Research and Destroy
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We intend to employ this tactic until it becomes generalized. In 2001 the first Argentine *piqueteros* suggested the form the people's struggle there should take: road blockades which brought to a halt the circulation of goods from place to place. Within months this tactic spread across the country without any formal coordination between groups. In the same way repetition can establish occupation as an instinctive and immediate method of revolt taken up both inside and outside the university. We have seen a new wave of takeovers in the U.S. over the last year, both at universities and workplaces: New School and NYU, as well as the workers at Republic Windows Factory in Chicago, who fought the closure of their factory by taking it over. Now it is our turn.

To accomplish our goals we cannot rely on those groups which position themselves as our representatives. We are willing to work with unions and student associations when we find it useful, but we do not recognize their authority. We must act on our own behalf directly, without mediation. We must break with any groups that seek to limit the struggle by telling us to go back to work or class, to negotiate, to reconcile. This was also the case in France. The original calls for protest were made by the national high school and university student associations and by some of the trade unions. Eventually, as the representative groups urged calm, others forged ahead. And in Greece the unions revealed their counter-revolutionary character by cancelling strikes and calling for restraint.

As an alternative to being herded by representatives, we call on students and workers to organize themselves across trade lines. We urge undergraduates, teaching assistants, lecturers, faculty, service workers, and staff to begin meeting together to discuss their situation. The more we begin talking to one another and finding our common interests, the more difficult it becomes for the administration to pit us against each other in a hopeless competition for dwindling resources. The recent struggles at NYU and the New School suffered from the absence of these deep bonds, and if there is a lesson to be learned from them it is that we must build dense networks of solidarity based upon the recognition of a shared enemy. These networks not only make us resistant to recuperation and neutralization, but also allow us to establish new kinds of collective bonds. These bonds are the real basis of our struggle.

We'll see you at the barricades.

strong in the schools and the immigrant suburbs, did not spread to the workplaces.

Our task in the current struggle will be to make clear the contradiction between form and content and to create the conditions for the transcendence of reformist demands and the implementation of a truly communist content. As the unions and student and faculty groups push their various "issues," we must increase the tension until it is clear that we want something else entirely. We must constantly expose the incoherence of demands for democratization and transparency. What good is it to have the right to see how intolerable things are, or to elect those who will screw us over? We must leave behind the culture of student activism, with its moralistic mantras of non-violence and its fixation on single-issue causes. The only success with which we can be content is the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the certain immiseration and death which it promises for the 21st century. All of our actions must push us towards communization; that is, the reorganization of society according to a logic of free giving and receiving, and the immediate abolition of the wage, the value-form, compulsory labor, and exchange.

Occupation will be a critical tactic in our struggle, but we must resist the tendency to use it in a reformist way. The different strategic uses of occupation became clear this past January when students occupied a building at the New School in New York. A group of friends, mostly graduate students, decided to take over the Student Center and claim it as a liberated space for students and the public. Soon others joined in, but many of them preferred to use the action as leverage to win reforms, in particular to oust the school's president. These differences came to a head as the occupation unfolded. While the student reformers were focused on leaving the building with a tangible concession from the administration, others shunned demands entirely. They saw the point of occupation as the creation of a momentary opening in capitalist time and space, a rearrangement that sketched the contours of a new society. We side with this anti-reformist position. While we know these free zones will be partial and transitory, the tensions they expose between the real and the possible can push the struggle in a more radical direction.



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movement sought to expand the rebellion into a general revolt against capitalism, they could not secure significant support and the demonstrations, occupations, and blockades dwindled and soon died. Ultimately the movement was unable to transcend the limitations of reformism.

The Greek uprising of December 2008 broke through many of these limitations and marked the beginning of a new cycle of class struggle. Initiated by students in response to the murder of an Athens youth by police, the uprising consisted of weeks of rioting, looting, and occupations of universities, union offices, and television stations. Entire financial and shopping districts burned, and what the movement lacked in numbers it made up in its geographical breadth, spreading from city to city to encompass the whole of Greece. As in France it was an uprising of youth, for whom the economic crisis represented a total negation of the future. Students, precarious workers, and immigrants were the protagonists, and they were able to achieve a level of unity that far surpassed the fragile solidarities of the anti-CPE movement.

Just as significantly, they made almost no demands. While of course some demonstrators sought to reform the police system or to critique specific government policies, in general they asked for nothing at all from the government, the university, the workplaces, or the police. Not because they considered this a better strategy, but because they wanted nothing that any of these institutions could offer. Here content aligned with form; whereas the optimistic slogans that appeared everywhere in French demonstrations jarred with the images of burning cars and broken glass, in Greece the rioting was the obvious means to begin to enact the destruction of an entire political and economic system.

Ultimately the dynamics that created the uprising also established its limit. It was made possible by the existence of a sizeable radical infrastructure in urban areas, in particular the Exarchia neighborhood in Athens. The squats, bars, cafes, and social centers, frequented by students and immigrant youth, created the milieu out of which the uprising emerged. However, this milieu was alien to most middle-aged wage workers, who did not see the struggle as their own. Though many expressed solidarity with the rioting youth, they perceived it as a movement of entrants — that is, of that portion of the proletariat that sought entrance to the labor market but was not formally employed in full-time jobs. The uprising,

will have to join with these others, breeching the walls of the university compounds and spilling into the streets. In recent weeks Bay Area public school teachers, BART employees, and unemployed have threatened demonstrations and strikes. Each of these movements responds to a different facet of capitalism's reinvigorated attack on the working class in a moment of crisis. Viewed separately, each appears small, nearsighted, without hope of success. Taken together, however, they suggest the possibility of widespread refusal and resistance. Our task is to make plain the common conditions that, like a hidden water table, feed each struggle.

We have seen this kind of upsurge in the recent past, a rebellion that starts in the classrooms and radiates outward to encompass the whole of society. Just two years ago the anti-CPE movement in France, combating a new law that enabled employers to fire young workers without cause, brought huge numbers into the streets. High school and university students, teachers, parents, rank and file union members, and unemployed youth from the banlieues found themselves together on the same side of the barricades. (This solidarity was often fragile, however. The riots of immigrant youth in the suburbs and university students in the city centers never merged, and at times tensions flared between the two groups.) French students saw through the illusion of the university as a place of refuge and enlightenment and acknowledged that they were merely being trained to work. They took to the streets as workers, protesting their precarious futures. Their position tore down the partitions between the schools and the workplaces and immediately elicited the support of many wage workers and unemployed people in a mass gesture of proletarian refusal.

As the movement developed it manifested a growing tension between revolution and reform. Its form was more radical than its content. While the rhetoric of the student leaders focused merely on a return to the status quo, the actions of the youth — the riots, the cars overturned and set on fire, the blockades of roads and railways, and the waves of occupations that shut down high schools and universities — announced the extent of the new generation's disillusionment and rage. Despite all of this, however, the movement quickly disintegrated when the CPE law was eventually dropped. While the most radical segment of the





# I

Like the society to which it has played the faithful servant, the university is bankrupt. This bankruptcy is not only financial. It is the index of a more fundamental insolvency, one both political and economic, which has been a long time in the making. No one knows what the university is for anymore. We feel this intuitively. Gone is the old project of creating a cultured and educated citizenry; gone, too, the special advantage the degree-holder once held on the job market. These are now fantasies, spectral residues that cling to the poorly maintained halls.

Incongruous architecture, the ghosts of vanished ideals, the vista of a dead future: these are the remains of the university. Among these remains, most of us are little more than a collection of querulous habits and duties. We go through the motions of our tests and assignments with a kind of thoughtless and immutable obedience propped up by subvocalized resentments. Nothing is interesting, nothing can make itself felt. The world-historical with its pageant of catastrophe is no more real than the windows in which it appears.

For those whose adolescence was poisoned by the nationalist hysteria following September 11$^{th}$, public speech is nothing but a series of lies and public space a place where things might explode (though they never do). Afflicted by the vague desire for something to happen — without ever imagining we could make it happen ourselves — we were rescued by the bland homogeneity of the internet, finding refuge among friends we never see, whose entire existence is a series of exclamations and silly pictures, whose only discourse is the gossip of commodities. Safety, then, and comfort have been our watchwords. We slide through the flesh world without being touched or moved. We shepherd our emptiness from place to place.

But we can be grateful for our destitution: demystification is now a condition, not a project. University life finally appears as just what it has always been: a machine for producing compliant producers and consumers. Even leisure is a form of job training. The idiot crew of

the frat houses drink themselves into a stupor with all the dedication of lawyers working late at the office. Kids who smoked weed and cut class in high-school now pop Adderall and get to work. We power the diploma factory on the treadmills in the gym. We run tirelessly in elliptical circles.

It makes little sense, then, to think of the university as an ivory tower in Arcadia, as either idyllic or idle. "Work hard, play hard" has been the over-eager motto of a generation in training for . . . what? — drawing hearts in cappuccino foam or plugging names and numbers into databases. The gleaming techno-future of American capitalism was long ago packed up and sold to China for a few more years of borrowed junk. A university diploma is now worth no more than a share in General Motors.

We work and we borrow in order to work and to borrow. And the jobs we work toward are the jobs we already have. Close to three quarters of students work while in school, many full-time; for most, the level of employment we obtain while students is the same that awaits after graduation. Meanwhile, what we acquire isn't education; it's debt. We work to make money we have already spent, and our future labor has already been sold on the worst market around. Average student loan debt rose 20 percent in the first five years of the twenty-first century — 80–100 percent for students of color. Student loan volume — a figure inversely proportional to state funding for education — rose by nearly 800 percent from 1977 to 2003. What our borrowed tuition buys is the privilege of making monthly payments for the rest of our lives. What we learn is the choreography of credit: you can't walk to class without being offered another piece of plastic charging 20 percent interest. Yesterday's finance majors buy their summer homes with the bleak futures of today's humanities majors.

This is the prospect for which we have been preparing since grade-school. Those of us who came here to have our privilege notarized surrendered our youth to a barrage of tutors, a battery of psychological tests, obligatory public service ops — the cynical compilation of half-truths toward a well-rounded application profile. No wonder we set about destroying ourselves the second we escape the cattle prod of parental admonition. On the other hand, those of us who came here to transcend the economic and social disadvantages of our families know that for



from a working class facing different problems. In the twilight era of the post-war boom, the university was not subsumed by capital to the degree that it is now, and students were not as intensively proletarianized by debt and a devastated labor market.

That is why our struggle is fundamentally different. The poverty of student life has become terminal: there is no promised exit. If the economic crisis of the 1970s emerged to break the back of the political crisis of the 1960s, the fact that today the economic crisis precedes the coming political uprising means we may finally supersede the cooptation and neutralization of those past struggles. There will be no return to normal.

## III

We seek to push the university struggle to its limits.

Though we denounce the privatization of the university and its authoritarian system of governance, we do not seek structural reforms. We demand not a free university but a free society. A free university in the midst of a capitalist society is like a reading room in a prison; it serves only as a distraction from the misery of daily life. Instead we seek to channel the anger of the dispossessed students and workers into a declaration of war.

We must begin by preventing the university from functioning. We must interrupt the normal flow of bodies and things and bring work and class to a halt. We will blockade, occupy, and take what's ours. Rather than viewing such disruptions as obstacles to dialogue and mutual understanding, we see them as what we have to say, as how we are to be understood. This is the only meaningful position to take when crises lay bare the opposing interests at the foundation of society. Calls for unity are fundamentally empty. There is no common ground between those who uphold the status quo and those who seek to destroy it.

The university struggle is one among many, one sector where a new cycle of refusal and insurrection has begun — in workplaces, neighborhoods, and slums. All of our futures are linked, and so our movement

cycle. Though it is not directly beholden to the market, the university and its corollaries are subject to the same cost-cutting logic as other industries: declining tax revenues have made inevitable the casualization of work. Retiring professors make way not for tenure-track jobs but for precariously employed teaching assistants, adjuncts, and lecturers who do the same work for much less pay. Tuition increases compensate for cuts while the jobs students pay to be trained for evaporate.

In the midst of the current crisis, which will be long and protracted, many on the left want to return to the golden age of public education. They naïvely imagine that the crisis of the present is an opportunity to demand the return of the past. But social programs that depended upon high profit rates and vigorous economic growth are gone. We cannot be tempted to make futile grabs at the irretrievable while ignoring the obvious fact that there can be no autonomous "public university" in a capitalist society. The university is subject to the real crisis of capitalism, and capital does not require liberal education programs. The function of the university has always been to reproduce the working class by training future workers according to the changing needs of capital. The crisis of the university today is the crisis of the reproduction of the working class, the crisis of a period in which capital no longer needs us as workers. We cannot free the university from the exigencies of the market by calling for the return of the public education system. We live out the terminus of the very market logic upon which that system was founded. The only autonomy we can hope to attain exists beyond capitalism.

What this means for our struggle is that we can't go backward. The old student struggles are the relics of a vanished world. In the 1960s, as the post-war boom was just beginning to unravel, radicals within the confines of the university understood that another world was possible. Fed up with technocratic management, wanting to break the chains of a conformist society, and rejecting alienated work as unnecessary in an age of abundance, students tried to align themselves with radical sections of the working class. But their mode of radicalization, too tenuously connected to the economic logic of capitalism, prevented that alignment from taking hold. Because their resistance to the Vietnam war focalized critique upon capitalism as a colonial war-machine, but insufficiently upon its exploitation of domestic labor, students were easily split off



every one of us who "makes it," ten more take our place — that the logic here is zero-sum. And anyway, socioeconomic status remains the best predictor of student achievement. Those of us the demographics call "immigrants," "minorities," and "people of color" have been told to believe in the aristocracy of merit. But we know we are hated not despite our achievements, but precisely because of them. And we know that the circuits through which we might free ourselves from the violence of our origins only reproduce the misery of the past in the present for others, elsewhere.

If the university teaches us primarily how to be in debt, how to waste our labor power, how to fall prey to petty anxieties, it thereby teaches us how to be consumers. Education is a commodity like everything else that we want without caring for. It is a thing, and it makes its purchasers into things. One's future position in the system, one's relation to others, is purchased first with money and then with the demonstration of obedience. First we pay, then we "work hard." And there is the split: one is both the commander and the commanded, consumer and consumed. It is the system itself which one obeys, the cold buildings that enforce subservience. Those who teach are treated with all the respect of an automated messaging system. Only the logic of customer satisfaction obtains here: was the course easy? Was the teacher hot? Could any stupid asshole get an A? What's the point of acquiring knowledge when it can be called up with a few keystokes? Who needs memory when we have the internet? A training in thought? You can't be serious. A moral preparation? There are anti-depressants for that.

Meanwhile the graduate students, supposedly the most politically enlightened among us, are also the most obedient. The "vocation" for which they labor is nothing other than a fantasy of falling off the grid, or out of the labor market. Every grad student is a would be Robinson Crusoe, dreaming of an island economy subtracted from the exigencies of the market. But this fantasy is itself sustained through an unremitting submission to the market. There is no longer the least felt contradiction in teaching a totalizing critique of capitalism by day and polishing one's job talk by night. That our pleasure is our labor only makes our symptoms more manageable. Aesthetics and politics collapse courtesy of the substitution of ideology for history: booze and beaux arts and another

seminar on the question of being, the steady blur of typeface, each pixel paid for by somebody somewhere, some not-me, not-here, where all that appears is good and all goods appear attainable by credit.

Graduate school is simply the faded remnant of a feudal system adapted to the logic of capitalism — from the commanding heights of the star professors to the serried ranks of teaching assistants and adjuncts paid mostly in bad faith. A kind of monasticism predominates here, with all the Gothic rituals of a Benedictine abbey, and all the strange theological claims for the nobility of this work, its essential altruism. The underlings are only too happy to play apprentice to the masters, unable to do the math indicating that nine-tenths of us will teach 4 courses every semester to pad the paychecks of the one-tenth who sustain the fiction that we can all be the one. Of course I will be the star, I will get the tenure-track job in a large city and move into a newly gentrified neighborhood.

We end up interpreting Marx's 11$^{th}$ thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." At best, we learn the phoenix-like skill of coming to the very limits of critique and perishing there, only to begin again at the seemingly ineradicable root. We admire the first part of this performance: it lights our way. But we want the tools to break through that point of suicidal thought, its hinge in practice.

The same people who practice "critique" are also the most susceptible to cynicism. But if cynicism is simply the inverted form of enthusiasm, then beneath every frustrated leftist academic is a latent radical. The shoulder shrug, the dulled face, the squirm of embarrassment when discussing the fact that the US murdered a million Iraqis between 2003 and 2006, that every last dime squeezed from America's poorest citizens is fed to the banking industry, that the seas will rise, billions will die and there's nothing we can do about it — this discomfited posture comes from feeling oneself pulled between the is and the ought of current left thought. One feels that there is no alternative, and yet, on the other hand, that another world is possible.

We will not be so petulant. The synthesis of these positions is right in front of us: another world is not possible; it is necessary. The ought and the is are one. The collapse of the global economy is here and now.



# II

The university has no history of its own; its history is the history of capital. Its essential function is the reproduction of the relationship between capital and labor. Though not a proper corporation that can be bought and sold, that pays revenue to its investors, the public university nonetheless carries out this function as efficiently as possible by approximating ever more closely the corporate form of its bedfellows. What we are witnessing now is the endgame of this process, whereby the façade of the educational institution gives way altogether to corporate streamlining.

Even in the golden age of capitalism that followed after World War II and lasted until the late 1960s, the liberal university was already subordinated to capital. At the apex of public funding for higher education, in the 1950s, the university was already being redesigned to produce technocrats with the skill-sets necessary to defeat "communism" and sustain US hegemony. Its role during the Cold War was to legitimate liberal democracy and to reproduce an imaginary society of free and equal citizens — precisely because no one was free and no one was equal.

But if this ideological function of the public university was at least well-funded after the Second World War, that situation changed irreversibly in the 1960s, and no amount of social-democratic heel-clicking will bring back the dead world of the post-war boom. Between 1965 and 1980 profit rates began to fall, first in the US, then in the rest of the industrializing world. Capitalism, it turned out, could not sustain the good life it made possible. For capital, abundance appears as overproduction, freedom from work as unemployment. Beginning in the 1970s, capitalism entered into a terminal downturn in which permanent work was casualized and working-class wages stagnated, while those at the top were temporarily rewarded for their obscure financial necromancy, which has itself proved unsustainable.

For public education, the long downturn meant the decline of tax revenues due to both declining rates of economic growth and the prioritization of tax-breaks for beleaguered corporations. The raiding of the public purse struck California and the rest of the nation in the 1970s. It has continued to strike with each downward declension of the business