldom what we get. When we said that it can’t be denied that the university is a place of refuge for the subversive/critical intellectual, what we were saying is that the university is more like a refugee camp than a writers’ colony. We go there when it feels like there’s no place else to go, not because we have no people but because we’re looking for more of them, who are ours in different ways, through other texts, in deviant styles; but the fact that one fills out an application to get in doesn’t make it any less a non-resort of last resort. The destination imagined in individuated flight is a field of embattled futility where looking for your people becomes learning to be (by) yourself. Let’s call the good student, who excels at elinquent, runaway self-discovery and self-expression, the fugitive intellectual, too. It’s just that this re-nomination doesn’t save the critical subversive from himself once

he discovers how he went to the university to be free from freedom's carceral impositions, and/or that he was specially sent there to fight the man, and the drones he sends, and the drive that sent him. The university is a fortress whose various appearances—refuge and refugee camp, writer's colony and colony—betray its deep, various, nefarious functions as well as the black operations we enact when our fallenness breaks through the floor of Dis's thought castle, aerating and seeding the ground on which it stands, which is where the damned all gather, inseparable pando in pandemonium. The strange, sad thing about the subversive/critical/fugitive intellectual is that he all but can't help but want unhappily to commit to the refugee camp in the hope of one or two glorious summer sojourns in the writer's colony, held, in either case, in the insufficiency of the primary amenity they each distribute, which is separation misunderstood as reward. Only in the university can winning a fellowship mean access to solitude. Trained to want to stay there rather than fall through there, the better he is, the more he gets, the worse he feels. Hence a set of fantasies, ranging from transparency to blackening, held in relational solitary confinement that mistakes the restricted (re)forms of the academy's general population for the revolutionary force of a general intellectual metæconomy that will have been foregiven in the subversion, criticism and fugitivity we share when we till in the morning, chop it up in the afternoon, and run the jam all night along.

This thing where you work for the abolition of the institution that you work for is nothing new. It happens under all kinds of coercive pressures and regimes, in the name of a general, generative, generous abolition—in the entanglement of growth and destruction in the very roots of the word—improvising its out and undergrounding (black) radicalism. It's a generous, generative, general metæconomy, which institutionality restricts and regulates. The dream of a “free and ordered” space was always a waking trauma of sequestration and management. The university is generation's cell. The marketplace of ideas is a battlefield. Even the open university was always an oxymoron, which some of us have proudly and generatively practiced like an annihilative, anorchestral score, cuts and scratches scarred and

dubbed unto a disappearance that hasn't happened yet because of the cuts and scarcity they impose. Being post-medieval doctors in good standing, we bleed the university in order to keep alive what we would kill. What emerges in this articulated, antagonistic combination is a temporary equilibrium, stasis as a kind of life support, a ventilator bearing both salvific and debilitating capacities. We are constrained to keep alive, under constraints that make what we are constrained to do impossible, a monster whose constant murder, which we intend, keeps us alive. And now, the university is just a dirty business and a state apparatus (for the imposition of policy), maybe most especially if it's private, though nowhere is the simple opposition between public and private more misleading. In the eclipse and subdivision, in the individuation of our dispossessive work into this or that bad job that you and I try desperately to own, we're a credential-granting front for finance capitalism and a machine for stratification. In other words, we're workers in and of study—which is, if it is study, black—insofar as we share a consensual condition. We are against what they have done and are still doing to us; and we have something to say about the new society to be built; and we share in that which they have sought to discredit. Therefore, you and I and the university have to disappear.

What does it mean, then, to work for an institution—the self, the university—whose disappearance you desire, particularly when the expression and refinement of that desire is the work you do? What does it mean to work against the institution you work for when your working against the institution is extracted by the institution as surplus? It's a real problem, in conditions of “freedom,” to work for the institution you work against. But that's a better problem than not working against the institution that works against us and our needs, and desires, and calling. We can work through the contradictions of working for and working against the university. It requires practicing non-cooperation rather than petitioning for shared governance. It requires generative, degenerative generosity, not the citational affirmations and shady dismissals of intellectual property management. We're not stakeholders in the university. Let's not share in its governance. We are neither producers

nor consumers of intellectual property. Let's not enact its management. And why should we want to hear from the motherfuckers who run it as they tell us why they have no choice but to run it like they do? Most people know they are in an antagonistic relation with their boss. It's a fuck of a lot easier to think about how to grow in antagonism to the boss than to think about how to make the bosses' genocidally dysfunctional shit job—the management he imposes upon us as weight and role—better. Why should we make their job better, or easier? Let's be glad to grow in the ongoing project of destroying their shit. Let's refuse to make do in the maintenance of their shit. Our work, not their jobs.

See, one way to answer the question, what is the undercommons? is that it is the discredited thing we have had a tremendous part in. But we have to be careful about what has in fact been discredited, and to distinguish it from what is only the job, which is to say the role play, the character. Because the university is an integral part and prime example of the experience economy. It is integral because it is where students and faculty learn to subordinate necessarily shared experience to the collective individuation machine of the experience economy, and it is a prime example because it incorporates so many aspects of the experience economy—sports, dining, dwelling, socializing, and co-branding (i.e., the students brands himself as, say, Northwestern's and Northwestern, through the student, brands itself repeatedly as Northwestern).

In other examples of the experience economy, precisely because they are not taken so seriously, the role player knows he or she is in a role, and the role delivers a purchased, packaged “experience” designed to simulate what is depleted, extracted, exploited, denigrated, and alienated in the quotidian world of work, (anti-)social reproduction, and (anti-)social life, that is to say the very forces the experience economy is designed to further by way of false remediation. In other words, the worker who puts on the Mickey Mouse costume at Disneyland, or the worker who paints themselves even whiter to be Snow White, knows they are delivering a paid experience. This is not to say they cannot take pleasure in a

child's smile. But it is a job. The nurse, who is on the job, knows they can make someone feel better but also knows the work is not the character they play, or show, or has but the sharing of an earthly rite that human difference bears and constantly endangers.

While the nurse or Mickey Mouse know they are in a role, the university teacher—especially the critical/subversive/fugitive teacher—thinks this role, this job, the work; that what they provide in the seminar room or in the lecture theater or, especially, in office hours is the work, not the job as purchased experience. But the purchased experience is the credential, the brand, as any marketing professor will tell you. Why this matters for *us* is that we need to abolish this institution; and the way to do that is a general strike; and the general strike as DuBois and Marley tell us is an exodus. If you think you can't leave because the students will be bereft, robbed, of the experience of the university, you'll never go. You'll just wait for the master to come back, and he will.

Now, when we say we need an exodus from the university we are talking about an exodus from the job and the experience it produces. We exit in practicing otherwise, in conjuring elsewhere off and under the university's metaphysical clock, in the abolitionist presencing of black study. This dusty, rough, natty, naughty Zion of the work is what we will have been doing all along when we refuse to enact the experience economy of the university and when we feel our general strike enough to leave the job and take the work with us, which as it turns out is all we need and the only thing the university cannot do without.

So, let's channel indignation over relatively small and insignificant inequities within the massive brutality of the administrative network into the destruction of the network, realizing how those inequities within the network so often obscure inequities outside of the network. Consider New York University, for instance, as a gathering of social, aesthetic and intellectual resources that provide occasions that obscure and operationalize an outlet for the buying and selling of credentials. The credential business is subordinate to and

conceptualized within an ongoing process of hoarding and irrational reproducing space and/as financial assets that is also called New York University. The credential business provides a more or less steady stream of capital (unless you get some kind of manmade natural disaster, say, in the form of a novel virus riding the blinds of globalization + the necessarily racist, misogynist and anti-black machinations of a capitalist “health care system”), which funds the (anti-)intellectual front and generally provides a surplus that is recognized and then deployed as financial asset. There is a board that runs the set of businesses called NYU and its primary objective is to optimize the leveraging of those assets not only to increase the value of the other assets they control, as their understanding of their interests commands, but also at the command of a system of accumulation which continues monstrously and masterfully to deploy the ge(n)ocidally bullshit idea of interests. The board that controls the businesses called NYU dictates terms to the administrators of the front called NYU. The job of those administrators is to oversee the dispersal of their job, to turn our work into their job, which is subdivided into the jobs NYU faculty rent, along with the apartments they rent if they are gifted with the privilege, which accrues to those on the tenure track, to pay a massive tax for the gift/privilege of teaching there, having exchanged the consensual intellectual debt we share for the individual academic credit they extend and the credentials they sell and use as tools of exclusion and hierarchization.¹ These university administrators distribute scarcity and manage insurgency (i.e., socio-aesthetic intellectual innovation against the state and, more generally, the static), which is extracted, (re)conceptualized and financialized by and for the businesses. When they distribute scarcity and manage insurgency, they do so by way of the constant imposition not simply of the effects but also of the labor of administration, which we sanction, and for which we clamor, under the name of shared governance. We say we want to be consulted and The Provost consults us, listening to us eloquently respond to her everlasting no until we walk away from the consultation unsatisfied, having been turned, just as we asked, into her consultants. We are immersed in the sick feeling of having been alienated from the

insurgency that we reproduce and that sick feeling resolves into a kind of resentment we direct at the crabs who are one or two levels above and/or below us in a barrel which is so bad, as barrels go, that it seems like it's not that bad. That condition adds a measure of guilt—usually expressed as philanthropic pseudo-solidarity with the unbarrel'd—to the sick feelings in which we are immersed. Fuck sharing governance, or the slightly more equitable distribution of extracted surplus; let's share needs.

Why the fuck should we want to lower administrative salaries rather than eliminate administration? Defund the police ain't the same as fuck the police. If detached from a general insurgency that it is ours, too, to practice and not simply describe, then members of the faculty *are* members of the administration, playing the role of its guilty conscience, good cops cleaning up the bad cops' mess then helping them get their story straight before throwing subadministrative shade back at the administrative suite on the way home, after work, at whatever faculty cop bar, and then going home to work some more, is neither fun nor productive nor destructive. So, fuck that. For there is a general imperative to refuse administration. The question is: how do we eliminate administration not only as this or that person or set of people filling this or that job or set of jobs but also as a mode of existence, as an attitude, as a kind of climate in which the job—the role, the character, the managed, manufactured “experience”—overshadows our work? Fuck every possible appeal to the bosses insofar as the rhetorical demand, the mere petition, is their protein shake; and fuck the acceptance of the university as limit or horizon. The enslaved didn't seek the reform but the elimination of the plantation. Via the patient, breathed accretion of the general strike, they advanced the long project of eroding it from the inside, which, now, we must extend, because the plantation never died but multiplied. The enslaved, who shared the advantage of knowing they were enslaved, worked and organized where they were but outside of any sense or imperative of a spatio-temporal coordinate that both established and bound their “personhood” or “subjectivity.” They practiced an anti- and ante-administrative ministry for defense and sacred and profane enjoyment. They didn't just utter but also practiced the

demand, and all but all of the time, when they did utter it, they were righteously, fugitively, fugally, selflessly talking to and amongst themselves, under duress that is beyond calculation and description. We think about how they lived through and how they lived on not because we have any hope of establishing a grammar adequate to that suffering but because their suffering and their practice are the anagrammatical poetics of our rebellion. The immeasurably narrow margin upon which black study might be in but not of the university has no room for the black student, let alone the black professor, insofar as both, in their individuation, are hosts for the oxymoronic plague of black administration, which professional, academic black studies tends to operationalize in spite of every possible good intention. Whatever vision we have of the university should begin with what we can practice, independent of what administration will or can or can't and will not grant. Let's criminally misinterpret the university. Let's cut it till we can't see it and then cut where it was.

Faculty and students and staff have the means of intellectual production. Now, all we have to do is want what we have. Let's stop violating those means, and the sharing of them, by engaging in abusive and extractive rituals of pseudo-intellectual governance, which are, in themselves, always unsatisfying. If faculty want their share in, rather than the eradication of administration, which is the governance of the bullshit that goes on outside the classroom, and students want a share of that power to trickle on down to them, both while relinquishing at the drop of any muhfuckin' hat the capacity to shape what goes on where the actual work is done, then we gotta learn how to want to be some other way, in those ways otherwise than normative academic being, which we share in relative unawareness with all who work to maintain the barest possibilities and necessary infrastructures of study in the university. Now, pitifully, we seem to want it one way instead of the other ways under a true but fictitious flag of economic necessity that relinquishes all that might be given in the sharing of needs. But there's something in the other ways through things. Fuck office hours,

classes and exams, all of which are serial and simulated monogamous situations for the enactment of the weak abusive power of the professor and the strong abusive power of the university, and the weak extractive power of the student and the strong extractive power of the university. They are tools of necessarily degraded and degrading identification, and sometimes counter-identification, with faculty, with administration and, ultimately, with the university. The identification with the fucking university is almost as bad as the counter-identification against the fucking university, which is almost as bad as the identification with the fucking university.

Is the difference between *satyagrah* and civil disobedience like the difference between non-cooperation and the demand for (transparency, equity and) shared governance? Why does Gandhi keep a kind of respectful distance from Thoreau even in his translational (ab)use of the term “civil disobedience,” while Arendt creates a kind of identification that weakens, ultimately, the essential force, the soul force, of non-cooperation? Non-cooperation refuses both consultation and confrontation to the extent that it is, in the first instance, not directed towards the bosses. If consultation is the fetish of this or that AAUP executive committee, then confrontation is the kink of non-general strikers. Either way, all energy is directed towards the bosses and our own sociality is residual, derivative, threadbare etiolation of social aid and pleasure. Power seeks our attention; we have to refuse their extraction of it. For all who crave either consultation or confrontation, for all who only feel alive when they're face to face with the man who is sent by the drive, remember that the drones who are sent by the man who is sent by the drive will absolutely come to claim our eye when we do what we do and selflessly practice what we preach to us, for us.

Unfortunately, as has become clear over the past few weeks in predictable, because they have been oft repeated, ways, this or that rhetorico-political stance on decoloniality or expression of solidarity with suffocated black lives breathes reformist air into a dying machine. On the other hand, the practice of anti-coloniality and anti-antiblackness tends

towards and is given in a general strike, an affirmative blow that is delivered, with increasing effectiveness the less the object of that strike or blow is our focal point. Can we resist the logico-neurotics of the demand as mere expression, mere petition? Rather than being a speech act whose perlocutionary effect will have been to convince the citizen of his own existence, the demand is a practice that will have been illegible to normal political psychology. In their teaching, Douglass and Fanon excavate an alternative meaning of demand that liberal academic posture and performance abjure and suppress. The expression of solidarity in the absence of the practice of solidarity is some similarly thin, hot air. Fuck the name and the game of honor. Fuck the future of the university. Please stop worrying about that shit so we can worry (till, tease, turn over, chew over, chop up and fret) the practice of our presence. No promises from the university, no demands on the university, just the presence of our practice in love and battle, in and through its ruins, on the other side of its dying gasps and last words.

¹ NYU housing is not subsidized housing. It's company housing. But it's not even that since real estate is such a fundamental part of NYU as a set of businesses and as a reservoir of financial capital. Or, if it is subsidized housing it's because we subsidize them, which is why the rent strike must accompany the labor action and why the demand to be paid must be accompanied by the refusal to pay. What is a general strike and what are the rent strike and the labor action within and as an emanation of that generative generality? The general strike is when we mobilize our needs, take them seriously as wealth—as shifting/shifted, historical essence, even, rather than as some depression from which we are trying to arise, or some deficit we are always trying to overcome, or some crisis we are attempting to (out)face, on the path to completeness or self-sufficiency. We should do so by way of the insight Marx has and shares in his definition of wealth in the *Grundrisse*. It's an insight worth having and sharing because it is common, because it actually makes Marx into something like (ir)regular

earthly folks rather than a great (European) thinker. We *need* to generate our own strike fund out of the way we go, and the fact that we go, on strike—to withhold from them and share with us for social aid and pleasure and the cultivation of people’s needs. We need simply to refuse the condition in which the university both neglects our needs and extracts the collective wealth that is given in those needs as surplus. The landscape of need is dark and lovely.